CONTENT MARKETING: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH TO DEVELOPING A CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Content Marketing: An Action Research Approach To Developing A Customer Engagement Strategy

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Purpose: The purpose of this thesis was to provide an online customer engagement (OCE) strategy for a start-up content marketing company based in Barbados called ABC Investments (a pseudonym). A framework which assisted in determining a process for identifying the antecedents and consequences of online customer engagement and the strategy to engage online customers was proposed and tested.

Rationale: The ability for a start-up content marketing company to create a strategy and monetize its content depends on the company gaining a good understanding of the antecedents and how they influence critical online customer engagement metrics. This thesis aims at contributing to the field of online customer engagement in the context of content marketing by researching the antecedents and outcomes of OCE in a real-world environment.

Methodology: The research follows a Mixed Methods Action Research (MMAR) approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data was collected from a start-up content marketing company via Google Analytics, Facebook, and Instagram to identify the "what" of the antecedents. The influence of eleven (11) antecedents was tested against six (6) metrics including page views, bounce rate, pages per session, average session duration, average time on page and social engagement rate. The qualitative data was collected from interviews with an in-house employee and used as scaffolding to determine the "why" and "how" of the results from the quantitative data collection stage. The Action Research process was used to test the hypothesis after each quantitative and qualitative iteration.

Findings and Implications: Originally eleven (11) antecedents were proposed, however on completion of the research twelve (12) antecedents were determined to have an impact on the six (6) online customer engagement metrics. There were two new antecedents which came to the forefront after qualitative analysis; “human personality” as an extension of vividness, and “discovery percentage” which replaced “hashtags”. The results also showed that online customer engagement antecedents could be grouped into two main categories: content-based antecedents, and platform-based antecedents. Additionally, the determination of which antecedents impacted on which consequences for practical application is much more complex than posited in previous literature; with results showing that an antecedent may impact on one online engagement metric positively but not on others. Firstly, the findings point to a need for an iterative process when determining the drivers of customer engagement. Secondly, the findings indicate the necessity for developers of content to first understand how the components of their content impact on customer engagement and utilize this understanding to create their online customer engagement strategies.

Originality and value of the research: Little research exists on online customer engagement within the context of content marketing, which provides a framework for the understanding of the antecedents that drive customer engagement metrics in a real-world environment. In my research, I provided a list of twelve (12) content and platform engagement antecedents and tested their impact on customer engagement to address this gap in the literature. New content marketing companies and content marketing managers can use the findings to create customer engagement strategies, manage engagement levels, and enhance online engagement.

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Key Words: Online Customer Engagement, Customer Engagement, Content Marketing, Viral Marketing, Start-ups, Content Strategy, Facebook, Instagram, Google Analytics

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Terms

ABC	Pseudonym for Company Being Studied In This Research
AR	Action Research
ASD	Average Session Duration
AToP	Average Time on Page
BR	Bounce Rate
BSBA	Barbados Small Business Association
CE	Customer Engagement
CM	Content Marketing
COE	Customer Online Engagement
LOL	Laugh Out Loud
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Size Enterprises
NA	Native Advertising
OCE	Online Customer Engagement
PPS	Page Per Session
PV	Page Views
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SER	Social Engagement Rate

SM	Social Media
UoL	University of Liverpool
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VM	Virial Marketing

1.0 Purpose and the Rationale of the Study

1.1. Introduction

Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Żyminkowska et al. (2017) theorized that embedded in an organization's competitive advantage is the ability for the organization to be able to identify, retain, sustain and continue to nurture their relationships with customers, or in other words - to engage customers. Calder and Malthouse (2008) in their research saw customer engagement (CE) within the context of online customer engagement (OCE) and postulated that engagement online does not merely refer to the viewing of content by users but encompasses more in-depth engagement with content such as commenting and reacting - including liking and sharing. The authors also theorized that when online engagement is successful, it can translate to increased sales, revenue or profits for the organization, as well as product innovation (Sawhney et al., 2005).

Harmeling et al. (2017) posited that within the past decade there has been an explosion in interest among both academics and practitioners of marketing regarding engaging customers; with Google search hits for customer engagement moving from 0 hits in 2007 to more than 700 million hits as of January 2, 2019. In addition, Chua and Banerjee (2013) and Abdul-Ghani et al. (2011) hypothesized that although customer engagement was not a new marketing concept for organizations, because of the advent of the internet and social media, even organizations that have a traditional brick-and-mortar presence have endeavoured to reshape how they engage customers through online engagement. Moreover, Perrin (2015) and Chaffey (2016) in their research indicated that there has been ongoing, global growth in internet and social media usage. With Chaffey (2016) showing in his study that as of January 2016 there were approximately 3.419 billion global internet users from a total global population of 7.395 billion people, which represents a penetration of 46 %, and a growth of more than 10% active users since January 2015. On the other hand, Perrin (2015), in his research indicated that 65% of American adults utilized networking sites or platforms, representing a 7% increase in usage since 2005. Moreover, Internet World Stats (2018) showed that as of March 2017, 80% (228, 717 people) of the Barbadian population utilized the internet while 56% of the population subscribed to Facebook, one of the more popular social networking sites. Constantinides et al. (2008) also theorized that because of the increase in online usage by customers, the internet has therefore become the new frontier for customer engagement.

Gorry and Westbrook (2011) and Pulizzi (2012) in their research postulated that organizations realized that in order to engage customers online they must utilize softer methods of marketing or non-direct sales pitches in the form of storytelling or content marketing. Baltes (2015) and Pulizzi (2012) hypothesized, that like customer engagement, the concept of content creation and marketing, is not necessarily new and has been employed from at least 1891 when August Oetker sold packages of baking powder with recipes on the back, as well as in 1895 when John Deere utilized the concept of content marketing via their magazine, "The Furrow", whose focus was not to sell equipment but rather to provide business advice and educate farmers on new farming technology. Baltes (2015) indicated that there is no universal definition of content marketing, however the author defined content marketing as "…the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience- with the objective of driving profitable customer action". Thereby implying the need for content marketing to include both a marketing and business process that seeks to understand and engage customers. Pulizzi (2012), Rumbo (2002), Baltes (2015), and Nosrati et al. (2013) further theorized that although the concept of online content marketing and offline content marketing are fundamentally similar, there are important differences which inevitably dictate the strategies to be used to maintain engagement and achieve the company's objectives. The primary differences between offline and online content marketing are:

1. Users are no longer held captive with online content as they were with offline content. They can choose whether to click on the content, stop a message or continue with a

message. Therefore, a message must be sufficiently compelling to hold customers' attention.

2. The internet is a vast arena and therefore an organization's message can easily miss its audience if not distributed correctly, contain the right keywords or has uninteresting content.

3. Customers are no longer passive recipients of information and will often add to an organization's message by creating memes, posting messages or by sharing.

4. Unlike television or print media, online distribution platforms often have multiple purposes. It is therefore vital that the content created is in sync with the distribution channel used. For example, Instagram is a very visually based platform with its creations giving rise to the phrase "instagrammable", which usually refers to vibrantly coloured, attractive and visually appealing content.

Ashley and Tuten (2015) postulated that although the internet, social media and the concept of content marketing (CM) is a mainstay in the academic and marketing practitioner's arena, little is known about how to develop a customer engagement strategy within the context of content marketing. Additionally, where research guidance was provided, the authors hypothesized that it was primarily prescriptive, not taking into consideration the many facets, motivations, and drivers of customer engagement and therefore not suitable for an organizational strategy. Matteo and Dal Zotto (2015) and Kumar et al. (2016) posited that even when the academic literature focused on content marketing, the research tended to concentrate primarily on user-generated content, and not firm-generated or free-content such as Buzzfeed or MSN.com.

My Action Research project will therefore, seek to address these academic gaps while developing a content engagement strategy for a content marketing company called ABC Investments (a pseudonym). In the subsequent sections within this chapter, I will provide an introduction and details of this Action Research project including an overview of the problem, a summary of ABC

Investments, my research role within the project, as well as the research objectives and questions.

1.2. Problem Overview and Summary of ABC

1.2.1 Problem Overview

Cheung et al. (2011) and Hollebeek et al. (2014) hypothesized that there has been a change in the way customers exchange and communicate information within the last several years as a result of the increase in online media platforms and channels. Both authors theorized that an online marketing strategy to manage customer engagement through these social media platforms is therefore important for organizations. A report on the top 500 sites on the web, showed that 35% or 7 of the top 20 websites visited globally were social media or content marketing platforms (Alexa.com, 2019a). Alexa.com (2019b) also showed that 50% of the top 20 websites (10/20), visited by Barbadians, were social media (SM) or content marketing platform sites. Although the usage of social networking and firm created content marketing sites by Barbadians was on par with global usage there are currently no Barbadian or Caribbean-based social networking platforms or firm-generated content marketing sites. Additionally, although usage from Barbados was on par with global usage, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram do not allow the ability for Barbadian companies to monetize their content, hereby creating a gap for a Barbados or Caribbean focused social networking platforms or websites.

Because of this gap in the market, in 2016, I started a content marketing company called ABC Investments. The original concept model for the business consisted of a free web application called ABC (a pseudonym), with the main product of the company being a free firm-generated content focusing on Barbadian culture, people, music, events, places of interests, cuisine and social news. The intended revenue model of ABC was similar to United States based companies such as Buzzfeed, Facebook, MSN.com and YouTube, where revenue is generated through clients advertising on the respective platform or requesting content be created (Andrews, 2012; Manic, 2015; Perell 2016; and Soha and McDowell, 2016). Wojdynski (2016) postulated that because the revenue model for content marketing companies hinges on client advertisements, the company must ensure that they create captivating content with which targeted visitors, viewers, readers or listeners would want to engage. Additionally, as mentioned by Lindholm et al. (2015) and Rumbo (2002), because customers online are bombarded by content it is necessary for content creators to ensure their content has the specific elements that would engage customers, and by respect ensure viewership or high engagement levels which would in turn compel clients to advertise with that content creator.

Pereira et al. (2014) and Sabate et al. (2014) also posited that to maximize engagement, a content marketing company needs to develop a set strategy to ensure repeatability of content engagement per post and to maintain a competitive advantage. Translating this to ABC, it would mean that for the company to be successful it would have to create engaging content. Moreover, that the content would have to provide ABC with a competitive advantage to ensure it can retain online customers to monetize the engagement and successfully generate revenue. Therefore, within the first phase of my project, I wanted to ensure that ABC had an effective engagement strategy. Bijmolt et al. (2010), Godes et al. (2005), and Hollebeek (2013) posited that given the business interest which customer engagement has received, it has also gained traction within academia however, customer engagement is still an emerging research area. Because the studies in this area are still emerging, research from such authors as Huizingh (2000), Gummerus et al. (2012), Sashi (2012), and Kim and Ko (2012) have been limited, focusing their studies instead on more established companies such as Facebook, on research on one particular brand, industry, etc., or the frameworks used are merely theoretical in nature. Moreover, no platform is the same and often because of the fast paced, complex requirements of business environments, theoretical frameworks do not always work in practice. Even when a researcher proposes customer engagement models, there would more than likely be a need for the company to change the specific strategy. Primarily, because each company needs to carve out a niche to ensure a competitive advantage, the problem ABC faced as it embarked into these uncharted waters was therefore: 1) What are the content or platform antecedents and consequences required to engage ABC's online customers? 2) What strategy would be suitable to allow ABC to engagement with its customer online?

1.2.2 ABC Overview and Structure

Jenders et al. (2013), Suh et al. (2010), Ho and Dempsey (2010), Berger and Milkman (2012), Kujur and Singh (2017), Gerlitz and Helmond (2011), and Luarn et al. (2015) postulated that it is vital that content and social platforms have features (intrinsic or extrinsic) that would allow users to engage with it. Campbell and Marks (2015) hypothesized in their research that although firm-generated content or native advertising was becoming an essential form of advertising with leading online publications such as Mashable, Adweek and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) featuring articles, it was still not well understood.

Campbell and Marks (2015) and Moses (2014) posited that the importance of firm-generated or native advertising to practitioners can be seen in the fact that, over the years, well established United States news and media agencies, such as The Huffington Post, The New York Times and Forbes, have started launching dedicated in-house or content marketing departments. Moreover, Pulizzi and Barrett (2009) theorized that content marketing or firm-generated marketing has come at an integral point in advertising where marketers are looking for new tools to enable them to engage with customers who are already bombarded with advertisements. Sebastian (2014) mentioned that marketers predicted that they would spend approximately $8 billion in native advertising by 2018. Additionally, Mullin (2018) posited that in 2018 more than three-fourths of all advertisements displayed on mobile phones were native or firm-generated content and that total digital advertisement spending within the United States in 2019 will account for 61% of overall marketing spend. All these authors primarily point to the sustainable trend that online content marketing, although not well understood, is the new frontier of marketing and advertising. Pulizzi and Barrett (2009) postulated as well that the formula to the successful production of firm-generated content with the goal of engaging customers online is that:

1. The content must have a purpose, focus or theme.
2. Understanding and targeting content is essential.
3. An actual strategy for the marketing of the content is integral.

As far as my research showed, there are currently no Barbadian-based companies that create firm-generated or native advertising as part of their core business. Additionally, there is only one individual or entrepreneur by the name of Seth Xcel who creates firm-generated content on an ad-hoc basis and without having a platform. Moreover, only two online news outlets (Barbadostoday.bb and The Nation Newspaper) have platforms which provide online advertisement options. However, neither of these news outlets create native advertising, therefore creating a possible gap in the market for ABC to exploit as the sole content marketing company in Barbados, with content being provided through a web application ABC.com. Below is a table (see Table 1) that shows where ABC' initial concept fell within the top 20 players of the global and local content market in terms of a customer engagement strategy.

Web/Social Application	Sign-in Required / Focal	Offline User Location/Engagement	Content Created By Company	Ability To Like Share, Comment
Facebook	Yes	No	No	Yes
Foursquare	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Pinterest	Yes	No	No	Yes
Twitter	Yes	No	No	Yes
Snapchat	Yes	No	No	Yes
Instagram	Yes	No	No	Yes
Tumblr	Yes	No	No	Yes
Google +	Yes	No	No	Yes
Viber	Yes	No	No	Yes
Reddit	Yes	No	No	Yes
Vine	No	No	No	Yes
BuzzFeed	No	No	Yes	Yes
MSN	No	No	Yes	Yes
Yahoo	No	No	Yes	Yes
YouTube	No	No	No	Yes
Funny or Die	No	No	Yes	Yes
Wayn	Yes	No	No	Yes
ABC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Comparison of ABC with other popular web applications

The overall structure of ABC Investments is with me, as the Principal Director and investor of the company. Additionally, ABC has one full-time employee, its Content Director responsible for the development of in-house content. The Content Director position was not always a paid in-house position; however, in mid-2018 the status was changed primarily to allow more control over the delivery of the content which is critical to the business.

Additionally, ABC utilizes a company called Upwork- a global freelancing platform through which freelancers are hired to perform required legal and professional services including video production, graphic design and software development and programming. The utilization of freelancers or contractors is a business model which I have used before and enables small business such as ABC to keep operational costs at a minimum while still having access to all the required skill sets. Upwork also helps in controlling the payment risk by facilitating the hiring of freelancers on a fixed cost versus an hourly price basis, where the budget of the project is placed in escrow and only released to the freelancer on approval of the work by the client. Therefore, there is no outlay of money until critical project milestones have been met. If the same talent was garnered locally, it would involve the outlay of a down payment prior to commencement of the task; thereby, increasing the project risk. A "Software Expert" (un-paid position) also forms part of the team and is utilized where software advice maybe required. All full-time employees, freelancers and external experts report directly to me. See below Figure 1 of the organizational structure for ABC.com.

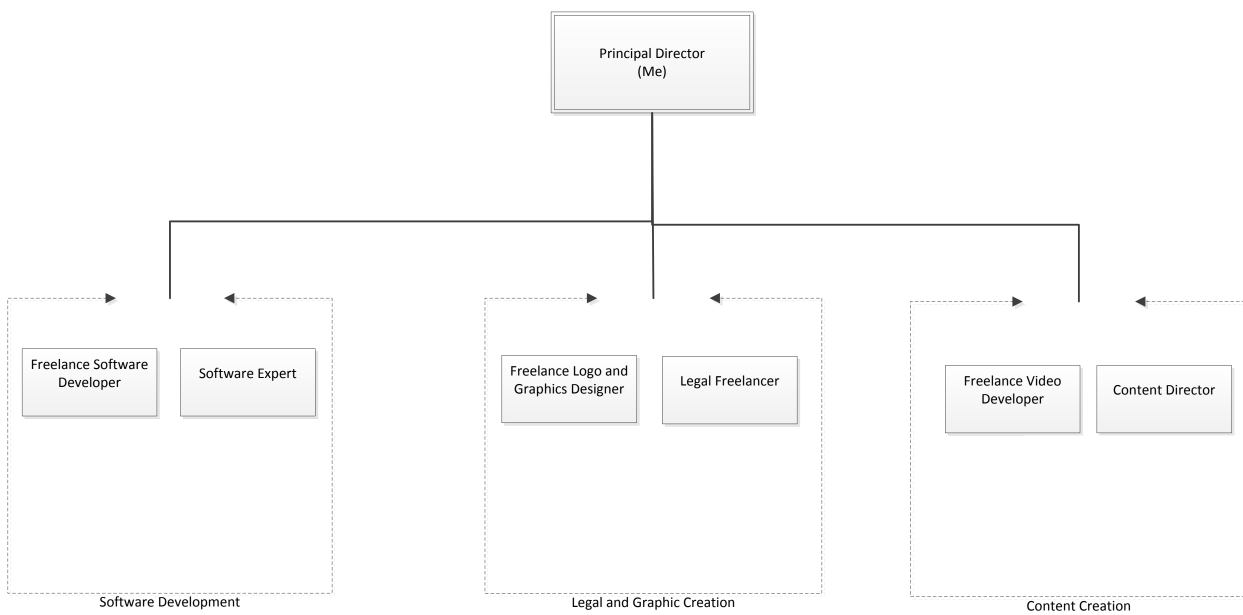

Figure 1: Organizational Chart for ABC

1.3. Research Role

Currently I am employed full time with a Barbadian-based conglomerate, called XYZ (a pseudonym), which has more than 60 companies in 25 countries. My academic background is grounded in several areas including marketing, analytics and management information. I have a Master's Degree in Management Science and Marketing Analytics, as well as a Bachelor's degree in Management with a focus on marketing and management information systems. Additionally, I have worked as a Management Consultant and have more than 15 years' experience assisting small to large organizations, Fortune 500 companies, and governmental institutions in the Caribbean, US, and UK with the development of business models, new business development, customer engagement strategies, and organizational re-engineering.

ABC Investments and the web application (ABC.com) is self-funded with me utilizing a percentage of my salary for the start-up capital and on-going operational cost. As indicated by Pedler (2011), McNiff and Whitehead (2016), and Coghlan and Brannick (2014) Action Learning and Research is a research methodology where the scholar is an insider seeking to solve organizational issues, they are a part of, using academic rigor. As the Principal Director I have a unique insider, scholar/practitioner perspective to which most academics or practitioners would not be privy since most scholars/practitioners would not be the sole investor and primary decision maker. This research anomaly has its benefits in that it significantly reduces the approval barriers that I would typically have to go through if I were simply an employee of ABC. Because the approval barriers are non-existent, the issue becomes "who is watching the watchers?" (MacColl et al., 2005 and Eikeland, 2006). Additionally, the fact that my Action Research project is linked to ABC and vice versa means that I have a vested interest in the completion of my doctorate and research. Moreover, it also means that I have a vested interest in the study being successful, unlike some of the prominent researchers in customer and online engagement such as Calder et al. (2009), Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), and Van Doorn et al. (2010) who were simply the researchers. It therefore implies, that for my research to be considered to have the required academic rigor, I will have to proportionately increase my ethical checks and balances concerning the decreased power and decision-making barriers within my project. For example:

- I must ensure that the consultant (s) do not feel pressured to answer questions because they believe it would affect our professional or personal relationships.

- That summaries of discussions with ABC consultant (s) are summarized accurately, and inaccurate inferences not drawn from what they would have said.

- Although as the Principal Director I may have access to all the user information including names and account information, it is necessary for me to ensure that customer information stays anonymous within the context of my research project.

However, I believe that this dual role is manageable given the strict ethical rules of the University of Liverpool Ethical Board which subsequently required that strict ethical standards be built into this research project.

1.4. Research Objectives

With any new start-up company, it is always necessary to develop a strategy for the business that would enable the organization to ensure it has a competitive advantage. The main objectives of my research are to:

- Determine the antecedents that impact on customer online engagement metrics and the degree of the impact.
- Determine the outcomes or consequences for the proposed customer engagement antecedents.
- Develop a practical online customer engagement strategy for ABC.
- Develop a framework or process for the ongoing modification of the strategy.

1.5. Thesis Structure and Content

In the previous sections, I would have introduced my Action Research project and provided details on the reason for the research, objectives, and research questions of my studies. In the additional four (4) chapters I will seek to provide details of my research.

Chapter Two (2) of my thesis is focused on providing a review of the literature. The literature review section consists of five (5) subsections. With subsection one (1) being the introduction and subsection two (2) relating to the literature on **Online Customer Engagement (OCE)** including its definition, antecedents and consequences, and metrics. In subsection three (3) I have reviewed the literature on **Content Marketing** including the definition, strategies, start-ups, micro and small enterprises strategies, and the ethical issues online companies have to consider. Subsection four (4) provides details of the conceptual model and research questions developed from review of the literature. While in subsection five (5) a summary of the chapter is provided.

Chapter Three (3) is focused on the **Research Methodologies and Design** for my thesis and consists of eight (8) sub-sections including sub-section one (1), the introduction. In sub-section two (2) I have concentrated on defining the foundational theories behind the AR project and look at **Philosophical Scaffolding.** In sub-section three (3) and four (4), I have focused on the Methodology Framework and the Application of the **Action Research Mixed Methods Approach**. In sub-sections five (5) and six (6), I have outlined the **Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis and Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis** processes respectively. While sub-sections seven (7), seven (8) provide details on the Ethical Considerations for research within the online arena and a Chapter Summary respectively**.**

Chapter Four (4) details the overall **Results and Findings** for each of the four (4) of the Action Research cycles. While in the final chapter, Chapter Five (5), the overall research **Conclusions** are provided along with details of my personal reflection, the extent of the research contribution to my professional development and opportunities, reflection on the contribution to the business and a reflection on the practical and academic contribution.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis and discussion of the academic themes and literature that provided the scaffolding for the research process. The purpose of the literature review was to provide the academic framework for the research methodology and improve the interpretation of the data. The literature therefore proved to be a central function to providing a deeper understanding and framing of the problem, generating potential solutions, and building the scholar and managerial-based knowledge.

As a result of my initial assessment of the problem, the literature review was first aimed at generating a deeper and better understanding of the areas that encompassed online customer engagement and content marketing. Given the project main objective was to develop an online customer engagement strategy for a content marketing company, I initially conducted a broad research on online customer engagement (OCE), how changes within content and platform are thought to influence the OCE behaviours in the form of antecedents and consequences, as well as examples of previous online customer engagement strategies depicted within the literature. I also felt it was critical to review previous research on content marketing and content marketing strategies. Moreover, given that this research would be conducted using a live website I felt it was important to also consider the ethical implications of conducting research using online data. Because ABC is a new and micro business, I also explored the strategies employed by comparable businesses of a similar size. Additionally, I explored both the management challenges faced by these business owners and suggestions for managing the respective challenges.

Online customer engagement is a relatively new phenomenon, and as such, I found that there was a paucity of literature on online customer engagement especially within the context of content marketing (Cheung et al, 2011). Consequently, I did not limit the literature review to only online studies or articles that viewed customer engagement solely within in the context of content marketing since this would have limited my understanding of the OCE, content marketing and the provision of a possible solution for ABC.

2.2 Online Customer Engagement

Several synonyms were used within the literature for online customer engagement (OCE) including online engagement, online user engagement, e-loyalty, and social media engagement. Additionally, most of the available literature on the online engagement did not specifically focus on online engagement but tended to merge their research on online engagement with more traditional academic areas such as branding, brand management and online learning. However, within the literature most authors defined online engagement and discussed the antecedents and consequences. As such 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 focused on the definition of OCE within the literature and the provision of the drivers and outcomes of OCE. Since the literature on OCE in the context of content marketing was scarce, in section 2.2.3 I discussed and reflected on the current literature as it relates to OCE and content marketing metrics and possible strategies to bridge the gap between OCE and content marketing.

2.2.1. Online Customer Engagement Definition and Elements

Thakur (2016) defined customer engagement as a physiological state that happens when a user interacts with the main object or media and in some way becomes absorbed in that respective media. Customer engagement is said to go beyond a customer's interaction with media but speaks to the need for the customer to relate to others about the media (Thakur, 2016).

In contrast Cheung et al. (2015), and Kujur and Singh (2017) defined customer engagement less as a manifestation of a customer's physiological state and more as the non-transactional behaviour which a user/ customer may have with a company, firm or a brand, which inevitably can be translated into measurable indicators of engagement such as number of shares, number of comments and the time the customer spent on the page. By defining engagement based on the actions of the customer Kujur and Singh (2017) and Cheung et al. (2015) inevitably elevates the customer's interaction with the determination of engagement and with propagating future engagement, as postulated by authors such as Manchanda et al. (2015), Wirtz et al. (2013) and Gummerus et al. (2012).

On reflection of the literature I realized that although the authors in this section had contrasting elements that formed their definitions, they also had common themes in defining online customer engagement. For example, the authors agreed that for online engagement to have occurred a user/ customer must do more than just click on or view content, in fact, they must exhibit characteristics of engagement such as being absorbed in the content or telling others about the content. Additionally, although there was no consensus on a definition of online customer engagement the authors made me reflect on the fact that beyond defining online engagement there was a need to determine possible drivers/ antecedents and the consequences or outcomes of online engagement. In section 2.2.2 I therefore reviewed and discussed the literature on antecedents and consequences in the context of online engagement.

2.2.2. Online Engagement- Antecedents and Consequences

Sun et al. (2006) proposed a communication channel model that focused primarily on the antecedents of engagement. The communication channel-focused antecedents proposed by Sun et al. (2006) were innovativeness, internet usage, and internet social connection (online communities). With the authors theorizing that if the communication channel can be determined, the antecedents can be harnessed, and therefore the organization had the potential to influence the consequences of the interaction and the online engagement greatly.

By contrast Fortin and Dholakia (2005), Srinivasan et al. (2002), and De Vries et al. (2012) focused their research on content and platform derived antecedents which would impact on online customer engagement. Fortin and Dholakia (2005), Srinivasan et al. (2002), and De Vries et al. (2012) jointly proposed interactivity, interactive continuum (different levels/methods of interacting) vividness, social presence (two- way communication), involvement (customer is viewed as part of the content through quizzes, polls etc), community (social spaces) and choice/different content options as more plausible antecedents of OCE.

On the other hand, Rauschnabel et al. (2012) postulated that it was the content design features that drove the level of online engagement. Design features such as day of the week, message length, product category, post size, media elements and invitation response. Rauschnabel et al. (2012) research showed that posting size, the number of media elements and invitation responses increased engagement, while the amount of text decreased engagement. Van Doorn et al. (2010) provided in their research a valid juxtaposition theory to the other authors by identifying context-based antecedents such as competitive factors, political, economic, social and technological factors. Although the work by Rauschnabel et al. (2012), Fortin and Dholakia (2005), Srinivasan et al. (2002), De Vries et al. (2012), Sun et al. (2006), and Van Doorn et al. (2010) provided much needed insight into the drivers of online customer engagement, on reflection I noticed that the authors fell short of providing a strategy for engaging, increasing or ensuring customer engagement. Although understanding of the drivers of customer engagement is important, more importantly for a company is the development of an organizational strategy, especially if the company's focus is to build a relationship with their customers beyond the primary transactional interaction (Venkatesan, 2017).

In relation to consequences Sun et al. (2006), and Pansari and Kumar (2017) postulated that when customers are engaged the company can expect the following engagement outcomes, namely; the referral of the content, firm, brand or platform to other customers (customer referrals), customers impacting the behaviour of another individual (customer influence), and customer knowledge, i.e. when customers are engaged they share their knowledge of the content, product or brand and identify ways of improvement.

In contrast to Sun et al (2006) and Pansari and Kumar (2017), Van Doorn et al. (2010) viewed the consequences of customer engagement in relation to the customer (i.e. cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, physical/time and identity), the firm (i.e. financial or revenue for the company, reputational, regulatory, competitive, employee and product), as well as a category that Van

Doorn et al. (2010) referred to as “other” which encompassed customer welfare, economic surplus, social surplus, regulation, and cross brand and cross- customer.

Sun et al (2006), Pansari and Kumar (2017) and Van Doorn et al. (2010) provided valid outcomes of the results of engaged customers and facilitated a better understanding of the consequences of online customer engagement. However, the authors stopped short of providing concreate, real-world value-based metrics for determining when the objectives were met, the extent to which the objectives were met and more importantly, when it was necessary to keep improving to meet the engagement objectives (Berman, 2012 and Cheong et al., 2010). In section 2.2.3, I will therefore review the literature on customer online engagement and content marketing metrics.

2.2.3. Online Engagement and Content Marketing Metrics

Peters et al. (2013) define a metric as a system of measurement that either describes or quantifies a characteristic, trend, evolution, dynamic or process. The authors noted that in business, as well as in research, metrics are employed to define the objectives, goals, measure the degree to which objectives have been met, completed or deviated from goals. But managerial manager objectives often differ, across businesses and industries and by respect metrics often differ. Therefore, the question still remained on what metrics were appropriate within the context of online engagement and content marketing. Farris et al. (2006) posited that there were different types of metrics, for example, amounts (e.g. visits, users, sales, etc.), percentages (e.g. percentage of males versus females), counts (e.g. the number of competitors), indices and ratings. Farris et al. (2006), also believed, as did Ailawadi et al. (2003), that there were several goals that any ideal metric should meet if it is to be used. Primarily metrics should be grounded in theory, encompass all essential facets that need to be measured, able to flag any downturns or improvements and provide diagnostic insight into what needs to be changed. Metrics should be able to capture the future potential of the variable being measured, be credible, intuitive and easy to understand by anyone, stable over time, reliable and robust.

Moro et al. (2016), in contrast to the work by Ailawadi et al. (2003), provided overall metrics for measuring the performance of content or posts as well as the impact of the page within the context of a content marketing platform (e.g. Facebook) thereby bringing a more practical, managerial applicability to their research. Moro et al. (2016) categorized the metrics for post measurement into two main categories: Category one is visualization, which represents "impressions" (i.e. a post loaded onto a user's page or browser whether organically, through another user or via an advertisement) is measured using a metric called engagement ratio (i.e. engagement ratio = users who interacted/ users who viewed). While category two is interactions, which represents “engagement” (i.e. any types of clicks on the content or the post including likes or reactions, shares, comments, replies to comments, views of the video or images and other interactions such as clicks on commenters’ names, tagging someone in a post or likes on comments or replies). Moro et al. (2016) also believed that "interactions" constitute a stronger measurement of user engagement and interest more so than visualization/ impressions since the loading of content on a browser does not mean that the audience or user can see it. On reflection of my own interaction with social media and content platforms I had to agree with Moro et al. (2016) that there was a differentiation of importance between interactions versus impressions, and as such I thought it necessary to determine the metric requirements for ABC to differentiate mere impressions versus interactions or engagement.

Additionally, unlike the research by Ailawadi et al. (2003), Moro et al. (2016), Baltes (2015), and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013)’s research focused on the reasoning behind the measurement of customer engagement. Content marketers are not only seeking to engage customers as a one-off event but to analyse or measure the digital marketing efforts for future strategies (Baltes, 2015). As such it would mean that in developing metrics for ABC it would be necessary to consider the ability of the metrics to allow analysis of engagement. Baltes (2015) and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) suggested specific metrics to be monitored by the marketing practitioner that went beyond the monitoring of cursory metrics such as “likes” and “shares”, namely: website visits, page views, bounce rate, time spent on the website and sharing metrics including likes, retweets and forwards.

What I believe the work by Baltes (2015) and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) brought to the discussion on online engagement metrics, especially in the context of content marketing, was that there was some specification to the metrics, but also that the metrics seemed to have more of a practical application. Neither Baltes (2015), nor Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) provided equations for the metrics but the list of metrics they provided was sufficient to provide, me as a manager, with a basic engagement metric focus.

Although the review of the literature by Farris et al. (2006), Ailawadi et al. (2003), Moro et al. (2016) Baltes (2015), and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) provided much needed insight and understanding into possible metrics to be used for customer engagement, I realized that among the aforementioned authors there was no mention on the impact which the strategy of the company would have on the metrics. Since, as with any business, the objective is not to simply measure customer engagement but to analyse the current strategy and the systematic method of achieving the objectives. I believe it was necessary to review the literature on online customer engagement strategies. See section 2.2.4.

2.2.4. Customer Online Engagement Strategies

Although online engagement is similar to offline engagement, there are some nuances with online engagement that require a specific strategy (Bittle et al. 2009). In their research, Bittle et al. (2009) indicated that by developing a strategy, the organization guarded against being swept up in short-term online trends and instead became innovators, driving the use of technology through their strategy. Consequently, Bittle et al. (2009) identify key elements to consider when developing an online engagement strategy. Firstly, consideration must be given to the audience, since different ABC segments may require different strategies and use different platforms e.g. younger audiences may use Instagram/ Snapchat while older audiences may use Facebook. Secondly, the objectives of the content or platform must be considered. For example, on the initial launch the goal may be to introduce ABC, while later it may be to engage more users. Thirdly, it is necessary to consider the metrics to be used and the question of whether the metrics will be the same for all platforms (Facebook, Instagram or YouTube). Fourthly, there is a requirement to consider the process to ensure that the steps for engagement are defined and linked to the respective audience segments and objectives. Additionally, within the strategy there should be a determination of the channel strategy (e.g. Facebook or Instagram), and technology (videos forums). Lastly, Bittle et al. (2009) indicated that experimentation would be required in any strategy due to the ever-changing nature of the internet. The previous days' philosophy of "let's build it, and they will come" no longer applies and therefore suggested that in any strategy it is necessary to understand that experimentation is required. The need for experimentation was a critical takeaway for this research since it meant that in developing the project plan for this research, time would have to be allotted for the team to experiment.

Mpinganjira (2016), unlike Bittle et al. (2009), viewed online strategies from an organizational perspective and hypothesized that the focus or goal of an engagement strategy is to help establish an intimate bond between the organization and the customer. In Mpinganjira (2016), the researcher, used service-dominant logic (SDL) as the basis for examining and determining the variables for a feasible online engagement model or strategy. Mpinganjira (2016) posited that customer online engagement geared towards a platform strategy must include the following:

- Human interactivity which related to whether ABC's users receive responses or feedback to their posts quickly.
- System interactivity synchronicity, which relates to whether the ABC platform is responsive.
- System interactivity control which speaks to whether the users can easily filter content or navigate through ABC.

Mpinganjira (2016) further postulated that if the web application, web site or platform can induce psychological responses in the consumer or user it will correlate in the users spending a considerable time interacting with the post, regularly interacting with and sharing ABC's content,

Tafesse (2015), in contrast to Mpinganjira (2016) and Bittle et al. (2009), viewed the engagement strategy from the point of view of the characteristics of the post required to engage users. For example, Tafesse (2015), indicated that the post should have the following characteristics:

vividness, interactivity, novelty, consistency (e.g. ABC would have to have a homogenous message across all platforms), and content-type (e.g. should the ABC content be informational, transactional or entertaining).

The authors in this section provided valid points in relation to the characteristics (Tafesse , 2015), key elements (Bittle et al. 2009, and Mpinganjira , 2016) which would relate to a general roadmap. However, on reflection I realized that the authors seemed not to take into consideration the impact that size and resource may have on a strategy. For example, start-ups or micro enterprises (such as ABC) are usually developed by one or two mavericks, wading in uncharted waters, where there are no road maps let alone a strategy for them to follow. The strategies employed maybe the same as with bigger companies however, the resources are different, and the timeframe for success to be realized is different. Moreover, Seth (2006) indicated that 75% of start-ups often fail. On reflection I therefore thought it necessary to look at the online engagement in the context of micro, small and medium size businesses and included a review in section 2.3.

2.3. Content and Content Marketing

With the advent of the internet came the ability for customers to simply determine what they want to see and what they want to engage with. As such, content has become “king” (Bailey, 2010). Intrinsically, content marketing also has an elevated status as an emerging marketing tool (Müller and Christandl, 2019). Content and the marketing of content can take many forms, and to ensure ABC’s success as a content marketing firm it was necessary to not only understand customer engagement but to understand the content marketing environment. In the below paragraphs I will review the literature on content and content marketing including the definition of content and content marketing (2.3.1) and content and content marketing strategies (2.3.2). This section will also include a review of the literature on the strategies used by start-ups, micro and small enterprises to have a better understanding of the nuances for these types of enterprises versus larger enterprises (2.3.3). It will also examine some of the ethical considerations required for researchers within content marketing, customer engagement and when using online data (2.3.4).

2.3.1. Content Marketing Defined

Although content marketing is not new, with the emergence of the internet, more companies are starting to realize that content is worthless without content marketing and a content marketing strategy (Pulizzi, 2012). There is no universal definition of content marketing (Baltes, 2015), however Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) defined content marketing as a set of management steps where a firm first identifies, analyses and then seeks to satisfy customer demand to gain revenue from the distribution of digital content via an electronic channel. In Kee and Yazdanifard (2015)'s definition there is a close relationship between marketing research and customer behaviour and like most marketing activities, the customer's needs are the focal point within content marketing. This implies that companies define content marketing themselves through the methods in which they create and distribute their content (Pulizzi, 2012).

Rowley (2008) provided a similar definition to Kee and Yazdanifard (2015), however unlike Kee and Yazdanifard (2015), Rowley (2008) viewed customer engagement as the final activity in the content marketing process and not revenue. Rowley (2008) defined online content marketing as the management process which is responsible for the identification, anticipation, and ultimately satisfying the requirements of the customer, suggesting, therefore that content marketing could occur sans the generation of revenue. In defining content marketing Rowley (2008) also highlighted a key relationship which was not proposed by Kee and Yazdanifard (2015). Rowley (2008) postulated that in online content marketing there is a relationship between the customer information collected and the digital marketing process since the collecting of the information and the analysing of this information can significantly enhance the content marketing process. As a manager the notion posited by Rowley (2008) is an important one since it highlights the importance of collecting and analysing the data from ABC to improve the content marketing process and the content marketing results.

In contrast to Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) and Rowley (2008), Ahmad et al. (2016) provided a more customer centric content marketing definition - defining content marketing as the process of actively sharing online customer space and gaining customer interest. By utilizing Ahmad et al. (2016)'s definition the content marketer or content marketing company identifies their target audience, what the customers see as valuable, where they frequent and then consistently distributes that content to the customer.

Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) and Rowley (2008), Ahmad et al. (2016) provided some key points in relation to content marketing however the authors seemed to define content marketing myopically not fully considering the importance of a strategy in defining content marketing. Therefore, in section 2.3.2 the ongoing debates on content marketing strategies will be discussed.

2.3.2. Content and Content Marketing Strategies

The main challenges which advertisers encounter are the scarcity of resources, both in their time and in their marketing budget, which essentially places pressure on the marketing practitioner to efficiently allocate marketing efforts (Gavilanes et al., 2018). Gavilanes et al. (2018) provided a few online content marketing strategies which they theorized impacted customer engagement levels differently including, promotions and Infotainment.

Unlike Gavilanes et al. (2018) that viewed content marketing strategy in terms of advertising methods, Elsayed (2017) looked at the strategies for content marketing more holistically, in terms of the components that made up a good strategy. Elsayed (2017) in their research focused on a strategic method that encompassed all the strategic development stages from planning, creation, and governance. Elsayed (2017) also proposed that organizations employ content creation and that marketing strategies include identification of the staff qualifications and responsibilities, determination of goals and objectives, identification of the type of content to use, who will approve the content and what metrics should be used. With Elsayed (2017) suggesting that the strategy should be reviewed every six (6) months.

On the other hand, Pophal (2015) did not view the discussion on content marketing in terms of one single theme as did Gavilanes et al. (2018) and (Elsayed, 2017) but instead viewed the area of content marketing strategy more as a complex ecosystem needing several sub-strategies to ensure that an organization's product, service or brand results are achieved. Pophal (2015) suggested valid content marketing strategy which included: a segmentation strategy based on the customer demographics and engagement levels; a content creation strategy based on the science of user experience; a distribution channel/ platform strategy that ensures the deployment of content across several appropriate platforms based on the engagement level and required outcome; and an optimization strategy based on ongoing measurement of goal requirements versus actual goal attainment.

Even with the significant research made by Pophal (2015), Gavilanes et al. (2018), and Elsayed (2017) regarding the creation of a content marketing strategy, the authors seemed not to have considered the extent to which the internal variables such as size and resources of the organization have on the content marketing strategy. The internet is increasingly being used as a platform for start-ups, micro and small businesses to engage in their own content marketing and start their own content marketing companies, however, the gusto and ease in which individuals can start their own company, can also lead to their ultimate failure because they are ill prepared during the planning or implementation stages for the challenges they might face (Naldi and Picard, 2012). To this end, a review of the literature on start-ups and micro small business in and outside of content marketing will be discussed in section 2.3.3 to provide an understanding of the strategies employed by thesis types of enterprises and the challenges they face.

2.3.3. Start-ups, Micro and Small Enterprises Strategies

Tse and Soufani (2003) posited that whereas traditional economies and markets favour size, the new internet and online economies tend to favour engagement, therefore the internet can be a conduit for small enterprises to prosper. Tse and Soufani (2003) however indicated that for small enterprises to prosper they needed to avoid being fixated on cost, leaders and pursuing technology for the mere pursuit of it. Tse and Soufani (2003) suggested, that entities such as ABC needed to look for features, technology and market niches that are fit for purpose. Secondly, ensuring that all drivers of customer engagement were considered, since one driver may enhance the effects of another antecedent. Therefore, specifically in section 2.2.2, but also in section 2.2.1 and 2.2.3 there was a need to review all the drivers of customer engagement and not simply select a few. Thirdly, Tse and Soufani (2003) recommended that start-ups, micro or small enterprises (such as ABC) needed to ensure that their strategy was tailored to the needs of the organization since online strategies for larger businesses (e.g. Facebook or Instagram) may not be applicable to smaller online businesses. Finally, Tse and Soufani (2003) further posited that start-ups, micro or small enterprises needed to consider that prominent firms can influence the effectiveness of small firm's strategies. As such although ABC may also need to utilize Facebook and Instagram to distributed content on these platforms, Facebook and Instagram are also competitors and a suitable strategy would need to be developed by ABC with this in mind (Morris et al., 2007).

In 2017 approximately 80% of small businesses utilized Facebook, approximately 51% utilized Twitter, 44% used LinkedIn and 36% used Instagram as part of their online marketing strategy (Pilon, 2017 and Chadha, 2017). As did Tse and Soufani (2003), Handayani and Lisdianingrum (2011) theorized that small businesses utilized social media/networking platforms because they provide free or inexpensive methods to market content, require limited writing or photography talent, provide access to customers, and return on investment can be assessed quickly. However, the authors in this section did not seem to take into consideration that although social media platforms can provide a gateway for start-up, micro and small enterprises (SMSE) to access customers, SMSE usually need to distinguish their brands by being more creative and more responsive and therefore require the respective strategy to allow for this (He et al. 2017).

Unlike Tse and Soufani (2003), and Handayani and Lisdianingrum (2011), Bode and Burn (2002) viewed the differences in strategy requirements from the fundamental characteristics of small and medium-sized businesses (SME). Bode and Burn (2002) posited that given their size and financial resources, SMEs are often unable to develop the required customer engagement strategies necessary in the age of the internet and are often caught up in simply surviving. This notion further solidifies the need for SMEs to either utilize their small stature as part of their strategy, and thereby focus on niche markets or appear bigger than they are through innovation (Chua et al. 2009). Although there were several important takeaways within this section, on reflection I felt that ethics also played a key role in the development of a practical strategy given that users often share sensitive data online without fully understanding the extent to which such data may be used for research (Light and McGrath, 2010 and Zimmer, 2010).

2.3.4. Ethical Considerations With Online and Content Marketing Research

Because people are engaging with social media platforms more in recent years, these spaces now hold vast quantities of naturally occurring user data on various topics, including individual political viewpoints, customer behaviour and attitude towards government policies (Townsend and Wallace ,2016). Although the quality and quantity of the data from social media sources is great, as a researcher data gathered from social media platforms bring new challenges which traditional ethical approaches and frameworks would not have to consider. Townsend and Wallace (2016), posited that it was necessary to consider the following areas:

- **Public and Private Data:** This is regarding the fact that in most instances users would have agreed to specific terms and conditions relating to the use of data by third parties. However, the authors argue that even with informed consent it was still necessary to ensure the utilization of the data was ethical. For example, April 10, 2018 the CEO and Founder of Facebook Inc., Mark Zuckerberg, came under harsh criticism and scrutiny in relation to the sharing of user data with several third parties and was subsequently asked to answer questions from the joint Senate Judiciary and Commerce Committee in Washington DC, USA (Dance et al., 2018 and Rys, 2018).

- **Informed Consent:** Although it was not expected that informed consent would be required in instances where the summary of data would be used (e.g. utilization of ABC's Google Analytics data) it was however expected that in instances where data is private or would be attributed to an individual, informed consent should be a requirement (e.g. direct comments relating to ABC content).

- **Risk of Harm and Anonymity:** This relates to potential identity breaches and the harm that could occur to participants especially in instances where the research was sensitive and related to their health, political views or sexual orientation. Anonymity might become difficult in online research where the name of the person is redacted in the research but the data unit in its original format can identify the participant. For example, a quote which may not have a name attached in a researcher's publication but may still be traceable to the original poster via a Google search. To ensure anonymity it would therefore mean having to use ABC's summary data instead of verbatim comments that would still be traceable.

In contrast, with the research done by Townsend and Wallace (2016), Moreno et al. (2013)'s research focused on the ethical issues, specifically as it related to observational research, interactive research, and interview or survey research within the context of social media platforms and theorized the ethical considerations vary with the online research method. Moreno et al. (2013) posited that while conducting observational studies utilizing social media data, the researcher, had to still consider whether human beings were involved, whether the user's data was password protected and marked as private or public and the legal ramifications of the utilization of user's data. For example, although, as of the writing of the research document Barbados is now in the process of enacting data privacy laws to govern the utilization of public data, in May 2018, "General Data Protection Regulation" (GDPR) came into force. The GDPR is a data protection and privacy law which governs the utilization of all European Union members no matter where the social media platform or company may be in the world. Therefore, although the GDPR is not a Barbadian law and Barbados currently does not have a data protection bill, I would still need to consider the GDPR for ABC and any subsequent research.

Unlike Townsend and Wallace (2016) and Moreno et al. (2013), Van Dijck (2009) research focused specifically on content marketers and the dual ethical responsibility they have. Van Dijck (2009) posited that one of the most significant ethical issues that content marketing companies or platforms face is balancing the juxtaposition of advertisers need to know about their target audience with the privacy needs of the users. Van Dijck (2009) rightfully indicated that the metadata captured by content and social media platforms was not merely a bi-product of a platform or content but a prime resource for profiling users and their interest. Essentially, a content marketer or platform needs data from users to be able to profile and monetize a platform but does so under some ethical constraints. Given that the data users provide, and the fact that organizations need this data, ABC would have to ensure user data is not inadvertently disclosed, users are not stalked online, user consent is provided for third party utilization of their data, backtracking surveillance-type functions are not in place and that the platform is secured against hackers (Debatin et al., 2009).

Finally, I wanted to review the study by Swirsky et al. (2014) who viewed ethics in terms of the issues of scientific merit, erroneous data, and ability for the research to be used in generalized terms when collecting and analysing data from online sources. Although the purpose of an Action Research based project is not for generalization purposes Swirsky et al. (2014) provided an interesting point for consideration within this research. Swirsky et al. (2014) posited that due to trolling- where a user may purposely post an inflammatory message- data collection and analysis of online comments can be inaccurate. Additionally, the fact that in general, online use is not distributed evenly across demographics, or geographies it may mean that research using online data for offline generalization may be problematic. For example, if online research indicated that young males between 18 and 24 years express a higher propensity to viewing ABC content on a specific platform, it may not be appropriate to determine that only 18 to 24 year olds are interested in ABC's content since the platform may cater to these age groups thereby eliminating other age groups from the inception.

There were a lot of key managerial takeaways within the literature reviewed, including the analysis of antecedents and consequences to determine the drivers of customer engagement, the need for ethical consideration in the development of a strategy for ABC, the utilization of more real-world metrics to assist with the analysis and iterative process of developing a new strategy, and the importance of ABC generating a strategy that takes into consideration that it is a start-up, micro and small enterprises' with limited resources, financial and available skill sets to engage customers. Section 2.4 will provide a discussion on these key elements and gaps discussed and provide a conceptual model and research questions to be used in this research.

2.4 Conceptual Model and Research Questions

The literature review provided valuable insights into the ABC's problem, however it was necessary to discuss and reflect on those insights to determine the research areas that are needed and a model for addressing the research. This section outlines the conceptual method used to develop objective-based, action-oriented improvements, within the business and generate long-term, objective-based, and sustainable change. This conceptual method was developed through a combination of practitioner/scholar and organizational focused discussions and reflections. Following the development of the conceptual model, specific research questions were developed in order to guide the subsequent action plan and methodology for the creation of an online customer engagement strategy for ABC. This section provides details into the full methodology that was utilized to generate the conceptual research model and research questions including the intervention model used to facilitate discourse.

2.4.1. Conceptual Intervention Model

The first step in the process of creating the conceptual model was the creation of the intervention plan to be used throughout this research. Action Research (AR) dictates the facilitation of an environment where discourse and mutual learning can take place (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). Therefore, even though I was the Principal Director for ABC and there was only one other employee, I wanted to ensure this research project had the framework for an AR intervention from the inception since it is collaborative/ co-generative research that personifies AR and provides the business with its transformative power (Kernstock and Brexendorf, 2012). Bearing in mind these points, my initial research goal was to develop an intervention plan and create regular discussion forums for the organization. As a guideline Greenwood and Levin's (2006, pp 93) Cogenerative Action Research Model was used to construct a conceptual interventional model as illustrated in Figure 2.

