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The Big Issues – Food, Clothing and Shelter: An Introduction

Nnamdi O. Madichie

As humans there are three important requirements for survival – notably food (including drink), clothing and shelter. Most business and management courses teach this key requirement in what can be termed business 101. In previous issues of this working paper series, the subject of “shelter” has been touched upon, hence it is a privilege to present the other two topics – food and clothing – as seen from the lenses of undergraduate students at Bloomsbury Institute. Indeed, there is no better time to reflect upon both of these topics than in these times of Covid-19 triggered “lockdowns,” where shops not catering to food have been restricted from operating – not once.

Both food and clothing constitute part of the retailing landscape, not just the UK, but globally. Both also entail the need the effective management of the supply chain. As far as food is concerned, it has been one crisis after the other – from the spot over contaminated beef, through the horsemeat scandal (see Madichie and Yamoah, 2017) to the challenges of migrant workers picking fruit and vegetables from British farms. Evidently, the movement from farm to fork, has remained a rather difficult terrain, not just for employers, but also employees – not to mention consumers.

The challenges have spanned Australia and the United Kingdom (notably Scotland and England) where the plight of migrant workers have remained a contentious issue. As the case of Australia seems where the plight of migrant workers have remained restricted from operating – not once.

More than 20,000 people have entered Australia through the seasonal worker program since the pilot began in 2008, and it’s now open to residents from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Numbers were increasing every year, it had become an indispensable workforce for Australia’s agricultural industry and an economic boon for some Pacific communities.

Coming back to the developments in the UK, a range of reports from The Grocer (Holmes, 2020; Sandercock, 2020) have highlighted unsavoury news - from the disarray of the food industry in the face of a no-deal Brexit (Holmes, 2020) [5], to the arguable “nonchalance” over British farming (Sandercock, 2020). As Sandercock (29 October 2020) only recently also, Nick Marston, CEO of British Summer Fruits in an interview with The Grocer, pointed out that “some growers had already begun to cut back on planting and production for the 2021 season.”[6] This was arguably instigated by the shortage of seasonal workers both at home and abroad (mostly). Considering that the majority of seasonal workers across UK farms are from abroad, stringent immigration policies would be catastrophic for the sector. As the report points out, “Growers have long warned that if the government stopped non-UK seasonal workers from entering the country, we would see commercial British farming shut up shop.”

The government seemed to get this and launched a pilot Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) in 2018[5], was extended to include 10,000 visa permits at the start of 2020. With growers meant to have started recruitment for 2021, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is reportedly “continuing to work hard” with the Home Office and other government departments. According to the report:

“If the government is as hot on data science as Dominic Cummings claims it is, it would see that the SAWS pilot has worked for two years. It would also see that Pick for Britain, despite its good intentions, was a failure.”

“UK-resident workers (so not necessarily British people) made up just 11% of the overall workforce in 2020. These workers stayed on farms for an average of nine-and-a-half weeks, compared with just over 14 weeks for first-time non-UK workers and 18 weeks for returnee non-UK workers.” [6]

Out of 24,775 seasonal roles filled on soft fruit farms, only 7% of all driver, picking or packhouse jobs were taken up by first-time UK-resident workers. Of that number, just 398 performed picking roles for six weeks or more [7]. A similar concern is also raised and discussed in the case of Scotland. As a recent article in a Scottish Newspaper:

“[The] UK government immigration restrictions must be relaxed to allow more foreign labour to help on Scotland’s farms. Douglas Ross is urging Westminster colleagues [...] Under the current post-Brexit rules, up to 10,000 seasonal workers would be granted permission to come into the UK to work in industries including soft-fruit picking. The Scottish Conservative leader, Douglas Ross, believes additional leeway should be added to the UK Government’s SAWS to meet the country’s needs.” [8]

He advised that the immigration restrictions must be relaxed to allow more foreign labour to help on Scotland’s farms. Apparently, there have been calls for more farm hands than is currently the case. According to the National Union of Farmers Scotland (NUFS), the UK allocation is not enough and claims 70,000 workers will be needed next summer, with 10,000 of those at least in Scotland [9]. According to him:

“We have seen the NFU in Scotland, England and Wales calling for more workers to be added to the scheme [...] I don’t think 10,000 is enough, we need to go beyond that and it is something I have made the case for. We have excellent produce in Scotland and we have to get it out to customers, which means we need ample people out to pick the fruit.”

Some of the main concerns in this sector and taken from a UK wide perspective is the shortage of “ample staff to pick fruit across the country.” On the subject of how workers from outside the UK could be attracted to the country to work, in particular after the Brexit process came into effect, the following remarks are instructive:

“I really want to see Scotland’s two governments working together. The pandemic is a crisis being felt by all European governments. Like we have seen with city and region growth deals, when the two governments combine their efforts they can provide far more for people. We don’t need to endlessly pick fights between the two.” [10].

The challenge of fruit and vegetable picking in the UK has been around since before the pandemic took hold. As Lisa O’Carroll reported in a Guardian article, “contract length, farm location and caring duties cited as reasons for turning down work.” [11] are some of the main reasons why British workers reject fruit-picking jobs. Evidently the shortage of farm hands is an employment matter, which has been previously mooted in this working paper series (Panganiban, 2019; Lukova, 2017) – albeit from the retail sector. Panganiban (2019) explored employee relations (i.e. motivation and retention strategies) in UK retail with a view to highlighting the significance of the role of management in the motivation and retention of employees.

The UK retail sector encompasses both the food (including fruits and vegetables) and non-foods (notably clothing, home and electronics) dotted across the British highstreet. Prior to the current health crisis and attendant lockdowns, the British highstreet has been a troubled sector with store closures, layoffs and now furloughs. The British public has witnessed various forms of restructuring in retail icons such as Philip Green’s British Home Stores in a long list that includes, more recently the John Lewis partnerships, Debenhams, Waitrose, Oak Furnitureland, Zara (Inditex), and even Boots Pharmacy.

According to reports, “there are signs that this is just the tip of the iceberg, as 22 percent of the multiple market is still closed temporarily.” As the report further reveals, “there has been a consistent increase in shop closures since 2017, with 2018 and 2019 seeing...”
an increase of around 1,000 store closures each year.” This is with particular reference to affordable brands holding their own, “the categories which have been steadily growing over the last five years are discount supermarkets and value retailers.” This year’s research covered all high streets, shopping centres and retail parks in the UK.

“With any economic turmoil, there are opportunities for retailers who are able to weather this storm, with the availability of prime property, increased activity and spend in local centres and changing consumer habits.”[12]

As previously discussed, the digital revolution has permeated and reconstituted innovation in recent years – from production to consumption, marketing and farmgate to the dinner table, bales to fabric and fashion (Madchie & Munro, 2019). In another article entitled “How technology is reshaping the shopping experience,” Madchie & Munro, (2019, p. 8) pointed out that “as an increasingly omnichannel industry, retail has undergone significant shifts to connect the digital and physical worlds seamlessly. The efficiency and immediacy of online shopping has cultivated a desire among consumers for the same experience in-store, with the added value of human interaction. This combination of digitisation and growing customer expectation has reshaped the shopping experience and transformed the role of physical retail stores. These authors also highlighted and unpacked a previous report on the ‘The Future of Retailing’ by highlighting five key areas that are moving the field forward – notably technology and tools to facilitate decision making; visual display and merchandise offer decisions; consumption and engagement; big data collection and usage; and analytics and profitability.

Overall, this final issue of the Bloomsbury Institute Working Paper Series comes at a very difficult time. It also highlights the successful efforts of the Institute in meeting their core values even with the addition of the Covid-19 lockdowns, apathy and student and staff concerns.

Papers in this Issue

In this issue, five contributions from the undergraduate student projects are a clear demonstration of the level of support they have received even in the face of the crisis. Topics range from food production to fashion consumption and human resource management and developments in the recruitment processes – all taken from a UK perspective.

In the first paper, Dimo Kalaydzhiyski, focuses on the recent developments in the UK agricultural sector by exploring the quality of management of migrant workers, which constitutes a large share of the available workforce. Drawing upon a sample of 45 migrant workers, the study finds the lack of consistent human resource management policies. The study identifies choke points including discrimination of part-time workers, and a lack of focus over employee management. These concerns are related to areas of job satisfaction and motivation are neutral and a large share of migrant workers demonstrated dissatisfaction with human resource management policies – all impacting upon performance issues and high turnover.

Lim Luong, in the second paper, highlights how brand image influence customer purchase decisions in the UK clothing industry. The study’s main objectives are threefold – notably to analyse the key drivers of brand image within the UK clothing industry; analyse consumer purchasing behaviours through the lens of brand image; and explore the correlation between brand image and consumer purchasing behaviour.

In the third article, Zdravka Simeonova, moves this conversation online by assessing how social media platforms progressively change consumers’ behaviour and influence their purchasing decision for luxury fashion online. The study notes the global luxury houses that have incorporated internet technologies and social media to contribute content to their followers on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. Thus, organisations transformed the tools used to promote and advertise their goods and services. In the light of increasing curiosity in the usage of social media marketing among luxury fashion brands, this study sets out to identify the impact of social media marketing over consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion in the UK. The study reveals the fundamental role of social media marketing in making a positive impact on the decision-making process on luxury brands in the UK. Generally, the study reveals that the active presence of luxury fashion brands on social media platforms not only benefits a strong relationship with the consumer but also influences the UK consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion. Additionally, the findings reveal that consumers are influenced by social media posts, adverts, or stories as well as reviews and ratings. It is revealed that Instagram and Facebook, take leading positions in customers’ preferences for effective platforms for luxury fashion, however, respondents consider Instagram two times more effective for the consumer decision-making process when it comes to luxury fashion consumption.

Remaining on the discourse of online shopping, Kofi Afram, in the fourth contribution, evaluates the growing trend and the changing behaviour of consumers in the UK online retail sector. The main argument in this study is that online shopping seems to be “taking the world by storm,” prompting a need to better understand the reasons consumers are shifting online, and how marketers can better manage this transition. In its attempt to explain factors influencing online shopping behaviour of UK customers in the retail sector, the study seeks to examine how the buying patterns of consumers are changing in the UK online retail sector in order to highlight ways retailers can optimise their online presence and to capitalise on the opportunities in that sector.

In the final contribution, Omama Kasmi, seeks to examine the impact of online recruitment platforms from the job seekers perspective with a view to ascertaining the effectiveness of this strategic endeavour. Taking a human resource management perspective, she seeks to achieve three main objectives – notably to (i) evaluate how jobseekers seek and apply for jobs; (ii) identify the preferences of online recruitment vis-à-vis traditional recruitment methods; and (iii) to highlight the effectiveness of online recruitment from the job-seekers perspective. The study resonates with the current climate where physical job interviews have become harder to manage for a variety of reasons including the current restriction of movement for geographically dispersed job candidates and/or applicants and the cost savings associated with fewer face-to-face recruitment. She argues that the practice has become increasingly popular with employers and potential employees. With limited research on how many websites are popular with employers and potential employees. The study provides data on the usage pattern of job applicants on recruitment websites, shedding some insight into what websites are being used and the efficiency of these platforms for UK jobseekers.
Conclusions and Implications

Overall, this final issue of 2020 seems to resonate with the current climate of uncertainty impacting the lives and livelihoods of UK consumers through what they eat to what they wear. For food consumption and the journey from the farm to the fork, the role of migrant workers is a conversation that needs to be had and sorted in the current health crisis situation and the restricted movements as the lockdown steps up gear. It is also of significance even after the pandemic especially as Brexit becomes more of a reality. According to Leeds, UK-based commercial Drone experts, COPTRZ, “Drones for Agriculture” may hold the answer for the future of picking seasons.” These experts have highlighted how drones the Covid19 crisis would accelerate drone use in harvesting [13]. They report something that highlights the reported pivoting of business in crisis times as follows, “As the UK government calls on the population to help with the 2020 harvest, amidst the Coronavirus crisis, drones for agriculture may hold the answer for the future of picking seasons.”

In the case of clothing and the fashion sector, it seems that pivoting online has become a new world order as only those who elate to that space seem to survive. This may, however, need to be interpreted with caution as the appetite for bricks-and-mortar, do not seem to have waned as many think. Indeed, only recently, Morag Cuddeford-Jones, Editor of the official magazine of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, recently, Morag Cuddeford-Jones, Editor of the official magazine of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, shared her belief that marketers may have with caution as the appetite for bricks-and-mortar, do not seem to have waned as many think. Indeed, only recently, Morag Cuddeford-Jones, Editor of the official magazine of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, recently, Morag Cuddeford-Jones, Editor of the official magazine of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, shared her belief that marketers may have

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Notes:

[5] The pilot is “A new two year pilot allowing a limited number of temporary migrants to enter the UK for seasonal work in the edible horticulture sector, under Tier 5 of the immigration system.” See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seasonal-workers-pilot-request-for-information/seasonal-workers-pilot-request-for-information
[7] Ibid.
References


Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how brand image influences consumer purchasing decision in the clothing industry in the UK. The research objectives are threefold – notably to analyse the key driver of brand image within the clothing industry in the UK; analyse consumer purchasing behaviours through the key components of brand image; and explore the correlation between brand image and consumer purchasing behaviour. That being said, this study adopts the positivism paradigm through the method of an online questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, a psychometric response specifying participants level of agreement: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Followed by an analysis of frequency tables, descriptive statistics table, and a linear regression through IBM SPSS to obtain empirical data.
Introduction

Research (Sleigh, 2018; Sabanoglu 2020) has shown that the UK clothing industry is worth £32 billion to the UK economy with a market value expected to be at 66.6 billion Euros in 2020. In addition to the market value, the annual expenditure on clothing, purely based on sales volume has had an increase of £8.3 billion in 2018. Felix (2020) states by 2020, e-commerce clothing will reach a US$450 billion figure and while in the recent years, the growth of online sales of clothing has been substantially high, with a total of 60% of consumer purchasing clothing on the internet in 2019, offline purchases are predicted to be 71.2% by 2020 (Sabanoglu, 2020). Without a doubt, the clothing industries in the UK is one the industries that significantly contributes to the UK economy, according to the industry classification benchmark (2019), the clothing industry is located under the classification; 3000 consumer goods industry, sector of 3760 personal goods and subsector of 3763 clothing and accessories.

While the business world is consistently changing day by day, brand image is arguably one of the main factors which influence consumer purchasing decisions especially in the UK clothing industry. With almost all products having a label, companies all strive to develop and maintain their brand reputation. One of the core concepts of brand image that helps the fashion industry in the UK is their brand equity, which essentially refers to consumer’s valuation of a brand (Zhang, 2015; Modicum, 2017). On the one hand, Alhaddad (2014) and Zhang (2015) share the opinion that brand loyalty is a core component of brand equity amongst other four components proposed by Aaker (1999). On the other hand, Riaz (2015, p.26) mentions in his research that consumer purchasing behaviours are essentially activities and processes in which consumer’s chooses and consume products, ideas, services, and experiences. In this light, this study is about looking at the five components of the brand equity model, and how it affects consumer purchasing decisions.

The main research question is: How may brand image influence customer purchase decisions in the UK clothing industry? The purpose of this study was to determine how may brand image influence consumer purchasing decision in the clothing industry in the UK. The research objectives are threefold – notably to analyse the key driver of brand image within the clothing industry in the UK; analyse consumer purchasing behaviours through the key components of brand image; and explore the correlation between brand image and consumer purchasing behaviour.

Literature Review

Brand Image in context

Brand image is defined as the front-liner of a product, an initial view that enables consumers to identify with products (Wijaya, 2013). However, the term originally derives from the ancient North Germanic language word “brand”; a literal meaning of a piece of burning wood, dating more than approximately 4,000 years ago, and it wasn’t until the 17th century that it was referred as a mark of ownership (Holland, 2017). Studies on brand image by Bastos and Levy (2012), suggests that branding and burning are interconnected to a certain extent with evidence revealing that the words burning and brand (image) are in fact linked with the German expressions “es brennte” (it is burning) and “der Brand” (the fire, the burning). Echoing these views, Moore & Reid (2008), discovered that branding and burning also have Icelandic synonyms “oorn” and “brand”, which means burning and fire. This draws attention to the fact that fire seems to be the main component when defining the roots of branding, Timpson (2015) supports this by explaining in his study that since the Anglo-Saxon time, branding meant marking someone or a product with something from the fire. However, as brand has continuously developed throughout the years and became a competitive market for businesses, by the 19th century a brand was simply defined as a particular kind of goods, with a brand manager being responsible for giving a product an identity which distinguishes it from almost indistinguishable competitors (Timpson, 2015; Arons, 2011).

Many studies on brand image states that a strong brand in the market competition is ultimately the main goal of many businesses. Fianto et al (2014, p60; Hawkins et al, 2004; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010) elucidates that it enables a range of competitive advantages to organisations including greater profits, opportunity for brand extension, and reduced risks. Given this statement, Fianto et al (2014, p60; Aaker, 1997) defines brand as an image that can be recalled by the public, making a positive brand, relevant and easy to remember by consumers. A combination of consumer’s perception and beliefs about a brand (Alhaddad, 2014; Campbell, 1993). With similar research (Sallam, 2016; Keller, 1993), defines brand image as the perceptions bought to the consumer’s mind by brand association while Alhaddad (2014, p. 29) defines brand image as a set of belief’s held about a specific brand. Therefore, brand image is the positive or negative perceptions held by a consumer’s own belief when associated with brands.

Classifications of Brand Image and Consumer Purchasing Behaviours

Looking into more depth of this research, brand image may influence consumer purchasing behaviours in the clothing industry in the UK through specific models. Firstly, brand image’s main key driver is brand equity and a model that illustrates brand image and its influence on consumer purchasing behaviours is a model proposed by Aaker (1991). Divided into five components which enables an insight of the relation between the components as well as the (future) performance of the brand: 1) brand loyalty; 2) brand awareness; 3) perceived quality; 4) brand associations; and 5) other proprietary assets. However, given that proprietary assets are essentially business-related components, this creates a four-dimensional consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) which consist of brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality and association (Kumar et al, 2013). In order to gain an understanding on how brand image may influence consumer purchasing behaviours, by dissecting and looking into more depth of this model is vital as it highlights and cover key areas of what makes up brand image and also how brand image affects an individual’s decisions when purchasing products, especially in the UK clothing industry.

