

Pseudo- vs. Genuine-intimacy:

**Disentangling the intimacy of brand-customer
relationships in social media – a hospitality industry
perspective**

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Abstract

Customer-intimacy has been recognised as vital to leveraging meaningful customer relationships for brands in the current and coming age of social-first generations (i.e. social and digital natives). This group are the next generation of consumers who will have never known or lived in a world without the social Web. Thus, the Web is precisely where they look to find, connect and communicate with and purchase from brands.

Despite its acknowledged importance within the social media context, the phenomenon of customer-intimacy has received remarkably little attention, and efforts to develop a valid and comprehensive measure have been limited. To date, there have not been any studies that have attempted to disentangle the complexities of customer-intimacy and its impact on social media. While prior work on customer-intimacy has proposed conceptual models highlighting different facets that contribute to brand-customer-intimacy's development, most of these concepts have not been subject to empirical testing. More importantly, the applicability of these models to a hospitality context is not clear. Hence this thesis sets out to fill these gaps in the literature.

This research is motivated by the dearth of research studies accounting for the consumer perspective on brand-customer-intimacy inherent to social media platforms, along with the lack of a valid and comprehensive scale to measure brand-customer-intimacy. This thesis aims to first review and then refine the concept of brand-customer-intimacy as a binary consisting of pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy, from the perspective of the social media consumer. It will then present empirical research based on the theoretical foundation of customer relationship marketing in conjunction with theories from the social media literature.

To fulfil the research aims, Churchill's (1979) paradigm was followed in conjunction with other scale development studies. The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on primary data from managers and social media customers of existing hotel and restaurant organisations. Qualitative research was undertaken to inform the conceptualisation of pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy from both expert and customer perspectives and to generate and purify the initial scale items. Quantitative methods were then adopted to validate and establish the final scale.

Guided by this research design, the researcher developed a brand-customer-intimacy scale consisting of three dimensions: a single dimension for both genuine-intimacy (labelled Genuine) and pseudo-intimacy (labelled Superficial), and a third dimension labelled Uninterested. Statistical analysis confirms the scale's reliability and validity. Furthermore, the scale's application is demonstrated by assessing and empirically assessing its association with the scales of brand satisfaction, brand loyalty and brand loyalty on social media platforms. The results support the proposition that the consumer perspective is important in understanding the complex nature of brand-customer-intimacy within the social media context.

The key contribution of this study is the development of a valid and reliable scale for measuring brand-customer-intimacy as formed within social media. The study extends the social media literature on brand-customer-intimacy which has not received much research attention to date, particularly in the hospitality context. The thesis proposes and empirically establishes new dimensions to brand-customer-intimacy as pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. The results of this study show that while genuine-intimacy predicts a positive relationship to brand satisfaction and brand loyalty behaviours in social media, each of the two pseudo-intimacy variables predicts both a negative and positive relationship to brand satisfaction and loyalty.

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*He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love
and His wonderful deeds for mankind.*

Psalm 107:29-31

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chloe Shinae Kim', written in a cursive style.

Chloe Shinae Kim

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter begins by illustrating the background from which this thesis was formed, briefly explaining the social media journey practitioners have taken to form and manage customer relationships in the service sector and in the hospitality industry specifically. The purpose and significance of the thesis are then explained, outlining the value of building research into the current body of literature in this field, as brand-customer relationships, (hereafter “customer-intimacy”) in Web 2.0 remain subject to a continuously evolving environment. Lastly, the research aims and objectives are then presented, followed by an overview of the research approach and structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background

Social media has dramatically changed the way consumers communicate, collaborate and consume (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). As the global social media user population comprises 2.46 billion people (as recorded in 2017) and is expected to grow to 3 billion monthly active users by 2021 (McNair, 2018), strategic consumer insight focusing on social media is essential for brands (Dessart, 2017). Social media is an ecosystem where interactions occur frequently among users but more importantly between brands and users (Zhu, Jiang, Dou, & Liang, 2019). Moreover, among heavy social media users, it has been reported that up to 39% believe an important use of a social network is to find out about products and services (Casey, 2017).

In the current digital age, there is an unprecedented amount of information to be accessed by customers and marketers alike. This empowers the consumer to make smarter purchase decisions and given marketers access to customer data like never before. In a 2018 report released by eMarketer (McNair, 2018), it was discovered that the once-unquestioned power of the traditional medium of television, has been dramatically eroded due to a fast emerging younger, digital-first generation of consumers (Sweeney, 2018). Advertisers are looking to invest in digital media (e.g. social media) to reach large audiences as viewership shifts to digital channels and ecommerce rises globally. In the same report, digital’s share of total

advertising was predicted to reach 50% by 2020 (McNair, 2018). Whilst the older generation of Millennials were *introduced* to a world of social media, the younger Generation Z (Gen Z), were *born* in to a world of social media. Reports have warned that marketing to Gen Z consumers the same way as to Millennials will not necessarily succeed (Forbes Agency Council, 2019; Hill, 2018). Identified, loosely as those born between 1996 and 2010, Generation Z represents a new type of consumer with elevated expectations overall: products and services need to be available on-demand, offer authentic and personalised experiences and face-to-face communication, show signs of affordability, and relate with consumer values, and with elevated expectations overall (Hill, 2018; Patel, 2017).

Clearly, social media usage will continue to be a steady presence in our everyday lives and even more with the way we consume. Social media has not only changed the way consumers browse, purchase and experience products but also the way they engage with brands. In the age of social media, customer relationship management strategy has emerged as management of the brand-customer dialogue, with a shift in focus towards customer engagement rather than management (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011). There is no doubt that social media platforms will continue to develop over time, and thus continue to reinvent possibilities for brand-customer engagement.

A decade ago, marketers were fighting to convince chief executives to invest in social media's customer engagement capabilities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and today we are still grappling with the ways in which this potential can be fully mastered. With the increase of consumer-brand engagement in social media platforms, consumers' expectations of brands have also increased (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012; Skift, 2015). In response, organisations have turned to creating internal teams dedicated to social media management, seeking aid from external agencies and even introducing software to assist in automated engagement efforts (Coelho, Rita, & Santos, 2018; Labrecque, 2014).

Beyond such efforts, understanding the underpinnings of forming customer relationships in Web 2.0 will be key for marketers, along with a clear sense of the potential pitfalls and opportunities of social media platforms. There have been many signs that the critical importance of achieving customer-intimacy for brands in the context of social media has been

anticipated. Desire for social interaction, transparency and the shift of control are three of a few key factors that will be briefly explained here. A commonly stated motivation for customers' active online engagement has been the desire for social interaction (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). This has enabled organisations to be elevated to the status of a friend, akin to someone who shares more intimacy with the consumer, consequently leading to attainment of more power to shape consumer attitudes and actions (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). As noted by Reid Hoffman, co-founder and chairman of the most sought-after social network for professionals, LinkedIn, one of the most transformative uses of the Internet will be the ability to leverage relationships embodied in social networks (Ricadela, 2007).

The second factor contributing to the need for customer-intimacy stems from the open nature of the Internet. Transparency has become one of the crucial factors contributing to brand-customer relationships (Labrecque, 2014) and this has led to a redefining of the meaning of intimacy in brand-customer relationships.

The final contributing factor for customer-intimacy has been the shift of control from brands to consumers. Previous studies on social media have found that customers traversing the platforms of social media today are better informed, more savvy, sceptical, and generally more in control (e.g. Heinonen, 2011; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013; Stewart & Pavlou, 2002). This shift of control presents intimacy in customer relationships as the key to a brand's influence because in the realm of social media, neither attention nor engagement is warranted for brand-generated content. There is an unlimited amount of social media content, which is generated by brands but increasingly more by the consumers, many of whom consequently become their own brands. This has redefined the potential of customers, allowing them to also quickly become competitors as social media platforms and technologies have lowered the entry barriers for any individual to become their own "brand" and grow their own following. Such factors anticipate a greater need for customer-intimacy and have become the predicament that many organisations today.

The service sector has often been viewed as a place of social encounters and bonding (Berry, 1995), and the hospitality industry, in particular, is an ideal setting for many customer

engagement opportunities. This potential has grown, with the introduction of social media, providing a powerful channel for brands to communicate with customers (Murdough, 2009). There have been differing reports on the business benefits of social media marketing among sectors within the hospitality industry. A number of studies have shown that restaurant entrepreneurs can draw and increase sales with social media sites (e.g. Badenhausen, 2013; Maines 2009; Pantelidis, 2010), while reports on the hotel industry show that although 75% of US hotels have used social media, more than half have not yet exploited the marketing potential of Web 2.0 technologies (Leung, Bai, & Stahura, 2015).

1.3 Research Gaps

Despite the clear marketing potential of customer-intimacy, an in-depth examination of this social media phenomenon has not been undertaken within the wider marketing literature (Gensler et al., 2013; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). The current state of knowledge on the measurement of customer-intimacy is particularly lacking and still remains an area that needs more research. Ashley and Tuten in their 2015 study state the plethora of studies on social media marketing have focused on execution strategies, while there has been little on strategies for processing, engagement and important brand outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty. This well-documented concern – i.e. conditions for marketing success in Web 2.0 – continues to present itself as a challenge for industry practitioners and hence is an area requiring deeper examination.

Marketers have struggled to define the return on investment associated with social media expenditures. Though there have been numerous solutions put forth in both academic and industry contexts, such as tools or metrics to collect quantifiable measurement items (e.g. numbers of followers, views or likes) (e.g. Sigala, 2018), there is increasing recognition of the need for quality measures that can help to interpret the meaningful values that can be attained through efforts such as customer-intimacy. As previous studies have suggested (e.g. Labrecque, 2014), development of a scale that can measure the antecedents of brand-customer interactions and relationships is critical for organisations to achieve and interpret their social media expenditures. The impacts of organisations' *affective* social media efforts are yet to be fully grasped; hence with such uncertainty, the need to develop ways in which deeper understanding can be gained are clearly vital. The dimensionality of customer-

intimacy as it presents itself in the confines of social media needs to be redefined and understood. Accordingly, there is an imperative need to conduct further research to examine in depth, the interactions that lead to intimacy and the outcomes of the differing levels of intimacy achieved.

In order to address this gap in the literature, this study sets out to disentangle intimacy in brand-customer relationships, as formed within social media, by examining the factors that affect customer-intimacy via a deductive examination. This study will address the need for further empirical research to establish the nature of how the phenomenon of customer-intimacy formed on social media can be managed and further enhanced by brands. As there have been differing reports on the business benefits gained from social media marketing among sectors within the hospitality industry, this study will carry out a subgroup analysis to explore and compare between hotel and restaurant brands in their social media profiles.

To summarise, this study has been prompted by the dearth of empirical studies addressing the consumer perspectives on social media customer-intimacy, along with the lack of an available scale to measure this phenomenon. A review of the literature indicates that research in this area, especially with regard to measuring customer-intimacy, is limited in several respects and developing a measure of this construct could serve to mitigate these limitations.

1.4 Problem Statement and Research Objectives

This research aims to address the following research problems:

The lack of understanding of the consumer perspective on customer-intimacy as formed within the context of social media, and an instrument to measure it.

The research aims to provide insight into the development and measurement of customer-intimacy as formed within the realm of social media. The achievement of this aim will unfold through two means: (1) by the conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, and (2) by the development of a measurement scale. The scale will serve three purposes: (1) to assist in measuring customer-intimacy, (2) to highlight and empirically establish the key measurement items, and (3) to facilitate the examination of the association between pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy to brand satisfaction and loyalty.

Considering the overarching research aim, the following objectives were developed:

1. To discover and redefine customer-intimacy through a new conceptualisation consisting of pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy.
2. To explore and identify the items for pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy based on current social media interactions between brands and customers.
3. To develop and validate a scale to measure pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy.
4. To empirically test the relationship between pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy and their impacts, including brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, as applicable to social media.

1.5 Research Methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives, this study adopted a mixed methods approach that employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed methods approach is deductive and sequential, beginning with research questions, then data collection and interpretation to finally test hypotheses. The aim of the first phase, qualitative in nature, was to identify and examine existing items for intimacy from two dimensions, conceptualised by this study as, pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy. The aim of the second phase was to quantitatively testing the intimacy items found in the first phase and their impact on brand satisfaction and loyalty.

The overall objective of developing an instrument to measure the constructs of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy was guided primarily by Hinkin, Tracey, & Enz's (1997), scale development process. Building on Churchill's (1979) paradigm, the work of Hinkin et al., (1997) was published for the purpose of advancing the future research of hospitality researchers in particular. As shown in Figure 1, the scale development process (SDP) of this research comprised of seven stages.

This study involved a first-time conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. Hence, it was deemed necessary to begin with a content analysis to identify the dimensions of the constructs as found within the context of social media and the hospitality industry. This process was a precursor to the stage of item generation.

To explore the phenomenon of social media customer-intimacy, the perspectives of both customers and organisational experts were sought. This involved semi-structured interviews to develop a better understanding of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. The results generated a breadth of views on both intimacy constructs, particularly relevant for hospitality organisations, and enabled the generation of items for each of the two constructs.

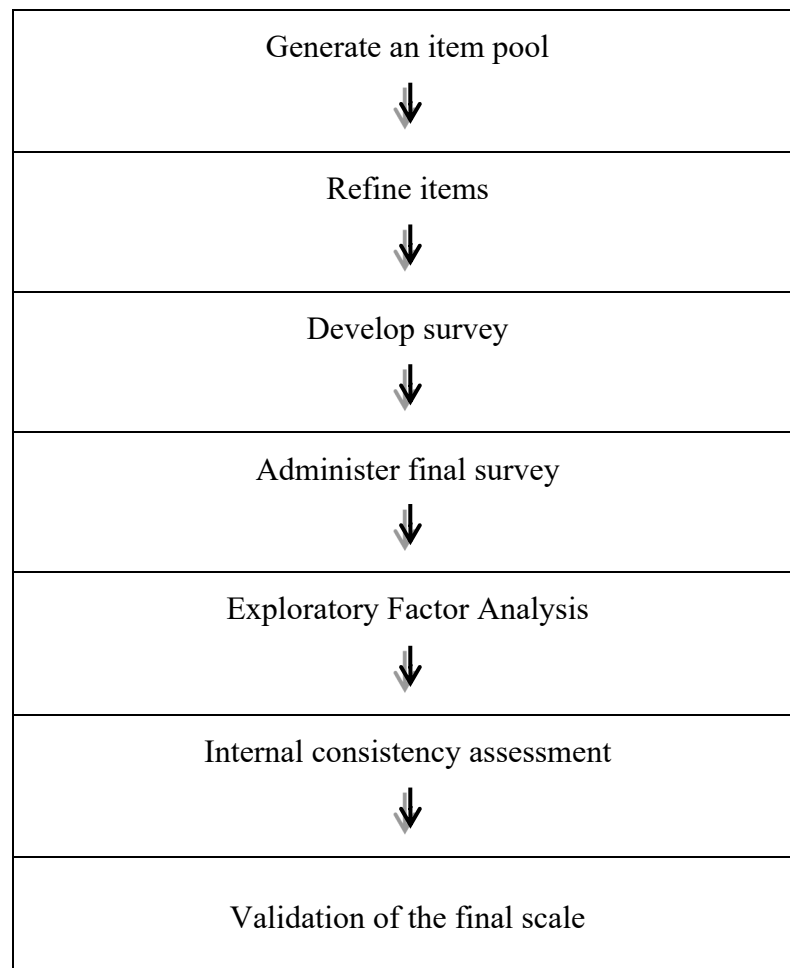


Figure 1: Scale development procedure followed by this research

These findings were further honed through the second stage of “refining the item pool”, to enhance content and face validity of the items (Getty & Thompson, 1994). The scale items were subjected to review by six independent hospitality and tourism academic experts.

In the third stage, a pilot study on a convenience sample of 26 respondents was conducted to achieve face validity (Hinkin et al., 1997). This was achieved via an online pilot survey in which the reviewed items were placed in the form of a questionnaire and respondents were asked to rate each item using a 7-point Likert scale.

The items were then administered to a wider sample ($N=457$) of hotel and restaurant customers through an online survey in the fourth stage.

In the fifth stage, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was completed, then the scale was cross-validated for its convergent validity and construct reliability as part of the sixth stage to complete the internal consistency assessment. Lastly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to develop and confirm the scale, reliability was established using procedures described in the extant scale development literature (Furr, 2011; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

1.6 Definition of Terms

The terms Web 2.0, social media platforms and customer-intimacy will be used extensively throughout the thesis, and therefore it is important to establish a common understanding of their meaning. The new constructs conceptualised as pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy are also defined, as well as the final outcome variables of brand satisfaction, loyalty and loyalty to social media as examined in this study.

Web 2.0 signifies a new era that has changed the Web as we once knew it. Web 2.0 describes an environment where all experiences, both personal and business, become social processes that are user-controlled and interactive in nature. (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Gensler, et al., 2013; Labrecque, 2014).

Social media (SM) is an umbrella term for Web 2.0 based applications that are “a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes” (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008). Social media often refers to sites where participants can produce, publish, control, critique, rank, and interact with online content (Tuten, 2008). In this study the terms ‘social,’ ‘social platforms’ and ‘social media’ are used interchangeably.

Customer-intimacy is often manifested in a close and personal relationship shared between the brand and the customer. Closeness, mutual understanding and value perception have been found as the dimensions of customer-intimacy (Brock & Zhou, 2012).

Pseudo-intimacy stems from the idea of a “parasocial” self, commonly ascribed to the superficial connections formed between celebrities and their fans in the realm of social media (Marshall, 2010). Regardless of this superficial level of engagement, as viewed from the perspective of the customer, it is considered as a beneficial state to reach for businesses within a marketing context (e.g. Colgate & Danaher, 2000; Gutek, 2000).

Genuine-intimacy in brand-customer relationships will describe a type of intimacy that is distinct from pseudo-intimacy. Understood as high levels of closeness with a brand, where there is a state of mutual value gain, ultimately signifying an engagement that is felt as genuine from the perspective of the customer.

Brand satisfaction refers to the high level of satisfaction achieved when customer expectations are exceeded and emotions become highly positive towards the brand (Oliver, Balakrishnan, & Barry, 1994).

Brand loyalty on SM represents customers’ intentions to continue to follow, interact with and share a brand’s social media content on the customer’s own personal social media account, as well as intentions to recommend the brand’s SM account to others.

Brand loyalty will describe the brand’s “earned media” in the form of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication and also customers’ repurchase intentions. WOM has been identified as a valuable outcome for brands and representative of the benefits gained from social media marketing (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

1.7 Thesis Overview

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of this research, the rationale for the research and the methodology adopted to achieve the research objectives, followed by a brief overview of the chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of the research literature. Presented in five sections, it begins with an overview of the broader social media literature, outlining the challenges this medium has posed for organisations in general. The study is then contextualised by highlighting the current trends and challenges for the hotel and restaurant scene in terms of customer management on social media. The next section presents the foundational theories that have contributed to the research, followed by an outline of the theories from which the conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy emerged. The final section explores the impact factors of customer-intimacy as found on social media.

Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. It addresses the research paradigm and the study's overall design. Furthermore, this chapter provides a detailed discussion on each stage of the scale development process undertaken by the research. The chapter concludes with discussion and justification of the data analysis methods that were employed by the research.

Chapter 4 illustrates the findings from the preliminary research that was conducted to generate and refine scale items, before presenting the results of the final research phase. This chapter begins with an overview of the extracts from the interviews, presenting both manager and customer perceptions of social media's customer-intimacy. Before the preliminary data analysis section is concluded, an account of the procedures that were undertaken to conduct an expert review as part of the scale item refinement stage is presented. The next section presents the analysis of data obtained from the final sample of 457 followers of hotel and restaurant brands' social media accounts. The chapter outlines the data preparation and assessment followed by a descriptive report of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and multiple regression employed during the data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter details the scale validation process and ends with presentation of the final scale.

Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the key findings for both phases of the research. The contributions this thesis makes to advance knowledge in the field are then discussed, followed by the practical implications of the study. The limitations of the research are also discussed along with suggestions for possible directions in future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Preview

Social media has become de rigueur for brands and their marketing activities today, causing profound implications for brand management and most notably brand-customer relationship management. According to an Edelman report that was released in 2018, four out of ten consumers said it would be unlikely for them to become emotionally attached to a brand unless there was social media interaction (Edelman, 2018). Uncovering the perspective of what is considered as an emotional attachment from the perspective of the customer has been a complicated matter for brands on social media. This chapter is presented in three parts: Part I: Industry Background first investigates what stories we have been told so far in the literature about the various challenges for brands adapting to the nature of “social” in social media platforms; Part II: Theoretical Background provides an overview of the concepts and theories that have informed this thesis; and Part III: Establishing the Concept outlines the premise on which the inquiry of this study has been founded.

PART 1: Industry Background

The first part of this literature review highlights the challenges that brands have faced thus far in operating on social platforms. Basic knowledge of social media needs and concerns from brands’ perspectives, as well as concerns that have specifically arisen for tourism and hospitality organisations, will thereby establish the current industry scene. Together, this will contextually locate the main inquiry of this thesis.

2.2 Social Media and Its Challenges

Now more than ever the success of Web 2.0 marketing depends upon relationship marketing strategies. Management of a brand’s social media influence increasingly depends on the relationships shared with individual customers. This is true especially when it comes to brand advertising (Heinonen, 2011) because a brand’s ability to attract and engage a group of customers who will ultimately act on its behalf has been defined as an influence in the realm

of social media (Peters et al., 2013). In light of this, customer communication strategies have seen a transition from what was the traditional one-to-many approach, to a predominantly one-to-one approach (Heinonen, 2011). This has prompted customer relationship strategies to be entirely rethought of, not as management of the customer per se but management of the *conversation*.

Numerous studies have revealed the challenges that have arisen around the complexity of creating and growing intimacy in brand-customer relationships, along with brands' abilities to manage this within social media platforms (Coelho et al., 2018; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011; Kuksov & Wang, 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2013). Gaining consumers' attention and strengthening interactions with them have been ways in which organisations have invested in to resolve such concerns (Coelho et al., 2018). Hence, customer-intimacy, may be the key antecedent to a brand's social media influence.

In a 2008 study conducted by the public relations and marketing agency, Cone Communications, 93% of social media users in the US believed companies should have a social media presence, while 85% of them thought that companies should interact with customers via social networking sites. Due to such customer perceptions, pursuing customer relations in social media has remained as top priority for organisational managers (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011; Moro & Rita, 2018). Similarly, in academic research, studies so far have recognised social media as a platform that can create real connections between customers and brands (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014; Labrecque, 2014), connections that can lead to the creation of brand awareness, purchase intention (e.g. Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012) and brand resonance (Tatar & Eren-Erdogmus, 2016). Despite such market potential, researchers have repeatedly noted the ongoing challenge of managing brand-customer relationships in Web 2.0 as SM platforms continue to change and evolve (Davis, Piven, & Breazeale, 2014; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Laroche et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2013; Stephen, 2019). Over the past decade, studies and industry reports alike have continued to highlight customers' expectations of brands and their social media efficacy (Papazolomou & Melanthiou, 2012; Skift, 2015). However, literature has highlighted that due to the unfamiliarity of social media platforms on the part of staff and their limited technical skills and time investment, managers lack the necessary experience, expertise and resources to adopt and implement systematic and successful social media marketing strategies (Gensler et

al., 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011). This, in turn, results in a gap between brands' capabilities and customers' expectations of this ubiquitous medium.

Studies have identified the pursuit of a social media user as gratification of social-emotional needs rather than informational, and for person-to-person connections that are more direct and interpersonal in manner (Rau, Gao, & Ding, 2008). Reflective of a basic human need, as identified long ago by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow & Lewis, 1987), social needs account for belonging and connection with others, which seems to reach a sense of fulfilment through social media. This has been reflected in various studies that have found the desire for social interaction as a key motivation for customers' active online engagement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). In the beginning, this innate desire for connectedness among social media users became the very rationale for brands to master the art of relationship management, when aiming to achieve marketing effectiveness in Web 2.0. However, Web 2.0 literature has presented discrepancies in terms of customers' expectations. Findings from other studies have challenged the idea that the desire for social interaction is a key motivation for customers' active online engagement, instead claiming that customers' motivations for pursuing brands on social media were for tangible, utilitarian benefits (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011). This highlights the clear disparities existing within the Web 2.0 literature, illustrative of how much of this medium is still unknown territory, and reflective of a discipline that is still nascent.

As highlighted, managing customer relationships in social media has presented various challenges. In the following sub-sections, three major challenges that brought about the need for a deeper examination of current customer relationship management techniques in social media are briefly outlined. With the empowered social consumer, brands have faced: 1) a shift of control, 2) shift of the dominant voice, and 3) ongoing uncertainty of the outcomes of their marketing efforts.

2.2.1 Losing control

Previous studies on social media have found that customers traversing the platforms of social media today are better informed, more savvy, sceptical, and generally have more control than brands (e.g. Heinonen, 2011; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014; Peters et al., 2013;

Stewart & Pavlou, 2002). The social media environment has been defined as a place where the power to influence others within the networks lies with the customer, to whom the control of the relationship has shifted (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011; Viglia, Pera, & Bigné, 2018). Leverage is no longer with brands but with customers, whereby, the ability to attract and engage a group of customers that will ultimately act on a brand's behalf defines influence in the realm of social media (Peters et al., 2013). This challenge has commonly been described as a "loss of control" facing organisations in this Web 2.0 era (Sigala, 2018). Web 2.0's interconnected and visible nature contributed to this shift of empowerment, further intensifying what was considered as the Internet's disruption to branding (Christodoulides, 2009; Harrigan, Soutar, Choudhury, & Lowe, 2015; Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006). As an example of this shift, more than 70% of US consumers were found likely to share their brand experiences and product discussions through social media (Hainla, 2018).

With tools through sharing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram or eBay and review sites such as TripAdvisor and Expedia, customers can publish and share user-generated content but also serve as retailers themselves, becoming stakeholders in the market (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Patel, 2017; Sheth, 2017; Lipiäinen, 2015). The vast range of multi-directional and instantaneous communication channels in Web 2.0, has left marketers unable to control the reachability, frequency or content of their marketing initiatives, resulting in the organisation no longer being in complete control of the message (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Powell, Groves, & Dimos, 2011). Whilst a satisfied customer holds the power to drive many potential customers to a brand, they also hold the potential to erode a brand's equity and profitability when dissatisfied. (Gillan 2010; VanMeter, Grisaffe, & Chonko, 2015). The Web 2.0 environment has intensified the delivery of WOM, enabling customer-published content to become a powerful force in consumer decision making (Cui, Lui, & Guo, 2012; Harrigan et al., 2015). Brand managers are afraid of this intrinsic lack of control regarding the messages users are exchanging through e-WOM (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013; Moro & Rita, 2018). In such ways, we see that influence in social media is now administered by the actions of users who are part of the brand network or brand communities. Consequently, there is a greater need for brands to form and maintain quality relationships with individual customers to foster loyal followers who will influence others in the brand community.

Many studies have attempted to address this issue and began by examining the motives and behaviours of social media consumers and their brand-customer interactions. This resulted in identifying the differing consumer typologies as the active versus passive user, while similar dichotomous views identified user groups as “fans,” or “advocates” versus the “lurkers” (Gerson, Plagnol, & Corr, 2017; Jahn & Kunz, 2014; Pagani, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 2011), (Kefi & Maar, 2018). However, another line of research has cautioned against identification of user-types as conclusive of the matter. Such studies have stressed the importance of engaging both ends of the social media user spectrum, finding that less active users, for example, can be particularly susceptible to influences from social peers (Liu, Wu, & Li, 2018). This suggested the need for deeper examination of the complexities of varying types of brand-customer interactions on social media and their impact on customer value (Ratchford, 2015).

2.2.2 Losing voice

Markets are conversations. The community of discourse is the market.

Companies that do not belong to a community of discourse will die.

(Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2000)

The rapid uptake of social media marketing has left organisations striving not just for a voice, but to establish an *authentic* voice. Early studies on social media were concerned with the issue of engagement, such as learning to talk with, rather than at their customers in Web 2.0 (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This approach required a shift in how managing customer relationships was thought of traditionally – the concern of management was no longer on the customer per se but on the dialogue (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011). It was quickly realised that brand pages on Facebook were like unregulated communities, where the dialogue unfolded before the public eye (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). These platforms offered consumers a space to criticise brands with the potential to cause repercussions of great scale via the spread of negative viral content (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gretry, Horváth, Belei, & van Riel, 2017; van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). This put organisations in a vulnerable position, inevitably leaving the consumer with the upper hand. Even a non-response became a response, and all traces of the dialogue were left as a public record for all to see even after the conversation had ended. Researchers such as Powell et al., (2011)

suggested that smart marketers will become active listeners and participate in these conversations, as losing control would otherwise increase the risk of losing their return on investment (ROI). Moreover, researchers have recommended that managers should engage with customers not to simply alleviate negative comments or reviews but to take such undesirable discussions as opportunities to influence and shape customer perceptions and experiences (Mangold & Faulds 2009; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Promoting and encouraging consumers to create brand-related content that is supportive of the brand and its products has been suggested as a solution. However, the fragmentation of the numerous social platforms and varied formats, along with content saturation across channels, has forced consumers to readily ignore content or become highly selective in what they view and process (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014). This has further subjected the content, or rather, the *voice* of many brands, to become part of the background noise; hence it has become harder for brands to be noticed on social media (“Social Media Trends”, 2019).

The issue of authenticity has been considered as an important factor in leading consumers to engage with brands on social media (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016), while authentic branding has been considered key to enhancing the reception of the message and, in turn, quality of relationships within the social media context (Holt 2004; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). The higher trust and value placed in user reviews compared with content posted by brands, and their stronger impact on consumer purchase (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013), has further elevated the importance of authenticity for brands engaging with customers in Web 2.0. The social media challenges that have been summarised herein, dovetails with what Paul Greenberg, social customer relationship management (CRM) expert and thought-leader, aptly identified as intrinsic to the social customer: “The new breed of customer requires corporate transparency, authenticity and interaction” (Greenberg, 2010, p. 410). It seems what Greenberg observed almost a decade ago still holds true today, and perhaps increasingly so.

2.2.3 Measuring social

In social media’s early days, convincing traditional marketers to implement social media strategies was difficult as there seemed to be no real way to measure the ROI for the medium (Powell et al., 2011; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Hence the need for measurable outcomes

for social expenditures was commonly highlighted as the topic of inquiry in past studies. Regardless of social media's concerns of measurability, over the past decade, the medium has become an indispensable part of what was known as the traditional marketing mix (House, 2018; Powell et al., 2011). In 2010, Hoffman and Fodor advised that any measures for ROI need to be revisited with social media, a "radical rethinking" before taking any steps forward. Utilising social media marketing with the aim of creating long-lasting engagement instead of enhancing short-term revenue is an example of this difference (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016). Introduction of measures like analytics, albeit rudimentary, seemed to almost make the outcomes of social media efforts more measurable or traceable than, for example, the traditional marketing campaigns (Powell et al., 2011). Over time, ROI in the context of social media has become a concept regarded as one that is complex, a term that should be warranted more depth to its interpretation than taken simply for its face value. Although it has become easier for organisations to implement a well-established social media strategy, the questions such as its impact on the organisation's performance as a whole have caused the debate about social media's measurability to still be relevant today (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019; Nadda, Dadwal, Mulindwa, & Vieira, 2015).

Researchers and practitioners alike have highlighted that a tool that can quantify and measure the impact of social media's marketing efforts is key to facing the unforeseen challenges social media will continue to present to organisations (Erskine, 2019; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). While various engagement metrics that have been developed to date, the common thread among metrics such as the "applause rate," has been in producing numbers based on counts of customer actions such as likes, comments, mentions or shares (Shleyner, 2018). Other measures include those that calculate the number of actions such as shares ("amplification rate"), or all types of engagement ("average engagement rate,") against the total number of followers. Tools such as "social share of voice" (SSOV) measure the number of mentions of a brand in comparison to competitor brands (Shleyner, 2018).

Research on the measurability of this medium has often suggested that in order to acquire a holistic measure of marketing efforts, a tailored mix of measures should be used (Blanchard, 2011; Erskine, 2019; Dawley & Aynsley, 2018; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Existing measures have been categorised into two different types: volume measures and sentiment measures (Dahl, 2018). *Volume measures* are quantitative in nature, based on counts, (like the

examples provided in the section above), while *sentiment measures* are considered as qualitative in nature. However, sentiment measures are also only qualitative to a certain degree, as they are often based on automated methods such as computer algorithms (Dahl, 2018). Hence, despite the varying types of (both paid and free) tools that have become readily available, the concern for brands now lies in finding measures that produce *meaningful* data (Kim, 2016; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). This is of particular concern when it comes to campaigns that are aimed at improving intangible aspects such as customer relationships. To that end, there has been an increase in more recent avenues of research that have concluded with a call for scales that can measure deeper levels of social impact resulting from brands' customer engagement efforts (Labrecque, 2014). While the advantages of this inexpensive platform are represented in numbers, with platforms such as Facebook reporting 22 billion ad clicks per year (Wordstream Inc., 2015), strategic ways to influence and engage customers still remains uncertain for marketers (Nadda et al., 2015; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

2.3 Social Media and the Hospitality Industry

The phenomenon of customer-intimacy investigated in this study draws on the theory of relationship marketing, which states that in many cases service encounters are also social encounters (Berry, 1995; McCallum & Harrison, 1985). According to Berry's claim, the social nature of Web 2.0 would then place the service nature of tourism and hospitality organisations at an advantageous position. Unsurprisingly, since the permeation of social media platforms, the tourism and hospitality industries have been considered ground-breaking in terms of acquiring customer feedback through online review platforms, such as TripAdvisor (Moro & Rita, 2018). Several brands in hospitality and tourism have, for example, invested in their Facebook pages in an attempt to increase customer engagement (Su, Mariadoss, & Reynolds, 2015). Both industries have been greatly affected by social media's power of e-WOM, with many scholars and industry practitioners alike highlighting the need for its incorporation in customer communications (Moro & Rita, 2018). Although a significant proportion of the published work on social media has highlighted the profound implication it has made on the tourism and hospitality industries, it is still less represented than other disciplines such as management and psychology (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Moro & Rita, 2018).

In terms of the industry scene, a common problem faced by practitioners of both fields has been identified as the lack of resources (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Högberg & Olsson, 2019; Lepkowska-White, 2017; Pantelidis, 2010). Industry reports have highlighted that many marketers in the hospitality and tourism industry are playing multiple roles in the absence of a team dedicated to the numerous tasks involved in the management of social media marketing, let alone brand-customer management. As a result, a few, whose primary roles are for other tasks in the organisation, are often lacking the professional capabilities and time and hence struggling to manage this time-consuming and highly demanding task (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

Though there are traits shared by both the hospitality and tourism industries, it is important to understand that the dynamics of brand-customer relationships differ for each sector. Hence this next section will uncover the conditions that are specific to the hotel and restaurant sectors, that are the focus of this study.

2.3.1 The hotel sector

Social media has forever changed the way in which travel and tourism information is accessed, disseminated and shared (Gensler et al., 2013; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Su et al., 2015). Social media's role within the travel industry has become a medium for sharing travel knowledge and a co-producer of travel information between community residents and tourists (Edwards, Cheng, Wong, Zhang, & Wu, 2017; Moro & Rita, 2018). In this way, social media has become an inseparable part of the tourism experience. It has been reported that more than one third of travellers are influenced by social pages such as Facebook and TripAdvisor, which are among the main platforms used by millions of visitors on a daily basis (Cabiddu, De Carlo, & Piccoli, 2014; Garrido-Moreno, García-Morales, Lockett, & King, 2018). A recent study by Medallia, for example, found a correlation between hotels and occupancy rates: organisations that were actively engaged with social media reviews had a double growth in occupancy rate compared with organisations that were not (Hertzfeld, 2015). Some of the most notable social media tools that have been witnessed in the hotel sector have been the adoption of messaging platforms, to provide real-time concierge services to guests staying at hotels. This has included both the use of third-party applications as well as native

applications (Ting, 2016). Offering bookings and reservations via social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have also been part of the digital shift.

2.3.2 The restaurant sector

Social media's presence has caused a seismic shift within the food and beverage sector. The taking and posting of food photos to social media has become a global phenomenon (Murphy, 2010). The number of photos posted to Instagram with the hashtag "food" for instance, increased from 800,000 in March 2013 (Cookbook, 2013) to nearly 250 million in July 2018 (Infogr8, 2018). In line with this increase, the way customers search for information on local restaurant businesses has seen a shift to smartphones and mobile apps, with online reviews becoming a source of information for the majority of customers when choosing a restaurant (Belt, 2017). This new way of searching has impacted the way businesses build and manage online reputation and visibility, causing restaurants to pay greater attention to how they appear in online reviews with updated information (Moro & Rita, 2018). Food tourism has also been elevated to new levels with social media platforms, causing destinations to reposition themselves in the global tourism marketplace (Oates, 2016). Despite such expansive industry impacts, the research on social media and the food and beverage sector is still in its early stages, such as the lack of evidence as to why the practice of food pictures has such significant marketing implications (Zhu et al., 2019).

2.3.3 Current trends in hospitality industry research

The years 2013–2015 saw a dramatic increase in social media studies for tourism and hospitality brands, yet studies for this discipline are still scarce in comparison to the mainstream literature (Moro & Rita, 2018). Of all hospitality fields, accommodation was found to be most represented, but mostly in relation to TripAdvisor, the most prominent review platform for the lodging industry (Kinstler, 2018; Moro & Rita, 2018). And of all social media platforms, Facebook has been the one most commonly studied by tourism and hospitality researchers. In contrast, Instagram is one of the less-studied social media platforms, though its use for visually sharing images of food and beverage has been discovered (Bui, 2014; Zhu et al., 2019). Overall, the accommodation sector was found to be

the most mature in terms of brands' awareness of social media relevance and research, with the most up-to-date studies.

Social media's power to influence travel decisions has been discovered by previous studies (Hudson & Thal, 2013); for example, studies both in the wider marketing literature but also specific to the hotel sector, have identified that when it comes to decision making, greater influencing power lies with user-generated reviews than other brand-generated content (Su et al., 2015). In general, studies have found that travel experiences accessed within social media platforms are deemed as more trustworthy than information from other media outlets (Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008). This has been consistent with findings from the food and beverage sector (Belt, 2017).

The benefits of social media marketing for hotels have been found by many previous studies (Su et al., 2015; Syed-Ahmad & Murphy, 2010); for example, to strengthen consumer networks for the purposes of relationship marketing (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014). While there have been studies that found a direct relation between social media activity and a ROI (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Powell, Groves, & Dimos, 2011), others have concluded otherwise, stating that when it comes to social media marketing, the emphasis for hotels has been less on the generation of direct sales but rather on its advantages as a cost-free platform with consideration of metrics such as engagement as more adequate in the context of social media (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Customer relationship management (CRM) has also become a strategic imperative in tourism and hospitality, as it can address competition, create differentiation and provide enhanced customer value (Debnath, Datta, & Mukhopadhyay, 2016; Sheth, 2017; Sigala, 2005; Sigala, 2018; Sheth, 2017). Recent studies within the disciplines of tourism and hospitality have also come to highlight dialogue facilitation and co-creative customer experiences as part of the CRM to social CRM shift (Dessart, 2017; Sigala, 2018).

PART II: Theoretical Background

The relevance and importance of brand-customer relationship management for organisations operating on social media platforms are presented in the second part of this literature review.

The shift that has occurred in both research focus and industry implementations in terms of managing customer relationships due to the rise of social media platforms are noted. In doing so, the vital importance of customer-intimacy will be established.

2.4 CRM to Social CRM

With the proliferation of social media studies focusing on the management of brand-customer relationships, there had been a renewed interest in customer relationship management (CRM) theories. The most notable change has been the emergence of social CRM, the socially driven evolution of the major strategies known to CRM. The critical importance of CRM has often been emphasised by past studies, some even claiming that the very existence of companies depends on the strength of their relationships with customers (e.g. Morgan & Hunt, 1994). CRM has been implemented by practitioners to maintain intimate relationships with their customers as this intimacy has enabled practitioners to draw valuable insights into the needs, behaviours and preferences of their customers (Josiassen, Assaf, & Cvelbar, 2014). In face of struggles posed by social media platforms, researchers have called for a re-evaluation of the existing customer management theories and strategies, giving way to a transformation in what was once known as customer relationship management (CRM) to *social* customer relationship management (also referred to as SCRM), or CRM 2.0 (Greenberg, 2009).

The social bonding required in traditional relationship marketing (RM) involved personalisation and customisation through regular communication with customers. This is still central to the social CRM approach where activities such as referring to customers by name during transactions (Berry, 1995), have remained relevant. It is evident that attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships, as Berry (1983) suggested, is still prominent in RM and CRM, whilst it is proposed that social CRM aims to redeem the missing strategies in traditional CRM to cater for the Web 2.0 environment (Sigala, 2018). In Greenberg's (2010) seminal study on CRM 2.0, he advised that CRM combined with social tools can provide the insight required for brands to cater for the "new breed" of social consumers (p. 410).

The social CRM philosophy views customers as social customers (Carfi, 2008), defined by their ability to collaborate with brands to co-create personalised experiences and value

(Sheth, 2017; Lipiäinen, 2015). Significant to the organisation's role in social CRM is the focus on facilitation of partnership with the customer rather than management of the customer (Heller Baird, & Parasnis, 2011). CRM has been considered as vital for organisations in developing long-term relationships with customers, whilst social media enables increased CRM effectiveness by improving customer interactions and offering brands with access to extensive, live customer data (Harrigan et al., 2015). Several scholars have documented the transition from customer-management-focused strategies to customer engagement as central to the CRM to social CRM shift (Greenberg, 2010; Sigala, 2018). This has taken the form of experiential-focused philosophies replacing what was known to be the more transactional or automated solutions (Sigala, 2018). The need to actively engage customers in relationship building and value co-creation and considering customers as collaborative partners has been found as common to social CRM definitions (Brodie, Ilić, Jurić, & Hollebeek, 2013; Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014; Dutot, 2013; Greenberg, 2009; Küpper et al., 2014; Lipiäinen, 2015). The shift from management of the customer to management of the dialogue has also been a recurring theme for social CRM (Sigala, 2018).

Despite the recent interest in social CRM, studies have concluded there is a lack of strategies discussing its implementation and existing research is fragmented (Law, 2017; Sigala, 2018). According to Law (2017), studies that provide insights into social media's impact on CRM emerged only in 2013, stating this as a landmark year for this topic. The nascent development of the research on social CRM merits further scrutiny.

2.4.1 The art of relationship management

For anyone and any business to thrive in the future,
they will have to master the art of relationship building.

(DiJulius, 2019)

Web 2.0 has clearly deconstructed the communication boundaries that may have previously existed between brands and consumers, making way for an increase in interactive experiences that go beyond the simple purchase experience (Brodie, Ilić, Jurić, & Hollebeek, 2013). Social media has allowed brands to reinvent their customer relationship strategies, enabling brands to interact with customers in more personal ways and, in turn, learn about customers'

individual needs and preferences (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018). Moreover, online social communities have further increased the opportunities for brands to build emotion- or affect-based relationships with customers (Moro & Rita, 2018; Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013).

The new type of relationship birthed through social media seemed to celebrate the end of the private-public divide (Holmes & Redmond, 2006). David Marshall (2010) called this the “public private self ... a recognition of the new notion of a public that implies some sort of further exposure of the individual’s life” (p. 45). Inevitably this affected the meaning of “intimacy” for brand-consumer relationships. In the context of Web 2.0, users are seen publicly sharing more of what would have been kept private in the past, which presents opportunities for creating more enduring and intimate relationships with customers (Dessart, 2017; Sashi, 2012). Consequently, the line between brands and consumers’ social networks is blurred (Gensler et al., 2013). Companies were quick to develop and implement strategies on the social media pages of their brands by involving consumers in creative processes for a behind-the-scenes look and experience (Labrecque, 2014).

However, what has been noteworthy is that this shift from private to public has reverted back, with an increasing number of social media users preferring to share and keep their social activities private even when it comes to interacting and communicating with brands. Recent industry findings have claimed this shift as most pertinent for the future of brand-customer relations in social media, with the profound impact it will have on consumers’ expectations (“Social Media Trends”, 2019). In response to the desire for more privacy, organisations have moved their customer communications to private messaging applications, with others developing their own native applications to provide customers one-to-one messaging functions (Ting, 2016). Hootsuite, the social media management company that has reached over 16 million users globally, warns organisations in its *Social Media Trends Report 2019* of the complexities of finding the most appropriate balance between personal and intrusive (Hootsuite, 2019). Relationship management has now become an art to be mastered by brands in order to stay relevant in this age of digital disruption.

2.4.2 Trust issues – it's complicated

Today, trust is an endangered value.

(DiJulius, 2019)

Paul Greenberg (2010), expert and thought-leader of social CRM, claimed a profound shift in the business ecosystem has occurred with the customer now in command of when, how and who they trust. Due to such shifts, studies have identified building brand trust with existing and potential customers as a crucial first step in fostering relationships on social media (Gleeson, 2012; Porter & Donthu, 2008), yet this has been a continuous challenge for brands (Gleeson, 2012). In the absence of brand trust, customers are likely to feel vulnerable and reluctant to open up to brands (Gretry et al., 2017; Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002). Recent disruptions to the Web 2.0 environment, including continuous reports of Facebook's violation of privacy and data protection, have further exacerbated trust issues. According to their 2018 Trust Barometer Report, global communications firm Edelman found that 60% of people no longer trust social media companies (Edelman, 2018). Similarly, the Ponemon Institute, an independent firm specialising in research on trust in privacy and security, reported that trust in Facebook has dropped by 66% (Hootsuite, 2019). Thus, creating a brand voice that can be heard but more importantly trusted by users of this network is vital. With trust reverting back to close family, friends or acquaintances (Šerić & Praničević, 2018), brands are focusing less on maximising reach and more on generating transparent, quality engagement such as context and audience-specific messaging (Hootsuite, 2019). This is why customer engagement has perhaps remained at the heart of inquiry by marketing practitioners and academic researchers on reaching social media success.

2.4.3 To friend or not to friend

The critical importance of managing brand-customer relationships has long been emphasised with some researchers even claiming that the very existence of companies depends on the strength of their relationships with customers (e.g. Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This notion has only come to hold greater truth for the socially-wired Web 2.0 where connections are the very essence of the platforms' activities. Many of the studies that have attempted to uncover the complexities of customer-intimacy have concluded there is still more to be realised, owing to its multi-layered and susceptible nature, coupled with the volatile nature of Web 2.0

platforms. In response to the relatively unimpressive correlations between organisations' use of social media platforms and brand-customer engagement levels, various authors have advised brands to focus on utilising the technology to create “long-lasting engagement,” than to achieve short-term results (Barger et al., 2016; Schultz & Peltier, 2013).

CRM success hinges upon whether a brand, which would otherwise be considered as just another acquaintance in a customer's social network, has formed a relationship that is felt to be personal to the customer (Gensler et al., 2013). If unsuccessful, the brand remains as simply another acquaintance with less chance of achieving marketing effectiveness.

Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, have grown adept at filtering out irrelevant ads, either skimming over or actively using ad-blocking tools. While brands may be able to pay their way into potential customers' social feeds, this has become no guarantee that anyone will pay due attention (Hootsuite, 2019). Peters et al. (2013) described this as “dead likes,” brands that may have high numbers of followers but minimum levels of engagement. In the same vein, Gensler et al., (2013) identified a distinction between weak ties or “acquaintance” versus strong ties, where the brand's status was elevated to “friend.” Brands can either become friends or remain as a part of customers' social networks (Su et al., 2015). For Gensler et al. (2013), a brand considered as a friend was symbolic of one who shares more intimacy with the consumer and has more power to shape the consumer's thought processes and actions.

With increased opportunities for brand-customer engagements, friendship is a key dimension that has emerged from the social CRM literature. Although the verb use of the word “friend” dates back to the time of Shakespeare and earlier (Garber, 2013), the meaning of the term as we knew it once has been irrefutably changed with the addition of a definition derived from its common use in Web 2.0 platforms.

As such, the terminology commonly used across these platforms is bound by social connotations, with verbs such as “to friend,” “friended,” or “friending” having been coined to define the act of making connections in both social and even formal Web 2.0 platforms (Merriam-Webster dictionary). The term friend is now loosely used for any particular connection or link made within a social networking platform – as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary the verb meaning of friend is “to connect with someone on a social website so that you can share information, pictures, etc.,” while the Oxford Dictionary more loosely defines

the term as “add [someone] to a list of friends or contacts on a social networking website”. The interpersonal relationship literature identifies managing friendships as the major function of social media platforms (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). To this end, studies suggest that use of the same terminology in social and brand-customer settings may unconsciously shape the consumers’ perceptions of their relationships with the brands they follow (Su et al, 2015).

Several studies have indicated that intensity in customer engagement levels precedes the building of a loyal base of followers who will share and actively interact with the brand (Peters et al., 2013; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Sashi, 2012). Overall, these studies have highlighted that quality customer relationships will determine influence in Web 2.0, rather than the number of a brand’s followers. In light of this, the development of strategies for reaching higher levels of intimacy in customer relationships has been undoubtedly crucial in this new marketing era. However, to date, the concept of customer-intimacy has not received much research attention in the context of social media. Despite being an important element in the relationship management process, research on this area has been minimal. It is the broad intention of this thesis to conceptualise and operationalise the concept of customer-intimacy in Web 2.0 and thereby extend the social CRM literature. Hence, the next section provides a more detailed discussion and justification for the need to look at the re-conceptualisation of customer-intimacy.

PART III: Establishing the Concept

In this final part of the chapter, the foundational perspectives from which the re-conceptualisation of customer-intimacy was birthed are discussed. The series of theories that have been instrumental in the process of the disentanglement of intimacy, a phenomenon specific to the brand-customer interactions within social media are presented. The establishment of intimacy as a binary is then explained and lastly the relevant implications of each dimension will be introduced.

2.5 Disentangling Intimacy

Before proceeding to any discussions about customer-intimacy, briefly taking note of the closely related concept of customer engagement assists in providing the bigger picture, as brand-customer-intimacy has often been identified as a component of customer engagement (Haven, 2007). Consumer engagement, a concept rooted in the RM literature, has recently gained traction in endeavours to understand brand-customer relationships in social media studies (Dessart, 2017; Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Wirtz et al., 2013). Singh, Kumar, and Singh (2010), claim that customers' intimate involvement with brands have been made achievable through Web 2.0, and in their customer engagement model, they describe customer-intimacy as an intensified level of engagement. Achieving and maintaining an engaged consumer base has become one of the defining success factors for many marketing professionals (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011; Brodie, Hollebeek, & Smith, 2011). As noted earlier, a considerable number of studies (e.g. Shleyner, 2018; Peters et al., 2013) have concluded that consumer reach or awareness in the absence of engagement will not translate to tangible outcomes for brands in social media. Engagement in social media brand communities has been found to lead to positive increases in purchases (Goh et al., 2013). Hence, Hollebeek and Chen's (2014) definition seems to best summarise customer engagement, as "a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interaction" (p.154), while customer-intimacy can be seen to fall under the customer engagement framework, considered as an embodiment of the emotional or affect-based nature of brand-customer relationships (Singh, Kumar, & Singh, 2010).

2.5.1 Customer-intimacy

Few empirical studies have attempted to determine the fundamental issues of how brand-customer relationships in social media are built, developed and affected (Su et al., 2015). Due to the fact that the marketability of brand-customer-intimacy in Web 2.0 so far remains undetected, the precise mechanisms that will transform social media impact in to true value creation remains uncertain (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018; Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman, & Bezawada, 2013). This major gap identified in this review is summarised by the resounding question presented in the Marketing Science Institute's (MSI), Tier 1 Research Priorities list

for 2018-2020: “What are the most effective strategies to drive deeper and lasting customer engagement with the firm?” This same question has been posed in MSI’s 2006-2008 research priorities list and again in the 2010-12 list. Over the years, the question has remained relevant for studies on the management perspectives of social media, yet the gap in literature has been that there have only been a few studies that have examined the heart of this issue in a quantitative way (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2015). While, awareness of brand-customer-intimacy and its business potential in Web 2.0 has often been highlighted, a systematic review of the phenomenon and its impact has not yet been undertaken.

In prior research, intimacy has been conceptualised as the quality of interactions and relationships between individuals (Laurenceau, Barrett & Pietromonaco, 1998; Timmerman, 1991) developed through processes involving disclosure of personal information to a partner who gives a response, which is then interpreted as understanding, validating and caring (Reis & Shaver, 1988). The concept of customer-intimacy can be traced back to the 1980s, dovetailing with the emergence of what would later be termed as CRM; i.e. marketing focused on relational rather than transactional economic exchanges (Berry, 1983; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). Customer-intimacy has been described in various ways, with factors such as closeness, value perception and mutual understanding prominent in the literature (Brock & Zhou, 2012). The impact of customer-intimacy on information sharing has also been a recurring commentary, with researchers noting it as a precondition to acquiring more information about the customer (Hansen, 2003). Hence, customer-intimacy can be broadly understood as a “customer’s willingness to share personal information and emotion as well as expectations for future transactions based on long-term relationship with a service provider” (Jeon, Kim, Lee, Park, Jeong, & Kim, 2013, p. 4).

Over the years there have been various academic contributions in the wider marketing literature that have highlighted the importance of customer-intimacy. Due to its marketing effectiveness, managers have been advised to add customer-intimacy into their relationship management systems “as a leading key performance and comparative benchmark indicator in order to monitor and manage desired outcome variables such as WOM, loyalty, availability, and advisor status more effectively” (Brock & Zhou, 2012, p. 379). In their investigation of intimacy in Web 2.0, authors Rau et al. (2008) found that although studies conceptualised

intimacy differently, self/partner-disclosure and emotional support were widely accepted as central to the formation of intimacy.

Before the birth of Web 2.0 technologies, intimacy in traditional media existed merely as a notion (Rasmussen, 1997). Consumers would share a sense of intimacy with the famous few, and as the private lives of celebrities were broadcast through mass media (Rasmussen, 1997), this created an intimate setting where the viewer gained personal information about the mediated persona (Meyrowitz, 1986). This intimacy was experienced without any form of direct communication. Thus, in the context of mass media and the public sphere, the process was described as “pseudo-communication” (Meyrowitz, 1986), which would create a kind of “pseudo-intimacy” (Rasmussen, 1997). However, since the popularisation of the term Web 2.0 in 2005 (O’Reilly, 2007) and its rapid permeation into people’s everyday lives, what was once merely a notion seemed to become a reality. With social media platforms, the public is now able to exchange immediate and direct forms of communication with the famous few, and in turn, this has posed new dimensions to our existing understanding of pseudo-intimacy. Yet, very few social media studies to date that have attempted to redefine this existing understanding of pseudo-intimacy. Various authors have previously concluded that customer engagement involves a multidimensional approach (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011; Coelho et al., 2018). Similarly, customer engagement in Web 2.0 has been considered as a multi-focal, context-specific phenomenon (Dessart, 2017). In the same vein, this study identified a need for distinction between the definitions of pseudo-intimacy as applicable to the context of mass media (Rasmussen, 1997) and social media. The theories and concepts this research gleaned from in order to re-conceptualise customer-intimacy as it is discovered within the context of Web 2.0 are introduced in the following section.

2.5.2 Pseudo-intimacy

The notion of pseudo-intimacy itself is not new within the business context. Barbara Gutek in her 2000 study categorised customer-organisation relationships as service relationships, service encounters and pseudo-relationships. Gutek (2000) describes the term pseudo-relationship as descriptive not pejorative, identifying that although encounters are between strangers, customers are provided with familiarity through repeated contact with the same company. Colgate and Danaher (2000) also observed that pseudo-relationships could be just

as successful as personal relationships if they were well implemented. The complications that have been brought to the scene by informed and savvy customers of social media calls for a process of redefinition. Due to the transparent nature of social media, the conscious consumer can be very aware of brands' managing tactics, hence is equipped with the ability to distinguish between pseudo and non-pseudo. Peters et al. (2013) inform managers of the need to be aware that all activities including listening, measuring and responding are often transparent in the social network, (compare with likes to levels of activity), and that these activities are known not only known to the managers, but to all. This transparency and awareness do not, however, signal the end of relationship marketing days for managers.