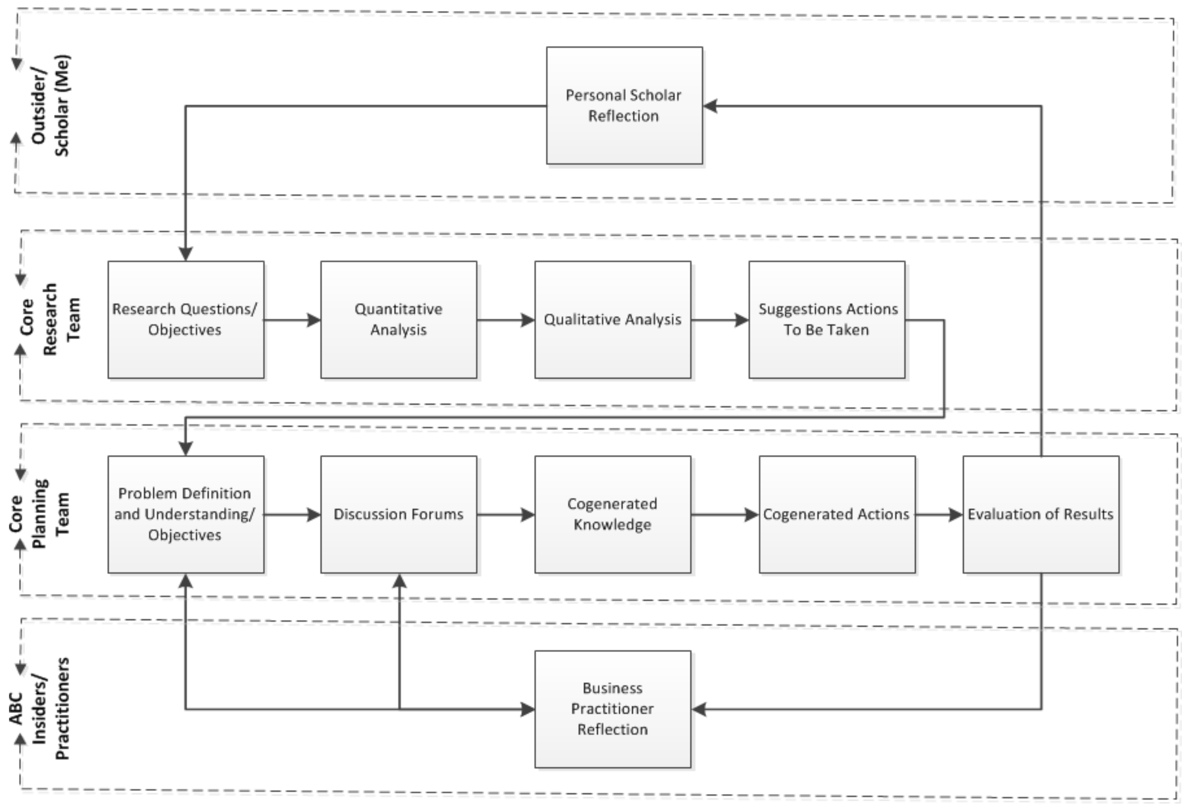

Figure 2: Conceptual Intervention Model Adapted from Greenwood and Levin (2006, pp 93)

The development of a conceptual intervention model was a valuable guide for the creation of the structure for the discussion sessions including meeting agendas and points of reflection. A core planning team (CPT) was initially set up consisting of myself and the only other ABC employee. The CPT subsequently utilized the intervention model to inform initial discussion sessions. In the initial CPT discussion, I emphasized the importance of having regular meetings and points for future discussion so that we could formulate a mutually agreed plan to address the project objectives. I also discussed the expectation that new knowledge and revised organizational practices would be generated from the overall team discussion efforts. There was resistance at first from the other CPT member who believed that a more collaborative process slowed the content and platform development down. Additionally, given that there were only two employees in ABC the other CPT member was concerned about their role within the research in relation to their role as part of the organization. There was therefore a discussion to have a core research team (CRT) that would have a different mandate and process to the CPT. There was consensus from the other CPT member on the utilization of the CPT and the CRT. However, this may have been agreed on by the other CPT member because it would mean they would have greater involvement in the overall planning and outcome of the research project. However, even though there may have been ulterior motives, the agreement allowed the creation of the CRT and the CPT. The process of discussing the project problem by the CPT also led to the development of research questions and the subsequent plans and actions that were deployed. In Chapter 3, how the conceptual intervention model will be executed, and details of the CPT and CRT will be described in more detail.

2.4.2. Conceptual Model

The first core planning team (CPT) meeting focused on the overall project objectives to create an online customer engagement strategy and a framework for ABC. During the discussion I -in the role as the Principal Director- indicated to the other team member that any content or platform changes targeted at increasing the online customer engagement level would have to be applied directly to content or the platform in a "live" environment rather than using either a focus group or a survey experiment. This decision was mainly based on the need to increase ABC's visibility and the ABC concept within the public domain, as well as test the online customer engagement strategy concepts in a "real word" environment. This was thought to be the best method for accomplishing this.

The conceptual research model implication of this overarching decision made by the Principal Director (me) was the reduction in the ability to measure individual online customer engagement levels, or consistently measure segments within the population to behavioural stimuli or drivers. As a result, the metrics used to represent and measure the online customer engagement level, had to be robust enough to be valid cross all social media platforms and the online user population. An advantage of this approach was that the measurements would be easily understood by several practitioner groups including marketers and clients. Moreover, the metrics would not be as prone to analysis errors as those that may arise from survey or focus group samples (Creswell, 2003 and Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012). Also, by allowing the testing of the live changes to the content and/or the platform, the research efforts had the potential to be seen by the entire online population and therefore raise the importance and visibility of ABC which is an outcome I -as the Principal Director- wanted to achieve.

Given the overall decision, the CPT the team convened to develop an approach to measuring content and platform improvements. The conceptual research model, illustrated in Figure 3, is a representation of the cogenerative approach that the CPT had finally decided upon. The premise was to capture the site online customer engagement data before and after each content and platform change/action was taken. By utilizing this method, the impact of the changes/actions could be analysed through the direct changes in the level of online customer engagement.

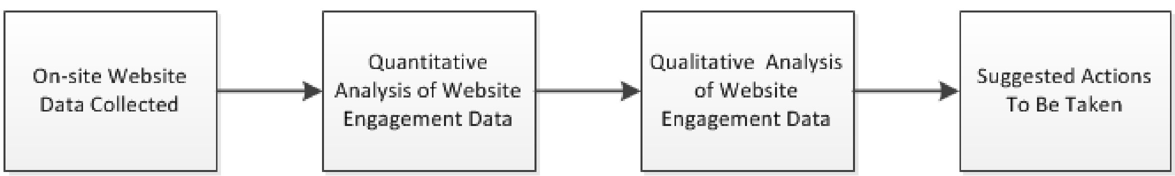

Figure 3: Conceptual Research Model

The CPT agreed that online customer engagement could be measured by analysing different online customer engagement metric data (documented in the conceptual research model as "outcomes"). The team consensus was that multiple iterations of content and platform changes would be conducted, where engagement levels would be measured and analysed. Following the final set of content and platform changes quantitative and qualitative data would be collected and a final strategy developed. Given the conceptual research being used the CPT realized that it may not be possible to determine the engagement level that the changes would render. The CPT team however indicated that the project would be concluded when the research questions had been exhausted and thereafter a final strategy would be provided.

Mehrabian and Russell's (1976) Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) was used as the foundation for the conceptual approach in this research. The SOR theory has been used to underpin conceptual models for academic research in area of online customer engagement by authors such as Peng and Kim (2014), Islam and Rahman (2017), and Kim and Lennon (2013). The premise of the SOR theory is that an environmental stimuli (S), within an environment will affect a customer/organism (O), which will elicit an engagement response on the content/ platform (R) or avoidance/non-engagement. In the case of this research the stimuli will be the changes to the content and the platform (S), the organisms will be the users/customers (O) and the response would be the measured by the quantitative online customer engagement data/metrics (R). Within the CPT discussion there were some concerns on what the online customer engagement metrics would be and how the quantitative data would ultimately be captured (see Figure 4).

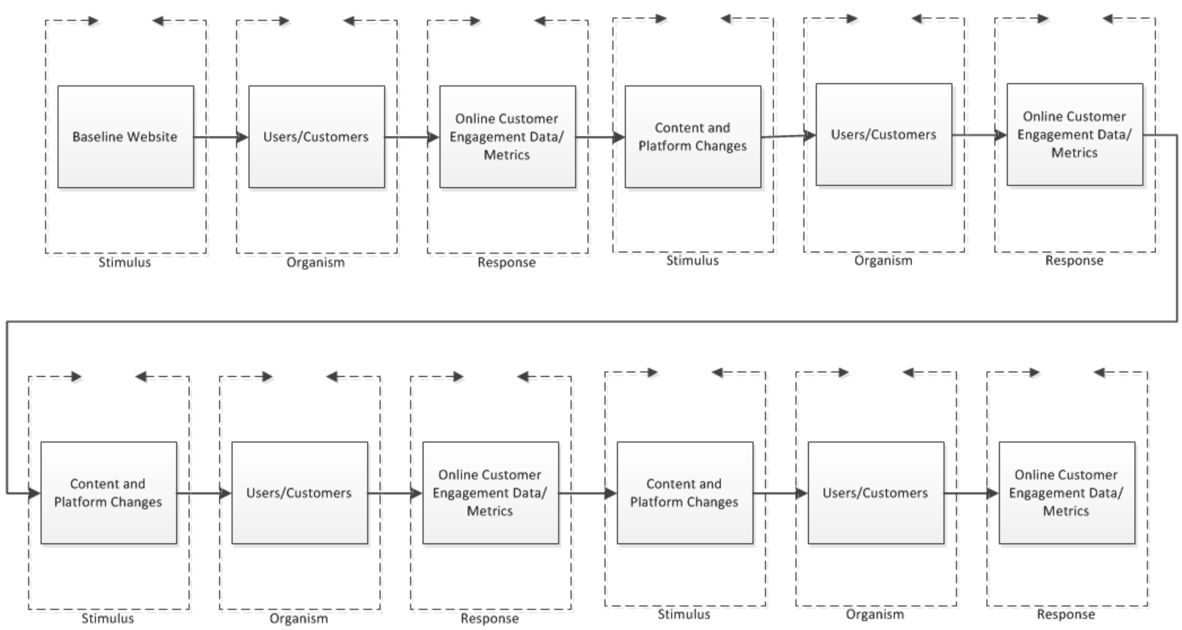

Figure 4: Research Conceptualization Using the S-O-R Framework

Utilizing the SOR framework and the literature as the foundation, the CPT proposed and agreed on several content and platform antecedents and the metrics/outcomes for customer engagement. Based on the output of the CPT discussion a conceptual research question model was developed that was based on comparable model development work conducted by Van Doon et al. (2010), Thakur (2016), Tafesse (2015), Mpinganjira (2016), Moro et al. (2016) and Kujur and Singh (2017). The research questions have been removed from the entire conceptual model to highlight the theoretical research question framework (see Figure 5). This research question model demonstrates how the broad drivers/ antecedents of online customer engagement are connected to the metrics/ outcomes of online customer engagement. The metrics/outcomes were identified from the literature and work conducted by Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), Baltes (2015), and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) and further refined or expanded upon and subsequently ratified through discussion by the CPT. It was agreed that the initial assumption would be that each driver/antecedent impacted on each metric/outcome and that the results from the analysis would be used to provide a deeper understanding of the impact that the changes to the content or the platform have on the respective metric. Additionally, there was a consensus that the process had to allow for the revision (addition/ subtraction) to the list of antecedents should there be a fundamental indication after an iteration that the this was necessary, with a caution that this should be kept to a minimum.

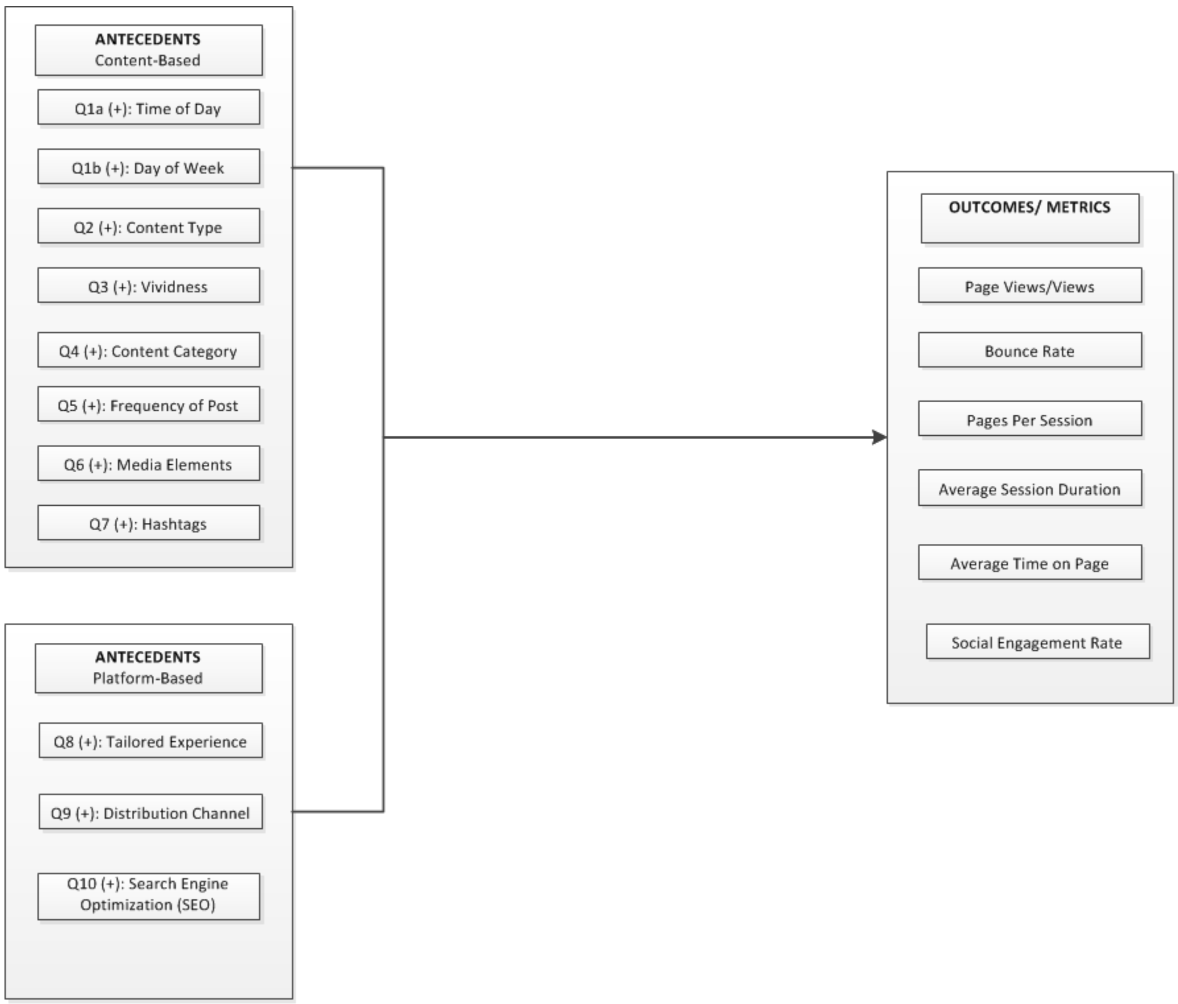

Figure 5: Conceptual Research Question Model

2.4.3. Research Question Development and Outcome Details

The below paragraphs detail the development of the content and platform antecedents which the CPT determined would impact on the online customer engagement and the metrics/outcomes to be used. First, a synopsis of the literature basis for the content and platform antecedents will be presented and then the research question will be provided.

2.4.3.1 Research Questions Development

<u>Content Antecedents</u>

Time and Day of the Week - this is seen as a significant indicator on how engaged users would be with the content as theorized by Rauschnabel et al. (2012), Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) and De Vries et al. (2012). For example, if a post is made during the evening or on Friday the understanding is that customers would be more engaged (Landsverk, 2014). Although there was a belief that time and day of the week did impact on online customer engagement there wasn't a consensus within the CPT, therefore the following research questions were proposed:

Q1 a: *Does the time of day impact positively on online customer engagement?*

Q1 b: *Does the day of the week impact positively on online customer engagement?*

Content type refers to whether the content is primarily images, articles or primarily text, video, listicles, contest, quizzes or games. The theory is that users will engage more with some categories of content more so than they would with others Elsayed (2017). For example, content where users can win prizes versus content that is simply for viewing may elicit greater engagement even in instances where the prizes may be small. The CPT proposed the following research question:

Q2: *Will the content types impact differently on online customer engagement?*

Vividness refers to the practical nature of the content in terms of using real people, sound, and colour to depict a scene or issue as well as the quality of the photo or video. Tafesse (2015), Fortin and Dholakia (2005), and De Vries et al. (2012) agreed that the extent of vividness could determine the number and type of senses that are stimulated, and this could subsequently determine how many views or likes a content receives. For example, content that only has photos may not be viewed as much as content that has video, additional content that has images of people may have more engagement than content that only has images of inanimate objects. The research question proposed is as follows:

Q3: *Will the vividness of content have an impact on the customer engagement level?*

The content category as an antecedent to online engagement was posited by several authors including De Vries et al. (2012), Tafesse (2015) and Gavilanes et al. (2018). This antecedent refers to the theory that engaged users need to be either entertained or informed by content, where entertainment can be humorous or informative. Therefore, the CPT proposed the following research question:

Q4: *Will the content category impact on the engagement level?*

Frequency of post was theorized by Srinivasan et al. (2002) as an antecedent of customer engagement. The premise was that when users/ customers are presented with the content on a frequent basis they are more likely to exhibit engagement behaviours than if there are provided with one minimal content or content on an infrequent basis. For example, in its initial start-up phase the Co-founder of Reddit, Steve Huffman, indicated that he and his business partner Alexis Ohanian set up several hundred accounts. This was to ensure that the website did not have a blank space and there were daily posts to encourage visitors to their platform and increased their ranking on Google through organic traffic (Huffman, 2012). The CPT therefore proposed the following research question:

Q5: *Does the frequency of the post-impact on online customer engagement?*

Media elements refer to the number of photos, videos or graphics that may be included in a post/ content. Rauschnabel et al. (2012) indicate that similar to word count the number of elements (images, videos or graphics) will determine how engaged a customer will be with the content. The research question was as follows:

Q6: *Will the number of media elements impact the level of online customer engagement?*

Historical interest relates to content that is personalized or similar to previous content the user/ customer would have looked at, liked or shared as posited by Koch and Benlian (2015). Additionally, this antecedent includes the use of "hashtags" or "tags" which within social media/platforms indicate the interest which a user may have. The theory is that if a user had a historical interest in specific content, they are likely to have a future interest in that content and engage with the content. Therefore, content that focuses on already established user interest will have a higher engagement level. The following research question was therefore derived:

Q7: *Will the hashtags have an impact on the customer online engagement level?*

Platform Antecedents

User-tailored experience denotes the fact that by having the website/platform features specific to a user's needs the user is more likely to increase their engagement (Constantinides, 2002, Pophal, 2015, and Srinivasan et al., 2002). For example, if a user is provided with similar content to what they looked at previously the theory is that the user will increase their visits and length of stay on the platform. The CPT posited the following research question:

Q8: *Will a more tailored customer experience translate to a higher customer engagement level?*

Distribution channel speaks to the place where the content will be made available to users to view, inclusive of the ABC website and social media (Tse and Soufani, 2003, Kee and Yazdanifard, 2015, Constantinides, 2006, Mahajan and Venkatesh, 2000, Kalyanam and McIntyre, 2002). The CPT proposed that like distribution channels within the traditional marketing mix where content is distributed is an essential element and will determine how engaged users are with the content. Primarily because the different distribution channels with their variant features and algorithms could hinder or facilitate content from being seen. The CPT therefore posited the following research question:

Q9: *Does the distribution channel used have an impact on the customer online engagement level?*

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to the process by which a website/platform visibility is optimized in a bid to ensure that it is ranked highly (usually on the first page) on a search engine, e.g. Google. The internet is a vast arena with search engines often returning millions of results per search. Therefore, for any new website/platform the engagement challenge is seeking to get noticed by visitors in the first place (Evans, 2007). The theory is that as long as the pages of the website/platform are optimized, the pages will be visible to the user who will engage. Therefore, the CPT posited this research question:

Q10: Does the implementation of search engine optimization increase online customer engagement levels?

2.4.3.2 Outcomes Details

As posited by Farris et al. (2006) there are different types of metrics, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) in their article also postulated several outcomes in the form of “likes”, “comments” and “shares”. On the other hand, Baltes (2015), and Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) included what could be considered more real-world metrics similar to the following metrics/outcomes agreed on by the CPT:

- **Page Views (PV):** The number of times a page, content or video is viewed by a user or the number of times a content was clicked (e.g. Facebook).
- **Bounce Rate (BR):** The extent to which a visitor moves away from content after only interacting with one single content type or page, usually measured in percentage. It should be noted that unlike the other metrics used the lower the bounce rate, the better the performance.

- **Pages/ Session (PPS):** Is the average number of pages viewed during a session. Note that repeated views of a single page are not counted.
- **Average Session Duration (ASD):** The average length of time of a session, usually measured in hours, minutes and seconds.
- **Average Time on Page (AToP):** The average amount of time users spends viewing a specific page or screen, or a set of pages or screens.
- **Social Engagement Rate (SER):** This metrics is a modification of the one provided by Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) and encompassed engagement metrics specific to social media such as "reactions" /"likes", "comments", "shares", "votes" and "saves" and "other" divided by the views. Where "other" presents a content engagement metric that is not "likes", "comments", "shares" "votes" or "saves". **The equation is as follows:**

Social Engagement Rate= $\frac{Reactions + Comments + Shares + Votes + Saves + Other}{Views} * 100$

2.5 Chapter Summary

Action Research (AR) is a research methodology focused on resolving practical context-based problems, which is accomplished through a collaboration process between the researcher and the stakeholder (s) (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, Kernstock and Brexendorf, 2012, and Kirwan and Conboy, 2009). The objectives of AR are to foster organizational learning, acquire new managerial knowledge and develop solutions that would improve the organization, and managerial practice in a sustainable and long-term manner (Kernstock and Brexendorf, 2012). When the research project is technology focused, AR can be especially useful as an aid to the organization by providing relevant findings and solutions (Kirwan and Conboy, 2009).

With the goal of creating new knowledge and constructing a long-term and practical solution to the project problem, the literature on online customer engagement, content marketing and the ethical considerations was used as scaffolding to construct a conceptual model which highlighted the drivers/ antecedents and the metrics/outcomes which would be used to measure the impact of online customer engagement. With the conceptual research model, research questions and metrics being created through dialogue, reflection and ratification by the CPT on completion of the literature review.

The resulting conceptual research model provided the guidance on the types of data that would be required to be collected and the methods for doing so. Leading to the formation of the research questions which were subsequently used as guides to determine the changes to the content and platform. In total eleven (11) research questions were developed to better understand the drivers of online customer engagement for ABC. See Figure 6 of the summary of the research question and related research.

RQ No.	Research Question	Authors
Q1 a	Does the time of day impact positively on online customer engagement?	Rauschnabel et al. (2012) and Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013)
Q1 b	Does the day of the week impact positively on online customer engagement?	Rauschnabel et al. (2012), De Vries et al. (2012) and Landsverk (2014)
Q2	Will the content types impact differently on online customer engagement?	Elsayed (2017)
Q3	Will the vividness of content have an impact on the customer engagement level?	Tafesse (2015), Fortin and Dholakia (2005), and De Vries et al. (2012)
Q4	Will the content category impact on the engagement level?	De Vries et al. (2012), Tafesse (2015), Gavilanes et al. (2018) and Koch and Benlian (2015)
Q5	Does the frequency of the post-impact on online customer engagement?	Srinivasan et al. (2002)
Q6	Will the number of media elements impact the level of online customer engagement?	Rauschnabel et al. (2012)
Q7	Will the hashtags have an impact on the customer online engagement level?	Koch and Benlian (2015)
Q8	Will a more tailored customer experience translate to a higher customer engagement level?	Constantinides (2002), Pophal (2015), and Srinivasan et al. (2002)
Q9	Does the distribution channel used have an impact on the customer online engagement level?	Tse and Soufani (2003), Kee and Yazdanifard (2015), Constantinides (2006), Mahajan and Venkatesh (2000), Kalyanam and McIntyre (2002)
Q10	Does the implementation of search engine optimization increase online customer engagement levels?	Evans (2007)

Figure 6: Research Question Summary

3.0 Research Methodology and Design

3.1. Introduction

The methodology choice has long been recognized as a fundamental component for both pure and applied research (Burgoyne and Cooper, 1975). This is probably because at the core of any research there is the need to interrogate the practical, technical and conceptual issues which require that the researcher clearly identify the framework used to conduct such research in order to ensure that the data gathering, analysis and reporting was done in an ethical and moral manner (Burgoyne and Cooper, 1975). The methodology choice was viewed as being especially important in this research project because it provided ABC with a methodology specific to investigating nuances of the business. Additionally, this section is deemed as important because of the ethical dilemmas that will accompany the juxtaposition of being the Principal Director as well as the sole researcher, and the various modes by which the inquiry of Action Research can be conducted.

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss the underpinning philosophical assumption in this research. It is important to state at this stage, that my philosophical stance for this study will be relativism ontology and social constructionism. Given the nature of this study, although Action Research was the framework, quantitative methods also formed a major part of the study. The methodological approach will therefore be a mixed approached, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, with my research philosophy underpinning the qualitative methods and the nuances of the data and objectives of the research determining the quantitative methods.

3.2. Philosophical Scaffolding

There have been long standing debates and tension among academics and practitioners regarding the relationship between data and theory and which paradigm is best to use. Although during the process of utilizing Action Research techniques and developing as a scholar/practitioner in my Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme I have learnt that while the failure to strategically indicate my philosophical position will not be fatal to my research, it can certainly impact on the quality of my management inquiry, and research design and methodology, including the questions asked, data gathered, and the analysis and interpretation of the data (Cassell and Johnson, 2006).

Ontology and Epistemology are said to be the starting points to which other philosophical approaches are based (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Lewis-Beck et al. (2003) and Thorpe and Holt (2007) explained that ontology is usually linked with quantitative methods of inquiry since by taking an ontological stance a researcher is concerned with the nature of reality and what can be discovered. For example, by having an ontological view, I would seek to address the question of: What are the antecedents that contribute to online customer engagement? Moreover, by having an ontology stance I would start with research questions, use quantitative data driven measurements and experiments to verity or reject my original “truth” and determine causality.

On the other hand, as (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012) indicated, epistemology is usually linked to qualitative modes of inquiry, and concerned with the most appropriate method for exploring the nature of the research and the researcher’s world (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003 and Willig and Rogers, 2007). Indicated more succinctly, in having an epistemology stance, I would be concerned with addressing the question of the nature of the relationship between the users, myself and my employees, and the online data I would have collected. Moreover, within my research methodology and design I would include the gathering of qualitative data through sense-making techniques such as interviews, open-ended questions and/or observation.

Throughout the previous projects I would have done as part of my DBA coursework, I had maintained a position that enabled me to generate knowledge capable of allowing me to create innovative techniques and solutions for my workplace-based problems, and which served to develop me as a leader. Although this workplace-based problem was based on my own company I wanted to ensure that I viewed it with the same rigour and diligence as with XYZ problems given that my current project was as complex and messy as those encountered at XYZ.

During my coursework I found the table (see Table 2) developed by Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) to be helpful in showing how the main philosophical paradigms (ontology and epistemology) are linked to methodology choices and it was this table that I went back to in this current project to assist me with making sense of my philosophical position (s) and how to transition these into my research methodology.

Ontology		**Realism**	**Internal Realism**	**Relativism**	**Nominalism**
Epistemology		**Strong Positivism**	**Positivism**	**Constructionism**	**Strong Constructionism**
Methodology	Aims	Discovery	Exposure	Convergence	Invention
	Starting Points	Hypothesis	Propositions	Questions	Critique
	Designs	Experiment	Large surveys multi-cases	Cases and Surveys	Engagement and Reflexivity
	Data Type	Numbers and facts	Numbers and words	Words and numbers	Discourse and Experiences
	Analysis/Interpr	Verification/falsification	Correlation and regression	Triangulation and Comparison	Sense-making; Understanding
	Outcomes	Confirmation of theories	Theory testing and generation	Theory Generation	New Insights and Actions

Table 2:Adapted from table 2.5 in Easterby-Smith et al (2012)

Although I had embraced the merits of qualitative methods of inquiry before I started my DBA program, my understanding of its value in research and the extent to which I utilize it has expanded over the years. I undertook my Bachelor's in Business from the University of the West Indies, during which time I was first introduced to the merits of qualitative methods, and then again during studies for my Master's degree in Management Science and Marketing Analytics at Lancaster University. Both the initial introduction and re-introduction to qualitative methods were primarily within marketing research courses and mainly focused on the utilization of focus groups as a qualitative method to assist in helping to clarify and reduce research questions to be used within more quantitative methods such as surveys.

While I saw the benefits of qualitative methods, I did not view it as having the theoretical gravitas to stand on its own or to be a complimentary methodology to the development of innovative ideas but rather, viewed it simply as a tool to elevate quantitative methods. Besides, my analytical background and with my work at XYZ, stakeholders expected to see quantifiable metrics (increase in profit, reduction in cost) which made me feel more at ease and familiar with the main assumptions of a positivist school, such as the utilization of larger datasets, the independence of the observer from the observation, the notion of causality, and the use of correlation and regression models. Before I would have started my DBA in 2013, it was easy to see my positivist approach as attractive and the core method of inquiry. Also, I have always been mathematically minded and held the simple notion that the world existed mainly as an external entity, and that all its properties could be measured seemed logical.

The DBA programme has however, made me a convert to the power dynamics and relationships which exist in organizations and the impact these have on managerial inquiry, action and organizational innovation. I have started to see AR as a complementary ally in developing innovative techniques for the organization and I am passionate about this development. The notable personal change as a result of this doctoral level development is that although I still utilize quantitative methods at the core of my research, I am no longer content in simply thinking that a quantitative approach to learning in research or practice is the best method, but now see the value in qualitative research. I see the research and practical value in using quantitative methods and having an outsider's point of view in the interpretation of data, but now I see the need for qualitative methods of inquiry such as engagement and reflection. I therefore see myself as a researcher and practitioner with a mixed method philosophy. In the below section I will indicate my perspective within the main philosophical stances of ontology and epistemology (3.2.1 and 3.2.2 respectively), how this change in philosophy has impacted on my mode of research (3.2.3), and modes of inquiry (3.2.4).

3.2.1 Ontology Perspective

With ontology, the main philosophical focus is determining the nature and existence of reality and determining truth from facts (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). There are three (3) different ontology perspectives which dictate how research information and data are viewed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), see Figure 7. These are realism, relativism and nominalism (see Table 3). A realism stance assumes that there is a single truth and that facts exist and therefore can be revealed, while a relativist perspective presumes that there are many truths and as such, truths depends on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Additionally, with a nominalism stance there is no truth and facts are all a human creation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). For the purpose of this doctoral research, to some extent I positioned my project in the relativism spectrum, since there is an assumption that all the stakeholders (me as Principal Director, online users and ABC's staff) as different observers may have multiple realities and viewpoints as a result of their social conditioning, interests and contexts (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). Additionally, although I may focus on more quantitative methods of seeing what I deemed as the truth, my staff who are less quantitively inclined may use more qualitative methods to determine the truth.

Ontology	Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truths	There are many truths.	There is no truth.
Facts	Facts exist and can be revealed	Facts depend on the viewpoint of the observer.	Facts are all human creation.

Table 3: Different ontologies (adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2012)

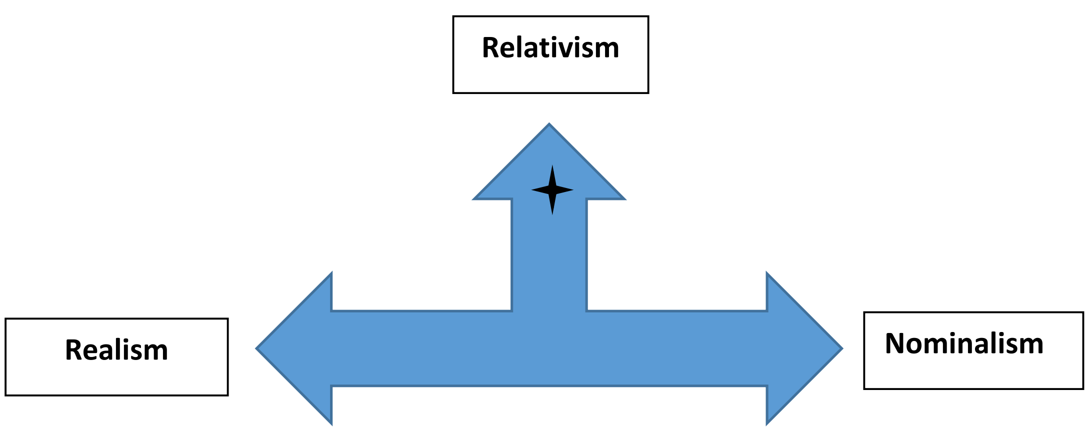

Figure 7: Ontology Perspective

Legend: The sign ✦ denotes the position of the study.

3.2.2 Epistemology Perspective

As indicated previously epistemology is defined as the philosophical branch concerned with inquiry and is the most appropriate method for exploring the nature of the research and researcher's world (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) further postulated that there were two main perspectives of epistemology: positivism and social constructionism (see Table 4 and Figure 8). With a positivism perspective the researcher/ observer is independent of the research, believes that human interest is irrelevant, and is more concerned with demonstrating causality. In the case of social constructionism however the researcher is part of the observation and the main aim is to understand the situation. Although, given my quantitative background I saw the need to maintain an objective observer point of view, since my development throughout my DBA programme, I could not discount the value which gathering rich data from interviews (qualitative data) can provide in increasing my general understanding of online customer engagement. I therefore felt that although my research had some elements of positivism, the fact that I was part of the research and would be including perspectives from others, I felt that my research was more social constructionism. In my research I will gather online data but will also interview my employee and discuss possible causes, thereby increasing my understanding of what maybe driving online engagement and feed these perspectives into my future engagement strategies. At this point it can be seen a bit more how the philosophical stance is starting to shape some of the aspects of my modes of research and methodologies.

	Positivism	**Social Constructionism**
The observer	Must be independent	Is part of what is being observed.
Human interests	Should be irrelevant	Are the main drivers of science.
Explanations	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase the general understanding of the situation.
Research progresses through	Hypotheses and deductions	Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced.
Concepts	Need to be defined so they can be measured.	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	Should be reduced to simplest terms	May include the complexity of "whole" situations.
Generalization through	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	Large numbers selected randomly	Small number of cases chosen for specific reasons.

Table 4: Different epistemology views (adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2012)

Figure 8: Epistemology Perspective

Legend: The sign denotes the position of the study.

3.2.3 Modes of Research

Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) presented two modes of research - modes 1 and modes 2 (See Figure 9). Mode 1 is often referred to as pure research and focuses on the detached researcher who is working with a homogenous disciple. By contrast mode 2, is often referred to as applied research, and focuses on the creation of knowledge through the direct engagement of the researcher with social practice within the context of the problem. Given my scholar/ practitioner roles as the Principal Director of ABC and the person conducting the research, coupled with the fact that I will be employing a more reflexivity, collaborate and social structure for my research, it leads to a declaration that my research is more applied than pure and therefore I will be using mode 2.

Figure 9: Mode of Research

Legend: The sign ✦ denotes the position of the study.

3.2.4 Modes of Inquiry

Creswell (2013) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) identified two modes of scientific inquiry: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods of research refer to the collection, analysis, and display of empirical data in a numerical form which enables the research to estimate future quantities or events. Qualitative methods of inquiry, on the other hand, involves a section of actions which involve discerning how human beings interpret, produce, experience and understand the social world. My doctoral study is recognized as a mixed inquiry approach since it has both quantitative and qualitative techniques and modes of inquiry (see Figure 10). Greene (2008) aptly indicated that the main benefit of a mixed method approach to a researcher is that is facilitates "multiple ways of seeing and hearing" (p.20). (Greene, 2008) indicated that practitioners often gather quantitative data to identify patterns, magnitude and dimensionality but utilize qualitative data to provide insight into the variances and contextual stories. In my research I will use the mixed methods approach in a similar manner. I will use quantitative data and techniques to identify patterns and trends in the online customer engagement data. However, given my growth within my DBA programme in seeing the benefit of such qualitative methodologies as AR, I utilized the qualitative techniques such as interviews to provide context to the quantitative data and generated ideas to explain the quantitative data.

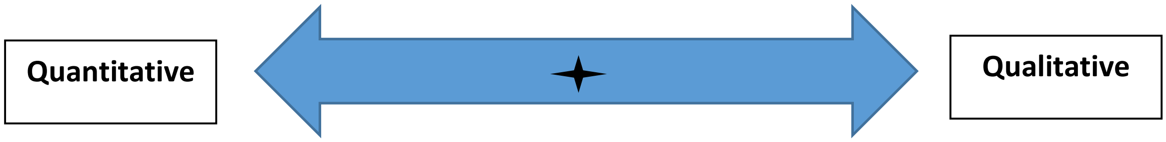

Figure 10: Mode of Inquiry

Legend: The sign ✦ denotes the position of the study.

3.3. Methodology Framework

The research methodology implication of my relativism ontology and social constructionism perspective was that I utilize a methodology that would allow me to triangulate the “truth”. One of the primary focal points with my choice of methodology was that I incorporate the qualitative techniques of sensemaking and reflexivity throughout my research process with the quantitative methods in a way that did not diminish either one of these modes of inquiry but allowed them to complement each other. In agreement with my philosophical perspectives (3.2.1 and 3.2.2) and mode of inquiry (3.2.4) my research will be based on quantitative and qualitative methodologies using quantitative methods to confirm the relationship between antecedents and outcomes but use the iterative process of AR as the overall approach.

Although AR is often seen as a methodology for qualitative research it can be used for both quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002). Coughlan and Coghlan (2002), Baskerville and Wood-Harper (2016), and Gummesson (2000) all posited similar AR steps, while Saunders et al. (2012 p.183) proposed a pre-stage of identifying the problem and the context before starting the iterative AR process. In Figure 11, I incorporated the suggested AR steps from Coughlan and Coghlan (2002), Baskerville and Wood-Harper (2016), Gummesson (2000), and adapted Saunders et al. (2012 p 183) model to create the AR process which I will use in my research. In step 1: the context and purpose of the project is determined, including identifying the objectives and research questions for the project. Steps 2 and 3 are the planning and action stages where CPT plan the research intervention and action is taken. This is followed by step 4 where new organizational knowledge is created through evaluation, reflection and understanding from the action taken. In order to be effective, the evaluation and reflective stage (step 4) needs to facilitate independence of thought but allow for member collaboration and discourse (Pedler, 2011). Following the meta-learning steps of planning, action and evaluation/reflection, the processes are repeated until the objectives are achieved (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014 and Saunders et al., 2012). It was the Sunders et al (2012) AR methodology which was utilized as the foundation for my AR process.

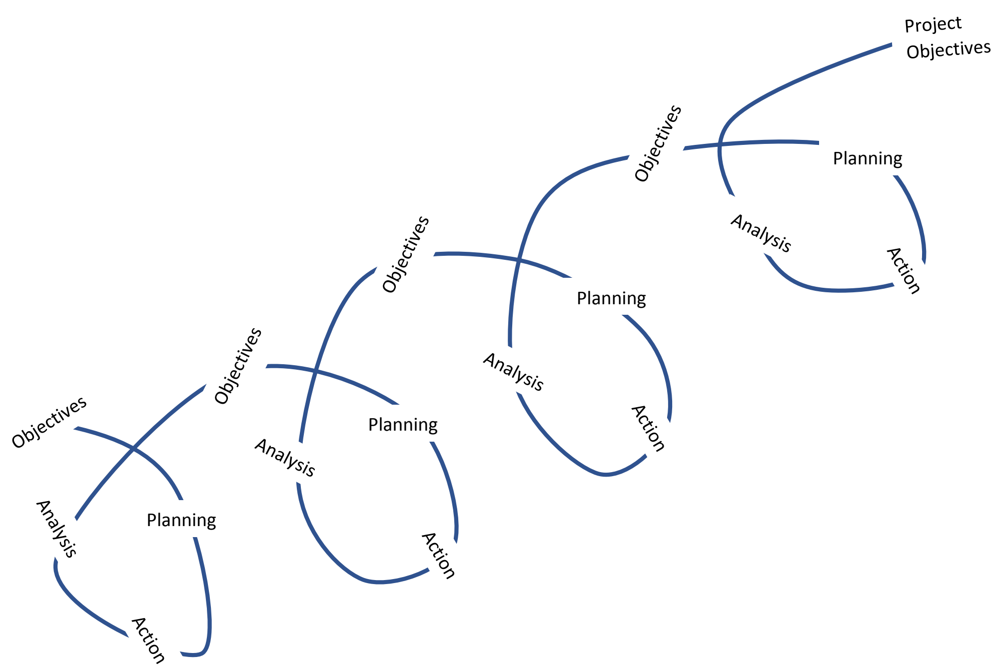

Figure 11: Chart Showing Action Research Steps Adapted From Saunders et al p 183.

At the initial stage of my research project, I (Principal Director and researcher) would have identified the current organizational problem as one of a lack of online engagement strategy for the content marketing startup. An initial literature review was performed and in collaboration with the core planning team (CPT) refined and concluded the following

problem statement and main objectives/purpose and secondary objectives:

__Overall Research Problem__

The lack of an online customer engagement strategy for ABC, a new content marketing company.

__The Objectives/ Purpose of the Study__

The main objective/ purpose of the study:

- To develop a practical online customer engagement strategy for ABC.
- To develop a framework or process for the ongoing modification of the strategy.

Additionally, part of my research objectives was to:

- Garner a deeper understanding of the antecedents that impact on customer online engagement metrics and the degree of the impact.
- Determine the outcomes or consequences for the proposed customer engagement antecedents.

3.3.1 Action Research Team Formation or Dynamics

As mentioned in Chapter One (1), ABC is a small start-up with me having several competing roles as the Principal Director, Investor, Executive Producer, and Web Developer. The organization also has one full-time employee, one external expert and freelancers (7 individuals) who are responsible for content, website or application development, graphic design and drafting legal documents. As mentioned previously the core planning team (CPT) and the core research team (CPT) were developed to provide planning and research guidance, with both the CPT and the CRT consisting of myself (Principal Director) and the only paid full-time employee.

During the CPT session where the members of the CRT were being discussed I brought up the issue that since the CRT consisted of only me (Principal Director and research) and the paid individual (who was present in the discussion) there was a possibility that the paid individual would feel as though he/she had to agree with my recommendation or risk losing their paid position. Although the other CRT member indicated that they did not feel that this was an issue, I thought it best to explore options to mitigate coercion or the appearance of coercion. One option discussed by the CPT, was to reduce my dominance in the research group by including the freelancers. However, the “freelancer” relationship with ABC was on a job-by-job basis, with the relationship between me (as the Principal Director) and the freelancers being tumultuous at times. Approximately, 43% of the freelancer relationships ended abruptly because of performance issues including; not meeting milestones, disagreement on service levels or seeking to increase their payment after an agreed rate. Additionally, the freelancers were under no obligation to perform any tasks outside of their contracts. The CPT also discussed the issue of not wanting to risk including freelancers within the research and jeopardize the ABC timelines for completion or give the impression that ABC was simply a “research” project that should not be taken seriously. The other option discussed by the CPT to mitigate my dominance and possible coercion within the CRT was to split the CRT process into two evaluation steps: 1. A quantitative evaluation step, consisting of the Principal Researcher (me), and 2. A qualitative evaluation step consisting of the paid full-time employee. In the CRT process the Principal Researcher (me) would download and prepare the quantitative data and metrics and subsequently provide the other CRT member with this data without discussing my thoughts on the data or the metrics. I then conducted open-ending interviews with the other CRT member to garner their opinion and explanation on what the quantitative data meant and actions to be taken in the next iteration. By the other CRT member evaluating the quantitative data without my influence, it was felt that this would assist with reducing points of coercion. Further, the inclusion of the other CRT member ultimately improved their understanding of the AR process and their buy-in for the recommended actions.

Another reason for separating the quantitative and qualitative/evaluation within the CRT was to reduce the power dynamic between my role as the Principal Researcher (scholar) and my role as the Principal Director (practitioner). Early in the ABC planning stage there were times when a decision would have been in the best interest for my research but not necessarily in the best interest of ABC and vice versa. For example, the decision to not allow the qualitative interviews to be taped was in the best interest of the organization, since the interview sessions may have contained ABC confidential information. However, as the researcher, I wanted to have the interviews taped to gather the rich data. I found that the separation of the quantitative and the qualitative sessions helped with this internal role power dynamic. The final CRT therefore comprised of me as the Quantitative Evaluator (QuanE) and the paid full-time employee as the Qualitative Evaluator (QualE). See Figure 12 which illustrates the primary power dynamics and direction between the Core Planning Team (CPT), the Core Research Team (CRT) and the other organizational team members.

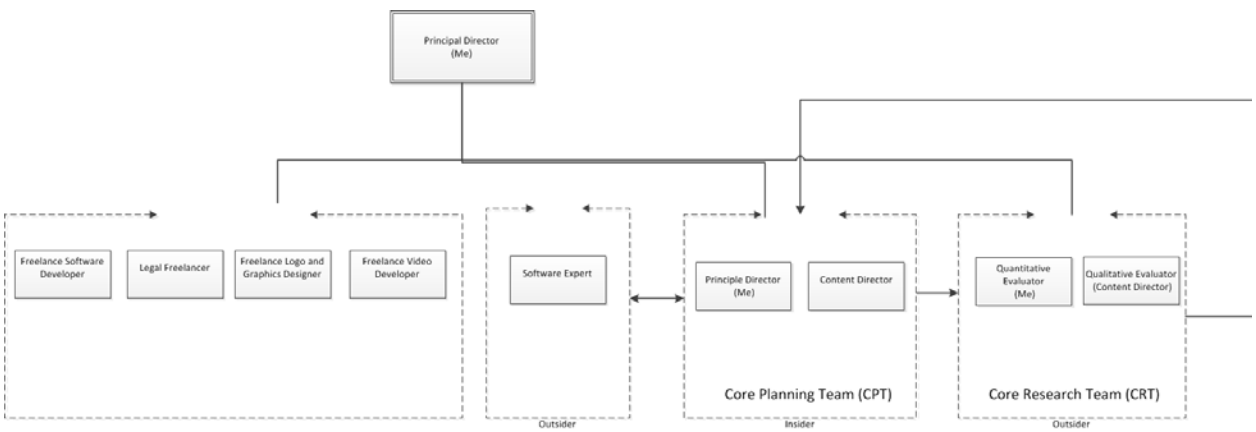

Figure 12: Research Groups Primary Direction of Power

3.3.2 Action Research Team Working Practices

Following the agreement regarding the team formation, a more in-depth and robust review of the literature surrounding online customer engagement and content marketing was required by the CPT to determine how the team would work in practice. This literature review allowed for the construction of the project's initial research questions, as well as antecedents and consequences/metrics of online customer engagement. From the CPT discussion on the initial research questions a final set of eleven (11) research questions/ antecedents and six (6) consequences/metrics were developed.

ABC was launched on August 5th, 2018 and during the first CRT forum the results for the first eight (8) research questions were reviewed, and data was analysed (both quantitative and qualitative analysis). The next round of actions taken, including the objectives, research questions to be addressed and any concerns with the execution of the actions were discussed within the CPT. It should be noted that given the time, resource and skill set constraints, not all the research questions/ antecedents or consequences/metrics originally conceptualized by the CPT could be addressed. Therefore, the research questions and the subsequently derived antecedents and metrics addressed at the "action taken stage"- presented in this thesis-are only those that the CPT agreed should be executed. Despite the inability to address all the research questions and relationships between the antecedents and consequences/metrics the exploration of alternative drivers and outcomes did generate new managerial knowledge which will be discussed later.

During the initial week of the launch the CPT met daily to discuss the online customer engagement data. However, after the launch week the CPT agreed to reduce the frequency of the meetings to once a month to allow more time to understand and analyse the data in the CRT sessions, as well as to plan and execute the content or platform actions/changes.

The monthly meetings were held on the first Saturday (morning) of the month to discuss the data collected from the previous weeks. For the meeting, I, as the Principal Researcher and QuantE, collated an initial document which contained the historical online customer engagement data, including the antecedents and results from the drivers. In the CRT meeting I interviewed the QualE to garner their insight on the reasons for the results and subsequent actions to be taken.

Following the CRT meetings, I compiled all the quantitative and qualitative data as well as the analysis to present at the subsequent CPT. The CPT meeting would also be the first time the full-time employee/ QualE saw the entire action plan generated from the previous CRT session. On Sunday at 4 pm the CPT met to discuss the execution strategy including priorities for each of the research questions and content/ platform drivers to be addressed, resources, time lines and when the new content or web site changes would be launched. Additionally, in the Sunday 4 pm meeting, the CPT decided for how long the changes would run before collecting the online engagement data and set the date and time for any subsequent meetings. Future meetings were scheduled within the Sunday 4 pm meeting to enable flexibility within the overall CPT structure since meeting times would largely be dictated by the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the results and the complexity of the actions (changes, strategies, resources, timelines etc.) to be taken. Additionally, this decision facilitated a more productive and action driven CPT meeting. In instances where any of the CPT members felt out of our depth with how to proceed with development changes, discussions were had with the external programming expert. I found that including an objective outsider (development expert) caused the CPT to reflect on the issues and possible solutions and led to refinement or changes in previously agreed on actions or execution plans. A depiction of the monthly AR discussion cycle is provided in Figure 13. It should be noted that in September/ October 2018 the website was hacked, therefore there were no meetings held during those months since my focus (as the Principal Director) was on increasing the security of the website and holding organizational crisis meetings with the freelance developers, consultants and other service providers.

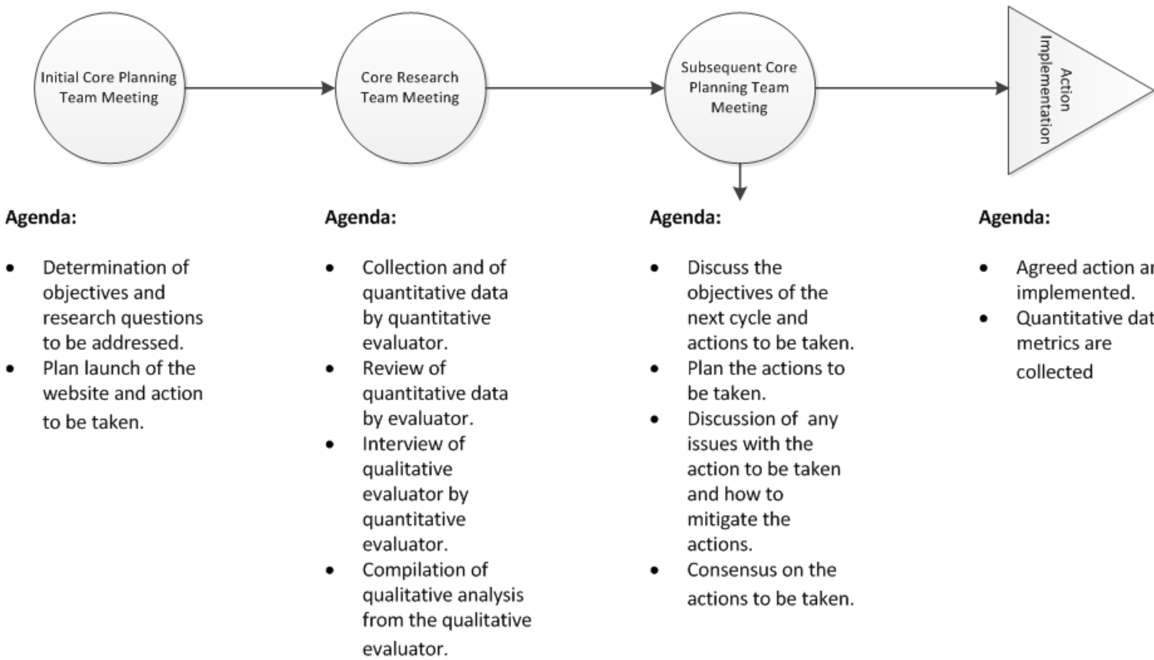

Figure 13: Weekly Action Research Cycles

Initially, in the CPT meetings I was looked upon for guidance. However, as we progressed through the AR cycles the full-time employee started to gain more knowledge and confidence in the AR process and content and platform development, they started to suggest more significant and innovative actions to be taken both on the content produced and the platform. Initially I was resistant to the suggestions and felt that the changes were too significant, and that the full-time employee was taking control of not only of my company but my research. However, on reflection I realized that the suggestions the full-time employee was making were innovative ones that could benefit ABC. Additionally, the confidence the full-time employee was showing indicated their growth in understanding of the objectives of ABC, this research, and the drivers of online customer engagement. This in turn meant that I could focus on other platform related tasks, thereby building the business' skill set capacity since less decisions had to be approved by me. This change in dynamic between me and the full-time employee also increased my managerial knowledge regarding leadership, forcing me to see leadership not only as having to manage all aspects of the process to meet objectives, but seeing leadership more as a catalyst for change or as a coaching role to facilitate individuals in determining their path and their process in achieving set objectives. On reflection, I had to concede that the organization also benefited from this change in roles with the provision of more innovative and more cost-effective methods of creating content, engaging customers and developing platforms which would not have been possible without the full-time employee/QualE.

In conclusion the adoption of a reflective, discourse based, iterative AR approach naturally resulted in some research design compromises. For example, a collaborative approach to the development of the antecedents and metrics, the data collection and analysis meant that compromises had to be reached regarding what was incorporated into the research and the research methodology used. Consequentially, the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and design were informed in part by the literature but were not entirely based on traditional standards of academic rigour and support. This is in alignment with Thorpe and Holt (2007)'s definition of AR, where theory informs action and through reflection is used to study the aftereffects of the action. The effects of these compromises and reflections will be born out in the remainder of this chapter.