Aaker’s Equity Model

For majority of marketers in the UK clothing industry, creating a strong and dynamic brand creates a solid foundation for an organisation, however, according to Modicum (2017), the success of the brand in the long term depends on the organisation’s brand equity. Brand equity is imperative being the second most important asset for a firm after consumers (Alhaddad, 2014, p. 28; Doyle, 2001). Aaker (1991), defines brand equity as a multidimensional concept that consist of a set of brand liabilities and assets linked to a certain brand but Keller (1993) defines brand equity as the consumers’ subjective intangible and intangible assessments of a brand above and beyond its perceived value, a value that is determined
by consumers perception or experience of a specific brand. This argument implies that a brand will have a high brand equity if consumers have a superior perception of a brand, conversely, if a brand is unable to deliver satisfaction and is consistently showing no progress, it has a negative brand equity. These assets are divided into five components which is fundamentally illustrated through the brand equity model that he proposed. As mentioned before, proprietary assets are essentially business-related components, therefore, creating a four-dimensional CBEE which consist of brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality and association (Kumar et al., 2013).

Brand Loyalty

There has been a wide range of research that view brand loyalty as the core dimension of brand equity, according to Alhaddad’s research (2014; Yasin et al., 2007), brand loyalty was found to have a “dominant effect” on brand equity and in response to this popular outcome, Sharif (2018) justifies and acknowledges Alhaddad’s (2014, p.19) results by further explaining in his study that if consumers purchase an item with little concern to the brand name, it is likely there is less equity. With this being said, Aaker (1991) explains that brand loyalty is a measure of the attachment that a consumer has to a brand, with a reflection of how likely a consumer will change from one brand to another, especially when it makes specific changes, either in product features or in price. Similarly, Keller (2013), explains that brand loyalty is the commitment of purchasing a product again in the future regardless of marketing efforts and situational influences. This leads to a discussion that both statements can be argued that consumers who are loyal to a specific brand are less likely to change to an alternative due to consumers’ intentions of relating a brand as their primary choice when it comes to purchasing.

Brand Awareness

Like brand loyalty, there are a various amount of research which acknowledges brand awareness as a crucial antecedent of brand equity. Chieng (2011, p36) defines brand awareness as the consumers’ ability to recall and identify a brand through certain associations in their memory. Whereas Christodoulides et al (2010), associates brand awareness with the level of familiarity that consumers hold with a brand purely based on its characteristics and their extension line of products.

Bringing these studies together, Aaker (1991) compiles both statement and supports it by stating that brand awareness provides a sense of familiarity which creates different brand nodes in consumers’ memory that allows it to act as a signal of trust to that specific brand. On the other hand, in Keller’s (1993) analysis on brand awareness, he conceptualises that brand awareness are primarily made up with two components; the requirement of consumers correctly discriminating the brand as having been seen or heard before is known as brand recognition; and the relation to the customers’ ability to correctly remember the brand from memory is known as brand recall. But Sharif (2018) points out in his research that the importance of brand recall and recognition depends purely on whether consumers make decisions in store or outside the store, as well as amongst other factors. Therefore, diminishing the statement that brand awareness is conceptualised and instead it is an antecedent of brand equity just as Aaker (1991), Chieng (2011), and Christodoulides et al (2010) has stated in their research.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is one of the concepts of brand equity, and many researchers including Zeithaml (1988) and Chieng (2011) defines perceived quality as the consumer’s judgement on a product or service’s overall excellence or superiority. Furthermore, Chieng’s (2011, p.38) analysis reveals that attributes perceived quality is dichotomised into intrinsic and extrinsic cues. With intrinsic cues relating to the physical compositions of the product or services and extrinsic cues relating to mainly outside of the product i.e. price, level of advertising and brand name. Supporting this study comes from Zeithaml’s research in 1988 where she discovers that the intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy of perceived quality cues is indeed useful when discussing about perceived quality. However, in both studies, they criticise that the judgement on a products’ quality is purely influenced by perceptions and comes with conceptual difficulties; majority of it involves with not being able to classify products as either intrinsic or extrinsic. That being said, Almasi (2011, p.68) states that perceived quality is understood to be a type of association that secures elevation to the status of a separate dimension of brand equity and therefore consumers have a subjective satisfaction of quality levels towards products offered under a specific brand, which is perceived quality.

Brand Association

As one of the core elements of brand equity (Wijaya, 2013; Davis, 2000) is the portrayal that consumer’s associate products with the perception of positive and negative views, brand promises and expectations from the brand in order to maintain customer satisfaction. Similarly, research conducted by Guzman (2016), reveals that brand associations are distinctive representations of what a brand means to consumers and is generally informational nodes directly linked to a specific brand in memory (Almasi, 2011). Keller (2003) follows up this statement by further revealing in her research that any experience or contact a consumer has with a brand can indefinitely change, create, or reinforce certain positive or negative associations, and in order to have a positive effect on brand equity, associations must be strong, favourable and unique. That being said, Chieng (2011, Kotler and Keller 2006, p.188) revised a theory that brand association consist of brand-related thoughts, perceptions, images, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and beliefs.

Where is undeniable that Aaker’s (1991) equity conceptualisation is one of the most influential one which consist of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary assets. Scales to measure these components are relatively easy, with tests and validation from a range of studies, however, a study conducted from Guzman (2016) testifies that not all components are easy to measure, as Aaker (1991) says. He further elaborates in his research by mentioning that despite the fact, conceptually brand associations are a vital source of meaning and equity to a brand, brand associations are purely based on consumers’ perceptions making it subjective and difficult to measure. With this being said, Bui (2009, p.1) criticises Aaker’s (1991) equity model in her research by stating that it has no distinction between added value for consumers and added value for organisation.

Impacts of Brand Image on Customer Purchasing Behaviours

Looking at the extant research on brand image’s key driver, brand equity and how it may influence consumer purchasing behaviours through the conceptualised model proposed by Aaker (1991), it is clear that brand equity is a fundamental component of brand image. Two hypotheses have been made for this research study after discussing the wide range of literature on brand image in order to achieve the research aim and objectives.

Hypothesis 1: Brand image has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviours.

Hypothesis 2: Brand loyalty has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviours.
Methodology

According to Saunders (2009; Pham, 2018), positivism is an epistemology approach in a quantitative research where positivists focuses on specifically “scientific empiricism” methods designed to discover and yield pure data of social science. Epistemologically, the main focus would be on uncovering observable and measurable facts and regularities, leading to a creation of credible and important data through the process of studying the correlation between an independent variable and or more dependent variable (Saunders 2009; Crotty, 1998; Pham, 2018). Pham (2018) further explains that using this paradigm allows positivists understand other methods available such as sampling, questionnaires, measurements, and focus group discussions giving the insights provided from positivists may potentially have a high quality of validity and reliability.

That being said, this study adopts the positivism paradigm through the method of an online questionnaire with a five-point likert scale, a psychometric response specifying participants level of agreement (Anon, 2010): strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Followed by an analysis of frequency tables, descriptive statistics table, and a linear regression through IBM SPSS to obtain empirical data. This approach has been nominated due to the circumstances that this research paper uses quantitative methods under the category of social sciences. According to Devault (2019), deductive research is a top-down approach that involves reasoning works from the general to the specific, with a general outcome of developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theories, which is then tested against observations to see whether the hypotheses created are true or not. Upon discussing deductive reasoning, this study focuses on the deductive method of theory development as it is a popular approach which supports hypotheses to see if it is true or false. The study proposes two hypotheses which will be later investigated to see whether they are true or not.

Sampling

According to Denscombe (2014), researchers have the choice of choosing either probability or non-probability sampling as the basis for selecting their sample for their research. Denscombe (2014, p. 33) explains that probability sampling involves and is associated with Random selection from the research population; Tends to be a large-scale survey using quantitative data; and is the best way to get a representative sample. Whereas non-probability sampling involves elements such as discretion or choice on the part where the researchers choose the selection process due to them finding it difficult or undesirably to rely on random selection (Ibid). As well as not having sufficient information about the specific research target to pursue probability sampling (Ibid). That being said, this research paper will be based on non-probability sampling with a target number of 50 respondents from London only and targeted at those who purchases clothing on a regular basis. These participants will be approached via email and text messages for a faster and efficient response as it will be an online questionnaire.

Data Collection Method

Denscombe (2014), explains that quantitative data are linked primarily with strategies of research such as experiments and surveys through the methods of observations and questionnaires. In order to achieve sufficient and empirical data, this research paper focuses solely on quantitative methods on obtaining primary data using closed-ended questionnaires. There is a total of four (4) questions to measure two hypotheses. The advantages of using closed-ended questionnaires are that it allows the data collected to be nicely quantified and compared providing data that can be easily analysed. In Denscombe’s textbook (2014, p.181) he lists a number of advantages of using online questionnaires, these include: They are economical (low cost in terms of materials, money, and time); Easy to arrange; and Eliminates the human error factor. However, they allow less scope for participants to provide answers that reflect their true feelings or facts (Denscombe, 2014, p.176). In addition to that, pre-coded questions impose a structure on the answer which causes research bias on the findings. A common fallback of using self-completion questionnaires is that it often offers less opportunity for the researcher to seek the truth in the answers given by the participants, making it difficult to trust whether the data is reliable.

Findings

The findings from the questionnaire distributed to participants was based on Aaker's equity model (1991), the key driver of brand image to see whether the two hypotheses created are true or not. Using IBM SPSS, first a frequency table was created in order to see how many times participants chose between the options between strongly agree, agree, nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree for each factor. Figure 1 has been customised through IBM SPSS to view the overall percentages of each factor. Each factor comes with an individual frequency table that will be discussed in more depths throughout the project.

**Figure 1. Representation of overall statistics of findings in percentage.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Quality</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Association</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brand Loyalty**

Looking at the Figure 2, out of the 50 participants who took part in this survey, 27 of them selected strongly agree when purchasing clothes in the UK with a specific brand in mind before looking at other brands. If combining the frequencies and percentages for strongly agree and agree, there is 38 out of 50 participants, this accumulates to 76% that would choose a specific brand than others and only 10% of those who strongly disagree (disagree) that doesn't have a specific brand in mind.

**Figure 2. Frequency table for brand loyalty.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This clearly shows a significant difference of 66% between those who has a specific brand in mind before purchasing clothes and those who do not. This also correlates to Keller’s (1993) statement that brand loyalty is the commitment of purchasing a product again in the future regardless of marketing efforts and situational influences.
Brand Awareness

Figure 3 illustrates the frequency table configured for brand awareness. Participants were asked whether they had to have some sort of awareness of a specific brand before purchasing clothes in the UK. In the frequency table configured, 22 out of 50 participants agreed that they must have some brand awareness before purchasing clothes.

Figure 3. Frequency table for brand awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Quality

Figure 4 depicts the frequency table configured for perceived quality. In this frequency table, participants were asked if positive or negative views associated with a brand affect their purchasing decisions.

Figure 4. Frequency table for perceived quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive Statistics

The second part of this analysis is a descriptive statistic result of the topic of brand image having a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviours. A study conducted by Ashraf (2017) collected approximately 170 of participants results through online questionnaires, however, in this case, only 50 respondents participated, which is significantly below the critical sample size, this is ultimately due to not having enough time to reach out for more participants to partake in this study. Figure 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the factors.

Figure 5. Frequency table for brand association.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brand Association

Figure 5 depicts the frequency table configured for brand associations. In this frequency table, participants were asked if positive or negative views associated with a clothing brand does indeed influence their purchasing decisions whether they are positive or negative views. Whereas a minority of 16% strongly disagrees (disagree) with that statement.

Figure 6. Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Quality</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Association</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean of brand loyalty is 1.82 with a maximum and minimum values respectively 5 and 1, its standard deviation is 1.082 which is smaller than the mean. Likewise, brand awareness has a mean of 2.50, with the maximum and minimum values of 5 and 1, its standard deviation is 1.147 which is smaller than the mean. The mean of perceived quality is 1.98, with a maximum value of 5 and a minimum value of 1, and a standard deviation of 1.186. Brand association has a mean of 2.46 and a maximum value of 5 and minimum of 1, its standard deviation is 1.182 which is less than the mean.

Linear Regression Test

The third part of configuring the data collected was conducting a linear regressing test using IBM SPSS. Table 1 provides a snapshot of results of the model summary (Adjusted R Square) and Coefficients (Significance).

Table 1. Results of the Model Summary (Adjusted R Square) and Coefficients (Significance).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Quality</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Association</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows whether the hypotheses created were true. As you can see from the hypotheses table, both hypotheses were true. Brand image and brand loyalty both have a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. Out of the five components in Aaker’s equity model (1991), brand loyalty is fundamentally the core component of brand equity which is the key driver of brand image. This comes from the 76% of participants who strongly agree that they all have a specific brand they go to first when purchasing clothes before looking at alternatives. In this light, research conducted by Alhaddad (2014, p19) has proven that brand loyalty has a dominant effect on brand equity.
The aim of this study was to determine how brand image influence consumer purchasing decisions. In this case, the research aim has been met, by an in-depth research of various studies by other researchers. Through a discussion of each objectives, this will explain how the aim has been met. The first objective was to analyse the key driver of brand image within the clothing industry, this was achieved through many researchers that found that brand equity was the key driver. The study developed a conceptualised model proposed by Aaker (1991) called the brand equity model which consists of five crucial components – brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary assets – reviewed and discussed on what makes a strong and influential brand image. However, as this study is focused on consumers, proprietary assets were not discussed as they focus more on the business-related part rather than taking a consumer perspective.

The second objective of this research paper was to analyse consumer purchasing behaviour through the key components of brand image. Like the first objective, this was also achieved as each component of Aaker’s (1991) equity model contained research on how consumer’s behaviour when purchasing clothes in the UK to a certain extent and this was extracted carefully and discussed with this objective in mind.

The third objective was to explore the correlation between brand image and consumer purchasing behaviour, again, like the other objectives, this was also achieved through various amount of studies conducted by researchers as well as this research paper’s very own study which concluded that brand image and brand loyalty has a significant impact on consumer purchasing behaviours. In future research, it would be good to construct the same research but in a different location, or culture. This would be interesting to see whether there are similar results between this research and the new research. Another recommendation could be using the same research but researched on a different target audience, as this research paper was targeted at everyone who purchases clothes in the UK. Future research could focus those in their 20’s or it could focus on one gender as there is currently a small minority if not, no studies conducted on this particular target audience.
References


Social Media Marketing on Consumer Decision-Making in UK Fashion Consumption

Zdravka Simeonova

Abstract

Social Media Platforms progressively change consumers’ behaviour and influence their purchasing decision for luxury fashion online via Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Global luxury houses have incorporated internet technologies and social media to contribute content to their followers. Thus, organisations transformed the tools used to promote and advertise their goods and services. The businesses were pushed in that direction by the disruptively innovative and rapid digitalised super-cycled world and pulled by the shift in consumer buying behaviour. In the light of increasing curiosity in the usage of social media marketing among luxury fashion brands, this study set out to identify the impact of social media marketing over consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion in the UK. The research revealed the fundamental role of social media marketing in making a positive impact on the decision-making process on luxury brands in the UK. The project adopted a questionnaire survey with fourteen questions. Generally, the study reveals that the active presence of luxury fashion brands on social media platforms not only benefits a strong relationship with the consumer but also influences the UK consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion. Additionally, the findings revealed that consumers are influenced by social media posts, adverts, or stories as well as reviews and ratings. This study discloses that Instagram and Facebook take leading positions in customers’ preferences for effective platforms for luxury fashion, however, the respondents consider Instagram two times more effective for the consumer decision-making process concerning luxury fashion. The findings show that even though social media marketing is effective for the consumer decision-making process if it is implemented with some forms of traditional marketing channels will benefit more businesses by reaching rapidly their strategic objectives.
Introduction

In the last decade, businesses have operated in a perplexing and unpredictable environment (McKinsey BOF, 2020). The challenges in the marketing landscape have come from two-phenomenon including world globalization and the improvement in technology field (KPMG, 2017, Al-Zyoud, 2018). 59% of the global population that uses the internet (Digital 2020, 2020), with an increase by 7.8% than 2018’s 51.2% (ITU 2018) illustrates the digitalisation and the exciting business landscape quite well (McKinsey, 2016). According to the KPMG Global Executive Survey (2017), the response to these demographic and technological changes is obligatory for businesses to survive. According to Chaffey & Smith (2017), businesses implemented digital instruments and techniques to achieve their strategic objectives and goals. In this manner, the terms digital marketing (DM) and social media marketing (SMM) were introduced to the company’s business environment and to the customers’ everyday life (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Therefore, implementing digital techniques that might lead to potential purchases (Chaffey & Smith, 2017) is a tactic in the right directions.

The profound interest in social media (SM) in the marketing field has captured greater attention due to the fact of the possible impact of the consumer decision-making process-CDMP (Solomon et al., 2016). Indeed, the considerable influence of SMM is thanks to the scope of a bigger audience and potential new customers simultaneously (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Buratti et al., 2018; Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, if there is a strategic and marketing alignment with SM platforms, it can offer an attractive, cost-effective and innovative concept for the luxury fashion brand, and on the other hand to build a huge, two-way dialogue with the customers (Deolitte Luxury Opportunity, 2015). Correspondingly, the power of SMM by telling the organization’s story through online SM platforms including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are substantial ways to improve the brand awareness and generate quick revenues at the same time (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Likewise, it is also an opportunity to reach and inspire the younger generation (KPMG, 2016). It can be highlighted that SM is an economical marketing tool (Al-Zyoud, 2018; Nash, 2019) provides opportunities for businesses to collaborate and develop strong interaction with their targeted customers (Ahmed et al., 2018). Therefore, SMM has become a connection between firms and consumers, offering a personal channel for user networking via digitalization of the channel (Almohaimmed, 2019). This means the role of SMM is vital for both consumers and organisations. However, SM always changes, some social platforms evolve, and new platforms appear, customers habits transform (Carter, 2020) thanks to the constant innovation taking place in the technology field, as well as the customer behaviour and needs (Appel et al., 2019). Thus, marketers need to ensure they have the right tools to respond to the new consumer needs to make the most of SM.