2.5.3 Pseudo versus genuine

Tracing the concept of pseudo within the social sciences literature takes us back to the distinguished work of George Herbert Mead who pioneered thoughts in social psychology. Of particular interest to this study is Mead's renowned collection of texts: *Mind, self and society*, published in 1934 (Mead, 1934). Mead's account was that all forms of communication were symbolic interactions (symbolic interactionism theory), bound within a social process. Following on from Mead, Horton and Wohl presented the *parasocial interaction* (PSI) theory in their 1956 publication *Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance*. Emerging from the communications literature, PSI defined relationships that were formed between consumers and the mass media. Described as an "illusionary experience" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215), PSIs were imagined to be face-to-face and reciprocal.

Later, in 1965, Marilyn Sermul La Porte, basing her study on Mead's original idea of symbolic interactionism, introduced the term *pseudo-communication*, which was antithetical to what she described as "true" communication. La Porte's interpretation that was formed within the linguistics literature seemed to add a new dimension to what had been the single dimension way of understanding communication. In the broader context, pseudo-communication was used by La Porte to define what Mead had observed as "communication without significance" (Mead, 1934, p. 81). According to La Porte, a gesture could only become significant when it aroused the same idea or response in the audience as it aroused in the performer (La Porte, 1965). Thus, successful communication was achieved only when

there was an identical response between the object and the subject. It seems that La Porte's idea of pseudo-communication closely resembled Horton and Wohl's (1956) account of PSI where interactions with those behind the screen were, in fact, one-sided and could only be imagined as reciprocal in the consumers' minds.

Once La Porte had established a definition, further elaboration of pseudo-communication was presented. According to La Porte, words in themselves carried two-fold meanings. The first is being the *dictionary meaning*, which is accepted communally as the meaning to a word and defined similarly by homogeneous groups, while the second is the *emotional meaning*, a meaning that is unique because it is determined by the "individual's personal response to it" (La Porte, 1965, pp. 257–258). La Porte referred to the first category as "pseudo-communicative words" and the latter as "true-communicative words". Upon this presuppose begins the disentanglement of the social media phenomenon that is customer-intimacy. In this study, the concept of pseudo-intimacy will be investigated from La Porte's perspective, as a widely accepted form of communication between a brand and customer; i.e. the dictionary meaning. The dictionary meaning when applied to the context of this study could be thought of as a brand's form of communication that is seemingly automated or commercial to the customer and therefore impersonal. This type of communication would not perhaps have any particular emotional or personal experience attached; rather, it is the form of communication expected of any organisation. In contrast, genuine-intimacy could be thought of as a customer feeling a unique connection to the brand, a connection that is personal to their own experience. This definition resonates with La Porte's depiction of words that are true-communicative or carry emotional meaning.

The two concepts of intimacy will further stem from Aggarwal's (2004) study on brand relationships, which distinguished between exchange and communal relationships: *exchange relationships* were defined by interactions for the purposes of business while *communal relationships* were defined by interactions motivated by genuine concern for and the benefiting of others. In this manner, the initial conceptualisation of pseudo-intimacy will account for exchange relationships while genuine-intimacy will account for communal relationships. From the brand's point of view, all interactions with the customer may feature aspects of pseudo-intimacy, accounting for some form of business intention. For this reason, pseudo-intimacy will define the attempts made by the organisation that are perceived by the

customer as pseudo, simply as part of an organisation's strategic management rather than an act based on genuine engagement. Pseudo-intimacy could account for the mistakes, failed attempts, or even intentional one-off social media campaigns that the customer knowingly perceives as pseudo-intimacy. On the other hand, genuine-intimacy will describe the customer's perception of their relationship with the brand as one that exists beyond transactional management tactics, a relationship that is perceived as genuinely intimate. Despite its negative connotations, prior research has outlined pseudo-intimacy as a beneficial state to reach in a business-marketing context when it comes to customer relations (e.g. Colgate & Danaher, 2000; Gutek, 2000). Hence this research turns to the Two-Factor Theory founded by Herzberg (1959) to better understand this complex state of customer-intimacy. The latter section of this review will outline how the phenomenon of customer-intimacy will be investigated through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

2.6 The Impact of Customer-intimacy

Understanding the consequences of customer-intimacy would help industry practitioners to select the most effective social media strategy. The perceived benefits of brand-customer relationships have often been referred to as brand satisfaction and a generation of positive word-of-mouth (Zhang & Luo, 2016). In the tourism sector for example, engaging customers has been found to increase loyalty and brand evaluations overall (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). Accordingly, the impact of customer-intimacy will be measured in terms of both brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

2.6.1 Application of the Two-Factor Theory

The consequences of the pseudo-intimacy/genuine-intimacy binary will be examined through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory in order to discover how the two forms of intimacy may differ from each other. Frederick Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Factor Theory (1959), later known as the Two-Factor Theory, has become one of the most used, known, and widely respected theories for explaining motivation and job satisfaction (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005; Stello, 2011). More recent studies within the social media literature have applied the Two-Factor Theory to explain technology usage and customers' motivations for switching between technology services (Carfi, 2008; Hou, 2015; Liu, Guo, &

Lee, 2011). According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, two distinct sets of factors exist in organisations: job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. One set, termed as "satisfiers" or "motivators", results in satisfaction when adequately fulfilled, while the other set, termed as "dissatisfiers" or "hygiene factors", causes dissatisfaction when deficient (DeShields et al., 2005). Herzberg's theory challenged traditional thinking to claim that satisfaction and dissatisfaction do not operate at opposite ends of the same continuum (Herzberg, 1959). The opposite of satisfaction would simply mean no satisfaction, not dissatisfaction, just like the opposite of dissatisfaction would not be satisfaction but rather no dissatisfaction. In the same way, this study also proposes that pseudo-intimacy and genuine- intimacy do not sit at opposite ends of the continuum. Through the lens of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, comparison between the two types of intimacy as perceived by the customer will be made to examine how the consequences of genuine-intimacy and consequences of pseudo-intimacy will uniquely differ in predicting brand satisfaction.

In accordance with Herzberg's model, this study proposes that feelings of genuine-intimacy will lead to satisfaction, and feelings of pseudo-intimacy will not lead to dissatisfaction but perhaps satisfaction at a lower degree. Instead of viewing pseudo-intimacy as a feeling that would simply lead to dissatisfaction, the customer would feel "less" satisfaction than they would if they experienced feelings of genuine-intimacy. Therefore, pseudo-intimacy is not conceptualised as an opposite feeling to genuine-intimacy but a feeling that is unique to genuine-intimacy. This theoretical disentanglement will provide insight on two levels: (1) what management approaches customers would perceive as pseudo-intimacy, and (2) which approaches would lead to perceptions of genuine-intimacy. The second level of insight intended through Herzberg's lens is to discover how the two concepts of intimacy will differently affect a customer's brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. For example, it has been found that brand-customer relationships that have high intimacy levels reflect more higher service evaluations including satisfaction and positive WOM intention than when compared to relationships with low intimacy levels (Jeon & Kim, 2016). Accordingly, this study will propose that customers involved in a relationship based on genuine concerns will evaluate a brand and its actions more positively than those in relationships based merely on transactional interactions (Aggarwal, 2004; Huang & Mitchell, 2014).

Several social media studies examining the effects of customer engagement and intimacy have found satisfaction and loyalty intentions as positive outcomes. For example, engaging customers through social media was associated with higher brand-consumer relationships and WOM communications (Hudson et al., 2016). Further, consumers' participation in social platforms, such as online brand communities have seen higher perceptions of brand satisfaction (Judson, Devasagayam, & Buff, 2012), greater brand loyalty and again WOM intentions (Madupu and Cooley, 2010; Su, et al, 2015). In line with the social media literature, this study will further investigate whether the type of intimacy felt by the customer will differently impact customers' satisfaction and loyalty intentions.

2.6.2 Brand satisfaction

Measuring online service quality has often been implemented through customer satisfaction, which can account for a customer's broad evaluation of the brand (Yang & Fang, 2004). Brand satisfaction has also been claimed as a powerful measure for brand equity when it comes to service businesses such as hotels, where loyalty is the cumulative result of the user experiences (Aaker, 1996), while in the context of social media, brand satisfaction has often been viewed as a consequence of brand-customer engagement (Clark, Black & Judson, 2017; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Social media has been viewed as a medium that has the potential to increase levels of satisfaction, whereby customers can voice issues for brands to resolve, this has enabled brands with opportunities to also recover from service failures (Clark & Melancon, 2013). Ashley and Tuten (2015) state the plethora of studies on social media marketing have focused on execution strategies, while there has been little on strategies leading to affect processing, engagement and important brand outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty.

2.6.3 Brand loyalty

Building and maintaining brand loyalty has long been a central research theme for marketers (Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012), it has been considered as a final dimension, an ultimate symbol of a customer's level of identification with a brand (Keller, 2008). The benefits of brand loyalty have often been regarded as increase in sale revenues, market share and supportive in a brand growing or maintaining their place in the market (Keller, 2008; Aaker, 1991,

Kapferer, 1997). With the rise of Web 2.0, an organisation's failure to meet customer expectations is punished more quickly, more consequently and with farther reach (Burmam, 2010). As a result of social media's wider reach and immediacy, customer loyalty has become an increasingly influential yet vulnerable status. Subsequently, examining customers' loyalty to brands and, especially, loyalty to a brand within the specific context of social media is deemed crucial.

Brand loyalty on social media

In light of the recent disruptions to the Web 2.0 environment that have jeopardised levels of trust towards social media platforms themselves, it seems highly pertinent to look into brand loyalty in terms of social media accounts. A customer's positive experience with a brand often leads them to spread the word in their social networks. Sashi's (2012) study on customer engagement and social media states, however, an "emotional bond" may be a prerequisite for such action. In a study of customer commitment, affective commitment was found to have a positive relation to WOM communication while calculative commitment had no relation (Harrison-Walker, 2001). For example, Labrecque's (2014) study looked at how providing customers with a "behind-the-scenes" and other brand initiatives such as disclosing information and fostering a sense of connectedness to the brand or fostering one-to-one relationships could lead to the strengthening of brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty to organisation

Relationship marketing states that social bonding can drive customer loyalty in a competitive environment and create higher tolerance levels in the face of a service failure (Berry, 1995). Concurrently, Aggarwal's (2004) research on brand-customer relationships found that customers involved in a social relationship with a brand will evaluate the failure of a service encounter more positively in comparison to those who are only in exchange relationships. More specifically loyalty and customers' willingness to tolerate flaws have been identified as key benefits of customer-intimacy (Rau et al., 2008). Social media-based brand communities have been found to enhance brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Emotion or affect-based relationships with brands have been found to lead to loyalty in the form of purchase behaviour (Moro & Rita, 2018; Turri et al., 2013).

Propositions

Application of the Two-Factor Theory resulted in the formulation of propositions that directed the research activities to follow.

Proposition 1: Both genuine-intimacy and pseudo-intimacy are positively related to brand satisfaction at different levels for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

Proposition 2: Both genuine-intimacy and pseudo-intimacy are positively related to brand loyalty at different levels for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

Proposition 3: The lack of genuine-intimacy or pseudo-intimacy will be negatively related to brand satisfaction for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

Proposition 4: The lack of genuine-intimacy or pseudo-intimacy will be negatively related to brand loyalty for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

The literature review chapter has presented a theoretical overview of the premise of this thesis. The studies most closely related to this thesis were reviewed, highlighting the research stream the thesis builds on. The challenges social media has posed for customer management, and the ways in which organisations have responded amidst the rise of Web 2.0 have been outlined. There has been a clear shift in studies concerned with social media marketing and particularly in social media studies within the tourism and hospitality context. The common thread of concerns for the tourism and hospitality industry has been the transformative power of social media. The crucial need to maintain intimacy in brand-customer relationships for marketing in the social media environment and the conceptualisation of customer-intimacy as a context-specific phenomenon have also been established through this chapter. With the rapid changes to today's social media platforms, and, in turn, customer behaviours,

presenting contemporary study that can shed light on both managerial and customer perspectives is crucial.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter presents the research methodology that guided this research. The research design aspects, the scale development process (SDP), data collection and analyses methods are addressed, with a detailed description provided of the process through which the research was conducted.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section I discusses the research design and rationale for the thesis and considers various issues and decisions related to the adoption of this design. Section II details the steps involved in the SDP. Section III presents the methods used for the qualitative research, including data collection and analysis of the interviews. Section IV presents an overview of the quantitative phase including the design of the main survey, the data collection process and the various techniques used for analysing the findings of the main survey. Finally, the chapter concludes with a prelude to the discussion of the preliminary and main survey findings in the following chapters.

To address the literature gap identified in Chapter 2 and advance research in this area of social CRM, it was vital to adopt a sound and theoretically informed research approach. The research questions that directed the research activities in order to achieve the overarching aim of this study are stated below. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, “What...?” questions were adopted.

- Research Question 1) What types of social media interactions are identified as pseudo-intimacy?
- Research Question 2) What types of social media interactions are identified as genuine-intimacy?
- Research Question 3) What are the unique effects of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty?

Section I: Research Design and Rationale

3.2 Research Paradigm

The methods of a research are predetermined by the ontological and epistemological principles that guide the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research paradigms “can be seen as a positive force for commitment, providing the researcher with a framework for making order out of the chaos of social life” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 11). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), before presenting the methods of a research, the paradigm that has fundamentally shaped the research ontologically and epistemologically must first be understood.

This thesis embraces a post-positivist paradigm, which assumes that an objective view of reality can be discovered, albeit a truth that may not be definitive of what is perfectly real (Gray, 2004). Therefore, the ontology is *critical realism*, where reality is apprehensible but only imperfectly (Guba, 1990). The epistemology of this study aims to be objective in capturing the perceptions of customers as close to reality as possible. Accordingly, the methodology takes a sequential mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research. A qualitative research phase was first approached using semi-structured interviews with both managerial experts and customers. The findings from these interviews were then used to inform the quantitative research phase, where an online survey was conducted with hotel and restaurant customers.

3.3 Research Design

Since the purpose of this study was to disentangle the phenomenon of customer-intimacy in social media by assessing the key dimensions of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, extant scale development procedures (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin et al., 1997) were followed. The scale development process allows the integration of both qualitative as well as quantitative approaches at various stages. In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore both perspectives of the brand-customer relationship as the pseudo- and genuine-intimacy dimensions are yet unexplored in the literature.

The qualitative stage complemented the subsequent quantitative phase, enabling the development of a scale to measure the constructs of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. Both approaches were required to develop and then validate the scale. Thus, a research design that could accommodate both qualitative as well as quantitative phases was deemed necessary for this research. This is explained in further detail in Table 1.

3.3.1 Rationale for a mixed methods research design

In the past, the wider marketing literature has favoured quantitative research, which has also been the case for the majority of studies focusing on relationship marketing (Hunt, 1994). However, concerns have been raised that the limitations of quantitative methods have restricted the area of inquiry (Walle, 1997). Accordingly, this has led scholars to question the lack of qualitative studies within the marketing discipline (Hunt, 1994). In light of this, there have been more studies in recent years conducting a combined mixed methods approach (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson 2003; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Scholars have recognised the strengths in integrating multiple methods where, for example, detailed insight that could be overlooked in quantitative surveys can be gained through qualitative data collection methods (e.g. Creswell et al., 2003; Jick, 1979). Hence, this study followed a sequential, mixed methods approach, with the contextualised information from the qualitative research phase setting the foundation for the quantitative data that was collected in the second phase of research.

There are varying types of research designs when it comes to mixed methods research where qualitative and quantitative research is combined. Broadly, there are two classifications, as outlined by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009): (1) *parallel mixed design*, where both qualitative and quantitative data is used in a concurrent manner and equal weight can be given to both approaches, and (2) *sequential mixed design* where the phases of the study occur in chronological order, with one strand emerging from or depending on the previous strand (either qualitative or quantitative). Hence, the distinction between these two approaches lies in the weight given to the qualitative versus quantitative phases. There are three further types of design within the sequential design approach: explanatory, exploratory and embedded (Creswell et al., 2003). Since, this research implemented the sequential use of qualitative and

quantitative approaches, the quantitative built on and further extended the qualitative. Therefore, exploratory design was deemed most appropriate, as discussed in the next section.

3.3.2 Exploratory sequential design

The exploratory nature of this research lies in its aim to provide an understanding of this relatively new social media phenomenon by exploring pseudo- and genuine-intimacy in brand-customer relationships. Exploratory sequential design is recommended by various authors when research involves the development and testing of an instrument that has not been developed before (Creswell, 1999; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). It is suggested that the research topic is first explored in the qualitative phase, which assists in developing and setting the boundaries for the new instrument, followed by the quantitative phase that empirically validates the instrument. This is a variant of the exploratory sequential design, referred to as the *instrument development model*, which in this study was incorporated through interviews to provide a set of qualitative findings that acted as a road-map to develop a list of items. Then quantitative data collected through an online survey served to develop and validate the final scale, enabling the inquiry of the research to be understood.

Figure 2 shows the mixed methods approach adopted within this research.

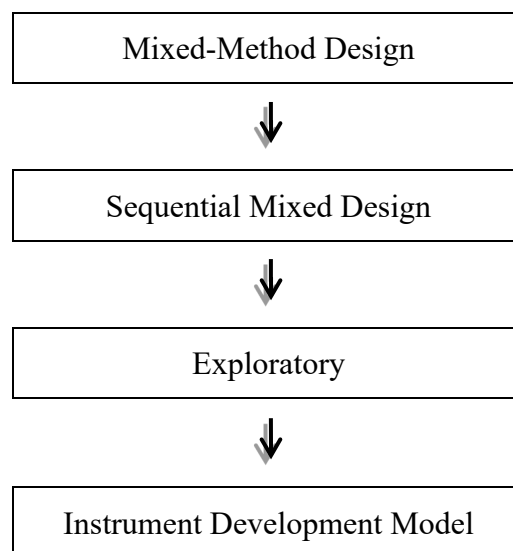


Figure 2: Mixed method research design

3.3.3 Procedure to implement the design

Mixed method research design was implemented across various stages of the scale development, as shown in Table 1. As evident from the table, both approaches were connected with the main quantitative phase building on the preliminary qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Table 1: Implementation of mixed methods design across stages of the scale development process

Method	Scale Development Process	Purpose	Action Taken
Qualitative	Step 1. Generate an item pool	To assist the formation of the interview instrument and develop a set of items to capture each intimacy construct	Content analysis to explore hospitality SM accounts and their brand-customer interactions Identified 13 activities
			Generated items from semi-structured interviews Generated 58 items
	Step 2. Refine items	To evaluate each item, and establish face and content validity of items	Items refined by an expert panel of hospitality and tourism academic experts Items reduced from 58 items to 26 items
Quantitative	Step 3. Develop survey (pilot testing)	To conduct an empirical investigation of items and then test them in a pilot study before conducting the main study	Include the 26 items in an online survey
			Pilot study administered to a convenience sample of 26 participants
	Step 4. Administer final survey	To develop the final scale	Online survey to a sample of 457 participants
	Step 5. Exploratory factor analysis	To conduct an empirical investigation of items to identify latent constructs for intimacy	EFA conducted with factor loadings using the Varimax rotation method
	Step 6. Internal consistency assessment	To examine the reliability of the intimacy constructs	Reliability tests conducted including Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability
	Step 7. Validation of final scale	To validate the final scale	CFA conducted – linking the intimacy constructs to the outcome variables (c.f. discriminant validity)

Section II: The Scale Development Procedure

3.4 Scale Development Process

The scale development process for this research was guided by Churchill's (1979) paradigm, which has been widely used for developing marketing scales, in conjunction Hinkin et al.'s (1997) scale development work. Hinkin et al.'s (1997) work, particularly, provides guidelines to assist hospitality researchers to systematically develop useable scales through seven steps. This section outlines each of the seven steps that were taken in this research, which adopted six of the seven steps as originally outlined by Hinkin et al. (1997).

Step 1 Generate an item pool

According to Hinkin et al. (1979), "the scale development process begins with the creation of items to assist a construct under examination" (p. 102). This item creation procedure can take an inductive or deductive approach. The current study took an inductive approach whereby the intimacy scale was derived from the generated items. To establish the binary conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, the inductive approach was deemed appropriate, as recommended for use when exploring an unfamiliar phenomenon (Hinkin et al., 1997).

In line with Hinkin et al.'s (1997) first step, the item generation process involved the development of a set of items that could identify the characteristics of each pseudo- and genuine-intimacy construct. Fifty-eight items were generated (see Appendix 7) based on the interview results. Prior to the interview process, a content analysis was completed to observe the current social media interactions between hospitality organisations and customers. This step was deemed necessary given the lack of the customer perspective on customer-intimacy in social media. With careful consideration of the literature review, a simple sorting procedure was used to produce a rudimentary list of key words or types of interaction as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy. This content analysis was preliminary in nature.

It was considered appropriate to conduct exploratory research in the form of qualitative interviews first, as this research aimed to conceptualise customer-intimacy in a new light. The

process of item generation and criteria that guided this process is discussed separately in section 4.2.3.

Step 2 Refine items

The process of refining the created items was conducted through an expert panel of academic researchers to establish content and face validity. Each expert was selected for their research expertise, having a PhD or doctoral candidacy in hospitality or tourism. The main aim of this step was to review and refine each of the generated scale items and assess their face and content validity (Getty & Thompson, 1994). These experts served as judges for evaluating the items. Through this process, the 58 items were reduced to 26, based on redundancy and clarity. This procedure is further detailed in the preliminary data analysis section of Chapter 4.

Step 3 Develop survey

After completion of the item refinement stage, the final 26 items obtained from the expert reviews were then placed into the form of a questionnaire with a seven-point Likert-type scale, this being the scale recommended as the most adequate for estimating reliability (Lissitz & Green, 1975). The survey questions and the structure of the overall questionnaire was modified according to an evaluation by four academic experts. The modifications were mostly based on issues of redundancy, clarity, conciseness and readability. Once the final version of the questionnaire was produced, a pilot study was conducted. The objective of the pilot study was to test run the survey process and to ensure face validity of the survey questions.

Step 4 Administer final survey

The objective of this step was to collect data from a wider sample to develop and validate the final scale. The final survey comprised 13 pseudo-intimacy and 13 genuine-intimacy items. This survey was administered to a sample of 516 customers who were currently following a social media account of a hotel or restaurant. The data was collected first through partnering organisations and then a second round of data was collected through a panel sample. The data received from the 516 customers was first manually checked and then refined through various statistical tests, resulting in 457 useable responses.

Step 5 Exploratory factor analysis

An EFA was conducted to develop the measurement scale using a principal components analysis with Varimax rotation. Based on eigenvalue, factor loadings and Cronbach's Alpha the underlying items were uncovered. Chapter 4 of this thesis has been dedicated to the analysis of data obtained from total respondents.

Step 6 Internal consistency assessment

This next step followed the process recommended by Hinkin et al. (1997) as a critical step for new scale development; namely, to calculate the internal consistency reliabilities for each of the scale. "[T]his step is justified as the unidimensionality of the individual scales" is established through the factor analyses previously conducted (Hinkin et al., 1997, p. 113). This step is to ensure the scale measures what it is intended to measure (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin et al., 1997). The internal consistency and validity of the scale were measured using SPSS 17 (Software Package for Social Science).

Step 7 Validation of final scale

The final step of the scale development process served the purpose of establishing the construct and discriminant validity of the scale. CFA was performed to refine the scale and then confirm its structure using the statistical software package LISREL, the overall fit of the social media intimacy scale was evaluated in the presence of other constructs. Based on Pearson correlation test, the final pseudo- and genuine-intimacy scale was correlated with brand satisfaction on social media, brand loyalty and loyalty to brand social media. The results showed significant relationships between the intimacy constructs and the three outcome variables. Explanation of the validity measures and details of how the reliability and validity of the final scale was established is outlined in Chapter 4.

Section III: Interview Process

3.5 Qualitative Interviews

3.5.1 Interview purpose

The main purpose of conducting the interviews was to explore and uncover the facets of customer-intimacy that have not been highlighted in the literature and to then capture perspectives unique to the realm of social media on the new constructs of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. The interviews contributed towards the generation of initial items to accomplish Step 1 of the scale development process.

Interviews can be useful to not only gain insight or understanding of opinions but also stories of any particular experiences (Rowley, 2012). Interviews can be defined as a data collection method whereby a discussion between the interviewer and the respondent is held with the purpose of unfolding the respondent's perspective towards the construct of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Use of qualitative interviews helped to explore the concept of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy in greater depth by developing the constructs based on an understanding of both consumer and expert viewpoints (Mason, 2002). These findings were to generate items for the two intimacy constructs that would then contribute towards the design of the online questionnaire.

3.5.2 Interview structure

The interview instruments were designed to be flexible, where the researcher was essentially the main “instrument”, with the instrument serving more as guidance than a structured template to follow (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Both expert and customer interviews included the same intimacy-related questions with minor differences in the opening questions. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions for the intimacy questions. This approach was chosen because open-ended responses allow the researcher to acquire descriptive responses from the participants in order to understand the world as seen by these participants (Patton, 1990, p. 24). Thus, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews enabled the research objective of discovering and identifying the two new customer-intimacy constructs to be achieved. Hence, the customer interviewees

were asked a series of open-ended questions in the first section of the interview instrument (see Appendix 6 for the expert interview instrument).

- 1) Could you please tell me about your day-to-day interactions with customers on social media?
- 2) Do you consider the organisation/brand as another “friend” in your network or a brand you’ve liked/friended for solely consumption purposes?
- 3) How much of your personal life would you share with a brand on social media?
- 4) Would you consider any of your relationships with brands as intimate in the realm of social media?
- 5) When you’re interacting with brands on social media, what makes you feel that it’s genuine interaction?

Responses to open-ended questions like “When you’re interacting with brands/customers on social media, what makes you feel that it’s genuine interaction?” were further investigated with questions such as “Then what about interactions that don’t feel are genuine?” This enabled the participants’ views to be captured without any predetermination of those views. Throughout the interview, participants were asked to recall certain types of interactions with brands that caused them to feel intimacy and whether it seemed to them as either genuine or pseudo. After ensuring the participants were able to share their views in their own words, the following section then asked specific questions.

In order to explore the two new customer-intimacy concepts for the generating of items, it was important that the interview participant understood the meaning of the questions presented by the researcher (Hinkin et al., 1997). Hence, when asking questions in relation to the pseudo- and genuine-intimacy concepts, the respondent was provided with a visual diagram to illustrate the two intimacy concepts (see Appendix 2). The eight engagement strategies identified from the content analysis were then presented case by case, where the participant was asked to rate each as an experience of either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy according to the visual aid. In this diagram, a few key words were provided under each type of intimacy to help provide the participant with a conceptualisation of each. These key words were taken from the brand-customer relationship studies introduced in the literature review chapter, particularly Aggarwal’s (2004) study which distinguished between “exchange” and

“communal” relationships, and Gensler et al. (2013) who identified a distinction between weak ties or “acquaintance” versus strong ties, where the brand’s status was elevated to “friend”. Hence, pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy were explored with different indicators in this part of the interview.

6) For the following statements, please rate on a 1 to 5 scale (according to the diagram), if you would perceive the following actions as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy?

- When the photo you post of a brand on your social media account is liked by the organisation
- When the organisation comments on your post of their brand
- When the organisation reposts your image on their social media account
- When you comment on a post by the organisation
- When the organisation replies to a comment you left on their social media account
- When you share a post by the organisation on your social media account
- The organisation shares their feelings to its followers
- The organisation says more about itself beyond products on their social media account

To ensure the questions were not restrictive, the participants were asked to recall an experience when they identified with a particular action. This recall provided an in-depth account of how identification affected their level of satisfaction and loyalty towards the organisation.

After the participants had been provided with cases to identify and recall as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy, the final section of the interview returned to open-ended questions that asked about the impacts of the two intimacy concepts. The interview ended with inviting the participant to provide any further comments they wished to add in relation to how brands could improve brand-customer interactions on social media. This allowed the researcher to gain further insight into the customer perspective.

7) Do you feel attempts for pseudo-intimacy would create negative feelings towards the brand, or could it still create positive feelings towards the brand?

