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Analysing the social media communication of SMEs in the fashion retail industry:
A case study of Bangladesh.

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Declarations

I confirm that the submitted thesis is my own work, that I have not presented anyone else's work as my own and that full and appropriate acknowledgement has been given where reference has been made to the work of others and it has not been submitted for any other degree at York St John University or any other institution.

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Abstract

This study analysed Facebook communication activities of SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh to identify the most effective Facebook communication strategies for consumer engagement. A growing number of SMEs are operating in Facebook in Bangladesh. Social media scholars acknowledged that consumer engagement is important for businesses to survive in virtual marketplaces, but several studies reported that the level of consumer engagement is declining.

This research adopted a pragmatic philosophy for answering the research question by utilising three different data collection instruments, namely netnography, archival review, and semi-structured interviews. A netnography research was conducted over four months by observing 20 fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities whilst 2409 Facebook posts were archived along with the number of likes, comments, and shares received on each post. Finally, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. Both netnography and interview data were analysed using thematic analysis whilst the archival data was analysed using multiple statistical tests.

The findings of this research make three substantial theoretical contributions, namely reconceptualization of salesperson interpersonal communication theory, remodelling of media richness theory and development of a strategic framework for Facebook consumer engagement and growth. The findings of this research also make several empirical contributions to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. Findings revealed that most SMEs in the sample generally adopted orthodox marketing techniques (e.g., advertising and sales promotion) whilst some used emerging and interactive communicational tools such as Facebook Live. This research identified that sales-focused one-way communications received a lower level of consumer engagement than interactive and relational posts. Mixed orientated Facebook communication received the highest level of consumer engagement. However, the generalisability of the findings may be limited to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs due to the small sample size considered in the research.

Keywords: SMEs, Social Media Communications, Consumer Engagement, Facebook Marketing

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Abbreviations

SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
E-WOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
SICT	Salesperson Interpersonal Communication Theory
MRT	Media Richness Theory
ICT	Information Communication Technology
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
B2C	Business to Consumer
ROI	Return on Investment
C2C	Consumer to Consumer
RMG	Ready Made Garment
COBRA	Consumer's Online Brand Related Activities
HOE	Hierarchy of Effect
B2C	Customer to Business
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1.   Research Background

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) play essential roles in supporting economic growth, innovation, and employment in countries around the world (Kumar 2017; World Bank 2020). Registered SMEs account for approximately 90% of global businesses, creating more than 50% of jobs worldwide (PwC 2020). In emerging economies, registered SMEs contribute up to 40% of national income (GDP) (PwC 2020). A World Bank's (2020) report shows that these numbers are significantly higher when the contributions of the unregistered SMEs are also included. A vibrant and growing SME sector is crucial for the growth and development of developing countries (Kumar 2017). A research study conducted by Aga, Francis and Rodriguez-Meza (2015) also identified that a country's SME sector size and its economic growth are positively related. Besides, SMEs have a vital role in attaining sustainable development goals in countries across all levels of development "enabling SMEs to adapt and thrive in a more open environment and participate more actively in the digital transformation is essential for boosting economic growth and delivering more inclusive globalisation" (OECD 2017: 5).

The widespread adoption of internet communication technologies has offered many new opportunities to businesses (Stankovska, Josimovski and Edwards 2016). As the development of web technologies from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 led to the development of many social media sites that provided new ways to communicate, collaborate and share content (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides 2011). The definition of social media is provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) as "a group of internet-based applications that built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Social media platforms are interactive and provide users with opportunities to collaborate with brands as well as other users simultaneously. Social media has emerged as one of the main media platforms that connect over a third of the entire world's population (Dolan et al. 2017). This revolution of social media has changed how consumers communicate and significantly transformed business communications too (Kannan and Li 2017). The growing importance of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in consumers' lives influences their communication habits (Hutter et al. 2013). Following the widespread

adoption of social media and its increased use, the level of online consumer interactions has increased too (Hutter et al. 2013). Concerning marketing communication, the arrival of social media has changed the marketer–consumer interface, allowing firms to engage directly with consumers in both "personal" and "real-time" interactions (Dolan et al. 2019). Many firms use social media platforms as part of their marketing advertising channel because social media provide rapid and convenient access to a large number of audiences (McCann and Barlow 2015). Even though this social media revolution has started in developed continents like America, Europe and Australia at the beginning of the 21st century; however, the adoption of social media has rapidly increased in developing countries over the past decade due to the increased availability and affordability of the internet and communication technologies such as smartphones and computers (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Dwivedi et al. 2020).

Some studies found during the earliest part of the 21st Century, SMEs did not extensively adopt digital technologies (Brown, Broderick and Lee 2007; Ahonen 2008). However, the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) rapidly increased over the past decades with the emergence of social media (Kim, Lee and Lee 2013; Wamba and Carter 2015; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). ICTs such as social media applications enable businesses to communicate and interact with their consumers directly (Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016). The rapid rise of social media has also attracted bigger firms, and they are now using social media as part of their marketing and branding strategies (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2015; Loureiro, Serra and Guerreiro 2019; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021). With the widespread global adoption of modern technologies, the number of internet users has increased rapidly globally and in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC December 2021), 123.82 million people have access to the internet in Bangladesh, with 113.73 million being mobile internet users and remaining using broadbands. In terms of the adoption of social media, 61.76 million people in Bangladesh are active social media users (Statista 2022a), with Facebook being the most common social networking site among internet users in Bangladesh (Statista 2022b).

The adoption of social media and the digitisation of the marketplace is expected to continuously rise in Bangladesh as the government is investing substantially in internet infrastructures (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017), improving 3G and 4G mobile network services and reducing home broadband prices, eventually connecting more people virtually (Bhuyan 2014;

Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). As BTRC (2021) highlights, nearly a hundred and twenty-four million people in Bangladesh are already active users of the internet, and this number is increasing every day. This digitalisation process has influenced every aspect of lives in Bangladesh over the last decade and has provided businesses with new ways to operate and reach out to their consumers.

The retail industry in Bangladesh has also rapidly transformed over the past decade (Sarker and Ashrafi 2018; Alam 2020). Among these changes are the rapid adoption of e-commerce and e-tailing, as well as multichannel retailing (Islam and Eva 2019; Alam 2020). Due to the fact that large fashion retailers cater to the needs of local consumers, they have already developed their own brand identities (Rahman and Mannan 2018). These large brands are mainly selling their products through traditional bricks and mortar stores. Now they are also growing across online platforms, including websites, social media, and other popular e-commerce platforms (e.g., Ajkerdeal.com, daraz.com, and Othoba.com) in Bangladesh (Rahman and Mannan 2018; Islam and Eva 2019).