In line with various past studies, the hypothesis in this research project is that SMM may affect the CDMP (Almohaimmed, 2019). Although there are numerous findings for the impact of the SM and SMM channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram on the CDMP, there are a few that are focussed on the luxury fashion brands in the UK. Therefore, the field of this research project is concentrated on luxury fashion in the UK. Despite the existence of numerous SM platforms, this project will take into account only Facebook and Instagram and the role they play in the CDMP. For this purpose, qualitative research methodology such as questionnaire survey will be applied to investigate the role of SMM on CDMP in the luxury fashion in the UK. Eventually, analysis of the gathered data will be presented together with the main findings, conclusion, and recommendation.

The essence of this study is to critically analyse the influence of social media marketing over the consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion in the UK. The main Research Question is How may social media platforms influence the consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion in the UK? The research project objectives are four-fold: To evaluate the impact of social media marketing for the luxury fashion in the UK; To explore the consumer decision-making process considering the luxury fashion industry in the UK; To articulate the importance of social media marketing for the consumer decision-making process for luxury fashion; and To investigate the influence of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook on the decision-making process for UK luxury fashion retail.

Literature Review

A critical review of the literature on SMM and CDMP is undertaken in the development of this study. In this essence, this section first will address the key terms in the field of SM and SMM highlighting the influence of SMM for luxury fashion in the UK. Then, the consumer decision-making framework will be presented. Finally, this literature review will be completed with an analysis of social media influence on the CDMP for luxury fashion.

Social Media

Back in the early 2000s, the emerging of a new tool of communication, which later became famously known as SM, completely transformed the business marketplace and the way organisations interact with the customers (Buratti et al., 2018; Almohaimmed, 2019). In this context, SM refers to the web 2.0 technology implemented for communication with the population (Zahoor & Qureshi, 2017). Furthermore, some authors argued that with the entrance of the SM, a new ‘P’ appeared in the Marketing Mix P’s – Place, Product, Price, Promotion (Kotler & Ahzi, 2015; Almohaimmed, 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that the transformation of the business landscape with the introduction of the SM allowed straightforward and quite cooperative approach of interaction where the customer plays actively in generating and sharing product- and brand-related content (Buratti et al., 2018; Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Siamagka et al., 2015). In this approach, brands and consumers are working together without time or place restriction to create new products and value (Kim & Ko, 2012). These arguments underline the significant role of the customers and therefore, it is not surprising that marketers embraced SM as a marketing channel.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Generally, the definitions of SMM discovered in the literature are based on the two vital pillars: the internet and social communication (Almohaimmed, 2019). SMM involves the usage of SM platforms for promoting and marketing purposes (Tuten & Solomon, 2015; Buratti et al., 2018). According to Chaffey & Smith (2017), SMM incorporates customer interaction through digital media to inspire engagement with the brand, which can lead to profit-making value. Furthermore, the applications that may perform as SMM channels for advertising are Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn (Appel et al., 2019; Buratti et al., 2018) or social blogs, podcasts and videos (Kim & Ko, 2012). Likewise, by converting the online users into collaborators and by engaging them via ‘communication, collaboration, education and entertainment’ (Safo & Blake, 2009) an opportunity of an efficient and effective profit increase is established (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Buratti et al., 2018). Hence, SM as a tool is considered to have a large impact on communication between firms and customers having in mind the large audience using SM applications such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Almohaimmed, 2019; Appel et al., 2019; Sharif et al., 2015).

Indeed, the combined scope of SM networks is overwhelming (McKinsey BOF, 2020). Currently, as per January 2020, according to Global Digital Overview, (2020), active SM users across the world passed 3.80 billion, which translates in a 9.2% increase compared with the previous year. Thus, this equals to 49% of the global population and suggests that brands have the opportunities to reach larger audiences more than ever before (Digital 2020, 2020). Therefore, SMM benefits both sides while it moved from the traditional one-way communication to embrace the two-way interaction where customers are highly engaged with participation to expand sales practising both pull and push methods (Dennis et al., 2009; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Nonetheless, the growth of SM appears to be slowing as consumer habits change (McKinsey BOF, 2020). Recently more people decide to ‘detox’ from SM as they feel overwhelmed and overstimulated (Smart Insights, 2019). For example, one in three adults in the UK chose to reduce the time they spend using SM, 6% of the users removed an app from their mobile and another 6% have even permanently deleted their accounts (Carter, 2020). Therefore, it becomes a challenge to the luxury businesses to maintain customer engagement and more importantly they need to take necessary steps to choose the right way to customer interaction and influence their behaviour (McKinsey BOF, 2020).
Luxury Fashion

In the past, luxury fashion trademarks trusted on solid brand assets and secure regular customers, however, with the recent appearance of various fashion producers followed by heated competition, there are unforeseen changes in the luxury market (Kim & Ko, 2012). The instability in the international markets due to China and US trade war, uncertain political scenario and more extensive usage of the advanced digital tools are deeply influencing its business model (Deloitte Luxury Report, 2019; McKinsey BOF, 2020). Nonetheless, the strong growth trajectory of 2018 followed positively in 2019 as the global luxury market moderately grew by 4% to an estimate €1.3 trillion while in Europe there was a slow growth of 1% reaching €88 billion, where the UK together with Spain were the top performers (Bain & Company Report, 2019). While the Deloitte Luxury Report (2019), projected that the luxury fashion sector is set to grow at 5-10% per year by 2022, the McKinsey Luxury Report (2018) predicts that by 2025 nearly a fifth of the luxury sales will be conducted online and will reach about €74 billion (Achille et al., 2018). In the Luxury Report (2018) predicts that by 2025 nearly a fifth of the luxury sales will be conducted online and will reach about €74 billion (Achille et al., 2018). In the UK, largely driven by Brexit, 2019 had the slowest rate of spending growth since 2010, however, online sales increasingly grow to reach 21% of a total sale (Deloitte Retail Trends, 2020). Although the promising results and projection, all of the luxury houses needed to close their bricks-and-mortar operations and production units due to global COVID-19 pandemic (Bain & Company, 2020).

Luxury fashion and the Importance of social media marketing

For luxury fashion brands, the dynamic nature of marketing means that traditional marketing is no longer promising a successful two-way interaction with consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). Even though most of the luxury houses implemented digital and SM approaches quite late in comparison with other industries (Kim & Ko, 2012), SMM, indeed, have become a crucial element of the fashion and luxury businesses’ strategies as well (Moatti & Abecassis-Moedas, 2018). Therefore, SM channels present opportunities for their key customers to fall in love even more with the luxury brand and for the businesses to align their social strategy with corporate and brand strategy, to boost sale (Deloitte Luxury Opportunity, 2015). Hence, this implies that it is a win/win approach. However, according to Safo (2014), an entirely innovative concept of ‘interconnecting’ all marketing tools called ‘Fusion Marketing’ that blends traditional marketing with DM and SMM could benefit businesses to accomplish their objectives. Safo (2014) stresses that marketing experts should not restrict by using only a stand-alone marketing approach such as Facebook or Twitter, as there are only tools, not a strategy. Therefore, a successful marketing strategy should integrate both traditional and digital (i.e. DM and SMM) concepts.

Consumer decision-making process (CDMP)

The CDMP is acknowledged as a fundamental component of consumer behaviour (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019; Nash, 2019). According to Kumar et al., (2018), CDMP is transforming rapidly due to the influence of the internet and information transmitted through digital marketing channels. For example, customers have many options of searching information for certain product and recommendation of that product from previous buyers, which can directly influence their final decision making (Kumar et al., 2018). Meanwhile, as consumers have complex needs (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019), the CDMP is identified as a complicated process straight from problem recognition until the purchase decision (Nikhat, 2019).

Traditionally consumer examiners observe CDMP as widely accepted five-stage decision process including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice and post-purchase evaluation (Solomon et al., 2016). However, broader explorations categorised that various psychological factors play a significant role in CDMP (Nash, 2019). The most common five stages of CDMP models emphasises only the motivational factors (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019). However, according to Neal (2006), CDMP depends on personal and situational factors as well. Additionally, Solomon et al., (2016) argued that emotional and physiological needs also influence the CDMP. It can be argued that failure to detect easily the different factors affecting CDMP means that the linear model only justifies part of the marketers understanding of the CDMP (Nash, 2019). Therefore, the clear five-stage structure could miss some factors to illustrate the influence of SM on luxury fashion CDMP (Nash, 2019). This is exceptionally vital and therefore, this requires a proper understanding of the patterns of the changing behaviour of CDMP.

Consumer decision-making process for Luxury Fashion

Despite the growing interest of SM from the luxury houses, the impact of SM on the consumer decision-making process has not been empirically tested within the essence of luxury fashion. Consumers get influenced by online and offline factors at each stage including personal, cultural, social and psychological (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019). For example, the younger population will be more interested in using new technology to shop rather than older people (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019). Additionally, some people are influenced by reviews and recommendations (Kumar et al., 2018) from close family and friends, others from fashion bloggers and celebrities (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). For others, brand name (Helal et al., 2018) or quality and sustainability (Soh et al., 2017) are leading influential factors.

Social media and consumer decision-making process for Luxury Fashion

As the markets are continuously evolving, the consumer demand and expectations have changed, the luxury fashion brands need to think outside of the traditional boxes to meet the changes in the consumer behaviour (Nash, 2019). Naturally, the importance of SMM is obvious for practically all of the business owners, however, not only brand awareness, fan engagements or website traffic matters (Appel et al., 2019; Roesler, 2015). The most valuable side of the SM or the content that can easily be spread via SM has the power to make the public to act in specific ways that benefit the business sales (Appel et al., 2019). The findings of the study conducted by Kim & Ko (2012) confirmed a positive correlation between SMM and subsequent CDMP within the luxury fashion industry.

SM affects CDMP in all age groups but especially younger population such as millennials, Generation Y and Generation Z (Deloitte, 2015). Furthermore, an inspiration from external sources such as influencers, friends and SM are more common motivations than the website or in-store staff (Amed et al., 2019). Therefore, SM content influence CDMP. According to Deloitte (2015), consumers who are shopping via SM are four times more likely to spend on purchases than those who do not use SM platforms. Likewise, 29% of the shoppers are more likely to buy a product the same day when using SM (Deloitte, 2015). According to Ogilvy Report, 60% of people are influenced by digital content and 55% actually bought a product online after they discover it on SM (Walts & Bali, 2020). This means that from inspirational platforms, SM turned into a complete warehouse experience. Therefore, SMM has a positive impact on the CDMP.

Facebook

Facebook is known as one of the fastest-growing SM podiums (Shareef et al., 2017). At the time of writing, Facebook claims a third of the humankind around 2.5 bn people as its users (Economist, 2020; McKinsey BOF, 2020) and takes leading position for most used SM platform globally (Digital 2020, 2020). According to the Global Digital Overview (2020), Facebook takes third place, only after Google and YouTube, for the world’s most visited website with more than 11 million visits. Equally, due to all-embracing demand of Facebook as a method of interaction between people, the traditional one-way communication to stimulate CDMP has been severely decreasing its convincing influence (Shareef et al., 2017). Hence, Facebook is an excellent platform for marketers to increase their promotion being viewed by more than 2.5 bn connected consumers.
Despite the increasing competition from other platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok, Instagram global users are still steadily growing (Emarketer, 2019). The Digital Overview (2020) shows that nearly a billion people can be reached monthly with an advert on Instagram while specifically, the UK users are 24 million, which accounts for over 35% from its population. By nature, Instagram is well-designed to increase the profits, for example, an immediate purchase is possible thanks to the addition of the “shop” button and other features such as Instagram Stories that enables brands to broadcast their events and post behind the scenes videos (Moatti & Abecassis-Moedas, 2018; World Bank, 2018). Furthermore, 200 million Instagram followers visit at least one business profile daily and one-third of the most viewed stories are from businesses with 62% of the people admit that Instagram’s daily Stories rise their interest in a brand or product (Hootsuite, 2019). Thus, these arguments make Instagram one of the social media platforms to be influential to its users and this should not be ignored by the businesses.

According to the World Bank (2018), luxury shoppers are some of the most enthusiastic users of Instagram: viewing content five times more and pressing the ‘Like’ button three times more than average users. According to Deloitte Luxury Report (2015), 85% of the UK luxury consumers use an average of three social media platforms and 58% of millennials, who are basically driving the growth of luxury sales, often buy luxury products through online channels. Statistics show that millennials spend on average nearly six hours a day shopping online, which is 50% more than the older generation (World Bank, 2018). According to the World Bank (2018), in fact, millennials alongside generation Z, are predicted to make up 45 % of the global luxury market by 2025. However, according to Achille et al., (2018) not only millennials but nearly 80% of the luxury shoppers are digitally influenced in the decision-making process. This means that it is vital for luxury brands to understand the CDMP of shoppers and to highly engage with them.

However, while the trends for 2020 indicates that digital, social media, mobile and internet marketing still remain at the top of the list for the luxury companies, with Instagram and Facebook as the most used social platforms, 84% and 83% respectively, only 25% of Instagram users and 14% of Facebook users rate these platforms as very effective channels (Dänziger, 2019). The data indicates that luxury brands need to rethink and re-evaluate their social media strategies, specifically to use the existing platforms more effectively (McKinsey BOF, 2020). Furthermore, the content strategy should be sound and different for each social network as the audience of the platforms is distinctive and so their interests and needs (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). For example, Ralph Lauren embraced the authentic storytelling approach while Burberry released a limited-edition t-shirt only available for 24 hours on their Instagram page (McKinsey BOF, 2020). Therefore, the created content should be quite convincing and extremely high-quality and ultimately to lead to a sale.

Methodology

A deductive approach assesses the rationality of assumptions or hypotheses made based on the existing theory that needs to be confirmed or rejected (Dudovskiy, 2018). Therefore, bearing in mind the key purpose of this research and the hypothesis made that SM may influence CDMP: a deductive approach looks quite reasonable. Additionally, it suggests a generalisation of the research findings to a certain point (Dudovskiy, 2018) which serves well to the purpose of this project as well. Moreover, it offers the model to measure the hypothesis quantitatively and justifies the relationship between the theories and variables (Dudovskiy, 2018) which links fairly respectably with the objectives of the research project. Ultimately, this approach is moderately rapid, less risky and offers numerous literature sources in comparison to the inductive approach (Dudovskiy, 2018).

The data concerning how may SMM influence the CDMP for Luxury fashion in the UK will be gathered through quantitative approach associated with mathematic numbers (Denscombe, 2014). The chosen method is considered more appropriate because it will easily measure the correlation between SMM and CDMP for Luxury Brands in the UK. The advantages of the quantitative method that can benefit this project are timesaving, low-cost and easy to measure when comparing the qualitative methods (Dudovskiy, 2018). However, some limitations including the absence of direct communication between the researcher and participants, lack of deeper clarifications (Rahman, 2017) and measuring the variable at a specific moment only can cause unclear results. Thus, it does not deliver quite deep information, rather, it provides a general representation of the variables at a specific moment of gathering the information.

Sampling

The key principle of sampling is to generate precise outcomes without presenting each member of the population (Denscombe, 2014). The primary data in this research project will be gathered from around 200 participants in London who will be randomly chosen. Another opportunity for selecting a sampling method is convenience sampling. The people will be reached by emails, social media platforms or other communication channels such as WhatsApp and messenger. The ultimate aim is to get involve people from different age group, culture background, however, all should be living in the UK. The essential benefit of sampling is that it is time and cost-efficient and it provides accuracy (Denscombe, 2014). However, the disadvantages of the sampling are probable inaccuracies of over or under-representation, sampling bias or frames, for example, involving some participants more likely than others (Denscombe, 2014).

Findings and Discussion

From the findings responses to the 14 questions individually have been presented in a Microsoft Word table with the raw data and then, visualisation of that data via appropriate Microsoft Excel charts or graphs have been offered. A discussion and analysis of the findings will follow after that. Naturally, the first two questions are typical with the demographic subject: about gender and age. Of the study initial population of 200, 72 respondents completed the questionnaire: 25 males, 46 females and 1 preferred not to specify their gender. As highlighted in Figure 1 in percentages it counts as 34.7% male, 63.9% female and 1% preferred not to say. Thus, more females took part in the survey.

To achieve the purpose of this study over the given period of time, the data collection methods preferred to gather a huge volume of information for a short period is a questionnaires survey (Denscombe, 2014). The intention of choosing this method over others is that the questionnaires are quite easy to set up, they a reasonably accurate to collect real data and can be used for both small and large scale (Denscombe, 2014). However, the drawback of that method is the low response rate (Denscombe, 2014). Indeed, the response rate for this project was as low as 36%. The questionnaire designed for the purpose of this study consists of a variety of 14 questions. The questionnaire involves multiple-choice questions, closed-ended questions, together as Likert scale questions ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree. See Appendix section 2 for the full and detailed version of the questionnaire survey. The data analyses methods supposed to transfer the quantitative data of raw numbers into significant data that has meaning and supports or rejects the hypotheses formulated at the previous phase of the research process (Dudovskiy, 2018). The data analyses method assisting this research of the quantitative data collected through questionnaires is Microsoft Excel as a cost-efficient and secure tool (Dudovskiy, 2018). Another more sophisticated tool that can be applied is SPSS which will help to correlate different variable.
Age groups are represented in Figure 2, where 25% of respondents are age 18-25, 40.3% are between 26-35, 27.3% are 36-45 years old, only 5.6% represents age 46-55 and 1.3% age 55+. The data from Figure 2 implies that the majority of the respondents are correspondingly millennials (40.3%), followed by Generation Z (25%) and Generation X (27.8%). As highlighted in Table 1, overall, most respondents spend no more than 30 minutes on social media.

Considering that social media platforms are tools of interaction with existing and potentially new consumers that could lead to profit-making value (Chaffey & Smith, 2017), spending less time on social media could mean less benefits for the companies. The data also confirms the change in consumers habits (McKinsey BOF, 2020; Nash, 2019) and possible ‘social detox’ (Smart Insights, 2019).