3.4. Application Action Research Mixed Methods Approach

As mentioned previously and given my philosophical perspective, a quantitative and qualitative mode of inquiry was better suited to achieve the objectives of this project. Given my growth throughout my DBA programme, the complexity of my project and the need for reflection, I required a method that would have facilitated the utilization of quantitative and qualitative methods while allowing an AR approach. Ivankova and Wingo,2018 proposed a methodology framework they labelled “Mixed Methods Action Research (MMAR)” which combined both action research and a mixed method of inquiry. Action Research and mixed method of inquiry are both procedural, philosophical and conceptually similar and therefore their integration is logical and possible (Ivankova and Wingo,2018). MMAR main research benefit is that it can produce robust and generalizable results by integrating, synergistically quantitative outcomes with qualitative stakeholder engagement to inform intervention/action, strategy, implementation and evaluation (Ivankova and Wingo,2018). However, in comparison with traditional mixed methods research, MMAR requires a more collaborative, reflective approach to be integrated into the research process.

The literature notes, that when using a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) research, the main consideration is sequencing and dominance (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Sequencing relates to whether one method is performed before the other and if so which method. Dominance relates to whether one method uses more resources or time than the other, or if they are relatively balanced. The different methods can be identified by various names, however there are three primary types of mixed methods research which combine the different sequencing and balancing choices. Sequential/ handmaid mixed methods research is where one method - either the quantitative or qualitative - dominates the other (Ivankova and Wingo,2018, Creswell,2003, and Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This commonly involves the collecting of quantitative data and subsequently using qualitative data to explain the results from the quantitative data. Parallel/ partnership mixed method involves combining two or more methods at the same time, but where both methods assume similar dominance or importance. The goal is to identify disparities between the respective datasets to identify areas for further studies (Ivankova and Wingo,2018 and Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). For example, the method can he used to gain a deeper understanding of results from a questionnaire (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). On the other hand, compensatory mixed methods design combines both quantitative and qualitative data types to compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). For example, quantitative research methods lack the required explanation for the data results being observed, while qualitative research methods lack generalization abilities thus the utilization of both methods can complement the shortcomings of the other (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012).

For this research study the sequential/handmaid mixed methods analysis was used. Quantitative online customer engagement data was collected by the Quantitative Evaluator (QuantE) and subsequently presented to a Qualitative Evaluator (QualE) who in turn sought to explain the quantitative results via semi-structured interviews (qualitative data). This conceptual approach is illustrated in Figure 14.

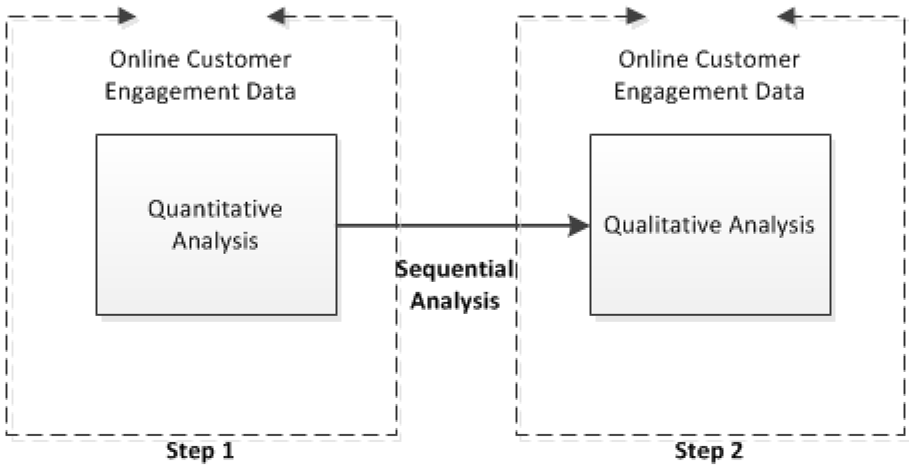

Figure 14: Mixed Method Analysis Type Usage

As valuable as the mixed method approach can be in providing deeper insight, credibility and generalization to the research, it is important to note that the MMAR does have some reported shortcomings. One common shortcoming identified, is that different philosophical paradigms are incommensurable and therefore their underlying incompatible paradigms make it difficult to join them together in one mixed method study (Howe, 1988 and Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). Such an argument assumes that philosophical paradigms cannot overlap, however although there are limits. A more modern belief is that paradigm boundaries are more fluid and that a mixed method approach, if used appropriately, can enhance research (Easterby-Smith et al 2012 and Shah and Corley, 2006). This is a view that I subscribe to and therefore do not see an overarching failing in my utilization of a mixed method approach.

Another common belief is that to use a mixed method approach the researcher must be skilled in the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods to be able to leverage both (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). I believe this point does have merit. Before my DBA course work my exposure and utilization of qualitative methods for data analysis was limited. However, since my introduction and training within my DBA programme regarding the value of including qualitative methods, my confidence in using qualitative methods has increased. However, reflecting on the concern raised by (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) , given that I do not have several years of practice with using mixed methods and AR for academic purposes, I felt that I needed to focus on data analysis utilizing familiar and previously used methods (where appropriate) to the overall research objectives and questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Figure 15 illustrates the mixed method action research approach which was used. This figure provided the overall process, from the initial development of the problem statement, highlighting the influence of the literate on the development of the research questions and how the online customer engagement data and the results from the semi-structured, in-depth interview questions led to the changes in the content and the website. Shown in the diagram at the respective stages is the underlining interactive AR methodology of planning, action and reflection.

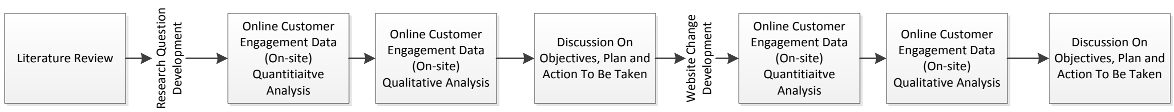

Figure 15: MMAR Research Approach Overview

3.5. Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

At the onset of this discussion on quantitative data collection, it is imperative to remember that this research is based on the fundamental principles of Action Research (AR). The process of AR is decidedly a collaborative methodology that balances praxis with the requirements of scientific rigour. Although AR is not a single method and in fact can encompass a broad array of methodologies and methods, the guiding principle is that at every stage of the research process the practitioner/scholar must follow the AR principles (Levin and Martin, 2007). Consequently, the proceeding discussion regarding the collection of the quantitative research data is both a narrative account of the AR process and an account of the theories and methods used to improve the quantitative data collection process.

The quantitative data was generated from live online customer engagement with ABC and other social media platforms, as a method to identify the cause and effect relationship in an online environment. Quantitative data is defined as numeric data usually in the form of objects, variables and their associated values (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Moreover, the quantitative data collection strategies can be either primary (survey) or secondary (website engagement or click data). Primary data is defined as data originally collected for a specific research objective, while secondary data is defined as data originally collected for another purpose other than the research in question (Hox and Boeije, 2005). The utilization of the respective strategies obviously has advantages and disadvantages. Broadly speaking the utilization of primary data benefits the researcher in that it is allows him/her to control the sample structure, data format and quality, which ensures a closer match of the data with the researcher's objectives (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). This benefit inevitably comes at a price, with primary data collection efforts being more expensive in both time and resources than the utilization of secondary data (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). Additionally, the utilization of primary data methods, such as surveys, to capture data related to customer engagement may provide a "crafted", biased view of engagement (Rieder, 2013) since participants of the survey may not fully understand the drivers of their online engagement. On the other hand, the utilization of secondary data can benefit the researcher in that it is less expensive to collect and provides an unbiased opinion of the customers' or users' opinion and engagement requirements (Rieder, 2013). One of the main disadvantages of secondary data however is that the researcher cannot guarantee the quality of the data being collected, the data structure or the specific data to be collected (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012).

The placing on content and platform changes to the live website had already been indicated by the Principal Director, however the CPT team still felt it necessary to discuss the merits of the utilization of the primary and secondary data collection methods. During discussions with CPT it was the disadvantages of primary data collection that was most concerning to the team. The CPT felt that although the surveys could be developed quickly and easily via online applications, such as SurveyMonkey the cycle time between development of the survey data and receiving user responses would take too long. Additionally, the CPT thought that although the collection of primary online engagement data through surveys maybe feasible in the initial stages of the research, given the quick turnaround that would be needed for content changes, this method would be too time consuming. As the CPT discussed the possible data type and the potential drivers of online engagement the team concluded that developing a survey that could simulate the initial and ongoing content and platform would not garner the real-world context that would allow research of the drivers of online engagement. Moreover, CPT felt that by collecting secondary customer/ user online data from ABC and its social media accounts there would be a richer, truer indication of the causes and effects of the proposed online engagement antecedents and outcomes. In other words, gathering data on "…. what people do rather than what they say they do…" (Rieder, 2013). There was also the discussion in the CPT regarding using secondary quantitative data and whether it would mitigate the issue of the long data collection cycles times.

This research utilizes secondary quantitative data from ABC and other social media, or networking sites owned by ABC. The original data used for my research was collected specifically for ABC to allow the company to determine the necessary changes to the content in order to assist with customer engagement. However, the data was also used in this doctoral research to facilitate the development of a customer engagement strategy and therefore it was considered secondary data.

In the proceeding paragraphs I will discuss the various facets involved in the collection of the quantitative secondary data required for this research including data sources (3.5.1), storing of the data (3.5.2), data preparation and analysis (3.5.3).

3.5.1 Data Collection and Sources

The CPT discussed that one of the critical decisions in determining the data collection methods was deciding on the data source. One of the disadvantages of utilizing secondary data is that the researcher does not have any control over the format of the original data (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). As such the CPT wanted to discuss the format of the data to ensure that we knew the data sources, their format and devise a plan for its collection, preparation and analysis.

The research team discussed that unlike other secondary data sources, where the researcher may have no connection to the secondary quantitative source, for the purpose of this research the quantitative data sources would represent the social media platforms where ABC was distributed and ABC's platform where the content would reside. Essentially, the data sources were where users/ customers would engage with the content or the platform and therefore where metrics on the relationship between content and platform changes and the online customer engagement level would be measured.

According to the data adapted from Alexa.com (2019b), 45% or 9/ 20 most popularly viewed websites by persons located in Barbados were social media/platform sites. Facebook, YouTube and Instagram ranked second (2nd), third (3rd), and tenth (10^{th}) respectively (see Table 5). The Alexa.com (2019b) was discussed by the CPT and what platforms would be used to distribute ABC's content would dictate the platforms where we needed to secure accounts with ABC's user names. The team discussed that the Alexa.com (2019b) ranking did appear to truly represent the usage rates of Barbadians. Although Twitter and Pinterest were not part of the top ten websites in Barbados, they were popular in the United States and CPT thought it necessary to also secure accounts on these platforms. This was to ensure that should these platforms be utilized in the future the branding (account names) would be consistent. It should be noted that in later discussions, because of time constraints and format restrictions the CPT decided not to include Twitter and Pinterest platforms as part of the main distribution channels for ABC content. Additionally, CPT felt that YouTube should be used as ABC's video repository to reduce the server cost of having the videos on ABC, but the platform should not be part of ABC's distribution channel for two main reasons: 1. The platform only facilitated the loading of video content and ABC content may vary (e.g. text, photos, Gifs and videos). 2. YouTube did not facilitate easy linking of content back to ABC, therefore traffic could not be easily driven from YouTube to ABC thereby reducing the organization's visibility. There was therefore a consensus, by the team, that ABC would house all the content, but data would be collected from ABC and the respective distribution channels (Facebook and Instagram).

Rank	Barbadian Viewed Website	Description	Country of Origin
1	google.com	Search engine website	USA
2	youtube.com	Video sharing website.	USA
3	Facebook.com	Online social media and social networking sites.	USA
4	Amazon	E-commerce and cloud computing website.	USA
5	Live.com	Search engine website	USA
6	Ntd.tv	Television broadcaster based website	USA
7	Wikipedia.org	A free user based encyclopedia.	USA
8	Nationnews.com	Barbadian based newspaper.	BDS
9	Yahoo.com	Internet portal and search engine website.	USA
10	Instagram.com	Photo-sharing and video-sharing social networking website.	USA
11	Barbadostoday.bb	Barbadian based online newspaper.	Barbados
12	XVideos.com	Pornographic video sharing and viewing website	USA
13	Reddit.com	Social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website	USA
14	Msn.com	Online portal for shopping, news and money, e-mail, search, and chat.	USA
15	Thepiratebay.org	Online index of digital content of entertainment media and software website.	USA
16	UWI.edu	University website	Barbados
17	Ebay.com	Person to person auction website	USA
18	Deloton.com	Virus website	
19	Providr.com	Celebrity news website	USA
20	Pornhub.com	Pornographic video sharing and viewing website.	USA

Table 5: Most Popularly Barbadian Viewed Websites Adapted From Alexa.com (2019b)

Surrounding the discussion regarding, the "what" and "where" of data collection, since the platform and data formats would be different for each platform the CPT also discussed "how" the data would be collected. The team contemplating collecting the research data by using the respective platforms' Application Programming Interface (API) (Stieglitz et al., 2018), however CPT thought it would be best to download the data via the respective platforms or collect it manually because: 1. The development of an API to facilitate the download of the data from each of the platforms would take time, and human and financial resources away from ABC's core platform and development. 2. Collecting data through general available methods would provide a more real-world application to the research, since in most instances other start-ups may not have access to the skill set to utilize API. 3. Via an API the CRT (specifically me as the QuantE) could have access to user detail information, which could identify the users personally which would increase the ethical risk.

In the below paragraphs, I provided a short description of the platforms where the data would have been sourced (i.e. ABC, Facebook and Instagram). In the paragraphs I provide details concerning data and the gathering of data, a summary of the data gathered from the respective social media platforms including the type, data source and metric type of the data.

ABC

As discussed in previous sections, ABC Investment's primary product or service is a website and/or application located at ABC.com. Google Analytics, a free and well-established data collection and analytical tool, was used to collect user generate data automatically and directly from ABC. Access to ABC's data would be via the Google Analytics dashboard. One of the disadvantages of collecting data via this source is that the data is in summary format, i.e. via graphs, charts or summary tables. However, adhoc reports can be generated for some of the fields and more detailed data can be downloaded in an Excel format. Another disadvantage is that Google Analytics does not capture data such as "shares", "comments" and negative/positives "votes" research data. Therefore, this data was collected manually. For this research the data collected represented a total of 10,831 users who visited ABC and 26,115page views. The data collected, the sources and metric type are provided in Table 6.

Ref.	Data Type	Definition	Data Source	Metric Type
1	Content ID	ID associated with the post.	ABC	Numeric
2	Post Date	The date the post was made on ABC	ABC	Date
3	Post Time	Time the post was made on ABC	ABC	Time
4	Content Title	Title of the post	Google Analytics	Text
5	Views	The number of times the post was viewed.	Google Analytics	Numeric
6	Votes	The number of times ABC users voted positively or negatively for a post.	ABC	Numeric
7	Reactions	The number of times ABC users used any of the icons which represents their reactions regrading a post including "lol", "love", "angry" etc.	ABC	Numeric
8	Shares	The number of times hashtag users shared the post with other social media platforms.	Google Analytics	Numeric
9	Comments	The number of times ABC users placed information in the comments or reply section of hashtagbarbados under the post.	ABC	Numeric
9	Page Views	The number times a page, content or video is viewed by a user on ABC.	Google Analytics	Numeric
10	Bounce Rate	The extent to which a visitor moves away from content after only interacting with a single content type or page.	Google Analytics	Percentage
11	Average Time On Page	The average among of time users spent viewing a specific page or screen or set of pages or screens.	Google Analytics	Numeric
12	Average Session Duration	The average length of time of a session.	Google Analytics	Numeric
13	Pages Per Session	Is the average number of pages viewed during a session.	Analytics	Numeric

Table 6: Information Regarding The Data Collected From ABC

Facebook

Facebook is a social media and social networking website, which permits the posting of links, images, and videos. It has a feature that allows external content to be shared/placed on the platform but facilitates a link back to the original website/ source (i.e. ABC.com). As with Google Analytics, Facebook provides free customer engagement data via a dashboard for all customers who have business pages. Facebook data is also in summary form (i.e. graphs, charts or summary tables), but some of the data specific to the content posted can be downloaded in an Excel format. For the research period, the data represented 262,501 Facebook users reached and 21,411 content views. The data collected and metric type are provided in Table 7.

Ref.	Data Type	Definition	Data Source	Metric Type
1	Content ID	ID associated with the post.	ABC	Numeric
2	Post Date	The date the post was made on Facebook	Facebook	Date
3	Post Time	Time the post was made on Facebook	Facebook	Time
4	Content Title	Title of the post	ABC	Text
	People Researched	Number of Facebook users who saw the content in their feed	Facebook	Numeric
5	Post Clicks	The number of times the post was clicked	Facebook	Numeric
6	Shares	The number of times Facebook users shared the post.	Facebook	Numeric
7	Comments	The number of times Facebook users placed information in the comments or reply section of Facebook under the post.	Facebook	Numeric
8	Reactions	The number of times Facebook users used any of the icons which represent reactions in regards to a post including "like", "love", "angry" etc.	Facebook	Numeric
9	Advertisement	Where the post was paid for or not on Facebook	Facebook	Text

Table 7: Information Regarding The Data Collected From Facebook

Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing and video-sharing social networking website/ mobile application that allows users to share short videos and photos uploaded from mobile phones. Unless the content is paid for, at the time, there was no facility that would allow the automatic redirection of users to an external link/ website. Unlike Google Analytics and Facebook, Instagram, at the time, did not provide very detailed analytics via a dashboard but did provide some summary data via a “view analytics” screen. The CPT acknowledged that this platform had some shortcomings but because of its ranking in Barbados and worldwide there was a consensus that it needed to be part of ABC’s distribution channels and by respect, a data source. For the research period the Instagram data represented 2,779 impressions, 2,183 people reached and 1,154 content views. The data collected and metric type are provided in Table 8.

Ref.	Data Type	Definition	Data Source	Metric Type
1	Content ID	ID associated with the post.	ABC	Numeric
2	Post Date	Date the post was made on Instagram.	Instagram	Date
3	Post Time	Time the post was made on Instagram.	Instagram	Time
4	Content Title	Title of the post	ABC	Text
5	Impressions	The number of times a post is placed on Instagram user's feed.	Instagram	Numeric
6	Reach	Number of Instagram users who saw the content in their feed	Instagram	Numeric
7	Profile visits	The number of times a user visits the poster’s profile page.	Instagram	Numeric
8	Website Clicks	The number of times a user clicks on the website from Instagram.	Instagram	Numeric
9	Views	The number of times a video post was viewed.	Instagram	Numeric
10	Shares	The number of times Instagram users shared the post.	Instagram	Numeric
11	Comments	The number of times Instagram users placed information in the comments or reply section of Instagram under the post.	Instagram	Numeric
12	Likes	The number of times Instagram users click the “love” icon.	Instagram	Numeric
13	Saved	The number of users who saved the content to view later.	Instagram	Numeric
14	Follows	The number of users who seek to follow the poster	Instagram	Numeric
15	Advertisement	Where the post was paid for or not on Instagram.	Instagram	Text

Table 8: Information Regarding The Data Collected From Instagram

The data sources as previously mentioned form a critical aspect of the discussion on secondary quantitative data collection because the data source often dictates other requirements during the data preparation, analysis and interpretations stages. In the proceeding section I will discuss methods used for the storing and preparing of the research data.

3.5.2 Storing Data

Although in theory there were several thousand data points relating to ABC's online customer visits and engagement, because the data was only available from ABC, Facebook and Instagram in summary format, the dataset was significantly reduced. The CPT discussed that giving the importance of the research data, a data storage and backup protocol needed to be developed in case of data destruction or compromise (Creswell, 2007). The CPT discussed that given that most of the data came from online sources (ABC, Facebook or Instagram), there would therefore be an online version (back-up) of the data even where the data was previously downloaded. For example, all data regarding user interaction with Facebook or Instagram would be kept on the Facebook or Instagram hosting site. Additionally, for data captured on ABC, there was storage redundancy via Google Analytics as well as via an analytics program called Analytify. For the data captured manually the storage protocol took this into account, and included, a step that required data to be backed up (see Figure 16).

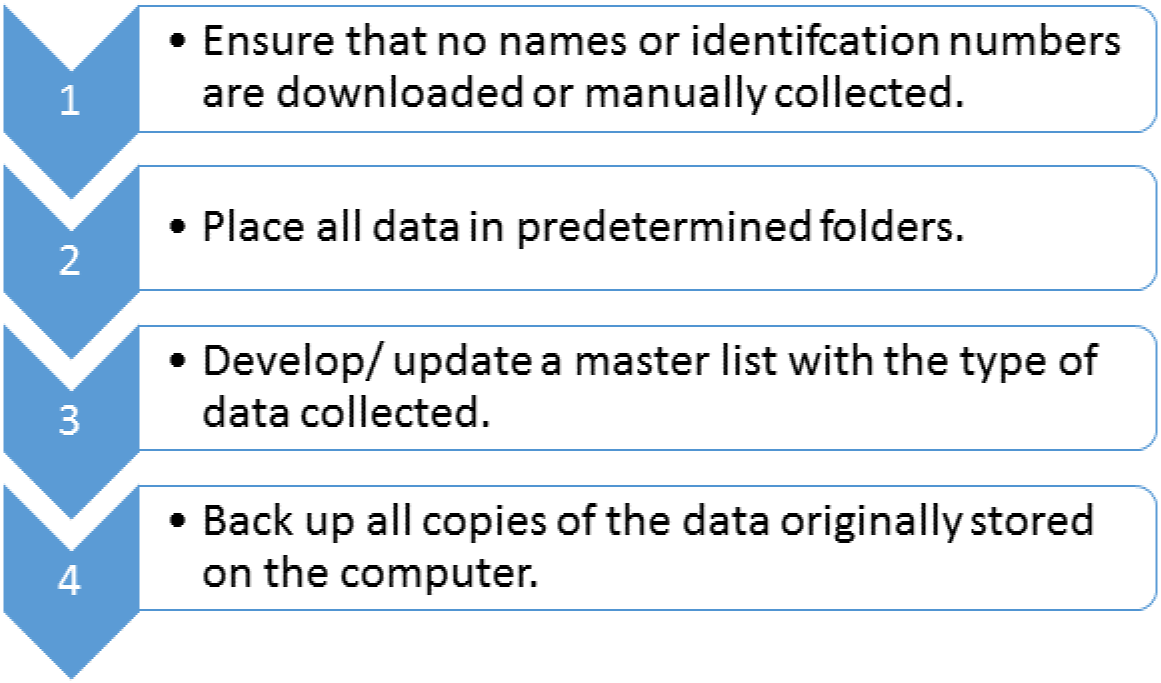

Figure 16: Steps Outlining The Data Storage Protocol adapted from Creswell (2007)

For the storage protocol illustrated in Figure 16 the identity of the users/customer (if known) are kept private from the inception of the process in step 1. The data is kept in a predetermined folder to ensure that it can be easily retrieved in step 2. In step 3 a master list is created or updated to allow a quick reference to be able identify the information kept in each of the files. The final step, step 4 is where copies of the original data is backed up to ensure there is no loss. The CPT did not believe it was feasible to back-up the data daily, however a weekly back-up protocol was agreed upon, where the team felt that there was a sufficient balance between the risk of data loss (only one week) and the time and human resource cost. The illustration of the process does not seem as though it is an iterative one but in practice as the raw data was prepared and analysed the cycle began again usually from step 2.

The next step in the data collection process is the preparation of the data. The initial raw data is collected and stored, however because the data is comprised of secondary data there is a need to remove any erroneous data and place it a format to be analysed. In the proceeding section there will be a discussion regarding the data preparation as it relates to this research.

3.5.3 Data Preparation and Analysis

Below are the details regarding data preparation stage of the data collection process which consisted of removing erroneous data during the data cleansing process and transforming the data.

Data Cleansing

From the outset of the data collection process the CPT realized that some of the data collected via Google Analytics contained erroneous data which represented data gathered from non-content pages. A quick review by the team revealed that in most instances the erroneous pages were, for example, 404/ error pages, pages that contained the terms of the agreement and privacy policy, as well as the registration pages. Additionally, the data after ABC was hacked (October 1 to December 1, 2018) was also not utilized in any of the data collection iterations. Although the team agreed that in general the data cleansing stage is an important one (Cooley et al 1999), there was initially a debate of what defined erroneous pages since it was thought that this definition may change over time. There was a consensus that instead of stating what pages were erroneous it would be more prudent to indicate that only data transactions relating to content pages would be retained, which would provide the QuantE with a robust and flexible direction regarding the removal of erroneous pages. It was noted however in the meeting, that erroneous data as part of the summary data could not be identified and therefore could not be removed. This was unfortunately a limitation of data and the data sources, but the team felt that should the data be skewed it would be noticed on initial analysis.

Data Transformation

The data for this research was either downloaded from Google Analytics or collected from Facebook, Instagram or ABC. With the data in its raw format without the distinguishing antecedent names it was necessary to transform some of the data fields into attributes denoting the antecedent under study. For example, there were no fields within the original raw data that identified whether the content was video, a poll/quiz or content with images/text, hence this information needed to be included. The raw data also did not have calculated fields such as social engagement rate, it was thus, necessary to transform the data to allow for this metric field - denoted as social engagement rating = (Likes+ Comments + Shares+ Votes+ Saves+ Other)/ Views *100 - to be included in the analysis of the data. The transformation of the data was done using basic equations or functions, within Microsoft Excel, and conducted by the QuantE. Usually for research such as this SPSS would have been used as the data preparation and analysis software however, Microsoft Excel was used firstly, because the raw data export was in an Excel format and transforming it within MS Excel would reduce the cycle of the data preparation. Secondly, a copy of SPSS can cost more than $10, 000 USD, and, given the development stage of both ABC and the project, the CPT did not believe that it made financial sense to purchase a copy. Additionally, the CPT felt that MS Excel was already a recognized business tool, moreover the type of analysis which would be required, and the descriptive statistics, graphs and pivot tables could be easily generated within Microsoft Excel.

Data Sampling

At the beginning of the research planning the CPT discussed whether sampling would be required given the ease (both time and cost) of collecting data online. Cost and time are predominately why sampling methods are required (Acharya et al., 2013). In instances where there are little to no restrictions (e.g. this research), there were questions raised in the CPT forum regarding why sampling was required. After some discussion the CPT did conclude that although the time to download the data would not increase exponentially as the data volume increased, the time to prepare and transform the data would not necessarily increase as the volume of data increased. The CPT discussed the possibility of using random sampling, where each of the observations would have a chance to be chosen, however the team felt that with the data being in summary form the volume of data would not warrant this method. The CPT also discussed the utilization of stratified sampling but determined that this type of sampling method would not fit the data set since stratification variables (e.g. age, gender, location etc.) would not be available for all the data and which could possibly reduce the dataset simply to meet a sampling method. The team eventually decided that we would use a criterion sampling method. With criterion sampling, the sample chosen is based on a predetermined criterion of importance (Sandelowski, 2000). For example, the research team suggested that the quantitative data would be chosen based on whether the respective user engaged with the content which was changed/action taken or whether the users engaged with the content or platform at the time when the action/changes were made.

Data Analysis

Where required, all the quantitative data went through the preparation processes outlined above. The data was then subsequently analysed within Microsoft Excel using a combination of equations, pivot tables and graphs to display the results. The resulting metrics (descriptive statistics), inferential statistics (correlation) and respective tables, graphs or charts were subsequently reviewed by me (the Quantitative Evaluator) for completeness, complied to be provided to the Qualitative Evaluator (the full-time employee) for them to review and in preparation for the qualitative step of the MMAR process.

3.6. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1 Data Collection

Hox and Boeije (2005) defined qualitative data as text data usually gathered from interview transcripts, discussions, observation and field notes, utilized to assist with understanding the complexity, details, and context of a research subject or data. The CPT determined that semi-structured, in-depth interviews were best suited for the flexible but rich data that was necessary at this stage of the MMAR methodology (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Yin, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are defined as a type of guided open interviews where the respective respondents are given the flexibility and freedom to discuss issues in a way that feels comfortable and natural to them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Yin, 2009). On the other hand, in-depth interviews are a type of interview that facilitates the deep probing by the researcher and assisted in gathering rich data (an epistemology social constructionism perspective) and understanding multiple truths and realities (an ontology relativism perspective).

As mentioned previously, the sequential/handmaid approach utilizes one method to explain or clarify the results of another method. Qualitative evaluation interviews were conducted as part of the MMAR process. Four (4) interview cycles were conducted during the period of September 3, 2018 to April 6, 2019. For each of the interviews the QualE was provided with the quantitative data and charts to review before the interview session. On the day of the interview I, in the capacity of the Principal Researcher and QuantE conducted the face-to-face interviews and asked a series of questions related to the quantitative data and graphs. One hour was allotted for each of the interviews but interviews at times maybe less than one hour. Permission was not granted for video or voice recordings therefore notes were taken in Microsoft Word during the interview session. Subsequently the interviewee was asked to review the notes and confirm that they represented what transpired within the meeting.

One of the prevailing ethical issues that I had to grapple with throughout my research was my dual role as the Principal Director of ABC and the Principal Researcher for this research. As the practitioner my obligation was to the best interest of the organization, however as the researcher my obligation was to the best interest of my research. At times, however, these represented two opposing interests. As the Principal Director my concern was that ABC was a new company and during the CRT meetings, we would be discussing the business strategies which would encompass details on content and platform changes. During one of our CPT meetings we discussed whether I should allow the taping of interview sessions the full-time employee (also the QualE) asked me a very important question, which determined my recommendation: “If you were not the researcher would you have given permission for recordings to be done?”. My immediate answer was “No.”. “Even though privacy of the interview sessions would be maintained, the company is at too vulnerable a stage. Maybe if ABC was not at the start-up stage”. Additionally, I recalled several occasions when I was seeking to conduct research at XYZ when permission was not granted for the video or audio recording to be done. There was a consensus therefore within the CPT forum to not record the interviews. However, although not recording interviews had several benefits, such as reducing the interviewee's concern about privacy and "not wanting to talk on record" (Hannabuss,1996), the disadvantage, however was how to reduce the ethical issues that would arise by me as the scholar/practitioner taking notes while ensuring that the advantages of this qualitative data collection method was maintained. The CPT felt that the face-to-face interviews were important to collect in-depth and rich responses through synchronous communication (Opdenakker, 2006, Yin, 2009 and Hannabuss, 1996). The team however wanted to reduce the disadvantages associated with this method including issues with accuracy of recall and introducing research bias through non-verbal cues where the interview felt coerced (Opdenakker, 2006, Middendorf and Macan, 2002, and Hannabuss, 1996). A more sinister but realistic disadvantage of researcher note taking was that incompetence about the method could lead to the method being misused and this was especially of concern in the MMAR method which was being used (Qu and Dumay, 2011 and Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). To mitigate the potential for accuracy of recall the notes were taken at the time of the interview and the interviewee shown the notes and asked to confirm whether they were accurate, and whether changes were made where necessary (Middendorf and Macan, 2002). To mitigate the interviewee feeling coerced, a participant consent form (see example in Appendix A) and participation information sheet (see example in Appendix B) were provided to the interviewee for completion and before each interview the interviewee was reminded that they could opt out of the interview anytime without any adverse repercussions to their employment with ABC. I had extensive training and knowledge of using face to face semi-structure, in-depth interviewing approaches through my Bachelor's and Master's degree program as well as more than 15 years of using these techniques for marketing research and to gather data from organizational line staff, Managers and Executives in my capacity as an Industrial Engineer, therefore it was deemed that the skill set was present. It should be noted that for all information captured in a physical format, the data was kept in a file on my (the researcher's) laptop which was password protected. Although the semi-structured and in-depth interview questions changed from interview to interview, the following fields were part of each interview (see Table 9):

Field Reference	Field	Description
1	Interviewee Code	The code associated with the person being interviewed.
2	Date	Date the interview took place.
3	Question number	The number associated with the question.
4	Question	Question asked within the interview
5	Response	Summary of the response which was given to the interviewer.

Table 9: Description of Fields Included In The Semi-structured and In-Depth Interviews

On completion of the data collection stage of the MMAR cycle I (as the Principal Researcher and Quantitative Evaluator) proceed to the next stage of data analysis where the qualitative data is reviewed and compiled into an action plan document to be presented to the CPT. In the below section details of the data analysis stage of the MMAR cycle will be provided.

3.6.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative evaluation process is expected to provide the CPT with rich information to facilitate the determination of the many truths (Ontology Relativism) that would guide the changes to the online engagement strategy, but there will be the need to review and analyse the data via constructionism approaches. There are various qualitative data analysis approaches and techniques with a constructionism perspective including discourse analysis, narrative analysis, thematic analysis and conversation analysis. Although the analysis approaches have different processes, origins and contexts, the most common thread among the analysis techniques appears to be that discourse and conversations are reviewed and analysed. The thematic analysis technique was used in this research because of the structure of the project where the research questions/ themes were determined from the onset of the project, quantitative data was collected and qualitative analysis was used to interpret the quantitative findings to produce required "next phase" actions (Creswell et al., 2003).

Thematic analysis is defined as a method for "systematically identifying, organizing, and offering into patterns of meaning (themes) across data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In essence, thematic analysis, although described as a method, provides a guideline more so that rules on the analysis of the qualitative data (Gibson and Brown, 2011). For each iteration the specific antecedents/ research questions needed to be addressed and as such the interview guide was based on the antecedents/ research questions. To some degree the themes used for this research thematic analysis have already been identified for each of the qualitative evaluation sessions. However, responses that would lead to a change or inclusion of a research question but did not fit within the predefined research questions or structure were still considered. By choosing this process of inclusion and theme modification, there was a greater assurance of reducing ethical researcher issues due to biased presumption (Gibbs, 2007). Interviewee responses were linked to the actions to be taken. As described previously after the qualitative data analysis sessions the recommended actions were identified and presented to the CPT for review and discuss. At this stage any changes to the proposed actions were adjusted, before the actions were feed into the next MMAR cycle.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2007) theorised that researchers needed to be sensitive to ethical considerations throughout all phases of the research process. The authors indicated that there is a common misconception that ethical issues only manifest themselves during the data collection stage of a research project. However ethical issues, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) and Creswell (2007), occur at all stages of the research process including pre-research start date, at the beginning of the research, during the data collection phase, during the data analysis phase, at the reporting stage and during the publication of the research. Additionally, with Action

Research, ethical issues can be magnified since the researcher is an insider or practitioner as well as an outsider or scholar. Some of the ethical considerations would have been discussed in section 3.5 and 3.6, however given that ABC is a small organization, and I am the Principal Director as well as the Principal Researcher, this provided some unique ethical challenges. The extent of the ethical dilemmas was only evident to me as the CPT planned aspects of my research. For example, I was aware from past AR projects, that as the scholar/practitioner I had the potential to be more prone to eliminating data points, voices or discussions that did not fit my research narrative. However, the conflict of interest in determining whether to choose to tape or not to tape the interviews with the CRT sessions and having to perform the introspection/reflection and discuss the issue with my CPT, was not one that I anticipated. On reflection I determined that the difficulty I had was because under normal circumstances the risk of the decision would have been out of my control, since with my DBA coursework the projects where based on XYZ. It was, therefore easier for me to concede when permission was not approved. However, because as the Principal Director the risk of the decision was in my hands and the research benefit was also in my hands, the conflict of interest became more apparent.

Another key ethical issue which arose, was with the action to be taken on content and platform changes. I had to be cognizant of the ethical ramifications of choosing to engage online customers or use their data in a way that was unethical or that could possibly endanger the user's privacy or endanger the online user either emotionally or physically (Debatin et al., 2009). For example, during the planning stage of ABC, Barbados did not have a Data Protection Act. However, to ensure that users could trust the website and to comply with international laws, a well thought out Privacy Policy and Terms of Service document was developed. Additionally, changes to the platform were made to comply with the "General Data Protection Regulation" (GDPR) which came into force in May 2018. A comprehensive approach to the research and content and platform changes was also developed which encompassed; the University of Liverpool's ethical standards (see Ethics Award Letter Appendix C) and requirements, the fact that my research was AR based, and also the fact that my research was based on the utilization of online data (See Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12).

Ref.	Phase	Ethical Issue	Consideration and Action
1	**Before conducting my research**	Gain access to ABC.com, Facebook, Instagram page and Google Analytics admin page and access to the relevant data from their Principle Director.	1. Completed the University of Liverpool's full ethics form under the guidance of my primary and secondary supervisor and gained approval for it. 2. Prepared an "Informed Consent Form" and gained approval for it, which was subsequently used to obtain consent from the research participants. 3. See Appendix A for the adapted template of the "Participant Consent Form" template which was used in my research. 4. Gained authorization from the Principal Director of ABC.
2	**At the start of conducting my research**	1. Disclose the purpose of the research to all interviewees. 2. Participants were not pressured into signing any of the consent forms and were told that they can withdraw from the research anything he/she wanted to. 3. All research data which was downloaded was kept in a secure password protected laptop/ pc and all access to the online data was password protected. 4. Online data privacy and security was maintained through the redacting of user identification.	1. Indicated to participants the reason and details of the study detailed in my information sheet provided to the interview participants. 2. Informed "Consent Forms" were signed. 3. Ensure that ABC.com has a "Privacy Policy" and "Terms and Service" that indicate that user information may be used for data analysis purposes (see appendix D and E respectively for a copy of both documents).

Table 10: Table Showing the Ethical Issues, Consideration and Action At Each Phase (Page 1)

Ref.	Phase	Ethical Issue	Consideration and Action
3	**Data collection**	1. Avoid disrupting the ABC.com website and their associated social media platforms as muchas possible. 2. Avoid misrepresenting participants' voices during the summary of the interviews. 3. Avoid only collecting data through observation that met my own narrative as the researcher. 4. Verbally disclose the ethical principles of my research to the participants to ensure that they understand them. 5. Avoid disclosing any identification data of the research participants.	1. Participation was voluntary, and he/she was allowed to remove themselves and their information from the research at any time during the research process. 2. Participants were provided with a summary of the information to determine if it was representative of what they meant or wanted to convey. 3. Observations by me the researcher were provided to ABC.com Content Consultant to determine if they also agreed with the observation. 4. Data fields containing any user identification information was never downloaded from ABC.com, Google analytics, and social media platforms. Additionally, the interviewee's name was never placed on any of the forms. 5. Data for the research was not shared with any third party. 6. No audio/ visual recording of the interviewees were ever done.
4	**Data analysis**	1. Avoid simply only seeking to indicate results that fit my narrative. 2. Avoid only taking one aspect of the research data.	1. Findings and opinions that were in contrast to my own were reported. 2. Research data was collected from multiple sources.

Table 11: Table Showing the Ethical Issues, Consideration and Action At Each Phase (Page 2)

Ref.	Phase	Ethical Issue	Consideration and Action
5	**Data reporting**	1.Do not plagiarize either journal work, other dissertations or writings from the book. 2.Avoid disclosing any information that would harm the participants even if it was provided during an interview or if the data was downloaded from the ABC website or any of their social media platforms. 3.Data was shared with the participants.	1. Other authors' words were not plagiarized. 2. Stakeholders and participants were provided the analysis and report before publication. 3. Information that could harm participants was not disclosed. 4. Participants' real names were not used in any of the research.
6	**Publishing of my research.**	1. The research was not duplicated. 2. Complete proof of adherence to the University of Liverpool's ethical standards.	1. Results were provided to the Creative Consultant who is the only paid employee within the organisation. 2. All conflicts of interest were disclosed in the ethical form. 3. No ethical issues were found in the collection, analysis or reporting of the research. 4. Acknowledgement was given to all participants in the interview process from ABC.com.

Table 12: Table Showing the Ethical Issues, Consideration and Action at Each Phase (Page 3)

3.8. Chapter Summary

This thesis chapter provided a detailed discussion regarding the methodology, methods and techniques employed for this research. This involved discussion on philosophical perspectives used within this research and the justification for the selection of each of the components of the overall methodology, supported by the relevant literature and agreement with the core planning team. As part of the initial discussion regarding the methodology used, the reason why an AR framework was used and how it provided the necessary overarching principles was discussed.

There was further discussion regarding the validity of the data collection methods used within the context of the Mixed Methods Action Research (MMAR). Relevant literature and organizational context were also provided for the quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods chosen. Lastly the ethical issues for this research would have been discussed.

Before proceeding to the next chapter on the recommendations and findings, it is important to note that the methodology and supporting elements were developed prior to and during the collection of the data, and not as a subsequent justification for the methods used. As mentioned previously, although the methodology was developed after review of the relevant literature and consultation with the CPT, not all elements or meetings bore deep insights into the problem or led to conclusive recommendations. However, one of the benefits of undertaking this research grounded in AR was that the methodology was collaborative, emphasized examination of the objectives, and took into consideration the nuances of ABC. Therefore, the methodology was tailored to provide the best results given the project context. This is not to say that other methodologies and elements may not have been successfully deployed however, given the fundamentals of AR, the expectation is not that there is only one methodology but that the best methodology is crafted given the nuances of the project (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). In the next chapter details of the research recommendations and findings will be discussed.

4.0. Results and Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter of this thesis provides details of the intervention including the analysis, results and findings from the research into each research question. As mentioned in section 3.3, this research utilized a cyclical Mixed Method Action Research (MMAR) methodology (Ivankova and Wingo ,2018). At the beginning of this overall MMAR process eleven (11) research questions were identified which were subsequently transformed into antecedents/themes, with each subsequent MMAR cycle addressing specific research questions. Secondly, in the CRT session the respective action/ intervention to be taken was identified. The "action" to be taken within the context of this research involved changes either to the content, process or the platform, with the overall objective of increasing online customer engagement at each stage. Thirdly, quantitative data and qualitative data were collected during the Evaluation Stage by the quantitative evaluator (QuantE) (me) and the qualitative evaluator (QualE) respectively. The output from the evaluation stage was a set of explanations and actional research questions or recommended changes, which were reviewed by the CPT team and developed into actions to be taken in the next MMAR cycle/ iteration to improve the online engagement levels. The complete cycle, based on Saunders et al. (2012) p 183 process, which was illustrated in Figure 11. This research consisted of four (4) distinctive MMAR cycles from September 8, 2018 to April 6, 2019, with on average each cycle lasting 3-4 weeks. However, it should be noted that as the CRT and the CPT became more au fait with the MMAR process, and the online engagement became more defined, the process time for the respective cycle became less. The following section will detail the quantitative and qualitative analysis within the Evaluation Stage, as well as the proposed action to be taken, objectives and issues discussed in the CPT sessions.

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4.2. Mixed Method Action Research Cycle One

The objectives of the first cycle were to gather preliminary online engagement quantitative data (see further explanation section 3.3.2) and subsequently use this data as the foundation for the interview with the QualE. On August 5, 2018 ABC was launched, the website had 50 posts primarily consisting of a few videos, images and text. The website was launched at this time, because on August 6, 2018 Barbados celebrated Kadooment, one of its biggest street festivals and we did not want to miss the content activity during that period. The customer engagement data, for this cycle, was collected for the period August 5, 2018 to August 31, 2018 and represents a total of 58, 822 page views and a maximum of 50 individual content/posts. Table 13 provides the details for the first seven (7) themes. Note that because the quantitative data was secondary data and in summary format, depending on the theme under investigation, the number of posts may not be available.

Data Collection Period (Start Date)	Data Collection Period (End Date)	Thesis Section Name	Total Dataset (Page Views)	Total Dataset (Num. of Post)
August 5, 2018	August 12, 2018	Time Of Day	12,409	N/A*
August 5, 2018	August 26, 2018	Day of Week	15,335	N/A*
August 5, 2018	August 31, 2018	Content Type	14,925	50
August 5, 2018	August 31, 2018	Vividness	11,723	47
August 5, 2018	August 31, 2018	Content Category	3,347	11
August 5, 2018	August 31, 2018	Frequency of Post	1,083	29
August 5, 2018	August 31, 2018	Media Elements	158	13
Total			**58,980**	
*N/A = Not Applicable				

Table 13: Dataset details for the first seven (7) themes.

In the next section I will provide details of the quantitative and qualitative analysis as it related to the research questions/antecedents/ themes addressed in this cycle.

4.2.1 Research Questions, Antecedents or Themes To Be Addressed

In this first iteration, the initial seven (7) research questions and respective antecedents or themes were addressed. The CPT determined that these research questions were a good starting point to provide an understanding of the level of online customer engagement. The seven (7) research questions addressed initially were as follows:

1. ***Q1 a:*** *Does the time of day impact positively on online customer engagement?*
2. ***Q1 b:*** *Does the day of the week impact positively on online customer engagement?*
3. ***Q2:*** *Will content type impact differently on online customer engagement?*
4. ***Q3:*** *Will the vividness of content have an impact on the customer engagement level?*
5. ***Q4:*** *Will the content category impact on the engagement level?*
6. ***Q5:*** *Does the frequency of the post-impact on online customer engagement?*
7. ***Q6:*** *Will the number of media elements impact the level of customer online engagement?*

In the next section, details of the results of the quantitative analysis will be discussed by the respective antecedent/theme.

4.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

The information for this section was derived from data collected from Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, Instagram Analytics, and ABC. The statistical type used to analyse the data was governed by the detail and the type of data available. By utilizing the quantitative methods to analyse the data and address the research questions, it essentially allowed the answering of the question "what" and "how" the antecedents were impacting on the metrics. Below I will utilize graphs, charts and comparative percentages to provide the full analysis relating to the seven (7) research question.

4.2.2.1 Time of the Day and Engagement

Review of the charts and graphs did not reveal a distinctive pattern in relation to time of day and bounce rate (Figure 19). However, the initial analysis did seem to imply that there was a relationship between time of day, page views (Figure 17) , pages per session (Figure 18), and time on page (Figure 20). Of note, was that page views seem to peak early in the morning (4 am to 6 am) and later in the evening (5 pm to 7 pm), with page views between 5 pm and 7 pm being 26.6% higher than the page views between 4 am and 6 am. Additionally, pages per session seem to gradually increase throughout the day and finally a peak between 9 pm and 10 pm of 2.08 pages per session. Although not as distinct as with page views, it still seemed as though the time of day did have an impact on pages per session, but that there may be other antecedents affecting this metric.

On the other hand, although there seemed to be a relationship between time of day and time on page, the relationship appeared a little more volatile with several sharp peaks and valleys throughout the day. However, on further examination of the data there were distinctive peaks in activity at early in the morning (7 am), in the afternoon (1 pm) and in the evening (8 pm). At 1 pm users spent on average 1 minute and 48 seconds on a page/ content and at 8 pm users spent an average of 1 minute and 54 seconds on a page/content which is 21.18% above average, 25.42% above average and 30.51% above average respectively.