- 8) Would feelings of genuine-intimacy with the organisation positively increase your satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand?
- 9) Are there any suggestions you would like to make that would improve brand-customer communications on social media?

3.5.3 Research sample

According to Patton (1990), all sampling in qualitative research is viewed as purposeful sampling, whereby a small sample of information-rich cases are selected. Over the years, Patton has suggested various different kinds of purposive sampling strategies that can often dovetail or be used in combination (Emmel, 2013). For the purpose of this study, three different kinds of sampling were implemented and twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted, comprising six expert and six customer interviews. Although the study's main interest was in discovering the customer perspectives of intimacy, due to the lack of research on this phenomenon, identifying the perspectives of both ends of the relationship was considered necessary. Hence, both customers and experts were consulted.

For the expert interviews, maximum variation sampling was used to select a diverse range of experts from both hotel and restaurant organisations to enable the emergence of common patterns from this variation to be identified (Gray, 2014). Those who served a role with regards to online brand management were selected for these individual interviews. Managers, and in some cases owners, within the hotel and restaurant sectors were interviewed. The expert respondents were initially obtained from the researcher's personal contacts and then from referrals from university colleagues who were sent research invitations and participant information sheets. The expert interviewees were specifically chosen as key informants to explore their views and expertise on customer interactions that unfold on their organisation's social media platforms. Table 2 summarises the profiles of the expert interviewees.

Table 2: Expert interviewees

Respondent	Sector	Position	Years of experience
1	Hotel chain	Director of sales marketing and distribution	14
2	Hotel	Marketing communications manager	4
3	Hotel chain	National marketing manager	1
4	Cafe	Digital content manager	2
5	Cafe/Company	CEO and creative director	5
6	Restaurant chain	Owner and creative director	6

A homogenous and intensity sampling method was applied for the six customer interviews. Participants were selected who were between the age groups of 18 and 35 years; i.e. either Millennials or Gen Z. These participants were deliberately sought for their broad and general knowledge of the topic and the likelihood that they would have experienced interactions with brands on social media on a day-to-day basis. Thus, they could “exhibit the phenomenon of interest intensely” (Emmel, 2013, p. 7). This homogenous sample of Millennials and Gen Z and their atypical experiences enabled common themes to emerge in relation to the social media phenomenon of customer-intimacy. The six customer interviewees ranged in their backgrounds (e.g. architecture, law, hospitality) and occupation, and included university students and working professionals. Potential participants were identified through customer referrals from the previously interviewed organisations and student referrals from university colleagues, and those identified were then sent research invitations and the participant information sheet.

3.5.4 Qualitative data analysis

The data analysis of the qualitative findings was approached with Creswell’s view in mind, whereby the researcher enters with data in the form of text or images to then exit the process with an account or narrative (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 150). In considering Miles and Huberman’s (1984, p. 150) approach, Creswell also suggests that qualitative data

analysis is a craft that is “choreographed”. Rowley (2012) further interprets Creswell’s approach by describing that there is no single formula that can be applied for all studies.

The researcher made no attempt to categorise or add meaning to the activities themselves but only compiled a list of the activities to serve the purpose of evidence that would be explained as part of the main research objective of the first phase. The job of categorising or identifying each activity as either a pseudo- or genuine-intimacy item was for the individuals who were being interviewed, and each item was identified from the dual perspective of both manager and customer.

The interview data was transcribed from the audio recordings, followed by a thematic analysis to generate an initial list of items from the transcribed data. As suggested by Gray (2014), an audio recording was made for each interview to enable the interviewer to focus on the process of listening to the interviewee’s comments and refocusing the interview. It was suggested by Veal (2006) that a sophisticated analysis of qualitative data could be regarded as less important, and to some extent unnecessary, when the purpose of an in-depth or informal interview is to help the formation of a formal survey questionnaire, which was one of the objectives of this initial stage of research. However, since interviews can help to uncover underlying aspects, which is not achievable with a questionnaire, the findings derived from the analysis of the interviews may be regarded as a case study within the thesis. Accordingly, it was decided that the process of coding the intimacy items would be conducted manually to inform the researcher with an “emerging map of what is happening and why” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 65). After generating an initial list of items for pseudo- and genuine-intimacy from each transcript, these items were then examined by an expert panel. The analysis of data collected from the interviews is provided separately in section 4.2.

Section IV: Conducting Surveys

3.6 Quantitative Surveys

The final data was collected through an online survey conducted on a wider sample to validate and establish the final scale. This section outlines the methods used in the second research phase, which took the form of a quantitative examination of the concepts of pseudo-

and genuine-intimacy from the perspective of customers of hotel and cafe/restaurant organisations. The pilot study is explained then the section ends with the final version of the survey that was completed by the respondents.

3.6.1 Survey purpose

The aim of this second phase was not only to empirically test the validity and reliability of these measurements but also the relationship of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy to the brand outcomes of satisfaction and loyalty. In line with Churchill (1979), Hinkin et al. (1997) and Getty & Thompson (1994), the collection of data for developing the final scale involved conducting a survey. There were several reasons for adopting this approach, including the nature and the location distribution of the respondents, as well as the nature of the research aims. As highlighted in the literature review, the scant empirical research that examines customer-intimacy as found in social media further gave purpose to this quantitative approach.

3.6.2 Pilot study

Once the survey was designed, a two-stage pilot study was conducted as part of Step 3 of the scale development process (see Table 1). In the first stage, a paper-based survey was administered to four academic experts. According to the experts' feedback, the overall flow of the survey was amended and a question was added at the beginning of the survey: "How long ago did you follow this hotel/restaurant brand's Instagram or Facebook page?" This initial question was suggested to aid in producing more meaningful insight of whether duration mattered in terms of intimacy felt towards the brands. Other amendments included the removal of the tentative definitions that were placed at the beginning of each intimacy section because the experts were concerned about the use of jargon and that the definitions might lead the participant.

In the second stage of the pilot study, an online survey was administered to 26 respondents. The respondents to the online survey included academics, marketing experts, industry professionals and university students. This broad range of participants was selected as the final survey would be administered to respondents from all backgrounds. The respondents

were asked to identify anything related to the overall flow of the survey and, particularly, any problems with the construction of the wording that may hinder understanding. Several changes were made to the survey through this two-stage pilot study and the survey was rechecked with those who had provided specific feedback. The following example exemplifies the type of changes that were made: “A ‘like’ from this hotel/restaurant is just an exchange” was replaced with “A ‘like’ from this hotel/restaurant is just part of their customer service”. In this instance, the terminology was amended so that the language used was familiar to the target respondents.

3.6.3 Sample and distribution

To be able to answer the research questions, it was vital to discover the customer perspective of the social media intimacy phenomenon. As found in extant literature, when it comes to social media, it is vital to begin with the customer perspective to develop a customer-centric measure in order to measure ROI (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Hence, an online self-administered survey was conducted to collect the data for scale construction from customer respondents only.

Data for the online questionnaire was collected by requesting the organisations that had been previously interviewed to post the survey link on their social media pages. A number of hotel organisations accepted the invitation to partner in this research. This approach enabled the study to be conducted with respect to selected brands. Furthermore, there were advantages in having the survey link posted by the administrators of the brand pages in that this structure ensured that: 1) the survey respondents were indeed customers of these brand communities, 2) the respondents had prior experience or observations of the brand’s social media account, and 3) the survey had increased levels of source credibility (Dessart, 2017). When clicking on the link that was customised for each brand, respondents were redirected to the Web-based questionnaire. Each survey was tailored to each organisation by including the name of the organisation throughout the survey. This was to ensure the respondent related their answers to the survey questions to that specific organisation rather than talking about hotels or restaurants in general. The survey was made available to customers for three weeks, and a reminder was posted on the social media platforms by the organisations after the first two weeks.

As the initial round of data collection was conducted only through partnering hotel organisations ($N = 148$), a second round of data was collected through the research services of the experience management company Qualtrics ($N = 309$). This was for the purpose of expanding the sectors to include a more diverse range of hospitality organisations and customers. The credibility of Qualtrics was duly verified before partnering for data collection.

The second round of data collection was conducted with a modified version of the questionnaire (see Appendix 13) with strict screening questions to further ensure the respondents were currently following a restaurant/cafe on social media. The structure of the survey (e.g. drop-down tabs) was refined and confirmed through communication with the management company to assure quality data would be collected. The data received from second round of data collection produced 309 useable responses. The data was then combined as one data set ($N = 457$ useable responses) for the final analyses. The second round of data collection lasted approximately two weeks.

The data was gathered using Qualtrics Survey website. To avoid any coding errors, the collected data was converted into an SPSS data file directly from the survey software to begin analysis.

3.6.4 Survey design

Designing a survey that was capable of accurately testing the hypotheses was critical in reaching the goals of this study, particularly to meet the objective of Step 4 of the scale development process. Several considerations such as the variables to be measured and the kind of samples to be drawn contributed to the development of the survey (Oppenheim, 1992). Moreover, the findings from the interviews of the preliminary study influenced the formation of the survey. For example, most customer participants mentioned the differences between their online versus offline experiences with the organisations when recalling examples. This led to the inclusion of both online and offline elements when asking the outcome variable questions of satisfaction and loyalty in order to cater for the holistic perspective carried by customers and their experiences with brand interactions. Also identified in the first phase were contrasting views on the impact of the duration on feelings of closeness; hence, this was added as a question at the beginning of the survey. Largely, the

survey covered three different areas of inquiry: basic information about the survey participant, the two intimacy constructs, and the impact of the intimacy constructs (see the complete survey in Appendix 13).

The survey began with a welcome note to the participants, providing an introduction about the researcher, the topic and purpose of research, and an estimated time required to complete the survey. The approximate survey completion time was based on the pilot testing conducted before the launch of the final survey. Participants were informed that all answers would remain anonymous and by completing the survey they would be providing their consent. A link to the participant information sheet that provided detailed information about the survey was also provided on the first page (Appendix 10).

The survey was divided into five sections. The survey instrument aimed to measure the participants' relationships with brands through social media by reflecting on real encounters, so it began by asking the participants, in the case of the Qualtrics panel, to name a single hotel or restaurant organisation they currently follow on Facebook or Instagram, as well as which of these two social media platforms they follow that particular organisation on. The following questions asked how long they had been following this organisation, and if they had visited the organisation in person. These initial questions were an important factor that would help to determine the intimacy constructs.

The second and third sections presented the questions formulated for the two intimacy constructs. All intimacy items are shown in Appendix 11. The questions for pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy were presented each on their own page and began by instructing the participants to answer the following questions based on the organisation they clicked the link from or named at the beginning of the survey. Each of the 13 intimacy item statements for both pseudo- and genuine-intimacy were considered as one question. Participants were asked to rate their response to these items based on the given response options on a 7-point Likert scale. Likert scales with seven-points are recommended as the most adequate for estimating reliability (Lissitz & Green, 1975), and are also recognised in literature as more reliable than equivalent items with greater or fewer response options (DeCoster, 2000). By retaining a neutral option in the scale with symmetry, the respondents were prevented from being "forced" to commit to a particular side (Leung, 2011).

The fourth section was devoted to discovering the relationship between the two intimacy constructs and the three outcome variables of brand satisfaction on social media, brand loyalty and brand loyalty on social media. The respondents were asked three questions on brand satisfaction, followed by two questions on brand loyalty and four questions about brand loyalty on social media. A single section was devoted to brand satisfaction questions, while brand loyalty to the organisation and brand loyalty on social media were combined and presented together, also in a single section. The questions for the three outcome variables were adopted from established scales from prior research in marketing with slight alterations in wording or terminology to fit the social media context of this study. To cause less confusion for the participant, all these questions followed the same response format as the intimacy questions (i.e. a 7-point Likert scale).

The final section of the survey included demographic questions. This section was included because the aim of this thesis was to disentangle the intimacy of social media relationships with organisations from the customer's perspective. Therefore, the demographic questions were designed to contribute insight about the participants and discover if there were differences in perspective depending on basic classification information. The final page of the survey ended with a thank-you note for the respondents.

3.6.5 Quantitative data analysis

Data gathered from the final survey ($N = 457$) was transferred directly to and analysed using SPSS software. The analysis began with data preparation and assessment wherein the sample was examined for missing values and various potential biases that might affect the results, such as non-response bias. It is advised that incomplete data should be addressed before beginning the analysis process to prevent bias when drawing conclusions (Byrne, 2001). Through SPSS, the 25 cases that were very incomplete with missing data were excluded. Using the boxplot tool through SPSS, 34 outliers that were at the high or lower end of the intimacy scale were detected and also excluded. The final number of useable responses that were retained for data analysis was 457.

Once the data preparation and assessment was completed, descriptive statistics were computed (these are further discussed in Chapter 4). The next step was to conduct

exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the data to identify the factor structure. EFA has been used extensively as the first step in developing a scale (e.g. Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Factor analysis using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was performed to provide a clearer separation of factors (Hair et al., 2006). Through EFA, Step 5 of the scale development process was achieved. The reliability of the scale was then assessed as part of Step 6 of the scale development process: Internal consistency assessment, by calculating Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Churchill 1979; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then conducted using the software LISREL to assess the goodness-of-fit of the measurement model and test the validity of the factors obtained from the EFA (Hair et al., 2006). Through CFA, the final step of the scale development process was completed.

Multiple regression was performed at the last stage of the quantitative data analysis to examine the proposition in terms of the effects of the intimacy variables on brand satisfaction and loyalty. Demographic variables of gender and age, and customer social media behavioural variables including duration of following the account, visitation to the hotel/restaurant (dummy coded as 0 = yes, 1 = no), social media type adopted (dummy coded as 0 = Facebook, 1 = Instagram), and organisation types (dummy coded as 0 = hotel, 1 = restaurant) were entered as control variables to remove their effects from the multiple regression equations between the intimacy variables and dependent variables.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and rationale for undertaking various approaches and decisions to fulfil the objectives of this research. The thesis adopts a mixed methods research design, along with integration of various stages of the scale development process. Since the scale development process is central to this research, its procedures and rationale for each step were first explained, including all the rigorous approaches adopted in constructing a valid and reliable scale for the intimacy constructs. Then the methods adopted in executing the first and second phase of research were detailed, including the procedures

and issues involved in developing a survey. The data collection as well as analysis methods were discussed for both phases, along with sampling procedures.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter reports on the findings of the preliminary research, followed by the analysis of data from the final research phase. The purpose of the first phase, a qualitative investigation of the brand-customer interactions within social media platforms, was to identify items that could be categorised as pseudo- or genuine-intimacy. The second phase was instrumental in progressing the thesis forward by drawing out answers to the research questions raised in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3). This chapter is presented in three sections: the findings for each phase of research are explained in their own sections before the hypotheses development and testing is presented.

4.2 Preliminary Data Analysis

The qualitative phase of research was first conducted as part the scale development process. The aim of this phase was to enrich the conceptualisation of customer-intimacy to generate and refine the intimacy items. Thus, the preliminary research provided support to the scale development stages as shown in Table 1. The overall findings of the interview outcomes are first outlined before the thematic findings of the intimacy constructs are explained. The findings gathered both expert and consumer insights on their understanding of customer-intimacy in general and the potential dimensions of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy to fulfil the first step of the scale development process. The final section outlines the process of refining the generated items that could potentially be included in the final scale, serving the second step in scale development.

Data management and analysis

Data transcription: After collecting the interview data, the voice-recorded data was transcribed verbatim. The process allowed the marking out of the data that appeared of particular relevance, shedding potential insight to the research questions.

Generating initial key themes: This step identified an initial list of items, extracted from the transcription. The data was first organised systematically, then the areas that were more

meaningful were recovered from the transcripts to begin the categorisation of the items into themes. The specific terminology used by interview participants to indicate intimacy and interaction were retained to provide a pure reflection of the participants' perspectives.

References were made to Miles and Huberman's (1984) framework to carefully analyse transcripts and all emerging patterns were noted during the analysis. This process was helpful in identifying the relevant themes and factors that could potentially contribute to the development of the indicators for the customer-intimacy scale.

4.2.1 Descriptive findings

This section begins by outlining the profiles of both the expert and customer participants, followed by an overview of the results of the broad open-ended questions that were presented at the beginning of both the expert and customer interviews.

Expert respondents

As outlined in Chapter 3, the industry experts were selected for their expertise in online brand management in the hotel and restaurant sectors (see Table 2). The six expert respondents ranged in their years of experience and industry positions, providing a diverse range of perspectives. When asked about their day-to-day interactions with customers on social platforms, expert respondents (1), (3) and (5) expressed how management of social media seemed like a burden. Respondent (5), for example, illustrated this vividly:

"We've never hired somebody to take care of purely social media; we almost do it because we know we should. Busy people get given the responsibility to deal with this very important role. It just feels like homework sitting on your desk."

Respondent (1) expressed a similar view:

"We were slower to jump on social media for fear of being unable to control [it], so trying to figure out what to do with it, trying to come up with guidelines ... from this part of the world [New Zealand], there is not enough resource of expertise, as it is a skill-based role ... not many of our hotel accounts are actively managed."

Despite their lack of resources in execution of effective social CRM, expert respondent (5) showed growing awareness of social media's impact:

"I've always said, 'I don't know if Instagram followers turns in to sales', but I'm changing my mind about social media as I can see that social media grows fanaticism, grows familiarity and familiarity gives confidence to potential new customers. I think more frequent interactions would increase following and posting more often."

The expert respondents, from both the hotel and restaurant sectors, shared their concerns about social CRM, a finding that is consistently reflected in the literature in terms of managerial anxieties towards social CRM.

The broad profiles of each organisation's social media followings, as described by the experts, are shown in Table 3. The experts' comments on their social media clientele generated useful information. For example, respondent (2) identified that their social media clientele consists of mainly working people between the years of 25 and 35 residing in New Zealand, adding, however, that there is a difference between this social media clientele and the actual target market of their hotel. This showed that the customers whom organisations are interacting with on social media platforms may not necessarily correlate with organisations' target markets.

Customer respondents

The six customer respondents were aged between 18 and 35 years and had satisfied two criteria: 1) they accessed social media platforms on a daily basis, and 2) they had experience interacting with brands on social media platforms. All responded that they interacted with brands on social media daily, mentioning interactions activities such as liking images. Interestingly, quite a few identified the simple act of viewing brands' posts as an act of interaction with the brand. The participants identified that their day-to-day interactions with brands occurred mostly on Instagram. Only one participant identified Facebook as their platform of choice, while one other said they rarely accessed Facebook. In terms of the type of organisation, four participants had interacted with cafes and restaurants on social media and two had interacted with hotels.

A common finding from both the expert and customer respondents was that the two major platforms used for daily interactions were Facebook (FB) and Instagram. This is consistent with literature findings on use of Facebook as the predominant social platform worldwide (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015) and is also reflective of industry trends (Clement, 2019; Wasserman, 2015). For example, it was found that 85% of Fortune 500 companies use Facebook, with six out of the top ten using Instagram with 53% active users (Allen, 2017). In terms of use, Nielsen's 2017 social media report on U.S. adults found that Facebook was the most used social network platform on both mobile (178.8 million) and PCs (desktops; 90.2 million), followed by Instagram on mobile devices (91.5 million) (Casey, 2017). Whilst Facebook and Instagram have been noted as the most common platforms for brands in the hotel sector (Kelly, 2016; O'Neill, 2019), Instagram has been found to be the most used platform for sharing of photos in the food and beverage sector (Moro & Rita, 2018). Accordingly, this study selected these two platforms for examination in the main study.

Current social CRM strategies

After the experts had provided descriptions of their social media followers, their social CRM strategies were discovered to further establish what current customer interactions were taking place. The experts were asked: "What are some current customer relationship strategies that may be in place for social media communication?" The most frequently mentioned CRM strategy was running competitions on social media. This highlights that the experts interviewed shared a common view of competitions as a key strategy. Table 4 shows an overview of all the social media marketing strategies that were mentioned by the expert respondents. The number indicates the frequencies of the social CRM strategies as they appeared in the transcripts.

When customer respondents were also asked a similar question about SM interactions with brands ("Could you please tell me about your day-to-day interactions with brands on social media?"), they mentioned more passive types of activities such as viewing the organisation's social media page and searching for brands on SM platforms. These examples suggest that customers may view brand-customer interaction differently in some aspects. Other answers that stood out were "tagging friends on a brand's social media post" (mentioned once), and "viewing how the brand interacts with other customers on social media" (mentioned twice).

Table 3: Expert interviewees' identification of social media clientele

Sector	Clientele Particulars	Age	Location	SM Platform
1 Hotel chain	-	—	More global	Both FB and Instagram; larger audience on FB
2 Hotel	Mainly working people	25–35	Mainly New Zealand	Both FB and Instagram; larger audience on FB
3 Hotel chain	-	All age groups	Mainly New Zealand	Both FB and Instagram; larger and more engaged audience on FB
4 Cafe	Mainly corporate/ fans of the shop, brand, coffee/regular customers	—	New Zealand and International	Instagram only
5 Cafe/Company	Cafe owners, cafe lovers, fans	Teens, 17+	Concentrated in Auckland/ Wellington, Australia and international	Both FB and Instagram; larger audience and more engaged on Instagram
6 Restaurant chain	Fans of the brand, mainly working people	—	Concentrated in Auckland	Both FB and Instagram; larger audience and more engaged on Instagram

Table 4: Social CRM strategies identified from expert interviews

Customer relationship management strategies	No. of times mentioned
Prizes and giveaways	5
Responding to customer comments	5
Answering customers' questions	4
Liking photos tagged by customers	4
Posting on Instagram often	3
Reposting customers' image posts	3
Having someone devoted/committed to this role of SM marketing	3
Responding immediately to a public complaint on SM	2
Using emojis when responding to customers	2
Comment on things personal to the customer	2
Making sure to acknowledge a special occasion for a customer	2
Double posting on FB, when posting to Instagram	1
Using a casual tone of voice, rather than a formal tone	1
Less focus on the product and more on the customer	1

Perspectives on pseudo- versus genuine- intimacy

Both respondent groups were asked to rate the case-by-case examples of social media interactions on a Likert-type scale (see Appendix 6), in order to identify each as representative of either pseudo-intimacy (1) or genuine-intimacy (5). It was found that “reposting a customer’s image to a brand’s account” was the highest representation of genuine-intimacy for both experts and customers, followed by the activity of “brands sharing more about themselves than simply posting about their products”. Interestingly, for the experts, another type of interaction that was equally rated as the second most representative of genuine-intimacy was “commenting on customers’ posts of their brands”, whereas the

customers ranked this fifth. For customers, a brand liking a customer's image of the brand was ranked as least representative of genuine-intimacy.

Outcomes of pseudo- and genuine- intimacy

There was a strong agreement in the responses of both customers and experts that a genuine-intimacy between brand and customers would have positive impact on brand satisfaction and loyalty. All the customer interviewees responded that feelings of genuine-intimacy with the organisation would positively increase their satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand.

"Yes, for sure; they show they generally care."

"Loyalty definitely."

"Yes, because you build a relationship with them."

All the expert interviewees' responses matched the customers' responses, with five of the experts strongly convinced that feelings of genuine-intimacy with the organisation would positively increase customers' satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand.

On the other hand, the respondents had divided opinions about the effects of pseudo-intimacy on creating positive feelings. Four of the six customer respondents expressed that pseudo-intimacy could also influence customers to have positive feelings towards a brand to a degree, as they considered this as demonstration of the brand attempting to engage and communicate with customers.

"You still are being part of it."

"Pseudo could still ... because they have come up on your radar."

"Pseudo – it could, but minimally."

However, two customers strongly stated that pseudo-interactions would not create positive feelings towards the brand, commenting, for example:

"No. I have no feelings towards the pseudo-intimacy actions."

Four of the experts agreed that pseudo-intimacy can have a positive effect on customer perception of brands. Respondent (2) commented that this is because pseudo-intimacy can increase a customer's feeling of validation and acknowledgement, concluding that any interaction would increase the feeling of intimacy over no interaction.

“Even with a ‘like’, I think they would feel more validated than not, unless they know or are an insider... I think more people would feel acknowledged rather than think ‘they’re doing this to everyone’.”

“Definitely feel that even pseudo-intimacy would still create pseudo interaction... More interaction would definitely increase feelings of intimacy.”

Other expert responses about positive effects of pseudo-intimacy include:

“I think pseudo-intimacy can still create positive feelings because a lot of [social media] is pseudo...”

“Any engagement with the brand for our customers would increase their loyalty and enthusiasm.”

Two experts who did not agree on the positive effect of pseudo-intimacy commented on specific approaches that their businesses take:

“[Our cafe’s] intimacy is related to actual relationships.”

“I don’t comment on people’s photos. Don’t want it to look like it’s trying too hard.”

4.2.2 Thematic findings

The following sections present findings of the preliminary data in a thematic arrangement along with quotes from the interviews that are supporting and illustrative of the themes (Gray, 2014). From the recurring patterns in the transcripts, five themes were identified for types of interactions that could be classified as genuine-intimacy and three themes were identified for pseudo-intimacy type interactions.

Both the customer and expert respondents were presented with 15 questions (including the case examples) for the purpose of discovering their understanding of pseudo and genuine interactions. Specific types of interaction activities such as reposting and tagging were commonly associated with different levels of intimacy for both respondent groups. Informed by the literature review, themes such as one-on-one interaction, automated response, frequency, terminology, etc. have been derived from the common occurrences of interaction activities. Table 5 summarises the types of interactions that the customer respondents identified as representative of genuine-intimacy.

Table 5: Examples of genuine interaction from customer respondents

Examples of genuine interaction	Frequency
If they have followed me back	3
One-on-one interaction	3
Consistent with the offline vibe	2
Giving a consistent response	2
Consistent reflection of the brand	1
Posts a story about the brand	1
Likes my post of the brand	1

Genuine-intimacy themes

Analysis of both the expert and customer interview transcripts illustrated that the “personal” aspect was important when determining whether an interaction is genuine. Four themes emerged from the answers given by both groups to the question: “When you’re interacting with brands on social media, what makes you feel that it’s genuine interaction?”

One-on-one

This is consistent with the literature findings on person-to-person connection (Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Rau et al., 2008). Customer interviewees noted the importance of the personal aspect via one-on-one or individual interactions with brand representatives by commenting:

“I think it kind of needs to be one-on-one... It needs to be kind of consistent and very one-on-one, direct way of communicating.”

This comment values consistent one-on-one responses for all queries in a brand’s account. The value attached to individual responses is also shown in this comment:

“At the end of the day, it’s a business you’re interacting with so you really do appreciate it if someone does actually have that individual response and they respond to you with something unique to you.”

There was also a discussion around how a direct message reply can begin the journey to building intimacy with the customers. For example:

“If [customers] ask questions on Instagram, it’s important that [brands] reply and message them directly. So, you start to build that intimate relationship with them... and move to more of an intimate type of conversation.”

Expert respondent (2) agreed on the importance of taking a personal approach when responding to customers on social media:

“Everything would need to be answered personally otherwise it would be like getting an order reply.”

They also identified that the strategy their organisation employed to enhance a “personal” aspect was by:

“...always personally addressing all comments especially using their names.”

Offline to online interaction

Two customer respondents commented that offline interaction played a part in their interactions with brands on social media. One noted that if the vibe of the brand as experienced from a

physical visit was consistently reflected on social media, feelings of genuine-intimacy were increased (see Table 5):

“...[brands] give off a certain vibe, an image and a feel...I think if [brands] reflect that in their social media then it appears genuine. A consistent reflection of the personality of the business.”

Another customer made a similar comment, saying that if they had physically visited the location and it was local, they (the customer) would interact and show their support:

“I will like a coffee post from a brand most of the time...It’s a big thing especially if it’s a New Zealand or Auckland based, or local for me or a place I visited before and I liked, I will continue to go back to [the social media account], I will continue to like support and feed in. I actively do that, knowing I’m doing it, for that reason.”

Four of the six expert respondents also mentioned the importance of offline contact to increase sincerity of an online interaction (see Table 5). For example, expert respondent (6) recognised the importance of physical contact with the store, describing that intimacy could be immediately increased if the customer physically visited the store as they would be able to gain an understanding of the brand.

Personal acknowledgement

Consistent with the consensus on valuing one-on-one or direct interactions, both groups agreed that activities that gave customers greater personal acknowledgement produce high levels of genuine-intimacy. Among the activities mentioned, a repost of a customer’s image on a brand’s social media account was identified as the pinnacle of genuine interaction:

“Reposting is the ultimate, it probably means your image reflects their brand.”