Although large, established fashion brands widely use e-commerce platforms alongside their websites (Sarker and Ashrafi 2018), small businesses tend to concentrate on growing on social media (Tabassum 2019; Sharmin and Sultan 2020). This is because website development and maintenance are expensive and unaffordable for many SME retailers that have limited resources, and using e-commerce platforms requires them to pay large commissions on sales (Alauddin and Chowdhury 2015; Rahman and Mannan 2018). However, social media like Facebook is free for everyone unless a business wants to promote through paid advertising, hence Facebook has become very popular among SMEs and other businesses (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021). Similarly, being the most popular social media platform, Facebook also has the highest number of users in Bangladesh with approximately 44.7 million of the Bangladeshi social media users are actively using Facebook (Statista 2022b). Facebook is not only the most popular social media site in Bangladesh, but it is also popular in other nations; Facebook had 2.91 billion monthly active users worldwide in the final quarter of 2021 (Statista 2022c), which is far above its competitors such as Twitter, flicker and Instagram. Additionally, the amount of time internet users spending on social media is increasing day-by-day. According to Statista (2020) internet users worldwide spent an average of 144 minutes a day on social media in 2019.

Zabeen, Ara and Sarwar (2013) first investigated Facebook as an online selling platform for businesses in Bangladesh. They predicted that Facebook would provide a new and rather revolutionary way of serving consumers in the Bangladeshi market, and they called it a revolution of F-Commerce (Facebook-Commerce). Since the arena of F-commerce is rapidly transforming, Zabeen, Ara and Sarwar (2013) emphasised the need for continuous investigation in this area. Moreover, consumers' preferences seemed to be changing gradually, favouring online purchases of fashion products in the Bangladeshi market (Islam, Rahman and Hossain 2014). The widespread adoption of social media has offered numerous benefits for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. SMEs can now set up their virtual stores, use digital marketing tools that are far cheaper and more effective than the conventional marketing tools, and communicate and interact with their consumers regularly at a minimal cost (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). Social media provide new alternatives for SMEs and entrepreneurs to reach out to their consumers and generate revenues (Sharmin and Sultan 2020). However, the competition in the social media-enabled virtual marketplace has intensified due to the reduced barrier to entry and ease of use (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Tabassum 2019; Sharmin and Sultan 2020).

Facebook provides an online marketplace for businesses where consumers and brands can interact and transact. Following the ease of setting up Facebook businesses (Tabassum 2019; Sultan and Sharmin 2020) and the growing number of active social media users (BTRC 2021), many companies have rushed into these online marketplaces, which has intensified the market competition. However, studies found that consumer engagement is declining across social media (Tafesse and Wien 2018; Deng et al. 2020). The ability to engage consumers is critical for businesses to succeed in the social media-enabled market, which is also reflected in the findings of multiple prior studies in social media communication (e.g., Ashley and Tuten 2015; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Cheung et al. 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). They have considered consumer engagement as the immediate outcome that determines the success or failure of social media communication strategies. Several studies recommend that the success of social media communication can be understood by investigating consumer interactions (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) related to each communication (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020).

Although the use of social media by SMEs has been assessed in several studies around the world, the past studies mainly focused on the social media business value for SMEs and emphasised the adoption and strategic planning for social media implementation (e.g., Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016), with only a handful of research considered the consumer engagement aspect of the social media usage (e.g., de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020). The review of extant literature discovered that several studies have been carried out to investigate the social media communication strategies of SMEs (e.g., Bulearca and Bulearca 2010; Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; De Vries, Veer, and De Vries 2018), but all those studies mostly considered the SMEs in the western developed market. However, the amount of research conducted from the emerging country perspective is limited and more specifically no prior research was identified in the literature that investigated the Facebook communication strategies from the consumer engagement perspective on fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh.

This research specifically focuses on Bangladesh as it is one of the emerging economies. It has an impressive track record of economic growth; over the past decade, the Bangladesh economy grew consistently by over 6% annually (World Bank 2022; IMF; 2022). Bangladesh is identified as one of the Next Eleven (N-11) fast-growing countries in the world that has the potential to become one of the world's largest economies by the end of the century (Bader, Alonaizi and Gadhoum 2017). Euromonitor International (2014) identified Bangladesh as one of the 20 markets of the future with high potential for consumer goods companies. Bangladesh is home to almost 168 million people (IMF 2022) and its population is still increasing. This growing population in Bangladesh has resulted in enormous demand for fashion products.

To meet this growing demand, a large number of fashion retailers are operating in the Bangladeshi fashion market which is mainly dominated by SME fashion retailers (Ali and Faroque 2017; Kumar 2017; Tabassum 2019; Sharmin and Sultan 2020). The retail industry in Bangladesh is rapidly transforming over the past decade due to the digitalisation of the economy (Sarker and Ashrafi 2018; Alam 2020), 123.82 million people have access to the internet in Bangladesh, with 113.73 million being mobile internet users and the remaining using broadbands (BTRC December 2021). Social media sites such as Facebook are the most visited sites among internet users, with 61.76 million people in Bangladesh being active social media

users (Statista 2022a). There are approximately 44.7 million active Facebook users in Bangladesh (Statista 2022b). Facebook has revolutionised the Bangladeshi retail market as it has created a virtual marketplace. Zabeen, Ara and Sarwar (2013) called it a revolution of F-Commerce (Facebook-Commerce). Due to the reduced barrier to entry, ease of use, and being a cost-effective channel for sales and communication, the adoption of Facebook has significantly increased among SMEs in recent years in Bangladesh (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of ready-made garment goods, and it has a really well-established fashion industry. Therefore, an investigation into the fashion retail industry of Bangladesh is not only expected to provide insights into how SMEs operate in the emerging market but also expected to shed light on what kind of social media marketing strategies SMEs use to engage consumers and thrive in a fiercely competitive marketplace.

1.2. Research Problem

SMEs are considered as the backbone of an economy because they play important role in supporting economic growth, innovation and employment (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Kim, Lee and Lee 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Wamba and Carter 2015; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Kumar 2017; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). Approximately 90% of global businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which create approximately 50% of jobs worldwide, according to a World Bank (2020) report; when informal SMEs are included, these numbers are significantly higher. Registered SMEs make up 40% of national income (GDP) in emerging economies. According to Kumar (2017), SMEs contribute significantly to growth in both developed and developing countries, which is why government officials at all levels of development prioritize SME development (OECD 2017). Bangladeshi SMEs are extensively using social media in business processes due to the reduced barrier to entry and the ease of use and being the cost-effective channel for sales and communication (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). Additionally, the adoption of social media and the digitisation of the marketplace is expected to continuously rise in Bangladesh as the government is investing substantially in internet infrastructures (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). The ability to engage consumers is critical for businesses to succeed in the social media-enabled market, which is also reflected in the findings of multiple prior studies in social media communication (e.g., Ashley and Tuten 2015; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019;

Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). Consumer engagement has been considered the immediate outcome that determines the success or failure of social media communication strategies. Several studies recommended that the success of social media communication can be understood by investigating consumer interactions (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) related to each communication (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015); Tafesse 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019). However, most of these studies analysed consumer engagement from large corporate brands' perspectives and very little to no research has focused on consumer engagement in the context of SMEs, especially in emerging markets. Additionally, marketing communications of SMEs are often haphazard, unstructured, spontaneous, reactive, and limited to the specific industry environment, as opposed to a large organisation (Gabrielli and Balboni 2010; Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012). Besides, SMEs' business structures tend to be significantly different from larger organisations as SMEs have limited resources, smaller market reach, and lower brand recognition (Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). Hence marketing communications strategies for consumer engagement used by larger brands may not be adequate for SMEs.