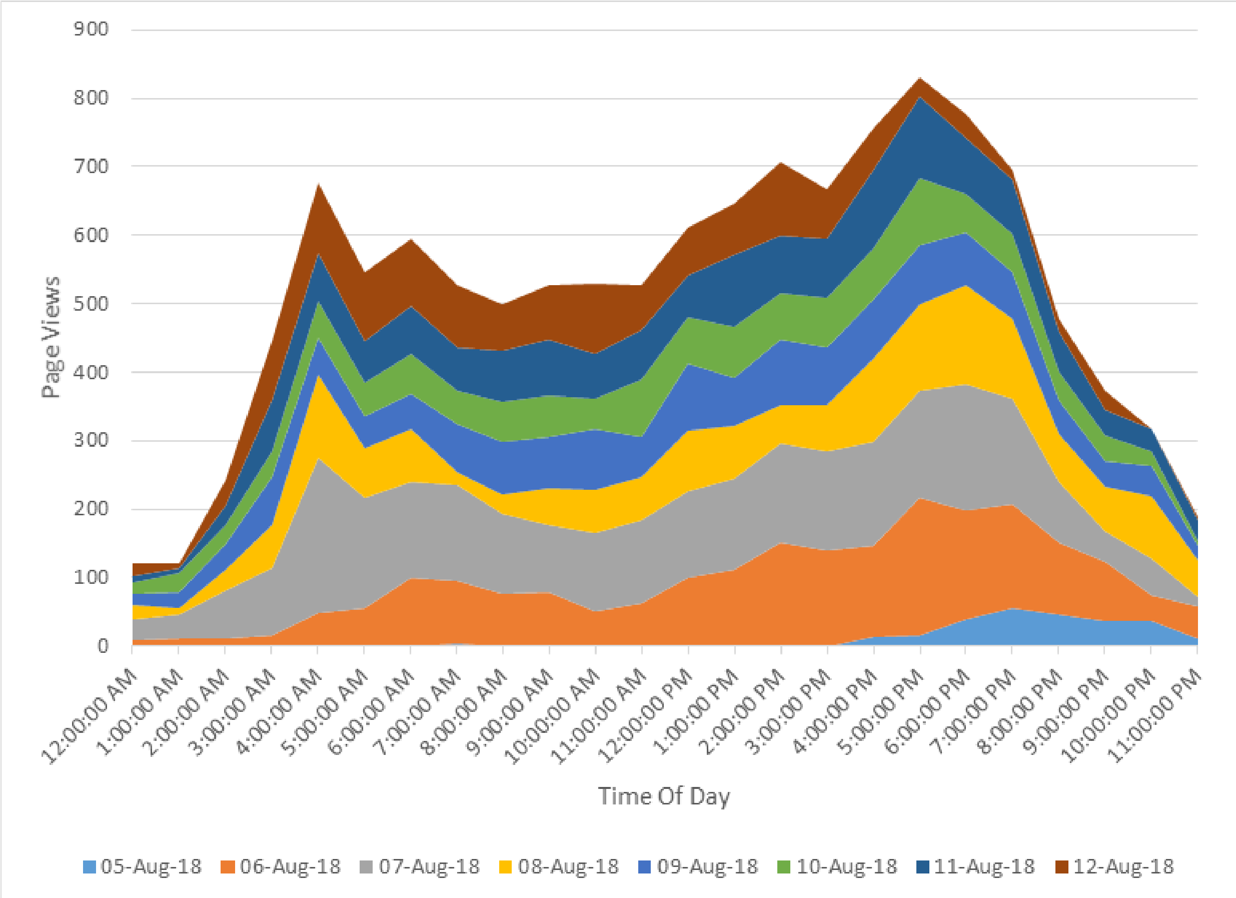


Figure 17: Area Chart of Page Views by Hour of the Day

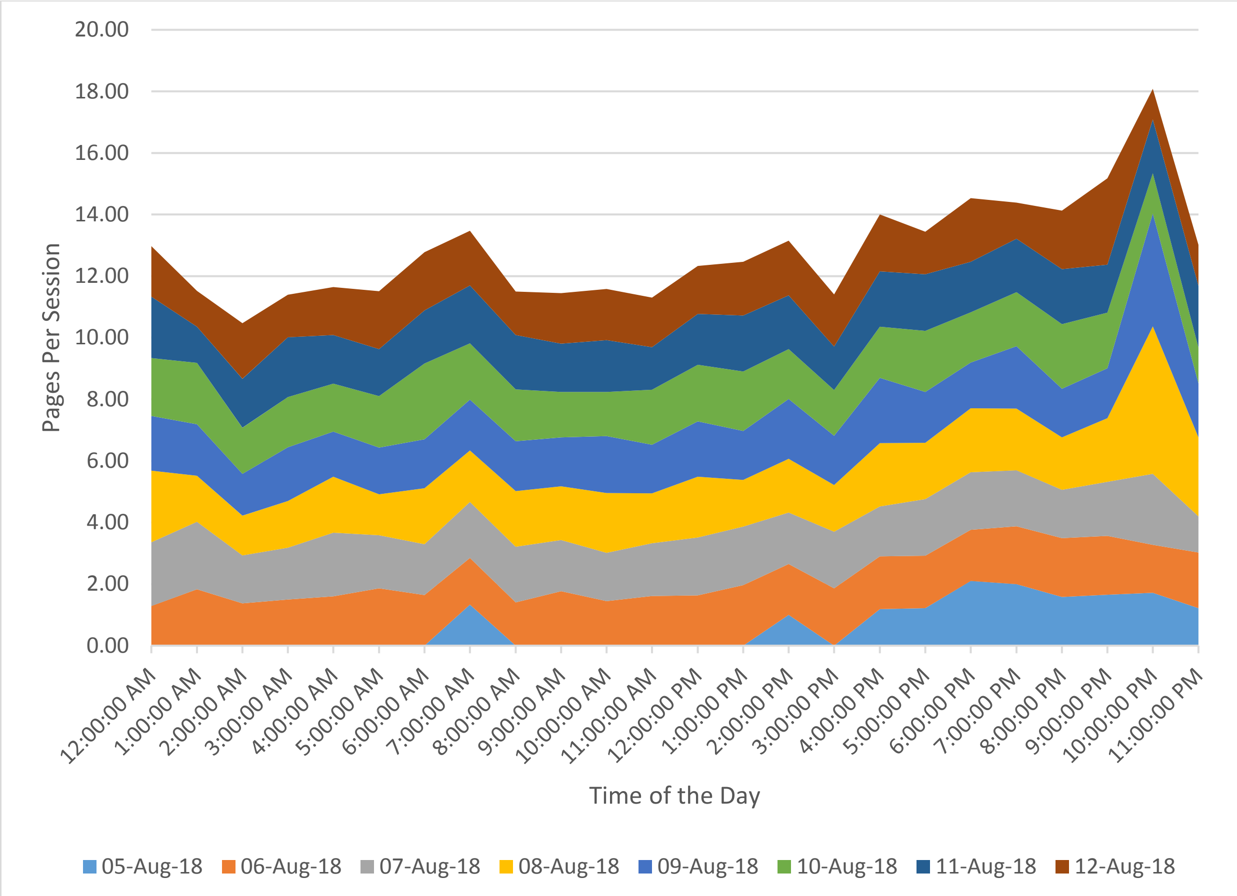


Figure 18: Area Chart of Pages Per Session by Hour of Day

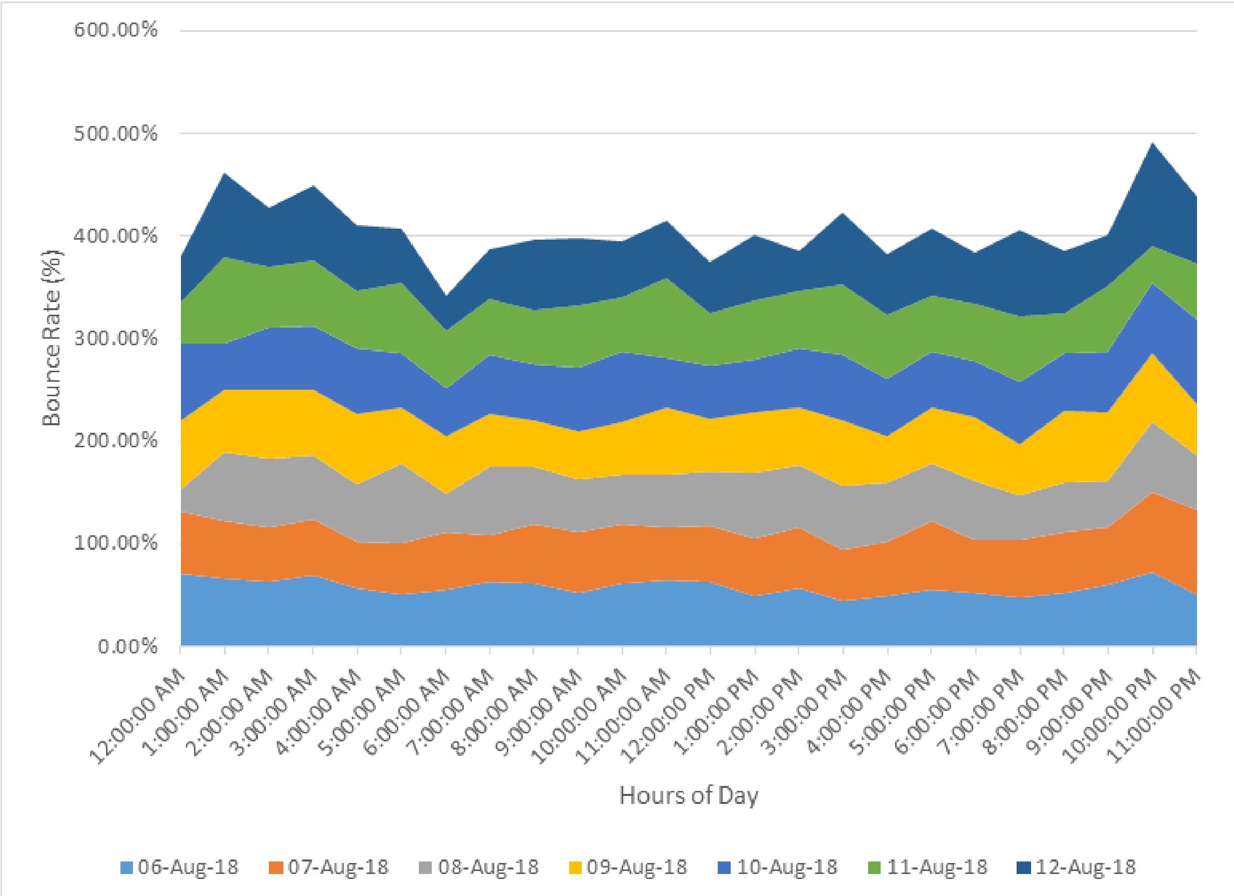


Figure 19: Area Chart of Hour of the Day by Bounce Rate

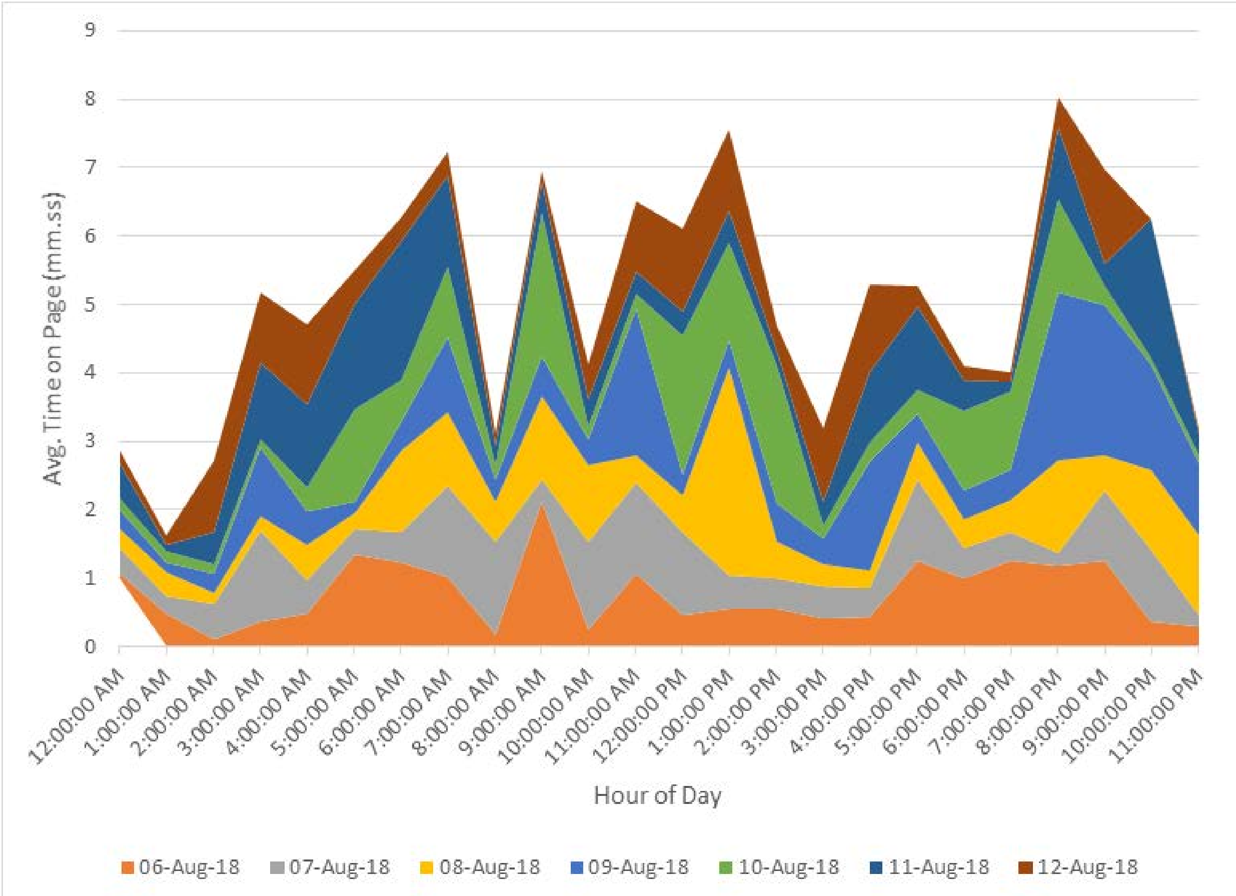
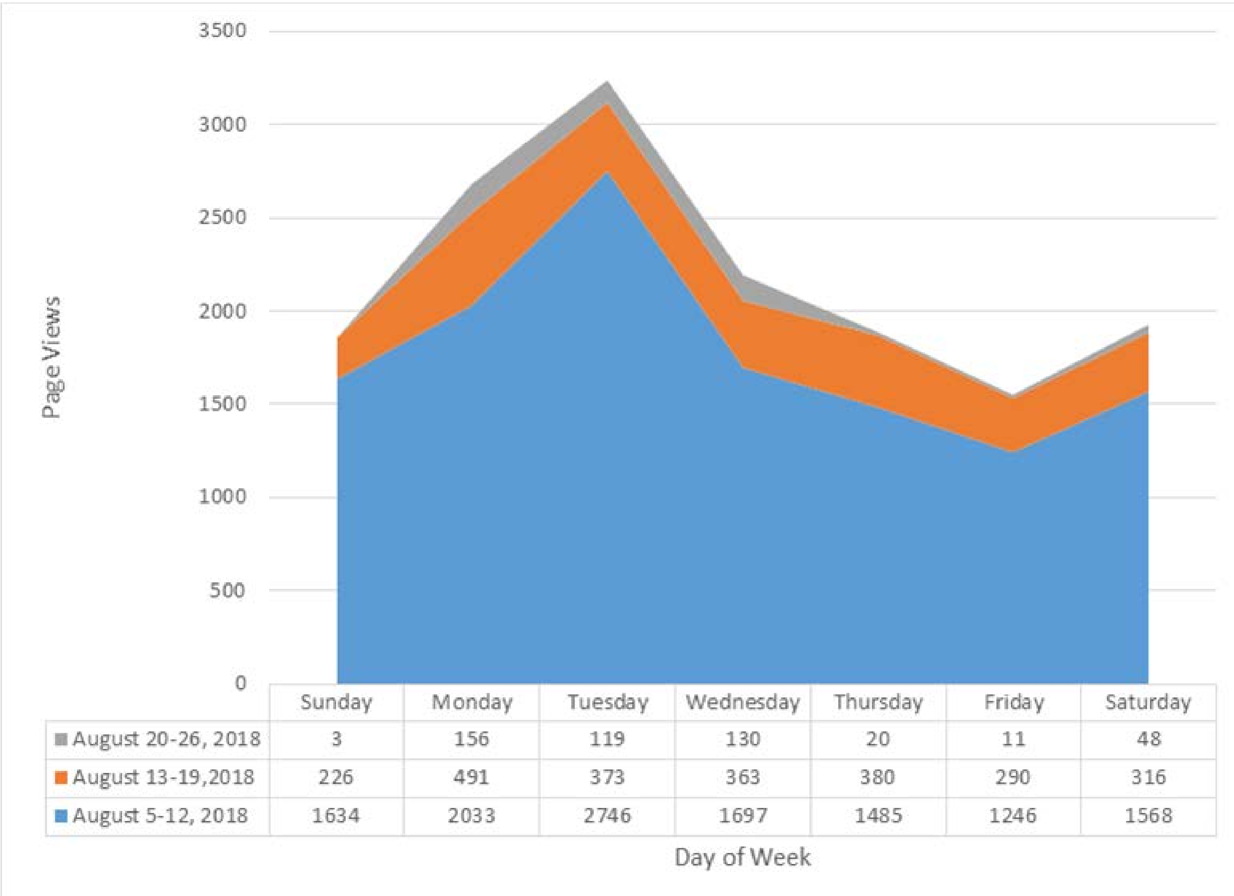


Figure 20: Area Chart of Average Time on Page by Hour of Day

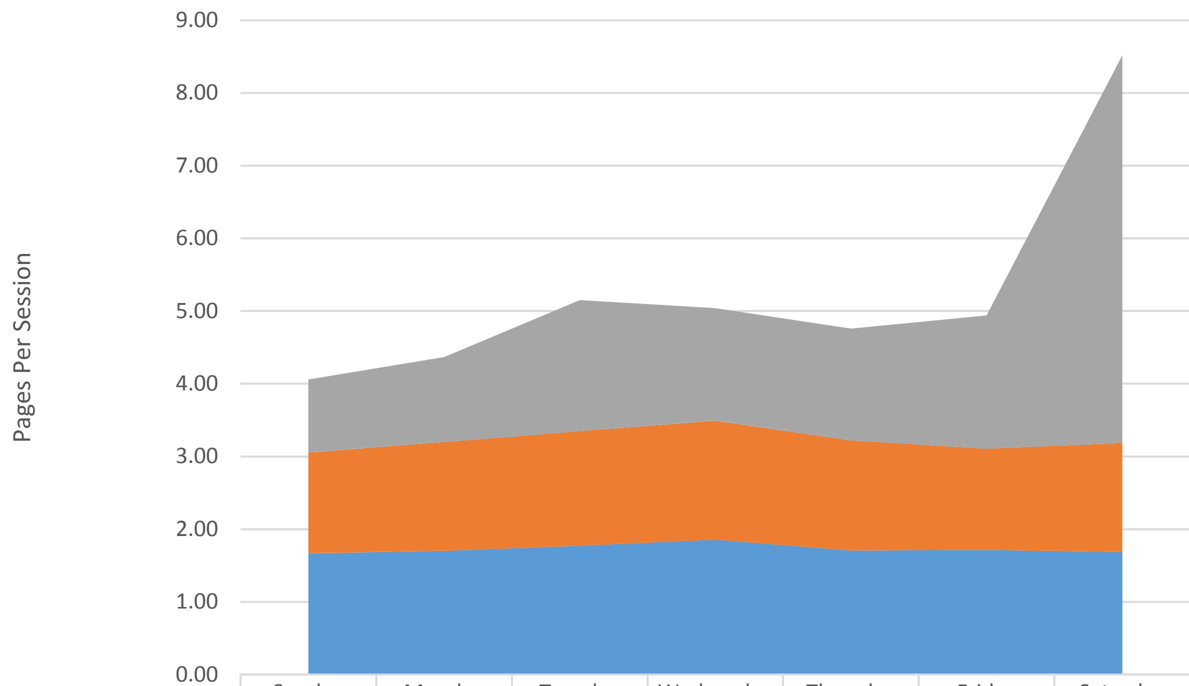
4.2.2.2 Day of Week and Engagement

With the exception of page views (Figure 21) , the other online customer engagement metrics such as pages per session (Figure 22) , bounce rate (Figure 23) , session duration (Figure 24) and time on page (Figure 25) did not appear to be impacted by day of week. Analysis of day of the week on page views showed that although there was a 324% decline in overall page views after the launch week (August 5th to 12, 2018) Mondays and Tuesdays had the highest page views, while Fridays and Sundays had the lowest peak, implying that day of the week impacted page views more so than it did the other OCE metrics.



	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
August 20-26, 2018	3	156	119	130	20	11	48
August 13-19,2018	226	491	373	363	380	290	316
August 5-12, 2018	1634	2033	2746	1697	1485	1246	1568

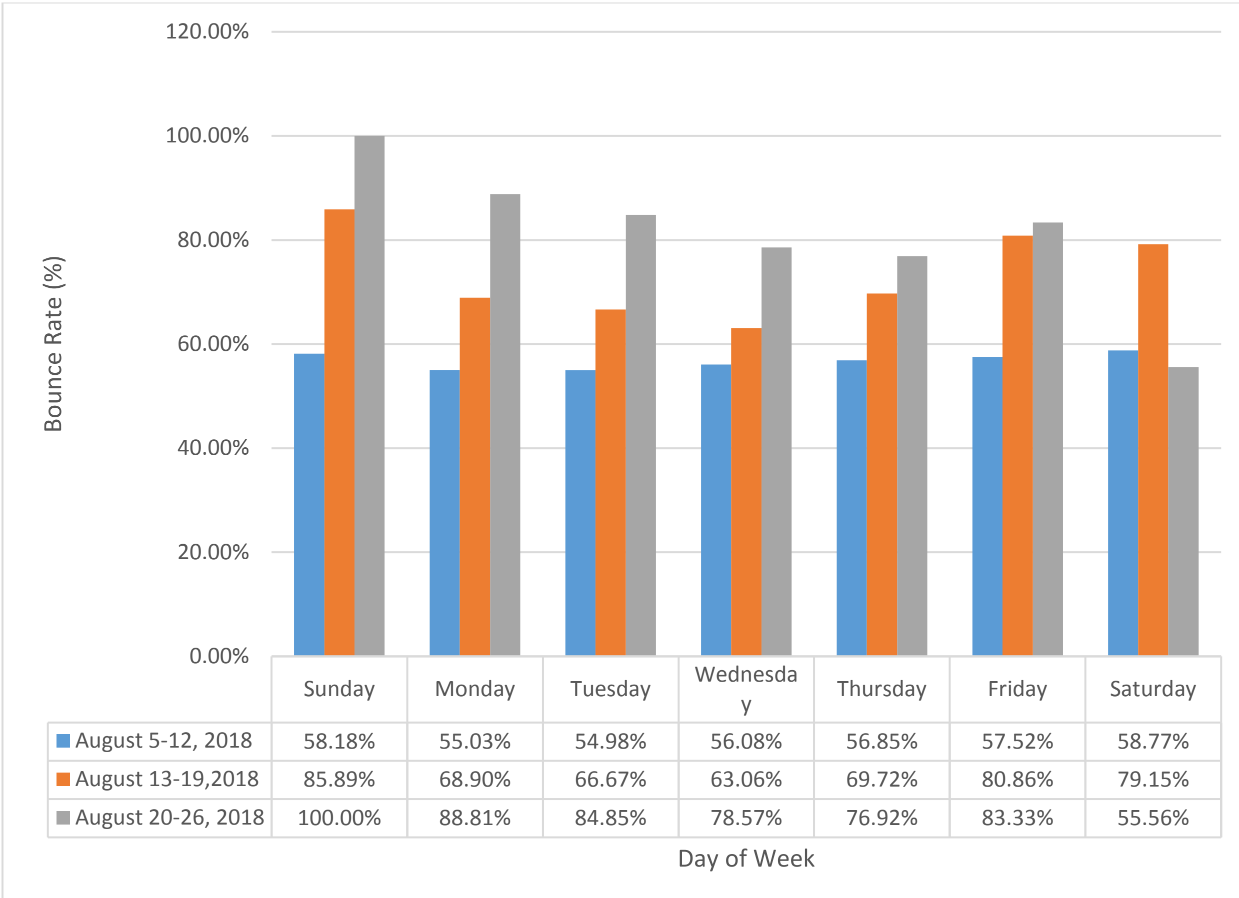
Figure 21: Area Chart of Page Views per Day of Week



	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
August 20-26, 2018	1.00	1.16	1.80	1.55	1.54	1.83	5.33
August 13-19,2018	1.39	1.50	1.57	1.64	1.51	1.39	1.50
August 5-12, 2018	1.67	1.71	1.78	1.86	1.71	1.72	1.69

Day of Week

Figure 22: Area Chart of Pages per Session by Day of Week



	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
August 5-12, 2018	58.18%	55.03%	54.98%	56.08%	56.85%	57.52%	58.77%
August 13-19,2018	85.89%	68.90%	66.67%	63.06%	69.72%	80.86%	79.15%
August 20-26, 2018	100.00%	88.81%	84.85%	78.57%	76.92%	83.33%	55.56%

Figure 23: Column Chart Bounce Rate by Day of Week

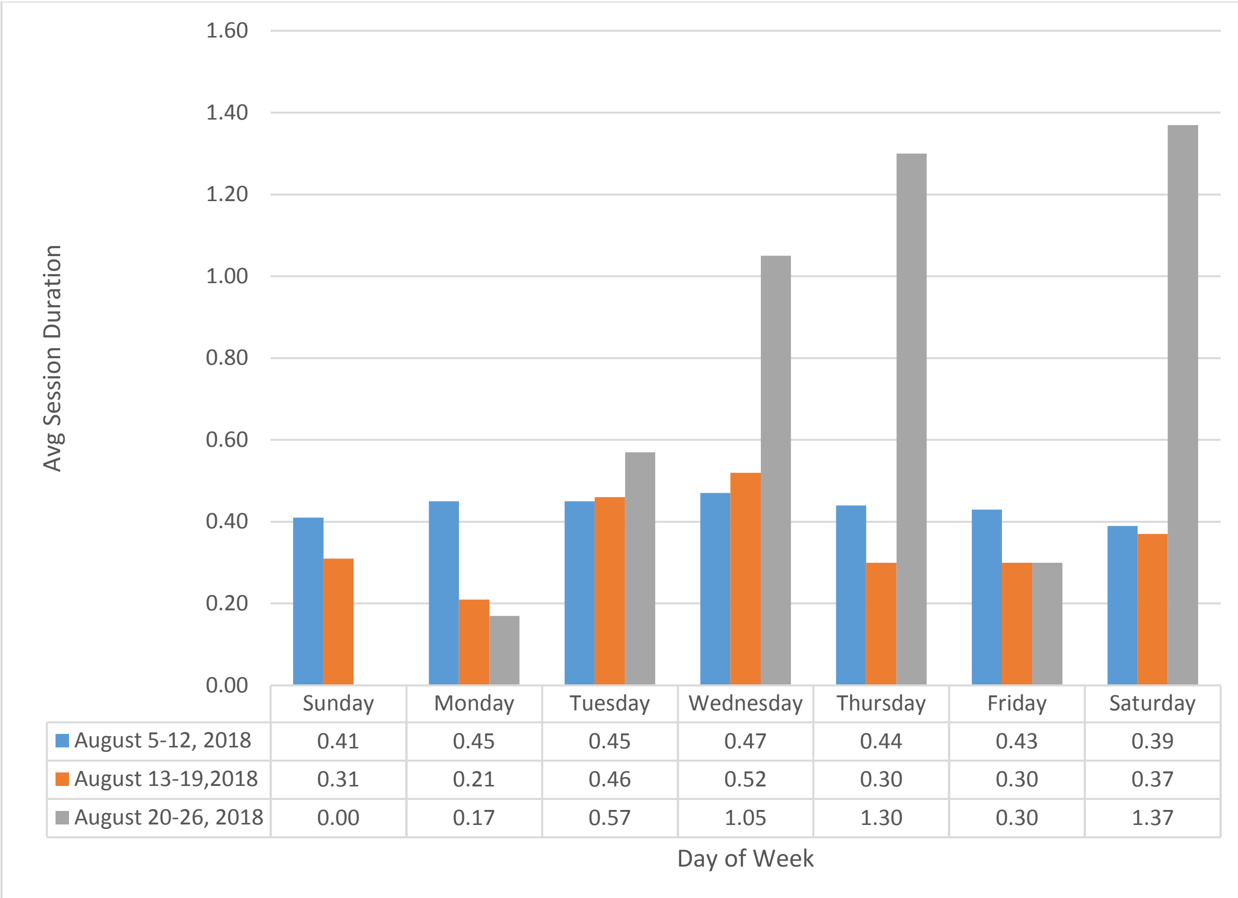
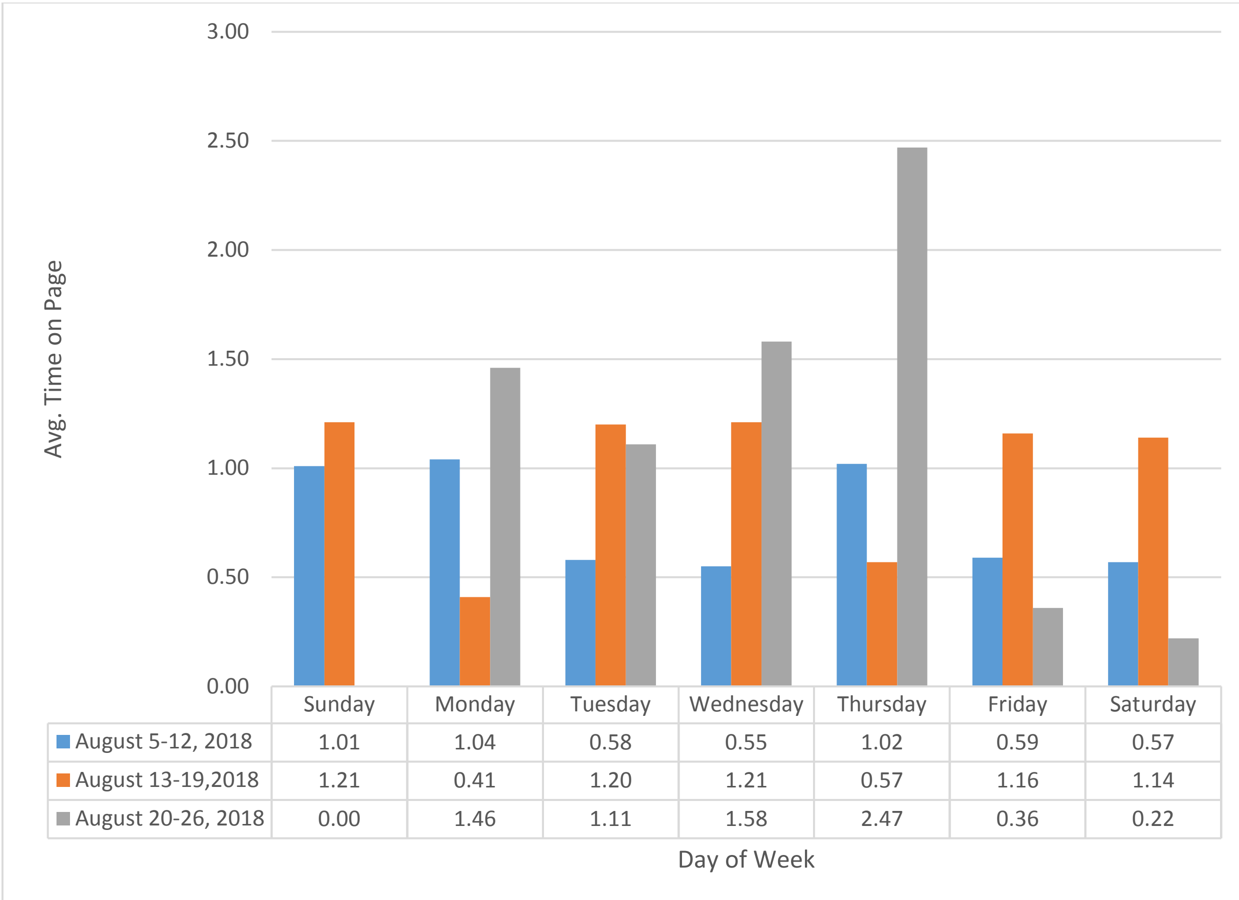


Figure 24: Column Chart of Average Session Duration by Day of Week



	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
August 5-12, 2018	1.01	1.04	0.58	0.55	1.02	0.59	0.57
August 13-19,2018	1.21	0.41	1.20	1.21	0.57	1.16	1.14
August 20-26, 2018	0.00	1.46	1.11	1.58	2.47	0.36	0.22

Figure 25: Column Chart of Average Time on Page by Day of Week

4.2.2.3 Content-Type and Engagement

The content type appeared to have an impact on the online customer engagement metrics but to a different extent depending on the metric. Videos appear to have the highest impact on page views, average time on page , and pages per session (see Figure 26) which are 459%, 21% and 247% respectively, higher than for content with image/text. On the other hand, content with images/text had the greatest impact on bounce rate , average session duration , and social engagement rate (see Figure 26) , which was 39%, 68% and 44% respectively, better than content with videos. Implying that it may be better for ABC to concentrate content creation on videos and images/text since these had an impact on OCE, even if different ones, while poll/quiz did not appear to impact on OCE.

Content Type	Avg. Page Views	Avg. Bounce Rate (%)	Avg. Time on Page (m,s)	Avg. Pages/ Session	Avg. Session Duration (m,s)	Avg. Social Engagement Rate (%)
Image/Text	196	28%	1.10	6	2.08	13%
Poll/Quiz	101	46%	1.22	3	0.07	7%
Video	1095	76%	1.39	20	1.16	9%

Figure 26: Content Type and OCE Metrics

4.2.2.4 Vividness and Engagement

With the research question regarding vividness, there was an assumption that in general content which was vivid would have a greater impact than content which was not considered vivid. However, the analysis of the quantitative data showed that vividness impacted positively on specific metrics namely; bounce rate, average session duration and average pages per session (See Figure 27). The vivid content for these metrics were 29%, 37%, 26% respectively, better than non-vivid content. A further drill down of the data video content appeared to show that videos attribute to the positive OCE since for average page duration, and average pages per session (Figure 28) content with videos had a higher rate (67% and 7% respectively) than content with image/text, while for bounce rate (Figure 28) content with videos had a lower percentage (9%) than content with images/text. On the other hand, content which was not considered vivid positively impacted social engagement rate and average time on page (See Figure 27), which was 39% and 93% respectively, implying that although vividness did impact on OCE there may be other antecedents/drivers which have more of an impact on these metrics simply than whether the content is vivid.

Vividness	Avg. Bounce Rate	Avg. Session Duration (m,s)	Avg. Time on Page (m,s)	Avg. Pages/ Session	Avg. Social Engagement Rate
Not Vivid	79.04%	0.3	1.46	1.24	9.77%
Vivid	56.16%	0.41	0.55	1.56	7.02%

Figure 27: Vividness and OCE Metrics

Vividness	Media Type	Avg. Bounce Rate (%)	Avg. Session Duration (m,s)	Avg. Time on Page (m,s)	Avg. Pages/ Session
Not Vivid	Image	69.80%	0.32	1.00	1.38
	Video	88.29%	0.29	2.31	1.1
Vivid	Image	58.69%	0.3	0.46	1.52
	Video	53.62%	0.51	1.03	1.6

Figure 28: Drill Down of Vividness and OCE Metrics

4.2.2.5 Content Category and Engagement

Analysis of the impact which content category has on online customer engagement revealed that content focused on providing information had a positive impact on pages per session, average bounce rate, average time on page, and social engagement metrics (See Figure 29) which was 43%, 23%, 18% and 36% respectively, better than their nearest content category. While content focused on food had a positive impact on page views and average session duration (See Figure 29) which was ranked 89% and 24% (respectively) higher than their nearest counterpart. Further examination of the data also seemed to reveal that although content focused on “events” did not rank the best with any of the engagement metrics, however to some extent “events” content did rank second best with engagement metrics such as page views, average pages per session, bounce rate, session duration and social engagement implying some impact.

Content Category	Page Views	Avg. Page/ Session	Avg. Bounce Rate (%)	Avg. Session Duration (m,s)	Avg. Time on Page (m,s)	Avg. Social Engagement Rate (%)
Event	1074	1.56	64%	0.34	0.56	11%
Food	2035	1.53	71%	0.42	1.06	9%
Information	339	2.23	52%	0.25	1.18	15%

Figure 29: Content Category and OCE Metrics

4.2.2.6 Frequency of Post and Engagement

During the week of August 5th to August 12th, 2018 six (6) posts were advertised via Facebook, while during the week of August 13- 19, 2018 only one (1) post was advertised. Overall analysis of the data seemed to show that there is a positive relationship between frequency of the post and online customer engagement for average pages per session (Figure 30) , bounce rate (Figure 31) , and average session duration (Figure 32) . Notably, there was a decline in average pages per session of 14% between the week beginning August 5, 2018 and August 13, 2018. For average bounce rate the week of August 5th was more favourable than the following week with an average bounce rate of 56.95% versus 73.69% (a difference of 16.74%) during the week of August 13th, 2018. Moreover, August 5th results showed an average session duration of 37 seconds, while the week of August 12th had an average session duration of 30 seconds, or 7 seconds less. On the other hand, the average time on page (see Figure 33) for the week of August 5, 2018, revealed that, unlike the other metrics, this week had a lower average time of 48 seconds in comparison with the week of August 13, 2018, of 1 minute and 8 seconds. The data on frequency of the post was drilled down to determine if there were any distinctive patterns in the age of the customers/users and their propensity to be engaged. However, although age seemed to play some role in how engaged users were, the patterns was not consistent enough across the metrics for any conclusion to be made, and as Swirsky et al. (2014) indicated, age online may not be distributed evenly online therefore its utilization may cause researchers to come to the incorrect conclusions.

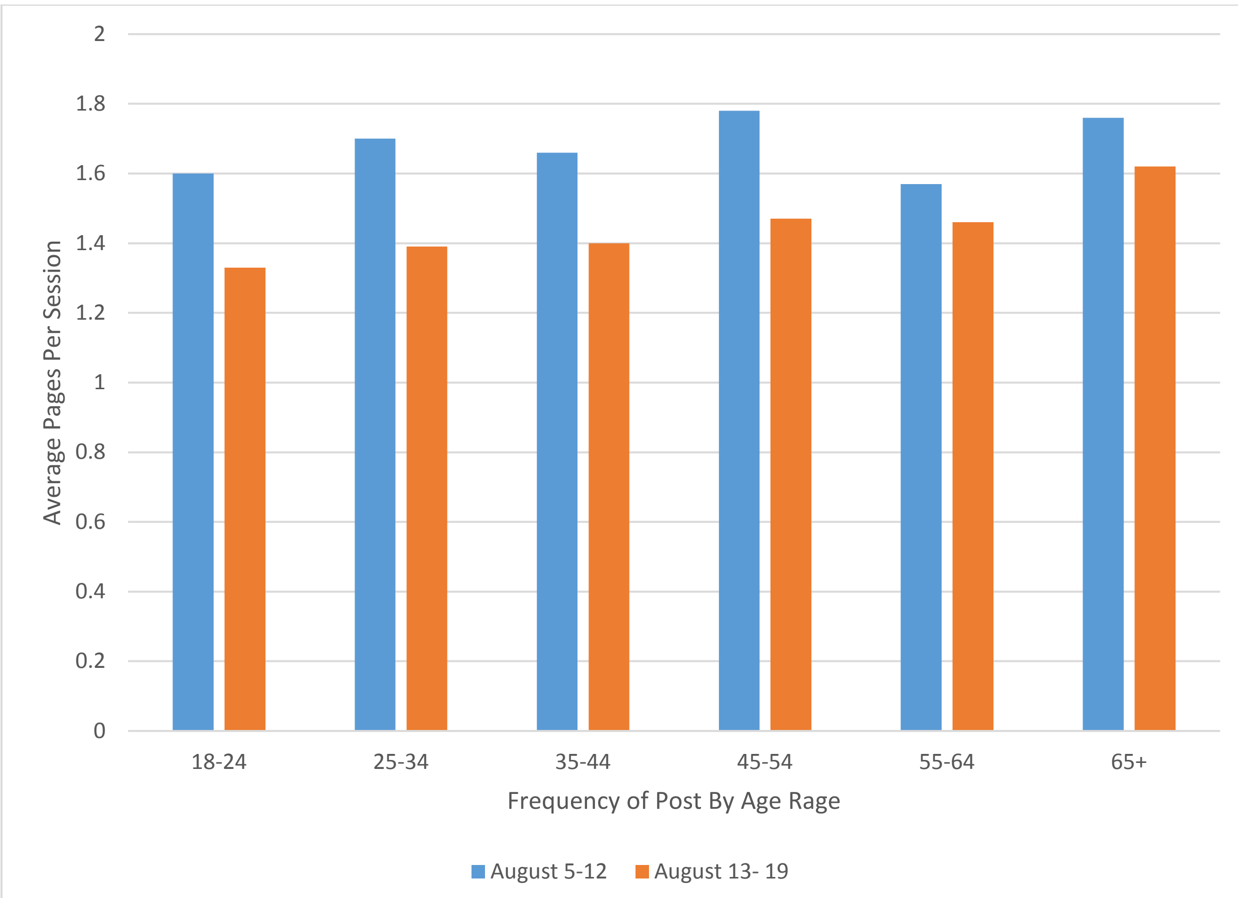


Figure 30: Column Chart of Average Pages Per Session by Frequency of Post

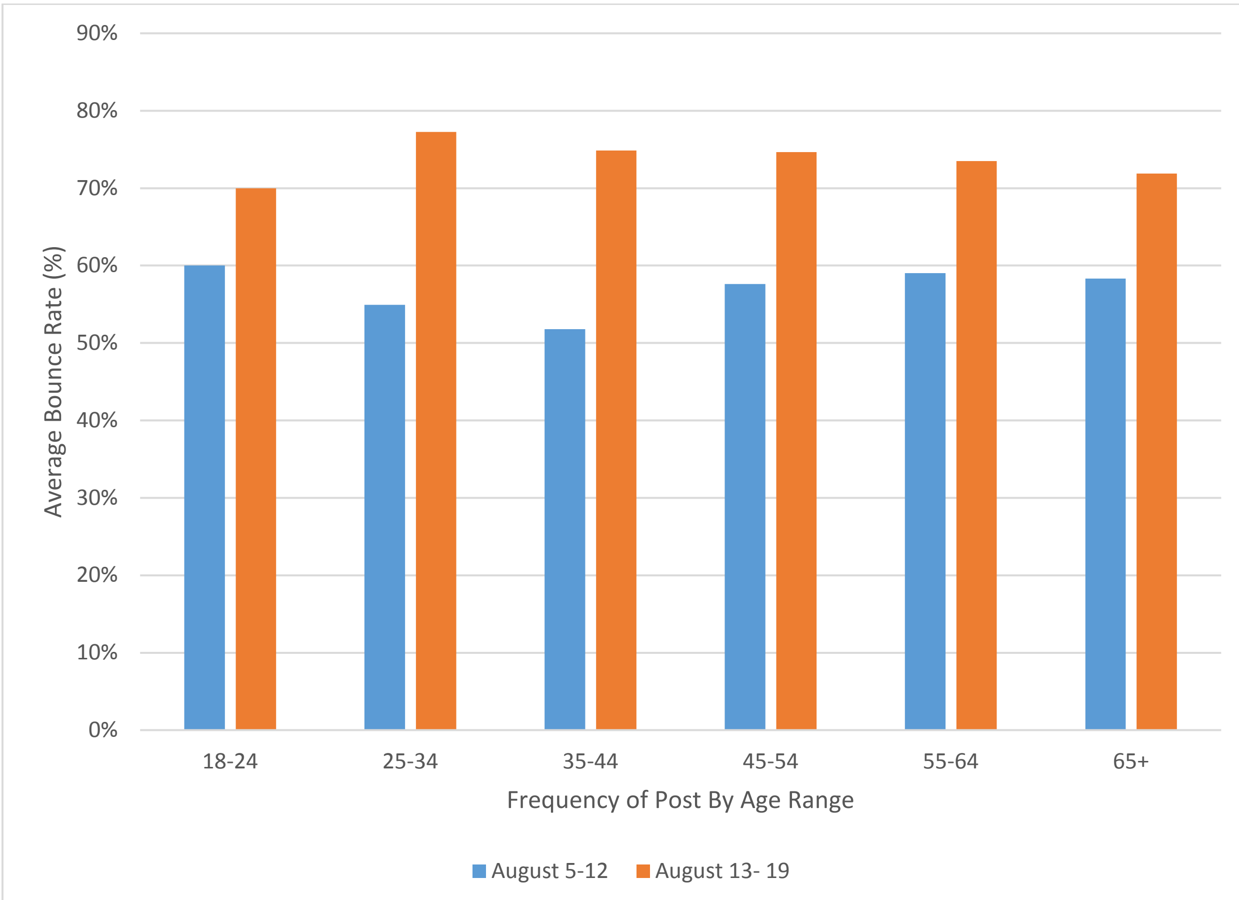


Figure 31: Column Chart of Average Bounce Rate by Frequency of Post

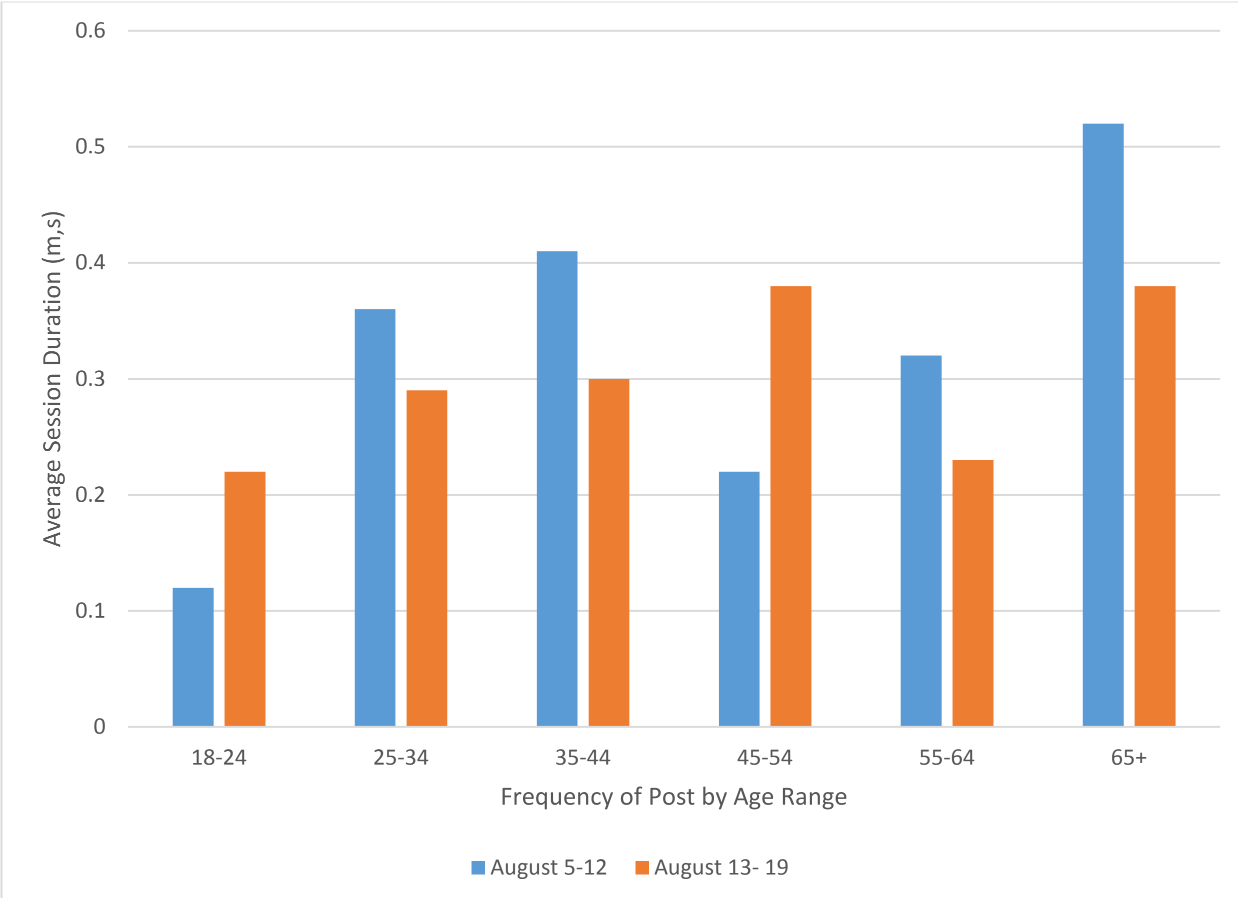


Figure 32: Column Chart of Average Session Duration by Frequency of Post

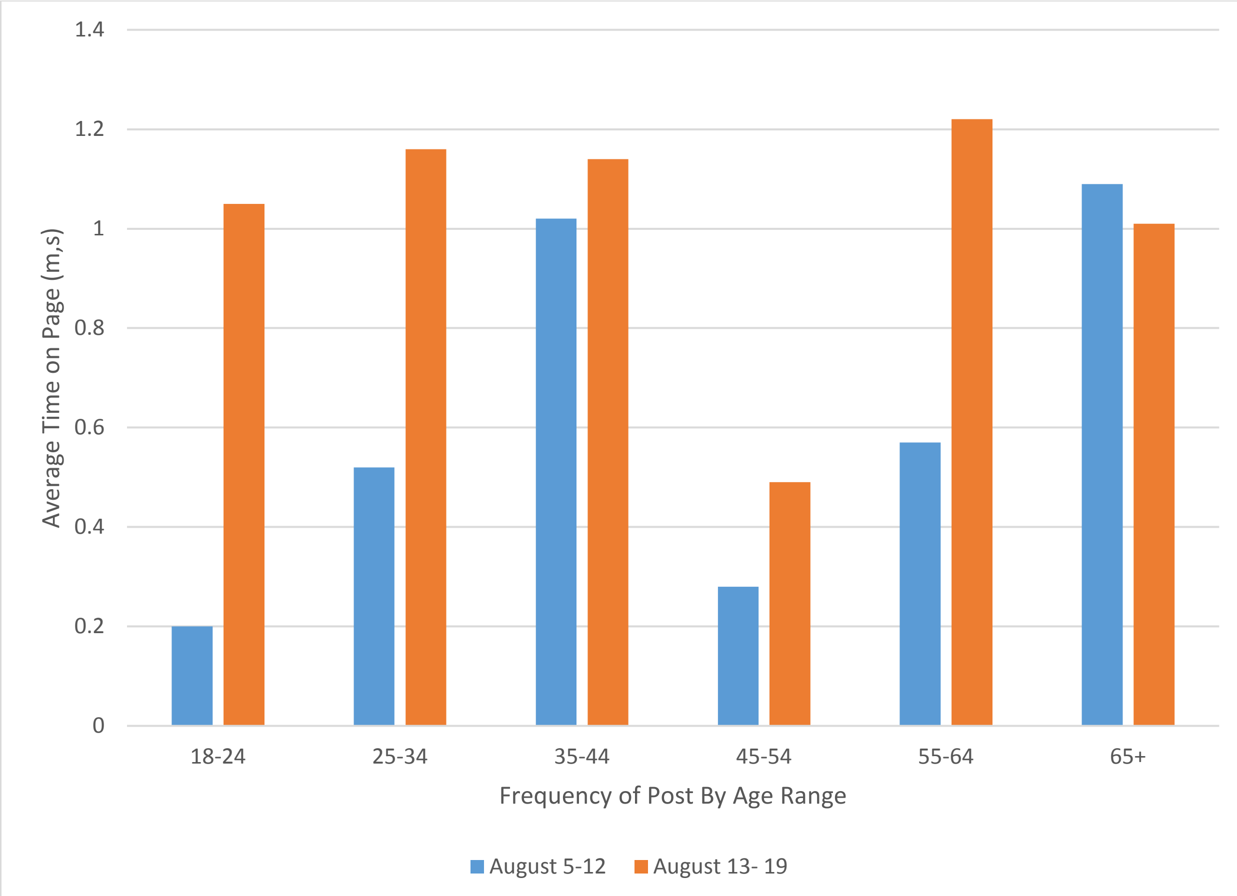


Figure 33: Column Chart of Average Time on Page by Frequency of Post

4.2.2.7 Media Elements and Engagement

Investigation of the impact which media elements have on engagement seems to show that there was a positive correlation between the number of media elements and the online customer engagement metrics. Analysis showed that to some extent there seems as though there is a positive correlation between the number of media elements and the respective online customer engagement metrics. Therefore, when the number of media elements increased the engagement levels such as average pages per session, session duration, and average time on page also increased. However there seemed as though there is a maximum point where the engagement increases before it starts to decrease. For average pages per session the maximum number of media elements was 11 (see Figure 34), for session duration it was between 6 and 8 media elements (See Figure 36), while for average time on page the maximum number of media elements of 14 (See Figure 37). For bounce rate there seemed as though there was a negative relationship between the number of media elements and bounce rate (See Figure 35). Therefore, when the number of media elements increased the bounce rate tended to decrease in performance (i.e. increase in percentage). However, still of note was that the lowest bounce rate was when there were 5 media elements.