Other customers also related the experience of a brand reposting their post as holding meaning and emotional effect:

“When the organisation reposts your image on their social media account. It would seem like a compliment because it’s appreciating your work and posting it on their page that means quite a lot.”

“...it makes you feel good, it’s a justification of my photo by a company.”

Another example of an interaction that represented personal acknowledgement was when a brand would follow the customer back on social media. This type of interaction appeared in the transcripts of three customer interviewees. For example:

“I guess what’s genuine is that they follow me and that to me shows that there’s a genuine appreciation going both ways.”

Another customer also noted:

“I would consider an organisation as a friend if they followed me back.”

Sharing

Experts considered that sharing a story or expressing emotion on social media was of less importance in fostering feelings of intimacy, which was in stark contrast with the customers’ perspectives which viewed this type of activity as a brand’s way of showing that they care. For example, a customer suggested:

“When it’s a post that doesn’t promote a deal, it’s a bit less transactional; when they tell a story, it shows that they are about customers.”

Also, in line with studies introduced in the literature review, shared values were identified as key to feelings of closeness. For example:

“If I share their values or know their story, I would consider them as a friend.”

The difference in the experts’ views about sharing beyond their products on social media may have been derived from management’s obligation to illustrate professionalism, as expert respondent (4) expressed:

“Standard professionalism as to how we are represented online as it is part of service.”

Time related

Time-related items such as frequency and the duration of an interaction as well as the promptness of responses were discovered to be important conditions for genuine-intimacy from both the customer and expert interviews. Four of the expert respondents expressed that interaction frequency matters for a genuine interaction.

Customer participants' comments also illustrate the importance of frequency for a genuine interaction, with "constant and regular interaction" being most frequently mentioned as necessary for considering relationships with brands as intimate. It seemed that frequent interactions, albeit less personal, such as tagging and likes, could still illustrate the fact that the customers were being loyal to the brand by showing support. For example:

"I will like a post from a brand I like most of the time because I think it's a show of support. I actively do that, knowing I'm doing it, for that reason."

The transcripts identified another important time-related condition for a genuine interaction: the promptness or timeliness of the response from a brand to a customer's inquiry or comments. A customer respondent suggested the importance of timely responses and how it can enhance a personal and intimate interaction on social media:

"...so [customers] know you care, respond in a timely manner."

Expert respondent (6) also expressed the importance of timely responses:

"If a customer asks about specific recipes, I will answer in a flash without any hesitation because it's a genuine interest and I appreciate that."

Pseudo-intimacy themes

When customers were asked about the types of interactions that would not feel genuine, three common themes emerged: lack of interaction, generic responses, and interactions that felt like simple social etiquette. The examples that were provided by customer respondents in relation to pseudo-intimacy are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Examples of pseudo-interaction from customer respondents

Examples of pseudo-interaction	Frequency
General response	3
Non-response	2
Advertising style	2
Random likes	1
Liking every single tag	1
Inconsistency between offline/online	1
Liking wears off over time	1
Self-promotion if they are liking their own product	1

Lack of interaction

When a brand's customer interaction levels on social media are low, customers described this as being similar to that of a traditional, one-way advertising medium, rather than a social media platform. For example:

“The brand doesn't feel genuine if they're not communicating with customers, if it's more one way, if their activity is just posting only, it just looks like advertising.”

Another customer gave a similar response by commenting that if they observed the brand did not provide responses to customer queries on social media, that this would create the impression that the brand was not genuine towards their customers:

“...so often times you'll see some [brands] on social media, people will interact with them by leaving questions and [brands] might just kind of do posts, they will either not respond at all or they'll just do a general response to everybody with a general

comment, that to me is like a sign that they don't care, I'll almost overlook it, I won't even bother looking at [the response]."

This comment provides insight into a number of key aspects. First, it shows that a customer's image of a brand can be based not only on their own experience with the brand but also from observations of how the brand has responded to other customers. Second, the customer's description of a brand that *does not care* about its customers is based on two aspects: 1) a brand that posts on their social media but doesn't respond to customers, or 2) posts on their social media but gives the same generic response to all customers. The generic response was a recurring item when customers described interactions they would consider non-genuine.

Generic response

From analysis of the customer respondents' transcripts, the most frequently mentioned interaction that was felt as non-genuine is when a brand gives a general response. When customer respondents were asked to describe what they would consider as non-genuine, general or automated responses were mentioned more often as being not genuine, even more than a non-response. For example:

"[An] automated answer doesn't make it feel genuine, such as a vague statement to just 'contact customer service'."

Other similar examples given by customer respondents answering this question described:

"It's not genuine if there is a certain pattern of brands replying to your questions or comments, or when they give the same standardised reply."

"When the organisation comments on your post of their brand, its intimacy would depend on the comment. If it's generic, then you can imagine they are copying and pasting."

Another customer also said that if a brand provides a comment but it does not lead to a conversation, then it is like making small talk without a deeper engagement. The comment describes that a surface-level conversation would be perceived as a pseudo-intimate interaction:

“It’s almost like making ‘small talk’, if a brand is making small talk and not engaging on a deeper level, if I tag an image of a meal I had and say ‘That was a nice breakfast I had’, and the brand comments saying, ‘Oh thank you’, that’s pseudo, engaging but not getting to the deeper.”

Therefore, in this scenario, the customer felt that the generic comment left by the brand was based on obligation rather than a desire for meaningful engagement, as the comment did not invite a response from the customer for potentially engaging them in a conversation.

“Social” etiquette

A third theme that emerged from the respondents’ transcripts was based on interactions that were felt to be *de rigueur*; i.e. actions taken simply because they are required by etiquette within the context of social media were felt to be superficial rather than genuine.

The experts’ transcripts revealed that the activity of tagging is considered merely etiquette rather than a genuine interaction. Expert respondent (2) gave the example of when a customer tags their friend in the comments section below a brand’s post:

“Tagging a friend is just ‘Hey, look’— very impersonal.”

Expert respondent (5) also referred to customers’ tagging activities as a non-genuine act:

“If a customer posts coffee and tags [our brand], one of their 20 hashtags – this isn’t genuine – they’re just playing by the rules of social media, but if they post saying ‘Thanks [café], I love it’, then we might comment.”

Another activity identified as non-genuine but rather social etiquette was the act of “liking”. From the customer’s perspective, the act of liking a brand’s post was described as something that could be done without much thought or meaning:

“Liking is very easy; I can do it as I scroll past.”

In a similar context, the same customer respondent explained that when a brand liked their posts that had no relation to the brand, it was considered as pseudo, a simple exchange or return, giving a “like for a like” or for a comment the customer just gave to the brand.

“I think pseudo would be when you might like a brand’s picture or you might comment or something and all of a sudden they’ll just go and randomly like two of your photos. You know what they’ve done, they’ve just gone, ‘Well let me interact with her, like, like’. That’s when you know it’s pseudo.”

What was interesting to discover was that the same liking behaviour described by the customer respondent also appeared in the transcripts of the expert respondents. Expert respondent (4) gave an explanation of a brand’s intention to like posts from customers that are not necessarily related to the organisation:

“For example, just liking a photo that isn’t or may not be specifically about [our organisation] but to just acknowledge, we will still ‘like’ it to pop up in their feed and also promote awareness of the brand.”

Another expert respondent also commented about “liking” or commenting for the purpose of continuously appearing in their customers’ feeds. However, unlike the customer respondent, expert respondent (2) noted that they still viewed this to be a genuine interaction, as they would refer to the customer by their name when leaving comments on these unrelated posts and also attempt to engage in conversations:

“We will comment back because the more you interact with someone it keeps going back in to their feed, so if you can get a conversation going regardless of whether it’s interesting or not it’s continuously popping up in to their feed, meaning that all of their friends will keep seeing this conversation with [our brand]. So, it’s all quite genuine, we will be personally responding and addressing it by their name.”

This example shows that customers can indeed be well aware of brands’ approaches and even intentions when it comes to social CRM strategies, identifying that approaches that aren’t for genuine engagement purposes would be considered as pseudo.

However, this act of “liking” is an interaction that seems to be dependent on various other conditions, such as timing. It was intriguing to find that another customer respondent who also commented about the liking behaviour of organisations shared a completely contrasting view. When describing how they felt when a brand likes a post of theirs that is not about that

particular brand, they commented that it was as if they were being noticed and therefore a personal connection would be made:

“There could be a degree of intimacy, if they liked a photo of something in my feed even though it wasn’t of their product, then it would stand out because it feels like they are noticing me and there’s some sort of personal connection.”

Another customer also responded:

“If they are only liking the posts I post of their products then that’s just self-promotion, if they are liking their own product. But if they like my other posts then that’s liking me for me.”

This signals that the act of liking, which may be considered as a pseudo-intimacy type interaction, could still lead to positive feelings for other customers. Hence, the simple act of liking is in fact a complex social media behaviour that could be considered as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy by the customer.

Table 7 summarises the themes that were identified from the preliminary research with links made to the literature.

4.2.3 Generating item pools

Once the findings of the interviews were understood and interpreted through a thematic analysis, all types of interactions were recorded and added to a list (see Appendix 7). The process of item generation followed the processes aligning with DeVellis’s (2003) suggestions for the purpose of scale development as well as the established guidelines on item construction by Furr (2011). This resulted in the generation of 58 items – 27 genuine-intimacy items and 31 pseudo-intimacy items – as shown in Appendix 7, which arranges all the items identified from the interview transcripts into themes.

Table 7: Themes identified in transcripts and the link with the literature

Types of intimacy	Themes	Examples of interaction	Literature
Genuine	One-on-one	Individual interaction	Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Rau et al., 2008
		Direct messaging One-on-one	
	Offline to online interaction	Consistent with offline vibe	Wirtz et al., 2013
		Posting physical products	
	Personal acknowledgement	Consistent response	Gummerus et al., 2012; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010
		Deeper conversations	
		Brand following customers back	
		Brand liking customer's post	
	Time related	Frequency	Clark, Black, & Judson, 2017; Harrigan et al., 2015; Kabadayi & Price, 2014; Su et al., 2015
		Constant and regular interaction	
	Sharing	Post a story	Hansen, 2003; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Ledbetter et al., 2011; Rau et al., 2008; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Su et al., 2015
		Share same values	
		Consistent reflection of brand	
		Know someone personally	
		Common interest	

(continued on next page)

Table 7 (con.) Themes identified in transcripts and the link with the literature

Types of intimacy	Themes	Examples of interaction	Literature
Pseudo	Generic response	General response Advertising style	Chan & Guillet, 2011 Meyrowitz, 1986; Rasmussen, 1997
	Lack of interaction	Non response	Chan & Guillet, 2011; Jeon & Kim, 2016
	“Social” etiquette	Random likes	Aggarwal, 2004; Gensler et al., 2013; La Porte, 1965; Mead, 1934, p. 81; Ramsay, 2010
		Liking every single tag	
		Inconsistency between offline-online	
		Tagging (one of many)	
		Small talks	
		Liking wears off over time	
		Only liking their own product	

4.2.4 Item refinement

Expert panel review

The process of item refinement began after generating a pool of potential scale items. The main aim of this step was to review and refine each of the generated scale items and assess their face and content validity (Getty & Thompson, 1994). Though Hinkin et al. (1997) do not provide any specific rules for the number of items, it is anticipated that approximately half the items are retained for use in the final scale, meaning that twice as many should be generated in the initial stage. It is recommended that a measure is comprised of the minimum number of items that can adequately assess the domain of interest (Thurstone, 1947).

All the items were subject to review by a panel of academic experts who evaluated each item. The required revisions were to ensure the wording was as precise as possible (Churchill, 1979). For example, “I care to know about the name or face of the person managing the social media account” was revised to “I would like to know the name and/or face of the person managing this hotel/restaurant’s social media account”.

Each of the reviewers were also asked to check that the items were not “double-barrelled”; i.e. that the item could reflect two or more questions and potentially create confusion for respondents (Hinkin et al., 1997). Items were also checked to ensure they were not leading or presumptive (Furr, 2011). For example, “This hotel/restaurant sincerely interacts with customers by reposting customer posts” was replaced with “This hotel/restaurant often interacts with customers by reposting customer posts”. Similarly, “I feel closer with this hotel/restaurant because I have had a one-on-one conversation with them on social media” was replaced with “I often have a one-on-one conversation with this hotel/restaurant on social media”.

Overall, the statements were modified according to the experts who served as judges for evaluating each of the items to ensure they were as simple and short as possible. This was an important stage in the development of the scale as it helped in evaluating the clarity, conciseness and readability of each item, thereby establishing face and content validity of items (Getty & Thompson, 1994). Through this process, the initial item pool of 58 items (see Appendix 7) was reduced to 26 items (see Appendix 11).

4.2.5 Section summary

This section discussed the interview process and the outcomes in detail. It showed the similarities and contrasts between the experts' and the customers' responses regarding intimacy of interaction with brands on social media. Also, the first and second step of scale development was achieved through this phase of qualitative research. The interview findings generated themes that emerged from both the expert and customer viewpoints. The findings from this preliminary research phase strengthened the research's conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy in a holistic way. The following section will discuss the analysis of the results from the second research phase which furthered the process of scale development.

4.3 Final Data Analysis

In this section, the findings of the quantitative investigation via an online questionnaire survey are presented. The scale for genuine- and pseudo-intimacy was empirically validated through exploratory factor analysis. As a result, three intimacy constructs were identified with their measures. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test the goodness-of-fit of the measurement model. The structural model with hypothesised relationships between the three intimacy constructs and brand satisfaction and brand loyalty was examined through multiple regression.

4.3.1 Participant profile

This section highlights the characteristics of the participants, providing insights into their demographic profiles. Of the 457 usable responses, 280 were from females and 175 from males, with 2 responses missing. These findings reflect the general population: according to a social media report by Nielsen (Casey, 2017), three-quarters of social media users are adult women. Half of the participants were aged from 18 to 34 ($N = 213$, 50.3%), and 34% from 35 to 54 ($N = 144$). The remaining 15.6% of the participants were over 55 years old ($N = 66$), while 34 did not report their age. The majority of the participants were from New Zealand ($N = 434$, 95%).

In terms of social media type, 86.4% of the participants followed the hospitality organisations on Facebook ($N = 395$), and 13.6% on Instagram ($N = 62$). The organisation types are hotel

and restaurant/cafe, and 55% of the participants are hotel followers ($N = 252$) and 45% cafe/restaurant followers ($N = 205$). Nearly half the participants had followed the organisation's social media account for more than 12 months ($N = 219$, 49%), and just over one quarter ($N = 128$ participants, 28%) had followed the accounts for 6 to 12 months. The rest had followed a hospitality organisation's account less than 3 months ($N = 110$, 24.1 %). Most of the participants ($N = 407$, 89%) had visited the hospitality organisations that they followed on social media platforms. This data is summarised in Table 8.

The social media profile of the hospitality organisations and the followers were further explored through cross tabulations. Cross tabulation with Chi-square statistics was performed to find out whether there are differences in the type of social media platform (i.e. Facebook and Instagram) adopted between female and male customers. The result shows that 90.4% of the female respondents are Facebook users, and just 9.6% Instagram users. This finding was consistent with industry findings reporting higher use of Facebook among hospitality organisations (Barnes & Pavaio, 2018). In comparison, 80% of the male customers use Facebook and 20% Instagram. The ratio of Facebook users is significantly higher for females than males (+10.4%, $X^2 = 9.815$, $p < 0.05$). These gender differences are summarised in Table 9 and can be clearly seen in Figure 3.

The same test was run to examine whether there is difference in social media types between organisation types. It was found that 91.7% of hotel customers use Facebook while only 8.3% use Instagram. In contrast, 80% of restaurant customers use Facebook and 20% use Instagram. Overall, there are more Facebook users ($N = 395$, 86.4%) than Instagram users ($N = 62$, 13.6%) following hospitality organisations regardless of organisation types. However, restaurant customers have a higher ratio of Instagram adoption than hotel customers do (+11.7%, $X^2 = 13.121$, $p < 0.00$). See Table 10 and Figure 4.

Table 8: Respondents' profiles

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender (<i>N</i> = 455, missing = 2)		
Male	175	38.5
Female	280	61.5
Age (<i>N</i> = 423, missing = 34)		
18 to 24	102	24.1
25 to 34	111	26.2
35 to 44	89	21.0
45 to 54	55	13.0
55 to 64	39	9.2
65 and older	27	6.4
Occupation (<i>N</i> = 452, missing = 5)		
Student	114	25.2
Employed	235	51.9
Retired	28	6.2
Unemployed	75	16.6
Residential location (<i>N</i> = 457, missing = 0)		
New Zealand	434	95.0
Other	17	5.0
SM types		
Facebook	395	86.4
Instagram	62	13.6
Organisation types		
Hotel	252	55.1
Cafe/Restaurant	205	44.9
Duration of follow (<i>N</i> = 457, missing = 0)		
Less than a month	54	11.8
1 to 5 months ago	56	12.3
6 to 12 months ago	128	28.0
Over a year ago	219	48.9
Visit (<i>N</i> = 457, missing = 0)		
Yes	407	89.1
No	50	10.9

Table 9: Social media types by gender

		Facebook	Instagram	Total
Female	Count	253	27	280
	% within Female	90.4%	9.6%	100.0%
Male	Count	140	35	175
	% within Male	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	393	62	455
	% within Gender	86.4%	13.6%	100.0%

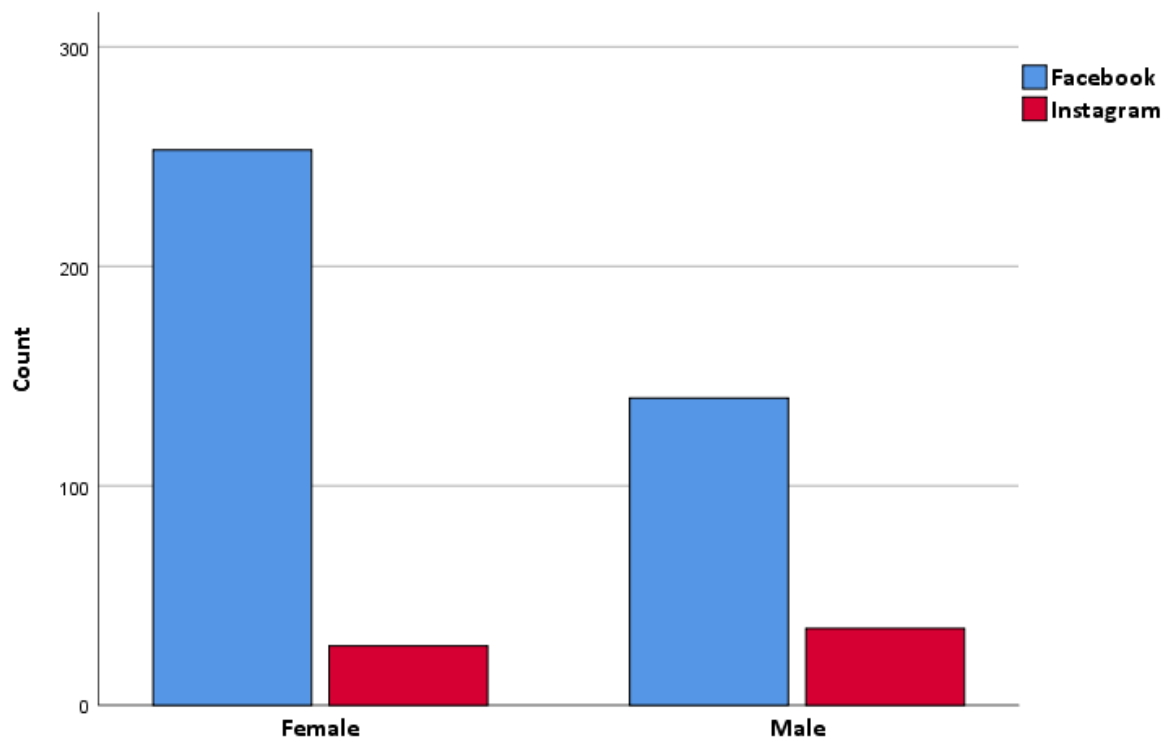


Figure 3: Social media types by gender

Table 10: Social media types by organisation type

		Facebook	Instagram	Total
Hotel	Count	231	21	252
	% within Hotel	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%
Restaurant	Count	164	41	205
	% within Restaurant	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	395	62	457
	% within organisation_type	86.4%	13.6%	100.0%

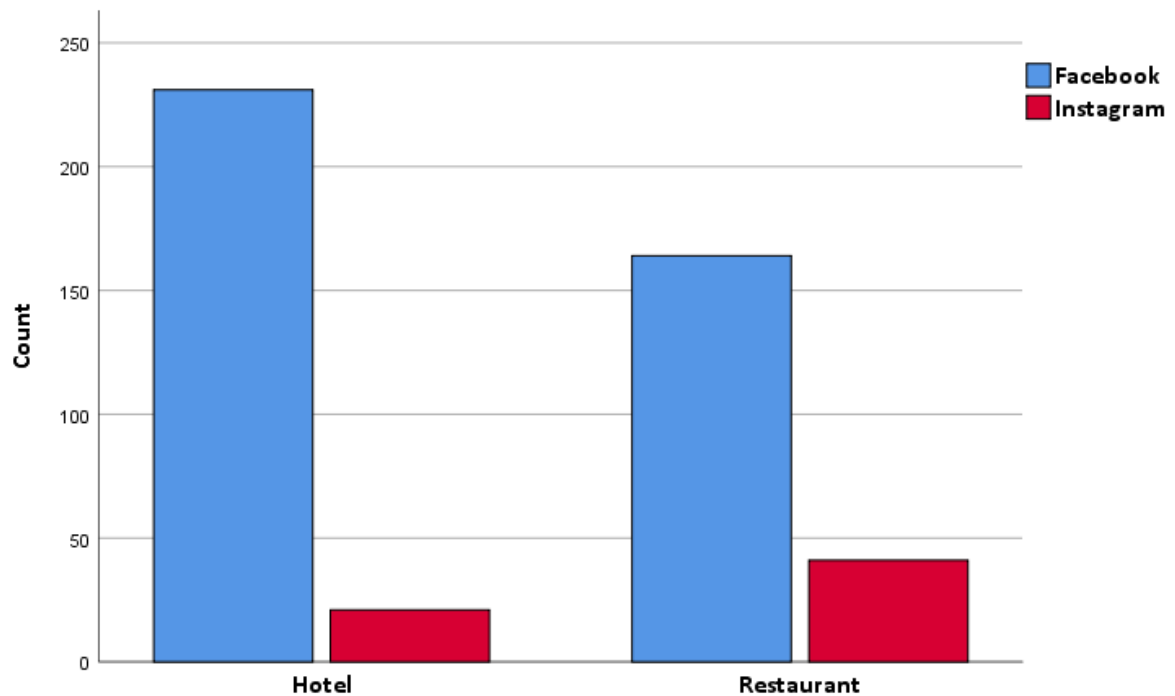


Figure 4: Social media types by organisation types

An independent *t*-test was run to find out whether there are significant differences in duration of following between gender, organisation types and social media type, and visitation of the organisations. The results show there is a difference between visitation of the organisations and duration of following, with customers who had visited the organisation having a longer duration of following ($M = 3.18$, $S.D. = 1.006$) than people who hadn't visited the organisation ($M = 2.60$, $S.D. = 1.088$). This difference is statistically significant at the 0.000 level.

ANOVA was performed to test the difference in the duration of following between age groups. The results show that there is no significant difference between age groups ($F(5, 422) = 1.218$, $p = 0.299$). Post-hoc tests with least significant difference (LSD) show that the age group 35 to 44 have a slightly longer duration of following than the 18–24 age group ($M_{I-J} = 0.291$, $p = 0.054^{\dagger}$), and also the 55–64 age group ($M_{I-J} = .383$, $p = 0.055^{\dagger}$).

4.3.2 Validation of the scale

Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal axis factoring method was performed to identify latent constructs for intimacy with the underlying measurements. Twenty-six items were entered for the EFA, and 10 items were excluded because their factor loadings below 0.50 meant they were not suitable for analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Table 11 presents the results of EFA with Varimax rotation applied. Three factors were extracted from the 16 measurement items, all with factor loadings were greater than 0.611, which implies that all the measurement items converged on their corresponding latent constructs (Hair et al., 1998). The three intimacy constructs have explained 58.6% of the overall variance. Factor 1_Genuine explains 27.8% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 4.763. Factor 1 consists of eight measurements from genuine-intimacy, featuring the friendly and proactive interpersonal interactions in social media between hospitality brands and the customers. Factor 2_Superficial explained 6.9% of the overall variance with an eigenvalue of 1.098, which contains three items from pseudo-intimacy manifesting hospitality organisations' standardised interaction with the followers in social media as part of customer service. Factor 3_Uninterested explains 21.9% of the overall variance with an

eigenvalue of 3.506. Five pseudo-intimacy items in relation to the organisations' response factors converged on Factor 3_Uninterested. These were the cases when the organisation either gave a late response or a generalised response; therefore, from the customers' perspective, this could be considered as the organisation's lack of interest in the customer. Cronbach's alpha for Factor 1_Genuine and Factor 2_Uninterested were over the threshold of 0.70, indicating the internal consistency of the constructs (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Though Factor 2_Superficial (alpha = 0.593) was below 0.70, the composite reliability value (0.60) is acceptable in exploratory research (Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel, 2007).

Confirmatory factor analysis

The objectives of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are to assess the fit of the measurement model. CFA was undertaken using LISREL software. The CFA results indicated that the proposed factor structure of brand-customer-intimacy was a good fit to the data: $X^2 = 421.11$, $df = 98$, $p = 0.000$, root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08, normed-fit index (NFI) = 0.92, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.93, and comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93. The proposed factor structure of outcome constructs (i.e. customer satisfaction, brand loyalty to organisation and brand loyalty to brand SM) was also a good fit to the data: $X^2 = 80.16$, $df = 21$, $p = 0.000$, RMSEA = 0.07, NFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, and CFI = 0.98.