The use of social media by SMEs has been investigated around the world, the past studies mainly focusing on the social media business value for SMEs and emphasising the adoption and strategic planning for social media implementation (Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda et al. 2016), with only a small amount of research considering the consumer engagement aspect of the social media in the SME context (de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020). The review of extant literature discovered that several studies have been carried out to investigate the social media communication strategies of SMEs (e.g., Bulearca and Bulearca 2010; Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; De Vries, Veer, and De Vries 2018), but all those studies considered the SMEs in the developed markets. SMEs possess different characteristics based on the size of countries' economies and where they operate (Kumar 2017), therefore, the findings related to SMEs in developed countries may not be generalisable to SMEs in emerging economies. Hence, an investigation into the marketing communication of SMEs in emerging economies could add valuable insights to the literature.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

Facebook provides a platform for SMEs to grow their business virtually. Many SMEs enter this virtual marketplace without knowing its actual norms, opportunities, and challenges (Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; McCann and Barlow 2015). Moreover, there is a limited understanding in the literature about SMEs' Facebook communication practices and consumer engagement, especially in Bangladesh. There is no empirical study in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs that explored the Facebook communication activities and strategies of SMEs for determining the best communication strategies for consumer engagement. In order to fill this knowledge gap, the following research aim is formulated for this research:

> *This research aims to identify the common Facebook communication strategies and evaluate their effectiveness in engaging consumers in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector.*

To achieve the above aim, four research objectives are outlined as presented below:

Objective 1:   To explore the common Facebook communication strategies used by fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh.

Objective 2:   To investigate the impacts of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies on consumer engagement.

Objective 3:   To explore the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool of communication from the perspectives of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' owners and managers.

Objective 4:   To recommend the most effective Facebook communication strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement and achieving SMEs' marketing objectives.

1.4. Rationale

Prior studies indicated that SMEs are forced to join social media due to pressure from competitors (McCann and Barlow 2015) and changes in the market environment (Dwivedi et al. 2020). In the increasingly competitive business environment, effective social media

communication is becoming a critical component of survival for SMEs (Ashworth 2016). As aforementioned, more and more SMEs are entering the realm of social media without knowing the actual norm, culture and effective communication practices of social media channels. On contrary, effective social media communication strategies are vital to succeed in this virtual marketplace (Adeola, Hinson and Evans 2020). Durkin, Mcgowan, and McKeown (2013) found that SMEs' owners and managers' interests motivate the adoption of social media more than motivations to adopt new marketing tools to enhance business performance. de Vries, Veer and de Vries (2018) warn that in social media, such motives are more harmful than helpful. Hence, they suggest businesses need to have a clear plan and digital communication strategies to succeed in the competitive digital marketplace.

One of the keys to the success of any business is effective communication (Ashworth 2016) because it can create brand equity, provide brand awareness, and enable new consumer acquisition and existing consumer retention (Schivinski, Bruno and Dabrowski 2016). Marketing communication plays an important role in building the brand identity and image of SMEs in the consumers' minds, and digital platforms such as social media facilitate multidirectional communication (e.g., B2C, C2B and C2C) (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014). Businesses can converse directly with consumers using social media and engage them in value co-creation through the interactive aspects of social media (Valos et al. 2016). Social media communications' effectiveness has been previously investigated mainly in the context of large global corporate brands (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018) and luxury brands (e.g., Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). Despite many studies focused on strategic social media adoption and implementation in the SME context (e.g., Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Kumar, Anuj; Ayedee 2019). However, a limited amount of research has been done from the perspective of consumer engagement. An extensive review of the literature identified that no prior study was conducted to explore the most effective Facebook communications practices of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs for enhancing the level of consumer engagement. Thus, there is a gap in the literature.

Consumer engagement is considered as the core aspect of social media marketing communication (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Deng et al. 2020; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns

2021). A high level of consumer engagement is vital for a firm to succeed and survive that primarily operates in the digital environment, as without consumer engagement, organisations are unable to grasp the benefits of social media (Arora and Sanni 2019). In other words, consumer engagement is the prerequisite of achieving the benefits in social media; for example, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), brand community, and co-creation are not attainable without active consumer engagement in the social media platforms.

Social media communication is more dynamic and interactive than traditional one-way channels, and they facilitate responsive two-way and even multidirectional communications (B2C, C2B, C2C) (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014). Social media studies have used a range of communication theories such as the uses and gratification theory (UGT) (adopted by Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack 2018; Lee and Ma 2012; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017), parasocial interaction theory (PSI) (adopted by Konijn et al. 2016; Labrecque 2014; Rasmussen 2018), cultivation theory (adopted by Ho-Shen and Yen 2016), media richness theory (adopted by D'Urso and Rains 2008; Ogara, Koh and Prybutok 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tseng et al. 2017) and salesperson interpersonal communication theory (adopted by Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Previous studies have mainly employed the frameworks of traditional advertising and traditional mass media communication theoretical lenses to classify the social media orientations (Labrecque 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Deng et al. 2020); despite the unique capabilities of social media as an interactive channel, little is being done to address this in the prior studies. Therefore, this research also seeks to conceptualise these interactive characteristics of social media by investigating Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication activities.

This research also seeks to explore the benefits Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs aimed to achieve with the adoption of Facebook and the challenges they face whilst communicating with consumers. A critical review of existing literature indicated that there are some studies around the world highlighted the opportunities and challenges of social media in the SME context (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Rana and Kumar 2016), there are a few conceptual papers available in Bangladesh (Bhuyan and Rahman 2014; Uddin 2017), but no empirical study was conducted in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to examine the benefits and challenges they experience whilst operating on Facebook. This study, therefore, seeks to address this knowledge gap not only to make contributions to the body of knowledge but also to have a broader contextual

understanding of Bangladeshi Fashion retail SMEs' social media activities so that robust and effective strategic recommendations can be made to the practitioners in relation to the best Facebook communication strategies for higher consumer engagement.

Businesses and consumers in Bangladesh overwhelmingly prefer Facebook compared to other social media platforms (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Tabassum 2019), Thus Facebook was chosen because it is the most popular social networking site in Bangladesh (Tabassum 2019; Sultan and Sharmin 2020). Tuten and Solomon (2014) suggest that Facebook can be deemed a social utility platform because it combines all four functions of social networking sites: social community, social publishing, social commerce, and social entertainment. A number of studies found Facebook is the most effective social media communication channel for businesses (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021). Facebook brings all business functions in one place (Tuten and Solomon 2014; Valos et al. 2016). According to Valos et al. (2016), social media like Facebook bring the communications and distributions channels closer and integrate all marketing, sales, and after-sales services in one place, which provides a substantial opportunity for businesses with limited resources (e.g., SMEs) to have an online presence and access to the wider market.