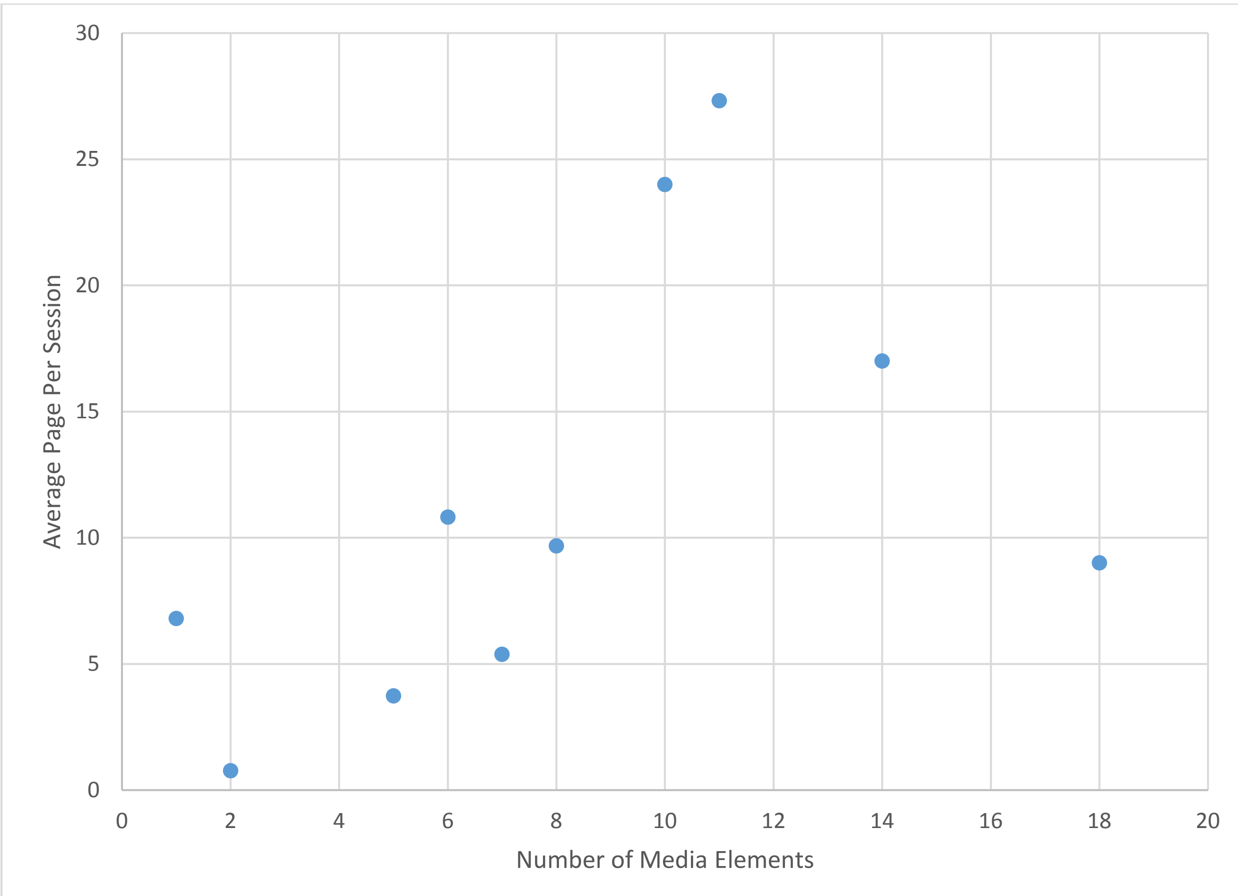


Figure 34: Scatter Chart of Average Pages Per Session by Number Media Elements

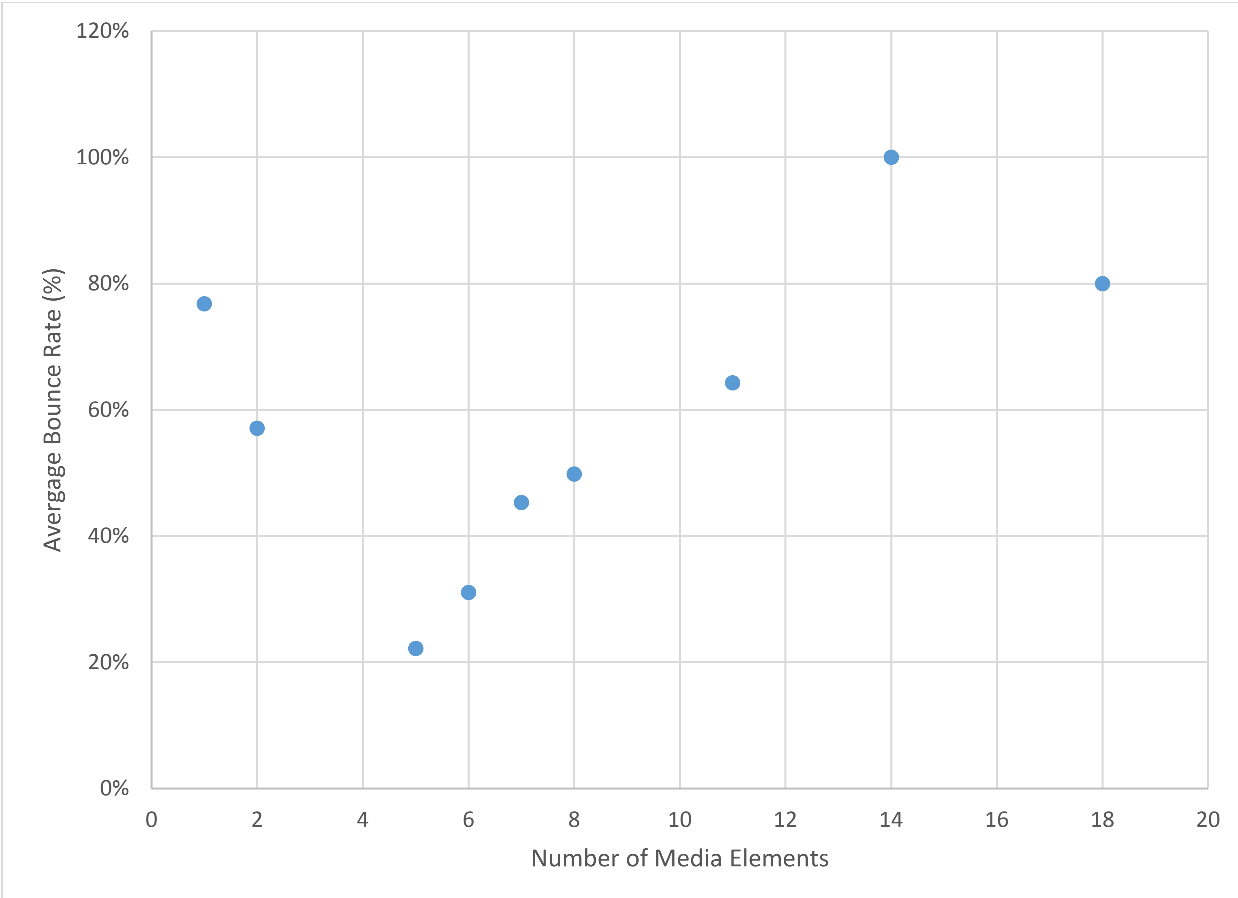


Figure 35: Scatter Chart of Average Bounce Rate by Number of Media Elements

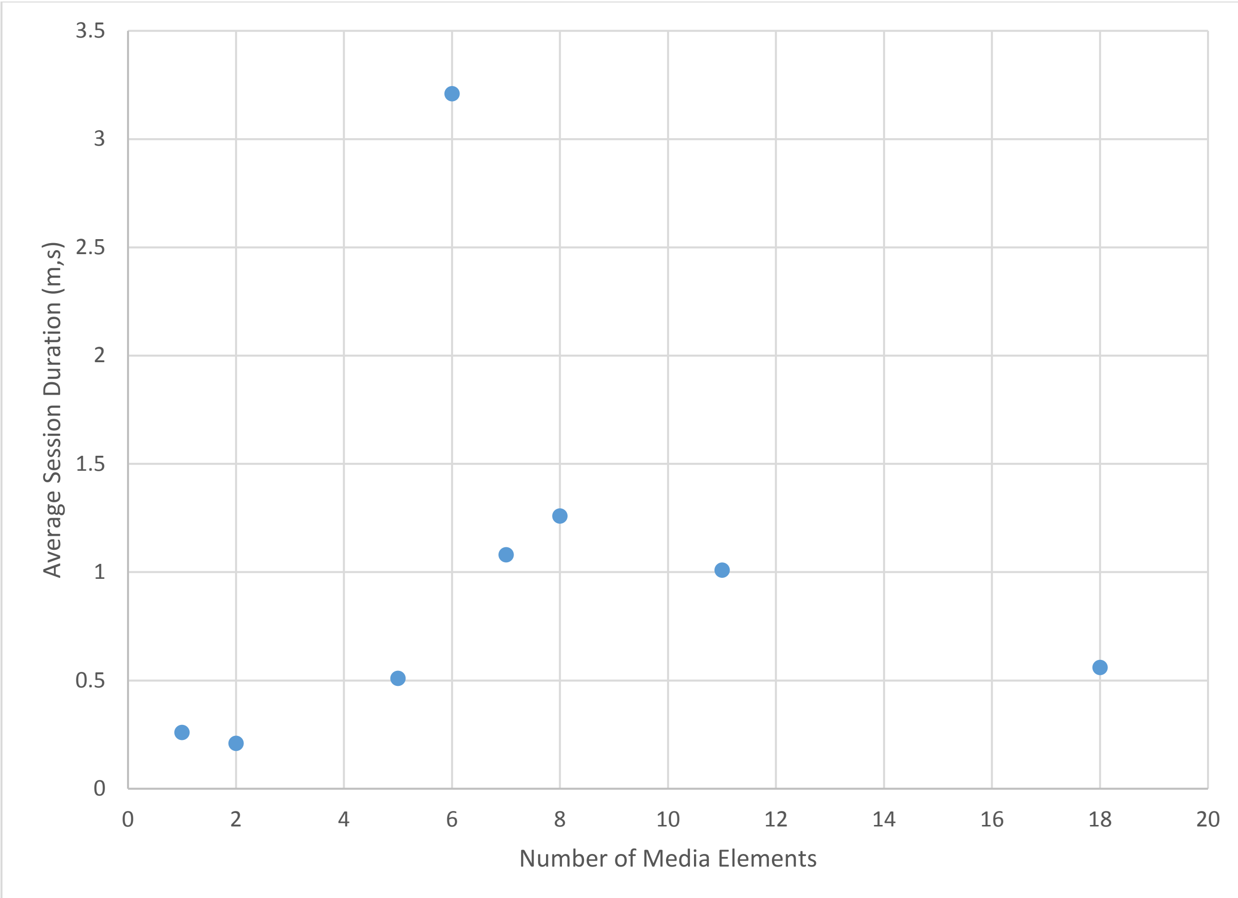


Figure 36: Scatter Chart of Average Session Duration by Number of Media Elements

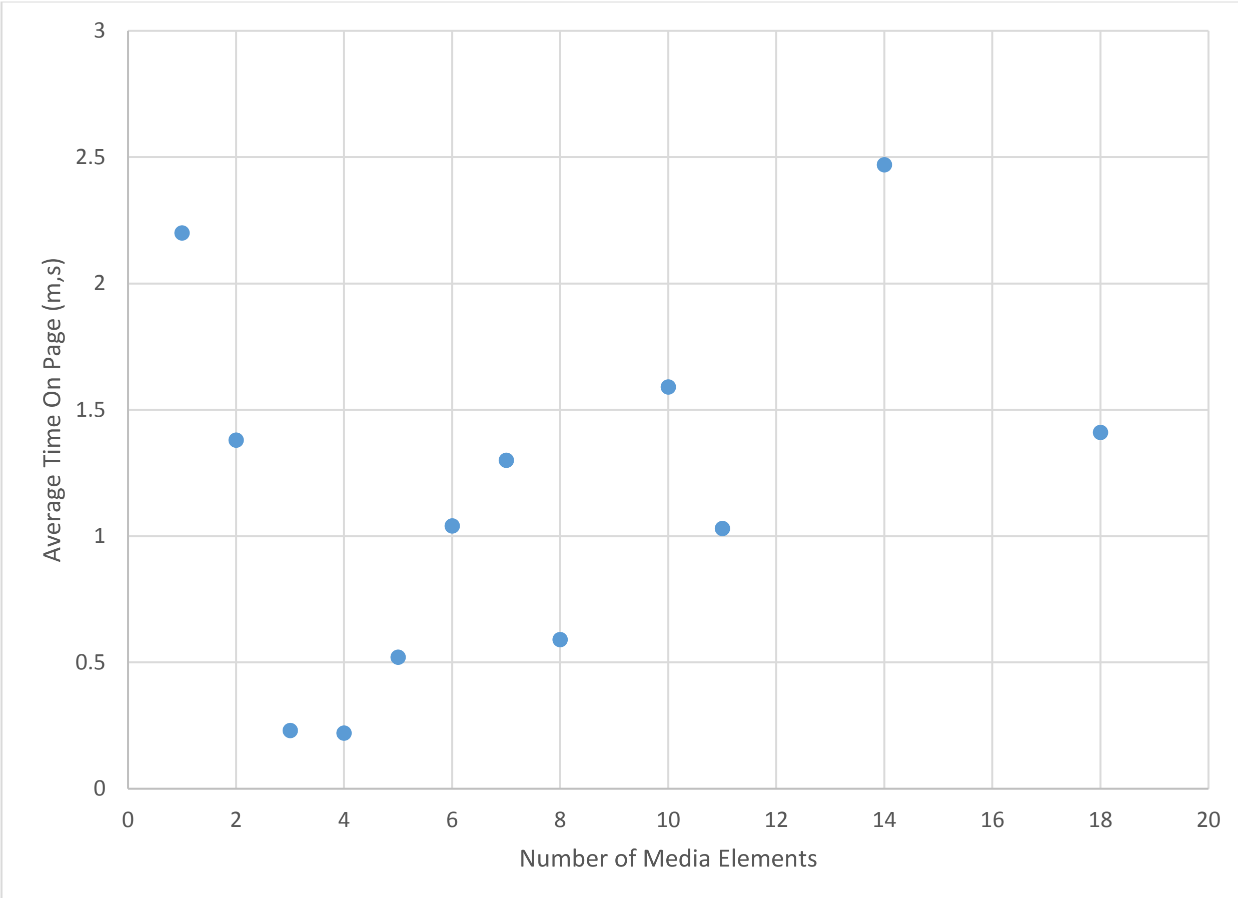


Figure 37: Scatter Chart of Average Time on Page by Number of Media Elements

4.2.3. Qualitative Analysis

The information in this section was derived from the analysis of data collected from the qualitative evaluator's open ended, in-depth interviews which took place on September 8, 2018. The September 8, 2018 interview session focused on the themes discussed in 4.2.2, with the intent of determining the "why" of the quantitative "what" and "how", as well as to determine what changes to content need to be made to improve the respective metrics. The results from the interview sessions were then summarized into one document. Below is a summary of the results from the first qualitative cycle categorized by theme.

4.2.3.1 Time of the Day and Engagement

The qualitative evaluator (QualE) theorized that one of the reasons for the increase in the pages viewed, and time being spent on the website early in the morning and later in the evening was as a result of users viewing content before work (4 am to 6 am) and after work (5 pm and 7 pm). In essence, it might mean that either posting should be done early in the morning before 4 am to ensure that the audience was captured. Should that time be missed then it would mean posting before 4 pm to ensure that users are captured before the end of their working day.

The QualE thought that although the pattern for pages per session and bounce rate showed slight relationships with the time of day the degree of the relationship seemed to imply that there were other factors driving both metrics. The QualE therefore believed that posting of the content at different times of the day would not result in a significant change in pages viewed per session or bounce rate.

4.2.3.2 Day of the Week and Engagement

In the interview session on the page views by day of the week, the QualE noted that although the page views between the launch week, August 5 to the 12, 2018 were significantly more than for the week of August 13 to 19, 2018 and August 20 to 26, 2018 the distribution patterns were relatively the same. The QualE did not have thoughts on the reasons for the patterns but indicated that because there were distinctive peaks on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday this may imply a need to ensure that content was posted on those days. Where users were already active, e.g. Monday or Tuesday, the QualE felt that it might also be necessary to post content on days that there were lower page views, e.g. Friday or Sunday to increase page views on those days.

In relation to the page views per session the QualE believed that because of the volatility of the relationship between this metric and day of the week that it would be necessary to find a method to stabilize page views per session, such as automatically loading the next page.

On the other hand, the QualE did not necessarily have an explanation for the bounce rate, average session duration, average time on page by day of the week, but suggested that since Sundays appear to have the lowest engagement results that lengthening the content published on Sunday maybe beneficial to improving the online customer engagement metrics. It was also felt that although the content length may engage a user on the page longer, and therefore improve the average bounce rate performance, it may mean having to place content into categories to engage users with the their historical category preference, to decrease the overall bounce rate, increase average session duration and increase the average time on the page.

4.2.3.3 Content Type and Engagement

During the interview session, the QualE indicated that they believed that there is a positive relationship between video content and online customer engagement metrics such as average page views, average time on page and average pages per session. However, when it came to page views, bounce rate performance, average pages per session or average session duration and social media engagement rates, content with images and text had either the best or the second-best results. The QualE pointed out that content with video may not have performed as well for bounce rate because the videos did not have features to cause viewers to interact with the video. Therefore, although a user was interested in viewing the video and spent a significant amount of time on the page (seen through the average time on page metric), as well as viewed other pages within that specific session, there was no need to click or interact, hence the high bounce rate. The QualE believed that content with text seem to engage users because the users have content to interact with. The QualE therefore suggested that the content strategy should include focusing the content on videos but ensure that the videos were focused on a specific topic and include text.

4.2.3.4 Vividness and Engagement

The QualE did not provide reasons for all the results related to vividness but focused their analysis on the reason why vividness did not seem to impact positively on the social engagement rate. The QualE felt that the reason why "vividness" did not have the same impact on the social engagement rate as it did with bounce rate, average session duration, and average page session was because those other variables were not as directly impacted on where the content was placed, whether the content relates to a popular topic, whether it is visible, or the image is interesting, which maybe an issue when content is placed on a social media platform. The QualE therefore suggested that for vividness to impact on the social engagement rate, other research questions and antecedents needed to be addressed. For example, the QualE believed that given the results from the social engagement ranking metric, that maybe the distribution channel was impacting on customer engagement to a greater degree than initially thought. The QualE determined that the platforms maybe resulting is different engagement level because posts tended to look different on the respective social media platforms, for example, Instagram tends to be image focused (see Figure 38), while Facebook tends to be text focused (see Figure 39). Therefore, a text-focused content may have a higher engagement rate on Facebook than on Instagram and vice versa. Additionally, the QualE mentioned that each platform had a different algorithm for making posts visible to users. Therefore, the QualE believed that maybe the research needed to take a closer look at the impact the respective social media platform had on customer engagement to determine which distribution channel (which was one of the proposed antecedents) was more suitable for the ABC's content.

Image holds prominence with Instagram post with text at the bottom of the image, therefore, holding less of a prominence.

Figure 38: Screenshot of Instagram Sponsored Post Showing Photo Prominence

Text is at the top of the image, and therefore text tends to have a more prominent position.

Figure 39: Screenshot of Facebook Sponsored Post Showing Prominence of Text

4.2.3.5 Content Category and Engagement

The QualE did not give reasons for the results of the content category quantitative data but mentioned that since it seemed as though content that focused on the provision of information and/ or food-related content, usually had higher page views, pages per session, bounce rate performance, session duration time, and social engagement rate that ABC's strategy should include focusing on informative and food focused content given that these content categories seem to result in higher levels of customer engagement metrics.

Additionally, given that content that focused on specific events had relatively high page views, session duration and social engagement rates the QualE believed that the ABC strategy should also include focusing on "trending" topics utilizing hashtags to assist with engaging users.

4.2.3.6 Frequency of Post and Engagement

In the interview the QualE theorized, that even though in some instances the impact seemed minimal, that since the frequency of the posts seemed as though it positively impacted on customer engagement metrics: pages per session, bounce rate, and session duration it may be necessary to ensure that posts are performed frequently. The QualE further posited that this would mean that ABC would have to post regularly within the week. The QualE indicated that given the results from the time of the day and day of the week analysis, it may be necessary to post on Sunday to assist with improving the engagement metrics for that day. Additionally, the QualE suggests that post occur on Monday to take advantage of the organic peak shown on Monday and Tuesday, and on Friday to increase the engagement metrics for the remainder of the week.

4.2.3.7 Media Elements and Engagement

The QualE indicated that it seemed as though there was a positive correlation between media elements and customer engagement metrics, such as pages per session, bounce rate, session duration and time on the page. The QualE noted that given the results, if ABC moved its strategy towards mainly video content, it would mean either having videos of a specific length that would mimic the reading time of post with 5 to 14 images since these were the number of media images which seemed to optimize average pages per session, average session duration, and average time on page engagement. Additionally, the QualE mentioned that it would therefore also mean that the length of the video could not be more than the equivalent reading time for a post with 5 to 14 media elements since engagement tended to diminish at this point.

I (as the QuantE) reminded the QualE that the original creation of videos however took more than a year to complete which may be an issue if the content needed to be created frequently and the main content type was videos. The QualE was however adamant that the way forward was with videos and indicated that the data also seemed to confirm this. However, the QualE suggested that the resource and cost solution may be dealt with by creating both short-term and long-term videos. For example, creating longer videos for Sunday when the engagement metrics page views, bounce rate, and session duration were at their lowest.

4.2.4 Proposed Action To Be Taken

This section will outline the objectives for the next cycle, reflect on the agreed actions to be taken, which will become the input for the second MMAR cycle, and any issues encountered. The objectives will be provided in sub section 4.2.4.1. The actions to be taken will be discussed in subsection 4.2.4.2, while the issues and concerns will be discussed in subsection 4.2.4.3.

4.2.4.1 MMAR Cycle Two Objectives

From the quantitative results of launch on August 5, 2018 the CPT felt that all metrics could be improved. At this stage the team was still exploring how the antecedents would impact on the metrics. The objective for cycle two was simply to improve the online customer engagement metrics provided in section 2.6.3.

4.2.4.2 Actions To Be Taken

Below are the actions the CPT agreed would be taken.

1. **Action:** Postings are to be made on a weekly basis and comprise of individually branded, vivid content focused on trending topics: Mondays would be "Motivational Mondays", Fridays would be "Foodie Fridays" and Sundays would be focused on information and socially focused videos under the brand "Did You Know", "Social", "Inspired" where the video on Sunday is between 5 to 6 minutes. For a post with image/ media and text the number of media elements should be between 6 to 11 (which was between the extreme of 5 and 14).

2. **Action:** Post to be made before 4 am or before 4 pm. The preference would be before 4 am to allow us to capture the morning peak, afternoon peak and the evening peak but, should there be a delay, we knew we would need to post by at least 4 pm.

3. **Action:** Change the feature on ABC.com so that the next post loads automatically.

4. **Action:** Target advertisements on social media to users between 25 years and older, in order to reduce the cost of the campaign.

5. **Action:** Tailor the website to allow users to easily find content that they are interested in, which involved placing categories related to the brands being used (e.g. Foodie Fridays, Social, etc.). Which would address the research question of "*Will a more tailored customer experience translate to a higher customer engagement level?" **(Q8)***

6. **Action:** The reviewing of whether the *distribution channel used has an impact on the customer online engagement level? (**Q9)***
7. ***Action:*** *Determine whether* the implementation of search engine optimization increases online customer engagement levels? **(*Q10)***

4.2.4.3 Concerns

During the planning stage the CPT identified two major concerns which it was believed could impact on carrying out the proposed actions. Below are the details of the concerns and how they were to be addressed:

1. The first concern which arose via the CPT meeting was that it was not sustainable to produce video content for three days given the freelancer issues ABC was having with the length of time video production was taking. It was suggested in the CPT meeting that to mitigate this the videos be created in-house. However, I was concerned that we did not have the skill set in-house and therefore the video production would take longer than if a freelancer was used or cost more. An online content creation application was however suggested that allowed for a flexible monthly subscription option (which could be stopped anytime). It also provided access to templates, freeware videos, images and music. As a small company, where I was the sole investor the subscription model was better suited to keep operational cost low. After review for quality and the ability to export videos and edit the videos from the software I approved the cost.
2. The second concern raised within the CPT meeting was that the execution of the content changes and addressing the additional research questions would be significant. The time constraint brought up by the team was a valid one, however I felt conflicted again in my role as a practitioner and a scholar because I knew that a delay in the implementation would mean a delay in the research being completed. Again, I chose what I believe was in the best interest of ABC and decided to implement the actions in stages. To address the time constraint but allow the research to progress

the CPT decided to address action items 1 to 4 in MMAR cycle two, while the team decided to address action items 5 to 7 in MMAR cycle three.

4.3. Mixed Method Action Research Cycle Two

The objectives of this second cycle was to execute the action plan for points 1 – 4 of cycle one, as stated in section 4.2.4.2 with the goal of attaining the objectives identified in section 4.2.4.1. The changes were scheduled to be implemented in October 2018 however in September/October 2018 ABC was hacked. Further details on the extent of the hack, the impact of the hacking and how it was dealt will be addressed in later chapters. However, because the hack would have affected this cycle, I will provide some details on the nature of the hack, and the impact it had on this cycle.

ABC had a security plugin but from the launch of the website was plagued with what was later identified as spam comments. The spam comments subsequently escalated to brute force attacks. A brute force attack is described as a “trial and error method used by application programs to decode encrypted data such as passwords or Data Encryption Standard keys, through exhaustive efforts (using brute force) rather than employing intellectual strategies” (Rouse, 2019). The hacker eventually will use the access to the website to steal data, shut the website down (Rouse, 2019), or in the case of ABC, to redirect the website to another website.

The original design for ABC was a proprietary web application with user engagement features and tools specific to ABC. The reason for this was to ensure that ABC was able to differentiate itself from other social media applications, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. However, after numerous delays in the development and changing developers at least 4 times between April 2017 and May 2018, although it was against my better judgement, I, in my capacity as Principal Director, made the decision to develop ABC using a WordPress Template to speed up the development process. Through extensive research and discussion with the CPT and development team a decision was made to purchase a WordPress Template primary because it met critical criteria including: a one off and reasonable fee, the inclusion of technical support with the initial cost, free upgrades, ability to utilize plugins to extend the functionality of the website, easy customization and provision of a similar design to the original ABC concept. My main concern with using a WordPress Template was with the security of the template. WordPress is one of three most popular content management systems on the market (Patel et al., 2011) used to power websites, social communities and blogs however vulnerability in the plugin used or the template can expose the user to cyber-attacks (Koskinen et al., 2012). Because the development was approximately a year behind schedule, the concern was the impact that the delay would have on the research. Under normal circumstances I would have made the decision which I believe was in the best interest of ABC but given the risk to the research I felt I needed to make the decision in the best interest of the research, and this was to go ahead with the WordPress Template.

From consultation with ABC's development expert it was determined that the hackers were able to probably exploit a vulnerability in the template. After the hack occurred in September/October, ABC went into crisis mode, with all resources, except for the content developers, being focused on determining and resolving the issue and increasing security on the website. Through discussions and collaboration with external service providers and web development experts, a plugin upgrade was purchased with enhanced security features including the use of recaptcha, which allowed security to not only be reactive (brute force alerts), but proactive (from the log-in stage) (Von Ahn et al, 2008 and Baecher et al, 2011). The hack however meant a delay of approximately three months in the research and a break in the website engagement data, as well as a cost in a reduction in engagement (Anderson et al., 2013). The hack also resulted in the resources being stretched thin since I had to focus on the security issues and could not lend as much content assistance. The hack also meant that the team spent several late nights trying to produce the content as well as having to acquire new skill sets. For example, I had to learn more about brute force attacks, online security and migrating websites. Under normal circumstances I would have outsourced these functions, but since I was not sure of the origin of the hack, I wanted to limit who had access to the database to only in-house staff. The trade-off was that I had to build new skills in a short space of time. Additionally, I would have been the person who provided the final edit notes, however given that I was occupied with the recovery process and had limited time, a lot of the final editing now fell on the content developer, who also had to enhance their video and content editing skills.

The recommended changes were actioned on December 1, 2018. As stated earlier, this section provides the results from the actions recommended in section 4.2.4.2. Given the main objective of the actions from MMAR cycle one was to improve the metrics (see section 4.2.4.1) in this cycle the results from December 1st to December 31st (the data gathering period for MMAR cycle two) were compared to the results from August 5th to August 31st, 2018 (when the first MMAR cycle took place). The sampling criterion was the same for this MMAR cycle as it was for MMAR cycle one. The customer engagement data, for this cycle, was collected during the period December 1st, 2018 to December 31st, 2018 and represents a total of 25, 183page views and a maximum of 47 individual content/posts. Because this cycle was focused on whether the actions proposed in MMAR cycle one yielded improvements in engagement, this section is not divided into themes but from the viewpoint of changes in the engagement metrics (e.g. page views, bounce rate etc.). Section 4.3.1 will provide the quantitative comparative results of MMAR cycle two and cycle one, with the analysis not categorized into sub-sections. Section 4.3.2 will provide the qualitative results gathered from the in-depth interview with the QualE but will have sub-sections focused on the two main metrics (average time on page and page views) which showed a decrease in online engagement after the cycle one action implementation. In section 4.3.3 the actions to be taken and any concerns will be discussed.

Table 14 provides the data collection details for cycle two. Note again that because the quantitative data was secondary data and in summary format, depending on the metric under investigation the number of posts would not be available.

Data Collection Period (Start Date)	Data Collection Period (End Date)	Thesis Section Name	Total Dataset (Page Views)	Total Dataset (Num. of Post)
August, 2018	December, 2018	Iteration Two- Quantitative Analysis	22,136	47
December, 2018	December, 2018	Average Time on Page	497	15
December, 2018	December, 2018	Page Views	2,550	N/A*
Total			**25,183**	
*N/A = Not Applicable				

Table 14: Dataset details for cycle two.

4.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

Comparison of the December 1st to 31st, 2018 data with the August 5th to 31st, 2018 online customer engagement metrics showed that bounce rate (see Figure 41), pages per session (see Figure 42), session duration (see Figure 43) and social engagement rate (see Figure 45) improved in December after the suggested changes from the first MMAR cycle were made. However analysis showed that, page views (see Figure 40) and average time on page (see Figure 44) did not improve after the recommended changes from MMAR cycle one were performed. Further analysis revealed that bounce rate declined by 66.10% from the August period where it was 62.15% to December where it was 21.07%. Additionally, pages per session showed a vast improvement of 68.07% from 1.66 pages per session in August 2018 when compared to 2.79 pages per session in December 2018. While average session duration in December 2018 was 1 minute when compared to 41 seconds in August 2018, an improvement of 46.34%. Finally, further analysis of the social engagement showed an increase of the social engagement rate of 116.67% for December 2018 which had a social engagement rate of 26% when compared to 12% for August 2018. On the other hand, page views for December 1st to 31st, 2018 of 8,331 showed a decline of 48.38%, when compared to the page views for August 5th to 31st, 2018 of 16,140. While average time on the page showed a decline in the performance of 47.62% from August 2018 where there was an average time on page of 1 minute and 3 seconds when compared to December 2018 average time on page of 33 seconds.

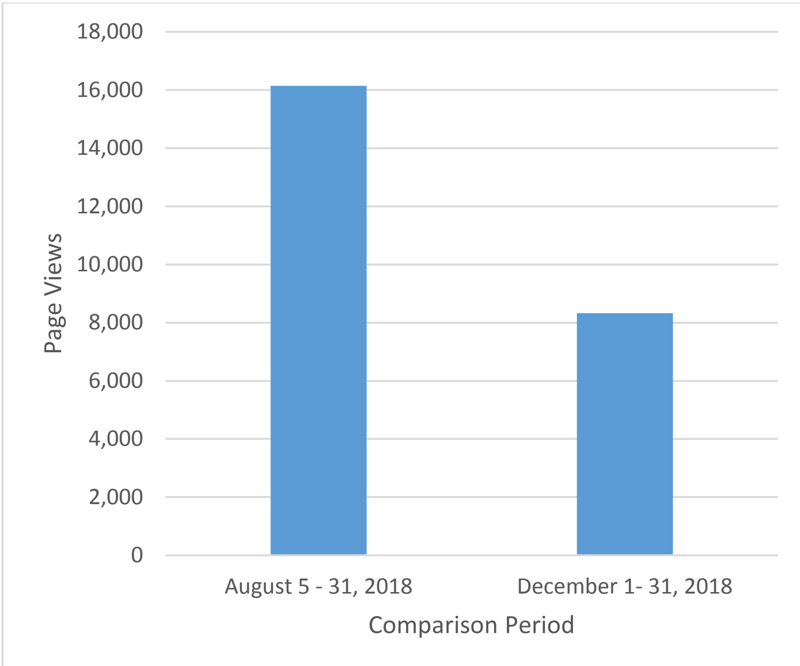


Figure 40: Column Chart of Comparison of Page Views for August and December 2018

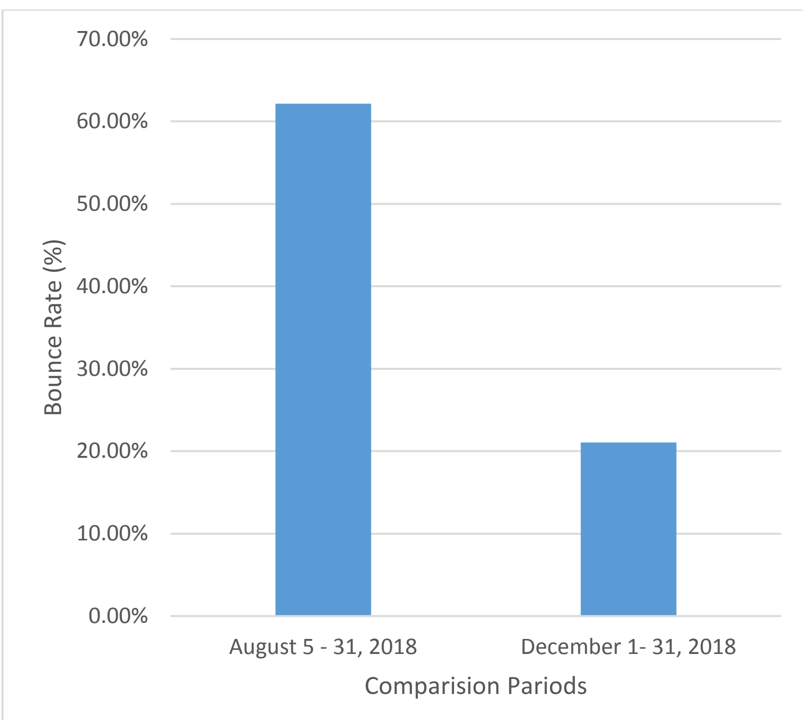


Figure 41: Column Chart of Comparison of Bounce Rate for August and December 2018

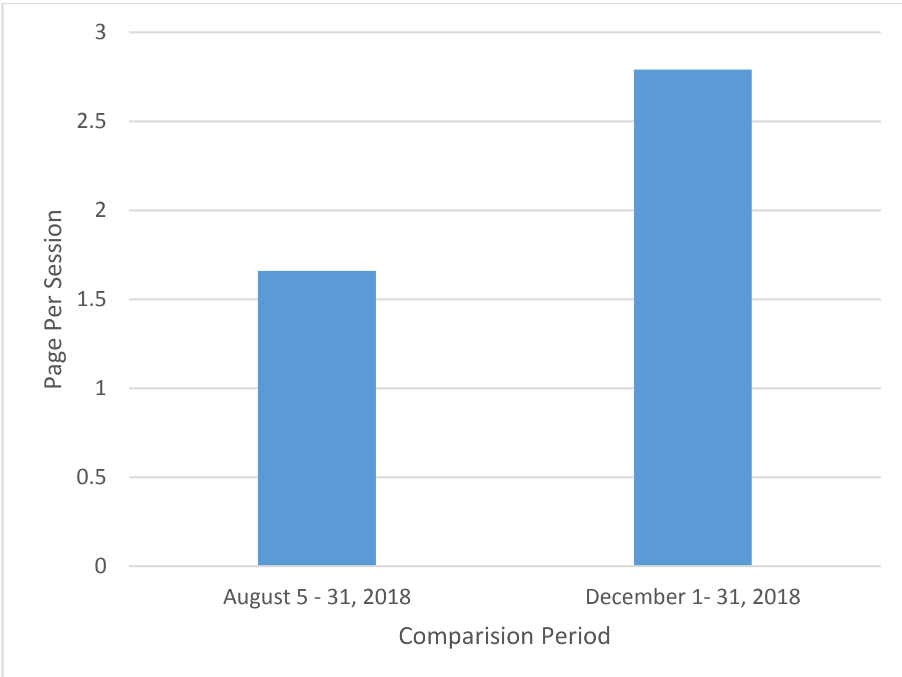


Figure 42: Column Chart of Comparison of Page per Session for August and December 2018

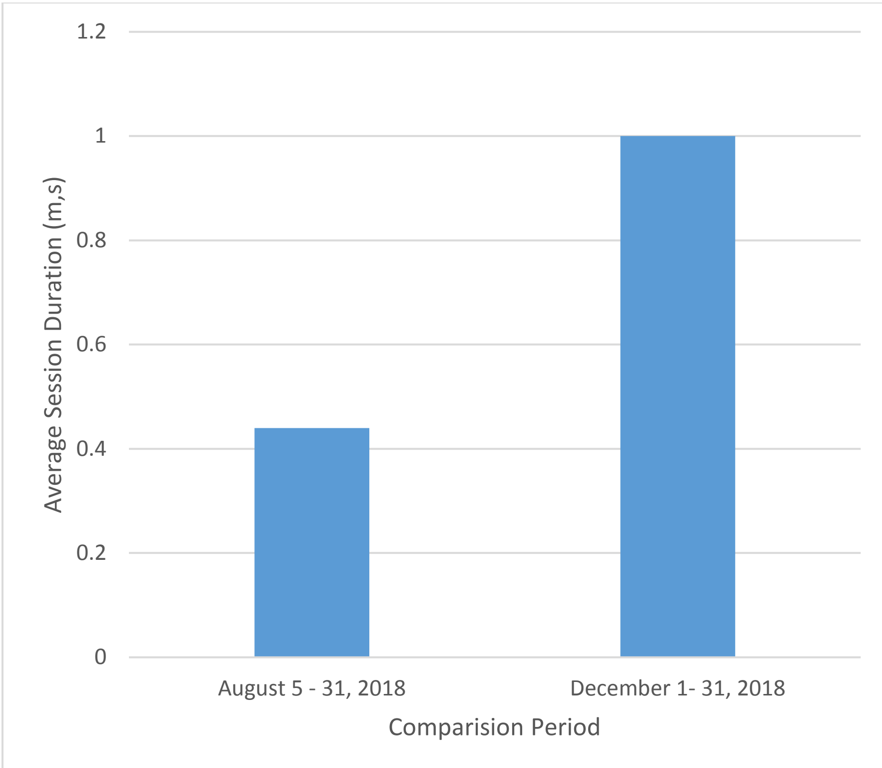


Figure 43: Column Chart of Comparison of Average Session Duration for August and December 2018

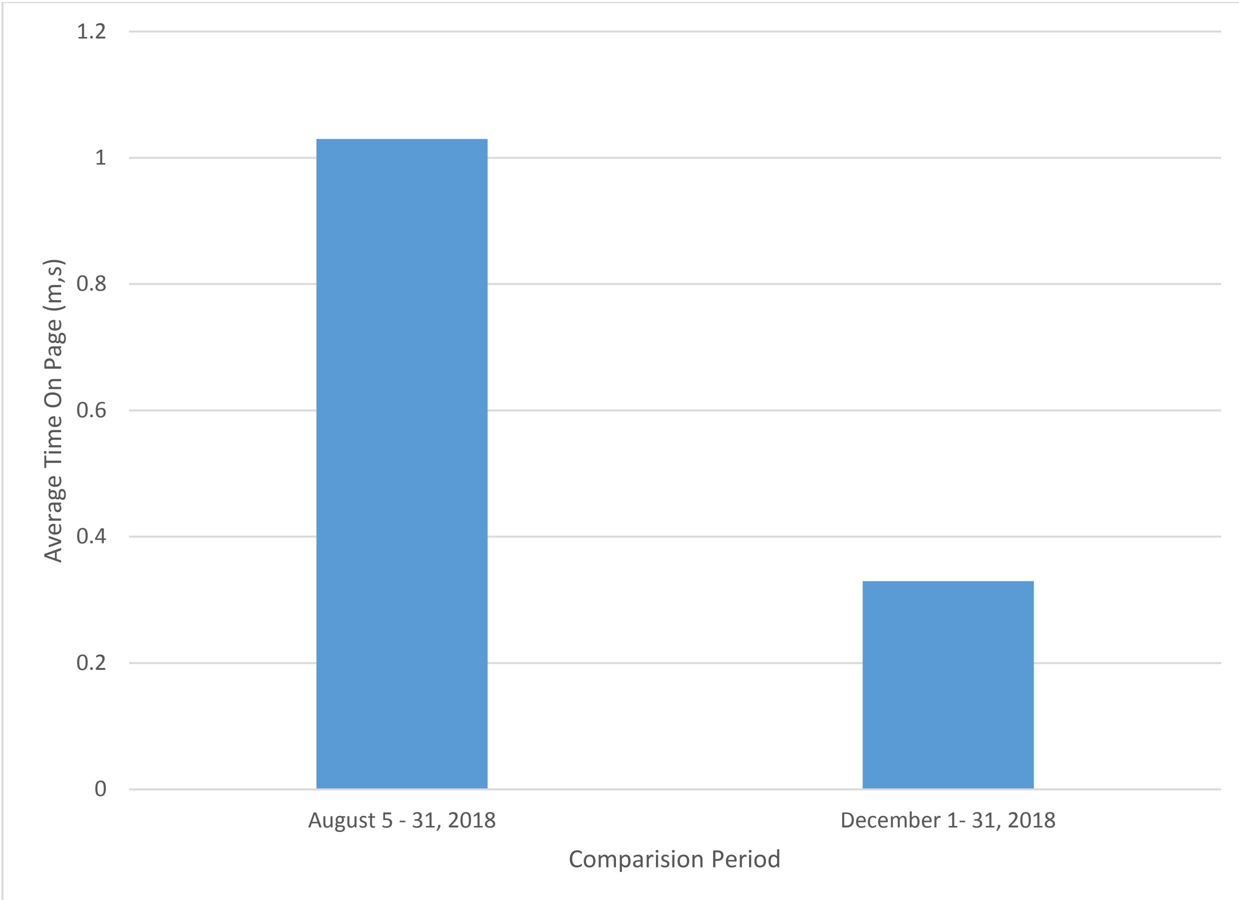


Figure 44: Column Chart of Comparison of Average Time on Page for August and December 2018

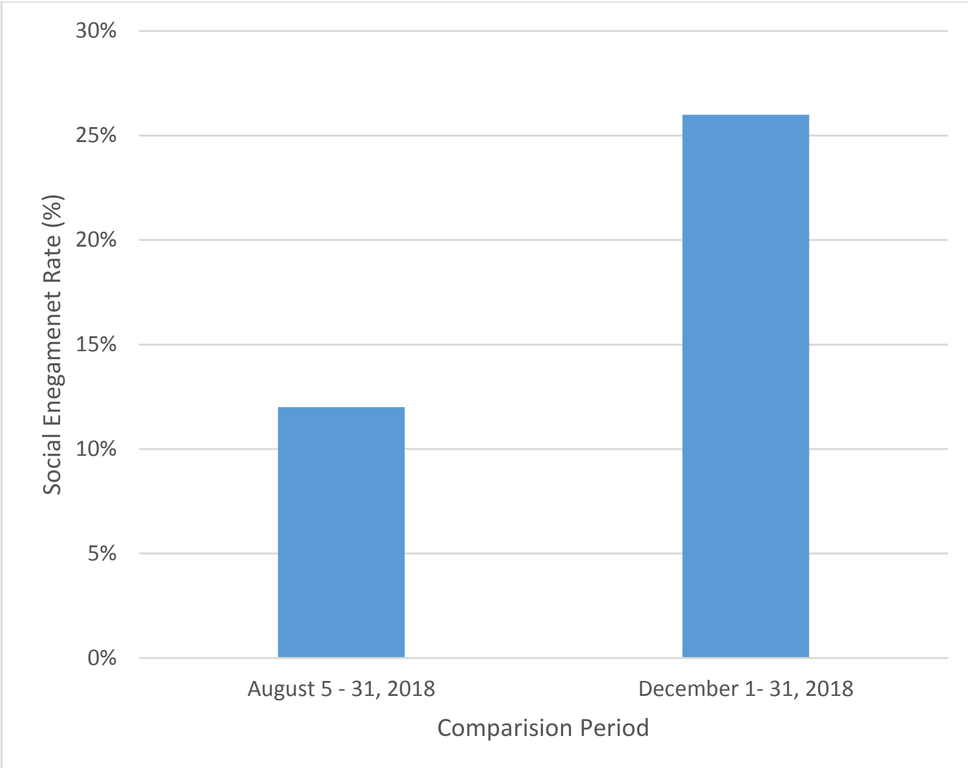


Figure 45: Column Chart of Comparison of Social Engagement Rate for August and December 2018

4.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

Although there was a vast improvement in the engagement results after the implementation of the actions proposed in section 4.2.4, there was still a decrease in some of the customer engagement metrics such as time on page and page views. Below are results from the qualitative analysis for MMAR cycle two which took place on January 5, 2019. Although the quantitative data and graphs from section 4.3.2 were used as the foundation for the open ended, in-depth interview with the QualE. It should be noted that the QualE also provided additional graphs which were not included in section 4.3.1 but are included here. Note that for this iteration, there will be only two subsections, time on page (4.3.2.1) and page views (4.3.2.2), since these were the main concerns coming out of the quantitative analysis.

4.3.2.1 Average Time on Page

Within a few minutes into the interview the QualE indicated that along with the graphs, they wanted to review the definitions of the metrics as defined by Google Analytics. The QualE indicated that the reason for this was that they were curious that there was an improvement for metrics such as “average session duration" for August to December 2018 but there was a decline in “average time on page”. The QualE’s point was that the metrics were similar but there was obviously a difference for the metric results to show a negative relationship in the same context. Google Analytics indicated that “**Average Session Duration**” measures the average length of a session, where a user's session could consist of just one page or several pages (Gunter and Önder, 2016). On the other hand, “**Average Time on Page”** measures the average amount of time users spent viewing a specific page or screen, or a specific set of pages or screens (Gunter and Önder, 2016). The QualE indicated that maybe the reason the average time on the page declined was because we had switched to videos instead of posts with images and text. Their thought was that the videos were too short, and users were viewing them and just moving on since there was nothing else for them to do, but that users were finding content that they were interested in the website and staying longer on the website as a whole. The QualE asked to see a drill down of the content videos, specifically the average time the week day videos were versus the weekend videos, and the number of new videos that were being posted on a weekend versus the day. The interview was paused so that I, in the capacity of the QuantE, could gather the data and run the analysis and reconvene the same day.

On review the length of the videos for the December posted content/videos (see Figure 46), showed that 40% would be considered the longer videos, which were posted on Sunday and had an average time of 3 minutes and 40 seconds. Conversely, the Weekday videos/ shorted videos accounted for 60% of the total new videos and have an average time of 30 seconds (see Figure 47).

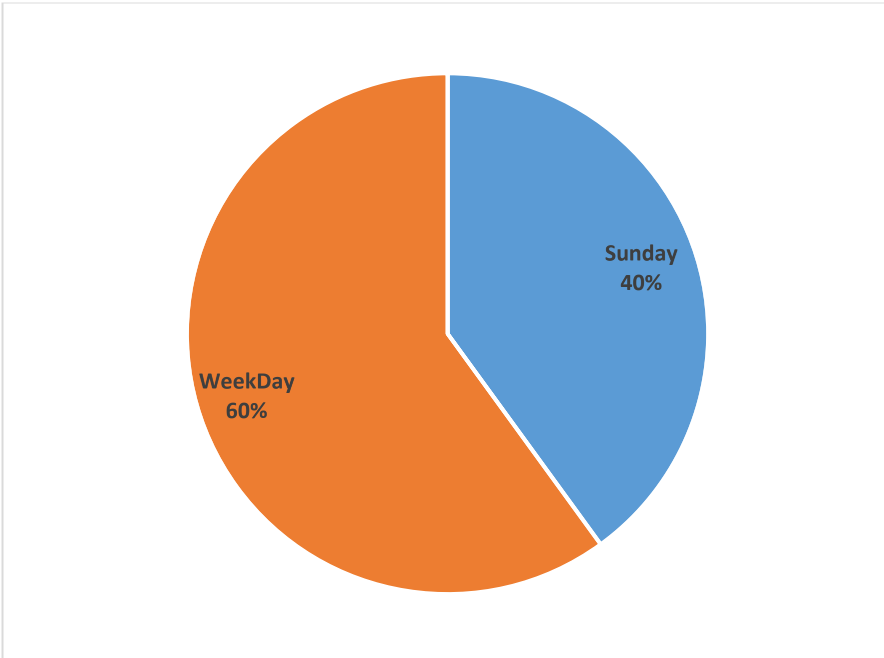


Figure 46: Pie Chart of Percentage of Long Versus Short Video Content

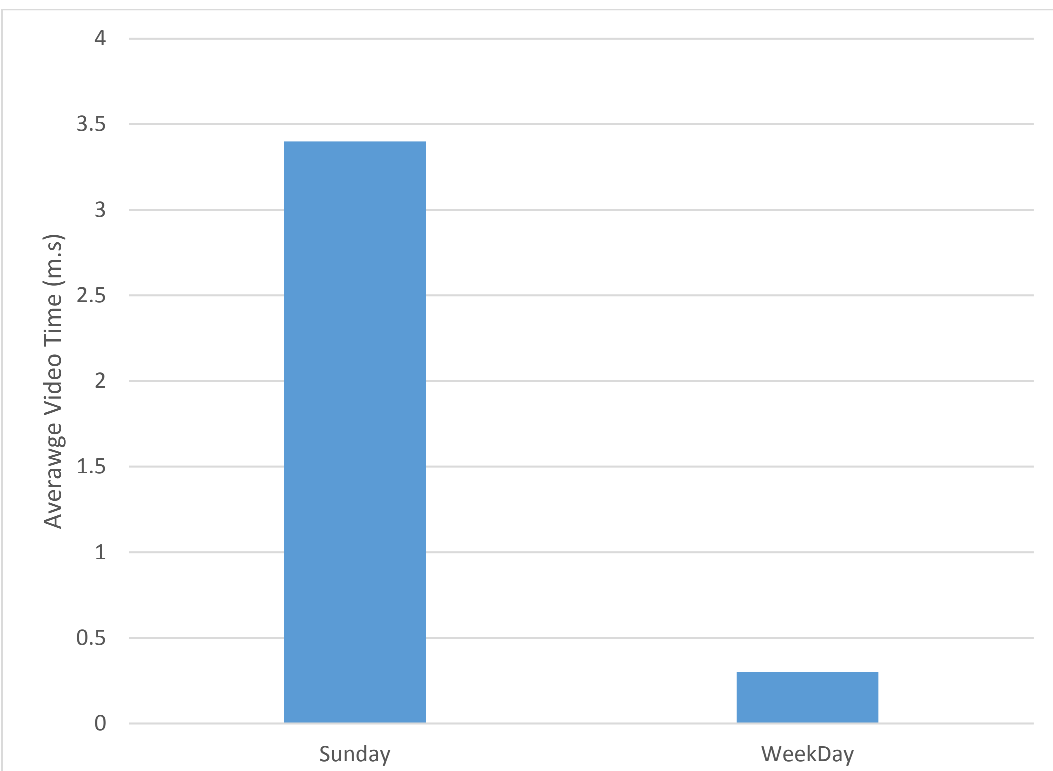


Figure 47: Column Chart of Time Comparison of Long Versus Short Video Content

The QualE indicated that given the results from the drill down graphs and the fact that the majority of ABC content was on average 30 seconds would explain why the "average time on page" in December was 0.33 seconds. The QualE indicated that it would mean increasing the number of longer videos. In the session we discussed the fact that even though we had learnt a lot during the past 2- 3 months the longer videos were still taking approximately two weeks to two months to create depending on whether the videos were created in-house or outsourced. Additionally, it was unclear on whether an increase in the number of longer videos could be affected without decreasing the frequency of the content posts. I queried the QualE thoughts on why the overall average time on page was still so low and whether it was even possible that it could simply be a matter of video length ratio. There was discussion on how to increase the time on page, eventually we had to table it and move on to page views.

On returning to the issue of how to increase the "average time on page" the QualE, indicated that maybe the video length may not be the only reason why users are not spending more time on the page. The QualE indicated that maybe the reason for the decrease in "average time on page" was because the content is not specific to their interests. The QualE also suggested that we seek to engage customers more by tailoring ABC to the user's interests. Therefore, the QualE suggested again that we address the research question **Q8** "Will a more tailored customer experience translate to a higher customer engagement level?" which had formed part of MMAR cycle one actions, but which was not addressed.

The QualE also brought up that the "average time on the page" might be impacted by the social media site used to distribute the content. The QualE reiterated what they had mentioned previously and was noted in section 4.2.3. that Instagram tends to be more image-focused, therefore, post size tends to be more prominent on Instagram making content images more appealing, while Facebook was more text-focused and therefore the name of the video or the text for the post would be more critical for engagement. The QualE indicated that given the change to videos, the distribution channel might impact on the engagement with videos. Therefore, the QualE suggested that we examine the question **Q9** "Does the distribution channel used have an impact on the customer online engagement level?” which was also one of the research questions spoken about in MMAR cycle one and needed to be addressed.

4.3.2.2 Page Views

In the interview on the page views, the QualE reasoned that the decline in page views in December 2018 when compared to August, 2018 may be because a majority of the December 2018 traffic was still being generated from paid advertisement (88% from Facebook), and was therefore not organically generated and representing a "true" interest in the content (see Figure 48). Moreover, the QualE believed that advertising was not a sustainable method of generating page views. The QualE thought that advertising via social media should stop and seek instead to optimize ABC, and the respective content to increase the organic user interest to understand ABC’s audience and increase page views. The QualE suggested that we address the research question of **Q10** “Does the implementation of search engine optimization increase online customer engagement levels?” which like Q8 and Q9 arose as a research question to be addressed in MMAR cycle one.

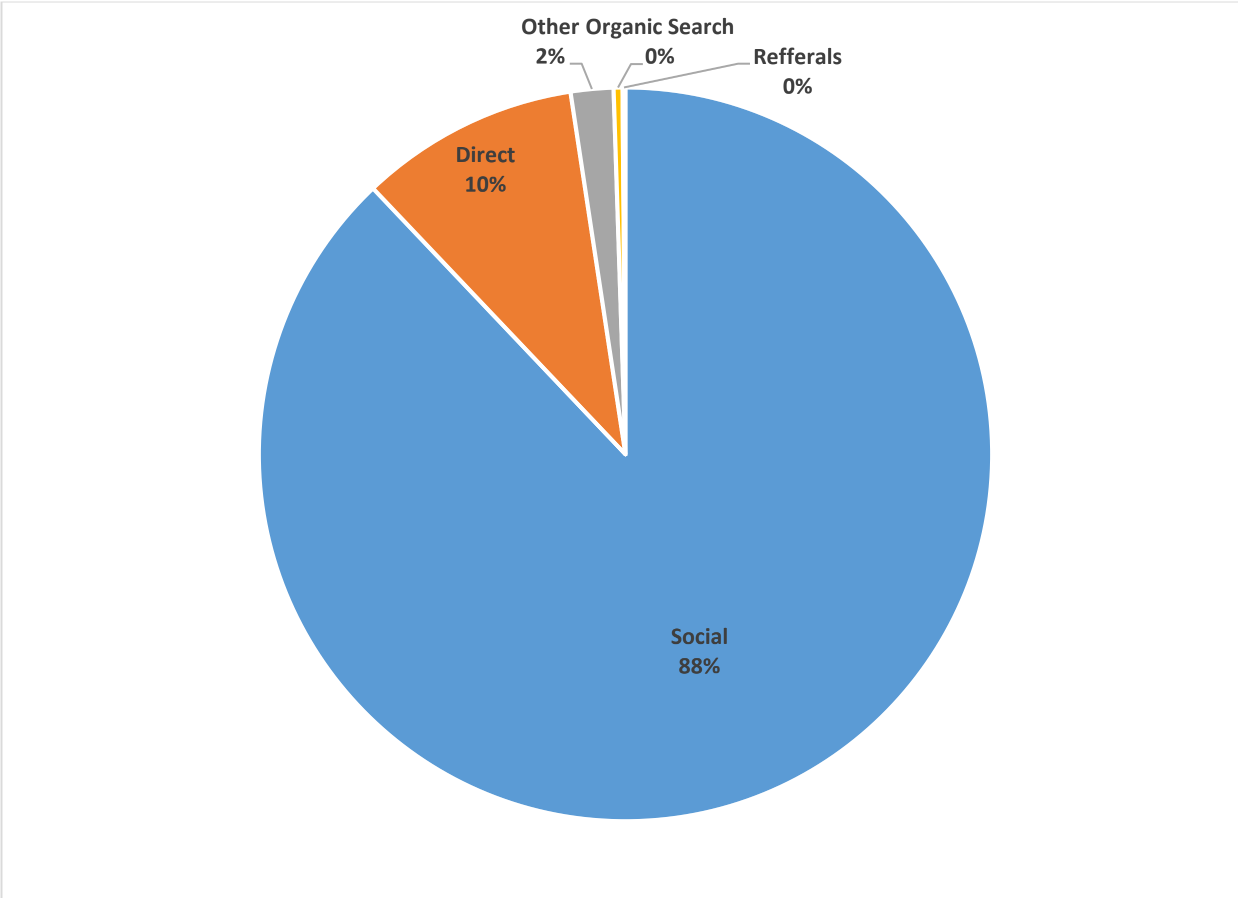


Figure 48: Pie Chart of Social Media Source Versus Other Page Source

4.3.3 Proposed Action To Be Taken

This section was compiled for January 6th, 2019 CPT meeting. This section will outline the objectives for the next cycle, reflect on the agreed actions to be taken, which will become the input for the third MMAR cycle, and any issues encountered. The objectives will be provided in subsection 4.3.3.1. The actions to be taken are discussed in section 4.3.3.2, while the issues and concerns will be discussed in subsection 4.3.3.3.