Table 12 shows that all factor loadings of measurement items (t -values) were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and most of the average variance extracted (AVE), calculating the variance explained by the construct, met the threshold of 0.5 for the study constructs. All composite reliabilities (CRs) were higher than 0.6, and the convergent validity of the constructs were adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity of study constructs were evident as all AVEs are larger than the squared correlation (R^2) for each pair of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 11: EFA for intimacy variables

Factors	Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of Variance Explained	Cronbach α
Factor 1 _Genuine		4.763	29.770	0.863
G1	0.663			
G2	0.655			
G3	0.670			
G4	0.764			
G5	0.778			
G6	0.760			
G7	0.694			
G11	0.615			
Factor 2 _Superficial		1.098	6.863	0.593
P1	0.775			
P2	0.633			
P3	0.611			
Factor 3 _Uninterested		3.506	21.912	0.831
P4	0.807			
P5	0.784			
P7	0.705			
P9	0.762			
P12	0.711			
Total variance explained (%)			58.545	

$N = 457$

Table 12: Properties of the measurement model

Constructs and Indicators	Completely Standardised Loading	<i>t</i>-value	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Genuine			0.86	0.45
G1	0.74	—		
G2	0.68	14.15		
G3	0.77	15.89		
G4	0.71	14.46		
G5	0.67	13.47		
G6	0.75	15.5		
G7	0.52	10.58		
G11	0.45	9.16		
Superficial			0.61	0.36
P1	0.4	—		
P2	0.73	6.76		
P3	0.61	6.56		
Uninterested			0.83	0.51
P4	0.85	—		
P5	0.82	19.21		
P7	0.63	13.98		
P9	0.62	13.74		
P12	0.59	12.87		
Brand satisfaction on SM			0.86	0.67
BS1	0.8	—		
BS2	0.8	18.17		
BS3	0.86	19.68		
Brand loyalty to organisation			0.79	0.56
LTY3	0.67	—		
LTY4	0.86	15.15		
LTY5	0.71	13.18		
Brand loyalty on SM			0.78	0.55
LTY1	0.73	-		
LTY2	0.77	19.05		
LTY6	0.72	14.36		

Note: $N = 457$

4.4 Hypotheses Development

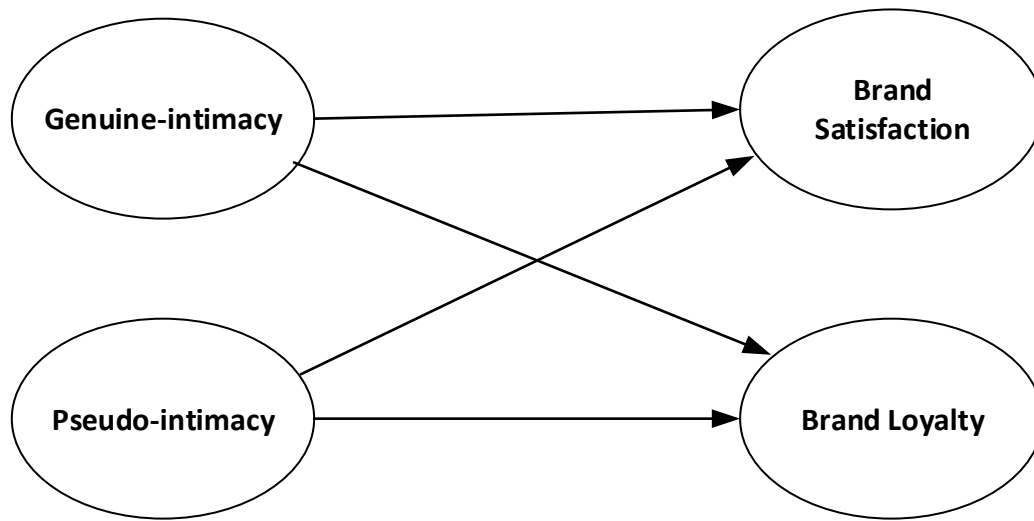


Figure 5: The conceptual model

The above conceptual model was posited to guide this study to investigate the relationship between pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy to brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Based on the results of the factor analysis, the study further proposes a structural model hypothesising the relationships between the intimacy constructs and the outcome variables of brand satisfaction on social media, brand loyalty and brand loyalty to organisation on social media. Upon examining the three latent variables that were produced as a result of the EFA, it was found that the items extracted for the variable labelled Uninterested seemed to represent a social media account that was being ignored. While the Genuine and Superficial items represented different intensities of social media interactions between the brands and customers, the items for Uninterested pointed towards an account that seemed inactive. Therefore, it is proposed that Genuine and Superficial represent genuine- and pseudo-intimacy, respectively. While these two intimacy factors sit on the continuum of intimacy, Uninterested symbolises the absence of intimacy. Hence, Uninterested should not be considered as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy. Accordingly, the model proposes that Genuine and Superficial will positively influence brand satisfaction on social media and brand loyalty, while Uninterested will have a negative effect on brand satisfaction on social media and brand loyalty (see Figure 6).

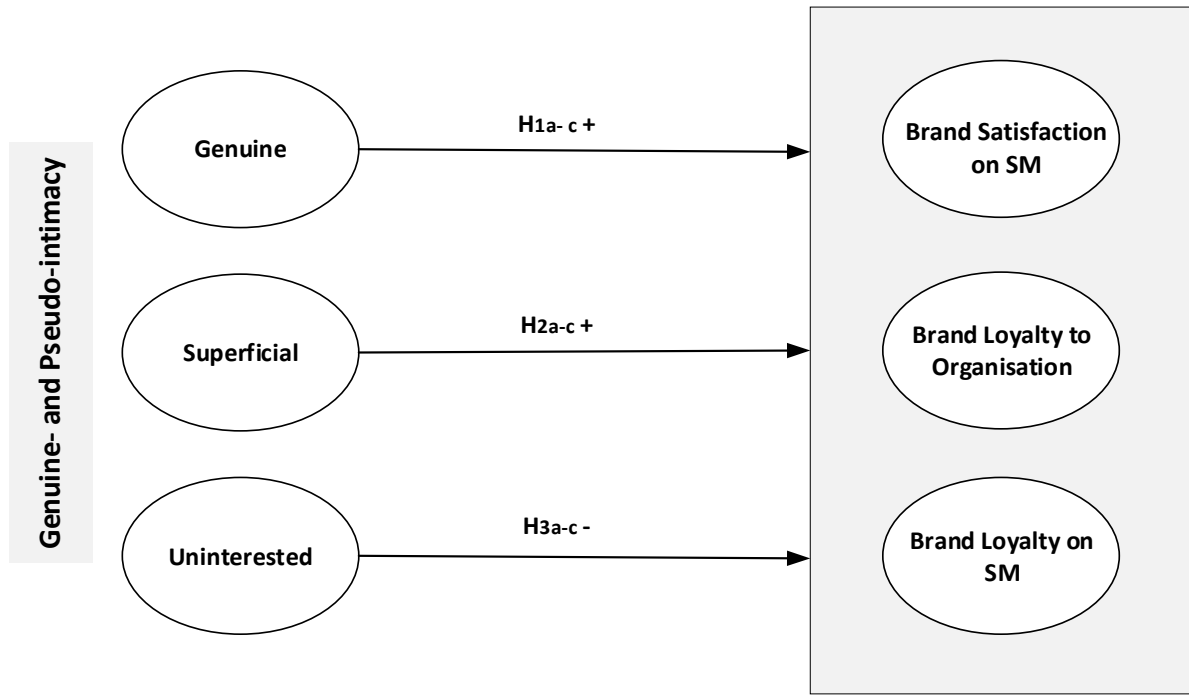


Figure 6: The structural model of the study

A list of hypotheses is presented below.

- **Hypothesis 1a:** Genuine is positively related to brand satisfaction on social media for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 1b:** Genuine is positively related to brand loyalty to the organisation for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 1c:** Genuine is positively related to brand loyalty on social media for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 2a:** Superficial is positively related to brand satisfaction on social media at a lower level than Genuine for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 2b:** Superficial is positively related to brand loyalty to the organisation at a lower level than Genuine for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

- **Hypothesis 2c:** Superficial is positively related to brand loyalty on social media at a lower level than Genuine for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 3a:** Uninterested is negatively related to brand satisfaction on social media for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 3b:** Uninterested is negatively related to brand loyalty to the organisation for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.
- **Hypothesis 3c:** Uninterested is negatively related to brand loyalty on social media for customers who interact with brands on their social media accounts.

4.4.1 Variables and measurements

Dependent variables

The dependent variables in this study are brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. The measurement items for brand loyalty were validated through the factor analysis. Three items were consolidated into brand loyalty towards the organisation and three for brand loyalty on social media. The measurements are listed in Table 13.

Table 13: Dependent variables and measurements

Variables and Measurements	Reference
Brand satisfaction on social media This hotel/restaurant's Facebook or Instagram page is appealing The information posted on this hotel/restaurant's Facebook or Instagram page about their products or services is sufficient for my needs or interest Overall, I am satisfied with my choice to 'follow' this hotel/restaurant on Facebook or Instagram	Zhang & Prybutok, 2005
Brand loyalty to organisation I will visit this hotel/restaurant on the next opportunity I would prefer to visit this hotel/restaurant over others I would recommend others to follow this hotel/restaurant on social media	Aaker, 1996
Brand loyalty on social media I will continue to follow this hotel/restaurant's social media accounts in the future I will continue to interact with this hotel/restaurant on social media in the future I would share this hotel/restaurant's post or content on my social media page	Ferguson, 2008; Turel, Serenko, & Bontis, 2010; Lee, Kim, Chung, Ahn, & Lee, 2016

Independent variables

The independent variables tested in this study were Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested. The items were derived from the item pool for pseudo- and genuine-intimacy and empirically validated through factor analysis. The measurements are listed in Table 14.

Table 14: Independent variables and measurements

Variables and measurements	Composite reliability
Genuine	0.86
G1: This hotel/restaurant seems to respond immediately to a comment, tag, post or “like”	
G2: This hotel/restaurant often reposts customer’s posts	
G3: This hotel/restaurant always responds to customer’s posts, comments or questions	
G4: This hotel/restaurant often refers to customers by name in comments or messages	
G5: This hotel/restaurant often follows customers back on social media	
G6: This hotel/restaurant often gives a personalised response to comments or questions	
G7: This hotel/restaurant “likes” customers’ posts even if they aren’t about themselves or their products	
G11: I often have back and forth comments with this hotel/restaurant on social media	
Superficial	0.61
P1: A ‘like’ from this hotel/restaurant is just part of their customer service	
P2: This hotel/restaurant usually ‘likes’ my photos of them at a much later date	
P3: This hotel/restaurant usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments	
Uninterested	0.83
P4: This hotel/restaurant doesn’t seem to respond to questions or comments	
P5: This hotel/restaurant is very late in responding to customers’ questions or comments	
P7: This hotel/restaurant rarely posts or shares a story about themselves on social media	
P9: I don’t relate to the culture of this hotel/restaurant	
P12: I’m not getting a consistent message about this hotel/restaurant’s values from their posts	

4.4.2 Results

Descriptive statistics of study variables

Table 15 shows the means, standard deviation and significant correlations that were found amongst the study variables. The mean scores for all study constructs were calculated using the average sum scores. For example, the mean score for Genuine was calculated using the average sum scores for corresponding measurements that were developed to measure Genuine.

Pearson correlation coefficient values indicate that all the main study variables were related ($p < 0.01$). The outcome variables brand satisfaction on social media (BS_SM), brand loyalty to organisations (LTY_ORG) and brand loyalty on social media (LTY_SM) have a positive relationship with predictor variables of both Genuine and Superficial. The factor Uninterested is negatively related to all the dependent variables. Genuine is more strongly correlated with all the dependent variables of BS_SM ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$), LTY_SM ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$), and LTY_ORG ($r = 0.56, p < 0.01$) than Superficial and Uninterested are. Discriminant validity was evidenced as the square root of the AVE value, which surpassed all the correlations between the study constructs (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). In terms of demographic variables, gender was found to be correlated to loyalty to organisation ($r = -0.12, p < .05$) and loyalty on social media ($r = 0.13, p < .01$). The duration of following is negatively correlated to brand satisfaction on social media and the two loyalty outcome variables ($r = -0.13, r = -0.12, r = -0.13, p < .01$, respectively). A customer's physical visit (i.e. whether they have visited the organisation) is strongly related to both loyalty to organisation ($r = 0.15, p < .01$) and loyalty on social media ($r = 0.14, p < 0.01$). Finally, organisation type (Org_Type) correlated to loyalty on social media ($r = -0.11, p < .05$), which implies that loyalty intention on social media differs between hotel customers and restaurant customers. The demographic variables were entered in multiple regression as control variables for their correlation with the outcome variables.

Table 15: Mean, standard deviation, correlation and reliability

	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Gender	0.38	0.49												
2.Age	37.38	15.21	0.10											
3.Duration_follow	1.88	1.03	0.05	−0.03										
4.Visit	0.89	0.31	−0.01	0.01	−0.18**									
5.SM_Type	0.14	0.34	0.15**	−0.13**	0.13**	−0.15**								
6.Org_Type	0.45	0.50	0.13**	−0.03	0.15**	−0.04	0.17**							
7.Genuine	4.32	1.00	0.02	−0.02	−0.03	0.05	0.04	−0.08	0.67					
8.Superficial	4.13	0.97	0.13**	0.08	−0.01	0.04	−0.07	−0.09	0.37**	0.60				
9.Uninterested	3.44	1.10	0.19**	−0.07	0.03	−0.07	0.04	0.14**	−0.17**	0.27**	0.71			
10.BS_SM	5.20	1.10	−0.09	−0.04	−0.13**	0.04	0.07	0.01	.51**	0.21**	−0.41**	0.82		
11.LTY_ORG	5.04	1.17	−0.12*	−0.08	−0.12*	0.15**	0.07	−0.08	.56**	0.26**	−0.24**	0.64**	0.75	
12.LTY_SM	5.27	1.11	−0.13**	−0.09	−0.13**	0.14**	0.03	−0.11*	0.46**	0.20**	−0.36**	0.69**	0.76**	0.74

Note: The square root of AVEs appear on the diagonal in bold; significance at ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); $N=457$ (pair-wise); BS_SM = Brand satisfaction on social media, LTY_SM = Brand loyalty on social media, LTY_ORG = Brand loyalty to organisation; Gender (female = 0, male = 1), Visit (yes = 0, no = 1), SM_Type = Social media type (Facebook = 0, Instagram = 1), and Org_Type = Organisation type (hotel = 0, restaurant = 1)

Hypothesis testing

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the predictive power of intimacy variables (i.e. Genuine and Superficial) as well as Uninterested on brand satisfaction on social media, brand loyalty to organisation, and brand loyalty to the brand on social media. Nominal demographic variables were firstly recoded into dummy variables using 0 and 1: gender (female = 0, male = 1), visitation (yes = 0, no = 1), social media type (Facebook = 0, Instagram = 1), and organisation type (hotel = 0, restaurant = 1).

Table 16 presents the results of the multiple regression for hypotheses testing. The analysis shows that when gender, age, duration of following, visit, social media type, and organisation type were entered at step 1, 3.6% of the variance in brand satisfaction on social media is explained. After entry of the three independent variables (Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested) at step 2, the total variance explained by the model is 44.5%, $\Delta F(3, 411) = 100.776, p < 0.01$. Thus, the independent variables explained an additional 40.9% of the variance in brand satisfaction on social media ($\Delta R^2 = 0.409$). In the final model, Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested show statistically significant coefficients in predicting customer satisfaction, ($\beta = 0.372, \beta = 0.219, \beta = -0.420$, respectively, at $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H1a, H2a, H3a were supported.

Similarly, the step 1 model explained 6.6% of the variance in brand loyalty to organisation. After entry of the three independent variables at step 2, the total variance explained by model 2 is 40.1%, $\Delta F(3, 411) = 76.831, p < 0.01$. The independent variables explained an additional 33.6% of the variance in brand loyalty to organisation ($\Delta R^2 = 0.336$). The standardised coefficients for Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested are $\beta = 0.462, \beta = 0.166$ and $\beta = -0.184$, respectively, at $p < 0.01$, leading to the support of H1b, H2b and H3b.

Results for brand loyalty on social media show that the step 1 model explained 6.6% of the variance. After entry of the three independent variables at step 2, the total variance explained by model 2 is 36.5%, $\Delta F(3, 411) = 64.670, p < 0.01$. The independent variables explained an additional 29.9% of the variance in brand loyalty on social media ($\Delta R^2 = 0.299$). The standardised coefficients for Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested are $\beta = 0.328, \beta = 0.191$, and $\beta = -0.344$, respectively, at $p < 0.01$, leading to the support of H1c, H2c and H3c.

Table 16: Multiple regression

Step	BS_SM		LTY_ORG		LTY_SM	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Beta						
Gender	-0.093 [†]	-0.060	-0.114 [*]	-0.122 ^{**}	-0.118 [*]	-0.093 [*]
Age	-0.025	-0.061	-0.057	-0.067 [†]	-0.077	-0.107 ^{**}
Duration_follow	0.138 ^{**}	0.142 ^{**}	0.092 [†]	0.091 [*]	0.099 [*]	0.102 [*]
Visit	0.033	-0.018	0.149 ^{**}	0.112 ^{**}	0.129 ^{**}	0.086 [*]
SM_Type	0.102 [*]	0.115 ^{**}	0.127 [*]	0.144 ^{**}	0.080	0.093 [*]
Org_Type	0.020	0.120 ^{**}	-0.071	0.004	-0.094 [†]	-0.010
Genuine		0.372 ^{**}		0.462 ^{**}		0.328 ^{**}
Superficial		0.219 ^{**}		0.166 ^{**}		0.191 ^{**}
Uninterested		-0.420 ^{**}		-0.184 ^{**}		-0.344 ^{**}
<i>R</i>²	0.036	0.445	0.066	0.401	0.066	0.365
ΔR^2		0.409		0.336		0.299
ΔF		100.776 ^{**}		76.831 ^{**}		64.670 ^{**}
<i>df</i>		3, 411		3, 411		3, 411

Note: [†]p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01; pair-wise; ΔR^2 = R-squared change, ΔF = F change; BS_SM = Brand satisfaction on social media, LTY_SM = Brand loyalty on social media, LTY_ORG = Brand loyalty to organisation; Gender (female = 0, male = 1), Visit (yes = 0, no = 1), SM_Type = Social media type (Facebook = 0, Instagram = 1), and Org_Type = Organisation type (hotel = 0, restaurant = 1)

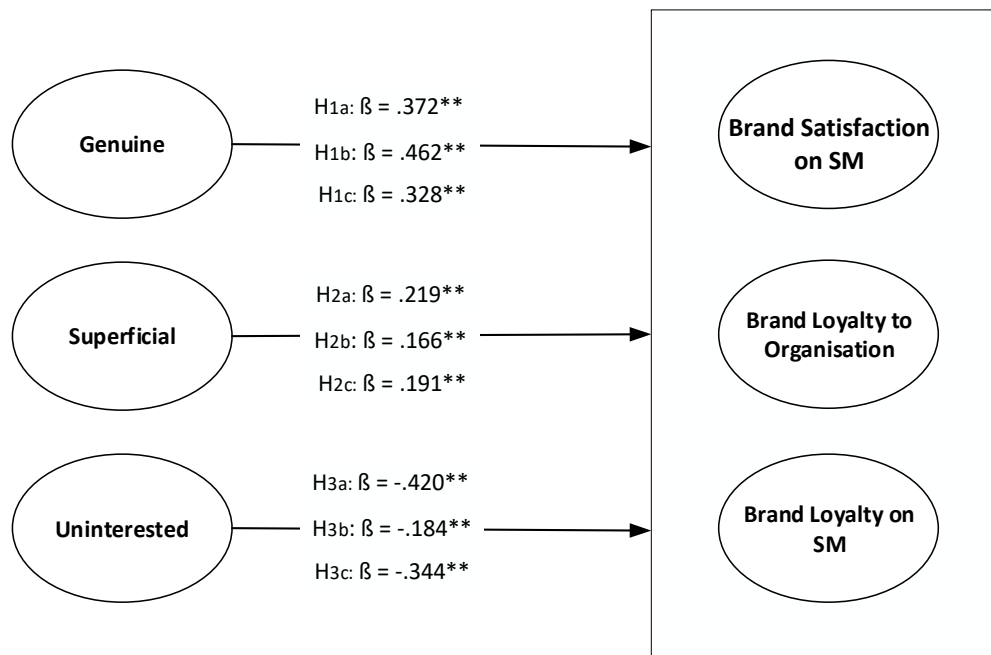


Figure 7: Summary of hypotheses testing

Overall the structural model explained a total variance of 44.5% in brand satisfaction on social media, 40.1% in brand loyalty to organisation, and 36.5% in brand loyalty on social media. Empirical evidence for the reliability and validity of the Genuine, Superficial and Uninterested measures, and their usefulness in predicting specific brand outcomes, will be of interest to marketers. All nine hypotheses received statistical support according to the conceptual model. Theoretically, this study contributes to social media marketing literature by introducing the concept of brand-customer-intimacy as a binary phenomenon, specific to the hospitality industry. Managerially, the results of this study show that both Genuine and Superficial, to differing degrees, predict positive/higher brand satisfaction on social media and brand loyalty behaviours in social media, while Uninterested predicts a negative relationship to brand satisfaction on social media and brand loyalty to organisation.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began with an analysis of the interview data. From this analysis, eight intimacy themes emerged, resulting in the generation of 26 intimacy items, after the item refinement process. This first phase of research not only contributed towards the first and second step of scale development, but also contributed meaningful findings towards a better understanding

of intimacy as formed within social media. The analysis revealed that there are indeed complexities and dimensions to the interactions between brands and customers that warrant deeper examination.

After the preliminary data analysis, the exploration and preparation of survey data for the research was outlined. The analysis followed, achieving the remaining steps of the scale development process. Through exploratory factor analysis and then confirmatory factor analysis, robust results were provided, and at the final stage, the validity of the intimacy scale (comprising 26 items) was established through testing their construct and discriminant validity. Three independent variables were established as a result: Genuine, which comprised the items for genuine-intimacy; Superficial, which comprised the items for pseudo-intimacy; and Uninterested, which comprised the items that represented the absence of intimacy.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Chapter Preview

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a discussion of the key findings and contributions of this thesis. The chapter covers three key areas. First, it reports the key findings for the preliminary data (Phase 1) that led to the inquiry of the main research (Phase 2), then briefly discusses each of the three intimacy variables. Second, it outlines and discusses the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions of the study to the research area. Lastly, it discusses the limitations related to this study and how these can be addressed by future researchers.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Social CRM has increasingly gained interest over the past decade from marketing scholars and practitioners alike. Despite this, there has been very limited scholarly research explicitly examining the dimensions and implications of social CRM, such as customer-intimacy.

Though prior research has provided an array of studies to explain the conceptualisation and components of customer-intimacy, the lack of its inquiry in social media studies is surprising given that the advantages of achieving customer-intimacy through social platforms has been frequently emphasised. Moreover, most existing studies have not been subjected to empirical testing, which has made it difficult to state definitive claims about the implications of customer-intimacy as experienced in social media, a phenomenon of Web 2.0. Consequently, the focus of this thesis has been to conduct a theoretical examination of this phenomenon and inform extant literature by achieving the research objectives that were introduced in the first chapter: 1) to discover and redefine customer-intimacy through a new conceptualisation consisting of pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy, 2) to explore and identify the items for pseudo- and genuine-intimacy based on current social media interactions between brands and customers, 3) to develop and validate a scale to measure pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, and 4) to empirically test the relationship between pseudo- and genuine-intimacy and their impacts, including brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, as applicable to social media.

Initially these research objectives informed the literature review for the thesis. The objectives were then explored through a sequential approach, first through qualitative research and then examined in more detail through the second quantitative research phase. This research contributes to the current literature on customer-intimacy and also yields practical implications.

5.2.1 Key findings from Phase 1

The main finding of the preliminary research phase is that the customer respondents agreed that feelings of pseudo-intimacy could still be considered as positive, with the potential to lead to brand satisfaction and loyalty. In comparison, all the organisational experts interviewed believed that pseudo-intimacy would cause a negative brand image. This showed that, as found in prior research, organisations' concerns towards management of the customer on social media still exists. Past studies have frequently concluded that there are disparities between what brands think customers care about and what customers actually say they care about when it comes interacting with brands on social media. Both academic and industry research has cautioned organisations against making assumptions about customers' social media expectations. Phase 1 of this study has discovered that when it comes to social media interactions, there are indeed gaps between the views of industry practitioners and customers, which need to be further understood. By examining each type of brand-customer interaction that is unique to social media platforms, light has been shed on the differences, as well as similarities, of both groups' views. The main themes revealed from the qualitative analysis for genuine-intimacy were One-on-one, Offline to online interaction, Personal acknowledgement, Time related, and Sharing, while the main themes for pseudo-intimacy were Generic response, Lack of interaction, and "Social" etiquette. Through the themes drawn from the interviews, the findings have served to bridge this knowledge gap by further illustrating the multidimensional nature of social media customer-intimacy and the concepts of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. In conclusion, Phase 1 has highlighted that there is yet more to be examined about the social customer.

5.2.2 Key findings from Phase 2

The findings from Phase 2 of this research have validated the conceptualisation of intimacy in social media as a binary existence. As a result, a scale for measuring customer-intimacy involving eight items for Genuine and three items for Superficial intimacy in social media, as well as five items to determine an absence of customer-intimacy, was developed and validated through factor analysis. Convergent and discriminant validity of the study constructs were met based on CFA. The main findings of the hypotheses testing are that both genuine- and pseudo-intimacy on social media positively affect a customer's brand satisfaction and loyalty, while the absence of intimacy causes negative effects overall. More specifically, Genuine is the strongest predictor for all three outcome variables: brand satisfaction on social media, brand loyalty on social media, and brand loyalty to organisation ($\beta = 0.372^{**}$, $\beta = 0.462^{**}$ and $\beta = 0.328^{**}$, $p < 0.01$, respectively). Superficial also positively predicts the three outcome variables but to a lesser extent ($\beta = 0.219^{**}$, $\beta = 0.166^{**}$ and $\beta = 0.191^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), whereas Uninterested contributes negatively to all three ($\beta = -0.420^{**}$, $\beta = -0.184^{**}$ and $\beta = 0.344^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). The research model has successfully explained 45% of the variance of brand satisfaction on social media, 37% of brand loyalty on social media, and 40% of brand loyalty to organisation. Although past studies have mentioned that pseudo-intimacy can still provide benefits for organisations, it had not been empirically tested nor examined within the context of social media or within the hospitality industry.

5.3 Research Contribution

5.3.1 Theoretical contributions

Since the advent of social media platforms, the rush to adopt marketing efforts to reach social media audiences has come a long way. One of the most marked transitions has been the focus from reach and engagement to building and maintaining online relationships that will withstand the test of time in a rapidly changing social environment. There is still little known about how brand-customer relationship building in Web 2.0 can lead to desirable outcomes for marketers such as brand satisfaction and loyalty (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016).

The key theoretical contribution of this study lies in the re-conceptualisation of customer-intimacy. A much-needed update of the concept of customer-intimacy within the context of social media was provided through the findings of this research. In doing so, the thesis has extended customer engagement research and filled a gap in the existing literature. For example, while many studies have outlined the effectiveness of social media on customer engagement (Bae & Zamrudi, 2018; Mishra, 2019; Sashi, Brynildsen, & Bilgihan, 2019), only a few studies have examined how to engage consumers on social media in different ways. Although social media studies thus far have investigated interesting avenues, knowledge is still lacking, specifically on the role of customer engagement on brand relationship development across contexts (Hollebeek, Conduit, & Brodie, 2016; Dessart, 2017).

In prior social marketing research, consumer typologies have often been the focus of examination (e.g. Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Studies have examined the active consumer versus the “lurker”, identifying active consumers as co-creators of brand advertising content (Rau et al., 2008), and defining social media as “user-generated communication” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Michaelidou et al., 2011). Other research has described the rise of social media causing the regeneration of the digital “prosumer” where the focus is on both consumption and production (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In such ways, previous studies have examined customers’ behaviours on social media in an attempt to improve customer management. Yet many of these studies have ended with categorising the customer according to their behavioural tendencies. In this study, through adoption of a qualitative phase, both customer and respondents’ views were explored to gather insight from both perspectives. By drawing comparisons between the views of both groups, a deeper understanding of genuine- and pseudo-intimacy was gained, providing more nuanced meanings to the two indicators, Genuine and Superficial.

Through this study’s two-phase research, the interview findings and survey findings collectively illustrated the final conceptualisation of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy.

It was vital to extract a holistic view of customer-intimacy in the preliminary phase of data collection by interviewing both industry experts as well as customers. This dual perspective was considered key in discovering what may be the causes behind the common concerns

surrounding the lack of customer engagement with brand-related content on social media, as noted in the literature review.

Another key contribution made by this study is its development of scale measurements that can help to interpret the underlying dimensions of brand-customer interactions that unfold within social media, thus addressing some of the concerns highlighted in relationship marketing studies. The development of this scale to measure the degrees of intimacy (pseudo and genuine) in brand-customer relationships within Web 2.0 contributes towards existing social media usage measures, which have predominantly focused on quantifying consumers by numbers, thus lacking strategic insights for managers. This scale of customer-intimacy, when used together with existing measures such as volume metrics, will provide depth to the understanding of customers' perspectives.

While there has been some evidence to suggest that investing in social media can bring marketing benefits that positively impact the bottom line, this too has been contingent upon how successfully brands can facilitate meaningful brand-customer interactions (Cruz & Mendelsohn, 2010; Hertzfeld, 2015; Neff, 2012). By developing a scale that measures interaction behaviours rather than counts or frequencies, this study provides a response to recent concerns expressed within the literature. Studies have called for richer insight and interpretation of the medium's impact, with industry practitioners emphasising that reach metrics such as impressions or views should rarely be considered as indicative of campaign success (Hootsuite, 2019). Through the development of a measurement scale, assessment of the social media phenomenon of customer-intimacy contributes towards the social CRM literature.