Additionally, the Bangladeshi fashion retail industry is chosen as the context of this study as investigating this industry is expected to yield interesting insights. This is because the Euro Monitor International report (2014) identified Bangladesh as one of the twenty markets of the future. Bangladesh has consistently registered over 6% economic growth since 2010 (World Bank 2021). Moreover, Bangladesh is home to over 166 million people (Statista 2021) and has a massive demand for fashion products in the local market. Bangladesh is also one of the top producers of ready-made garment (RMG) products and the second-largest exporter of RMG globally (Islam, Rahman and Hossain 2014). Due to easy access to the locally produced RMG products and high demand in the local market, the number of SMEs that operate in the fashion retail industry in Bangladesh is substantial. Over 99% of private businesses are SMEs and create 70% - 80% of employment in Bangladesh (Alauddin and Chowdhury 2015). In terms of digitalisation, a large number of the Bangladeshi population are active internet users (BTRC 2021), and over sixty per cent of internet users are actively using social media (Statista 2021) as highlighted in section 1.1. The most popular social networking platform in Bangladesh is

Facebook, with 44.7 million active users (Statista 2022a). A large number of SMEs are operating on the Facebook virtual marketplace in Bangladesh (Tabassum 2019; Sultan and Sharmin 2020).

In addition to making contributions to the literature, this study is expected to provide guidance to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs as the adoption and use of Facebook among SME fashion retailers have increased to a great extent in recent years (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019; Wang et al. 2019). Due to the low barrier to entry in the social media marketplace and ease of use (Tabassum 2019; Sultan and Sharmin 2020), the number of SMEs are growing in this platform every day and creating high competition and a challenging market environment for each other. SMEs in the fashion retail industry mainly sell similar fashion products that have high demand in the market, with minimal to no product differentiation. Hence, in this highly competitive environment, SMEs need to adopt effective communication strategies to engage consumers with their businesses as part of their success and survival strategy. The empirical findings of the research are expected to provide them guidance in relation to the most effective Facebook communication practices for enhancing consumers engagement and thereby becoming more competitive in the marketplace.

1.5. Researcher's Motivation

Growing up in Bangladesh, I was actively involved in a family-owned retail business. Over the last few years, I saw how our family business struggled to cope with the rapidly changing market environment. Consumers were moving towards online marketplaces as there were more and more alternative products available at competitive prices. Besides, the number of new online retailers was also increasing consistently along with large established brands introducing new products to address the ever-increasing market demands. In the current age of digitalisation, large brands with ample resources dominate the online market in Bangladesh and pose challenges to SMEs by creating unfair market competition. I witnessed the trend of social media adoption and how social media waves moved from developed countries to developing countries. As SMEs do not usually have structured digital marketing strategies, I reviewed the existing literature to find if any work has been previously done in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication to identify the best practices for Facebook marketing communications. The review of extant literature highlighted a knowledge

gap that I aspire to fill with the current research whilst also contributing to SMEs by providing them with effective social media marketing communication strategies. Additionally, growing up in Bangladesh and working in the fashion retail SME sector, I was able to form numerous personal networks, which proved useful for accessing participants during the process of data collection.

1.6.   Brief Description of Research Methodology

This research follows the pragmatist research philosophy with an abductive approach to theory development for exploring SMEs' social media communication strategies and evaluating their effectiveness for engaging consumers. A case study research design was adopted by deploying multiple tools and techniques for collecting and analysing data to achieve the objectives of this research. This research adopted a sequential approach to achieving the research objectives and deploys a multi-method strategy by combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Bryman and Bell 2015). Initially, for exploring SMEs' common social media marketing communication practices and strategies, netnography research is conducted by following the procedures outlined by Kozinets (2015) and Bryman and Buchanan (2018) and observing and analysing Facebook marketing communication activities of 20 fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh. Salesman's Interpersonal Communication Theory (SICT) and Media Richness Theory (MRT) were used as the frameworks to analyse the data collected through netnography. The analysis revealed 14 common Facebook communication practices of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. They were broadly categorised under four key Facebook interpersonal communication strategies: task orientation, interaction orientation, self-orientation, and mixed orientation.

Subsequently, upon categorising SMEs' communication practices and strategies, they were quantitatively evaluated by assessing the effectiveness of different communication strategies from the perspectives of Facebook consumer engagement. A total of 2409 Facebook posts of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were reviewed and statistically analysed using SPSS as part of the quantitative research. Finally, 12 owners and managers of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were interviewed using semi-structured interview questions to further assess the efficiency of SMEs' Facebook communication strategies in terms of providing business opportunities to SMEs. Furthermore, challenges faced by SMEs during Facebook communications were also explored in order to make recommendations to Bangladeshi fashion

retail SMEs. Chapter Four of this thesis details the methodology of this research and provides justifications for using a sequential approach for achieving the research objectives.

1.7.   Scope and Limitations of the Research

For exploring social media marketing communication strategies of fashion retail SMEs, this research investigated the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector. SMEs' Facebook communication activities were considered in this research. To collect the data, only SMEs with active Facebook accounts were selected. All of these, SMEs in the sample were trading within Bangladesh. This study only focused on the SMEs' Facebook marketing communication aspects, and other digital marketing strategies were not considered. The findings of this research may be affected by the following limitations (limitations further detailed in section 7.5 of this thesis):

Contextual limitations: This research investigated Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook marketing communication strategies from the perspective of consumer engagement. The research data were collected from SMEs' Facebook pages; hence the findings may not apply to other social networking platforms (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram). Therefore, findings may not reflect how consumers engage with SMEs on other social media platforms.

Limited to particular time: Research data was collected between early-2019 to early-2020 and outside of specific events such as national festivals or global events such as a pandemic. Hence, the findings may not reflect how SMEs communicate during adverse socioeconomic conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data collection and analysis methods: This research comprises three sets of data from three different sample units: Facebook netnography of 20 fashion retail SMEs, semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, and a review of 2409 Facebook posts. Given that Bangladesh hosts thousands of fashion retail SMEs, the results produced by reviewing a mere 20 SMEs may not be generalisable across the industry. Besides, qualitative findings based on 12 interviews may also not represent the entire picture of the industry. Additionally, all of the Facebook posts were coded by the researcher himself; thus, the coding accuracy may also be questioned to a certain extent.

Lack of generalisability: As this research only concentred on Bangladeshi SMEs' Facebook communication and consumer engagement, the findings may be limited to only Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication practices and their consumers' behavioural engagement with them.

1.8. Contributions of the Research

This research makes several theoretical, empirical and practical contributions. The following section briefly presents the key theoretical and empirical contributions of this research:

1.8.1. Theoretical contributions

This research makes three theoretical contributions as stated below. Theoretical contributions are detailed in section 7.3.1 of this thesis.

a) Theoretical Contribution One

This research makes a theoretical contribution by reconceptualising the existing three-dimensional salesperson interpersonal communication theory (task orientation, interaction orientation, and self-orientation) in the context of SMEs' Facebook marketing communication. In light of this study's findings, the buyer-seller interactions aspect of the salesperson interpersonal communication theory is modified by adding an additional dimension (mixed orientation). The new reconceptualisation more accurately reflects how Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs communicate with consumers on Facebook.

b) Theoretical Contribution Two

This research identified that richer media not only reduce the ambiguity of the messages but also enhance the effectiveness of the messages in the context of Facebook communication of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. This finding supports Daft and Lengel's (1986) media richness theory in the context of SMEs' Facebook marketing communications and makes contributions to the literature by further restrengthening the media richness theory.

c) Theoretical Contribution Three

This research also makes contribution to the literature by conceptualising a strategic Facebook communication framework for consumer engagement and growth of SMEs (detailed in section 6.6). The newly proposed framework provides a pathway for enhancing the effectiveness of SMEs' social media communication as well as achieving business objectives.