4.3.3.1 MMAR Cycle Three Objectives

Since the “average time on page” and the “page views” (via social engage rate) had shown a decrease in performance the increase of those two metrics were confirmed to be the objectives of MMAR Cycle Three.

4.3.3.2 Actions To Be Taken

The CPT determined that unlike the actions which were addressed in cycle two, the action for cycle three needed to include fundamental research questions, antecedents/ themes which would have been alluded to in section 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.2.2. Below are the actions the CPT agreed would be taken in MMAR Cycle Three.

1. **Action:** Tailor the website to allow users to easily find content that they are interested in, which involved placing categories related to the brands being used (e.g. Foodie Fridays, Social, etc.) in the menu sections as well placing the reaction icons on the header/menu level. This would address the research question of “*Will a more tailored customer experience translate to a higher customer engagement level?” **(Q8)***
2. **Action:** Discontinuing advertisements on Facebook and Instagram but posting the same content on both. This would address the research question of *“Whether the distribution channel used have an impact on the customer online engagement level?”* (***Q9).***

3. ***Action:*** Research and acquire a search engine optimization plugin to optimize the content and the pages. This would address the research question of *"Whether the implementation of search engine optimization increase online customer engagement levels?"* ***(Q10)***

4.3.3.3 Concerns

During the planning stage the CPT did not identify any major concerns with the new action plan. One of the team members commented that after MMAR Cycle Two changes and the crisis with the hacking of ABC, the team felt more cohesive with a sense of purpose and that the late nights under pressure seemed to have resulted in a streamlining of the process as well, which can happen after a crisis (Pearson and Clair, 1998). The team however identified only two overarching concerns which it was believed could impact on carrying out the proposed actions. Below are the details of the concerns and how they were addressed:

1. The main concern that the CPT had was the fact that we currently had no knowledge of any SEO plugins and if one was purchased there would be a delay in confirming whether it worked and if we started using it, the concern was how easy would it be to reconfigure. Again, for the team, cost and time were also major determinations on the feasibility of any SEO plugins. Most of the plugins offer a free version therefore real time research of possible SEO plugins was inexpensive. WordPress plugins also had a feature where you could see the number of downloads and the rating the plugin received. Subsequently I (in the capacity of part of the CPT team) searched WordPress for SEO plugins and determined which had the most downloads in addition to the rating the plugin had. The CPT agreed as well that the action cycle needed to be extended to facilitate the implementation of the search engine components and the analysis of the effects the search engine optimization changes had on the data.
2. The other concern was with the ramifications of discontinuing the advertisements on Facebook and Instagram which was related to the execution of "**Q9"**. One of CPT members mentioned that the implementation of this could be difficult, since, unlike Facebook, external links were not allowed on Instagram for content that was not being advertised. Therefore, it would mean that the content placed on Instagram may

not result in user engagement with content on ABC. There was some discussion around this, primarily on what it would mean to the objectives. Some other key questions raised were: “How would we measure the impact of the different social media channels on engagement?”. “Would we take the measurement from google analytics?”, because that would only allow us to accurately take engagement metric for Facebook and not Instagram. “The page views would obviously be lower that before since we were not advertising how would be measure that now?” There was a consensus among the team that instead of using Google Analytics, the “social engagement” metric would have to be used to allow the comparison of apples with apples, since it provided engagement levels (page views included) for the respective content from the platform itself. Therefore, the team could compare the same content placed on ABC, Facebook and Instagram for the same period. The CPT felt that by using the “social engagement” metric, it provided a more direct answer to the question: “Does the distribution channel affect customer online engagement?”. Although the compromise was not idle for me as a researcher, in using secondary data there are always compromises that must be made. Additionally, I did not see it as too much of a compromise since the metric was one that was already being used and the objective to gain managerial knowledge about the impact of the media distribution on engagement was still being obtained.

The other concern with discontinuing the advertisement, which the other member of the CPT brought up, was that at the time Instagram only facilitated free streaming of videos that were between 3 seconds and 1 minute, if posted in the feed, and 15 seconds if posted in stories. This would mean that the short videos had to be less than 1 minute, and the longer videos would have to be discontinued or shorter versions would have to be developed. As pointed out by one of the CPT members short videos, did not seem like the best idea since it may reduce the “time on page” metric, which we were trying to focus on improving. Moreover, the disadvantage of the creating “clips” was the additional time and resources it would take to create “extra” videos.

The CPT decided that to mitigate the time issue it would be best if all clips were created in-house, since there would be more control for something that needed a quick turnaround. Therefore, coming out of the CPT meeting was the following additional action:

Action 4: Create clips for Instagram.

In section 4.4. details of the MMAR cycle three will be discussed. First an introduction will be provided. Secondly, the quantitative analysis will be proved in section 4.4.2 and thirdly the qualitative analysis compiled from the open-ended interview with the QualE will be provided in section 4.4.3. The proposed actions to be taken for the subsequent MMAR cycle three (3) will then be provided in section 4.4.4.

4.4. Mixed Methods Action Research Cycle Three

The goal of this third MMAR cycle was to execute the actions laid out in section 4.3.3.2 section 4.3.3.3. In this cycle the following antecedents will be addressed: “tailored experience”, “distribution channel” and “search engine optimization (SEO)”. The data in this cycle refers to the data collected between December 2018 and March 2019. It should be noted here as a reminder, that unlike in December 2018 when all the content was sponsored, the January data represents content that was not advertised on Facebook nor on Instagram. However, identical content was posted on both social media platforms. The “tailored experience” dataset represented 8,331 page views and a maximum of 32 posts, while the “distribution channel” dataset represented 1,098 page views and a maximum of 15 posts. The SEO changes were not implemented until March of 2019; therefore, the quantitative data analysis represents data collected from January 2019 and March 2019. On the other hand, the SEO dataset represents 1,098 page views.

Table 15 provides the details for the subsequent three (3) themes that were added in section 4.3. Note again that because the quantitative data was secondary data and in summary format, depending on the theme under investigation the number of posts, which the data represented, would not be available.

Data Collection Period (Start Date)	Data Collection Period (End Date)	Thesis Section Name	Total Dataset (Page Views)	Total Dataset (Num. of Post)
December, 2018	January, 2019	Tailored Experience	8,331	32
December, 2018	January, 2019	Distribution Channel	1,098	15
January, 2019	March, 2019	Search Engine Optimization	1,098	N/A*
Total			**10,527**	
*N/A = Not Applicable				

Table 15: Dataset details for the additional three (3) themes.

In the next section details of the quantitative and qualitative analysis will be provided as it relates to the research questions/antecedents/ themes addressed in this cycle.

4.4.2. Quantitative Analysis

Because this iteration was based on specific changes to the ABC platform, in this section, I will detail the respective changes along with providing details of the quantitative analysis. The analysis would be categorized by themes specifically “tailored experience”, “distribution channel” and “search engine optimization”. Because of the availability of the secondary data and the themes to be addressed, only specific metrics were included in the quantitative analysis. For tailored experience, data was only available to be able to compare the “average time on page”, “pages per session” and “bounce rate” therefore the analysis for this theme only addressed those metrics and compared the January 2018 data with the December 2018 data. For “distribution channel” only “social engagement ranking” metric was available. Given that the discontinuation of paying for advertisements was only done in January the data collection and subsequent analysis only represented January 2019 data. For “search engine optimization” the “average time on page", "average session duration", "pages per session" and "bounce rate" metrics were available and examined. The data was collected from Google Analytics and given that the advertisement was discontinued in January the "social engagement rate" metric was not used for comparative analysis since the data would be skewed. Additionally, "social engagement rate" was only examined for the distribution channel antecedent since the analysis did not require comparative analysis.

4.4.2.1 Tailored Experience and Engagement

The CPT concluded that the website could be tailored to user's experience by adding the emoticon feature and by adding hashtag categories. By adding the emotion icons (1 and 3) and the hashtag (#) categories (2 and 4) to the top of the menu users can easily find similar content that they may be interested in (see Figure 49 and Figure 50). For example, if a user visited the page and realized that they were interested in "Foodie Friday" videos, they could click on the #foodiefriday category and view all the content with that hashtag. Additionally, if they wanted to visit all the "humorous content", they could simply click on the "LOL" icon to view this type of content. The intent was to specifically increase the "average time on the page" since the previous analysis had shown that this was one of the only engagement metrics that did not improve between August 2018 and December 2018 iterations.

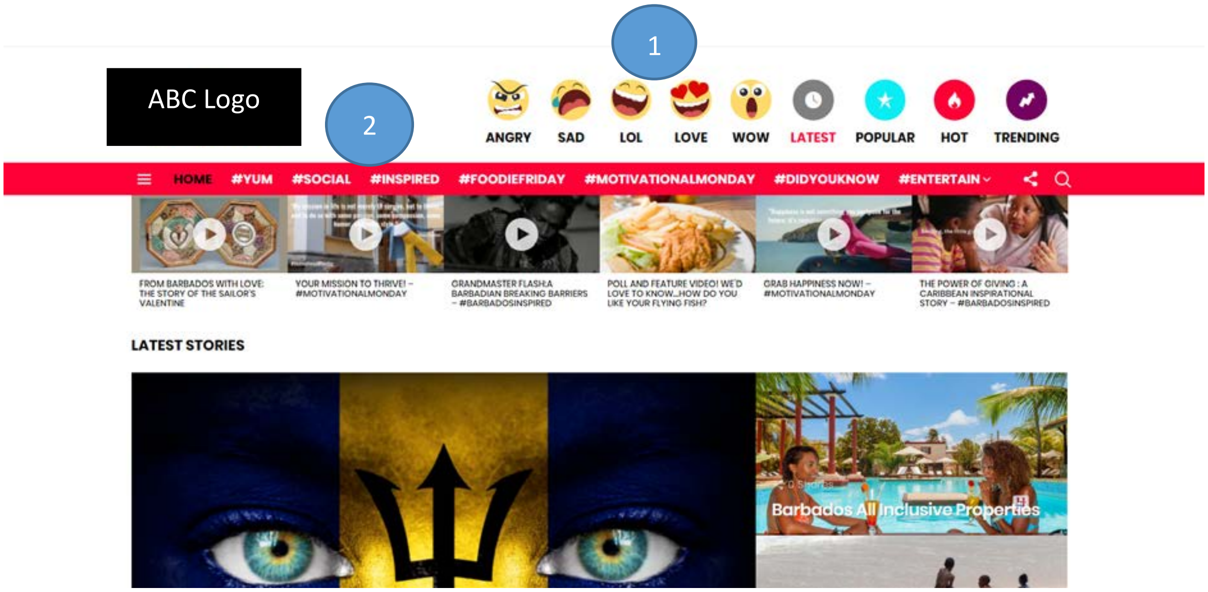


Figure 49: Screenshot of ABC Showing User Experience Changes On Website

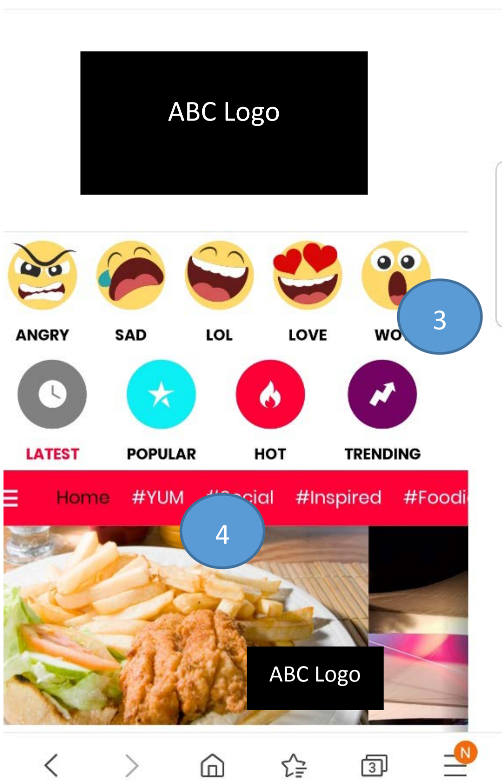


Figure 50: Screenshot of ABC Showing User Experience Changes On Mobile Phone

The analysis of the “average time on page” (see Figure 51) metric showed an increase of 72.73% from 33 seconds in December 2018 to 57 seconds in January. 2019. Further analysis also showed that the “average session duration” (see Figure 52) increased by 30 % from 1 minute in December 2018 to 1 minute and 18 seconds in January 2019. However, analysis of the pages per session (see Figure 53) showed a decline by 15.05% from 2.79 pages per session in December 2018 to 2.37 pages per session in January 2019. Additionally, the bounce rate (see Figure 54) performance also decreased with a total increase from December to January by 72.85% while for December it was 21.07% and in January it was 36.42%. This seemed to imply that although tailoring of the platform to customers does have a positive impact on some customer engagement metrics such as “average time on page” and “average session duration”, it does not have a similar impact on such metrics as “pager per session” or “bounce rate”.

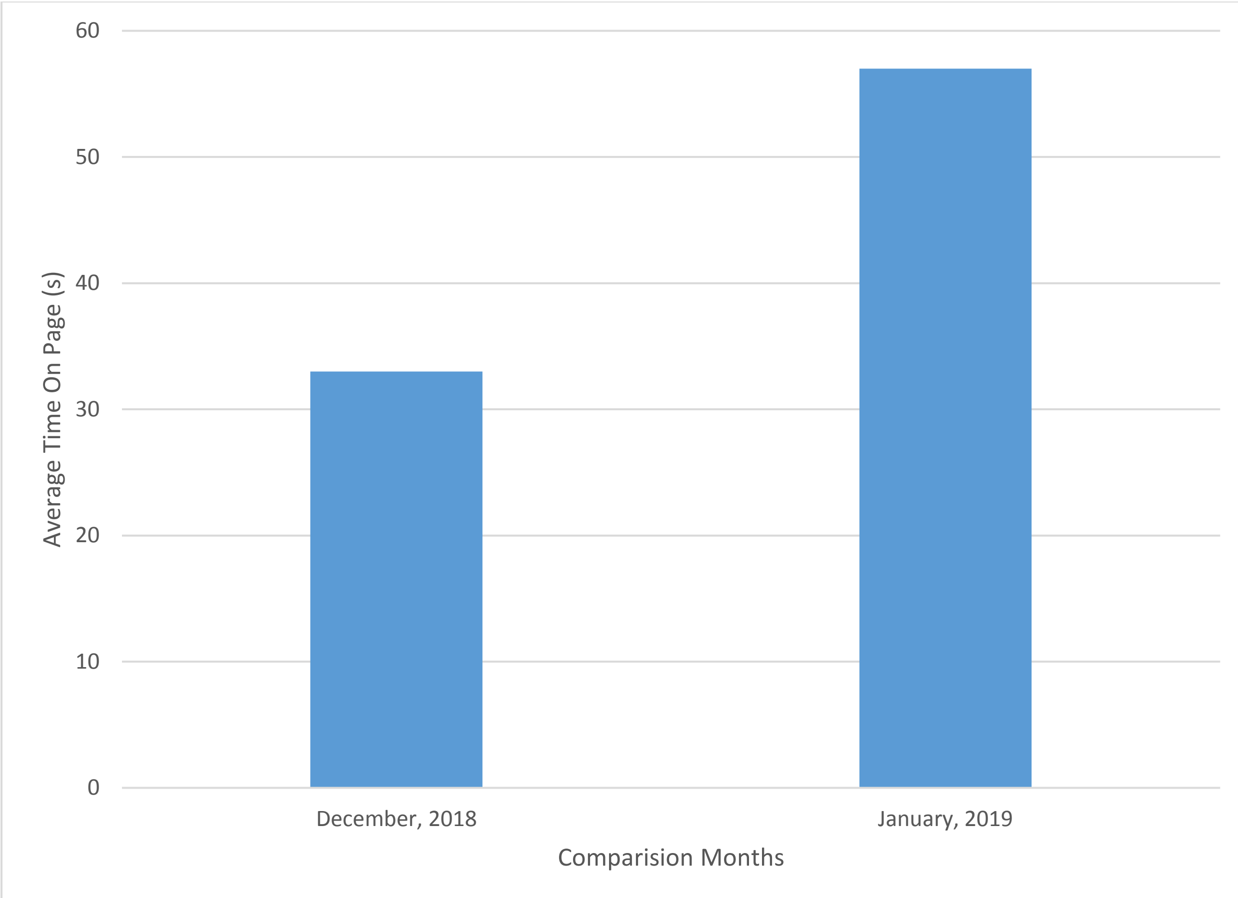


Figure 51: Column Chart of Average Time on Page for December 2018 and January 2019

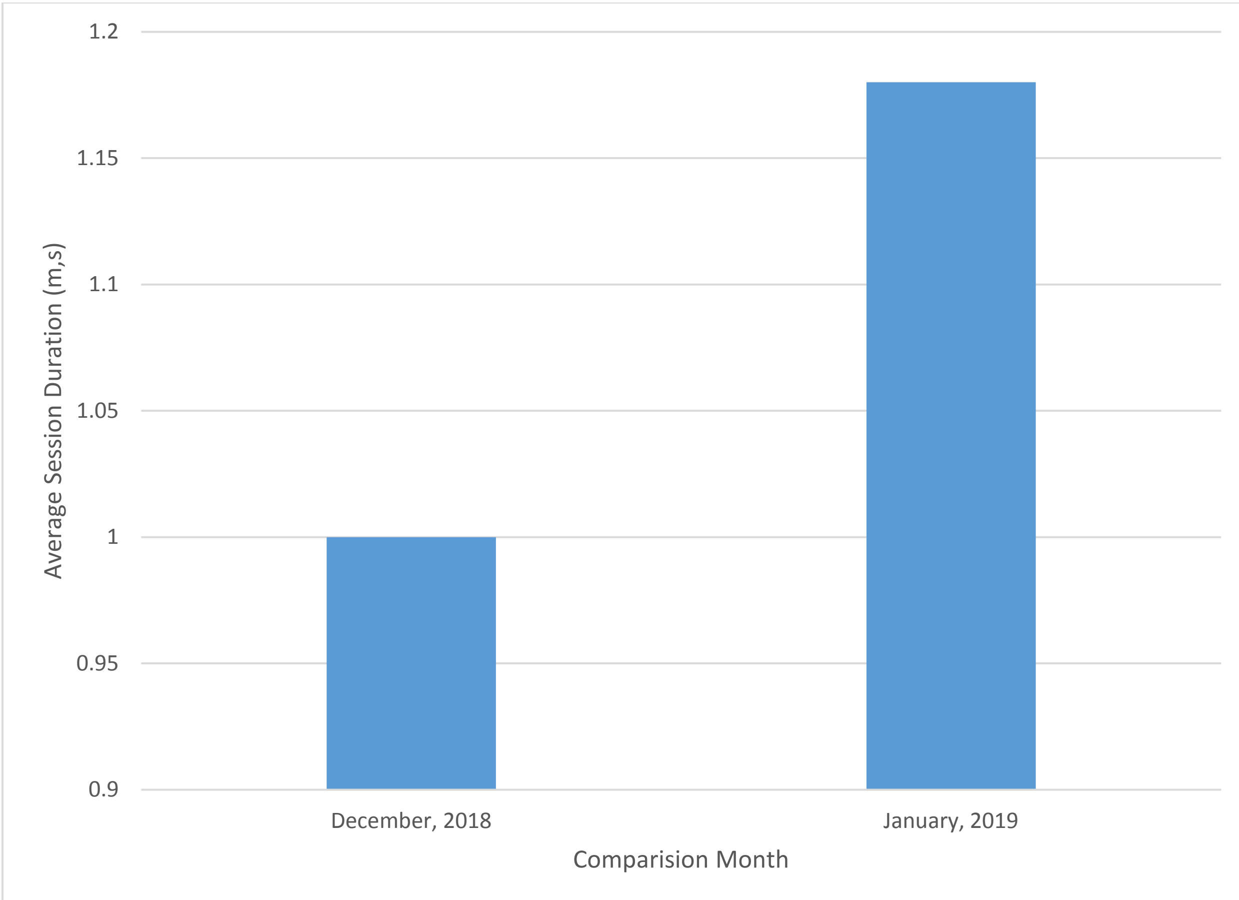


Figure 52: Column Chart of Average Session Duration for December 2018 and January 2019

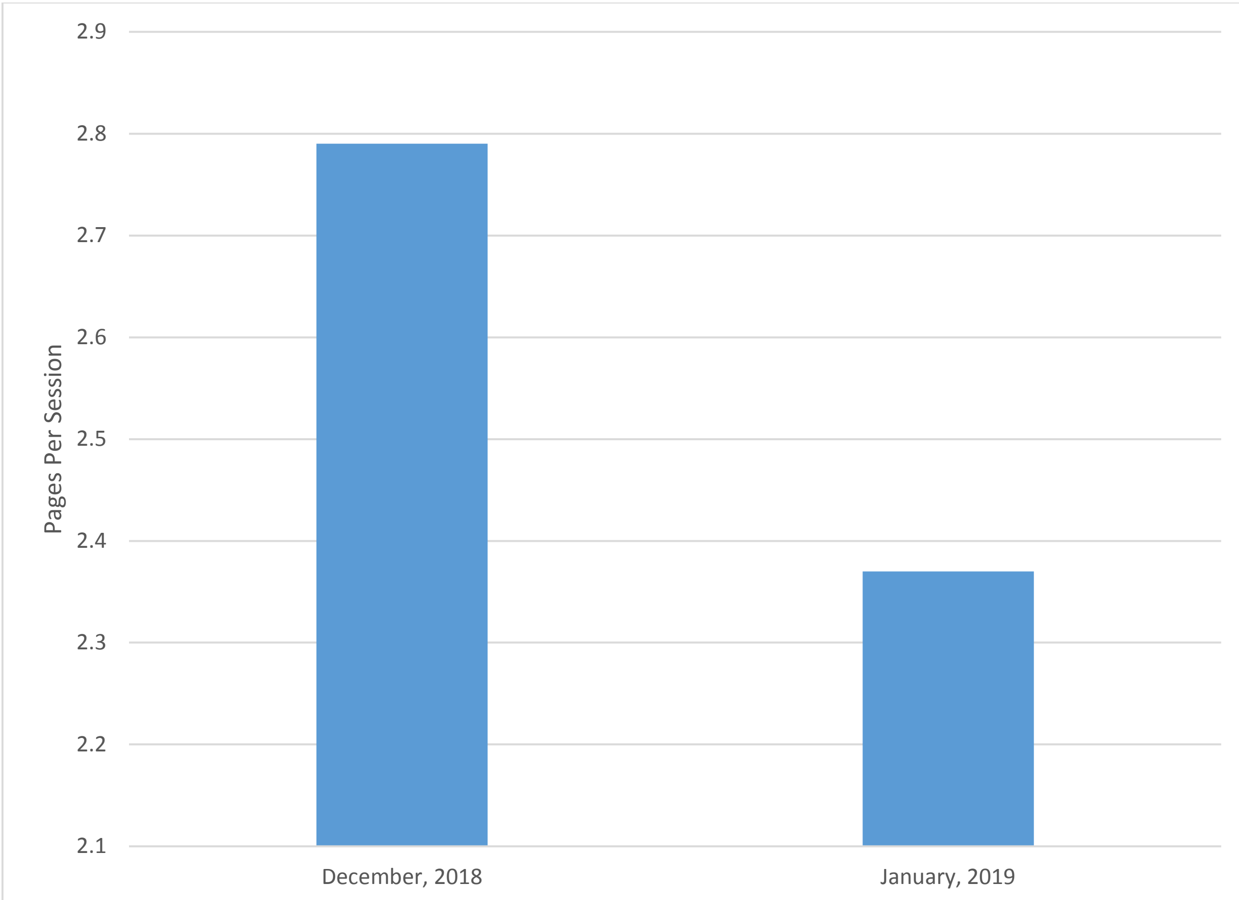


Figure 53: Column Chart of Pages Per Session for December 2018 and January 2019

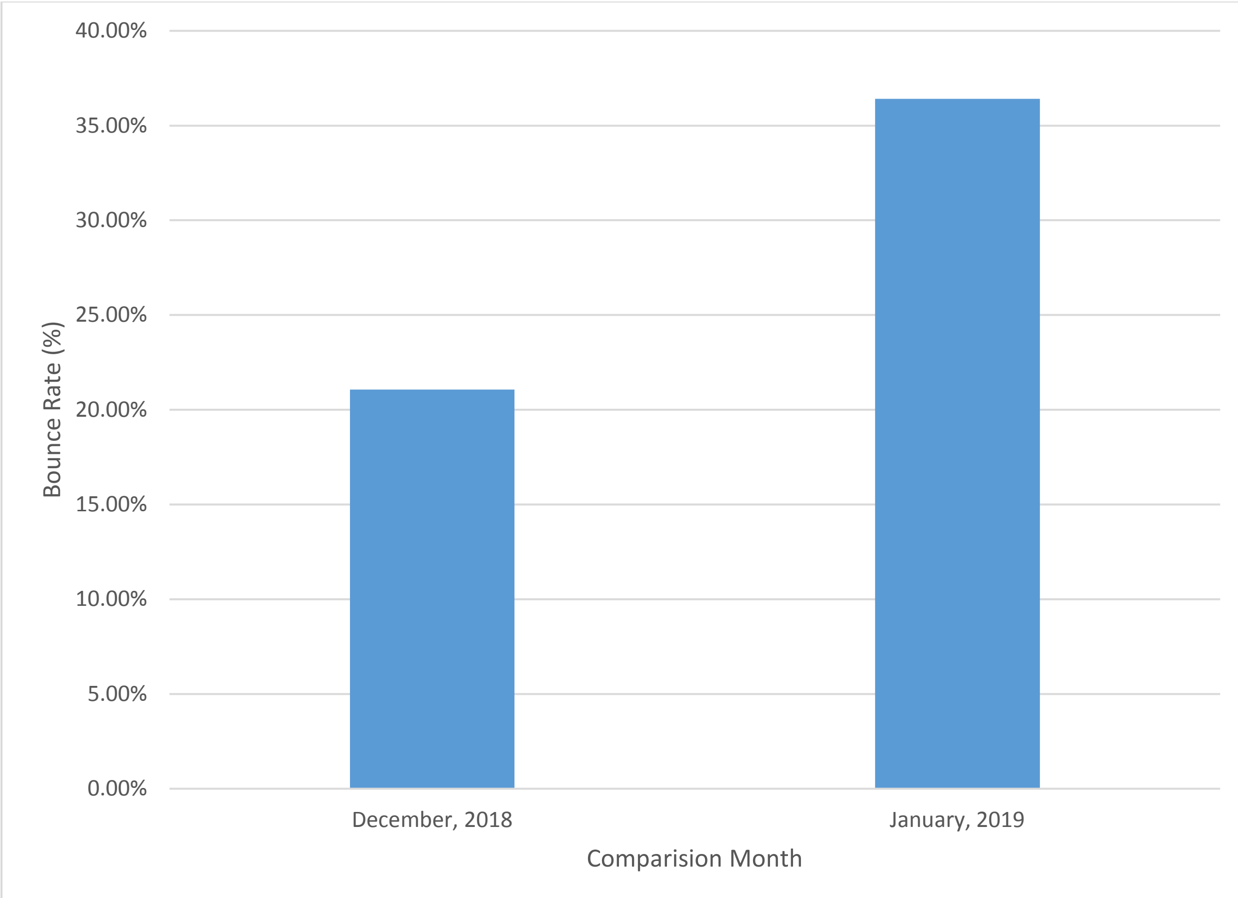


Figure 54: Column Chart of Bounce Rate for December 2018 and January 2019

4.4.2.2 Distribution Channel and Engagement

Analysis of the social engagement rates of paid and unpaid content across distribution and platform channels (see Figure 55) revealed that when the content was paid, engagement on Facebook and Instagram were similar at 27% and 26% respectively, while on ABC the engagement was on average 50% less at 13%. However, when the content was unpaid, the content on Instagram appears to have a higher Instagram engagement rate of 33%, while Facebook stood at 11% and ABC was 9%. This seemed to imply that although there was no significant difference with distribution channels with paid content, when the content was unpaid, Instagram was better than Facebook in facilitating the engagement of customers.

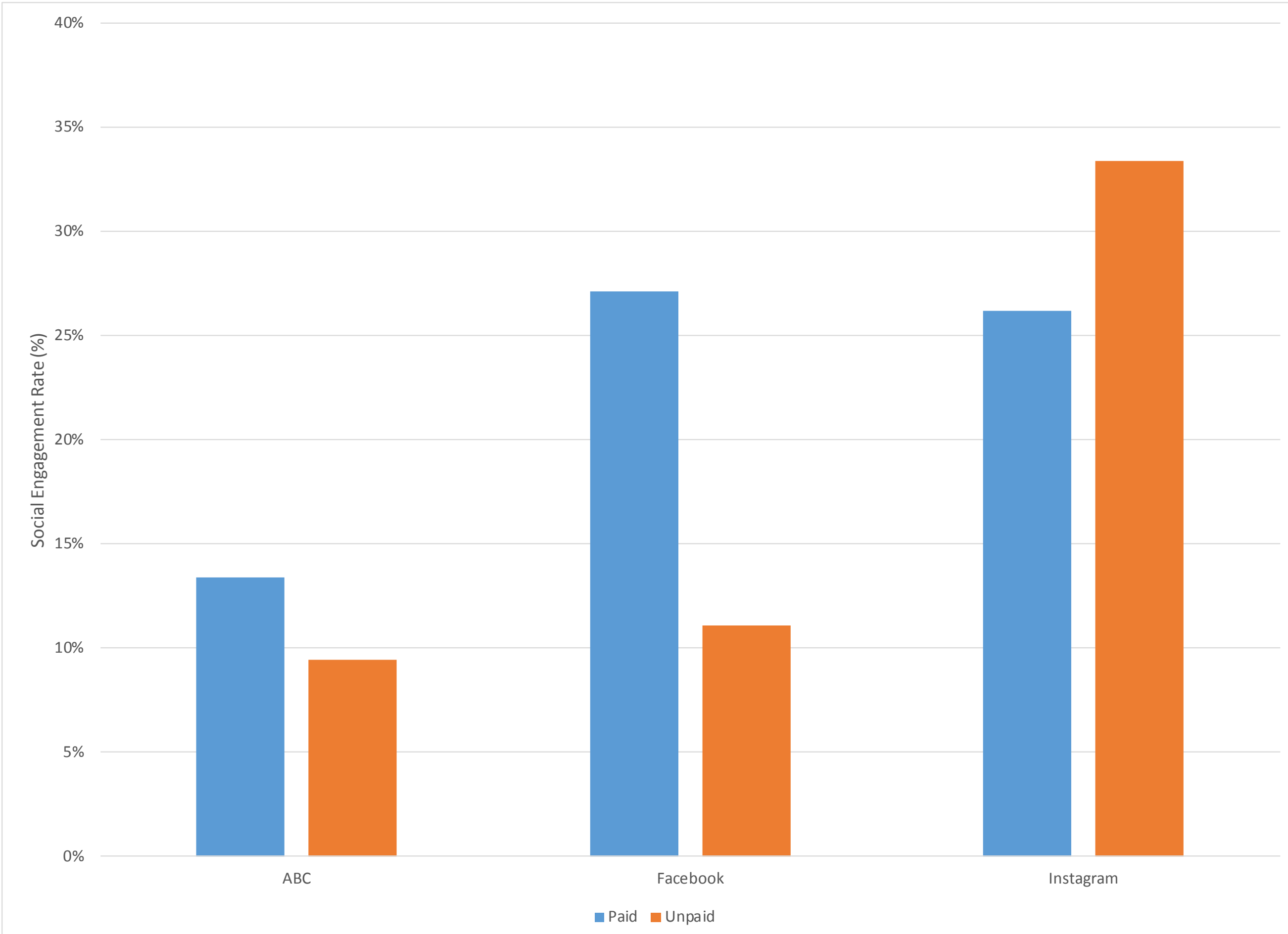


Figure 55: Detail Column Chart of Breakdown of Social Engagement Rate by Platform

4.4.2.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Engagement

Analysis of the "average time on the page" (see Figure 56) showed an increase of 31.58% from January of 57 seconds to March of 1 minute and 15 seconds. Furthermore, the analysis also showed that the "average session duration" (see Figure 57) also increased significantly by 123.08% from January to March of 1 minute and 18 seconds to 2 minutes and 54 seconds respectively. "Pages per session" (see Figure 58) showed improvement as well from 2.37 pages/ session in January to 3.31 "pages per session" in March to a total increase of 39.66%. Additionally, the "bounce rate" (see Figure 59) also improved with a reduction from January to March by 12.25% from 36.42% to 31.96% respectively. Of all the improvements made, it seemed as though the inclusion of the search engine optimization antecedent had the most notable impact on the customer engagement metrics.

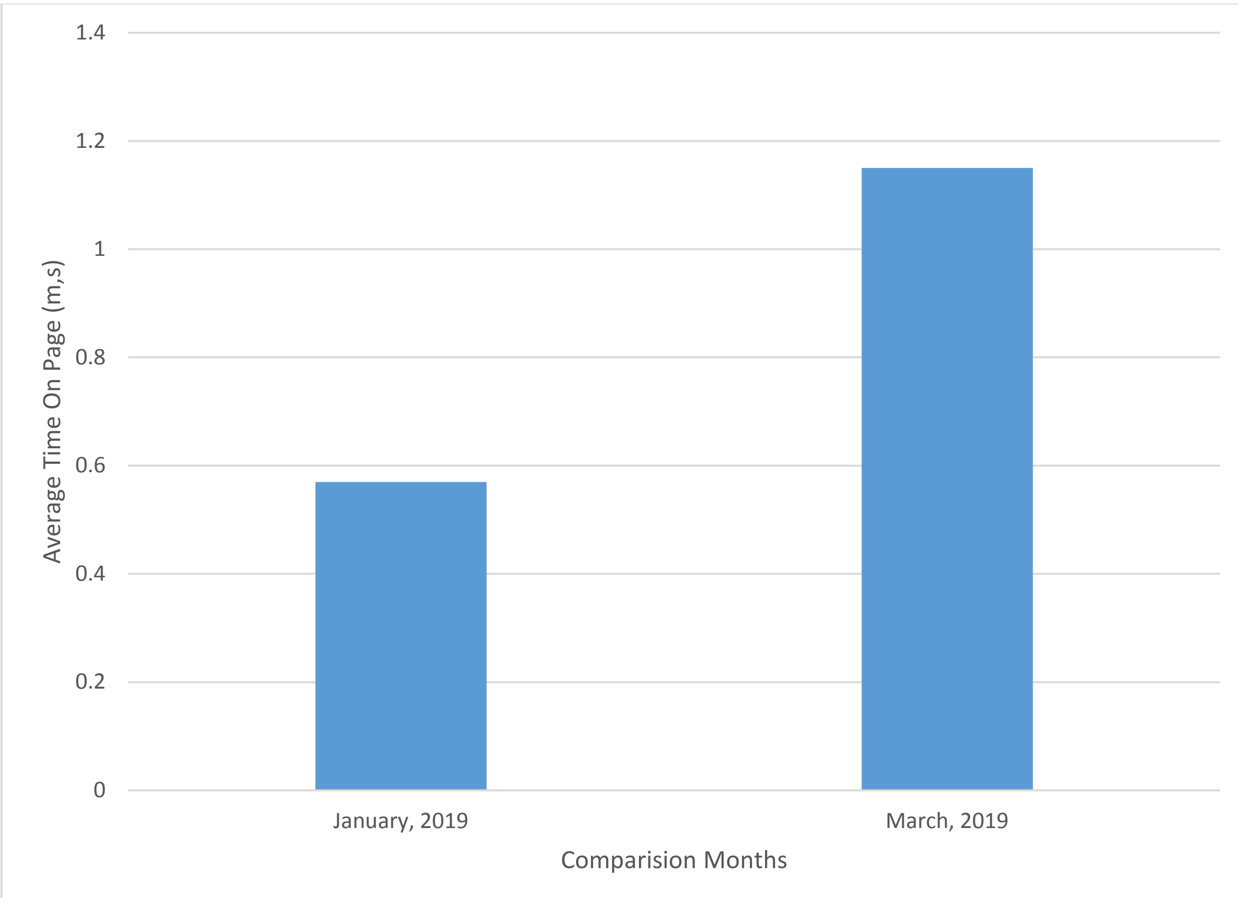


Figure 56: Column Chart of Average Time on Page for January 2019 and March 2019

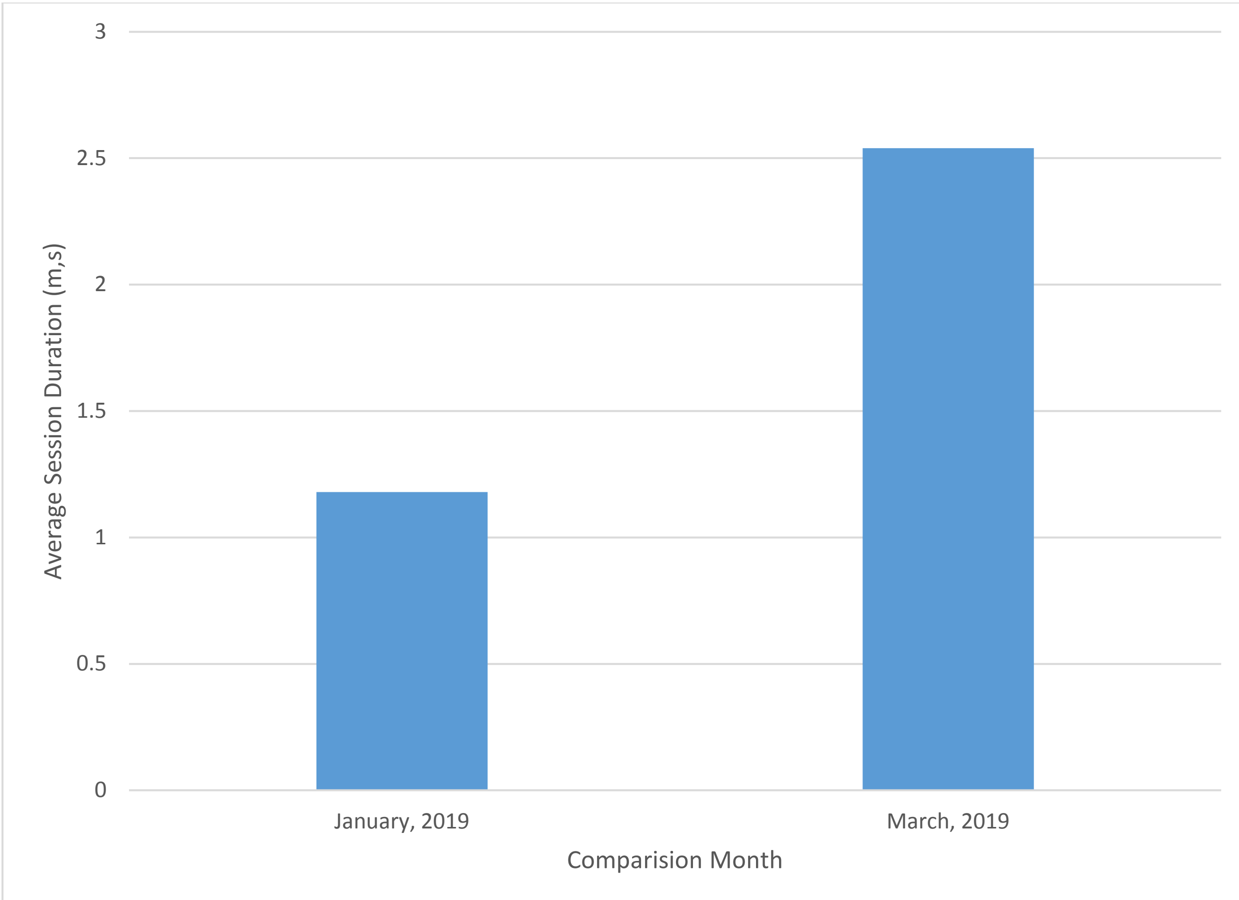


Figure 57: Column Chart of Average Session Duration for January 2019 and March 2019

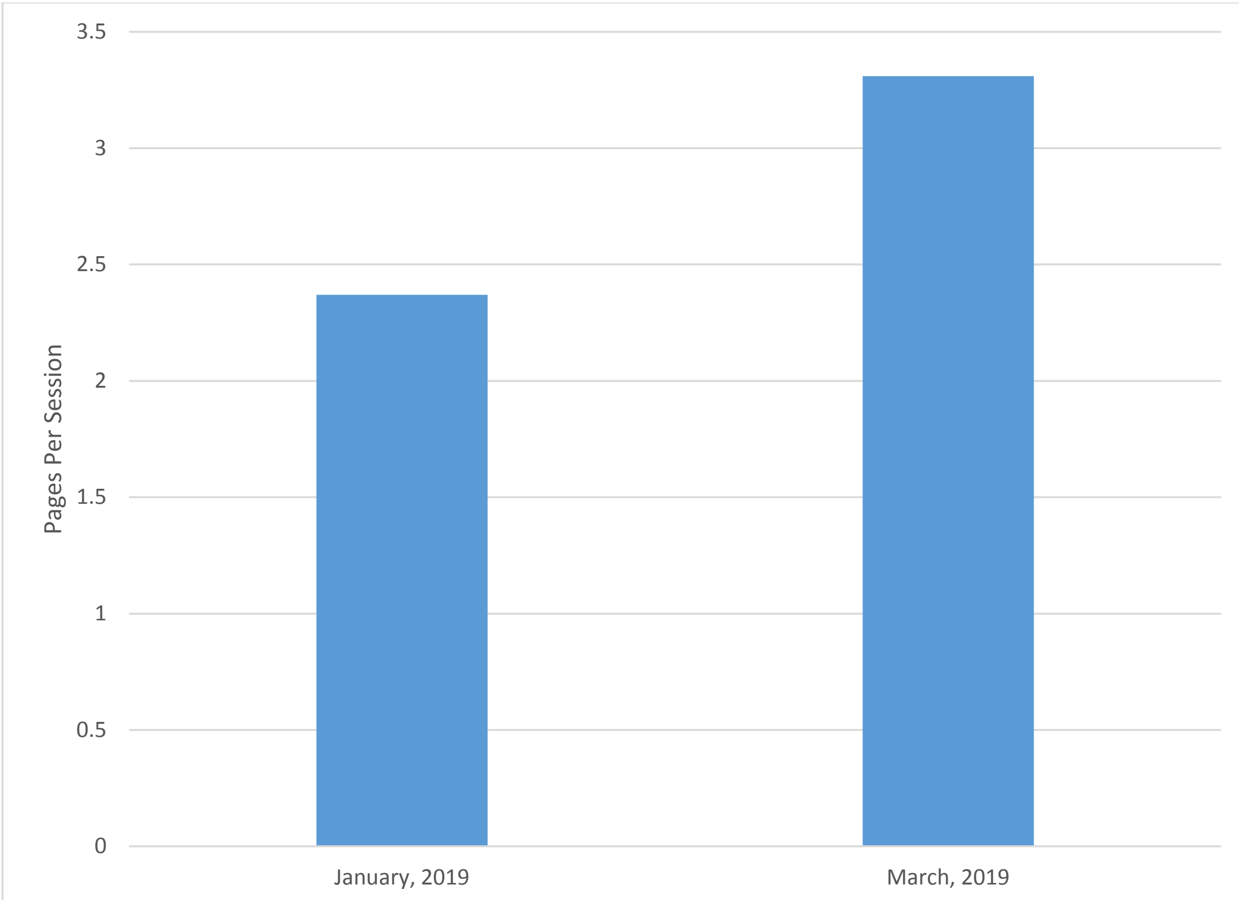


Figure 58: Column Chart of Pages per Session for January 2019 and March 2019

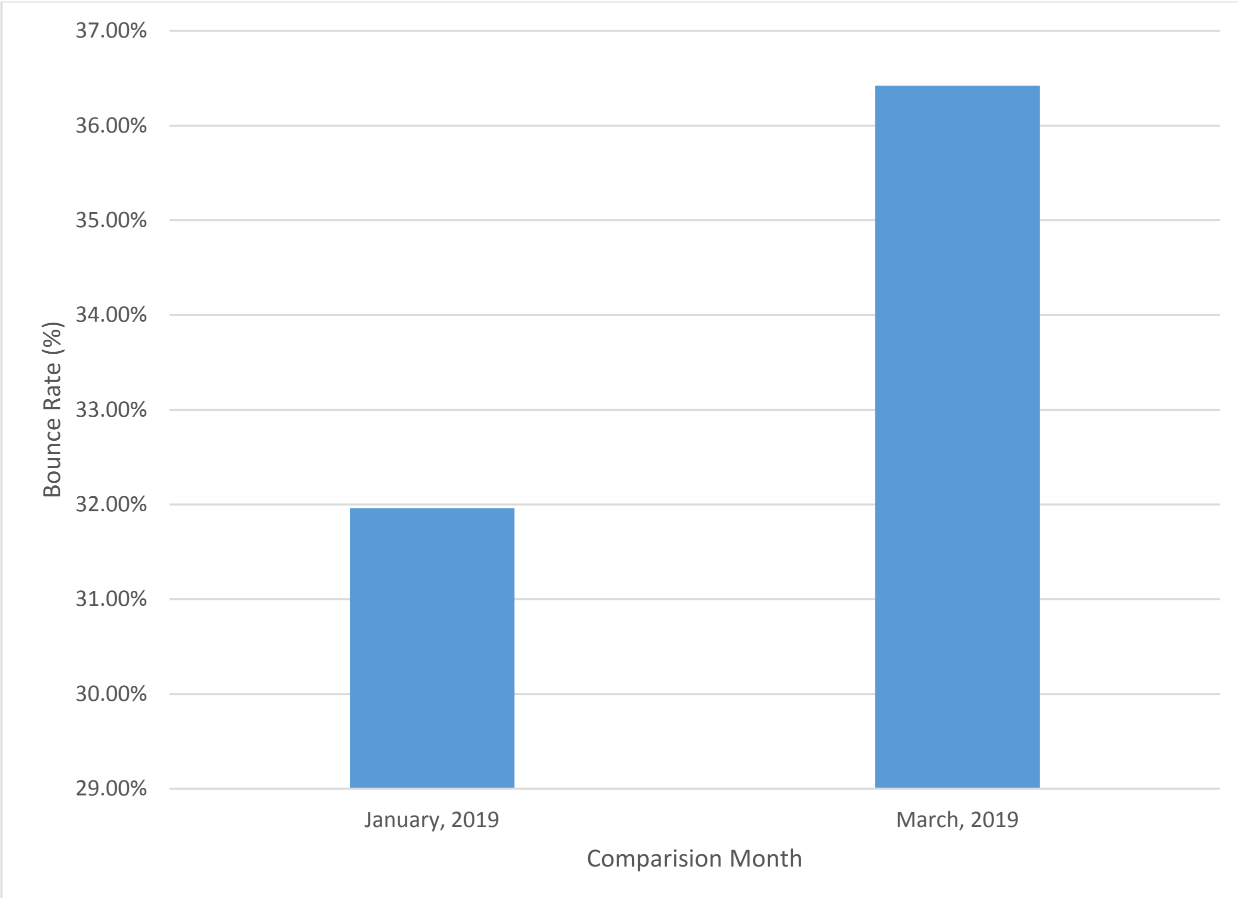


Figure 59: Column Chart of Bounce Rate for January 2019 and March 2019

4.4.3. Qualitative Analysis

Unlike section 4.2.3 (the first MMAR cycle) the qualitative analysis for MMAR cycle three will be categorised into the themes/ antecedents which the QualE would have proposed and not the themes from section 2.6.3. This was primarily done because at this stage of the research the improvements were focused less on the previous themes since most of the metrics had improved except for page views. It was noticed that from the initial "action implementation' discussion in section 4.3.3 the page views either declined or had minimal improvement in comparison with the other metrics. During the CRT session two additional themes were proposed by the QualE, namely; "discovery percentage" which replaced "hashtags" and "human personality". The CRT sessions would have taken place on February 9, and April 6, 2019. The proceeding sections will focus on both of these themes in relation to the improvement of page views.

4.4.3.1 Discovery Percentage

On review of the quantitative analysis, the QualE pointed out that there seemed to be a disparity in engagement levels between the respective platforms, and paid and unpaid content. The QualE reasoned that this may be because of the differences in the Instagram and Facebook algorithms. She further indicated that in 2018, Facebook's CEO announced that their algorithm would inherently favour users seeing posts from friends and family and limit the posts from business, brands, and media (Mosseri, 2018), thereby penalizing unpaid content/ posts from businesses. The QualE also indicated that they believed that one of the reasons why the engagement rate for unpaid content on Instagram was higher than on Facebook and why paid content on Instagram performed similarly to content distributed on Facebook was because, on Instagram, ABC could access users or people on the platform through the utilization of hashtags.

The QualE felt that given some of the past research they had done relating to hashtags, adding hashtags on Instagram could increase engagement of the post (Hart, 2019). Additionally, the QualE mentioned that there were no limitations on the number of hashtags, but it was essential to ensure that hashtag research was used to determine the best and most appropriate hashtags to use. For example, the QualE indicated that, as a company, decisions needed to be made regarding the utilization of high-density hashtags. High-density hashtags are where there are many posts and therefore a lot of user visibility, but also a lot of post competition (Hart, 2019). On the other hand, low-density hashtags are where there are not a lot of posts, and therefore the users are limited (Hart, 2019). Conversely, with low-density hashtags there is not a lot of competition and a greater likelihood that the post will be seen (Hart, 2019). The QualE did mention that given her experience there is no hard and fast rule regarding the number or type of hashtags to be used and further suggested that the best way of monitoring and determining the level of page views would be by monitoring the discovery percentage (percentage of nonfollowers) and identifying if hashtag changes needed to be made to a post. The QualE further mentioned that there might be a correlation between the discovery percentage and the engagement levels, such as page views since technically a post could not be viewed unless it was discovered. Therefore, the following research questions/antecedents/ themes were considered integral to the improvement of online customer engagement. The research question regarding hashtags was changed to reflect on this discussion. My research changed from Q7 to Q7 b and Q7 c:

1. ***Q7:*** *Will the hashtags have an impact on the customer online engagement level?*
2. ***Q 7 b:*** *Is there is a positive correlation between discovery percentage and engagement levels?*
3. ***Q 7 c:*** *Does the increase in discovery percentage result in increased page views?*

4.4.3.2 Human Personality

The QualE mentioned that they believed that the social engagement rate and the page views could be improved. The QualE went back to previous analysis in section 4.2.2.4 and 4.2.3.4 surrounding the vividness theme and indicated that they believed that content which was classified as vivid did well not merely because of the quality of the photo, or how close it was to reality but whether or not the thumbnail showed a human face. Additionally, the QualE felt that having a human face, personality or character, as part of a marketing campaign formed a bond with the audience (Naylor, 2018 and Idler, 2013), and that content with faces, engage users more than content without faces (Bakhshi et al., 2014). A research question that spoke to the impact of a human personality was therefore added (see below):

1. ***Q11:*** *Will content with human personality have higher engagement than those that do not?*

4.4.4 Proposed Action To Be Taken

This section was compiled for April 7th, 2019 CPT meeting and, as was the case in cycle one, represented a summary of the analysis from the April 6th, 2019 meeting with the QualE. As with previous cycles, this section will outline the objectives for the next cycle, reflect on the agreed actions to be taken, which will become the input for the fourth and last MMAR cycle, and any issues encountered. The objectives will be provided in subsection 4 .4.4.1. The actions to be taken will be provided in subsection 4.4.4.2 and the issues and concerns will be discussed in subsection 4.4.4.3.