### Table 1. Time spent on SM platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>0-30 minutes</th>
<th>30-60 minutes</th>
<th>1-2 hours</th>
<th>More than 3 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>34 (47.2%)</td>
<td>21 (29.2%)</td>
<td>12 (16.7%)</td>
<td>5 (6.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>22 (30.6%)</td>
<td>14 (19.4%)</td>
<td>20 (27.8%)</td>
<td>16 (22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>64 (88.9%)</td>
<td>3 (4.2%)</td>
<td>3 (4.2%)</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>32 (44.4%)</td>
<td>20 (27.8%)</td>
<td>6 (8.3%)</td>
<td>13 (18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>64 (88.9%)</td>
<td>5 (6.9%)</td>
<td>3 (4.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, if only Facebook and Instagram are considered, the results disclosed that people who spend more than 1 hour on Facebook are nearly 24% while on Instagram 50%. This surprisingly means that people spend two times more on Instagram than Facebook. Hence, although Facebook has nearly 2.5 billion active users (Economist, 2020), Instagram with its 1 billion users (Digital 2020, 2020) should not be ignored by businesses.

As highlighted in Figure 3, 25% of the respondents (answered with agree and strongly agree) are effectively convinced by Facebook for their CDMP, while 54.1% think that Instagram is more effective for their CDMP. Therefore, remarkably Instagram is two times more effective in convincing consumers to decide to buy from luxury fashion. The results also revealed that 45.9% disagree and strongly disagree that other social media networks such as Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn are effective for CDMP while just 16.7% thinks that other networks are effective for CDMP for luxury fashion.

### Table 2. Impact of SM platforms on the CDMP in luxury fashion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>12 (16.7%)</td>
<td>4 (5.6%)</td>
<td>35 (48.6%)</td>
<td>14 (19.4%)</td>
<td>5 (5.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>12 (16.7%)</td>
<td>4 (5.6%)</td>
<td>14 (19.4%)</td>
<td>24 (32.3%)</td>
<td>12 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>21 (29.2%)</td>
<td>12 (16.7)</td>
<td>15 (21.4%)</td>
<td>11 (15.3)</td>
<td>3 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, this data confirms that Facebook and Instagram are the top two effective channels for luxury fashion (Danziger, 2019). The results of this question present comparison between Facebook and Instagram as two of the most used platforms for luxury fashion brands (Danziger, 2019). As highlighted in Figure 4, about 45.8% of the respondents consider that Instagram impacts more luxury fashion than other industries. On the opposite side, 52.8% thinks that Facebook impacts other industries more than luxury fashion. Thus, these findings highlight that Instagram is maybe more appropriate social platform in terms of luxury fashion.
Figure 4. Impact of Facebook/ Instagram on the CDMP for UK Luxury Fashion

Additionally, Figure 5 highlights that majority of the respondents that think Instagram impacts CDMP more for luxury fashion than other industries are millennials and Generation Z. Therefore, that confirms luxury shoppers, some of the most enthusiastic users of Instagram are represented by millennials and Generation Z (World Bank, 2018). Even though that 34.7% of respondents gave neutral replies as shown in Figure 6, approximately 43.1% believes that social media post, adverts and reviews are likely and high likely to impact their CDMP for luxury fashion.

Figure 5. Correlation of Age and Instagram on Luxury Fashion CDMP

This supports that the most powerful side of social media content is not only that it can be easily spread to a bigger audience (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Buratti et al., 2018), but it can make the public to act in a specific way that benefits the sales of the business (Appel et al., 2019). Figure 7 confirms that there is a significant relationship between age and impact of SM post, Ads, and story on CDMP as significance is under 0.05. Therefore, this result has further strengthened the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between social media platforms and CDMP for luxury fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Figure 6. Impact of SM tools on the CDMP for the luxury fashion

Figure 7. Correlation between age and SM posts and story for CDMP

Figure 8 emphasizes that 41.7% of respondents consider reviews and ratings very important for their CDMP for luxury fashion. This means that reviews and ratings affect the CDMP (Kumar et al., 2018). This finding fits the statement that consumers get influenced by online factors (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019) such as ratings and reviews.
Moreover, it matches that it is a two-way dialogue (Deloitte Luxury Opportunity, 2015), where customers play actively in sharing product-related content (Buratti et al., 2018), in this case, reviews and ratings. As illustrated in Figure 9, the quality of the product is considered by 59.7% as another influential factor for CDMP for luxury fashion. Thus, apart from reviews and ratings, which implies online influence, consumers get influenced by offline personal factors as well (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019). Figure 10 demonstrates that 40.3% makes a same-day purchase when shopping for luxury fashion and nearly 36.1% takes the decision to buy luxury within 7 days. This proves that some shoppers are likely to buy the same day when using SM (Deloitte, 2015) and as proposed by Appel et al., (2019) SM benefits the sales. Additionally, the prediction from Deloitte Luxury Report (2019) that luxury sales in the next three years are expected to grow with 5-10% might begin to happen.

In response to the question on how often social media influences consumer purchases, the responses ranging from rarely to never, accounted for about 47 percent (see Figure 11). As highlighted in Figure 11, 10% of the respondents’ state that they always buy luxury fashion products seen on SM, 43% does it sometimes and 36% shops rarely. Thus, total 89% states buying luxury fashion, which also concurred with the initial findings that SM platforms impact positively for CDMP for luxury fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012) and that SM has the power to make the public to benefit the businesses sales (Appel et al., 2019).
Figure 12 emphasises that there is a statistically significant association between gender and buying luxury fashion seen on SM (the significance is 0.005 which is less than 0.05). Surprisingly, men were more likely always to buy luxury fashion seen on SM than women (20% to 2.2%). Hence, gender is not independent from buying luxury seen on SM. Although 36.1% thinks that impact of SMM did not change the CDMP to online purchases as displayed in Figure 13, the findings also reveal that nearly 40% believes that social media likely and high likely shifts their CDMP to online purchases. Figure 14 illustrates that there is a correlation between age and changing CDMP to online purchasing as the significant difference is below 0.05.

Figure 12. Gender and frequency of buying luxury fashion seen on SM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buying luxury fashion on social media</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Impact of SMM for online purchases for luxury fashion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shift CDMP to online purchase</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.280*</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 14. Correlation between age and shift of CDMP to online purchases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shift CDMP to online purchase</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.280*</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15. Channels for Luxury Fashion shopping

Figure 15 shows that only 10% prefers to shop from social media site, 22% from the website while 39% still prefer to shop from the high street shop or shopping mall. However, 29% states that they shop for luxury fashion from all of the mentioned channels. That proves Safco (2014) idea of Fusion Marketing that blends traditional marketing, with DM and SMM could potentially be the solution for all the luxury businesses to reach their financial objectives. Considering the responses to the question, “what social media is used for in luxury fashion,” (see Figure 16), 38% of respondents were found to have used SM for reading trusted recommendation, 23%-new realise and 23% looks for ideas and 22% checks the prices. However, only 14% uses SM to purchase a product from luxury fashion.
Conclusions

Following an investigation of whether, and how, SMM influences the CDMP considering the luxury fashion in the UK has proceeded. Three important conclusions can be drawn from the findings. First, the findings help to better understand the importance of SMM for luxury fashion in the UK. SMM is a growing phenomenon and it is overwhelming how it advanced from just a simple platform for peoples’ interaction to an influential podium for customers to reach their favourite brands, product and services (Al-Zyoud, 2018) and followed by the profit-making value (Solomon et al., 2018). Second, this investigation has found that CDMP for luxury fashion has transformed due to the rapid changes on the internet and information available via digital and SM channels (Kumar et al., 2018). Third, this study suggests that SMM mediates a positive effect on the CDMP regarding luxury fashion in the UK (Kim & Ko, 2012). In particular, posts, Ads, and story on social media, together with reviews and ratings stimulus the CDMP for luxury fashion. This finding provides evidence that apart from the opportunity to reach larger audience simultaneously, effectively and cost-efficiently (Agnihotri et al., 2016, Buratti et al., 2018, Chaffey & Smith, 2017), the most prevailing part of SM is that it encourages consumers to undertake actions that benefit the sales of businesses (Appel et al., 2019).

Limitations and Implications

This study has some limitations that lead to recommendations for researchers. First, as mentioned earlier the main participants in this study live in London, Leeds, and Newport. However, to represent a bigger part from the UK population, residents of large towns including Liverpool, Birmingham, Belfast, Northampton, Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester, and others should be invited to participate in the questionnaire survey. In that way generalisation of the findings would be significantly accurate. Second, an important point regarding the usages of SM has always been related to the age of its users or followers. A curious future research topic would be a correlation between age, social media, and consumer behaviour. In particular, it could cover millennials, Generation Z or X. Third, this study investigates the CDMP as part of consumer behaviour. Scholars can also explore other forms of consumer behaviour, for example, consumer buying behaviour or consumer preferences for luxury fashion in the UK. In conclusion, this business research project has confirmed the confident synergy between SMM and the CDMP for luxury fashion in the UK. Indeed, SM platforms can be an effective marketing strategy for luxury brands in the UK.

The general limitation of this study is the sampling size. Although the aim was to incorporate analysis from a minimum of 200 responders, the response rate was low. The results have been taken from a small cluster of 72 respondents, who mainly live in London, Leeds, and Newport – which makes the outcome confirm the confident synergy between SMM and the CDMP for luxury fashion in the UK. Indeed, SM platforms can be an effective marketing strategy for luxury brands in the UK.
References


Factors Influencing Online Shopping Behaviour of UK Retail Customers

Kofi Afram

Abstract

This study evaluates the growing trend in online shopping and the changing behaviour of consumers in the UK retail sector. As online shopping is taking the world by storm, it is important to do detailed analysis to understand the reasons consumers are shifting from shopping in stores to online shopping and to identify areas for research. In its attempt to explain factors influencing online shopping behaviour of UK customers in the retail sector, this study is guided by three main objectives: To critically examine how the buying patterns of consumers are changing in the UK online retail sector; To evaluate online shopping growth and trends in the UK; and critically analyse the factors that influence online shopping behaviour of consumers in the UK in order to find out how retailers can optimise their online presence and to capitalise on the opportunities that exist in the sector.

Introduction

Online shopping is increasingly popular (Panhila & Warsta, 2010). It is the process a consumer takes to buy a product or service on the internet (Zuroni Md Jusoh, Goh Hai Ling, 2012). The UK’s online retail sector is the largest in Europe, ahead of France, Germany, and Spain (CRR, 2019) and online retail sales in the UK rose from 5% in January 2008 to 18% of all retail sales in August 2018 (Rhodes, 2018). More than half of UK consumers already shop online (Williams, 2019) and half of UK's retail sales will be online in ten years' time (Butler, 2019). This trend is partly due to advancement in technology and, high internet penetration and increased use of electronic products.

This study evaluates the growing trend in online shopping and the changing behaviour of consumers in the UK retail sector. As online shopping is taking the world by storm, it is important to do detailed analysis to understand the reasons consumers are shifting from shopping in stores to online shopping and to identify areas for research. What are the factors that influence online shopping behaviour of UK customers in the retail sector? The main objectives of the study are three-fold: To critically examine how the buying patterns of consumers are changing in the UK online retail sector; To evaluate online shopping growth and trends in the UK; and critically analyse the factors that influence online shopping behaviour of consumers in the retail sector in the UK in order to find out how retailers can optimise their online presence and to capitalise on the opportunities that exist in the sector.

Literature Review

In this literature review, some models and theoretical frameworks that are associated with online shopping will be examined. Blackwell et al (2006) noted that the complex and dynamic nature of consumer behaviour has made it difficult for researchers to define the concept, resulting in many definitions. However, consumer behaviour is defined as the study of the ways in which a person, groups and companies buy and dispose of goods, services, or ideas to satisfy needs and wants (Kotler and Keller, 2011). Consumer behaviour is radically changing with advancement in technology. This has contributed to the changes in online shopping behaviour (Wagner, et al., 2013; Madden, et al., 2016). People’s lifestyle and preferences have changed (Kassam, et al., 2015) and businesses are rethinking the way they respond to customer needs (Anato, 2006) to gain competitive advantage (Engel, Blackwell and Muniard, 1995, p.12). Six variables worth examining are: Technology Acceptance Model, Consumer Traits, Situational Factors, Product characteristics, previous consumers’ experiences in online shopping, and Consumer Trust in online shopping.

One of the theories used by researchers to explain the behaviour and intentions of people to adopt new technologies is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). It was proposed by Davis (1989) to help understand how information systems were adopted in workplaces but became useful for understanding why people are embracing new technologies (Chen et al. 2002; Moon and Kim, 2001; Lederer et al., 2000). TAM post that perceived “usefulness” and perceived “ease of use” have direct impact on a persons’ attitude towards the use of new information systems. In this context, “usefulness” refers to the extent to which a person perceives the new system to enhance his or her performance and “ease of use” refers to the extent to which a new system is perceived to be free of effort (Davis, 1989, 1993). It is argued that “usefulness” is influenced by “ease of use” as the easier a technology is perceived to be, the more useful it is (Venkatesh, 2000; Dabholkar, 1996; Davis et al., 1989). A new addition to TAM focusses on “enjoyment” construct. Holbrook (1994) argued that a person may shop online solely as a result of the “enjoyment” he or she derives from the experience.
Consumer Traits

Consumer traits such as age, gender, income, and education are four demographics (Burke, 2002) that have significant bearing on consumers' attitude and intention toward shopping online. Young people tend to be more inclined to adopting new technologies and more technology savvy. For example, 16-34 year-group were most engaged in online shopping in the UK in 2018/2019. It is believed that older age group consumers are behind in online shopping because they consider the cost of acquiring the necessary skills higher than the benefits. This perception may discourage them from engaging in online shopping (Ratchford et al., 2001).

With gender (Figure 3), men in the UK are ahead of women in online shopping between 2008 and 2019 even though the gap has been closing up (Humphries, 2019). However, female consumers who do prefer to shop online do so more frequently than men (Burke, 2002; Li et al., 1999). Furthermore, higher education is positively associated with a persons’ level of knowledge in internet usage. As such, people with higher education are more comfortable to use the internet for online shopping.

Situational Factors

The attitude and behaviour of consumers toward online shopping cannot be fully understood without looking at a person’s situational factors. Wolfinbarger and Gilly, (2001) noted that easy access to online retailer’s website is one of the important attributes of online shopping to most consumers. However, factors such as geographical distance, lack of mobility, the need for special products or lack of time have enormous impact on online shopping behaviour. As Jiang et al., (2013) stated, the convenience of online shopping has been one of the main reasons why consumers engage in online shopping. A study show that the ability to shop online anytime is the reasons why they shop online (Chaffey, 2017). Some people engage in online because they either live miles away from the stores or do not have access to car or any means of transport. In addition, some people have busy lifestyles, either working long hours during the day or engaged in other activities. For such people, online shopping provides great opportunity for them.
Product Characteristics

The type of product in question plays a role in a person’s decision to buy or not to buy a product online as some category of products are more suitable to be bought online than other categories. Some products more suitable to be bought online as they do not require any from a salesperson. For example, the intention to buy books online is high since it is standardised and perceived product quality uncertainties are low and do not require any physical assistance or pre-trials in the shop (Grewal et al., 2002; Reibstein, 1999). The same goes for products that require anonymity or privacy such as adult materials (Grewal et al., 2002). By contrast, there are products that consumers want to feel, touch, smell or try on before they purchase them. Hence, such products cannot be considered for online shopping. Televisions, to some degree or cars fall into this category as they require product knowledge (Elliot and Powell, 2000). Thus, a consumers’ intention to shop online is low if the product under consideration requires pre-trial, product knowledge from salesmen, or if there is the need to feel or smell the product.

Having said that, research shows that 94% of UK consumers say they do use the internet to do research on a product before they buy them in store (Loveday, 2019).

Consumers’ previous experiences in online shopping

A study shows that there is a direct relationship between a person’s intention to engage in online shopping and their previous online shopping experience (Eastick and Lotz, 1999; Weber and Roehl, 1999). In a similar vein, it is noted that when customers are satisfied with the services of a specific website, it leads to positive intention towards purchasing or repurchasing from that website (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003). Generally, online shoppers evaluate their experiences based on their perceptions regarding variety of issues such as product information, delivery terms and conditions, method of payment, perceived risks, system security, quality of service offered, user friendliness of the website, or how entertaining the whole experience was (Burke, 2002; Parasuraman and Zinkhan, 2002; Mathwick et al., 2001). There is a higher chance that consumers will engage in online shopping in the future if they have positive evaluation and are satisfied with the outcome of their experiences (Shim et al., 2001). On the other hand, unsatisfactory outcomes and negative experiences inhibit the desire to shop online. This goes to show how vital it is for online retailers to offer the best services to their customers to retain them and to turn them into repeat shoppers (Weber and Roehl, 1999). For example, 59% Amazon website users are reported to be loyal because they have positive online shopping experiences with the retailer (Butler, 2019).

Consumer Trust in Online Shopping

Issues relating to consumer privacy and security and the effects they have on trust and loyalty on the internet have been a topic for discussion in many research studies (Kruck et al., 2002; Gavish & Gerdes, 1998). Social psychologists are of the view that Trust is the behaviour a person expects from others in a transaction, dwelling mainly on the factors that allow the development and maintenance of Trust to be enhanced or retarded (Lewicki and Bunker, 1995). In online shopping context, consumers are faced with high perceived risks and uncertainties in doing business with websites (Hoffman et al., 1999). The safety of the internet as a medium for transacting business and the way online retailers use customer’s personal information are of great concern to consumers due to the increasing levels of spam, identity fraud and the activities of hackers. For example, 3 out of 5 respondents in a survey involving 9,700 online consumers said they do not trust online retailers (Balanger, Hillier, & Sitt, 2002)

It is fair to say that developing trust for online websites are more difficult than ‘bricks and mortar’ stores (Bitting and Ghorbani, 2004). However, 65% of UK consumers say they trust online retail sector with their personal data (Sabanoglu, 2019) In addition, 68% of a survey involving 1000 UK shoppers say they would be more willing to shop online if they can enjoy the quality of service retailers can provide them with the same quality of service they get in store (Rahim, 2018)

Based on a review of the literature, it is evident that online shopping is growing at a faster rate than shopping in the stores. This changes in consumer spending more people are engaging in online shopping due to the factors discussed above. In store sales have been declining since 2014, however, ‘bricks and mortar’ stores still account for almost 82% retail sales (Murphy, 2018). The literature review suggest that online shopping will continue to be popular way of shopping.