1.8.2. Empirical Contributions

The findings of this research make three empirical contributions to the literature and bridge the existing knowledge gaps. Empirical contributions are further elaborated in section 7.3.2 of this thesis.

a) Identification of the impact of different Facebook communication strategies on consumers engagement in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs

Upon the literature review, it was noticed that no prior study investigated how fashion SMEs' Facebook communication strategies affect the level of Facebook consumer engagement. To fill this knowledge gap, this research investigated the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities and revealed that posts with more than one message orientation attract significantly higher level of consumer engagement than posts with single message orientation. This finding makes empirical contributions to the knowledge by filling an existing knowledge gap.

b) Identification of the difference in consumers engagement levels across different media types in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs

An existing knowledge gap was also observed regarding how the level of fashion retail SMEs' Facebook consumer engagement differs across different media types. To bridge this gap, this research analysed 2409 social media posts of 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and revealed that the richest form of media (i.e., Facebook Live) gathered the highest level of consumer engagement. This finding provides guidance to practitioners regarding the best media type for higher consumer engagement whilst making contributions to the literature.

c) *Identification of factors that motivate Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to adopt Facebook and the challenges SMEs face whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication*

No empirical and comprehensive study was conducted previously to explore what Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs seek to achieve through Facebook communications and what kind of challenges they face whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication. In order to add new insights to the literature, this research qualitatively interviewed 12 owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and revealed SMEs use Facebook for accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues, conducting cost-effective digital marketing, relationship building, increasing brand awareness, engaging in value co-creation, and spreading positive e-WOM. This research also revealed four key challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool, namely an increase in negative feedback, possible theft of intellectual properties, a lack of expert human resources for managing digital contents and an overcrowded virtual marketplace. These findings make empirical contributions to the literature by adding new insights.

1.9. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one highlighted the research background, outlined the research problems, and presented the aim and objectives of this research. This chapter also offered a detailed justification for this study, a concise description of the chosen methodology, and briefly highlighted the contributions of this research along with research scope and limitations.

Chapter Two: Social Media Marketing Communications

A critical review of existing literature is presented in chapter two that critically review the prior studies on marketing communication, social media marketing communication, small and medium-sized businesses, social media consumer engagement, benefits of social media as a communications tool, etc.

Chapter Three: Marketing Communications and Consumer Engagement

Chapter three deals with theoretical aspects of the research and the social media consumer engagement aspect of this research. It reviews several communication theories (e.g., salesperson interpersonal communication theory, media richness theory, uses and gratification theory, and cultivation theory). Finally, this chapter presents the conceptual framework for the research.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

Chapter four of this thesis reviews various methodological viewpoints and provides justifications for the selected research design for the research. This chapter begins with a discussion of philosophical assumptions (e.g., ontological and epistemological) and explains why pragmatism is selected as this research's philosophical stance. This chapter also provides justification for the sampling strategies and criteria for sample selection. Besides, the data collection and analysis process is described in the latter part of this chapter, along with the ethical considerations made during this research.

Chapter Five: Findings

Chapter five presents the research findings. The first part of the chapter presents 14 commonly used Facebook communication practices and four social media communication strategies of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, followed by the findings of statistical analyses on the effectiveness of different communication strategies in terms of enhancing consumer engagement on Facebook. Toward the end of the chapter, the findings of the interviews are presented concerning the benefits and challenges SMEs face when interacting on social media.

Chapter Six: Discussions

Putting the research findings into the broader context and discussing their contributions to the literature, this chapter explores the significance of the findings. First, the key results of this research are highlighted, then these findings are compared and contrasted with the findings of the existing study. Subsequently, findings are interpreted, and contributions are drawn.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Contributions and Recommendations

The seventh chapter summarises the research, illustrates how the objectives were achieved, concludes the thesis, explains the theoretical and empirical contributions of the research, and offers recommendations to the practitioners and policymakers in light of the findings of this

research. Finally, the limitations of this research are highlighted, and suggestions for future researchers are also made.

1.10. Summary of the Chapter

In summary, this chapter provided a brief contextual and theoretical background to the research and outlined the research problems that this research seeks to address. A preliminary review of the literature indicated that there is a limited understanding of how SMEs interact across social media and what are the most effective strategies of social media communications for enhancing the level of consumer engagement for SMEs. Social media offer numerous opportunities for SMEs such as access to the wider market, cost-effective communication, and a digital marketplace, however, for grasping the opportunities enabled by social media, consumer engagement is critical. Indeed, as the level of consumer interactions and engagement increases, so do the opportunities for increasing sales and revenues. This research, therefore, seeks to explore how SMEs interact with their consumers in social media and whether or not the strategies adopted by SMEs are effective in maintaining a high level of consumer engagement by reviewing the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs as a research case. It is expected that this research will uncover insights that will assist social media marketers to formulate effective digital marketing strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement across social media. The next chapter now presents a critical review of the existing literature.

Chapter Two: Social Media Marketing Communications

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the extant literature in relation to marketing communications and its importance, social media marketing communications, social media marketing communication strategies, and Facebook as a channel for marketing communication. As this study is being conducted to investigate common Facebook communication practices and evaluate their effectiveness in engaging consumers by investigating Bangladesh based fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities, this chapter also reviews existing pieces of literature related to social media marketing communications of SMEs and social media strategies of SMEs. In the construction of this chapter, an extensive literature search was conducted by accessing numerous databases such as Business Source Premier, Emerald Journal, Ethos, Google Scholar, Mintel, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis Online, WARC, Wiley Online Library and many governmental and non-governmental publications and websites. Some of the keywords used during the literature search include social media, social media marketing communication, social media business practices, social media communication strategies, SMEs' social media communication, and Facebook communications.

The following format has been used to organise this chapter. Section 2.2 presents the literature findings related to marketing communication, section 2.3 discusses social media marketing communications, section 2.4 briefly describes the channels of social media communication, section 2.5 focuses on the importance of social media marketing communication to the organisation. section 2.6 explores the use of social media communication by fashion retailers, and section 2.7 discusses how SMEs use social media communication. In addition, section 2.8 of this chapter highlights the potential benefits and challenges involving social media communication for SMEs whilst an overview of social media communication strategies is presented in section 2.9, followed by an overall summary of this chapter in section 2.10.