Empirical research on customer-intimacy within the context of the hospitality industry using mixed methods has been limited. The current study fills this gap through adoption of a comprehensive process of scale development, where the final scale items were a collective result of the preliminary and final phases of research through qualitative and quantitative approaches, respectively. The study design began with a content analysis in the preliminary research phase, where the brand-customer interactions currently taking place on the social media accounts of existing hotel and restaurant brands were discovered. The observations of customer interactions made from this content analysis were then presented to both the

practitioners responsible for managing these activities and the customers to categorise as either pseudo- or genuine-intimacy. This process allowed more meaningful findings to be drawn. In Phase 2, a quantitative investigation was conducted. Data for factor analysis and hypotheses testing was collected from the followers of existing hotel and restaurant social media accounts, and this aggregated sample has provided unique and rich findings that added to the validation of the research model and results. The intimacy scale developed in this study has been contextualised within the hospitality industry and can be adopted for future studies focusing on other sectors of hospitality.

Re-conceptualisation of intimacy

Engaging with consumers on a social (or relational) rather than transactional level has been promoted by both academics and practitioners alike (Berry, 1983; Dwyer et al., 1987; Sigala, 2018), and further intensified with the shift of engagements to Web 2.0 platforms. The very definition of engagement has matured to account for behaviours that have more tangible and long-term impact on brand value and ROI (Hootsuite, 2019).

Recent studies have referred to public engagement and exchange in the realm of social media as an “intercommunicative self”. Marshall (2010) says that users of social media are engaged in a multi-layered form of communication, and phatic forms of communication take precedence. The concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) has since been extended to the online environment (Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Goldberg & Allen, 2008), and is used to describe interactions that are perceived to be two-way and personal between brand representatives and customers, which has further broadened the PSI literature to the field of marketing (Labrecque, 2014). Unlike the parasocial interaction theory, the state of intimacy between brands and customers has yet to be uncovered within the social media environment. In response to this gap in literature, the following section further discusses the foundational theories on which the new intimacy dimensions were developed from. The notion that two differing dimensions – pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy – may be inherent to the intimacy that is formed within the realm of social media and the unique implications of these two dimensions are discussed.

Genuine-intimacy in brand-customer relationships describes a phenomenon distinct from pseudo-intimacy. Genuine-intimacy is understood as intimacy with a brand that is felt as

“genuine” by the customer. The term customer-intimacy has been used by many scholars in past studies (Heinonen, 2011; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014; Peters et al., 2013; Stewart & Pavlou, 2002) to describe a relationship between a brand and consumer that is based on understanding and where an emotional connection is felt. Consistent with the literature, this study found that a relationship with a brand can be felt as personal, particularly when personalised responses have been provided to customers’ questions or comments on a regular basis. According to findings from the preliminary phase, it does not matter whether these interactions have been experienced by the individual themselves or if they are based on observations that have been made from viewing how the brand interacts with other customers on their social media account. Hence, the findings from the preliminary phase of the research provide evidence that social CRM should indeed be thought of as management of the dialogue rather than of the customer (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011). Moreover, these findings illustrate that social media accounts are indeed like unregulated communities (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016), where customers not only observe but are susceptible to the dialogue that unfolds between brands and their customers. Hence, this gives reason to why brands should avoid giving the impression that they are uninterested in their customers.

This study identified a need for distinction between the understanding of pseudo-intimacy as it was defined prior to the birth of Web 2.0 platforms (Meyrowitz, 1986; Rasmussen, 1997) and pseudo-intimacy as it emerges within social platforms. Therefore, by providing a re-conceptualisation of customer-intimacy as the binary of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, this research extends the relationship marketing literature. By developing and redefining the existing definitions of phenomena known as “pseudo-interaction”, “pseudo-communication” and “pseudo-relationships” (Gutek, 2000; Rasmussen, 1997) within the context of Web 2.0 and the hospitality industry, this study is a first of its kind.

Application of the Two-Factor Theory

Brand-customer-intimacy was disentangled through implementation of Frederick Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959) to develop the two constructs of pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. Apart from containing directly opposing items such as “this organisation responds immediately” versus “this organisation usually likes my photos at a much later date”, the

measures between pseudo- and genuine-intimacy included items that were uniquely different to each other.

The research findings have highlighted that pseudo- and genuine-intimacy indeed have an effect on brand satisfaction and loyalty. The relationship between satisfaction and dissatisfaction as distinct (not opposite) factors, as theorised by Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, was found to hold true to a certain extent in its application to this study: pseudo-intimacy and genuine-intimacy were found to be distinct from each other, yet not opposite to each other. Like Herzberg's claim, the findings of this study indicate that the opposite of genuine-intimacy is not pseudo-intimacy but the absence of genuine-intimacy. Furthermore, according to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the interactions that belong to the intimacy construct of Genuine (as satisfiers/motivators) result in brand satisfaction and loyalty when adequately fulfilled, while the interactions within the construct of Superficial (as hygiene factors), if adequately fulfilled, will also result in brand satisfaction and loyalty but to a lower degree. However, when there is an absence of both pseudo- and genuine-intimacy, this can lead to feelings of brand dissatisfaction and decreased loyalty intentions towards the brand. The cases or behaviour identified within the Uninterested construct, for example, will contribute towards an impression that the brand is negligent of their customers. Thus, this study posits that pseudo-intimacy does not lead to dissatisfaction but to satisfaction and loyalty to a lower degree, while the absence of both genuine- and pseudo-intimacy will lead to customer dissatisfaction and have a negative impact on loyalty intentions.

5.3.2 Empirical contribution

Scale development and validation

Although customer-intimacy has been considered as a relationship attribute characteristic of this social rather than transactional approach, rigorous conceptualisation and empirical assessment has been scant within the social media literature. The second major contribution of this study relates to the increasing need for quality-based social usage measures, as highlighted in the social media marketing literature. Adoption of a vigorous process to develop a brand-customer-intimacy scale is another key contribution of this research. The measurement scale was tested for its validity and reliability; therefore, it is able to contribute

to the development of the field of social CRM research and enrich existing knowledge on customer-intimacy (Reynolds, 2010; Slavec & Drnovšek, 2012). Furthermore, this study developed a customer-centric measure, which has been most recommended for exploration of social media measures (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). The scale developed in this study is a metric that has been much sought after to assist organisations in the face of the Web 2.0's uncertain forecast (Erskine, 2019).

Currently social media metrics are limited to measuring interactions of customers via the numbers of likes, comments, shares and fan numbers, yet such measures are increasingly becoming a poor proxy for brands if these followers aren't engaged (Peters et al., 2013). Researchers suggest measuring customer engagement levels is important. The importance of quality-based social metrics such as the one this study has developed has been argued for by managers due to findings on the greater social impact produced by highly engaged fans compared with the sheer volumes of inactive followers (Borders, Johnston, & Rigdon, 2001; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2013). This scale responds to calls for metrics that can help to drive customer engagement and produce insight (Kim, 2016; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019), as opposed to financial metrics that can lead to short-sighted management practices (Mizik, 2010; Rust, Moorman, & Balla, 2010). By using this measurement scale, managers will be better informed and equipped to achieve and manage more genuine and sustained customer relationships, alleviating the dissatisfaction found to arise from unskilled operators in the realm of social media (O'Keefe, 2008).

The developed scale suggests that customer-intimacy comprises two dimensions: Genuine and Superficial. Hence, the scale can be used to measure both pseudo- and genuine-intimacy constructs. Furthermore, the third dimension (Uninterested) can serve to identify behaviours that will cause customers to not only feel an absence of intimacy but lead to negative brand outcomes. Since all three intimacy dimensions met the criteria of validity and reliability, they can be replicated to measure social media intimacy in different service contexts. Each of the dimensions that were discovered will be discussed in the following sections, along with their practical implications.

The intimacy dimensions

The intimacy dimensions with their indicating items are listed in Table 17.

Genuine

“We’re close, we’re committed, and it’s personal.”

The findings of the genuine-intimacy construct (Genuine) confirmed that brands can achieve a deeper level of closeness through new Web 2.0 platforms (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). Moreover, the findings of this study show that when a customer feels there is genuine-intimacy, this leads to positive impacts for brands in terms of satisfaction and loyalty towards the organisation, as well as the organisation’s social media account. This finding is aligned to prior research, where closeness was found to lead to future interactions (Hansen, 2003).

The Genuine dimension includes aspects related with brand behaviours that reflect reciprocity, closeness and commitment. For example, among the eight interaction types, two were representative of a brand’s personal approach: (1) when brands referred to customers by their name, and (2) when brands provided a personalised response. Despite the prevalence of an informal communication style that has been adopted by many brands on social media, there has been a lack of research on the effects therein. Therefore, the findings from the participant interviews, drawn from the preliminary phase of research, and the indicators that were identified as part of the Genuine dimension have shed light on this area.

With the advent of social media marketing, the shift of key brand-customer dialogues to online platforms has seen the rise of an informal communication style. This has been an area of question for organisations engaging with customers in the social media context, further building on the concerns of losing a dominant voice amidst the constant flow of conversations. Hence, as a means to foster brand-customer relationships, brands should refer to customers by their first name, along with abbreviated expressions, and often times incorporate the use of emoticons (where appropriate) as part of the informal approach deemed suitable within the realm of social media (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015; Gretry et al., 2017).

Table 17: Customer-intimacy dimensions and their items

Dimension	Item Description
Genuine	This hotel/restaurant seems to respond immediately to a comment, tag, post or 'like' This hotel/restaurant often reposts customer's posts This hotel/restaurant always responds to customer's posts, comments or questions This hotel/restaurant often refers to customers by name in comments or messages This hotel/restaurant often follows customers back on social media This hotel/restaurant often gives a personalised response to comments or questions This hotel/restaurant 'likes' customers' posts even if they aren't about themselves or their products I often have back and forth comments with this hotel/restaurant on social media
Superficial	A 'like' from this hotel/restaurant is just part of their customer service This hotel/restaurant usually 'likes' my photos of them at a much later date This hotel/restaurant usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments
Uninterested	This hotel/restaurant doesn't seem to respond to questions or comments This hotel/restaurant is very late in responding to customers' questions or comments This hotel/restaurant rarely posts or shares a story about themselves on social media I don't relate to the culture of this hotel/restaurant I'm not getting a consistent message about this hotel/restaurant's values from their posts

Furthermore, it is now widely acknowledged in the social CRM literature that engaging with customers through tailored messages will ensure that the increasing demands for personalised customer experiences are met (Chwialkowska, 2019; Davis et al., 2014; Mazza & Palermo,

2018; Moro & Rita, 2018). Other studies have described this as the era of *unscale*, where individual and personalised experiences will be the key to success (Taneja, 2018).

The positive impact of genuine-intimacy felt when the brand reciprocates the act of “friending” by following customers back on social media is also consistent with findings of previous studies (e.g. Gretry et al., 2017; Su et al., 2015). The norm of reciprocity has long been understood as a guide for relationship behaviour (Gouldner, 1960; Hansen, 2003). Intimacy with the brand may also be felt as genuine when there is an experience or evidence of value co-creation, such as the act of reposting a customer’s post (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The findings of this study showed that such activities were felt as an appreciation of the customer; hence, the customer becomes intimately acquainted with that brand. In a day and age where loyalty in the context of social media has become a rare and valuable entity, making the customer feel appreciated could unlock loyalty intentions. According to Marcie Merriman, executive director of growth strategy at Ernst & Young, Generation Z “expect businesses, brands and retailers to be loyal to them. If they don’t feel appreciated, they’re going to move on. It’s not about them being loyal to the business” (Schlossberg, 2016).

In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that brands ensure their approaches to customers are carried out in a personal manner; for example, Genuine item 6: This hotel/restaurant often gives a personalised response to comments or questions. Adopting appropriate automation tools available to social platforms could assist in this. Furthermore, when responding to customers’ questions or comments, brands should make sure to refer to their customers by name – a little goes a long way in terms of ensuring that a brand interaction is felt as genuine; for example, Genuine item 4: This hotel/restaurant often refers to customers by name in comments or messages. Providing timely responses is also felt as a genuine interaction that leads to satisfaction (e.g. Genuine item 1: This hotel/restaurant seems to respond immediately to a comment, tag, post or “like”), a finding that is consistent with previous research (Song & Zinkhan, 2008). However, in contrast to previous research, this study found the same positive relationship also existed between response time and brand loyalty.

Past studies have frequently reflected on the disparities that lie between what brands think customers care about and what customers actually say they want when it comes interacting

with brands on social media (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011; IBM Institute for Business Value, 2011). This research confirms industry findings on consumers' desires to use messaging tools to communicate with brands, in order to increase chances of personalised engagements (Hootsuite, 2019). Customers have stated that the ability to directly message a company provides more trust and confidence towards the brand. Hence, this study recommends brands integrate the use of private messaging functions or third-party messaging apps in social CRM strategies.

Reciprocating customers' behaviours should also be noted as a key social CRM strategy; for example, Genuine item 11: I often have back and forth comments with this hotel/restaurant on social media. Reposting customers' posts that consistently reflect the brand should be a regular activity included in a brand's content calendar. Following customers back on social media can also be a way of expressing genuine engagement. If these activities are not suitable for a brand, responding in a timely manner is still helpful, while ensuring that customers' comments or questions are not left unanswered should be a mandatory protocol. A combination of these interaction behaviours will provide a strong sense of a brand's commitment to their customers, symbolic of a brand that is considered genuine. In summary, achieving genuine-intimacy with customers should entail interactions that are felt as personal.

Superficial

“We're just friends.”

Pseudo-intimacy dimensions identified through this study included three types of interactions: (1) a like that was felt as merely customer service, (2) a delayed like, and (3) standardised responses. Although these three dimensions may seem to represent negative or failed attempts at genuine interaction, the findings of this study showed their positive impacts on both satisfaction and loyalty levels. This finding is consistent with others found in the literature, which have described pseudo-intimacy in brand-customer relationships as a beneficial state to reach for businesses within a marketing context (e.g. Colgate & Danaher, 2000; Gutek, 2000). Furthermore, this superficial level of intimacy resonates with findings from prior research that also suggest that the mere sense of connection with brands can bring forth brand loyalty effects (Labrecque, 2014). This builds on the idea of a “parasocial” self,

commonly ascribed to the superficial connections formed between celebrities and their fans in the realm of social media (Marshall, 2010).

Providing a standardised response was found to be a part of the Superficial dimension that leads to positive brand satisfaction and loyalty. Interestingly, this contrasts with what the interviewees said, as they commented that a generic, standardised response would cause negative feelings toward the brand. Furthermore, literature also shows divided perspectives on this particular behaviour. In past research, providing a generic response has been identified as a critical factor that would cause negative outcomes for brands, while other researchers have found that a generic response would still posit positive outcomes. In this way, the nature of brand-customer conversations needs to be re-examined in terms of the Web 2.0 context. Much of the conversation needs to be delivered in a timely manner, if not in real time, and deciphering the most appropriate conversation style is key for many organisations.

From analysis of the customer participants' transcripts, a brand's general response was the most frequently mentioned item as an interaction that is not perceived as genuine. This resonates with Chan and Guillet's (2011) finding that a standard response may result in the brand appearing to be insincere and unconcerned about its customers. This in turn does not promote or inspire dialogue but can actually discourage the customer from further interaction with the brand. In this scenario, the social media platform fails to mediate discussion due to the brand's one-way or generic type of response to a customer's question or comment. However, as was highlighted from the findings of the preliminary research, a generic response is better than a non-response. Most of the interviewed customers said they understand it can be difficult for businesses to answer everyone individually. Therefore, this collective response from the participants in Phase 1 of this research adds meaning to the findings of Phase 2, that a standard response can still lead to positive outcomes.

The findings of the Superficial dimension extend the literature on parasocial interaction theory, which illustrates that friendships on social platforms can be formed but only to a superficial extent (Marshall, 2010). The superficial nature of social media relationships has been examined within the communications literature through observations of celebrities and

their fans (e.g. Marshall, 2010; Rasmussen, 2018), while studies that have pursued such investigations for brands and customers have been relatively limited in number.

The findings from the interviews in Phase 1 of the research revealed that indeed customers can be aware of brands' approaches and even intentions when it comes to social CRM strategies. Hence, conducting a close examination of the customer perspective of customer-intimacy, but more importantly the effects of pseudo-intimacy, is critical. Pseudo-intimacy items reveal that although customers are aware that these interactions and behaviours are superficial and void of genuineness, they will still lead to positive feelings towards the brand and, more importantly, positive intentions for loyalty towards the brand.

Uninterested

“It's just business.”

The interactions that were identified as a brand's negligence of their customers and which would, in turn, lead to negative brand outcomes included response behaviours, inconsistency or lack of meaningful information, and relatability in brand content.

A late response was found to give the impression that the brand is uninterested in engaging with their customers, an impression that is due to customers' increasing expectations for immediate responses (Harrigan et al., 2015). As found in previous research also, a late response not only shows the organisation's slow responsiveness but contributes to a potential loss of business. For customers, no response was also perceived as a sign that the brand was neglecting customers. More specific to the context of social CRM, a brand's account that has no responses is considered as a one-way form of communication, and hence lacks the feeling of genuine-intimacy. This causes the customer to view the brand's account as an advertising channel rather than a social engagement platform, and as highlighted in prior research, customers will not engage with content that seems overly commercial (Hootsuite, 2019; Swani et al., 2013). Neglecting customers' comments or questions on social media will amount to negative impressions towards the brand. Organisations cannot afford to ignore the dialogue, and instead must learn to collaborate and co-create with consumers to reach desired outcomes. The interview findings indicate that customers are discouraged from engaging with a brand when comments are not addressed. Whether organisations are there to engage or not,

the brand dialogue will continue, nonetheless. In the age of social media, a dissatisfied customer has the ability to tell ten million customers (Gillin, 2007). It is the customer who has greater influence over other customers, and previous studies have presented practices of co-creation as remedies to this shift (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008; Burmann, 2010; Muñiz & Schau, 2007).

Other behaviour related to the Uninterested dimension was a lack of posts or if the posts rarely shared a story about the brand. Hence, in line with the findings from this dimension, it is suggested that brands should post content that shares sentiment with their customers, as content that shares more about the brand has also been found to increase customer engagement levels (Labrecque, 2014).

The interaction items discovered for the Uninterested dimension suggest that brand behaviours that would be unacceptable in a physical or offline service environment are equally felt to be unacceptable in the social media environment. Just like providing a late response to a restaurant customer or hotel guest would lead to a negative experience for the customer, so would a late response from a brand's social media platform be negatively perceived by a customer. Moreover, the negative impact of a non-response (Jeon & Kim, 2016), whether it is a question, comment or enquiry, should be considered equally detrimental whether the non-response is direct or from a social media platform. Late responses are a critical issue for a company as they not only show that the company has low responsiveness to its customers, but they also contribute to a potential loss of business (Chan & Guillet, 2011). Thus, social media management practices should have the same expectations of high levels of customer service as traditional customer management practices.

5.3.3 Practical contribution

The results of this study provide clear implications for industry practitioners. For the first time, the differing dimensions belonging to customer-intimacy on social media are explained, as well as a tool being provided to measure them. The behaviours that cause each type of intimacy (or lack of it) and their impacts on customers have been identified. In conclusion, this study informs brands of the ways in which customer-intimacy can be achieved, along with behaviours that should be avoided.

The potential cost-free advertising benefits of social media have been highlighted by many industry practitioners (Mathwick, Wiertz, & De Ruyter, 2008; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). However, social media has been shown to be a double-edged sword, too, as the many benefits offered to businesses come at a significant cost. Finding ways to translate online interactions within brand communities into customer relationships with profitable outcomes is an ongoing challenge for social media's marketability (Coelho, Rita, & Santos, 2018; Hudson et al., 2016). Organisations continue to grapple with challenges of this fairly new medium, as technological advancements have weakened the human relationships that are vital to customer experiences (DiJulius, 2019). In a recent study by the American Marketing Association's leading researcher, Andrew Stephen (2019) concluded that discovering the best ways to leverage social media for brands is ongoing as platforms continue to change and evolve. For example, some travel marketers who had invested in ads on Snapchat were caught off-guard with the sudden drop in popularity of the platform (Wasserman, 2015). To this end, attention has turned to customer-intimacy; for example, authors Mario Natarelli and Rina Plapler of the acclaimed book *Brand Intimacy, A New Paradigm in Marketing*, conclude that "brands that build stronger bonds create stronger business return and longevity" (Harrison, 2018).

There has been a shift in the advice given within the industry when it comes to marketing on social platforms: for years the emphasis had been on the production of content, but now there is an increasing emphasis on the role of the context in which the content is being delivered (Hootsuite, 2019). Further contributing to this shift has been the decreased levels of trust toward social platforms in general. To this end, content that is considered as "authentic" and "genuine" to the brand is core to expert recommendations (Hootsuite, 2019). Trust and feelings of genuineness are now attributes that brands must earn for continued engagement with customers. Hence, not only can the dimensions identified in this study's intimacy scale be used as a measure for practitioners, but each dimension can also be used individually as indicators of social CRM strategies that need to be implemented in order to provide customers with feelings of genuine-intimacy.

Due to the glut of content, messages and perspectives in today's media landscape, organisations need to break through and establish long-term relationships with consumers, regardless of their individual business goals (Nielsen Insights, 2018). By 2020, Generation Z

will account for 40% of all consumers; they will be the first generation who has never known life without easy Internet access and mobile technology, meaning that brands will have to work harder to gain their attention (Patel, 2017). Hence, online engagement efforts will continue to interest organisations. This research offers marketers theoretical guidance for interacting with customers in social media settings and ultimately fostering brand-customer relationships that will lead to positive outcomes for brands. Messaging, for example, offers clear practical benefits for brands but it can also play a much deeper, more meaningful role. The sense of human connection that conversations can unlock will give consumers a sense of appreciation and closeness. In summary, when brands position themselves in a more human manner, there is an increase in feelings of genuineness.

For brands to avoid negative outcomes caused by late or non-responses, it is suggested that a “less is more” approach be adopted. In the case of brands lacking the resources to effectively manage several social platforms, a single platform that can be frequently accessed is recommended. When the responsibility for social media resides with a managerial staff member who happens to have many other hats to juggle, engaging even a few customers on a genuine-intimacy level will still be beneficial. Other possible solutions that could be adopted include outsourcing social media management to external agencies who can act on behalf of the organisation, or social media automation tools that can respond to customers in real time.

This study has found that genuine-intimacy will lead to loyalty behaviours, which in the context of social media translate to acts of brand advocacy such as e-WOM (word-of-mouth), which has been identified as the most common loyalty behaviour in social media (Madupu & Cooley, 2010; Woisetschläger., Hartleb, & Blut, 2008). Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter 2, users consider information provided by other individuals to be more trustworthy and credible (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016); hence, gaining a loyal customer-base through genuine-intimacy is suggested.

In summary, an organisation should focus on operationalising the measurement items identified under the Genuine and Superficial intimacy dimensions but avoid the items identified under Uninterested.

John DiJulius, in his 2019 book *The Relationship Economy: Building Stronger Customer Connections in the Digital Age*, cautions organisations to avoid simply incorporating

advanced technology as a means to stay relevant in social media. Instead, he advises that brands must remember that people ultimately carry the innate desire for human interaction. Based on Dijulius's argument, the interactions identified as Genuine, including behaviours such as responsiveness, engaging in conversations and showing appreciation through reciprocity, will help brands to set themselves apart.

Organisations are constantly faced with the challenges of managing their brands in the social media landscape, and when managers are faced with failures in such periods of trial and error, achieving customer-intimacy is key. Brand-customer relationships that are based on intimacy can act as a buffer as customers are more positive towards brands' failures (Aggarwal, 2004) – another of the many reasons why managers need to invest in forming and maintaining intimate customer relationships.

The findings of this study may serve as a valuable source for hotels and restaurants to formulate their social media marketing and customer relationship management strategies. According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that interactions identified as both genuine-intimacy and pseudo-intimacy will lead to brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. However, items that are symbolic of an absence of intimacy will have a negative effect on both customer brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. The findings of this study may serve as a valuable source for hospitality organisations to formulate their social CRM strategy. The current lack of understanding of many managers may result in ineffective strategies when it comes to marketing on social platforms, which will undermine the value that can be delivered with social CRM. Overall, this research may particularly help organisations in New Zealand as well as organisations in other locations to enhance their competitiveness in the global market.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has made valuable contributions to the customer-intimacy and social media literature, although it still has some shortcomings.

The study initially set out to investigate both Facebook and Instagram platforms, but most of the respondents of the online questionnaire identified themselves as followers of Facebook, meaning that in comparison, followers of Instagram were underrepresented. Future research

studies could investigate other platforms, such as Instagram, given its increasing influence for businesses in general but also particularly in both the travel and hospitality sectors.

Given the limited scope and time constraints of this study, the final step of repeating the scale-testing with a new data set, as recommended by Hinkin et al., (1997), still remains. This replication process could be a follow-up study pursued with the scale that has been developed, to further test the scale with a new data set in different settings. As suggested by Hinkin et al., (1997), determining construct validity of a scale should be an on-going process.

A further limitation is that this research is based on data collected from participants drawn from the New Zealand population. It has not been tested or established whether the study's findings will generalise to other countries as well. For example, results might vary for a sample from a different country. Future research should be carried out to replicate this study across cultures and other service sectors to discover whether these preliminary findings can be generalised.

Future research should build on the scale developed in this study, using a mix of tools to provide a holistic understanding of the impacts of social media because, as highlighted in this chapter, no single measure can be used on its own as a means to understand the effects of an organisation's social CRM strategy. Combining this intimacy measurement with others would produce interesting findings for both academic researchers and industry practitioners.

Moreover, the scale developed in this study does not encompass all types of brand-customer interactions that could potentially lead to either constructs of pseudo- or genuine-intimacy. For example, interactive behaviours such as messaging between brands and customers should be further examined. The engagement levels achieved through direct messaging customers either through native or third-party applications has increasingly gained attention.

Researchers should undertake additional efforts to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Social media platforms are continuously evolving and expanding; hence engagement research on other platforms could lead to different results and further research is warranted. Digital platforms will continue to change, meaning that the future will continue to be uncertain. Therefore, when it comes to understanding the dimensions of social media

engagements, there will be much to be explored. Presenting an up-to-date study that can provide light on both managerial and customer perspectives seems to be crucial.

5.5 Closing Comments

This PhD research may not suffice to deliver data that can transform a business, but if and when it is combined with the research and discoveries of other disciplines to piece together a holistic illustration of the social media landscape and the customer tendencies, the findings could be eye opening.

Given the paucity of brand-customer-intimacy studies within the social media literature, this research endeavoured to examine the complexities of customer-intimacy that has been brought on by the advent of social media. In an effort to reach a deeper understanding of this phenomenon as experienced by the social media consumer, it was deemed that developing a measure for the customer perspective was the foremost step to take.

The author of this thesis acknowledges that any attempts to investigate social media phenomena from the perspective of the customer will almost immediately become out of date. Nonetheless, this research is meaningful as it has dug deeper into the phenomenon of customer-intimacy as it is formed within social media, through its re-conceptualisation as pseudo- and genuine-intimacy. Establishing human connections and relationships must always be the focus when creating any digital experience, as only this will lead to enduring customer loyalty and emotional connection to a brand. With sweeping technological shifts such as the introduction of artificial intelligence in a digital disruption era, the greatest asset for true hospitality and genuine service will be the “social” experiences, based on authentic human interactions. This effort to disentangle the intimacy that lies at the heart of what we now know and navigate in our everyday lives on the social Web, sheds light in foreseeing the perspectives of the social-first generation who will soon enter the market. Our greatest consultants will be the social-natives themselves, and the relationships we forge will set us apart.