4.4.4.1 MMAR Cycle Four Objectives

The objective of MMAR cycle four was primarily to improve the OCE metric page views since this seemed to still be an issue. The other objectives were to determine whether an increase in discovery percentage resulted in an increase in page views and whether there was a positive relationship between discovery percentage and engagement. Additionally, the objectives of cycle four would be to determine whether having a human face would impact positively on engagement. At the end of the MMAR Cycle Four the ultimate goal is to ensure that the overall research objectives outlined in section 1.5 are realized including:

- Identification of a practical customer engagement strategy.
- Identification of a practical framework/ process for the creation of a customer engagement strategy within the context of content marketing.

4.4.4.2 Actions To Be Taken

The CPT identified that given the objectives (in section 4.4.4.1), the actions in cycle four (the last cycle) would need to include the respective research questions, antecedent/ themes which would have been provided in section 4.4.4.1 as well as the creation/confirmation of a practical strategy for ABC and a framework to be used for future strategy creations. When the CPT examined the new objectives and actions there was a consensus that new actions including the research questions were an exploration of new thinking and new managerial knowledge and required the collection of new data but did not require the creation of new content. For example, to answer the questions whether the discovery percentage resulted in an increase in page views, quantitative data on the discovery percentage and the page views for the respective content would simply have to be collected. Below are the actions the CPT agreed would be taken in MMAR Cycle Four (the final cycle)

1. **Action:** Collect the discovery percentage data, including the number of hashtags used and collect the page view data for the respective posts on Instagram and determine if there is a positive correlation between the discovery percentage and the engagement level. Which would address the research question:

   "*Is there is a positive correlation between discovery percentage and engagement levels?* ***(Q7b)***

2. **Action:** Determine the content to be examined and research possible hashtags that could be added given the content focus.   Add the additional hashtags and monitor the extent to which the discovery percentage increased and the engagement level increased. Which would address the following research question:

   "Does the increase in discovery percentage result in increase in page views?" ***(Q7c)***

2. **Action:** Collect data from similar content where one had a human face as the main image and the other did not have a human face as the main image. Which would address the following research question:

   "*Will content with human personality have higher engagement than those that do not?" (**Q11)**.*

3. **Action:** Solidify a strategy for ABC and a framework for the creation of new strategies.

4.4.4.3 Concerns

During the planning stage the CPT did not identify any specific concerns with the new action plan since the actions involved changes to the collection of data more so than to the content and therefore were not considered as time consuming as previous changes. The team was going into the fourth and final MMAR cycle and felt that an overall strategy for content creation, platform requirements and processes could now be determined for ABC along with a framework for the creation of the strategy. Because one of the actions involved the gathering of data from content with a human face/personality, the below concern will be focused on the discussion which would have been had by the planning team previously regarding the inclusion of human faces.

1. In previous discussions with the CPT, concerns were raised regarding the utilization of human faces. Although at the time Barbados did not have any explicit laws regarding the utilization of faces and the consent that would be required. To reduce any possibility of a law suit, legal issues, or ethical issues however, I (in the capacity of the Principal Director), directed the team to only use images that were either owned by ABC, or purchased from depositphotos.com and therefore ABC had the rights to use. Additionally, the team was directed to not use images of minors unless the photo was purchased and therefore according to the terms of service for depositphotos.com consent would have been provided.

In section 4.5. details of the MMAR Cycle Four will be discussed. First an introduction will be provided. Secondly the quantitative analysis will be proved in section 4.5.2. Thirdly, in section 4.5.3 the qualitative analysis will be performed and lastly a final discussion of the antecedents, strategy and the framework will be provided.

4.5. Mixed Methods Action Research Cycle Four

The goal of this fourth and final cycle was to execute the actions laid out in section 4.4.4.2 including addressing the themes “discovery percent”, “human personality” (4.5.2), as well as the creation/indication of a set strategy for ABC (4.6.2) and framework for the creation of subsequent strategies being discussed in (4.6.1).

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The data for this fourth iteration refers to the quantitative data collected from Instagram between February 1st, 2019 and March 31st, 2019. It should be noted that the content during February 1st, 2019 and March 31st, 2019 would not have been paid for or advertised. Additionally, it should be noted that new content was not created for this quantitative analysis but simply that this section represents new data that was collected from existing content, and in the case of the discovery percentage new hashtags were added to existing content and monitored. The entire dataset consisted of a maximum of 16 content items/posts and 5,180 page views. The “discover percentage” dataset represented 1,528 page views and a maximum of 16 posts, while the “human personality” dataset represented 3,652 page views and a maximum of 15 posts.

Table 16 provides the details for the subsequent two (2) themes that were added in section 4.4. Note again that because the quantitative data was secondary data and in summary format, depending on the theme under investigation the number of posts, which the data represents, would not be available.

Data Collection Period (Start Date)	Data Collection Period (End Date)	Thesis Section Name	Total Dataset (Page Views)	Total Dataset (Num. of Post)
February, 2019	March, 2019	Discovery Percentage	1,528	16
February, 2019	March, 2019	Human Personality	3,652	15
Total			**5,180**	
*N/A = Not Applicable				

Table 16: Dataset details for the additional two (2) themes.

4.5.2. Quantitative Analysis

The analysis in this section was slightly different from that of the previous iterations. Although descriptive statistics, bar charts and graphs similar to those used in the previous sections were used, inferential statistics comparing the variable "discovery level" against both page views and the social engagement rate in the form of correlation coefficient were also used. In section 4.5.2.1 the quantitative analysis of the discovery percentage will be performed, while in section 4.5.2.2 the analysis of the human personality will be examined.

4.5.2.1 Discovery Percent and Engagement

Analysis of the relationship between the discovery percentage and the page views (see Figure 60) seemed to show that there was a linear relationship between the percentage discovery on Instagram and the number of page views. Further analysis of the correlation between the discovery percent and the page views showed a relatively high positive correlation of 0.6333 (see Figure 61). In contrast, however, the analysis showed that there was little correlation between the discovery percentage and the social engagement rate (%) of 0.0049 (see Figure 62).

To further analyse the correlation between discovery percentage and page views, six (6) new hashtags were added to one specific post. The new hashtags accounted for a total increase in group posts between February and March by 37,751,339 more posts, which would inevitably increase the visibility of the original content. Further analysis showed that this change resulted in an increase of discovery percent from February (which was at 53%) to March (which was 94%)

by 41% (see Figure 63). Additional analysis also showed a significant increase in page views during the data collection period of fourth MMAR Cycle. With the changes in hashtags resulting in an increase in page views from 73 page views in February,2019 to 841 page views in March 2019 which equated to an increase of page views of 798 a total percentage increase of 1093% (see Figure 64). It should be noted that the page views of 798 were organic page views and represented approximately 100% more than the average page views when content was being paid for on Instagram or Facebook.

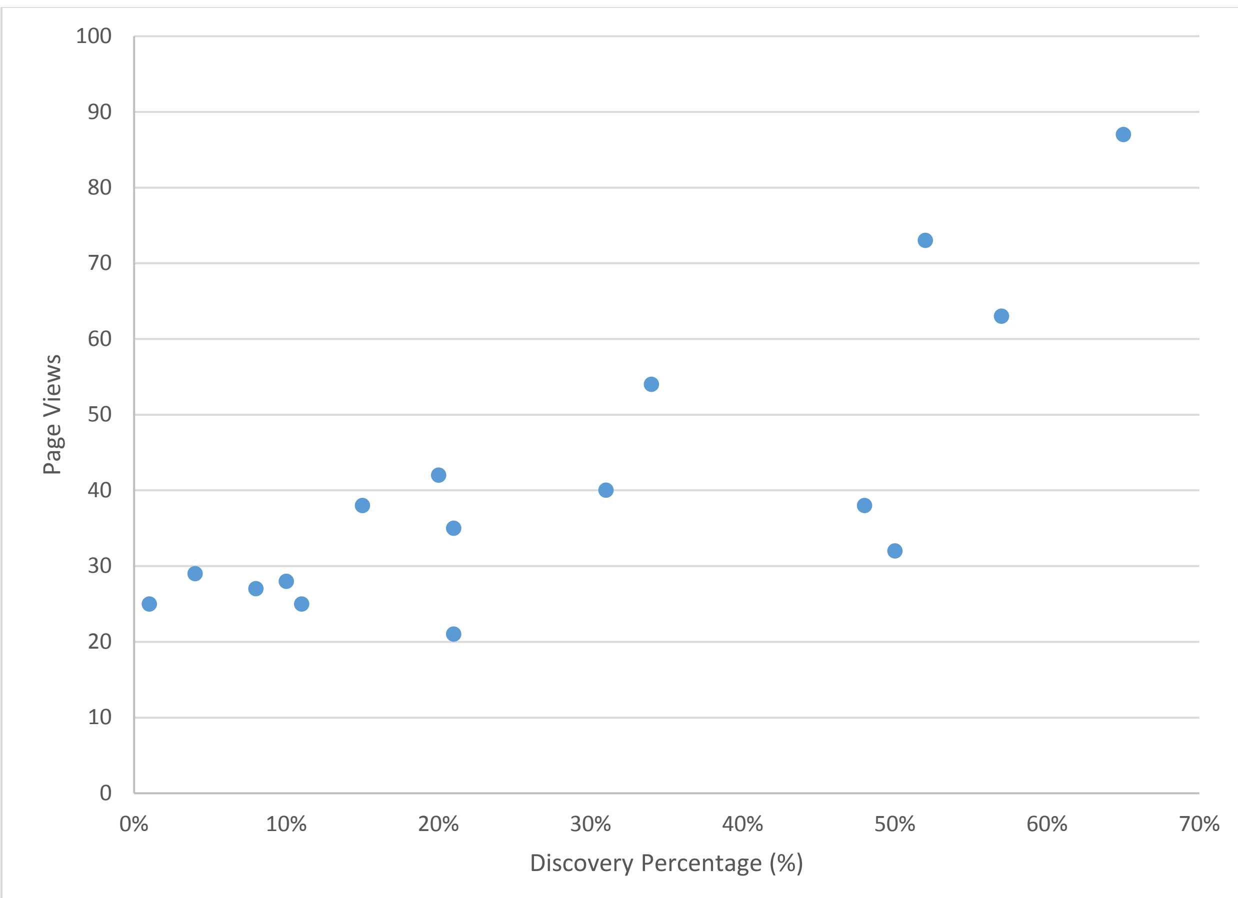

Figure 60: Scatter Chart of Discovery Percentage In Relation To Page Views

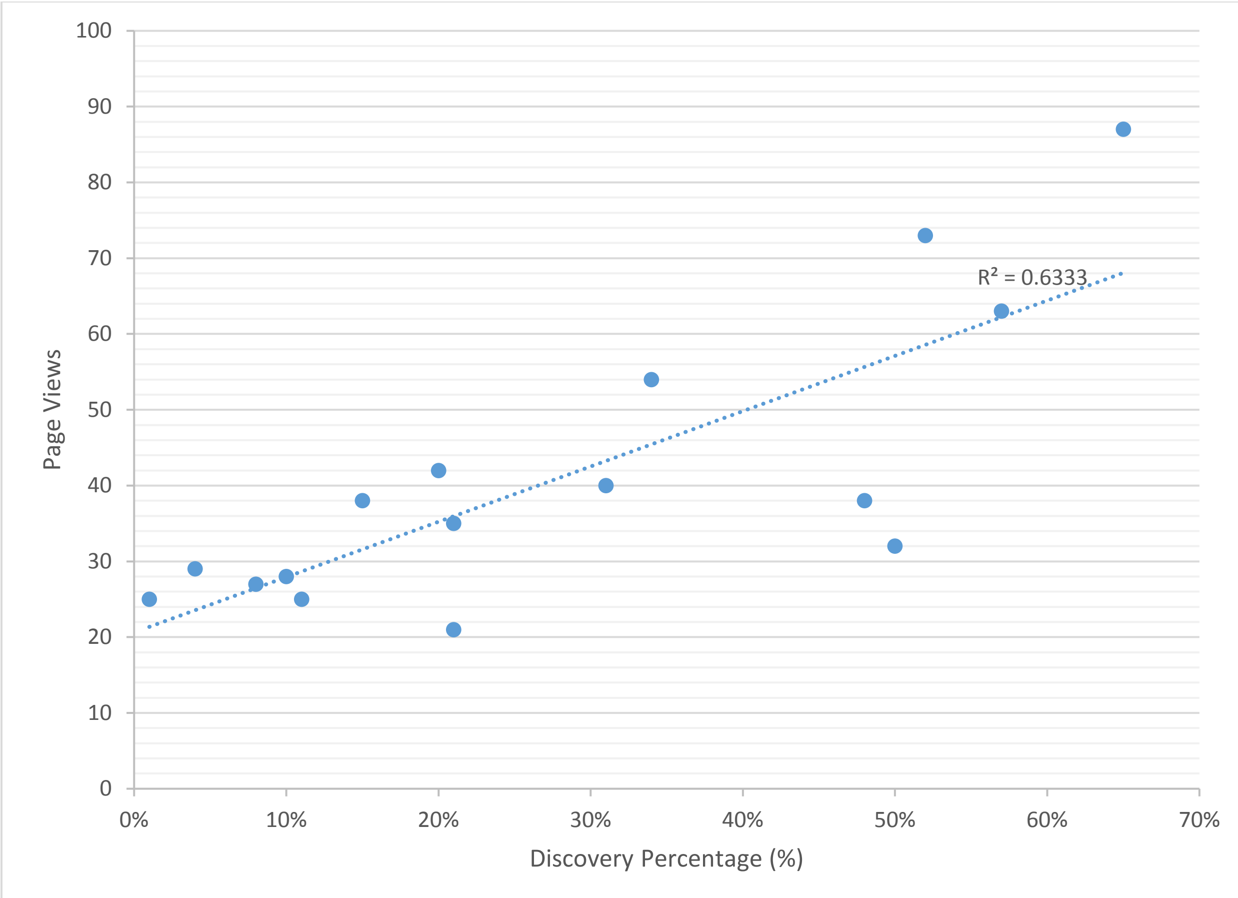

Figure 61: Scatter Chart Showing Correlation of Discovery Percentage and Page Views

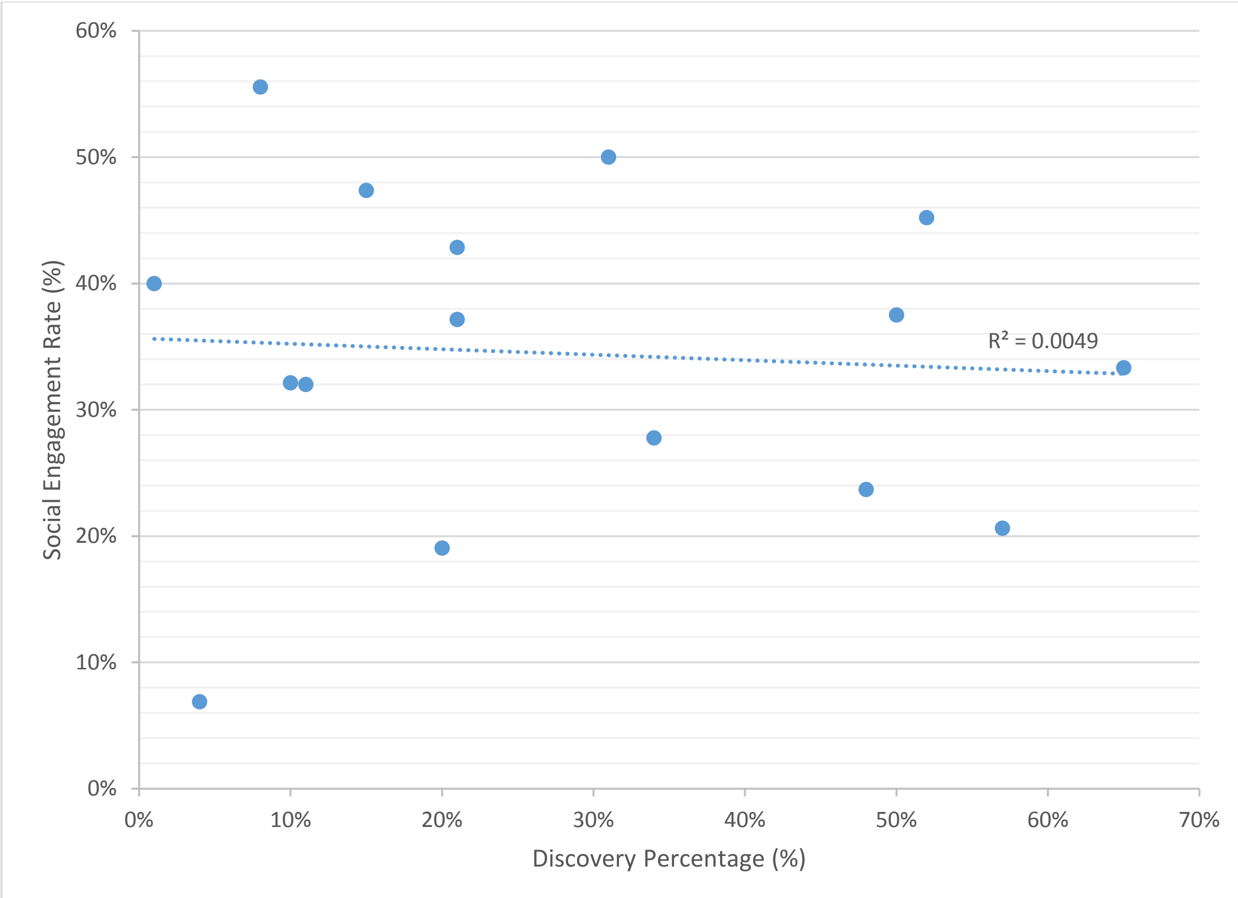

Figure 62: Scatter Chart Showing Correlation of Discovery Percentage and Social Engagement Rate

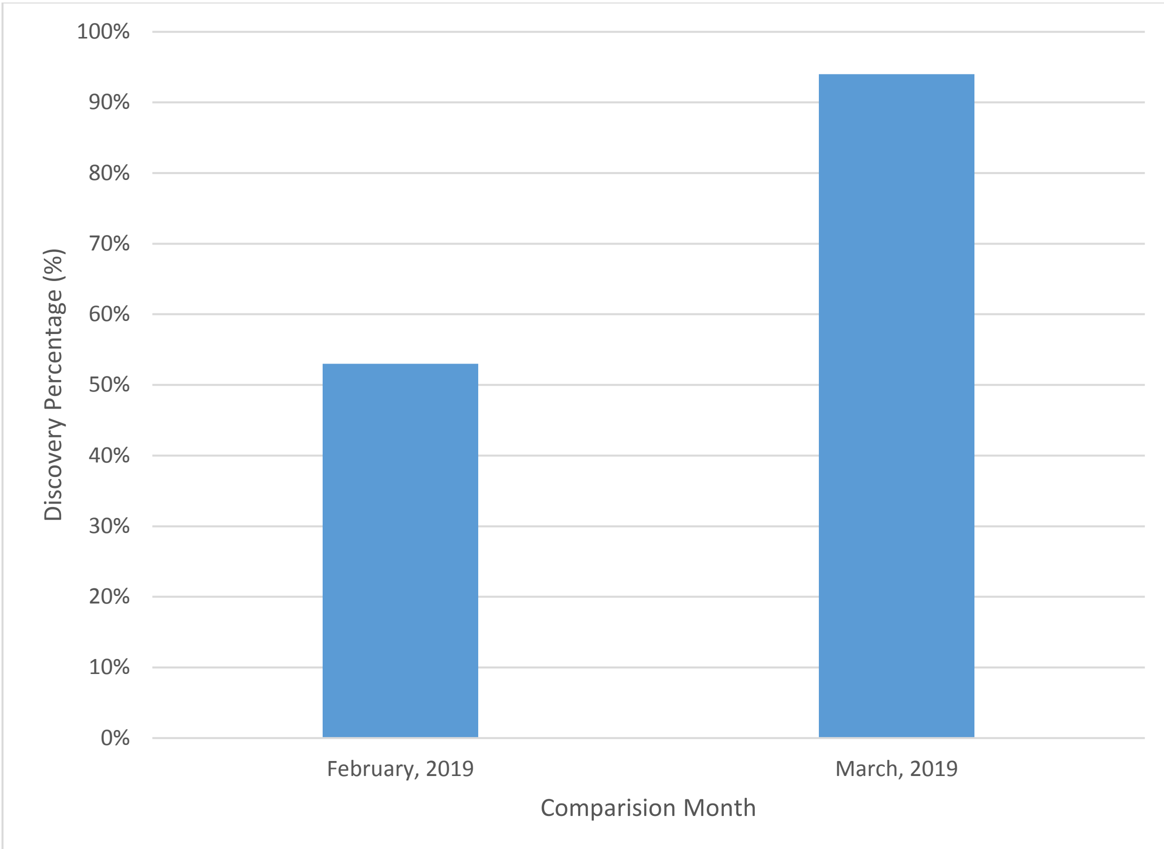

Figure 63: Column Chart Showing Comparison of Discovery for February and March 2019

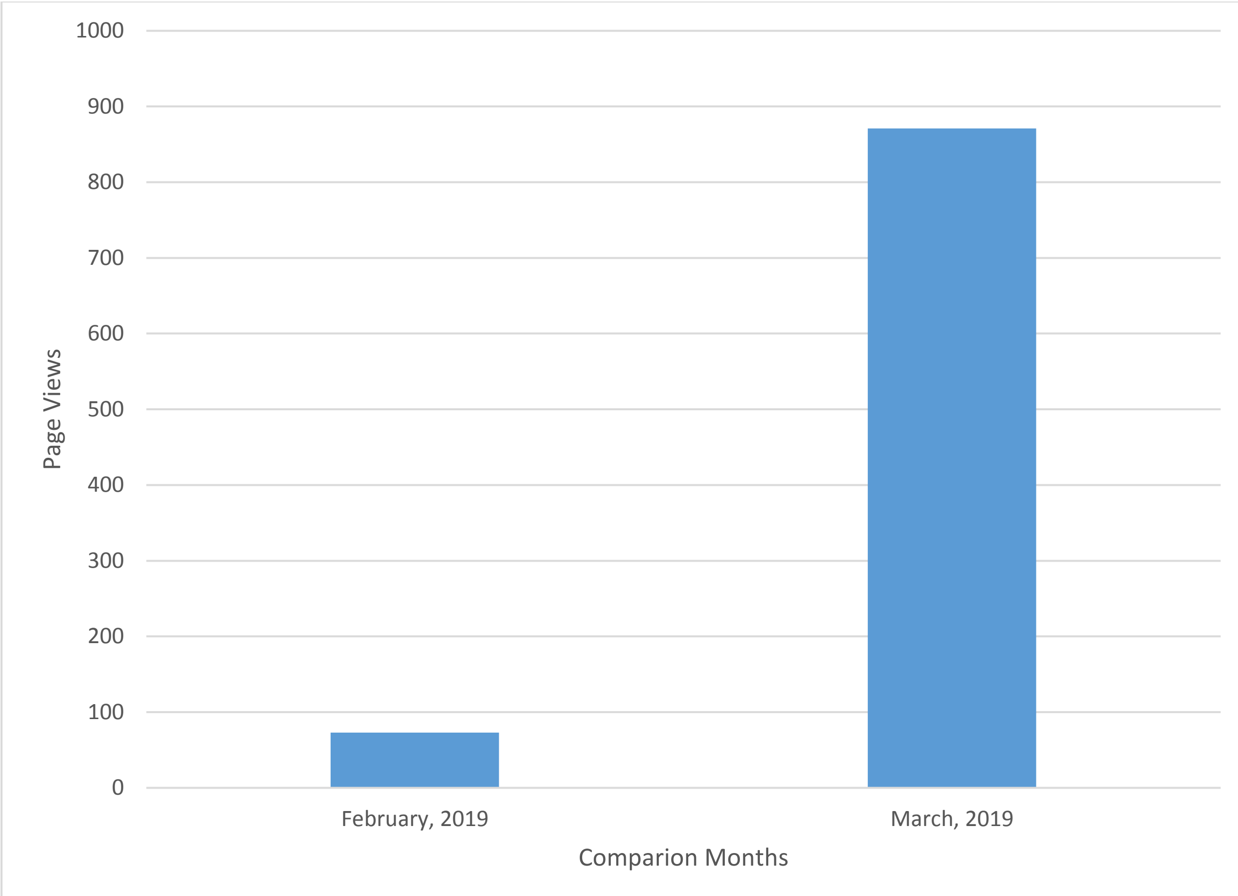

Figure 64: Column Chart Showing Comparison of Page Views For February and March 2019

4.5.2.2 Human Personality and Engagement

Analysis seemed to show that overall, having a human personality as the thumbnail did have a positive impact on the social engagement rate, with the results showing that when there was no human image, the social engagement rate was 11%. However, when the content had a human face the social engagement rate was 23%, an increase of 12% (see Figure 65). Further analysis of whether having a human personality will have an impact on engagement by social platform showed that across all the platforms, content with a human personality had a higher social engagement rate than those without. The content with human personalities on ABC showed a social engagement rate of 16% and content without had a social engagement rate of 10% with a difference of 6% (see Figure 66). On Instagram, the content with human personalities showed a social engagement rate (SER) of 26% and where there was no human personality there was a SER of 25% which was a difference of only 1%. On the other hand, the content with human personalities which was placed on Facebook had a social engagement rate of 42% while content without a human personality had a social engagement rate of 11% which was a difference of 32% (see Figure 66).

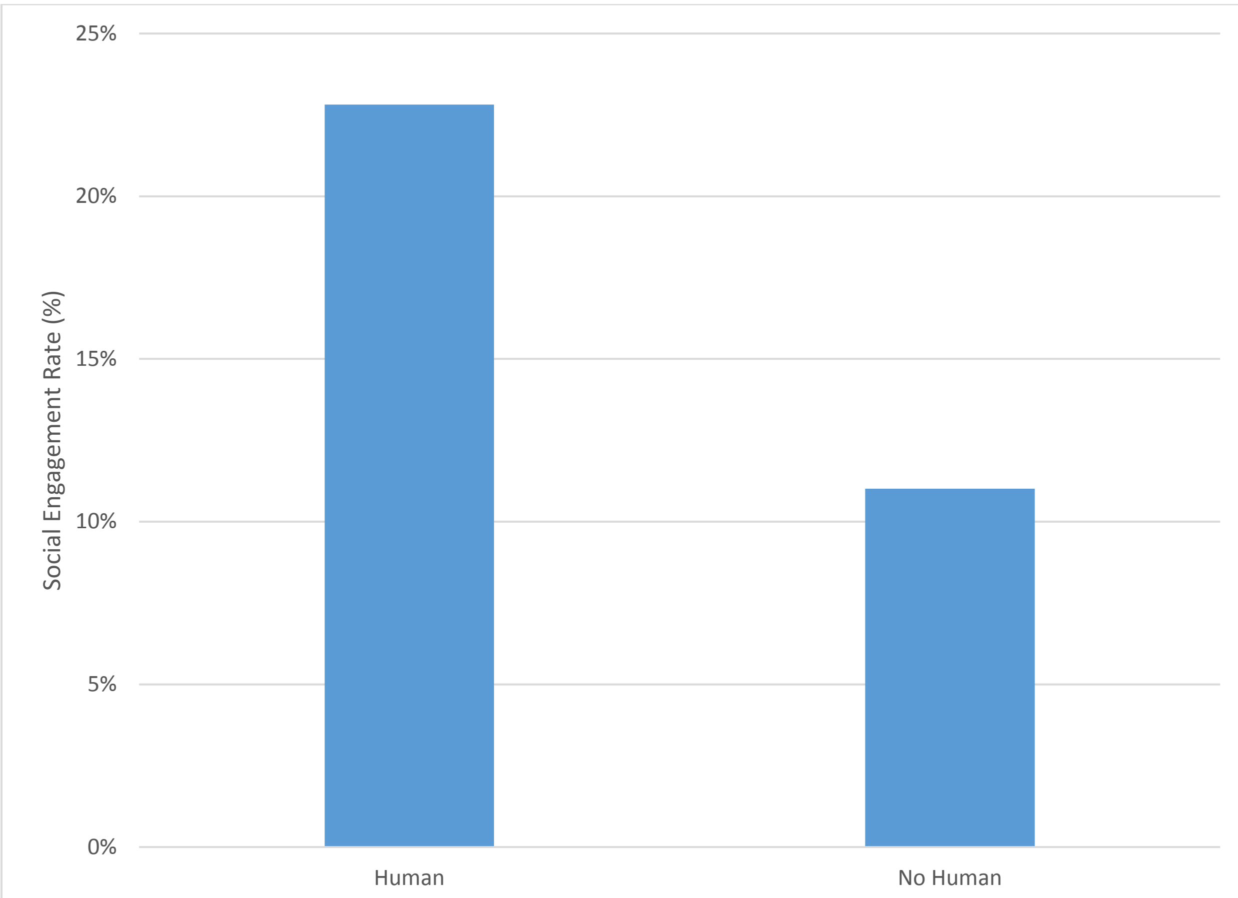

Figure 65: Column Chart of Social Engagement Rate (%) Comparison of Content with Human Personality

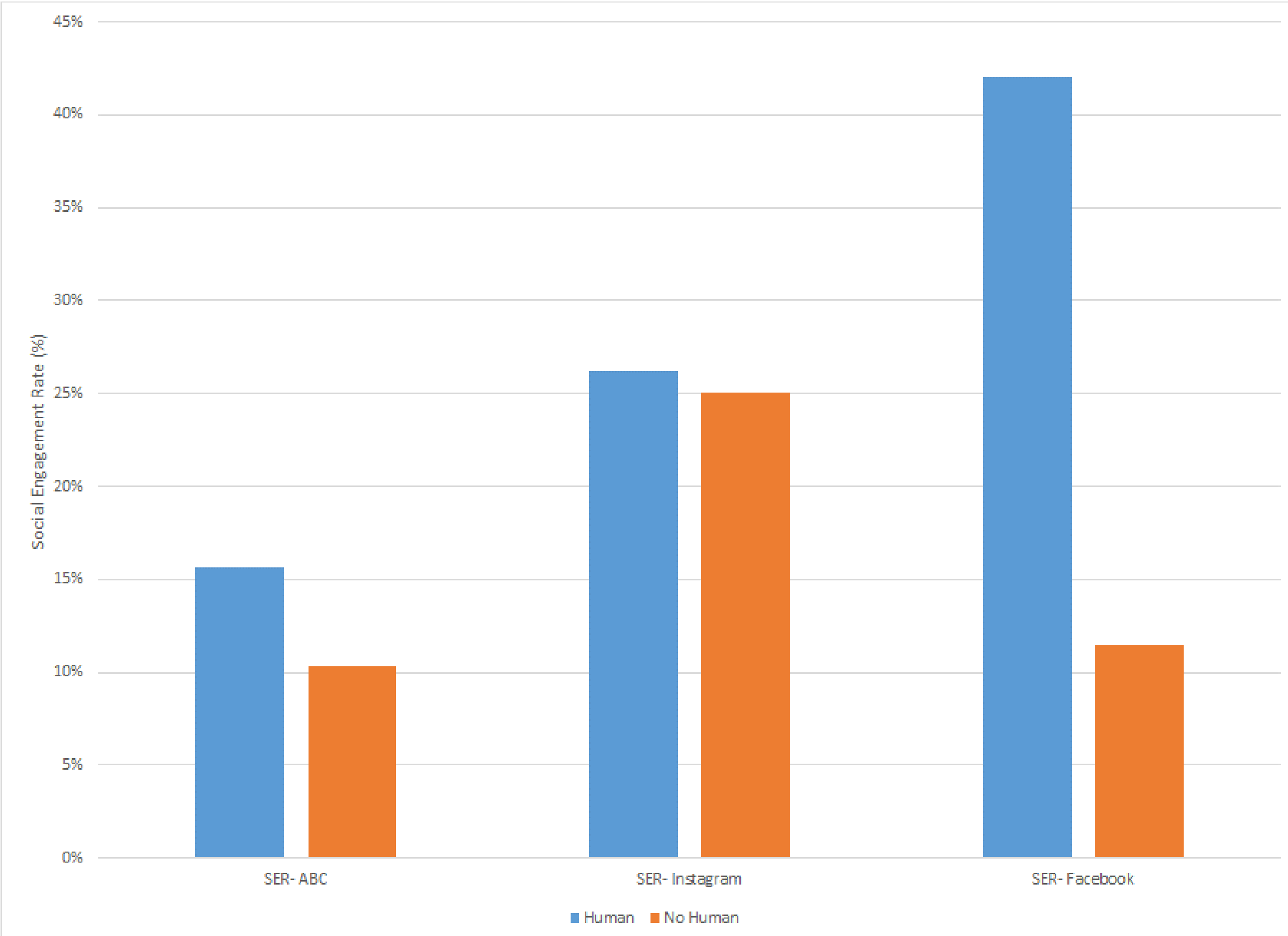

Figure 66: Detailed Column Chart of Social Engagement Rate (%) Comparison of Content with Human Personality

4.5.3. Qualitative Analysis

For this section the analysis will focus specifically on the QualE interview related to the quantitative analysis in section 4.5.2.1 which was focused on the themes "discover percentage" and "human personality" and conducted on April 7, 2019. Because this was the final MMAR cycle the analysis and interview questions were more focused on what the results regarding the discovery percentage and human personality themes meant and what it would mean to the overall strategy. Although this section related primarily to the research questions in section 4.5.2, a subsequent section in the discussion regarding the overall strategy will be provided. Note that the below analysis will be categorised into themes with the qualitative analysis on the theme "discovery percentage" being covered in section 4.5.3.1, and the qualitative analysis on the theme "human personality" being covered in section 4.5.3.2.

4.5.3.1 Discovery Percentage

On review of the quantitative analysis in section 4.5.2.1 the QualE pointed out that correlation between the discovery percentage and the page views did make sense since the more users saw or found the content the more likely it would be to result in higher page views. Given that although research had shown that hashtags did increase engagement, there was no set number or type of hashtags to be used (Hart, 2019). The QualE felt that the results from the discovery percentage signal the importance of ensuring that ABC's strategy included a method to include trending topics on platforms such as Instagram, through the discover percentage, or on search engines, though key word utilization. The QualE pointed out that it would be necessary after posting content to also monitor the discovery percentage and key word utilization to determine if adjustments to the hashtags or key words needed to be performed. Additionally, the QualE indicated that they believed there was a low relationship between the discovery percentage and social engagement rate because realistically, the showing of content would not necessarily mean that a user wanted to like, share, or comment on the content, since these may constitute different engagement motivations than the viewing of content.

4.5.3.2 Human Personality

The QualE indicated that it was interesting that although the quantitative results from all the platforms seemed to show that content with a human personality had a higher engagement level than those without, the Facebook social engagement rank showed the greatest difference between content that had a human personality and content that did not. The QualE felt that the reasons why Facebook had the results that it did in comparison with Instagram may be because Facebook objectives are more social and therefore users would gravitate towards images which have a human personality, since it may imply that the article or post is more "human in nature", while Instagram users' main objectives may be to see and share vivid/ pretty images hence the phase "instragrammable". The QualE indicated that this may mean having to ensure that the strategy included human personality for Facebook posts, and ABC's posts having a human personality for Instagram posts may be important to a lesser extent.

4.6. Chapter Summary and Summary of Principal Research Findings

The joint results generated by the research into each research question, antecedent or theme were interesting in many ways. The managerial benefit of examination of the research questions from a practice-based approached was that it challenged the purely theoretical thinking on the relationship between antecedents and consequences in the context of online customer engagement. The research process also helped to facilitate the creation of a strategy for ABC and the development of a practical framework based on a Mixed Methods Action Research methodology. The results were not envisioned to have generalized purposes; however, they did provide insight into the relationship between online customer engagement antecedents and the corresponding metrics/consequences. This section will first provide a synopsis of the findings in relation to the respective research questions, antecedents or themes as well as the final strategy and the framework to be used by ABC.

4.6.1 Summary to Research Findings Relating To Antecedent and Consequences

This section will focus specifically on the research findings related to the antecedents/ themes and their effects on the online customer engagement metrics specified in section 4.2 to 4.5. The CPT did not feel that the OCE framework initially suggested needed to be changed, but given the results of the research, it was necessary to change the section on the antecedents and customer engagement metrics since the research provided a more accurate relationship. Additionally, "human personality" and "discovery percentage" was added to the initial eleven (11) antecedents however "discovery percentage" replaced "hashtags" as a more practical antecedent of OCE to conclude with a final set of twelve (12) antecedents. See below in Figure 67 changes to the initial customer engagement framework highlighting the antecedent and outcome section and the complexity of the relationships between the antecedents and the outcomes in comparison with the initial conceptual research model in Figure 5.

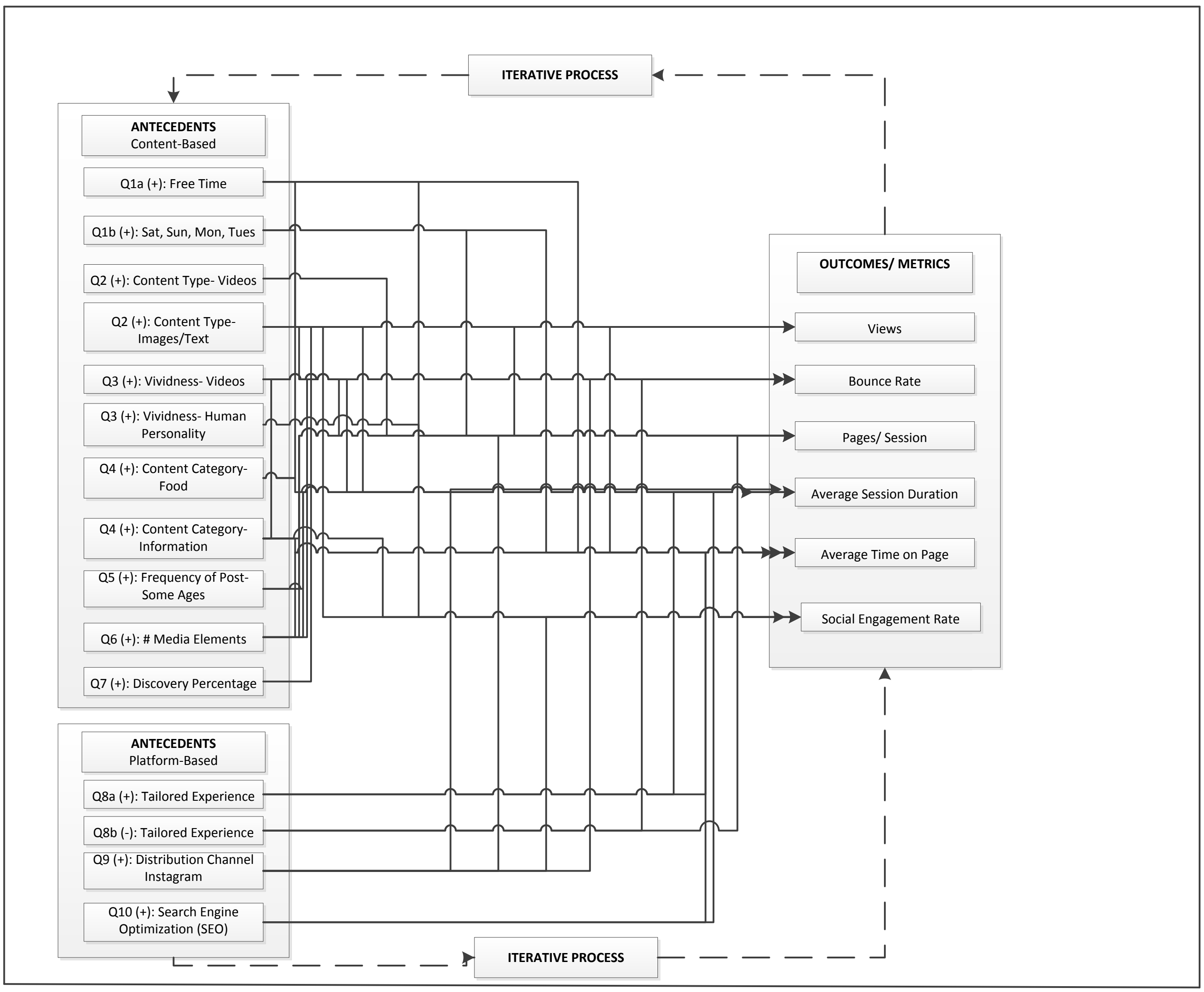

Figure 67: New customer engagement framework highlighting the changes to the antecedent and outcome section

4.6.1.1 Time of the Day and Day of Week

In their article, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) provided a conceptual framework which theorized that weekdays and evenings, through the night time were peak user times, however, this research found that although to some extent weekdays and weekends did show peaks in activities, so did early morning, i.e. when users/customers may first be waking up. Moreover, this research also showed that for ABC users it was not only weekdays that had peak engagement but some days within the week and some days on weekends. Therefore, it was determined that it was more plausible that the driver of customer engagement was when the users had free time, which was shown in the higher peak usage and engagement during Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays. Additionally, when the time of the day and day of the week data was further analysed, the research appeared to show that the time of the day and day of the week had a positive influence on some of the engagement metrics. Specifically, there was a positive influence on page views and to some extent time of day and day of the week appear to influence page per session and average time on page positively.

Resulting Strategy: Posts are to be made before 4 am or before 4 pm to ensure that the morning and evening peaks are taken advantage of the natural user peaks discussed in section 4.2.2.1. Consequentially, posts performed on Sunday are aimed at Sunday and Monday users. Posts on Monday are aimed at Monday and Tuesday users. This strategy is to ensure that posts are frequent and would allow ABC to take advantage of user peaks while managing the cost of content development.

4.6.1.2 Content Type

Elsayed (2017) suggested that content type has an influence on the engagement level of users. Analysis showed that content type did have a positive influence on OCE but only on specific engagement metrics. In this research, “videos” showed a positive influence on the page views and pages per session metrics. Conversely, “image/ text” had a positive influence on bounce rate, average session duration, social engagement rate, and to some extent average time on page.

Additionally, this research also revealed that content with “video” or “image/text” ranked either first or second for 83% or 5/6 of the metrics.

Resulting Strategy: Posts to be developed that are based on video and image/text content.

4.6.1.3 Vividness

In their papers, De Vries et al. (2012), Kujur and Singh (2017), Fortin and Dholakia (2005), and Tafesse (2015) theorized that content vividness relates to richness of the content and its ability to represent reality and activate the five (5) senses. Additionally, the authors posited that vividness has a positive impact on engagement. During this research, it was determined that vividness did seem to impact positively on some of the customer online engagement. Moreover, this research provided more details on the relationship of vividness and engagement in that it showed that, like the other antecedents, vividness had a positive relationship with some engagement metrics. Specifically, that vivid videos had a positive influence on bounce rate, average session duration, and pages per session.

More noteworthy, this research also found that as was indicated by Idler (2013) and Naylor (2018), human personality formed an essential feature in engaging customers. Furthermore, that when content had a human personality, it increased the social engagement rate by 12% and moreover that there was a more significant impact of content with human personality for content placed on Facebook, than content placed on Instagram or ABC.

Resulting Strategy: The core research team determined that the ABC strategy would have to stipulate that content had to be vivid and have human personality as the thumbnail.

4.6.1.4 Content Category

De Vries et al. (2012) and Tafesse (2015) theorized that content category influenced online customer engagement. This research also found that content category influenced OCE. Specifically, in this research it was revealed that content focused on "food" had a higher impact on page views and average session duration, while content focused on information tended to impact positively on pages per session, bounce rate, average time on page and social engagement rate. Moreover, "information" content ranked either first or second for 83% or five of the six (6) OCE metrics. Therefore, the CPT felt that the longer videos should be dedicated to informational content since the return on investment (time and resources) would be justified. On the other hand, content focused on "food" and "events" both ranked either first or second for 50% of the six (6) OCE metrics. Therefore, the CPT felt that shorter in-house video content should be focused on these content categories.

Resulting Strategy: "Informational" content would form the majority of the content, while content focused on "food" and "events" would also be created but would be a minor content focus.

4.6.1.5 Post Frequency

Tafesse (2015) hypothesized that post consistency or frequency had a positive impact on OCE. This research also showed a positive relationship between frequency of post and OCE, but only for some engagement metrics. Specifically, frequency of post seemed to have a positive impact on average pages per session, average session duration users, and time on page. Although there were higher OCE rates between some age groups, since the data did not show a distinctive trend, the CPT felt it was more practical not to eliminate any of the age groups during targeting, with the exception of users who are less than 18 years of age, for ethical reasons. 18 years is the age of majority in Barbados and users can enter into a contract without permission from a parent or guardian (Forde, 1991).

Resulting Strategy: Posts performed several times a week following the strategy outlined in section 4.6.1.1.

4.6.1.6 Media Elements

Rauschnabel et al. (2012) in their research posited that media elements were a viable antecedent for customer engagement. However, their research would have provided a general theory on media element but did not provide specifics on the quantity or type of media elements that would impact customer engagement. In this research, the quantity of media elements was examined, and it was found that to some extent the number of media elements did have a positive impact on ABC's OCE metrics. Specifically, that there was a positive correlation between media elements and average pages per session, average bounce rate, average session duration and average time on page. Further analysis also showed that in most instances the OCE metrics tended to be at their highest when the number of media elements were between 5 and 14 elements. Moreover, the research showed that there were diminishing returns in the customer engagement metrics when the media elements were more than 14.

Resulting Strategy: Posts or content should have between 6 and 11 media elements avoiding the extreme lower (5) and higher (14) media elements.

4.6.1.7 Tailored Experience

Constantinides (2002), Pophal (2015) and Srinivasan et al. (2002) theorized that when the platform is tailored to the user, they are much more likely to engage than when the platform is not tailored to their needs or general usage patterns. Within this research, it was confirmed that to some extent when the platform is tailored to the user it does have a positive impact on their engagement levels. For example, when the ABC platform was modified (see Figure 68 and Figure 69) to include emotion icons, (1) and the hashtag (#) categories (2) to the top of the menu to provide users with access to content they had previously showed some interest in, the analysis showed that there was an improvement in the average time on page and the average session duration. However, this research also seemed to show that the tailoring of the user's experience may also have an impact, be it negatively, on the pages per session and bounce rate since the changes showed a decline in these customer engagement metrics.

Resulting Strategy: Website designed to allow users to easily find content that they are interested via “you may also like”, menu level branded categories (e.g. Foodie Fridays, Social ,etc.) or “reaction” categories (see Figure 68 and Figure 69). Additionally, the website allowed the automatic loading of the “you may also like” section to keep users engaged.

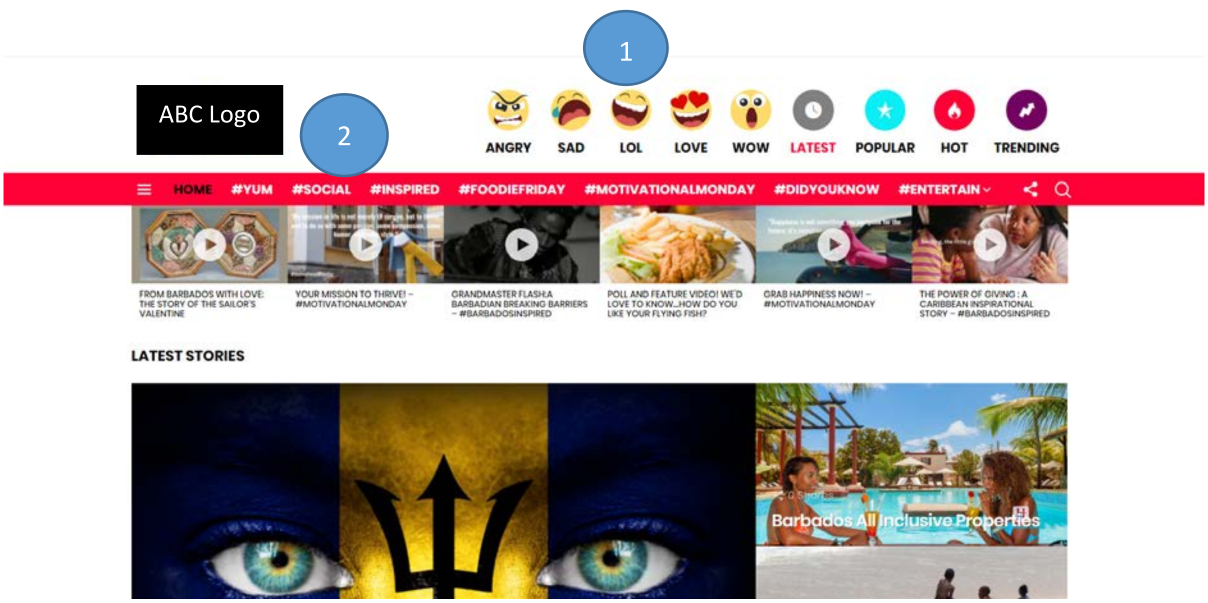

Figure 68: Screenshot of ABC Website Showing User Experience Changes

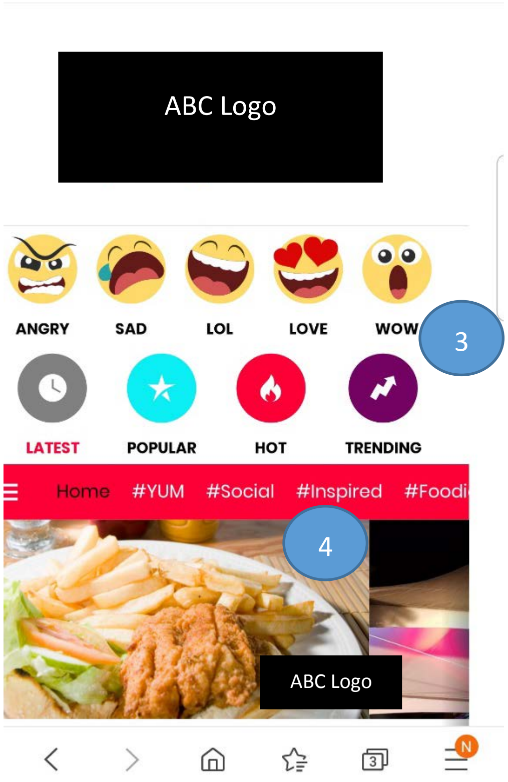

Figure 69: Screenshot of ABC Showing User Experience Changes On Mobile Phone

4.6.1.8 Distribution Channel

There have been several authors who used Facebook as the basis for research on content marketing or online customer engagement, for example, Bonsón and Ratkai (2013), Conroy et al. (2012), Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013). However, in this research Facebook, along with Instagram, were seen as distribution channels for ABC and not the focal point of the research. The research question regarding the distribution channel focused on whether the distribution channel influenced the engagement level, specifically the metric social engagement rate. In this research, both Facebook and Instagram, as well as ABC were reviewed, and found that paid content on Instagram, tended to do just as well as the content on Facebook, and when the content was unpaid, it did significantly better on Instagram than on Facebook.

Resulting Strategy: Utilize Instagram as the leading distribution channel when an external distribution channel is being used.

4.6.1.9 Search Engine Optimization

Although Van Doorn et al. (2010) referenced the influence which external factors have on customer engagement, the authors did not include search engine optimization (SEO) as part of their list of engagement antecedents. Although practically speaking, for customer engagement, the harnessing of SEO is an essential factor for content marketing companies (Evans, 2007). This research however found that when search engine optimization methods were used there was an improvement for all engagement metrics including average time on page, bounce rate and pages per session, but significantly more for average session duration.

Resulting Strategy: The content to be focused on topics that are trending or popular topics and the content or posts on ABC must be optimized.

4.6.1.10 Discovery Percentage

Discovery Percentage was not one of the antecedents or strategy elements included within any of the research papers. However, it presented itself as a possible antecedent during the qualitative interview with the Qualitative Evaluator. The "discovery percentage" proved to have a significant impact on positively influencing one of the harder to improve customer engagement metrics, that is, page views. During the final MMAR cycle it was found that the discovery percentage on Instagram which related to the quality of the hashtag had a high correlation (0.63333) with page views. Moreover, when hashtags were increased it greatly influenced the discovery percentage and the page views by 1093%, and organically improved the page views to an extent that was not possible through paid advertising.