2.2. Marketing Communications

Marketing communications at an organisation entail informing, persuading, and reminding consumers about the products and services they offer, either directly or indirectly (Kotler 2009). As defined by Fill and Jamieson (2014: 12), marketing communication is "a management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences. By understanding an audience's communications environment, organisations seek to develop and present messages for their identified stakeholder groups before evaluating and acting upon the responses. By conveying messages that are of significant value, they encourage audiences to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses." Essentially, marketing communication involves recognising the distinction between the target audience's transactional and relational demands. To satisfy the demands of a range of audiences, marketing communications can be applied in a variety of manners such as one-way, two-way, and trialogue (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014). However, not all audiences seek to form a bond with the organisation; for some, one-way communication is sufficient. According to Fill and Jamieson (2014), brands should develop messages that encourage the target audiences to respond to the organization that they relate to. Fill and Jamieson (2014) suggest these responses could be instantaneous, such as purchasing behaviour or calling consumer service lines, or they can be delayed as data is adapted and processed for future use, despite the information being deleted later, the communication should have stimulated interest and inspired thought about the message. Amin and Priansah (2019) argued that effective marketing communication requires informed reviews of various features of target markets, especially to inform and show how and why the product is used, who the target market is, and where and when the product can be obtained.

Marketing communications play a vital role in an organisation's success. Hasbullah et al. (2018) clarified that marketing communications require reciprocal relationships between marketers and consumers. Marketing communications increase an organisation's awareness of the market and shape the consumers' perceptions. Effective marketing communications allow an organisation to build brand image and equity, increase sales revenue and enhance business performance (Bogan 2014; Amin and Priansah 2019; Schivinski et al. 2021). However, those organisations do not have effective marketing communication strategies in place it can affect their business operations and profitability negatively (Ritz, Wolf and McQuitty 2019). Therefore, as Ntloko (2020) argued, having effective marketing communication strategies in place allows organisations to stand out in the crowded marketplace whilst enabling them to

become more competitive. For marketing communication, firms use numerous channels such as television, print media, social media and the internet. The social media platform is becoming one of the most widely used marketing communication channels. The next section now reviews the literature in relation to social media marketing communications.

2.3.   Social Media Marketing Communication

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61), social media is "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". There are many social media channels that are used for a variety of purposes, for example, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, media sharing sites such as YouTube and Instagram, e-commerce communities such as eBay and Amazon, and blogs and discussion forums such as Reddit and Medium (Valos et al. 2016). Virtual participation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing activities are facilitated by social media (Knoll 2016; Chen, Ji and Men 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018). According to Bowen (2015), social media has a stronger capability for reaching out to people than conventional media (e.g., television, radio stations and newspapers).

Swani and Milne's (2017) social media communication framework (i.e., figure 2.1) provides a clear understanding of how information flows through social media platforms. As Swani and Milne (2017) highlighted, communication flows unidirectionally in social media, hence businesses can disseminate marketing information using specific content strategies; however, it is up to the consumers to decide whether to consume the information or to reject it. In social media marketing communication processes, interactions play essential roles as marketers encode the messages and consumers decode them. Similarly, the consumer can provide instant feedback through the same process.
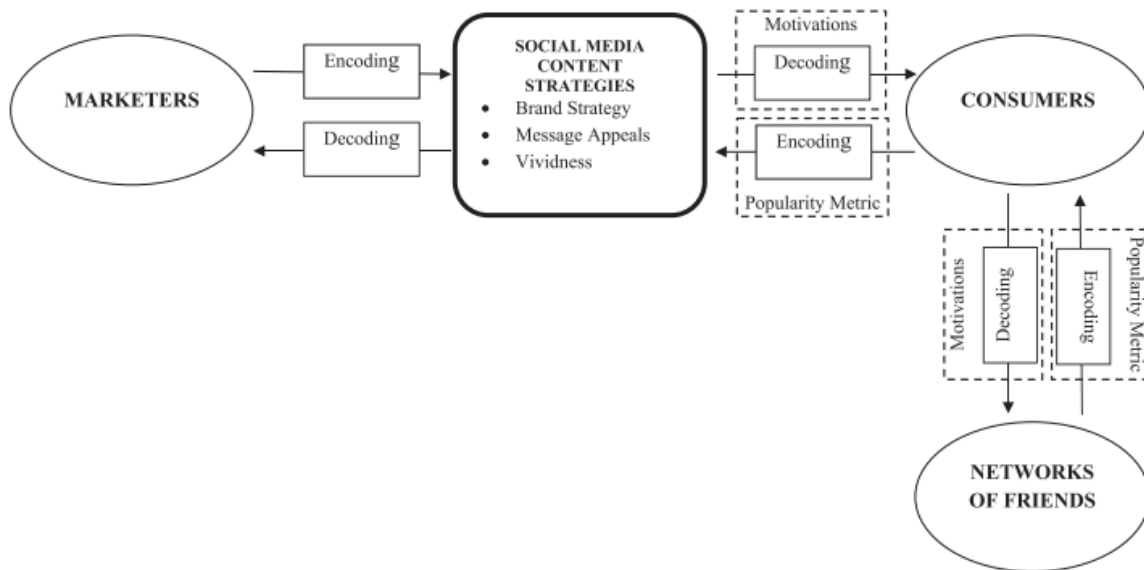
Figure 2-1: Social media communication model

Source: Swani and Milne (2017: 125)

Social media marketing communications differ significantly from traditional marketing communications (Bowen 2015). There are many traditional media outlets, for example, radio, television, direct mail, newspapers, billboards and magazines which typically have one direction of information flow. (Bowen 2015; Valos et al. 2016; Kallier 2017). Social media can be used by businesses for communication and interaction with consumers (Koekemoer 2014; Kallier 2017) at minimum costs whilst being able to monitor consumer feedback regularly (Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015; Momtaz 2019). Digital marketing communications are more cost-effective than traditional marketing communications, making them a more realistic alternative for organisations with limited resources (Patil and Bhakkad 2014; Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015; Momtaz 2019). Marketing communication in the digital era is immediate and easy to track, while in traditional communications, various drafts may need to be prepared before they can be approved for print or broadcast (Nobre and Silva 2014; Kallier 2017). Digital marketing technologies, according to Eid and El-Gohary (2013), may boost marketing performance and communication efficacy when utilised effectively. As this research focuses on exploring how SMEs use social media marketing communication strategies, the subsequent section now details the specific characteristics of social media communication channels.