Methodology

The philosophy guiding this research is Pragmatism. Pragmatism is of the view that the world can be interpreted in many ways and research can also be conducted in many ways and that there is no single point of view that can give a complete picture of a phenomenon as there may be multiple realities (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The reasoning behind the use of pragmatic philosophy is that it allows for the research to be viewed from both objective and the subjective angles. By doing so, the outcome of the research would be more meaningful. As this study sought to test the validity of theories in hand, Deductive approach will be employed. This means that a set of hypotheses will be formulated based on the theory in hand and then apply the relevant research method to test the hypothesis (Wilson, 2010, p.7). The advantage of using this approach is that concepts can be measured quantitatively, and the research findings can be generalised to a reasonable extent (Dudovskiy, 2018).

Mixed methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative research was used to generate data. The idea of triangulation is the reasoning behind this approach. As proposed by Greene et al., (1989, p.259), mixed methods approach seeks to identify corroboration, correlation, and correspondence of research results from different methods. Data collected using this method will provide in-depth understanding of the research problem under study (Denzin, 2012, p.82) as different facets of the research problem are addressed. It also improves data accuracy and enhances the quality of research findings. Quantitative research refers to the collection of numerical data and drawing inferences from it to resolve problems (Herbst & Coldwell, 2004) and the type of knowledge acquired is objective. Data was collected by email through well-structured and self-containing questionnaires which comprise of close-ended and open-ended questions. Questionnaires are less expensive than other traditional methods such as telephone, or group interviews. Secondly, as all participants respond to the same question, data collected is standardised and research analysis and generalisation becomes easier.

Some limitations of quantitative research are noted. Participants may present false answers just to give a positive image of themselves. Secondly, pre-coded questions generally tend to shape the nature of responses from the researcher’s viewpoint rather than what respondents might think about the topic. (Denscombe, 2014, p.15). Moreover, as the research is not done face-to-face, the truthfulness cannot be verified. To mitigate the above limitations, semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Qualitative research is mainly associated with a complete picture of a phenomenon as there may be multiple realities (John Dudovskiy, 2018, p.89), and the type of knowledge acquired is subjective.

Interview techniques are used to explore the perspectives of a small number of respondents on an idea or a situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Qualitative methods generate quality data about people’s experiences and help to understand behaviour in a wider context (deVaus, 2012). Due to coronavirus pandemic, self-isolation and social distancing rules, face-to-face interviews may not be appropriate. Interviews will be conducted using social media platform WhatsApp application on smartphone. It is a free application, easy to use, and data is collected faster. Each participant will undertake a minimum of 30 minutes interview section. However, it is likely some people may not want to participate in the interviews, and some may provide inaccurate information. Qualitative methods are also criticized for making it difficult for subsequent researchers to replicate research findings due to its reliance on subjective interpretations (deVaus, 2012).

Sampling

Sampling is a specific principle used in the selection of members of a population to take part in a study (Dudovskiy, 2018, p. 114). Since not everyone can participate in the research, sampling techniques are used to obtain samples from the large population (Proctor, 2003). The responses of selected members are used to draw conclusions about the population (Dudovskiy, 2018, p. 114). The sampling target for the quantitative research is 60 participants and 20 for qualitative research. All selected members are 16 years and above, able to read and understand, and living in the UK. Non-probability sampling rather than probability sampling is preferred for qualitative research since not every member of the population is included in the study. This technique is time-efficient and cost-effective compared to other techniques that involve every member of the population (Denscombe, 2014, p. 51). However, research findings may be unrepresentative of the entire population as large proportion of the population are not included in the study.
Google Forms software will be used to analyse data. It creates surveys easily, fast, and efficiently. It allows for different types of questions such as multiple choice, short answers, or paragraphs to be included in the survey and data can be analysed in detailed because the responses populate into pie-charts or graphs. However, it has some security issues. Participant’s anonymity could be compromise and information disclosed to others due to cybercrime. Also, only certain amount of text, images and spreadsheets can be accepted. To mitigate these limitations, strong password will be used to increase the level of security. The research is also good to go ahead since the file being used is relatively small.

**Findings**

A total of 60 participants took part and data was generated using random sampling. 51 of them (32 females and 19 males) successfully completed their questionnaires within the time frame required. Information gathered was examined and compared with the factors identified in the literature review for similarities and differences. These findings are presented below in Pie-Charts and Bar Charts because they simplify complex data and provide effective visual appeal. The majority 62.7% were female and 37.3% male. More women than men successfully completed their questionnaires. Based on Figure 4, 16-35 and 36-55 age groups participated most in the survey compared to the other two older age groups. The high responses from the younger age groups show how involved they are with technology. The data also shares the views of Prescott (2019) that online shopping is increasing phenomenally. Figure 6 indicates that most participants (37.3%) are non-managers, 27.5% were supervisors, 23.5% were mid-managers and 11% senior managers. Information from different job positions provided unbiased views of participant’s experiences.

In Figure 5, 29.4% of participants are graduates. High school and undergraduates are at par with 27.5%. Postgraduates form 9.8% and 5.2% are people with higher degree. The diverse educational backgrounds were helpful in providing different perspectives on the research.

**Figure 4. Age of Respondents**

**Figure 5. What is your level of education?**

Based on Figure 4, the working hours per week is between 8 to 60. The three highest hours per week are 40 hours, 45 hours, and 16 hours representing 27.5%, 19.6% and 9.8% respectively. It suggests that some participants have busy lifestyles. As noted earlier on, a person’s situation plays a part in his or her attitude towards online shopping. In Figure 5, 88.2% engage in online shopping as against 11.8% who responded otherwise. This shows that participants have positive attitude towards online shopping. This confirms the view that online shopping is increasing popular (Pahnila & Warsta, 2010). Figure 6 indicates that 51% of participants prefer online shopping and 49% prefer shopping in stores. The close gap suggests that many people still prefer to shop in the stores. This data agrees with a study which shows that 94% of UK consumers do exactly that (Loveday, 2019). Based on Figure 7, 43.1% of participants prefer shopping in stores because they want to physically see, feel, or touch the product before buying it. 33.3% shop in the stores because of positive previous experience, 15.7% enjoy going to the stores, and 7.8% want to have face-to-face experience with store staff. This data is in line with a study which shows that consumers prefer to touch and feel the items (Chaffey, 2017).
The data shows that consumer habits and preferences are constantly changing. In Figure 11, for instance about 82.4% usually buy clothing online more than any other item. Unlike books or magazines which are standardised, clothes are items consumers would normally like to see, feel, or try on before buying them. It can be argued that consumers are visiting the stores to see the item before buying them online. 23.5% buy food but this figure may have increased in recent times as more people buy grocery items online due to covid-19 movement restrictions.

Based on Figure 13, none of the participants do online shopping on daily basis. However, 46% of respondents said they do it once a month, 30% do it weekly, and 24% every fortnight. 30% is a huge figure for weekly shopping. This could be people with busy lifestyles, people self-isolating due to covid-19 or those with mobility problems who cannot go to the stores due to long geographical distance. Overall, the data reflects positively on online shopping.

In Figure 12, Amazon is the biggest website usually used by participants, scoring 94.1%. 68.5% use eBay, 60.8% Argos, 52.9% JD Sports, 33.3% PC world and so on. About 2% of the respondents did not use any websites at all. It can be argued that Amazon’s dominance is attributed to wide range of products, more favourable goods return policy, excellent customer and delivery services such as Amazon Prime and large loyal customer base (Butler, 2019). This data also confirms a report from the same source that almost 90% of UK shoppers use Amazon website.
Drawing from Figure 14, 49% find it extremely easy to use online websites and 41.2% find it quite easy to use. In this context, 90.2% have confidence in what they are doing as against 9.8% who said otherwise. This shows that more people are using new technologies such as the internet. The data agrees with a study which shows that 91% of adults used the internet in 2019 (Prescott, 2019).

In Figure 15, 41.2% of respondents rated online websites 3 out of 5, 35.3% rated it 4 out of 5, 17.6% rated it 2 out of 5, and none of them rated it 5 out of 5. Concerning trust, this data suggests there is positivity towards online websites. The data confirms the views of (Hoffman et al., 1999) who noted that online shoppers are sceptical due to perceived risks and uncertainties such as scam or internet fraud.

In Figure 16, 54% said they will trust online store most if they can easily contact the company, 29.4% prefer positive customer reviews, 7.9% clean website design, and 7.8% prefers secure browsing. This data is in contrast with existing literature, which indicated that positive customer reviews is what consumers consider most important. However, participants in this study said contacting the company easily is what they consider most important. It also shows the importance consumers attach to customer service, for either to obtaining quick information about products or to have queries resolved.

In Figure 17, 54.5% are quite comfortable with online shopping, 29.4% are moderately comfortable, 9.8% are extremely comfortable, and 5.9% not comfortable. This indicates positivity towards online shopping even though some participants still have low level of confidence. This could be due to privacy or security issues with the website.

Qualitative Data Analysis

About 20 participants who have online shopping experience selected for the interview, 18 of them participated (10 females, 8 males) in an in depth semi-structured interviews. This technique was useful because it allowed for other questions to be asked to further probe for more answers. The interview questions revolved around four main areas: Reasons for engaging in online shopping; Ease of use of online websites; Trustworthiness of online websites; and Online shopping satisfaction and how online shopping experience can be improved.

The interview results revealed that most participants regard online shopping as time saver since they can place orders quickly without leaving the comfort of their homes. Secondly, the data reveals that
participants are engaging in online shopping due to access to many product options, the ability to compare prices from different retailers and the fact that online are always open. When asked how easy it is to use online websites, a couple of them said they sometimes seek help from their children or friends, however, the majority of them find it quite easy to navigate websites, purchase products and use them for their shopping needs. On trustworthiness, majority of participants expressed some degree of scepticism. On the scale of 1-5, most of them rated websites 3 out of 5. None of them rated it 5 out of 5 as in the case of quantitative research. High level internet fraud and breach of bank and credit card information were some of the concerns raised. Also, majority of them are quite satisfied with online retailer services, with a rating of 4 out of 5.

However, many of the participants said they would like online retailers to provide more user-friendly websites. Other concerns are the cost of delivery, receiving the wrong items, late delivery, and complex goods return policy. To improve online shopping experience, majority said they would like to see more improvement in data protection laws, more secure web browsing, more relaxed goods return policy, and special discounts for loyal customers. Some responses are noted below:

I am busy person and I do long hours in the office, rarely have time to do shopping in the stores. Knowing that I can shop online anytime makes my life much easier. I am quite satisfied with the delivery services but I have concerns about my personal information being stolen by criminals. (Mid-Manager)

I enjoy online shopping because I can search for information on the items I want and compare prices too. This saves me a lot of time going from one shop to another looking for the best prices. I do not trust online stores 100% with my personal data but I think they are doing their best. However, I prefer to buy expensive designer clothes in the high street stores because I am cautious not to buy fake items. (Superior)

I am one of the older generations who prefer to buy items in the store. I enjoy picking my own fruits and vegetables. However, the current Covid-19 climate has changed my mind. I am buying items online for the first time, especially grocery items. (Senior Manager)

For me, there are no hard and fast rules about online shopping. It all depends on what I want to buy. I buy books online, grocery and makeups from the stores and I buy my clothes from the stores after I have done my research online. I am not too much worried about identity fraud because my bank will reimburse me if I am innocent. (Non-Manager)

Discussions

The objectives of this research project is to analyse the factors that influence online shopping behaviour of consumers in the UK retail sector, evaluate the growth and trends of online, and to find out how online stores can optimise their online presence to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the sector. Judging from the research results, majority of the findings in qualitative research agree with those in quantitative research. First, there is evidence that consumers are shifting from shopping in the stores to online shopping. Figure 6 indicates that 88.2% of participants engage in online shopping, 51% in Figure 7 prefer to shop online, and 30% in Figure 12 do it on a weekly basis. It can be argued that government’s restriction on movement due to covid-19 has contributed in some way to this high figure of 88.2% because online sales for groceries increased sharply in the last couple of weeks. It is also noted that younger age groups use the internet most and shop online more than older age groups. However, internet usage among 65 to 74 years age group have been increasing fast since 2011 (Prescott, 2019). This suggests that as more older age groups use the internet, they are likely to be drawn to online shopping.

The study also highlights privacy and security concerns that need to be addressed by online retailers. For example, Figure 14 shows that none of the participants fully trusted online websites. This has negative impact on the relationship between online retailers and consumers. However, the findings suggest that privacy and security concerns do not have major effect on the growth of online shopping. As noted earlier, 88% of participants do online shopping. Figure 14 also suggest that participants have positive attitude towards online websites, and 54.9% in figure 16 feel quite comfortable shopping over the internet.

However, the increasing popularity of online shopping does not mean shopping in the physical stores will completely fade away. The study suggests that shopping in stores is still popular. Some consumers use the internet to research on products and then buy them in the stores and some may want to buy items and take it home immediately. 49% of participants still prefer to shop in the stores and 43.1% and some want to see, feel, or touch the item before they buy it. This data is in line with a study that, 78% of 1,056 UK adults prefer to see, touch or feel the item before they buy it (Loveday, 2019).

Quantitative research also reveals that some participants decision buy items online or in stores depending on the item involved. Standardised products such as books were bought online while others buy designer or expensive products in the stores after researching on them online.

In a nutshell, it is noted that consumers generally are attracted to online shopping because with good internet connection and a click of the mouse, it saves time to buy directly, from online store. In addition, consumers have the privilege to check for product availability, review products, compare prices and do their shopping anywhere and anytime of the day. However, the delivery cost, the difficulty of returning unwanted goods or soliciting for refund, and the risks of online retailers compromising consumers’ personal information data are the major factors noted to impede the growth of online shopping. In normal life situation without any sort of pandemics, it can be argued that majority of consumers are most likely to use both forms of shopping (online and in stores) complementarily to satisfy their shopping needs.
Conclusions and Implications

The study analysed the growth and trends of online shopping in the UK in relation to existing literature and the findings of the data collected from consumers. This provides insight and direction to an understanding of the factors which underpin the behaviour and attitude of consumers towards online shopping. It can be argued that majority of the findings support the views of other authors. However, consumer behaviour is dynamic and will continue to change depending on people’s lived experiences. Online shopping is widely used but the full potential is yet to be realised. The internet will continue to play a key role in the online shopping process and majority of internet users may use the platform to research on products but still shop in the stores.

It is important to point out that the sample size adopted is not as big as it would have been preferred. It can be argued that a larger sample size could have been more representative of the population and thereby produce more accurate result. Furthermore, as this is the first major academic research to be conducted by the researcher, it is likely to have flaws in the implementation of data collection methods and the depth of discussions of the topic compared to that of experienced researchers.

In terms of implications for online retailers, the study suggests that online retailers need not only focus on the functional performance of their websites but also undertake research that focus on understanding the cognitive and the emotional state of their customers. This provides them with rich and valuable information in terms of how to formulate customer relationship strategies that will help them achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Drawing on the above, the study provides a framework for future research in online shopping. The limitations of the study pointed out earlier on need to be addressed and future researchers need not only focus on online shopping behaviour in normal human conditions, but also consider prevalent life disruptions such as Covid-19. It also provides opportunity for future researchers to ensure wider participation of consumers with varied economic and social backgrounds to ensure fair representation and more accurate generalisation of research findings.

References

Migrant workers in the UK Agricultural sector – A Human Resource Management Perspective

Dimo Kalaydzhiyski

Abstract
The study focused on the recent developments in the UK agriculture sector. The quality of management of migrant workers, which constitute a large share of the available workforce, is explored. Primary data evidence was collected from a diverse sample with 45 participants – migrant workers with different background. Findings revealed the lack of consistent human resource management policies. There were issues related to discrimination of part-time workers, as well as lack of focus over some key determinants of employee management. The final scores in terms of job satisfaction and motivation were neutral and a large share of migrant workers demonstrated dissatisfaction with human resource management policies. In alignment with the proposed theoretical models, the lack of high job satisfaction and motivation also led to performance issues and high turnover. Based on findings, researchers and employers in the agriculture sector received specific recommendations for improvements in the future.
Introduction

This study is focused on the agriculture sector in the UK because of its dependence on migrant workforce and existing issues. HSE (2019) explains the term “migrant worker” as one who has worked in the UK in the last 12 months. Moreover, such work experience must have been gained at any time in the last five years (HSE, 2019). According to the European Commission (2019; p.1), a migrant worker is a “...person, who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not nationals”.

Regardless of the specific definition under application, the existing dependency on migrant workers in the agriculture sector is significant. It is mainly explained by the seasonal nature of most activities where labour shortages occur during peak seasons (McGuinness & Grimwood, 2017). According to McGuinness and Grimwood (2017), migrant workers are also more adaptive than locals. They are characterised with a higher level of willingness to participate in temporary jobs and under tougher work conditions. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the UK unemployment reached a historical low of just 3.8% (Financial Times, 2019). The lack of available employees in the economy as a whole also explains the increasing dependence on migrant workers.

Such dependence is evidenced by the available labour market data. Data show that 1/5 of all workforce in the agriculture sector has a non-UK origin. The contribution of two countries – Bulgaria and Romania – is essential. They account for around 12,000 and 8,000 workers every year, respectively (McGuinness & Grimwood, 2017). Moreover, there are extra 27,000 workers from other countries which are members of the European Union (EU) (McGuinness & Grimwood, 2017). Furthermore, the harvesting season poses extra demand for foreign workforce. The shortages are addressed by importing migrant workers from the EU. Thus, approximately 75,000 temporary-based migrant workers are supplied during peak seasons (McGuinness & Grimwood, 2017).

The share of migrant workers from EU-13 (old members) has remained stable. The contribution of migrant workers from the new member states has been steadily increasing in the recent years (UK Government, 2018). This shows the increasing dependence on migrant workers in the agriculture sector. Given the increasing dependence on migrant workers, the study is interested in exploring their management. At the current stage of development, many farmers are suggested to experience issues with migrant workers. Lack of appropriate motivation erodes productivity and leads to costly turnover; thereby, offsetting many of the benefits of the working process (McGuinness & Grimwood, 2017). Hence, the study is interested in understanding key performance metrics regarding employee satisfaction and motivation, as well as the factors of affecting human resource management effectiveness. The study sees an opportunity to collect information and deliver valuable recommendations for improvement.