Resulting Strategy: Determine the hashtags that are trending and create content surrounding the respective hashtags. Indicate the required hashtags and monitor the discovery percentage to ensure that the value is more than 90%.

4.6.2 Summary of Final ABC Online Customer Engagement Strategy

One of the prevailing points which CPT felt was the biggest constraint to ABC engaging with customers was the size of the company and the resources available (both human, time and finance). The team felt that a lot had been gained from the research but that a sustainable strategy is needed to ensure more frequent posts, and therefore rank higher in search engines such as Google, which may mean devising more innovative ways to leverage the size and resources of the company. The CPT posited moving ABC from being strictly a publisher of content to a platform where users could post their own content, and a SWOT analysis was developed to get an idea of some the **S**trength, **W**eakness, **O**pportunities and **T**reats facing the organization (see Figure 70). In this section the final ABC strategy discussed and proposed by the CPT will be provided.

Content and Platform Strategies

1. **Posting Days, Frequency and Content Type:** The CPT team felt that given ABC's cost and resource constraints, the new strategy needed to change to allow users to post their own content. The ABC team would still generate content, however by allowing users to post their own content the CPT team felt that this would allow the ABC team to mitigate some of the company's weaknesses and be able to create higher quality, longer, more innovative content since the pressure to post as frequently would be removed. In instances where ABC created content however, the CPT felt it was still necessary that the strategy included the following in relation to the antecedents examined:
    a. **Posting Time:** When it is determined that users would be free, including before 4 am or before 4 pm to take advantage of morning, evening and peaks during holidays.

b. **Media Elements and Content Category:** The utilization of mainly video content but also images/ text content.
   i. **Image/ text**: The number of media elements should be between 6 to 11.
   ii. **Videos:** The length of videos should be approximately 5 – 6 minutes.

c. **Vividness:**
   i. The video or content depicts the real world.
   ii. The featured image for the content had an image of a human personality.

d. **Distribution Channel:**
   i. Utilize Instagram as the leading distribution channel.

e. **Discovery Percentage and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**
   i. Determine the hashtags and topics that are trending and create content surrounding the respective hashtags and trending topics.
   ii. Indicate the required hashtags and keywords and monitor the key words and discovery percentage to ensure that the value was more than 90%.

f. **Tailored Experience:**
   a. ABC platform is changed to facilitate the loading of additional posts automatically.
   b. Tailor ABC to allow users to easily find content that they are interested in, which involves placing categories related to the brands being used (e.g. Foodie Fridays, Social ,etc.) at the menu sections as well as placing the reaction icons on the header/menu level (see Figure 68 and Figure 69). `

Strength	**Weakness**
1. Small and more agile and can adapt content and platform more quickly to the needs of the market without having to go through as much red tape as a larger company. 2. Intimate understanding of the needs of the Barbados and Caribbean can cater content that that market would want to engage with. 3. The development of a strategy based on customer engagement understanding of the customer engagement strategy after the research.	1. Limited financial and human resource therefore unable to develop quality content as frequently as required. 2. Limited financial resources therefore paying for advertisements online is not a sustainable strategy. 3. Not known in the market therefore the name would need to be established and build users. 4. Maybe more caught up in simply surviving.
Opportunity	**Threats**
1. There is no platform that caters specifically to the Caribbean ensuring that it is inclusive of its cultural needs and nuances. 2. Larger social networking platforms do not allow most individuals or companies from the Caribbean to benefit financially from their post. 3. The Caribbean consist of a population of approximately 44 million. 4. The Caribbean is not seen as financial beneficial for most social networking companies since it represent only approximately 0.6% of the world's population.** 5. Current social media algorithms do not allow companies or individuals to reach their target audiences without advertising. 6. Approximately 50% of the Caribbean utilizes the internet which is on par with the world uses of 56%. ** 7. Approximately 28 million (64%) of the Caribbean population do not use Facebook.** 8. The online arena favours engagement more so that company size. 9. Facebook has been pledged scrutiny on the utilization of user data.	1. Individuals and companies may want to continuing using larger more established social media platforms. 2. Approximately 16 million (36%) of the Caribbean population uses Facebook. 3. Limited timeframe for success.

Figure 70: SWOT Analysis for ABC

**** Source: Internetworldstats.com (2019)**

4.7. Research Limitations

Action Research (AR) as an overall methodology within the context of a social science research project is not intended to provide generalized results. The results from any AR project is the creation of new knowledge generated through an iterative collaborative approach within the context of the practice therefore generalization would be difficult across all business contexts (Somekh, 2005). Because this research follows the AR methodology it therefore would be logical that it is also subject to the limitations associated with the AR approach. The main objective of the AR based research is to create actionable, contextual knowledge for a complex problem within the parameters and nuances of the practice. Since the AR approach is not to generate generalized knowledge, the knowledge processed from an AR project may not be applicable within other similar organizations or contexts (Kemmis et al, 2014). This research proposed to overcome this limitation by utilizing a mixed method approach and integrating quantitative research methods within the qualitative research. However, by utilizing secondary data the research was limited to the summary data gathered from ABC, Facebook or Instagram. Therefore, some of the descriptive and inferential statistics could not be generated because the data or the data in a specific format was not available from secondary sources.

The limitations of this research were also as a result of the interview sample used and the method by which the interview data was collected. There were two processes which were put in place to reduce biasness from the sample size. One was separating the person who collected the quantitative data (Quantitative Evaluator) from the person who provided the qualitative data (Qualitative Evaluator) and giving the QualE the opportunity to review and sign off on the summary of the interview (See Appendix D for a summary of the qualitative analysis sessions) The other process which was used to reduce biasness was ensuring that the during open-ended interviews the Qualitative Evaluator was not provided with the Quantitative Evaluator's interpretation of the data. However, given the size of the company and the relationship between the company and the freelancers, it was only possible to use one person for the qualitative interviews and one person for the quantitative analysis. This meant that only two perspectives were taken into consideration. Therefore, the analysis logic from the quantitative analysis, to the qualitative analysis, to the subsequent action taken, would have to be assessed individually for how logical and unbiased they seemed within the context of the AR project.

Additionally, this research was limited because of the narrow focus of data to ABC and the insights which were generated through collaboration with the company employees. This narrow focus may affect the analysis and insight which was generated from the open-ended interviews. It could therefore be beneficial for future research to replicate the study but utilize a company which will have a greater user base, and which is more established in order to determine if the antecedent and consequences relationships remain the same or are similar.

Another limitation of this research was related to the time available for the data collection and data analysis process. During the development of the ABC platform strategy two incidences occurred which limited the timeframe for research and development of the platform and strategy. The first incident was the issue with finding suitable developers. The development of the website was scheduled to start on April 12, 2017 and completed on September 30,2017 (See Appendix E summary of the thesis timelines). However, it took from April 18, 2017 to October 2018 to complete the first stage of development where the back end and front-end designs for ABC were completed. This inevitably meant that the project was delayed for a year. Consequently, there was a need to pause the development of the application and find a quicker and more feasible method of developing the application on my own. Although there was no desire to utilize a template, eventually a WordPress template had to be used, which was similar in concept to ABC, to allow the launch of ABC.com by August 2018. See below Figure 71 and Figure 72 which show the difference in the original application concept and the WordPress template respectively. The delay in the development meant a delay in the launch of the website and subsequent delay in the data collection, data analysis and development of the initial model. The data collection, data analysis and model development steps were scheduled to start on September 30, 2017 and end on January 31, 2019, however the data collection could not be started until the week of August 5th, 2018 when the platform was launched.

Additionally, in September/October 2018 ABC.com was hacked. I discovered that the hackers were able to exploit a vulnerability within the WordPress template and redirect the website to another website. It meant that from October 2018 to November 2018 valuable resources earmarked for data collection and analysis had to be redirected and focused on increasing the security of the platform, rebuilding the website and developing a security and back-up strategy. Consequently, research and data analysis did not resume until December 2018 and ended in March 2019. No data was lost, but the loss in time inevitably reduced the analysis time from 15 months to 5 months, which in turn limited the antecedents that could be reviewed and the dissecting that could be performed. For example, it was not possible to fully explore how age, and other demographics, impacted on the antecedents and customer engagement metrics other than “frequency of post”. The broadening of the data analysis to include a drill down of the demographic information is an aspect which could be considered in future work within the area of customer engagement and content marketing to determine how different demographics react to the same antecedents (Islam and Rahman, 2017).

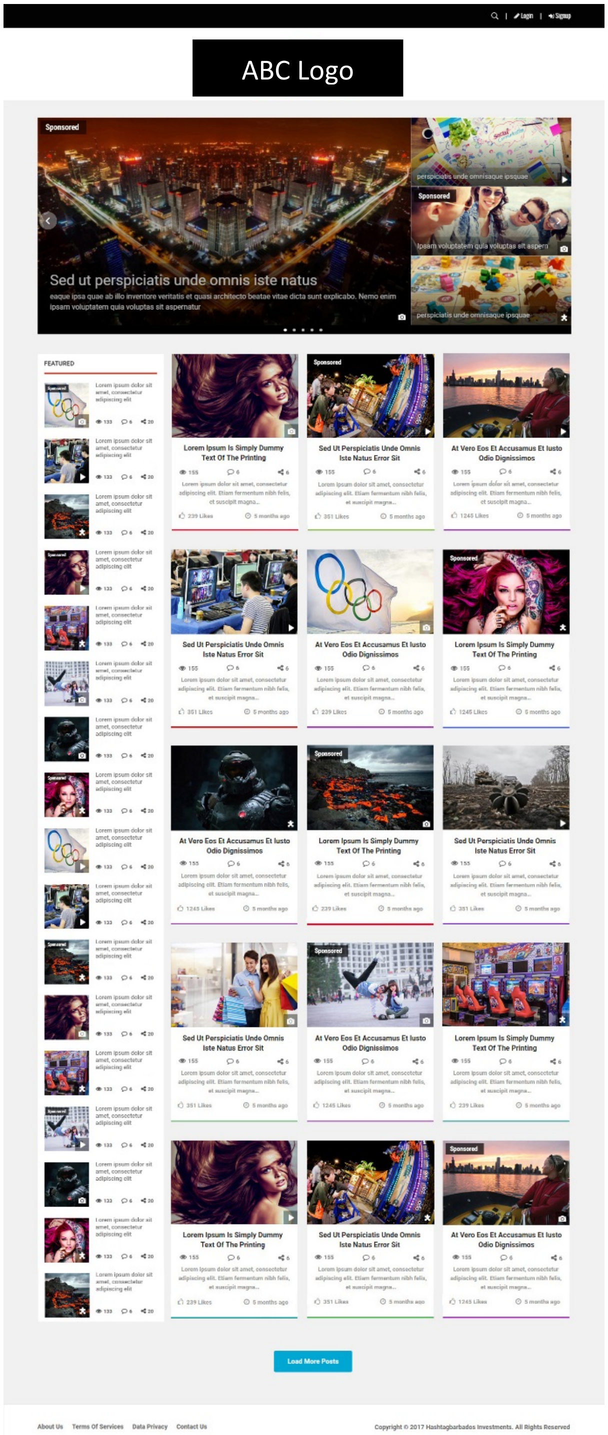

Figure 71: Front Page Showing The Original Concept of ABC

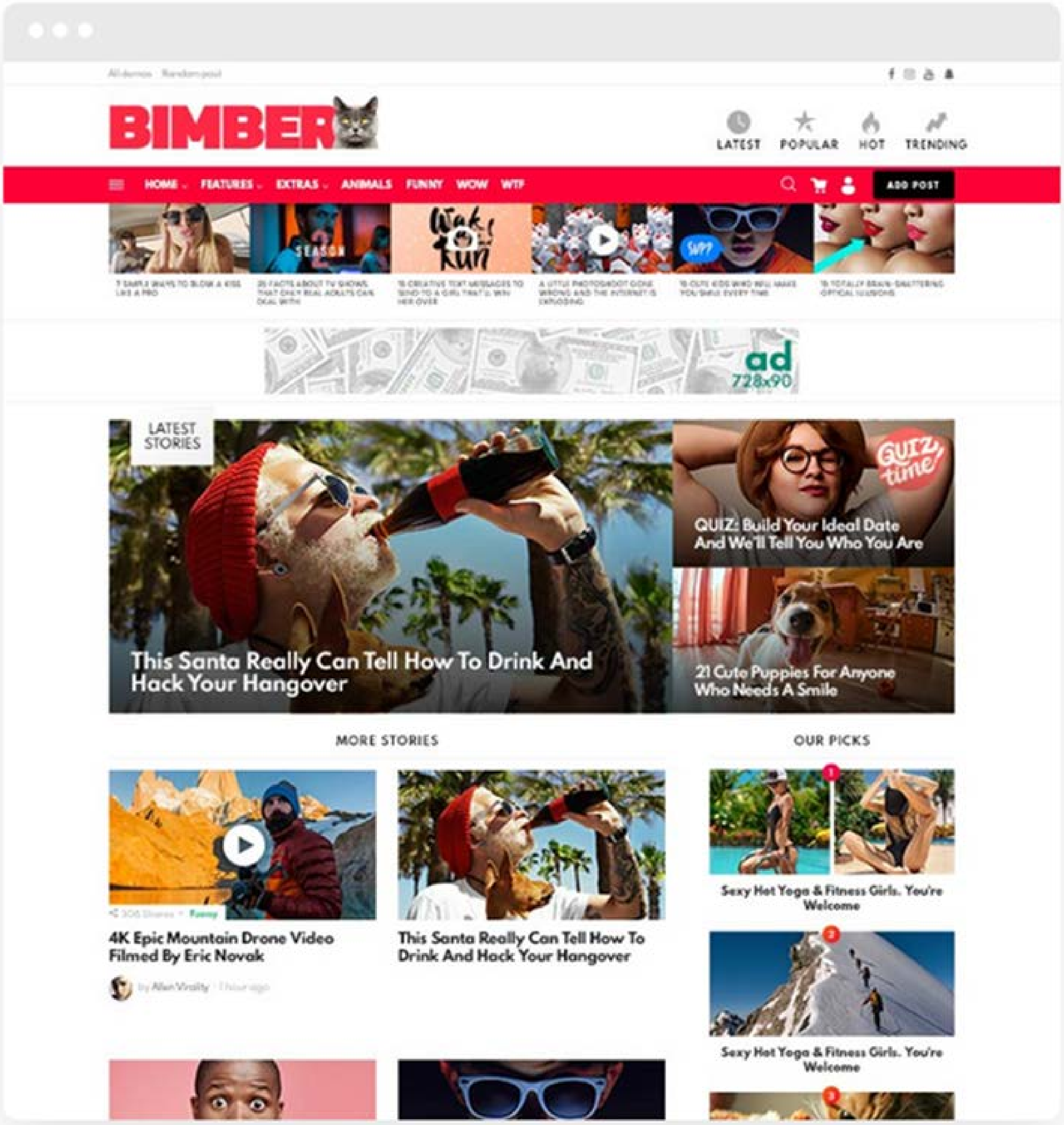

Figure 72: Screenshot of the front page of the Wordpress template used in its original form

4.8. Further Work

This thesis and discussion on online customer engagement especially in the context of content marketing, is an important research topic both to marketing practitioners and academics who want to understand the drivers of online engagement and develop a practical strategy. As highlighted in this research, antecedents such as time of day, vividness and day of the week are important, but for the practitioner knowing those antecedents would not be enough to engage customers online or become a leading content marketing company. Although this research met the objectives of the project, in that it provided a strategy and a framework to be used to develop subsequent online engagement strategies, it also raised new questions and opened areas for further research.

Firstly, given that the research was performed on a new content marketing company, the research data used did not consist of millions of datasets, which was pointed out as one of the limitations of the study. Therefore, further research is needed on a more extensive and more diverse dataset to determine if the results seen in this research dataset would transcend to a broader audience. This would allow for a possible generalization of the findings and comparisons with other research.

Secondly, although glimmers of an indication that differences in age had an impact on the consequences of online customer engagement (notably within the analysis of the “frequency” antecedents), because summary secondary data was used, it was not possible to explore the full extent to which demographics had on the online engagement metrics, or on how a content marketing company can use such knowledge to create a strategy to increase their online customer engagement (OCE). Much of the literature on online engagement and content marketing treat antecedents and customer choices as the focal reasons why customers engage, but this view also needs to include user differentiators. For example, research which explores the impact that age, gender, and country can have on the different customer engagement metrics can assist companies in pursuing and nurturing niche segments. For this to be feasibly possible it would mean ensuring that users can logon to the ABC platform and create profiles that capture demographic data, as well as gathering and collecting more data from the ABC platform.

Thirdly, this was an Action Research (AR) based approach where the researcher was part of the practice. As such, the limitation of biasness from the scholar/practitioner's is one which has to be guarded against and can easily permeate into the research and reduce its ability to be used for generalized purposes. It would therefore be valuable- for generalization purposes- for the field of online customer engagement and content marketing if the qualitative and quantitative analysis was performed on another company dataset where the researcher and the practitioner are not both the same and where there was more than one qualitative evaluator.

Finally, this research would have delved into the impact that different social media and networking platforms have on online customer engagement. However, given the time limits of the research, it was not possible to explore the connection between the antecedents, differences in social media platforms and the consequences/metrics. Therefore, it would be valuable to explore the impact which different social media platforms and their respective algorithms have on online customer engagement especially for small and medium size business which limited marketing budgets. For example, the results from this research implied that some social media platforms are more suitable with some content types and not others, therefore further research could explore the extent to which this is in fact the case with a broader dataset.

5.0. Conclusions: Action Research, Reflections and Contributions

The fundamental principle of AR is that it marries three elements together action, research and participants (Greenwood and Levin, 2006 and Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Moreover, one of the main aims of AR is to generate new knowledge while creating sustainable organizational change (Greenwood and Levin, 2006 and Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). It is important therefore to discuss and demonstrate how new knowledge was formulated and leveraged as part of this research. Reflection is a principal element of the process of generating new knowledge especially for the scholar/practitioner and the key stakeholders within the research process (Greenwood and Levin, 2006 and Pedler, 2011). In accordance with this, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a summation of the personal development and research and organizational benefits derived from the utilization of an AR methodology for this thesis project. This chapter will therefore incorporate personal reflection on the impact which the AR process had on me and on the Qualitative Evaluator/Content Director as we went through the AR process, as well as to the organization and how the development on one aspect on my life (e.g. personal development) impacted on the development in other areas (e.g. professional development).

5.1. Personal Reflection and Personal Development

At the time of the writing of this research document it has been more than three years since I would have started my Action Research final project journey. During these three years this Action Research (AR) project has contributed to my personal development in ways that I could not have conceived prior to its completion. In this section I will reflect on the impact this project has had on my personal development.

As the Principal Director of ABC, I was responsible for the interviewing, hiring, payment and management of all freelancers and employees. Although I had previous experience developing websites, managing developers and budgeting, this was the first time I would have had to manage a project where the risk of any decision was solely on my shoulders. Unlike with my fulltime job, there was no Chief Executive Officer or Board of Directors from whom to request additional funds, and there was no one to step in if a bad decision was made. There were several situations, during the AR process of collaboration- which on reflection- I believed made me a better leader and a better project manager.

Firstly, as part of the AR process it is necessary to collaborate with others, and as such it is often necessary to have difficult conversations (Polito, 2013). I believe that although difficult conversations can be the most dreaded tasks for any leader (Reynolds, 2014), the discomfort of those conversations helped me in developing as a leader. For example, as mentioned previously, a global freelancing platform was used to higher freelancers. Freelancers worked either on a fixed cost or per hour basis. With fixed cost projects the freelancers and ABC would agree on set cost for the project and the final deliverables (product not necessarily date). For fixed projects funds were only paid to the freelancer when the client approved the project. All ABC projects were set up as fixed cost projects, however some of the freelancers- especially the software developers- often tried to renege on the project agreement by asking for full payment before completion of the development work. To progress the project, I therefore had to either comply to the change in payment terms and risk an exploding budget, or not comply with the changes in the payment terms and risk angering the freelancer and slowing or stopping the development work. In April 2018 when the development project was stopped for the third time I felt as though I needed to utilize two of the main elements in AR, reflection and collaboration and spent approximately a month reflecting and discussing the issue with the organization's software expert. During this period of reflection, I thought about the part I may have played in breakdown of the relationship between myself and the freelancer. I realized that in most instances there were red flags from the interviewing stage but because I wanted to progress with the development, I ignored these red flags. I therefore included a more rigorous interview process. Additionally, the freelancers I would have chosen in the past worked on their own and therefore did not have the capacity to handle more than one job. On reflection I felt that this was one of the reasons why they wanted to be paid so quickly since they did not have the revenue stream of a full-time job. I therefore sought to only hire agencies/ organizations for longer projects since they could have multiple revenue streams and were not as focused or dependent on one project providing all their revenue. By the time I had changed the freelancer hiring process, the project had already been delayed by a year, but I believed the new process worked and in August 2018 I finally found and hired an agency for ABC who continued to work with the company after the initial contract ended.

Secondly, at the time when this research was being conducted, I had the demands of a full-time job as well as the demands of starting a new business while simultaneously conducting research. Although I had thought about the rigours of the research and the impact it would have on other aspects of my life, I believe that before the commencement of the research I was a little naive about how difficult juggling a fulltime job and this research would be. However, when the issue with the hacking of the website occurred and I had to dedicate more time to that, other members of the team stepped up and took on more responsibilities especially as it related to the change in the content. When the hack occurred my first instinct was to delay content development and there was some friction between me and the Content Director on what needed to be done and the direction of the content. On reflection however, although it was difficult for me to take a back seat and let others make decisions concerning what I considered to be “my baby”. I realized that time would not permit further delay and that I needed to reduce my involvement in the content decision making. There was still a lot of conflict between me and the other team member after the issue with the hacking was resolved but on further reflection on this conflict, I believed it made me a better leader and project manager in that I had to learn how to lead from behind. Also, in taking less of a leadership role within the core planning team (CPT), I saw the changes in the other team member who started to become more assertive and exhibit more leadership growth as well.

When I was going through the research process, I do not believe that the rigour of the project allowed me to reflect on the link between my personal development and the changes I saw in my professional development. In the next section I will provide a summary of how this research has impacted on my professional development.

5.2. Research Contribution To Professional Development and Opportunities

When I began this research journey my expectation was that I would perform research and gain new knowledge in the area of content marketing and online customer engagement to assist with my professional growth within that area. What I did not appreciate is the extent to which going through the AR process would impact on my professional growth within other areas outside of content marketing and the subsequent professional opportunities that would arise from the new knowledge I would have acquired as a result of my research.

The ABC project mainly involved the development of content and a platform. However, because ABC was a content marketing platform which would eventually house personal user data it meant that I had to be cognizant of the current and changing laws regarding data collection. ABC was based in Barbados but when the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPRS) came into force on May 25th, 2018 it impacted on all platforms globally which gathered data on European Union Citizens no matter where the platforms where based. The enactment of the GDPRS meant that I had to quickly become au fait with the new regulation and ensure that ABC.com complied with these regulations. At the time, Barbados had a Data Protection Bill 2018 that was not enforced as yet, but I wanted to ensure that it was considered in the "Terms of Service" and "Privacy Policies" for ABC. A legal freelancer was hired to create the Privacy Policy and Terms of Service for ABC. To ensure that the legal documents were complaint with GDPRS and the existing Barbados Data Protection Bill 2018, I also had to research, perform an extensive review of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Bill 2018 and become au fait in the area of data protection law. Although it is not my area of expertise, when the Government of Barbados made a request for oral and written submissions on a revised version of the Data Protection Bill, I felt confident enough provide an oral submission. On June 26, 2019 I provided an oral submission to the "Joint Select Committee on the Data Protection Bill, 2019" in the Parliament of Barbados detailing the amendments to the Bill that I thought were required and the impact to which the Bill would have on content marketing businesses such as ABC. The submission was lived streamed and viewed by approximately 3, 000 persons. My comments during the "Joint Select Committee on the Data Protection Bill, 2019" were also featured in one of the leading Barbadian newspapers, The Nation Newspaper (Hope, 2019). Both the oral submission and being featured within The Nation Newspaper had other far reaching impact on my professional development in the area of content marketing and customer online engagement leading to me being offered a position as an Adjunct Lecturer in Search Engine Marketing at one of the leading universities within the region, as well as being asked to write a regular editorial column for one of the country's leading newspapers.

Apart from the direct impact which the acquisition of new knowledge in the area of content marketing, customer engagement and data protection laws has had on my professional development within the area of content marketing the new knowledge acquisition has also sparked development in other areas. Since the formal completion of the research I started utilizing what I learnt on online customer engagement within this research project to develop my professional branding. I started posting more original content, videos and stories showing my thoughts, perspectives and new methodologies on change management, operational management techniques and content marketing which has led to me being approached by various individuals to either collaborate on projects, consult for their companies or permanently join their organizations.

5.3. Reflection On The Contribution To Business

As mentioned in section one, this research was performed to provide a strategy for ABC as well as to determine a framework for the creation of subsequent strategies for the company in the future. When the development setbacks occurred, a decision had to be made on how to move forward. Changing the research focus was not an option at the time, since it would have meant a significant delay in the research timelines. Although a template was eventually used instead of the proprietary web application that was originally proposed, the intent was to use the findings from this research to better develop the original design. This research project provided the catalyst for the creation of a new web application which has the same fundamental functionalities of the original design but also some other enhanced designs born out of the findings and new knowledge gained from this research. At the formal conclusion of the research project a more in-depth discussion was had with members of the team on broader impact of the project and what would be the next step after the new knowledge acquisition from the research.

In the one to two months immediately following the completion of the research project, the core planning team- consisting of myself and the Content Director- stayed in place. The focus of the team was to create new content and develop the platform using the strategy identified from the research. The Content Director went on to take a much greater role within the company not only creating and developing the content but determining the objectives and outcome of the content and making executive decisions regarding the production of videos, while the role of the Principal Director became more involved in outlining the long-term direction of the platform and seeking funding for the development of the project. The freelancer developers that were being used within the last stage of the development work have been retained to perform additional development work on the platform. The company has also been approached by at least three small businesses owners enquiring on how they could utilize ABC to market their products and services. When ABC was first launched one of the small businesses which was featured in a post lamented “that they were going to close but after seeing the feature and the comments that they received they have decided to stay open”.

I believe that the co-founder of Reddit Steve Huffman best described what it takes to grow a social media or content marketing website whose main goal is to engage customers as a “little bit of magic” (Huffman, 2012). Approximately Six (6) months after the completion of the research project there was an agreement that the following would form part of the overall ABC strategy:

- The negotiation of a more long-term relationship with the freelancer development team to have them on board on a joint venture partnership, i.e. a long-term relationship versus a freelance arrangement.
- The focus of the development team on designing a proto-type which takes into consideration the original ABC design and the new knowledge which came about from the research project.
- The development of a business plan or proposal to seek out funding for the web platform and move away from the self-funding model.

5.4. Reflection On The Practical and Academic Contribution

Reflecting on the academic implications of the findings from this research would suggest that the relationship and links between antecedents and consequences/ metrics of online customer engagement (OCE) in the context of content marketing are difficult to determine and complex in nature. Where there had been academic linkages drawn between online customer engagement and the respective outcomes, the linkages have invariably been performed in a pristine, controlled environment. In such environments the research identified and built direct (one to one or one to all) associations between drivers of content and platform and online customer engagement metrics or outcomes. However, conducting research within a real-world environment, the ability to derive the direct and pristine associations (one to one or one to all) depicted within the academic literature was more problematic. Moreover, the linkages seen in the real-world context of this research implied a more complex relationship between the antecedents of online customer engagement and business metrics which has implications for both practitioners and academics.

From a practitioner perspective, this research challenges the assumption that the creation of content, as long as it met specific variables or attribute standards such as vividness and specific category types, would allow the content marketer to meet all their company customer engagement metrics. Therefore, as an outcome of this research, it is recommended that businesses conduct their own research into what variables and attributes drive their business' online customer engagement metrics.

From an academic perspective this research challenges the notion that in a real-world scenario there is a direct relationship between either one OCE driver and one OCE business metric or all the business metrics. This research therefore further provides evidence of the importance of developing OCE models/frameworks within a real-world environment to determine the model/ framework's ability and benefit to practitioners, and not just simply utilizing empirical data to justify a model's ability to be used in a real-world context.

This research also clearly highlighted the value which the utilization of a Mixed Method Action Research approach brought to the development of a more holistic OCE strategy. Without the inclusion of qualitative data and analysis there is a likelihood that OCE strategy based only on quantitative data would not have been feasible to solve the practical and complex issue which real-world situations often require.

For practitioners and academics, this research challenges an often-held view that quantitative data analysis was the only meaningful method of analysing the outcome of OCE and determining the further actions to be taken. This research shows the value to which the utilization of qualitative data gathered from collaboration with individuals external to the quantitative process could have on the future actions to be taken. This reach also provides evidence of the need to not only use qualitative methods such as focus groups as methods to reduce the number of quantitative variables which are reviewed; but that qualitative methods can be used as a complimentary method to provide reasons for observed data and practical recommendations.

Moreover, this research also contributes significantly to the research on online customer engagement and content marketing by first extending the work done by Tafesse (2015), Fortin and Dholakia (2005), and De Vries et al. (2012) to posit that the definition of "vividness" should also include the variable "human personality". Secondly, this research extends the work by Tse and Soufani (2003), Kee and Yazdanifard, (2015), Constantinides (2006), Mahajan and Venkatesh (200), Kalyanam and McIntyre (2002), Evans (2007) by demonstrating the impact which antecedents such as distribution channels and search engine optimization (SEO) have on real world OCE metrics such as page views which may ordinarily be difficult to increase. Lastly, this research adds to the overall OCE variables but adding a new antecedent called "discovery percentage" previously not considered in the more prominent and notable OCE research done by Van Doorn et al. (2010), Kujur and Singh (2017), Moro et al. (2016) and Cvijikj and Michelles (2013).

For practitioners and academics, this research also becomes beneficial in that it provides a perspective of how customer online engagement can have different results depending on the platform being used. New and emerging content marketing companies tend to either use social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to distribute their content. However, what this research found was that when the same content was placed on each of these platforms the results were different, primarily because each of these platforms had algorithms which at times could hinder the discovery of content and hence hinder engagement levels. From a practitioner perspective, this would mean the marketer may need to tailor content and strategy to the respective platforms' algorithms. From an academic perspective this finding from the research would spark future researchers to focus on projects that utilize data and compare results from more than one platform for studies in online customer engagement.

As was the focus of this project, the utilization of an Action Research methodology was the main contributing factor to the development of an online customer engagement strategy and framework for ABC. As is the case with AR projects this process of reflection also had the added benefit of having a broader impact on the development of my personal and professional journey. Additionally, this research project, also contributed to the area of content marketing and customer engagement by providing a list of twelve (12) customer engagement antecedents and six (6) consequences/outcomes.

Appendix A: Example of Consent Form

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:
Content Marketing: An Action Research Approach to Developing A Customer Online Engagement Strategy

Researcher(s):

Cynthia Wiggins

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet Version: 02/ July 19th 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.
5. The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.
6. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.
7. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.
8. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

1

Version 2.1
June 2013

Appendix A: Consent Form (Page 2)

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

9. I understand and agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised and I will therefore no longer be able to withdraw my data.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

Principal Investigator:	**Student Researcher:**
Cynthia Wiggins	Cynthia Wiggins
XXXXX, XXXXX, XXXXXX, Barbados	XXXX, XXXXX, XXXXX, Barbados
(246) XXX-XXXX	(246) XXX-XXXX
xxxxxxxxxx@hotmail.com	xxxxxxxxxx@hotmail.com

Version: 02/ July 19th 2018

Appendix B: Example of Participant Information Guidance Sheet

Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Title of Study**

   Content Marketing: An Action Research Approach To Developing A Customer Online Engagement Strategy

2. **Version Number and Date**

   Version: 02/ July 19th 2018

3. **Invitation Paragraph**

   Dear Colleagues,

   My name is Cynthia Wiggins and I am a student of the University of Liverpool within the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program. This invitation to participate in this interview are being provided to you as an employee of ABC Investments, ABC or ABC.com. Participants for this study should be 18 years or older and have worked with ABC from 2016 onward in a full-time capacity. The study will consist of open-ended interview sessions.

   ABC Investment's main product is a web application called ABC. As a content marketing company it is critical that ABC has a viable model which would encourage online users to visit and engage with the application in an effort to generate revenue, however the company does not currently have a viable customer online engagement model. The interview is to allow ABC to gather your input on areas on the strategy.

   The interviews will each take approximately 45 -60 minutes t and your participation is completely voluntary. There are no rewards attached to your participation to the interview. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to reiterate that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, therefore you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part in the study if you want to. Additionally, you can discontinue your participation any time during the course of the survey or interview, without incurring any damages.

   Thank you for reading this.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

   My name is Cynthia Wiggins and I am a student of the University of Liverpool within the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program and the principle Director of a content marketing company called ABC Investments. ABC Investment's main product is a web application called ABC. As a content marketing company it is critical that ABC has a viable model which would encourage online users to visit and engage with the application in an effort to generate revenue, however the company does not currently have a viable customer online engagement model. The interview is to allow ABC to gather your input on areas on the strategy.

2. **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

   The invitations to participate in this study are being sent to all full-time employees of ABC Investments, ABC, or ABC.com. Participants for the study should be 18 years or older and have worked with ABC from 2016 onward in a full-time capacity to gain their feedback in an effort to create a more robust and innovative customer engagement strategy. The study will consist of open-ended interview sessions.

   Please note that although you have been chosen to participate in the interview your participation is voluntary, you can discontinue your participation any time during the course of the interview, without incurring any damages.

3. **Do I have to take part?**

   No, you do not have to take part in this study. The invitations to participate in this study is being sent to full-time employees of ABC Investments, ABC, or ABC.com. Participants for the study should be 18 years or older and have worked with ABC from 2016 onward in a full-time capacity. Participation is voluntary and you are free to decline the offer to participate in this research or withdraw at any time without explanation and without your decline to participate affecting your contract or professional status with ABC Investments or ABC.

   Note that results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed, and no further use is made of them.

4. **What will happen if I take part?**

   The invitations to participate or take part in this study is being sent to full-time employees of ABC Investments, ABC, or ABC.com. Participants for the study should be 18 years or older and have worked with ABC from 2016 onward in a full-time capacity. The study will consist of interview sessions. If you choose to take part in this research interview dates, times and place will be arranged with you prior to the interview being conducted. All interviews will be conducted face to face by me (the researcher) either via Skype or in a secure area and participants will have the option to choose a time that is convenient for them. Interview forms will be completed by me, the researcher, to ensure that no one can recognize the respective participants from their hand writing. Participants' names will not be placed on the interview forms and will only have a number attached to the forms.

   All interviews will be kept on a laptop accessible only through a log-in password, known only be me (the researcher).

   Note that there is no reward attached to your participation in this study and you are free to decline the offer to participate in this research or withdraw at any time without explanation and without your decline to participate affecting your contract or professional status with ABC Investments or ABC.

1. **Are there any risks in taking part?**

   The interviews will each take 45 – 60 minutes and as such you will have to take time out of your schedule. Additionally, because of the subject matter of the study you will not be placed through physical test that would cause participants to be injured or be under emotional stress I therefore do not perceived any physical or psychological risks to research participants. However, because I am the researcher as well as the Principle Director of ABC participants may feel as though their comments would affect their economic, professional or general relationship with ABC and lead to termination of a contract or some other professional fallout. Your feedback is critical to the provision of an innovative model which will assist in providing users with a robust content marketing strategy and as such you can be assured that your participation in this research will not result in the loss of contract, or a professional fall out with ABC Investments or ABC.

2. **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

   Yes, they are. In taking part in this research you will be assisting ABC Investments and ABC in creating a more robust content marketing strategy for its users. Note that there will be no monetary reward provided to participants for taking part in this interview.

3. **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

   If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me Cynthia Wiggins the Principle Director of ABC and Principle Researcher at XXXXX, XXXXX. XXXX, Barbados at (246) XXX-XXXX. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

4. **Will my participation be kept confidential?**

   If you choose to take part in this research, you will be provided with this participation sheet and a consent form initiated by Cynthia Wiggins (the researcher).

   Even though the research information will be provided to you by the research whom you already know, your name will not be mentioned in any of the research and no one other than the research will be able to link your responses with the research. When you have completed the interview the information will be kept electronically on a laptop and only accessible via an administration login/password which only me (the researcher) will have. Note that results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them.

   In the event that the interview forms are kept in hard copy form they will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Additionally, copies of the interview forms or the results will not be shared with any third party organizations.

5. **What will happen to the results of the study?**

   The intent is not to publicly publish the results of the study, however in the event that the research is made public a link to the source will be provided to you via email and you will not be identifiable within the research unless you have consented to do so.

Appendix C: Ethics Award Letter

Dear Cynthia Wiggins ,

I am pleased to inform you that the DBA Ethics Committee has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below:

Committee Name: DBA Ethics Committee

Title of Study: Performance measurement systems for measuring Information security resilience: an action research approach

Student Investigator:	Cynthia Wiggins
School/Institute:	School of Management Approval
Date:	23 February 2018

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

1. The researchers must obtain ethical approval from a local research ethics committee if this is an international study
2. University of Liverpool approval is subject to compliance with all relevant national legislative requirements if this this is an international study.
3. All serious adverse events must be reported to the Sub-Committee within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the Research Integrity and Governance Officer (ethics@liv.ac.uk)
4. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Committee of the amendment.

This approval applies to the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Committee should be notified.

Kind regards,

Dr. Shahnaz Hamid

DBA Ethics Committee University of Liverpool on-line Programmes

Appendix D: Summary of Qualitative Interviews

MMAR Phase	Interviewee Code	Date	Variable	Question	Response
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Time of Day	Q1) What are your thoughts about the page view peaks and valleys in the "time of day data" especially early in the morning and later in the day? Q2) What are your thoughts about the bounce rate and "time of day" data? Q3) What are your thoughts about the average time on page and "time of day" data?	R1) It seems as though pages are being viewed, and time is being spent on the website early in the morning maybe because users are viewing the content before work and after work? If this is the case we may have to post early in the morning maybe 4 am or later in the day before 4 pm. Otherwise we will not be able to capture the users and make the most of the post time. R2) There seems to be some slight indicates of peaks and valleys but other variable (s) maybe a driving force of bounce rate. I am not seeing a clear batter for bounce rate and time of day. R3) Not sure what is going on there seems like there is a pattern yet not really. Seems erratic so there may be some other variable (s) impacting on time of day that we need to explore some more.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Day of The Week	Q1) What are your thoughts on page views and the day of the week? Q2) What are your thoughts on pages per session and the day of the week? Q3) What are your thoughts on the bounce rate, average session duration and average time on page in comparison with the day of the week variable? Q4) Do you think that the lengthier content not determine the users more than cause them to engage more?	R1) I am noticing some distinctive peaks on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday this may mean a change in strategy to ensure that content was posted on the days that users were already active. We may also have to post content on other days, though were the page views we lower like Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to boost the page views there. R2) I am seeing a pattern between pages per session, and day of the week. The pattern seem to become more unstable as the page views decreased. We might need to find a way to stabilizing the pages per session no matter the page views? I will have to think about this. R3) Sundays alway seem to have the highest bounce rate. Sundays also eem to either have the lowest or one of the lowest average session duration within three separate weeks. R4) Maybe, but having different categories may help. Right now we have content but no real focus, maybe we need to say this say is for "X', this day we post content focus on "Y"? We may have lengthen the content for Sunday so that users stay longer on the page.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Content Type	What are your thoughts on content type (images/text, poll/quiz and videos) engagement and average page views, average time on page, bounce rate, average pages per session and social engagement rate?	I am seeing a relationship between video content and customer engagement metrics such as average page views, average time on page and average pages per session. But I am also seeing a relationship with conent that have text and page views, bounce rate average pages per session, or average session duration and social media engagement rates. I thnk content with video may not have performed as well for bounce rate because the videos did not have interactive features. So users who were interested in viewing the video, spent a significant amount of time on the page and viewed other pages within that specific session but there was no need to click or interact, hence the high bounce rate. I notice that the performance for bounce rate, average session duration and social engagemenr rate was better with content that had images/text maybe because users could interact more . So maybe we need to focus videos content but ensuring that the videos were focused on a specific topic and included text.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Vividness	What are your thoughts on vividness and the implications on the engagement metrics?	I notice that content that was considered "vivid" had better engagement levels for bounce rate, average session duration, and average page session. If you look at the drill down graphs of "vivid" video content you notice better engagement levels as well. So if we focus on videos we may also have to ensure that they were "vivid" since it seemed that videos had to be "vivid" more so than images to engage users. I notice that "vividness" did not have the same impact on the social engagement rate as it did on ther other engagement rates. Maybe because other variables, e.g. popularity of the topic, visibility of the content or how interesting the image was may impact on vividness.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Content Category	What are your thoughts on content categories and the implications on the engagement metrics?	I noticed that content that focused on the provision of information and/ or food-related content, seem to have the highest page views, pages per session, bounce rate performance, session duration time, and social engagement rate. Maybe we needed to include specific content categories. Maybe just food and informative given that these content categories seem to result in higher levels of customer engagement metrics. Since the content focused on specific events had relatively high page views, session duration and social engagement rates we may also want to focus on "trending" topics utilizing hashtags to assist with engaging users.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Post Frequency	Q1) What are your thoughts on frequency of post and the impact on the engagement metrics? Q2) Do you think we can post every day of the week?	R1) The impact in some instances seem minimal but the frequency of the posts did seem as though it positively impacted on pages per session, bounce rate, and session duration. I think this just means that we would have to post regularly. R2) Maybe not every day but at least Sundays to ensure we boost activity on that day? Mondays to cover Tuesdays, Wednesday and Thursday and then again on Friday for the weekend?
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Media Elements	Q1) What impact do you believe that the media elements have on customer engagement metrics? Q2) What about the length of time for the creation of the videos?	R1) I notice a positive correlation between media elements and customer engagement metrics, such as pages per session, bounce rate, session duration and time on the page. So if we moved towards mainly video content, it would mean either having videos of a specific length that would mimic the reading time of post with 5 to 14, or 6 to 11 images since these were the number of images which seemed to optimize engagement and were not the extreme. It would also mean that the length of the video could not be more than the equivalent reading time for a post with 14 since engagement seemed to peak at this point. R2) Maybe we can have some longer videos and some shorter videos? Maybe the longer ones on Sundays and the shorter ones during the week. Which would make sense and be more managible.
1	Interviewee1	September 8 ,2018	Other Discussion	What are your other thoughts regarding the engagement? What other variables do you believe maybe impacting on customer engagement?	Given what I am seeing with the social engagement metric I think that the distribution channel ihas more of an impact on the customer engagement than we initially thought probably because we never considered how the post look on the different social media platforms. Think about it Instagram tends to be image focused while Facebook tends to be text focused. Also, how they seem to determine which post to show users seem to be different as well. Maybe we need to take a closer look at the impact the respective social media platforms have on dtermining customer engagement to determine which distribution channel was more suitable for the content. We may also have to look at the impact of trending topics, hashtags or optimizing pages and what impact they have on customer engagement.

Appendix D: Summary of Qualitative Analysis Interviews (MMAR Two)

MMAR Phase	Interviewee Code	Date	Variable	Question	Response
2	Interviewee1	January 5 ,2019	Average Time on Page	How can average time on page be improved?	It was odd that there was an improvement for metrics such as “average session duration" for August to December 2018 but there was a decline in “average time on page”. They metrics seem similar. [On reviewing the definitions for average session duration and time on page we realize Average Session Duration measured the average length of a session, where a user's session could consist of just one page or several pages. Average Time on Page measured the average amount of time users spent viewing a specific page or screen, or a specific set of pages or screens.]. So maybe the reason the average time on the page has declined is because we switched to videos instead of posts with images and text. The fact that the majority of our content was on average 30 seconds could explain why the December time on page metric was just 0.33 seconds. I don't think we can create lengther content though it is already taking us from two weeks to two months depending on if it is created inhouse or by a freelancer. Another reasons why I think users are not spending more time on the page is because the content is not of their specific interest. Maybe we can seek to engage customers more by tailoring hashtag to the user interest. I also think that average time on the page might be being influenced by the social media site used to distribute the content. Think about it Instagram is more image focused and the post size is more prominent amd more appealing. While Facebook is more text focused was more text-focused so the name of the video or the text for the post maybe more important. Given that we changed to videos, the distribution channel may impact more for the engagement with videos.
2	Interviewee1	January 5 ,2019	Page Views	How can page views be improved?	I think the page views may have declined in December 2018 when compared to August, 2018 because a majority of the December, 2018 traffic was still being generated from paid advertisement. So advertisement although we needed may not be the best thing for us to use to generate page views. Maybe we need to seek to stop advertising via social media and seek to optimize the site, as well as the content to increase the organic users interest and the page views.

Appendix D: Summary of Qualitative Analysis Interviews (MMAR Three)

MMAR Phase	Interviewee Code	Date	Variable	Question	Response
3	Interviewee1	February 7,2019	Tailored Experience	What are your thoughts on the tailored experience results?	I notices an increase in time on page and session duration it seems the changes in the platform was able to get the users to come to a particular page and stay on that page but the decrease in results for pages per session and bounce rate makes it seem as though the changes did not cause the users to want to look at other content. I am at a lost as to why this maybe the case, maybe the users are interested in the content they iniital interact with but really the other content is not intising them to stay?Maybe the content is nothing they are interested in? This came up before so maybe we need to look at trending topics to focus our content on? That maybe it, the content we are putting out maybe interesting to them but since the other content is not about a trending topic or of interest to them, they come, they see and leave.
3	Interviewee1	February 7,2019	Distribution Channel	Q1) What are your thouhgts on the distribution channel results? Q2) We have a hashtag a research queston relating to hashtags do we need to change that?	R1) There seem to be a disparity in engagement levels between the respective platforms, and paid and unpaid content. Instagram and Facebook seem to be behaving differently so that maybe causing this. Facebook changed their algorithm recently remember, probably to get us to pay more for post. I always found it strange the number of our followers that list our post on Facebook are so low. Instagram seems to work differently though, pluse we can use hashtags there, maybe we should focus on placing the content there instead of Facebook. I took a look at some of our post on Instagram with hashtags and there is a increase of about 12.6% when post have hashtags. Maybe we should focus on seeing how the Instagram post do on their own and use the discovery percentage to help us. R2) Yes probably to look more directly at the discovery percentage. 1) If the discovery percentage increase will the engage increase?. I believe that it will. 2) If the discovery percentage increase will page views increase?. We seem not to be able to get page views to increase. What if this is the way?
3	Interviewee1	April 6,2019	Search Engine Optimization	What are your thoughts on the results for the SEO?	Of all the changes we made the SEO seem to have had the most impact since it improved all the metrics except bounce rate probably because the SEO changes brings more organic traffic who are looking for the content already and not like with the paid traffic where the users may not even be interested in the content. What we may want to do now is look at the the type of content and focus on more trending topics.
3	Interviewee1	February 7,2019	Improvement on Iteration Three	What other improvement do you believe can be made on the strategy from iteration three?	I think there is more to vivivness than just whether it seem more real or not. I think the content which was classified as vivid did well not only because of the quality of the photo, or how close it was to reality but whether or not the thumbnail showed a human being's face. I saw some articles -I will have to find them later- that showed that having a human face, personality or character as part of a marketing campaign can help form a bond with the audience.

Appendix D: Summary of Qualitative Analysis Interviews (MMAR Four)

MMAR Phase	Interviewee Code	Date	Variable	Question	Response
4	Interviewee1	April 7,2019	Discovery Percentage	Q1) What were your thoughts regarding the discovery percentage results? Q2) What do you think it did not have an impact on social engagement rate?	R1) It seems as though the discovery percentable does have a positive impact on some of the the engage metrics in particular page views which we have been trying to increase. So the original thinking on the fact that the issue of page views was because the content needed to focus on more trending topics maybe correct. R2) I was surprise that it did not have an impact on the social engagement rate though but that maybe because there are other components lumped into the engagement rate such as comments, shares etc. So maybe focusing on trending topics as mentioned before would increase the page views but not the shares or comments? Which make sense. So we would have to ensure that the content is focused on a trending one but still make the content interesting and inclusive of the other elements that seem to improve the social engagement metric if we want it to be shared and commenting on. Which makes sense.
4	Interviewee1	April 7,2019	Human Personality	What were your thoughts regarding the human personality results?	Having a human face did seem to impact postively on the social engagement rate like we suspected. I did not however expect it to impact on Facebook more so than Instagram but thinking about it maybe it is because Facebook is focus on the social and cumminity aspect, while Instagram users are focused more on how instagrammable something look, vigrant colours etc.. Which I don't think we ever realized. So if we continue to use Facebook as a distribution tool but if we use mainly ?Insgram it may not be as important to have a face on the thumnail, maybe something more interesting and vivid.

Appendix E: Thesis Outline and Time Table

Ref #	Timeline	Activity	Possible Issues	Mitigation
1	April 12- September 30, 2017	Development and launch of ABC web application.	The programmers have indicated that they should finish the web application by June 15, 2017. However, web applicable development can often be unpredictable therefore I have extended the time to September, 2017.	This task to some extent is outside of my control, however I have sought to mitigate it by increasing the timeframe or end date on this task to ensure that I have a more realistic timeline.
2	September 30 2017- August 31, 2018	Develop Action Plan, Data Gathering: Collect, review, gather and clean data.	This initial stage of developing the action plan, data gathering etc.is a critical one because if there is a delay at this stage there will be a delay for the entire project. With the new web application the understanding is that the data would be adequate enough by this time. Within six (6) months the data should be sufficient, however I have extended the timeframe to one year to allow enough time to gather the data.	This task to some extent is outside of my control, however I have sought to mitigate it by increasing the timeframe or end date on this task to ensure that I have a more realistic timeline.
3	April 1 – October 31, 2018	Data Analysis: Analyse data, experiment with content.	Six (6) months should be enough time for the volume of data to start accumulating. As such I should be able to start this stage on April 1 and run it in parallel to the reviewing and data gathering stage.	I have sought to run this task to some extent in parallel to the data gathering stage to ensure that I can adequately analyse the data without jeopardizing the project deadline.
4	July 1, 2018 – January 31, 2019	Development of initial model.	Because of the time of the year of this stage work commitments and developing content for the web application may delay my ability to concentrate on building of the model.	Model building in the past has taken me approximately a month. I have extended the time to two months in an attempt to ensure that I meet the project deadline.
5	April 1, 2018 – July 31, 2019	Commence writing introductory aspects of thesis, researching and writing the Literature Review.	The writing and research can be a time intensive aspect of my thesis project.	I believe that I will be able to start researching at the time that I am analysing the data and run most of the research and the writing aspect of my thesis in parallel with the previous stage.
6	July 1, 2018– October 30, 2018	Implementation and Evaluation of the model	I believe that the first iteration of the model will be developed within 1- 3 months, however I have placed one (1) more month to ensure that I stay within the schedule.	I will implement the model by using a subset of the content and having a “hold out sample”. Additionally, I will utilizing a sample size instead of the entire web application population in an effort to reduce the experimental timeframe.
7	November 1, 2018 - February 28, 2019	Review/ develop an Action Plan for the new model iteration and therefore repeat steps 1 to 6.	I believe the first iteration of the model will take the longest time, but the second iteration will take approximately 4 months since I will have to start this stage from step 1 and continue to step 6 i.e. data analysis to evaluation.	Seek to add an extra/buffer time of a month onto the proposed schedule to ensure I am able to meet the overall scheduled deadline.
8	March 1, 2019 - May 30, 2019	Review/ develop an Action Plan for the new model iteration and therefore repeat steps 1 to 6.	From experience this third iteration/ cycle should take a shorter time than the first two cycles because I would have a better understanding of the data. I believe that this third iteration should take 2 month but will add another both to ensure I meet the schedule completion date.	Seek to add an extra/buffer time of a month onto the proposed schedule to ensure I am able to meet the overall scheduled deadline.
9	June 1, 2019 - June 30, 2019	Review/ develop an Action Plan for the new model iteration and therefore repeat steps 1 to 6.	This third and final cycle of model building should be the shortest. I believe that this third iteration should take 1 month.	Seek to add an extra/buffer time of a month onto the proposed schedule to ensure I am able to meet the overall scheduled deadline.
10	April 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019	Complete writing and submit the first draft of my thesis.	The writing and research can be a time intensive aspect of my thesis project.	I believe that even though I will start writing the draft of my thesis during the testing period where I will have a significant quantity of the data and have perform the most of the analysis. I will still need to have time for any rework and issues, thereby still meeting my November 30, 2019 final submission.

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