2.3.1. Characteristics of social media

As far as their characteristics and utility values are concerned, traditional and social media marketing channels differ significantly. A review of the existing literature highlighted five distinctive features of social media marketing channels:

a. Interactivity and individualisation

Most traditional media channels cannot support two-way interaction between consumers and brands. Direct mail and call centres, according to Valos et al. (2016), may have some direct and two-way elements of communication but they are not as technologically advanced and interactive as social media. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) noted, content generation and sharing in social networks may occur entirely inside the organisation such as employees to employees; entirely outside the organization such as consumers to consumers or other external stakeholders; or even cross-organisational boundaries such as consumers to the organisation. Chen, Ji and Men (2020) claimed that interactivity on social media is demonstrated in two ways. The first type, called functional interactivity, is enabled by useful features such as buttons to like and share, links to external sites, and making comments. The other type of interactivity is message-based, known as contingency interactivity which occurs when someone uploads a post on social media in response to an existing post. Social media also provides private channels for communications.

b. Integration of communication and distribution channels

In addition to bringing communication and distribution channels to close together, social media has made it possible for consumers to communicate seamlessly and in a way that was previously impossible (Valos et al. 2016). There are many ways in which social media can impact an organisation's operational areas, for example, advertising, sales, marketing and consumer services (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Rathore and Ilavarasan 2018) and in the new social media environment, organisations that successfully handle the growing complexity of all these business operations may easily outperform others. (Heywood, Hillar and Turnbull 2007; MindTools 2021).

c. Immediacy

Consumer-centric information may be easily gathered and shared through social media monitoring and behavioural tracking. Consumers are additionally empowered by social media since it allows for quick access to information, a faster response to marketing operations, and speedier word-of-mouth information (Chen, Ji and Men 2020). According to Valos et al. (2016), the immediacy and digital nature of social media allow marketers to assess the efficacy of these efforts swiftly and precisely. The 'viral' diffusion of information on social media is an important feature of immediacy, as information may quickly reach a broader audience (Valos *et al.* 2016; Chen, Ji and Men 2020).

d. Information collection

Social media offer new ways of researching consumers. Social media platforms enable marketers to monitor consumer feedback using social media platforms that naturally record the comments of consumers (Brooks et al. 2014; Valos et al. 2016). As a result, social media allows for more informed marketing communications and marketing decisions in general. Moreover, social media communication takes place in an open environment, word-of-mouth is more easily spread to a wide range of people (Ryu and Park 2020). Although such exposure brings both opportunities and challenges for companies, positive word-of-mouth can amplify the scale of impact, allowing third-party endorsement to reach beyond just one individual's network (Rugova and Prenaj 2016; Chen, Ji and Men 2017).

e. Connectedness

"Being social is being connected" (Chen, Ji and Men 2020: 154). Companies try to connect with their stakeholders whilst individuals try to communicate with their family, friends, and professional networks. The connectedness of social media results in the formation of various online ecosystems where individuals spread information to one another (Wood 2016). People naturally tend to trust the information provided to them by their community members, especially when there is no self-interest attached to that information (Habibi, Laroche and Richard 2014). Although such needs existed long before the beginning of social media, technology today has made the trend much more prevalent due to the ease of connecting and exchanging information.

2.4. Channels of Social Media Marketing Communications

Varied social media platforms have different features (Aaltonen et al. 2015), and businesses employ a mix of social media platforms to achieve diverse business goals. For example, a Facebook fan page is mostly used by businesses to communicate with their current and potential consumers interactively (Valos et al. 2016), whilst Twitter is being used to disseminate brief, real-time informative updates (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2014). Similarly, Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) found companies utilise video commercials on their YouTube channels to market their products and services. As this research focuses on exploring the best strategies for social media communications of SMEs, many social media platforms commonly used by SMEs were reviewed. According to a large number of studies (e.g., Tafesse 2015; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; de Vries, Veer, de Vries 2018; Tofesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021) one of the most popular social media channels for organisations to communicate with their consumers is Facebook. Therefore, the section below now reviews Facebook and its features.

2.4.1. Facebook as a Channel of Marketing Communication for SMEs

Facebook gained around 2.91 billion monthly active users globally in the fourth quarter of 2021, maintaining its position as the most popular social networking site (Statista 2022). Tuten and Solomon (2014) suggest that Facebook can be deemed a social utility platform because it combines all four functions of social networking sites: social community, social commerce, social publishing and social entertainment. Facebook also presents huge prospects for businesses as it allows businesses to converse with their current and potential consumers through images, videos, instant messaging, and live communications. Facebook is not only a channel for marketing communication but also provides channels for all other business-related functions such as sales, community, e-WOM, consumer services, channels for direct, interactive and personal communication and is often considered one of the effective social media platforms for businesses (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021). According to Valos et al. (2016), Facebook and other social networking platforms bring the communication and distributions channel closer and integrate all marketing, sales and after-sales services in one place, which

provides a massive opportunity for businesses with limited resources (e.g., SMEs) to have an online presence. However, the ultimate online success depends on businesses' effective use of these tools.

For interaction, connection development, and managing online communities, social media platforms (such as Facebook) are more successful than traditional media channels (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). Chen, Ji and Men (2017) suggested the use of social media is about being social, and the individuals and communities behind the platforms are the driving force. The power of social media comes from its capability to carry the content generated by both organisations and stakeholders and allow different parties of interest to engage and interact. Valos et al. (2016) claimed that social media possess unique characteristics compared to traditional media, and its implementation in a business requires a significant modification of existing traditional marketing communication frameworks.

2.4.2. Justifications for Selecting Facebook

As previously stated, this research takes the Facebook activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to explore their social media marketing communication activities. Social media is an umbrella term used for referring to multiple social networking platforms. Different social media platforms have distinct functionalities for serving the different needs of their consumers (Valos et al. 2016). For example, Twitter is mainly used for delivering a short message, LinkedIn for professional networking, Instagram and Flicker for photo sharing, YouTube for video sharing, Facebook for friends and family networking and story sharing, and TikTok for entertaining video sharing (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2014). Facebook is the most popular social media site with approximately 2.91 billion monthly active users worldwide in the final quarter of 2021 (Statista 2022c), which is far above its competitors such as Twitter, flicker, and Instagram. According to Meta (2022), more than 200 million businesses are using Facebook brand pages to connect with their customers. Similarly, a number of studies across the world have confirmed that Facebook is one of the most effective social media platforms for businesses communications (e.g., Tafesse 2015; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; de

Vries, Veer, de Vries 2018; Tofesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Dolega, Rowe and Branagan 2021).

In Bangladesh, the most commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. In Bangladesh, 93.05% of the adult population use Facebook, 3.99% use YouTube, 1.8% use LinkedIn, 0.62% use Pinterest, 0.54% use Twitter, and 0.39% use Instagram (Global Stats 2022). Being the most popular social media platform, Facebook also has the highest number of users with approximately 44.7 million Bangladeshi social media users actively using Facebook (Statista 2022b), which is far above its competitors. Businesses and consumers in Bangladesh overwhelmingly prefer Facebook compared to other social media platforms (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Tabassum 2019). Therefore, Facebook, the most visited social networking site in Bangladesh (Tabassum 2019; Sultan and Sharmin 2020), was considered most appropriate for this research. Tuten and Solomon (2014) suggested that Facebook can be considered a social utility platform because it combines all four functions of social networking sites: social community, social publishing, social commerce, and social entertainment. (Valos et al. 2016), Facebook brings the communications and distributions channels closer and integrates all marketing, sales, and after-sales services in one place, which provides a substantial opportunity for businesses with limited resources (e.g., SMEs) to have an online presence and access to the wider market, which further justifies the selection of Facebook for this research.