In this way, the welfare of migrant workers can be improved together with increasing the productivity and competitiveness in the sector.

Furthermore, it appears that the topic has not been studied before. There is a knowledge gap and need to better understand the developing trends and areas for improvement. This study has the opportunity to reveal the most recent trends and deliver relevant HRM improvements. In addition to all that, I have personal motivation and interest to perform the study.

Employee motivation and work performance

Ensuring high degree of workforce satisfaction is viewed as an important prerequisite for meeting a series of core targets correlated with business success. According to Martin & Dowson (2009), improved work efficiency, dedication, and productivity are associated with high motivation. In general, motivated workers strive to put more energy and ambition at work. Besides, motivation is also important in avoiding the costly issues of absenteeism and attrition which often occur among workforce members (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Based on sample evidence from UK farms, Grant (2017) suggests that migrant workers outperform UK workers in many main components of work performance. In the categories of absenteeism and turnover migrant workers demonstrated lower levels than the average score. In addition, migrant workers have a high level of stamina. This shows an increased willingness to engage in prolonged work duration and at more flexible schedules (Grant, 2017). Migrant workers ultimately contribute dramatically to rising efficiency rates on farms and even inspire the UK colleagues to be more committed (Grant, 2017). Despite these improvements, McGuinness & Grimwood (2017) indicate that concerns surrounding the retention and hiring of migrant personnel are also existing and relevant. They demonstrate that retention at the end of each farming season is a key problem for farms. Variations around the cross-sector also exist and cause major workforce issues. Grant (2017) indicates a favorable situation in the dairy farmers’ community, while McGuinness & Grimwood (2017) recognise issues in the segment of vegetables growing and other similar operations which involve more challenging field work.

Theories of employee motivation

Findings suggest workplace satisfaction and motivation remain dynamic phenomena. In this relation, there are numerous diverging opinions on
the possible causes or determinants that appear to affect the morale of workers (Gagne, 2015). It is important to reveal the most popular theoretical models in the field. This would also be important to examine the facets of work satisfaction and success by recognising the reasons for workplace motivation. Such key dimensions of job success can be greatly affected by successful HRM tool, respectively. The diversity of models of employee motivation can be divided into two main groups: content and process theories (Ramlall, 2004). The analysis focuses on content theories due to their specific propositions for enhancing employee motivation in the workplace.

The popularity of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs explains why the model is considered when examining migrant workers’ motivation in the agriculture sector. Maslow recognises the existence of hierarchical human needs in five distinct levels. They have to be addressed consistently and in a specified order from the more basic needs at the bottom towards the top level needs (Jerome, 2013). In theory, the most significant outcomes in terms of employee motivation are seen when all needs are met (Jerome, 2013). The ability to address the highest-order self-actualisation needs is then seen as an indication for very successful HRM policies and practices which have consistently satisfied all previous needs at the pyramid (Jerome, 2013).

Effective HRM policies must initially focus on the basic physiological needs of employees. Then, HRM policies should gradually progress by addressing safety and social needs. These require policies, such as job security, reasonable pay rate, health and safety at work, teamwork, good relationships, etc. (Jerome, 2013). The fourth level addressed the needs of esteem. Recognition of achievement, status and appreciation of contribution and role are relevant policies here (Jerome, 2013). Eventually, individual self-actualisation needs, which deliver maximum motivation in the workplace, focus on career growth opportunities, responsibilities, challenges, training, and development (Jerome, 2013).

The second model refers to the Two-Factor theory of employee motivation. Herzberg (1987) recognises the same variables, which affect employee motivation, as suggested by the pyramid of Maslow. However, these factors are categorised in two major groups: hygiene factors and motivators, as shown below. This classification is explained by the different role of the factors. Herzberg (1987) shows that hygiene factors do not lead to higher motivation among staff members. Nevertheless, the absence of appropriate policies in respect to these factors may cause a lack of motivation (Herzberg, 1987). Hence, they should not be overlooked when developing HRM policies.

The second model refers to the Two-Factor theory of employee motivation. Herzberg (1987) recognises the same variables, which affect employee motivation, as suggested by the pyramid of Maslow. However, these factors are categorised in two major groups: hygiene factors and motivators, as shown below. This classification is explained by the different role of the factors. Herzberg (1987) shows that hygiene factors do not lead to higher motivation among staff members. Nevertheless, the absence of appropriate policies in respect to these factors may cause a lack of motivation (Herzberg, 1987). Hence, they should not be overlooked when developing HRM policies.

Maximum employee motivation is reached when meeting all hygiene factors and motivators in a simultaneous fashion (Herzberg, 1987). Interestingly, the group of motivators includes several variables, as shown in Figure 2. They are similar to the factors explained in the top two levels of the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

The more detailed analysis of both content models of employee motivation shows an alignment of propositions. More specifically, employee needs at the lower levels from the Maslow’s model coincide with the group of hygiene factors, as identified by Herzberg’s Two Factor model (Macpherson, 2013). Moreover, the group of motivators is reflected by the highest order needs of esteem and self-actualisation. The alignment between the two key models of employee motivation is visually presented below.

Source: BJ (2019)

Source: EMP (2018)

Source: MacPherson (2013)
The obvious similarities between the two main models of employee motivation should be considered as a positive development. It shows that theorists to a great extent consider the same factor as responsible for workforce motivation. Hence, the application of the combined model should be seen as a way of accessing more valid research findings. The reliance on content theories is explained by the fact that their models explore specific determinants of employee motivation. The frameworks are specific and it is easy to understand the performance of companies in respect to a set of specific determinants. This is impossible to be done, if using a process model of employee motivation because of the lack of objective and specific assessment framework. Having said this, the investigation of migrant workers’ motivation level in the agricultural sector applies a model which combines the two most popular theories in the field: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s Two-Factor theory. The survey questionnaire incorporates the main propositions of the models. The appendix section presents the questionnaire in detail. The study continues by analysing the chosen methodological framework.

### Methodology

The methodological framework clarifies and justifies specific steps for analysing the work motivation of migrant workers in the UK. Since the study relies on primary data, there are several main methodological stages to be applied in a systematic manner, as shown by the popular research onion model (Saunders et al., 2012). The methodological framework explores the research philosophy and approaches, primary data collection strategy, choices, time horizon, as well as techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). Moreover, the discussion critically explores several additional aspects, such as sample design, research limitations and ethics.

#### Research philosophy and approach

Positivism is applied as a foundation of the current research. The philosophy ensures that the subjective opinions, attitudes and feeling of the researcher do not influence the research process due to the assumption for independent reality (Dudovskiy, 2018). Generalisation of findings is also possible; hence, a small sample of migrant workers is used to draw some relevant conclusions for all migrant workers in the agriculture sector in the UK (Dudovskiy, 2018). The philosophy of positivism also employs hypotheses testing and quantitative data collection and analysis methods and tools (Dudovskiy, 2018).

Positivism is closely related to deductive approach. The idea behind deductive thinking, which is also applied in the current study, explains the importance of moving from the general to the particular (Dudovskiy, 2018). This approach is evidence when exploring the level of employee motivation among migrant workers. First, some general theories and empirical findings are discussed.

#### Research strategy

The strategy is entirely quantitative. The preferred tool for collecting primary data is a survey among migrant workers. As suggested by the research onion model, quantitative data collection strategies and tools align with positivism and deductive reasoning (Saunders et al., 2012). The choice of employee survey is not accidental. It reflects the need to quickly and cost-effectively collect primary data from a large sample of relevant respondents (Denscombe, 2014). Surveys are then efficient for gathering a large volume of data (Denscombe, 2014). Moreover, the tool includes structured questions. This is a reasonable strategy for exercising a higher degree of control over the data collection process (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, surveys produce quantitative data. They can be analysed with various tools and methods - a key prerequisite for objective analysis of findings. Last but not least, surveys are popular in practice and this is seen as a way for achieving a higher response rate and finish the data collection process quickly.

The investigation of migrant workers’ motivation level follows a mono-method. Only surveys are used in order to collect primary data. As shown by the research onion model, mono-methods are quite appropriate in the context of positivism and deductive reasoning (Saunders et al., 2012). It is also important to mention that this is a cross-sectional study. This means that the issue of employee motivation is studied at a given period of time (year 2020). Hence, research findings are then efficient for gathering a large volume of data (Denscombe, 2014). Moreover, the tool includes structured questions. This is a reasonable strategy for exercising a higher degree of control over the data collection process (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, surveys produce quantitative data. They can be analysed with various tools and methods - a key prerequisite for objective analysis of findings. Last but not least, surveys are popular in practice and this is seen as a way for achieving a higher response rate and finish the data collection process quickly.

The obvious similarities between the two main models of employee motivation should be considered as a positive development. It shows that theorists to a great extent consider the same factor as responsible for workforce motivation. Hence, the application of the combined model should be seen as a way of accessing more valid research findings. The reliance on content theories is explained by the fact that their models explore specific determinants of employee motivation. The frameworks are specific and it is easy to understand the performance of companies in respect to a set of specific determinants. This is impossible to be done, if using a process model of employee motivation because of the lack of objective and specific assessment framework. Having said this, the investigation of migrant workers’ motivation level in the agricultural sector applies a model which combines the two most popular theories in the field: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s Two-Factor theory. The survey questionnaire incorporates the main propositions of the models. The appendix section presents the questionnaire in detail. The study continues by analysing the chosen methodological framework.

#### Data collection and analysis

An online survey platform is used to create, distribute, and store survey questionnaires. This is modern way of instantaneously accessing potential respondents by sending an online link. This is also a very cost-efficient manner of data collection due to the low costs of using online survey platform. The costs typically do not exceed £10 per month. The traditional way of using paper-based questionnaires and meeting respondents in person is no longer feasible given the existing time and financial constraints. The online survey saves paper which contributes to protecting the environment. Furthermore, it is important to note that the chosen survey platform - Obsurvey - uses double encryption as an advanced security measure (Urrea, 2019). The survey platform is also reputable which improves its reliability.

Data are stored in a password protected Microsoft Excel file. The analysis of primary data findings is based on several tools. Mean values are used to show performance scores and compare findings. The results are also analysed by groups of respondents, rather than solely depending on aggregate findings. Correlation analysis is used to show the behaviour of some variables. There is also a t-test which aims at findings whether the mean values of two groups are statistically significant or not. There are charts and a table providing visual representation of findings.

#### Sample design

The sample size reached 45 respondents. It was possible to expand the sample size based on snowball sampling. The technique was also suitable for reaching respondents who are not known by the researcher (Denscombe, 2014). This is possible due to the strategy behind snowball sampling. It consists of two stages. First, survey questionnaires are distributed to migrant workers who are known by the researcher (Saunders et al., 2012). Once these known participants complete the questionnaire, they will be asked to re-distribute it to their colleagues. Thus, it is possible to access initially unknown during the second stage of the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2012). The recruitment of new participants can continue till reaching the desired sample size. Although being time-efficient, the snowball sampling technique leads to lowered control over the selection of participants during the second stage of the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2012). In order to tackle the risk of including inappropriate respondents, the initial group of participants is carefully instructed regarding the participant selection criteria.
Findings and analysis

This chapter discusses all survey findings in more details. First, the sample characteristics are analysed. Then, the actual findings in the field of employee satisfaction, motivation and their impact of turnover are assessed. Finally, a more detailed analysis of determinants of employee motivation is included. Survey findings are expected to provide enough evidence to reveal the main HRM practices in relation to migrant workers in the UK agriculture sector.

Sample characteristics

Sample characteristics are explored first. The employment experience is quite diverse. The data show that 40% of sample participants are new and have no previous experience. In contrast, there are 26.7% with more than three years of experience in the sector. These are long-term and experienced workers. The additional 1/3 of the sample is composed of workers with some (1-2 years) experience.

Figure 4. Years of experience as migrant worker in UK

The analysis also explores whether migrant workers have been working at the current farm before. Interestingly, 37.8% of sample participants are repetitive workers with previous experience at the current employer. The remaining 62.2% have not had such experience before. These findings are quite unexpected and show that some employees demonstrate loyalty to their employer. The next key aspect of the sample is to include migrant workers with different status. This objective is achieved, as 1/3 of survey participants are hired on a part-time basis. The remaining 2/3 of the sample is composed of full-time employees. These results indicate that flexible employment opportunities are also present in the agriculture sector. Many workers operate on a part-time basis or work on several places as part-time employees. The differences in employment status are later explored with the idea of analysing whether there are HRM policy differences between both types of employees. It is also possible to explore potential differences in terms of job satisfaction and motivation based on work status.

Ethical considerations and Methodological limitations

Informed consent and voluntary participation are main ethical pillars. As per Bloomsbury Institute ethical policy, all participants have to read and understand their rights when participating in the study, as well as the purposes of the research. There are no stimuli for participation. This is purposefully done because including motivated and committed survey respondents tends to improve the quality of the accessed primary data. The information will be stored in a Microsoft Excel file which is protected with a password. Thus, no one except for the researcher and lecturer will be able to access the information. Focus on anonymity of respondents is also prioritised (Dubovskiy, 2018). Employers or other unauthorised parties should not be able to access the employee data. Furthermore, there are no sensitive questions in the survey which collect personal information about respondents. The study will not include inappropriate groups of participants. As a result, there are no migrant workers under the age of 18, as well as vulnerable individuals.

In terms of the limitation of the chosen methodological framework three key challenges need to be acknowledged. First of all, the sample size is relatively low because of the lack of financial and time resources to conduct a more extensive survey. This increases the risk for biased research outcomes. The issue with the small sample size is partially compensated by including respondents with a diverse geographic background. Second, the reliance on quantitative strategies for collecting primary data limits one’s ability to access in-depth information which could otherwise be done with qualitative strategies and tools, such as focus groups and interviews. The lack of in-depth data means that it is difficult to understand migrant workers’ individual attitudes and beliefs regarding the studied issue of employee motivation. Furthermore, the utilisation of closed-end and preliminary determined questions inhibits the access to get access to new and initially unexpected data. The third methodological limitation refers to the reliance on the Maslow’s model of employee motivation. Every model has limitations in terms of validity (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, there might be some other factors, which influence employee motivation, not being included in the chosen theoretical framework. As a result, some determinants of motivation are not reflected in the current study.
Overall, the sample seems to be diverse and reflecting the general characteristics of UK migrant workers in the agriculture sector. These are strong arguments in favour of data reliability and validity of findings.

**Job satisfaction and motivation**

The analysis continues with an investigation of the levels of job satisfaction and motivation among migrant workers in the agriculture sector. Findings regarding the aggregate scores in both key areas are presented in Figure 6. In general, it can be seen that performance is quite average on the 5-step scale. The share of generally dissatisfied workers is approximately 35%, whereas the satisfied ones account for 41%. There are also 23% with neutral opinions. In terms of motivation in the workplace, the share of those with very low and below average motivation accounts for approximately 40%, whereas the ones with positive motivation scores have a share of around 43%. The neutral opinions decline to just 17%. Having said this, employee motivation performs slightly worse than the average score in job satisfaction; yet results appear to be quite identical. Findings also reveal that the performed HRM policies in the sector are not very effective due to the large share of dissatisfied and de-motivated employees. The analysis of findings is also interested to analyse whether there is a relationship between job satisfaction and motivation in the workplace. Correlation analysis is performed to show the behaviour of both variables among survey participants.

The correlation index has a very strong and positive value of 0.87. This means identical behaviour of both variables. Hence, satisfied employees also tend to be very motivated and the vice versa. The potential link between individual background specifics and motivation in workplace is explored. This approach suggests that there might be some individual specifics under importance, rather than simply focusing on HRM policies as the only factor explaining variations in employee motivation. The sample is broken down based on status of employment, duration of experience and whether a given employee has already worked at the current employer before. Dramatic differences are observed when contrasting the motivation level of part- and full-time employees. More than half of part-time employees have very low motivation. The evidence from full-time employees is quite different because approximately 55% demonstrate positive level of motivation. These significant variations suggest that there might be different HRM policies towards part- and full-time employees. The analysis later examines, if full-time employees receive better rewards, stimuli and attention at work.

The second variable explores variations in motivation based on whether one is working on a repetitive basis at the current employer. There are significant differences in this case, as well. New migrant workers with no previous experience at the current farm have very low level of motivation. In contrast, repetative workers show mainly positive opinions. These differences may be explained with variations in HRM policies in respect to new and old employees. Furthermore, loyal employees, who continue to work at the same employer year over year, are also expected to have high motivation in order to show such loyalty. Therefore, the high motivation scores among repetative employees may be misleading and a result of natural selection and filtering of the most satisfied and motivated employees over time.

The third background variable refers to duration of employment as a migrant worker in the agriculture sector. In this case, the level of employee motivation tends to increase along with the length of employee experience. This may also be a result of the fact that motivated employees are more likely to return to UK to work in the sector. Perhaps, more experienced employees are also working with the same employer (repetative employees). As a result, they are more familiar with the working situation, tend to have more realistic expectations and improved relationships with the employer or receive better HRM policies as a result of their loyalty.

Irrespective of the interpretations, findings show that individual background factors also interfere in determining the level of motivation in the workplace. Given the very high and positive correlation between motivation and job satisfaction, the importance of background factors is likely to be quite identical when referring to variations in employee satisfaction. The level of retention is a key variable which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of HRM policies. Survey findings show that migrant workers in the agriculture sector have a retention level of 3. A five-step Likert scale is applied ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The value of three indicates an average level of retention which is quite neutral.

**Figure 6. Job satisfaction (left) and motivation (right)**

**Figure 7. Variations in employee motivation based on background factors**
The secondary data discussion in the literature review also showed the positive relationship between satisfaction/motivation at work and retention. This case, retention is strongly and positively correlated with both factors. Satisfaction and retention have a correlation coefficient of 0.89. Employee motivation and retention are correlated with a coefficient equal to 0.90. Thus, survey findings from the case of the agriculture sector validate earlier propositions. Migrant workers are also more likely to stay at the current employer if the former are satisfied and motivated in the workplace.