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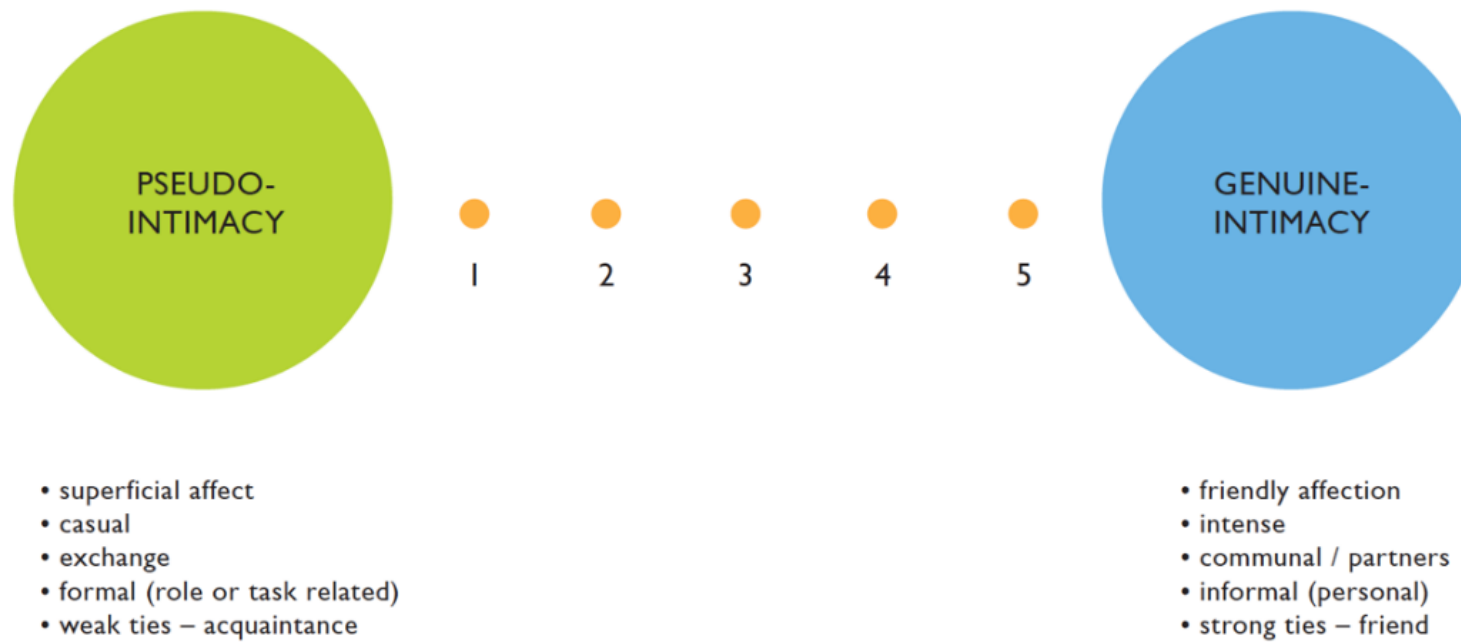
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Content analysis

Type of interaction	No. of brands where the interaction occurred
Brands liking a post a customer has tagged them in	7
Brands leaving a comment below a post a customer has tagged them in	4
Brands reposting customers' posts and tagging them	3
Brands responding to customer questions/comments/complaints	7
Brands posting an image of employees/staff with caption to introduce them	4
Brands requesting customer input/feedback by posting a question	2
Brands posting a video to tell customers a story about the brand	2
Brands running a competition	3
Customers leaving a question/comment	7
Customers liking a brand's post	7
Customers sharing a brand's post	2
Customers tagging a friend under the brand's post	7
Customers posting a complaint	4

Appendix 2 Interview diagram



Appendix 3 Phase 1 Invitation

Dear _____,

As a PhD Candidate at the Auckland University of Technology, I'd like to invite you to participate in my research as an interview partner. It will take half an hour of your time and your participation would contribute to the research phase of my doctoral degree titled:

An examination of hotel and restaurant brand-customer relationships in social media: Pseudo- vs genuine-intimacy

This study will explore the phenomenon of brand-customer relationships formed within the realm of social media and examine the layers of intimacy that result from these relationships. It is hoped that this research will inform hospitality organisations, through gaining insight from the customer's perspective. Recommendations for managers in managing customer communication and relationships on social media platforms will be made from this study.

I have attached an information sheet outlining the purpose of my study and how you can participate. If you would like to participate please fill out the consent form also attached and return it via email to this address within two weeks, by dd/mm. Also, if you do not want to participate please reply to this email and no further contact will be made.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!

I would truly appreciate your time and participation.

Yours Sincerely,

Chloe Kim

PhD Candidate
Social Media Marketing, Hospitality and Tourism
Auckland University of Technology

Appendix 4 Phase 1 Participant Information Sheet (Expert)

Participant Information Sheet	
Project Title	An examination of hotel and restaurant brand-customer relationships in social media: Pseudo vs genuine intimacy
An Invitation	I am a doctoral candidate at the Auckland University of Technology and I would like to invite you to participate in my research, which is concerned with the way in which you interact with customers on the social media pages of your organisation. I am also interested in how you perceive the interactions and relationships formed on these platforms. This study will contribute towards my doctoral degree in the School of Hospitality and Tourism.
What is the purpose of this research?	This research is part of my study for my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in social media and recommendations for managers in their future marketing and management of their accounts/pages. I also hope to explore how customers perceive interactions with brands in the social media environment, whether the relationship formed is considered genuine or pseudo.
How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?	You have been invited to participate in this research due to evidence of customer interactions on your brand's social media page, an account of your expertise and/or experience with regards to this activity will be valuable to this research. Your contact details were obtained through a referral by someone within my network.
How do I agree to participate in this research?	Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. If you are interested in taking part in this research, please fill out the consent form attached to this email and return it to me.
What will happen in this research?	1. We will arrange a time to meet, which is convenient for you and at a public place that is appropriate. 2. There will be one, single interview with myself during which I will ask you questions from one questionnaire. The interview is expected to last no longer than up to an hour and is a one-off event. 3. Once the interview is completed I will send you a summary for your approval, you can request any changes to be made. 4. When I have completed the study I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.
What are the discomforts and risks?	You will not be exposed to any risks and no discomfort is foreseen, as the questions asked will be related to the public interactions you've had with businesses. In addition, it has to be acknowledged you are spending up to 1 hour of your valuable time for the interview, which might cause a minimal level of discomfort.
How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?	However, if for any reason you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you can pause or postpone it at any time. You are also free to ask any questions prior to or during the interview. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to answer specific questions, you may skip those questions. A withdrawal is possible until data collection is completed and it will not cause any disadvantage for you.
What are the benefits?	Your participation in this research will contribute towards the achievement of my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. The findings of this study can be summarised and disclosed to you, hoping that, based

on the results of this study applications could be made in the everyday management of customer relations on your brand's social media pages. It is hoped that the findings of this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in the social media environment, with recommendations for managers on customer management strategies. I also hope to explore customers' perceptions of brand interactions in the social media environment, to gain a deeper understanding of how brands' actions/responses are perceived by customers.

How will my privacy be protected?

If you agree to take part, your name will not be recorded on the questionnaires and the information will not be disclosed to other parties. Your responses to the questions will be used for the purpose of this research only. You can be assured that if you take part in the interview confidentiality will be maintained.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

One interview lasting no more than up to an hour.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Two weeks

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Once the interview is completed, I will send you a copy of a summary for your approval, you can request any changes to be made. When I have completed the study I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6105

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Chloe Kim, chloeskim60@gmail.com, 021 355 114

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 6105

Simon Milne, simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 9245

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 15th September, 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/288.

Appendix 5 Phase 1 Participant Information Sheet (Customer)



Participant Information Sheet

Project Title

An examination of hotel and restaurant brand-customer relationships in social media: Pseudo vs genuine intimacy

An Invitation

I am a doctoral candidate at the Auckland University of Technology and I would like to invite you to participate in my research, which is concerned with the way in which you interact with organisations on their social media pages. I am also interested in how you perceive the interactions and relationships formed on these platforms. This study will contribute towards my doctoral degree in the School of Hospitality and Tourism.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is part of my study for my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in social media and recommendations for managers in their future marketing and management of their accounts/pages. I also hope to explore how customers perceive interactions with brands in the social media environment, whether the relationship formed is considered genuine or pseudo.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. If you are interested in taking part in this research, please fill out the consent form attached to this email and return it to me.

What will happen in this research?

1. We will arrange a time to meet, which is convenient for you and at a public place that is appropriate.
2. There will be one, single interview with myself during which I will ask you questions from one questionnaire. The interview is expected to last no longer than half an hour and is a one-off event.
3. Once I have transcribed the interview I will send you a copy for your approval, you can request any changes to be made.
4. When I have completed the study I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You will not be exposed to any risks and no discomfort is foreseen, as the questions asked will be related to the public interactions you've had with businesses. In addition, it has to be acknowledged you are spending 30 minutes of your valuable time for the interview, which might cause a minimal level of discomfort.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

However, if for any reason you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you can pause or postpone it at any time. You are also free to ask any questions prior to or during the interview. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to answer specific questions, you may skip those questions. A withdrawal is possible until data collection is completed and it will not cause any disadvantage for you.

What are the benefits?

Your participation in this research will contribute towards the achievement of my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that the findings of this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in the social media environment. I also hope to explore customers' perceptions of brand interactions in the social media environment, to gain a deeper understanding of the brand-customer relationships formed.

How will my privacy be protected?

If you agree to take part, your name will not be recorded on the questionnaires and the information will not be disclosed to other parties. Your responses to the questions will be used for the purpose of this research only. You can be assured that if you take part in the interview you will remain anonymous.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

One interview lasting no more than half an hour.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Two weeks

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Once I have transcribed the interview I will send you a copy for your approval, you can request any changes to be made. When I have completed the study I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6105

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Chloe Kim, chloesk60@gmail.com, 021 355 114

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 6105

Simon Milne, simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 9245

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 15th September, 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/288

Appendix 6 Phase 1 Expert interview questions

Expert Interviews

1. Could you please tell me about your role and background?
(Including prompt questions e.g. How long have you been in this role, what was your previous role?)
2. Who are your clientele/ who uses your business? (Does this client base differ for your social media accounts?)
3. What are some current customer relationship strategies that may be in place for social media communication? (How often do you interact with the customers on social media? What about social media marketing techniques?)
4. When you're dealing with customers on social media what makes you feel that it's genuine interaction? (Could you give specific examples?)
5. Then what about interactions with customers on social media that don't feel genuine?
(Could you give specific examples?)
6. Would you consider any of your relationships with customers as intimate in the realm of social media?
(Why? Are there different degrees to this intimacy?)
7. How would you describe the level of engagement you have with customers on social media?
(On a 1 to 5 scale, from 1 = low levels of engagement to 5= high levels of engagement. Could you provide specific examples?)

For the purposes of this study I have a diagram to demonstrate this concept of pseudo- vs. genuine-intimacy.

For the following questions, please rate from 1 to 5 (according to the diagram), if you would perceive the examples as either genuine- or pseudo- interaction:

1. When you like an image of your brand posted by a customer
2. When you comment on a customer's post of your brand
3. When you re-post a customer's image on your social media account
4. When a customer comments on a post by your organisation
5. When you reply to a customer's comment/question left on your brand's social media account
6. When you share the brand's feelings to followers on the social media account
7. When you say more about the brand, beyond products on your brand's social media account

Do you feel attempts for pseudo-intimacy would cause customers to have negative feelings toward the brand?

Would you say (or have you witnessed) feelings of genuine-intimacy with the customer positively increase the customer's brand image, satisfaction and loyalty? What about pseudo-intimacy? Does pseudo-intimacy still create positive feelings?

I've touched on a lot of things today; do you feel there are any existing gaps or avenues we could pursue? Anything that would help your organization?

Appendix 7 Items generated from transcripts categorised into themes

Interview-generated intimacy item pools	
GI 1 One-on-one	1. This organisation often refers to customers by name in comments or messages
	2. This organisation often gives a personalised response to comments or questions
	3. I feel closer with this organisation because I have had a one-on-one conversation with them on social media
	4. I always show my support to this organisation no matter what they post
	5. This organisation refers to me by my name
GI 2 Offline to online interaction	6. I would like to know the name or the face of the person managing the social media account
	7. I like this organisation's account because it's consistent with their offline character
	8. The offline vibe of this organisation is well reflected in their social media platform
GI 3 Personal acknowledgement	9. This organisation often reposts customer's posts
	10. This organisation often follows customers back on social media
	11. This organisation commented on my posts about them
	12. This organisation always replies my comments on their posts
	13. This organisation always quickly responds to my tags
	14. This organisation sincerely interacts with customers by reposting customer's posts
GI 4 Sharing	15. I have had a few back and forth comments/responses with this organisation on social media
	16. This organisation 'likes' customers' posts even if they aren't about their products
	17. I share common values with this organisation
	18. I have similar lifestyle interests as this organisation

	19. This organisation shares their values and emotions to their followers
	20. The values expressed by this organisation are consistent
	21. This organisation has 'liked' my posts that aren't about them
	22. This organisation often shares a story about themselves on their social media
	23. This organisation seems to respond immediately to a comment
	24. This organisation always responds to customer's posts quickly
	25. This organisation always replies to comments
	26. This organisation always attends customer's questions quickly
	27. This organisation seems to responds immediately to a tag
	28. This organisation always responds immediately to a 'like'
GI 5 Time related	29. I will always like the posts from this organisation
	30. This organisation doesn't answer questions
	31. This organisation doesn't respond to customers' posts about them
	32. This organisation doesn't respond to likes or tags
	33. This organisation never follows customers back
	34. This organisation doesn't give 'likes' to customers' posts about them
	35. This organisation never reposts customers posts about them
	36. This organisation never replies customers' comments
	37. This organisation rarely posts or shares a story about themselves on social media
	38. This organisation 'likes' customers' photos of them/ their products at a much later date
PI 1 Lack of interaction	39. This organisation responds to my comments usually much later
	40. This organisation is usually late in answering questions
	41. This organisation usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments
	42. This organisation's replies feel automatic
PI 2 Generic	

PI 3 'Social' etiquette	43. This organisation's likes feel as if they are automatically generated
	44. This organisation usually gives a very generic response
	45. I'm not getting a consistent message about this organisation's values from their posts
	46. A 'like' from this organisation is just a part of their customer service
	47. This organisation 'likes' customers' post of them or their products without commenting
	48. 'Likes' from this organisation don't hold much value because they 'like' everyone who posts or tags them
	49. 'Replies' from this organisation don't hold much value because they give similar responses to everyone who comments
	50. Likes from this organisation feel random and transactional
	51. Small talk with this organisation on social media is just a form of exchange
	52. This organisation mostly posts advertisements/promotional content on social media
	53. The actual service at this organisation is not as friendly as their social media communications
	54. I don't mind if I don't know the name or face of the person I'm interacting with on this organisation's social media account
	55. I don't give it much thought when I 'like' this organisation's posts on social media
	56. I have not visited this organisation
	57. I tag the organisation's posts on social media without much thinking
	58. I don't relate with the culture of this organisation

Appendix 8 Phase 2 Invitation sent to organisations from preliminary research



Dear _____,

I hope you've been well since we last met in December of 2016, I appreciate the knowledge you shared and the contribution you gave towards my study.

I have now reached the final stage of research and I would like to invite you to be an industry partner. Your participation would greatly contribute to the most meaningful phase of my doctoral degree but also provide your organisation with valuable market research.

This study will explore the phenomenon of brand-customer relationships formed within the realm of social media and examine the impact of this relationship on the following outcomes that will be examined: **brand image, satisfaction and loyalty**.

Upon your participation, this valuable data would be collected from customers of your organisation through an anonymous online survey. A report of the results will be provided based on the findings from your customers, once the research is completed. Recommendations for customer communication within social media platforms based on the overall results of this study will also be provided. (Multiple organisations will participate in this research).

I have attached an information sheet outlining the purpose of my study and more information about the process of data collection.

If you would like to participate please let me know by responding to this email! Also, if you do not want to participate please reply to this email and no further contact will be made.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!

I would truly appreciate your time and contribution. I look forward to hearing from you and follow up contact will be made soon.

Yours Sincerely,
Chloe Kim

PhD Candidate
Social Media Marketing, Hospitality and Tourism
Auckland University of Technology

Appendix 9 Phase 2 Participant Information Sheet for partnering organisations



Participant Information Sheet

Project Title

An examination of hotel and restaurant brand-customer relationships in social media: Pseudo vs genuine intimacy

An Invitation

I am a doctoral candidate at the Auckland University of Technology and I would like to invite you to participate in my research, which is concerned with the way in which customers interact with organisations on their social media pages. I am also interested in how customers perceive the interactions and relationships formed on these platforms. This study will contribute towards my doctoral degree in the School of Hospitality and Tourism.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is part of my study for my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in social media and recommendations for managers in their future marketing and management of their accounts/pages. I also hope to explore how customers perceive interactions with brands in the social media environment, whether the relationship formed is considered genuine or pseudo.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. If you are interested in taking part in this research, please fill out the consent form attached to this email and return it to me.

What will happen in this research?

1. We will arrange a method that suits your organisation to distribute the online surveys.
2. An incentive for participants **may or may not** be arranged to suit your organisation and customers.
3. An email link to the online survey will be provided to be distributed by **you/your organisation**, according to the arrangements previously agreed to.
4. When I have completed the study a summary of the findings will be produced which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You or your customer participants will not be exposed to any risks and no discomfort is foreseen. Since the online survey will be **entirely anonymous, participants will be informed that participation in this study is entirely voluntary.**

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

It is also not compulsory to answer every question in the online questionnaire. If participants feel uncomfortable with any question, they can skip it at any time or withdraw the online survey at any stage. Moreover, no personally identifiable information will be collected in this online survey so it is unable to identify who the participant is. In addition, only aggregated research findings will be released in this study. Therefore, the privacy and confidentiality of your organisation and participants will be protected.

What are the benefits?

Your participation in this research will contribute towards the achievement of my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that the findings of this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in the social media environment. I also hope to explore customers' perceptions of brand interactions in the social media environment, to gain a deeper understanding of the brand-customer relationships formed.

How will my privacy be protected?

Since the online survey will be entirely anonymous, participants will be informed that participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

One online survey lasting no more than 15 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Two weeks

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A summary of the findings will be sent to you once the study is completed.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6105

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Chloe Kim, chloesk60@gmail.com, 021 355 114

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 6105

Simon Milne, simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 9245

Appendix 10 Participant Information Sheet posted at the beginning of online survey



Participant Information Sheet

Project Title

An examination of hotel and restaurant brand-customer relationships in social media: Pseudo vs genuine intimacy

An Invitation

I am a doctoral candidate at the Auckland University of Technology and I would like to invite you to participate in my research, which is concerned with the way in which you interact with organisations on their social media pages. I am also interested in how you perceive the interactions and relationships formed on these platforms. This study will contribute towards my doctoral degree in the School of Hospitality and Tourism.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is part of my study for my doctoral degree at the Auckland University of Technology. It is hoped that this research could provide useful information for hospitality organisations about communicating with customers in social media and recommendations for managers in their future marketing and management of their accounts/pages. I also hope to explore how customers perceive interactions with brands in the social media environment, whether the relationship formed is considered genuine or pseudo.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. All information provided in this survey will be kept anonymous and all answers will remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to answer a specific question, you have the possibility to skip the answer. You may also withdraw from the survey at any time during participation. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible. By completing this survey you will give consent to participate in this research.

How will my privacy be protected?

This online survey will be entirely anonymous. It is also not compulsory to answer every question in this survey. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you can skip it at any time or withdraw the online survey at any stage. Moreover, no personally identifiable information will be collected in this online survey so it is unable to identify you. In addition, only aggregated research findings will be released in this study. Therefore, your privacy and confidentiality will be protected.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

One online survey lasting no more than 15 minutes.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 Ext 6105

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Chloe Kim, chloeskim60@gmail.com, 021 355 114

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Peter Kim, pkim@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 6105

Simon Milne, simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 Ext 9245

Appendix 11 Intimacy measurement item pool

Genuine-Intimacy

G1: This hotel/restaurant seems to respond immediately to a comment, tag, post or 'like'

G2: This hotel/restaurant often reposts customer's posts

G3: This hotel/restaurant always responds to customer's posts, comments or questions

G4: This hotel/restaurant often refers to customers by name in comments or messages

G5: This hotel/restaurant often follows customers back on social media

G6: This hotel/restaurant often gives a personalised response to comments or questions

G7: This hotel/restaurant 'likes' customers' posts even if they aren't about themselves or their products

G8: This hotel/restaurant often shares a story about their hotel/restaurant or product on their social media

G9: I share common values with this hotel/restaurant

G10: I always show my support to this hotel/restaurant no matter what they post

G11: I often have back and forth comments with this hotel/restaurant on social media

G12: I often have a one-on-one conversation with this hotel/restaurant on social media

G13: I would like to know the name and/or face of the person managing this hotel/restaurant's social media account

Pseudo-Intimacy

P1: A 'like' from this hotel/restaurant is just part of their customer service

P2: This hotel/restaurant usually "likes" my photos of them at a much later date

P3: This hotel/restaurant usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments

P4: This hotel/restaurant doesn't seem to respond to questions or comments

P5: This hotel/restaurant is very late in responding to customers' questions or comments

P6: This hotel/restaurant 'likes' customers' post of them or their products without commenting

P7: This hotel/restaurant rarely posts or shares a story about themselves on social media

P8: This hotel/restaurant mostly posts advertisements/promotional content on social media

P9: I don't relate with the culture of this hotel/restaurant

P10: I don't mind if I don't know the name or face of the person I'm interacting with on this hotel/restaurant's social media account

P11: I don't give it much thought when I 'like' this hotel/restaurant's posts on social media

P12: I'm not getting a consistent message about this hotel/restaurant's values from their posts

P13: The actual service at this hotel/restaurant is as friendly as their social media communications

Appendix 12 Final survey (Hotel version example)

Please answer the following questions with regards to this hotel. Please base your answers on the experiences you've had with this particular hotel on social media

Screening Questions:

1. Are you 18 years or over?

Yes ☐ (if yes will lead to question 2) No ☐ (end of survey)

2. Do you follow this hotel on Instagram or Facebook?

Yes ☐ No ☐ (end of survey)

3. Have you visited this hotel in person?

Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Communications with this hotel on social media

Please rate the following statements on your level of agreement using (1=Strongly disagree / 7=Strongly agree)

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Mildly Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Mildly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
This hotel always responds to posts, comments or questions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel seems to respond immediately to a comment, tag, post or like	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel usually 'likes' my photos of them at a much later date	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel 'likes' my post of them or their	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

products without commenting								
This hotel often reposts customer's posts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel often follows customers back on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel refers to customers by name in comments or messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A 'like' from this hotel is just part of their customer service	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel/restaurant often gives a personalised response to comments or questions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel 'likes' customers' posts even if they aren't about their hotel or products	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel often shares a story about their hotel or product on their social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I always show my support to this hotel no matter what they post	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I often have back and forth comments/responses with this hotel on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to know the name and/or face of the person managing this hotel/restaurant's social media account	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I often have a one-on-one conversation with this hotel on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I don't mind if I don't know the name or face of the person I'm interacting with on this hotel's social media account	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I share common values with this hotel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The actual service at the hotel is as friendly as their social media communications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel doesn't seem to respond to questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel is very late in responding to customers' questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel rarely posts or shares a story about	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

themselves on social media							
This hotel mostly posts advertisements/ promotional content on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I don't relate with the culture of this hotel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I don't give it much thought when I 'like' this hotel posts on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I'm not getting a consistent message about this hotel values from their posts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Overall Satisfaction

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Mildly Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Mildly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
This hotel's social media accounts are visually appealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The information posted on this hotel's social media accounts about their products or services are sufficient for my needs or interest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall I am satisfied with my choice to 'follow' this hotel on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Future intentions

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Moderately Disagree (2)	Mildly Disagree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Mildly Agree (5)	Moderately Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I will continue to follow this hotel social media accounts in the future	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will continue to interact with this hotel on Instagram/ Facebook in the future	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you visit this hotel on the next opportunity?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you prefer to visit this hotel over others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you recommend others to follow this hotel on social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you share this hotel's post or content on your social media page?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. Personal information

Your gender? Female ☐ Male ☐

Your age?

18–24 years old ☐

25–34 years old ☐

35–44 years old ☐

45–54 years old ☐

55–64 years old ☐

65 years old or over ☐

Your educational background? Less than High School ☐ High School ☐ Some College/Institute ☐ Bachelor degree ☐ Postgraduate degree

Your occupation? _____ Professional /Student /Self-employed

Is your occupation/major media related? Yes ☐ No ☐

Your country of residence? _____ New Zealand (Auckland / Other regions) / Overseas

Thank you so much for your participation!

Appendix 13 Qualtrics Survey

Q1 Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey. My name is Chloe and I am conducting this survey as part of my doctoral qualification at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). This survey is about **your social media experience with hospitality organisations**. Your participation is meaningful to my research and the completion of my qualification.

This survey will take you **about 8 minutes** to complete. All data collected will be used for **academic research** only. All your answers for this survey will remain anonymous.

By completing the survey, you are giving consent to this research.

For detailed information or questions about this survey, please click the [Participant Information Sheet](#)

Thank you.

Q2 Please select which type of hospitality organisation would you follow on Facebook or Instagram

- ☐ Hotel
- ☐ Restaurant

Q3 Please indicate which year you were born _____ (1999 ...1920)

Q4 Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Q5 Please specify your nationality _____ (New Zealand ... Other)

Q6 Please indicate your occupation _____ (Student... Other)

Q7 Please name **ONE** hotel/restaurant you follow on Facebook OR Instagram. Your answers to this survey will be based on this hotel/restaurant.

- ☐ Facebook Hotel/restaurant name: _____
- ☐ Instagram Hotel/restaurant name: _____

Q8 When did you start following this hotel/restaurant on Facebook or Instagram?

- ☐ Over a year ago
- ☐ 6–12 months ago
- ☐ 1–3 months ago
- ☐ Less than 1 month

Q9 Have you ever visited this hotel/restaurant in person?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q10 Please answer the following questions based on the social media experiences you've had with the hotel/restaurant you have named at the beginning of this survey.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
This hotel/restaurant seems to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

respond
immediately to a
comment, tag,
post or 'like'

This
hotel/restaurant
often reposts
customer's posts

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

This
hotel/restaurant
always responds
to customer's
posts, comments
or questions

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

This
hotel/restaurant
often refers to
customers by
name in
comments or
messages

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

This
hotel/restaurant
often follows
customers back
on social media

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

This
hotel/restaurant
often gives a
personalised
response to

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

comments or
questions

This
hotel/restaurant
'likes' customers'
posts even if
they aren't about
themselves or
their products

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

This
hotel/restaurant
often shares a
story about their
hotel/restaurant
or product on
their social
media

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I share common
values with this
hotel/restaurant

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I always show
my support to
this hotel/
restaurant no
matter what they
post

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I often have
back and forth
comments with
this hotel/

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

restaurant on social media							
I often have a one-on-one conversation with this hotel/restaurant on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to know the name and/or face of the person managing this hotel/restaurant's social media account	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q11 Please answer the following questions based on the social media experiences you've had with the hotel/restaurant you have named at the beginning of this survey.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
A 'like' from this hotel/restaurant is just part of their	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

customer service							
This hotel/ restaurant usually 'likes' my photos of them at a much later date	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel/ restaurant usually gives a standardised (non-personalised) response to questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel/ restaurant doesn't seem to respond to questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel/restaurant is very late in responding to customers' questions or comments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This hotel/restaurant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

'likes'
customers' post
of them or their
products
without
commenting

This
hotel/restaurant
rarely posts or
shares a story
about
themselves on
social media

This
hotel/restaurant
mostly posts
advertisements/
promotional
content on
social media

I don't relate
with the culture
of this
hotel/restaurant

I don't mind if I
don't know the
name or face of
the person I'm
interacting with
on this hotel/
restaurant's
social media
account



I don't give it much thought when I 'like' this hotel/restaurant's posts on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I'm not getting a consistent message about this hotel/restaurant's values from their posts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Display This Question: If have you ever visited this hotel/restaurant in person? = Yes

Q12 Visitation

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The actual service at this hotel/restaurant is as friendly as their social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

communication s	
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Q13 Overall Satisfaction

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
This hotel/restaurant' s Facebook or Instagram page is appealing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The information posted on this hotel/restaurant' s Facebook or Instagram page about their products or services are sufficient for my needs or interest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Overall I am
satisfied with
my choice to
'follow' this
hotel/restaurant
on Facebook or
Instagram

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Q14 Future Intentions

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
I will continue to follow this hotel/restaurant' s social media accounts in the future	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will continue to interact with this cafe/ restaurant on social media in the future	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I will visit this
hotel/restaurant
on the next
opportunity

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I would prefer
to visit this
hotel/restaurant
over others

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I would
recommend
others to follow
this hotel/
restaurant on
social media

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I would share
this hotel/
restaurant's post
or content on
my social
media page

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