Given the significant importance of satisfaction and motivation on employee retention, it is important to understand the HRM factors with the strongest effect on motivation. As already shown, there are some individual background factors which are likely to influence motivation. The discussion in the literature review also proposed several frameworks which are used to examine a set of factors with proposed impact on motivation of employees. The assessment of these factors by migrant workers is presented below by following the five-step Likert scale. The worst performance in relation to a given factor is indicated by the value of 1, whereas the best one has a value of 5. Findings indicate variations across factors. Employers from supervisors, rules, and policies, as well as work conditions, security levels, pay rate, support from supervisory, rules, and policies, as well as work relationships. The higher-order needs, which are also motivators, include recognition, professional development, training, challenges/responsibilities, and job design.

The average assessment value of hygiene factors is 3.07 – slightly above the neutrality threshold. In contrast, motivators receive an evaluation score of 2.78. This difference is considered as statistically significant by t-test findings. The p-value is 0.04 which is below the significance threshold of 0.05 at 95% confidence level. Hence, employers are suggested to prioritise the more basic hygiene factors over motivators. This is a key reason for the lack of high employee motivation among migrant workers.

The lack of balance in HRM policies is also visible when comparing the scores of part- and full-time employees. In all categories without exception full-time employees demonstrate higher evaluation scores in comparison to part-time ones. Except for professional development, all factors are positively evaluated by full-time employees. Furthermore, full-time employees also receive more balanced HRM policies because the performance gap between hygiene factors and motivators is very insignificant. In contrast, part-time employees evaluate all HRM factors negatively which is a strong indication for ineffective HRM policies in respect to this group of migrant workers.

Survey participants were also offered the opportunity to provide a free answer regarding their concerns. This approach goes beyond the structured questionnaire and aims at including additional primary information with relevance for better understanding HRM policies.

In total, five out of 45 respondents used the option or a response rate of 11.1%. One participant said: “They don’t ask for my opinion”, “Uncertainty” and “No opportunities for extra work.” These opinions indicate that some part-time workers may need more work and be full-time ones. Serious issues in job security, job design and employee inclusion are also noted from responses.
Discussion

Survey findings are quite detailed and helpful for understanding the major trends among migrant workers in the agriculture sector in the UK. The evidence shows an average level of satisfaction and motivation of survey participants. Nevertheless, the distribution of responses is quite polarized. Instead of having concentrated responses around the average assessment score and a normal distribution of responses around the mean, responses are concentrated in both extremes. Approximately equal shares of migrant workers are satisfied/motivated and dissatisfied/de-motivated in the workplace.

The significant variations are explained by strictly individual factors, as well as ineffective and inconsistent HRM policies. Employers tend to prioritise the group of hygiene factors and fail to account for motivators. There are also significant variations in policies depending on whether part- or full-time employees are taken into consideration. Improvement in HRM policies is necessary due to the demonstrated positive impact on motivation, satisfaction, and employee retention. Improvements in HRM policies and practices are also likely to stimulate productivity and reduce turnover costs. Therefore, investments in better HRM will deliver a reasonable pay-off for employers and the agriculture sector in general. This may be of significant importance for business survival in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and dramatic shortage of migrant workers in the UK. It is also important to note that survey findings confirmed the theoretical propositions, as suggested in the literature review. The alignment between primary and secondary data is considered as a strong indication for more valid research outcomes and relevance of the stated recommendations.

Conclusions and Implications

To sum up, research findings confirm general trends in the agriculture sector and existing issues. Turnover issues and lack of enough labour supply are largely explained with the low job satisfaction and motivation of employees. Employers in the agriculture sector have to consider improvements in order to improve competitiveness and attractiveness of the sector to migrant workers.

First, employers are advised to equalize their HRM policies between part- and full-time migrant workers. Since part-time workers account for 1/3 of the migrant workforce, they deserve better policies. Moreover, many part-time employees may eventually become full-time ones. Hence, they have to be carefully managed and not underestimated. In many cases, employers in the agriculture sector may discriminate unintentionally. In order to avoid such negative developments, employers have to develop objective HRM approaches. The introduction of employee appraisal schemes is a way for objectively monitoring and evaluating performance based on a set of performance indicators. Employee appraisals may improve the level of equity when delivering performance-based rewards, stimuli, and policies to all types of employees.

Second, as indicated by survey findings and one qualitative response, employers have to demonstrate flexibility in the field of HRM. The communication and connection between employers and migrant workers have to be improved. Integrating employees in the process of decision making, creating more teamwork job activities, establishing channels for ideas and feedback are considered as effective tools for gathering more information and changing HRM policies in accordance with individual needs. Eventually, employers have to know and adapt to individual specifics of employees in order to improve motivation, performance, and retention. The creation of an atmosphere of teamwork and inclusiveness are also strong factors for higher motivation. Thus, factors, such as job design, managerial support, work relationships and job environment may be improved.

Third, employers have to fully understand the importance of HRM. The focus of employee management has to be expanded by also addressing the range of higher-order needs. Without neglecting the importance of job security, pay rate, managerial support, policies and teamwork, employers have to also adapt job design according to individual needs which is based on a more customised HRM as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The agriculture sector does not provide many opportunities for career growth due to the nature of the job; however, employers are still able to devise some training opportunities, as well as a wider range of job challenges and responsibilities. In this way, migrant workers may become significantly more motivated as they will no longer deal with monotonous farming activities only. Furthermore, the earlier-mentioned implementation of appraisal schemes may also improve the process of recognition of individual achievement which is expected to have a positive impact on motivation.

Fourth, employers have to appreciate the significant role of background factors. For example, they may re-shape recruitment and selection policies, so that more experiences employees are hired. Another example may include the change towards more full-time job positions as a way for stimulating job security among employees and providing higher pay rate due to the higher number of working hours. Eventually, employers should aim at stimulating workers’ loyalty, so that they return year after year. This is possible with improved HRM policies and practices. Loyal employees are more productive, committed and experienced with the specifics of the job at a given company. Hence, targeting higher loyalty through improved HRM is of key importance for business success in an uncertain environment and labour supply shortages.

Finally, several recommendations for future research are proposed. First, a wide-scale survey with more respondents can be of help in analysing the situation across the entire country. A higher sample size will reduce the risk of biased results. Second, considering interviews with migrant workers and employers may be of help in gathering more detailed and diverse opinions in order to reveal more valuable points of view for HRM policy changes. Third, a longitudinal study is also applicable. The investigation of the HRM practices is interesting in the context of the dramatic changes in the labour market, COVID-19 impact, and post-Brexit migration law changes. A longitudinal study may also examine whether the proposed recommendations are applied and the need for new ones depending on the most contemporary developments in the sector.
A Jobseekers perspective on eRecruitment in the UK

Omaima Kasmi

Abstract

The recruitment industry is worth over £35billion to the UK economy and continues to grow as technology continues to adapt. As technology becomes an important aspect of a recruitment tool, e-recruitment is becoming increasingly significant and popular, increasing the average users’ online-seeking employment. In 2003, 45% of jobseekers have used the internet as part of their job-search. Whereas by 2006, the number of jobseekers referring to online-platforms was 96%. Additionally, 84% of businesses are using online-recruitment channels to aid their recruitment. This indicates there is a growing number of online-recruiters shifting traditional methods with new recruitment-markets. This study aims to identify how UK jobseekers use online platforms as part of the recruitment process and how online platforms are successful. The following objectives of the study are to (i) evaluate the process of how jobseekers, seek and apply for jobs; (ii) identify if job seekers prefer online recruitment to other methods; and (iii) identify the effectiveness of online recruitment from the job-seekers perspective.
Introduction

Human resources play a vital role in organisations. Selecting the right candidate for the right job will yield profit for a business. Businesses are now rapidly using the internet as a recruiting tool. Technology has enabled recruitment to become efficient for businesses and jobseekers. E-recruitment first appeared in the 1990s as a recruitment-revolution (Boydell, 2002). Technology has opened up new opportunities for innovative recruiting methods; methods have changed how job-seekers search for work and have led to the success of companies in selecting potential candidates. Certainly, experts such as Cappelli (2001) and Birchfield (2002) argue E-recruitment has altered the way candidates “Look for work.”

The recruitment industry is worth over £35 billion to the UK economy and continues to grow as technology continues to adapt (Costello, 2019). As technology becomes an important aspect of a recruitment tool, e-recruitment is becoming increasingly significant and popular, increasing the average users’ online-seeking employment. In 2003, 45% of jobseekers have used the internet as part of their job-search. Whereas by 2006, the number of jobseekers referring to online-platforms was 96% (Gentle, 2007). Additionally, 84% of businesses are using online-recruitment channels to aid their recruitment (Using Social Media for Talent Acquisition, 2017). This indicates there is a growing number of online-recruiters shifting traditional-methods with new recruitment-markets.

There is a vast amount of literature around e-recruitment but in contrast little empirical analysis for online platforms. Evidence suggests that 79% of job-seekers are more likely to use e-recruitment platforms to apply for jobs (Glassdoor.co.uk, 2013), however, 21% are still using other methods, this is important as even though technology is evolving there are jobseekers still using traditional-methods. The main aim of this study is to examine the role of online-recruitment platforms from job-seekers perspectives, and report on the analyses conducted to determine whether online-platforms are successful for recruitment for jobseekers. This study aims to identify how UK jobseekers use online platforms as part of the recruitment process and how online platforms are successful. The following objectives of the study are to (i) evaluate the process of how jobseekers, seek and apply for jobs; (ii) identify if jobseekers prefer online recruitment to other methods; and (iii) identify the effectiveness of online recruitment from the job-seekers perspective.

Literature Review

Building upon the main research question, “Examining the role of online platforms in the recruitment process from the UK job-seekers perspective,” the review of literature covers how recruitment has changed in recent years.

The changing face of recruitment

Breaugh & Starke (2000) state recruiting talent presses problems in businesses, they define recruitment as “practice and processes of attracting potential candidates to become part of an organization”, but the main source of recruitment is online. According to Filippo (1984), “Recruitment is the process of searching the candidates for employment and stimulating them to apply for jobs in the organization”, meaning recruitment links employers and jobseekers. Recruitment refers to the process of finding employers and shortlisting capable applicants for employment. Human resources (HR) is a crucial component for industries. HR was first introduced in the 1960s when the value of labour-relations began to garner attention and when motivation, selection, and organizational behavior began to take place (Human Resources (HR) Definition - What is Human Resources (HR), 2020). Defining HR is difficult, many theories find HR being made from different aspects of a business. According to Armstrong (2006), Human Resource Management is defined as a “strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization most valued assets- the people working for the organization”, from this description, HR is a function in a business designed for employees to be selected or improve employee-performance.

HR is responsible for all worker-related employee relations (Pauwue & Boon, 2009). HR is increasing in demand; many businesses may hand over their HR responsibilities to other secondary-sources to manage or find employees while the company focuses on developing their core-competencies. Examples of firms that will handle HR responsibilities include, professional employer organizations; aiding them to manage their payroll-related taxes or other employer-related administer functions; secondly, HR outsources: helping companies transfer risks and responsibilities to the external provider helping complete tasks; finally is E-Services, this is an external platform for HR which enables them to maintain control of their recruitment online and use the internet more efficiently (Green, 2020).

Recruitment and selection are also changing as HR evolves. CIPD (Green, 2020), state recruitment is a key-responsibility of the HR department and is changing rapidly on how recruitment is done in an organization. Recruitment is vital for organizational as it achieves competitive-advantage; having the right candidate for the right job will ensure that the workforce has long-market-performance. Recruitment involves attracting and hiring candidates for a job-role. Recruiting-effectively is important for business as it will help them achieve their goals (Green, 2020). The role of recruitment is to create a job-analyses for jobseekers to find and then jobseekers will be able to see the job-alert and apply for the position. Additionally, there are several sources for recruitment and business can decide whether to hire external sources to help them hire or post them online. Over the years, the role of recruiting has changed. The threat to the role of recruitment comes from E-recruitment-platforms. E-recruitment reduces the cost of HR and is perceived to increase-performance. There has been a change in employers’ approaches to apply for jobs. Online-recruitment has changed how jobseekers apply for work and how organizations search for candidates.

E-recruitment

E-recruitment has become increasingly popular for modern organizations to use online-platforms to employee potential candidates and has become an issue of interest over the years as it is considered the latest tool for hiring. Online-recruitment is embraced by the term web-based recruiting, it can be defined as any recruitment method that organizations can conduct through web-based tools, to apply and source candidates and aid the recruitment process. Online-recruitment can also define as E-recruitment and internet recruitment (Pavitra Dhamija 2012). Many organizations are now using online-platforms to source new candidates and advertise job-vacancies. The purpose of online recruitment is to match people to work. Jobseekers send their applications or curriculum vitae using email or other recruitment platform’s, recruiters then see candidates and can be drawn by prospective employees depending on their requirements.
Corporate Website Recruiting

There are many examples of corporates posting job vacancies on E-recruitment platforms for jobseekers. These include, Indeed and Facebook. Facebook is also a social-recruiter creating job-alerts for jobseekers, it is used to source new employees. Another e-recruitment platform is Indeed; it pulls all jobs from different career sites and displays them on their site for jobseekers to view and is also available for use for recruiters searching for candidates. However, online-recruiting is difficult as jobseekers have a large availability to job-hunt, but 1 in 6 candidates who applied for a job have been asked for an interview (Turczynski, 2020), this shows gaps and challenges in using online-recruiting, making it tough for jobseekers to find a certain recruitment platform to apply for jobs. Numerous explanations have been offered by several types of research defining diverse recruitment methods. As Lievens and Harris (2003), noted in their study, there are numerous approaches to E-recruitment. Lievens and Harris outlined several methods, these include, job-boards, company websites and recruiters searching online for candidates. Although, they did acknowledge that e-recruitment approaches are evolving frequently. This is due to the growth of e-recruitment. Breauha and Stark (2000), also agree there are several methods of recruiting such as job referrals and job portals.

Significance of Online Recruitment

Recruitment is essential for effective HR management. Current times suggest, there is rising evidence that businesses are using e-recruitment to hire candidates and a growth of jobseekers using e-recruitment. It has had numerous significant advantages compared to other traditional recruitment methods. Harris (2007) believes that e-recruitment is beneficial for modern recruiters as it is easier to find candidates and new opportunities are easily found. Technology has enabled job seekers to become more interactive and sophisticated (Harris, 2007). Online-platforms have given jobseekers the benefits of streaming at different jobs and choosing what is acceptable for them. E-Recruitment channels open opportunities for jobseekers. E-recruitment has evolved over the years, becoming easily accessible and used by jobseekers. iLogos research (2002) conducted a survey and claims, 91% of the Global 500 organizations used their corporate website for recruiting in 2002. This evidence strongly acknowledges businesses are utilizing the internet and online-platforms as a platform for recruiting, and jobseekers are more aware of the platforms.

In 1998 corporate-website recruiting was only 29% whereas no-corporate website recruiting was double the percentage with 57%, this is a dramatic change in the three periods, which may be due to online-recruiting was not acknowledgeable by jobseekers and recruiters. However, as years have developed in 2001 corporate-website recruiting has tripled with 88% and only 12% of no-corporate website recruiting. Additionally, in 2017, statistics show that 77% of jobseekers would look on companies’ websites and 58% would look online-recruitment platforms (Turczynski, 2020). This shows there has been a change in the way jobseekers have been looking for work and how HR has been selecting and recruiting candidates. However, this study can be updated and look at job-seekers interpretation as each platform is different, this will determine if e-recruitment is effective or is only effective as technology is changing.

Subsequently, there is growing evidence that organizations are using the internet as a platform to recruit jobseekers. Additionally, another study that supports the research of iLogos is The institute for employment studies (IES). IES also carried out a survey that reporting, 50 organizations that they researched, 67% were using online-application forms (Kerrin and Kettley, 2003). This is relevant to the research area as the evidence reports that the role of E-recruitment is effective for recruiting, and the method used to conduct the study will be presented in the research gradually to identify the role of e-recruitment. The reason for the growth of e-recruitment is due to one factor being labour-market shortages, this has made it difficult for organizations to find skilled candidates and has led to more competitive-recruitment in the market. Ball (2019), shared statistics of over 106,000 vacancies at a professional level were considered hard to fill by jobseekers.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that 84% of organizations experienced recruitment difficulties in 2007 (Cipd.co.uk, 2017). CIPD (2006) found 64% of UK organizations’ have used E-recruitment, this rightfully argues that the growth of E-recruitment as a recruitment tool has been considerable and impacted many organizations. To support the importance of e-recruitment from a job-seekers perspective, Khan et al. (2013) explored the significance of e-recruitment practices and examined the relationship between job-seekers perception and recruitment sources. The study consists of 257 respondents and the study shows that the internet is more current to source for jobs.

Ahlawat & Sangeeta (2016), explored the role of e-recruitment in organizations, and found, they use online-recruitment as it increased the speed of hire and keeps ahead of competitors by saving money and provides a large candidate-pool. However, this study does not support the research question as it only focuses on the perspective from originations rather than jobseekers. Rani (2016), found jobseekers are finding jobs easily on sites as it is time-effective, proving the internet is a better source of finding jobs and more convenient. E-recruitment channels open many doors to more jobseekers and streamlines processes. Subsequently, businesses are competing with other organizations to recruit the best candidates for their firms. However, this evidence does not show the role it plays on jobseekers.
Challenges of online recruitment

In essence, there is bold appropriate evidence that organizations are using the internet for recruiting. Unfortunately, even though there has been a growth on e-recruitment, Bartram (2000), Lievens and Harris (2003), and Anderson (2003) indicate, the usage and adoption of online-recruitment are mainly restricted to large organizations and recruiting large numbers of candidates, for example, graduates or international pool. These authors overlook other originations and argue that there is a limit to recruitment selection. Rani (2016) conducted a study showing issues with e-recruitment platforms such as Facebook and Indeed, and also identified that job platforms need to deliver “extra useful function on the sites” to help job seekers in their search.

Online-recruitment has changed the way talent is searched. Traditionally methods include phone-calls and face-to-face networking. Joos (2008), calls this as the ‘spray and pray’ method, where large numbers of advertisements or applicants are sent out (“Sprayed”) while both employers and jobseekers wait (“pray”) for feedback. Joos (2008) believes new recruitment such as e-recruitment has not replaced traditional approaches but has added existences for recruitment and selection.

Additionally, research also suggests that the switch from traditional to online-recruitment for jobseekers might not be simple as it requires more skills and confidence to apply online. Moreover, research such as Parry & Tyson (2008), found in their analysis of UK practices that even though e-recruitment has become widespread it is still not dominated the recruitment market in the way media is predicting.

Gaps in the literature

Studies have been conducted to explore the role of social media in recruitment and its usage to identify a candidate’s personality traits during recruitment and selection processes (Kluemper & Rosen 2012). However, studies have attempted to examine the issues of using e-recruitment as recruiters such as CIPD, Putting social media to work (2014) and how social-media as a recruitment channel is impacted in the workforce. These studies are focusing on the impacts of social-media on their existing candidates and there is little research conducted to investigate the use of online-platforms for jobseekers. These gaps will help address the issues in the studies and evaluate the role of online platforms for jobseekers.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the research design that will be adopted for this study and the research- paradigm. To carry out the research correctly and efficiently, it is best to follow the research-paradigm which will direct the study to accurate data (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). The research paradigm includes three elements. First, ontology, research can be subjective, based on personal interpretations and emotions, whereas objective perspective can be used as evidence and can be evaluated without having a personal belief, therefore the ontology for this research is objective. O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015) identified four epistemological phases (interpretivist, positivist, action research and critical realist). Interpretivism involves researchers believing the nature of reality is socially constructed and focuses on subjective meanings. Positivism is acknowledging the true nature of how society operates using scientific evidence (DeCarlo, 2018). Critical-realism is where the research focuses on power inequality and social-change. Whereas action research involves integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data given (DeCarlo, 2018). This study dwells on positivism, as the researcher believes society should be studied empirically and scientifically, using the data that will be conducted in the research. In terms of the research paradigm, this can be either inductive or deductive. The deductive approach is aimed and used to testing theory whereas the inductive approach involves moving from a specific theory to a new general theory (Gabriel, 2013). This research will be using a deductive approach as there are theories in this study, but further research can be done to gather results and prove the hypothesis.

In meeting the objectives of this study, a quantitative research method was adopted, the data collected from the questionnaire will then be used to compare relationships between e-recruitment platforms. The reason for this choice of method is that it is appropriate for small-samples and easily collecting statistics. The method has changed from the proposal as using interviews will be difficult to generalize and make comparisons for the research question. Following a detailed analysis of previous methodological approaches on e-recruitment in the literature, it became apparent that the use of a questionnaire would be more appropriate for a study of this kind. The rationale behind this decision is because it is an easier way to gather how jobseekers have applied for jobs.

Questionnaires are regarded as a more appropriate method for this type of research, it is an easy way to gather high-quality and real-value data and it will be able to cover a large number of potential respondents with no limited geographical-area. Also, it is a reliable and objective source of data (Evaluated, 2006). Also, the research will produce results that are based on real-world observation also known as empirical data. Finally, the information retrieved from the questionnaire will have a sufficiently large and representative-sample, in a short time for a low-cost, therefore it sets a finite time-span for the research, which can help in planning and delivering the results aim to provide.

The questionnaire will consist of 11 questions and include closed and mult choice-questions. Furthermore, it will not lead respondents, using simplistic language ensures the respondents understand the questions. The data collected will be studied empirically and scientifically, using the data given (DeCarlo, 2018). This study dwells on positivism, as the researcher believes society should be studied empirically and scientifically, using the data that will be conducted in the research. In terms of the research paradigm, this can be either inductive or deductive. The deductive approach is aimed and used to testing theory whereas the inductive approach involves moving from a specific theory to a new general theory (Gabriel, 2013). This research will be using a deductive approach as there are theories in this study, but further research can be done to gather results and prove the hypothesis.
be primary and show the final empirical data using graphs. The results will be designed to answer the thesis of this project. SurveyMonkey was used to complete the questionnaire. This is an online data collection platform that sends questionnaires via email to participants who have consented to taking part in the research. An online-questionnaire will allow more respondents and is more likely to achieve a higher-completion rate as the participants can do it from the comfort of their own home. The questionnaire is a structured method asking the same question to all respondents and anonymous and there is a copy of the questionnaire in the appendix. SurveyMonkey is free and is easily utilized to capture data, the site enables comparison of other results and interpretation into charts.

Findings

The findings have been put into graphs to highlight correlations and common trends. SurveyMonkey was used to produce and collect the data to ensure there was 100% data collection using a non-purposive sampling approach. The results show numerous factors related to research-question. The questionnaire produced 56 responses but only 55 participants were used because one is incomplete. The research was collected over a period of 5 days allowing a good amount of time for participants to complete it. The questionnaire will be divided into three themes to be analysed (i) About the responders; (ii) Job search; and (iii) Attitudes towards online-recruitment.

Sample Size and data collected

The sample of the study is a minimum of 50 participants, the reason for this; to receive a large number of responses which allows effortless comparisons. A total of 56 participants took part in this study via email, after removing anomalies (due to incomplete questionnaires) the data of 55 participants were collected and investigated. No demographic data was collected, and all information was kept confidential and could not be traced back to individuals. Research suggests that for a small-scale study 50 participants is a good amount as it allows for effortless comparisons (Morse, 1994).

Profile of responders

The first question was to find out the age of the responders. The age-distribution of the research population is shown below. The results indicate the highest age is between 16-24 with the percentage being 89.09%, and in second only 5.45% are aged 25-34. The rest of the response percentages are 1.82% which are aged 35-44 and 45-54 and one preferring not to answer. As can be seen from the table below, 89.09% of respondents are between 16 - 24, resulting in them being the key-demographic age however, the results will not be generalised. This implies that the younger target-market is more likely to use the internet to apply for jobs due to their greater experience of it.

Employment Status

Secondly, employment status is useful to understand the relationships between recruitment and applications for the job. As can be seen from the chart below, the key-finding from the data highlights that 52.73% are employed. 18.18% only seek employment when there is a need for a job and 16.36% are currently seeking-employment. The other findings include 10.91% are not employed whereas 1 response is constantly searching jobs. This demonstrates most of the demographic group is employed however they may be employed and continue to seek employment. This tells us that most of the population can be considered representative of the area of recruitment, adding further weight to the research as the participants have been part of the employment.

Job review

Question 3 was sought to establish when the last time the responders seek for a job. The results show, in the last 3 months, 52.73% of the responses looked for a job. Whereas 23.64% of responses searched for a job for more than 1 year. 10.91% of responses looked for a job in the last 12 months whereas 12.73% searched for a job in the last 6 months. These figures demonstrate that majority has looked for a job within the last 3 months.
In terms of the recruitment platform responders used to locate their recent job, the finding from this data is that 72.73% of responders used online-platforms. Responders also suggested they applied for their recent job using other traditional-methods such as CV-hand in with 5.45%, Newspapers 1.82% and the second highest with using referrals 12.73% as a method to locate jobs. Also, the responses were able to choose “Other” if they applied for jobs using other options. The Other option showed another key-finding that can be used in the research project, one of the responses that was not shown in the answer choices was jobs being directly offered to them. It is immediately apparent that the majority of jobseekers have used online-recruitment, resulting in the questionnaire to be effective in finding a trend to answer the research-question.

**Job-seeking strategy**

Question 5 sought responses about how they are most likely to seek employment. This differs to question 4 as the responders may use other platforms to apply for work, this would give the research-project a more just result. The findings support the relevance of this research as 81.82% will use online-platforms and 7.27% will use referrals or CV-hand in. Also, 2 responders agreed they will use newspapers to seek employment with 3.64%. These key findings are essential as these factors prove that the majority of jobseekers will opt to use e-recruitment when searching for a job.

Additionally, question 6 helped obtain information about whether the responders would use more than one platform to seek-jobs. The findings were 81.82% of their responders answered yes and 10 (18.18%) answered no. This is an important factor as although the previous questions show a trend of users using online-platforms, jobseekers also select to use other platforms or sites to find jobs and not only stick to one recruitment channel.
Online Recruitment

In terms of online recruitment, Question 7 requested if the users have ever used online-recruitment to seek jobs. The findings show that 87.27% of the users have previously used online-recruitment, however, 12.73% have answered no. Having established that there is a clear result of online-recruitment being used, figures from question 7 suggest that users are still opting to use traditional methods for recruitment.

Figure 9. What attracted you to use online recruitment for jobs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Answered</th>
<th>Skipped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease to use</td>
<td>35.19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filtered to my preferences</td>
<td>12.96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply to large amount of jobs</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More accessible</td>
<td>27.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never used online</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Would you recommend using online recruitment for job seekers?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Answered</th>
<th>Skipped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>14.55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 9 sought to establish if the responses would recommend using online-recruitment platforms for jobseekers. The findings propose 78.18% would recommend online-recruitment, however, 7.27% answered no. Another interesting key-finding is that 14.55% were unsure if they would recommend using online-recruitment to jobseekers. This can be due to not having a positive experience from using online-recruitment or they have not yet used the channel. Overall, it is a clear majority of the users would recommend using e-recruitment.

Figure 11. Would you ever stop using other recruitment sources and just use the internet to source jobs?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Answered</th>
<th>Skipped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41.82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Views on Job-sourcing

Question 10 questioned the responses if they would only use the internet to source jobs. The results for this question were astonishing as 41.82% would stop using other recruitment channels, however, 38.18% answered no and will continue to use other sources to source jobs. Additionally, 20% of the responders were not sure. The responses to this question were distributed, as there was only 3.64% difference between yes and no, this is an important factor that can be discussed further in the critical analyses.
Figure 12. Overall, do you believe that the internet has added value to recruitment for job-seekers?

![Bar graph showing 96.36% for online platforms and 3.64% for other]

**Value of the internet**

The final question was used to ask if the responders believe that the internet has added value to recruitment for jobseekers. This question will help determine whether the internet is effective for jobseekers. Overwhelmingly, 96.36% agree that the internet has added value for jobseekers, however, only 3.64% believe it has not added value. This linked to question 9 can help justify the underlying reasons why online-recruitment is more effective for jobseekers.

To summarise, the questionnaire has illustrated the efficacy of using online platforms as part of the recruitment process and how online-platforms are successful. This study examines the questionnaire data on the usage and effectiveness of online-platforms from job-seekers perspective perspectives. Numerous important factors have been recognized in the research. Having established that the highest population in this research is aged 16-24 (89.09%), this influences the results as this target-group can already have experience with the internet resulting in them being familiar when seeking jobs. Additionally, 52% of the demographic age are employed, this is important for the research as these will help determine how jobseekers seek their work. Furthermore, what was particularly striking about the results from question 5 is 81% of participants usually use online-recruitment whereas only 3.64% use newspaper; this is surprising as aged 16-24 would not usually go for traditionally recruitment-methods and would recommend using online-recruitment as technology would be evolving in that era. Moreover, another particular striking information is from question 10: only 41.82% would stop using other recruitment channels and only using e-recruitment, whereas 81.82% said no. This data identifies even though 81% of participants usually use online-platforms, some users are not comfortable to stop using other channels. The study also established that 96.36% believe the internet is valuable, this presents clearly that the internet is contributing to how jobseekers apply for jobs.

**Discussion**

The overall aim of this research was to identify how UK jobseekers use online-platforms as part of the recruitment process and how online-platforms are successful. This study examines the questionnaire data on the usage and effectiveness of online-platforms from job-seekers perspectives. The results show that more than half of the responders from the questionnaire have used online-platforms to seek employment and support the research-question. Furthermore, the data collected revealed common themes and trends which consist of the usage of online-platforms and significance the internet for recruitment is and its effectiveness for jobseekers. Accordingly, these crucial findings are presented below and explored in terms of the literature reviewed previously.

Firstly, as noted in the literature view, there is an increase in the usage of technology and e-recruitment. Theories such as Harris (2007), identify that e-recruitment is becoming more modern for recruiters therefore many jobseekers are using e-recruitment as their main source for job-seeking. There are strong evidence and correlation in the questionnaire which determined the significance of technology and E-recruitment, as technology become the main source for recruitment for jobseekers. The study revealed that 72.73% participants have used online-platforms to recently find their recent job. Also 81.82% of participants agreed that they are more likely to use the online-platform to seek employment, this correlation between the two questions shows relevance between the pieces of information demonstrating that online-recruitment is more common than using traditional-methods. Thus, the findings for this study support the literature insofar as there is a strong positive link between the usage of online-recruitment and jobseekers. Additionally, continuing with the significance of technology and e-recruitment.

Rani (2016) argued that e-recruitment is beneficial however online-platforms still need to deliver other useful functions for job-seeks. Further analyses from the data revealed that more participants were using online-recruitment because of its beneficial-aspects. 35.29% participants revealed they use online-recruitment as it is easier to use, Rani (2016) evidence from chapter two supports this, this study proves jobseekers opt to use e-recruitment platforms as it is time-effective and easier to use. Whereas 12.96% find it helpful that e-recruitment allows
the jobseekers to filter to their need and 14.81% can apply to a large number of jobs. Therefore, it is obvious that e-recruitment has its benefits for jobseekers. To support the evidence, Harris (2007), also finds e-recruitment has helped jobseekers find jobs effectively and opportunities are easily found. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2013) also support the importance of e-recruitment for jobseekers as he examined the relationship between the two and the study also positively shows that the internet is more current to source for jobs.

On the contrary, traditional methods are still in use and the importance of the applicant’s view. Theories from the literature view ties with findings from the questionnaire. Joos (2008) evidence show, traditional-approaches cannot replace e-recruitment and data from the questionnaire state that 18.18% are more likely to use other traditional-methods rather than use online-recruitment. This evidence strongly acknowledges and supports Joos (2008) as e-recruitment will not dominate traditional-methods and continue to be available for jobseekers. Similarly, Parry & Tyson (2008) support this evidence, as their theory shows the relevance of links between their theory: e-recruitment is widespread for jobseekers but it is not subjugated the way the media has predicted. Other researchers such as Malhotra & Sharma (2016), support the data conducted from the questionnaire as they compared traditional-recruitment with e-recruitment and found that traditional-methods will continue to exist for jobseekers. Recent view in the literature also show difficulties in businesses recruiting efficiently: 84% of organisations experienced recruitment difficulties in 2007 (CIPD, 2007), this ties with the findings from the questionnaire as recruitment is a two-way process, therefore organisations need to be more open to other forms of recruitment if they want to seek best candidates.

The findings from the questionnaire also show 18.18% applicants are still using other recruitment methods.

Moreover, the data from the questionnaire help answer e-recruitment does play a role for jobseekers and future studies should take into consideration the findings of this study because it is focussing of jobseekers methods when looking for a job. The data from the questionnaire and literature review indicates jobseekers would continue to use other sources, this is particularly interesting as other studies from the literature review highlight the ease and convenience of online-recruitment and the growth of technology affecting recruitments yet in the findings online recruitment was not seen as the main source for participants to continue to use.

As Harris (2007) argues, technology does add-value to recruiters as it is easier for recruiters to employ candidates. However, the findings of this study contradict, there was a gap in the study as it mainly was drawn from the recruiter’s perspective rather than jobseekers. To support the theory, data from the questionnaire help support this research as the data displays 96.36% of the participants believe the internet has added-value to recruitment for jobseekers, proving that technology has played a role for jobseekers as well as recruiters for finding jobs. This analysis is appropriate to the statistics collected as it confirms that the internet is influential for jobseekers. However, figures from the questionnaire predicted that the internet would be considered a high-percentage of users stopping the use of other recruitment-platforms, yet the data from the questionnaire does not support the thesis of this study, 38.18% of participants show that they will not consider stopping the use of other recruitment methods and use only e-recruitment channels. This negative information contradicts the theory of this study and supports the gaps in the literature. Yet, Harris (2007), the study also confirms this data as they believe that technology has enabled jobseekers to become more interactive, but jobseekers are not 100% supportive of reducing the usage of e-recruitment.

The key-findings have successfully helped answer the research-question, the data conducted from the questionnaire aid the process of answering the question. The study revealed the importance of online-recruitment for jobseekers and how they value that recruitment platform more than other recruitment-channels. Additionally, the results from this research fill the gaps from existing literature from chapter two and also support the existing literature from this concept and can be used for future research. The reasons for results are different from other studies performed in the existing literature is due to the fact it being from a job-seekers perspective rather than focusing on workforces’ recruiters. Moreover, the primary data of this study fully concur with the aims and objectives of this research project, by identifying the effectiveness of online platforms has for jobseekers and their process for job-seeking and the face there is a clear positive relationship and correlations between job-seekers using online platforms and its value for them.

The first limitation of this study is the use of questions in the questionnaire which could have been defined more. Questions about gender and education; such data would have enriched the analysis and could have led to other findings. Additionally, the reserve use was paid for, thus was a limit to what can be assessed for the research, if opting to use other methods conducting the research, it would have gathered more information. Even though the study expected the target sample, the sample size was limiting and there could have been sampling errors. However, this limitation may be prominent, I believe that the right methods and existing research has been sufficient to provide credible research in terms of this study. Although using a questionnaire for research has many benefits there are also some limitations. The response rate may be low, and some respondents can misunderstand the questions, to resolve this from happening there will be a pilot questionnaire, to ensure there are no errors. Moreover, securing a high-response rate for the questionnaire can be hard to control, particularly if sent online, as some participants may not have access to the internet to complete the questionnaire, therefore, the questionnaire will have a period of 3 days to be completed.

Overall, this study has provided a foundation for future research wanting to investigate jobseekers perspectives when applying for jobs. Other researchers can expand and include more variables to this study to find other correlations that may have been missed. This study was conducted by following the methodology, however, there is a recommendation for future research. Firstly, the area of the study can be expanded, this includes an increase of sample size to generate a more accurate representation of job-seekers relationship with online-platforms. Also, aiming the study to more range of ages. The sample size for this study was 55 which has limited the generalisability of results. Moreover, focusing on other sectors of participants can gather more managerial perspectives for this study e.g. IT sector. The framework for this study was the use of a questionnaire, yet, using different frameworks and different obstacles collecting the data can help present the future results more effectively and clearly.


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