2.5. Importance of Social Media Marketing Communications to Organisations

The development of social media has substantially changed the communication environment and how organisations connect with their consumers (Kannan and Alice 2017). Consumers' communication patterns are changing as a result of the increasing influence of apps like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others in their life (Hutter et al. 2013). Consumers are spending an increasing amount of time on social networking sites, with a greater percentage of conversations taking place in these spaces (Kanuri, Chen and Sridhar 2018). In terms of marketing communication, the introduction of social media has altered the marketer and

consumer interface, allowed consumers to communicate directly with businesses in both personalised and real-time conversations (Dolan et al. 2019).

Mangold and Faulds (2009), in one of the early academic studies on social media, argued that social media platforms give chances to build brands, demonstrate leadership behaviours, expand resources, reach new audiences, and locate new sources of ideas. Similarly, several other studies have shown that organisations are already using social networks for value generation in marketing, recruiting, product innovation, and consumer services (Hoffman and Fodor 2010; Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Scheafer 2012; Womba and Carter 2014). According to McCann and Barlow (2015), social media can be used in a variety of ways to improve operations and enhance a company's profile through effective communication, including increasing exposure by amplifying WOM effects, getting closer to consumers and building relationships with existing consumers, attracting new consumers, promoting a company's products/services, improving brand awareness, and increasing web site traffic. Rathore and Ilavarasan (2018), on the other hand, cautioned that social media platforms will not be effective unless they are utilised creatively, with a structured approach and day-to-day effort toward building brand confidence and loyal users' community collaborations, as well as establishing online communities. Businesses use social media for marketing communication and at every stage of the consumer journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016): prepurchase, purchase and post-purchase. Social media simplifies the pre-purchase stage marketing communications by helping to reach out to potential consumers; sales at the purchase stage; and consumer services, relationship management and community building at the post-purchase stage. In addition, social media also spreads e-WOM communication between consumers (Valos et al. 2016).

Consumer engagement is a critical aspect of social media communication (Schivinski et al. 2019). When consumers interact with brands on social media, the brand's performance on several metrics, such as brand recognition and buy intent, improves dramatically (Colicev et al. 2018; Yoon et al. 2018). As a result, one of the key goals of modern social media marketers is to stimulate and cultivate consumer engagement (Kohli, Suri, and Kapoor 2015; Schivinski et al. 2019). Brands are increasingly encouraging and eliciting consumer interaction with their social media posts since this sort of interaction is seen as a vital component of online marketing strategy and performance (Pansari and Kumar 2017; Schivinski et al. 2019).

Despite the ability of social media marketing communications to maintain and develop consumer connections, resulting in increased sales and revenues, social media marketing is plagued with challenges (Tafesse and Wien 2018; Deng et al. 2020). As organic reach and user engagement across social media are declining, spending vast organisational resources on social media marketing may no longer be well justified (Tafesse and Wien 2018). According to Lee, Hosanagar and Nair (2018), despite social media consumer engagement yielding brands numerous benefits, only approximately 1% of a brand's Facebook followers engage with its postings on average. Even among the most well-known Facebook brand pages, according to Deng et al. (2020), the fan interaction rate is only 4.3 per cent. However, as Deng et al. (2020) stated that Facebook consumer engagement may be further increased if brands adopt active consumer engagement strategies that specifically focus on enhancing consumer engagement and they recommended further studies for enhancing social media consumer engagement.

2.6. Use of Social Media Communications by Fashion Retailers

The fashion retailing sector is fiercely competitive, and firms must constantly change their marketing and promotion strategies to stay ahead of the competition in the online age (Loureiro, Maximiano and Panchapakesan 2018; Loureiro, Serra and Guerreiro 2019). Social media related studies in the fashion industry have heavily focused on large international and luxury fashion brands. For example, the influence of a luxury brand's social media marketing efforts on consumer engagement was investigated using big data by Liu, Shin, and Burns (2021). They investigated 3.78 million tweets from 15 top luxury brands over 60 months and the influence of a luxury brand's social media activities on consumer engagement with brand-related social media activities in terms of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and personalisation. According to their research, focusing on the interactivity, entertainment, and trendiness parts of a luxury brand's social media marketing activities significantly increases consumer engagement, whereas focusing on the customisation component does not. This is a substantial finding given the size of data and timeframe considered in the research. However, the research of Liu, Shin and Burns (2021) fails to demonstrate the pattern of change that occurred in the social media marketing approach over the period of research and the findings were only limited to Twitter.

Loureiro, Serra and Guerreiro (2019) explored the online communication of six international fashion brands by taking their Instagram activities as a case. They discovered three primary aspects that determine online success using a netnography approach: the brand's engagement with consumers, the continual and consistent updating of photographs and videos with relevant material, and the employment of celebrities to promote the brand's products and campaigns. However, their findings may not apply to other platforms such as Facebook as the user demographics of different social media platforms tend to be different (Chen, Ji and Men 2020). Furthermore, Lee, Hur, and Watkins (2018) examined the impact of social media image visual complexity on consumers' brand perceptions in the context of luxury fashion brands and they found that in a classical style luxury brand context, respondents' perception of luxury was higher for simple and plain images than for more complex ones when they were familiar with a classical style luxury brand. According to Lee, Hur, and Watkins (2018), marketers should choose the visual complexity of social media photos they employ based on consumers' level of knowledge of the brand to boost favourable impressions of luxury brands. However, the findings of Lee, Hur and Watkins (2018) may not be highly relevant to SMEs as SMEs have different characteristics than big brands (Sedalo, Boateng and Kosiba 2022).

In addition, Escobar-Rodrguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) used a sample of 46 worldwide prominent fashion firms to undertake a content analysis of 2,326 Facebook posts. They discovered that while the amount of a Facebook audience is proportional to the size of a business, small retailers had greater levels of fan engagement and activity on their Facebook pages. Furthermore, Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) found that marketing, photo albums, and videos make up the bulk of the content on the Facebook pages of top fashion retailers. However, their findings may lack credibility because they deviated from their chosen theoretical perspectives (i.e., WOM and brand community) and failed to focus on the implications of these two essential elements of social media, e-WOM and brand community. Moreover, they focused on the leading international fashion brands, hence their findings may not be relevant in the case of SME fashion retailers.

Wang et al. (2019) conducted a study in Bangladesh to investigate the overall performance of social media marketing to see if it is successful in creating brand consciousness (e.g., brand preference, brand attachment, brand association, and brand loyalty) among online consumers, which could lead to buying commitment. A total of 564 Bangladeshi consumers were surveyed as part of the study to see how sensitive they were to social media motivational posts. They

chose Bangladesh's internet shopping market, a growing sector that has only been around for a decade.

Wang et al. (2019) focused solely on the local fashion industry as their target market, employing a holistic approach to social media marketing that included customisation, engagement, entertainment, e-WOM and trendiness. Wang et al. (2019) found significant evidence that Bangladeshi fashion retailers' social media marketing activities are successful in developing consumer connection and preference. However, they also revealed that the social media marketing efforts of Bangladeshi fashion retailers fail to create committed buyers. This was primarily due to the lack of loyalty initiatives that drove consumers to become one-time buyers. While Wang et al. (2019) indicated that Bangladeshi fashion retailers' marketing efforts are successful in building consumer attachments and preferences, it was not clear how much of the samples consisted of SMEs' consumers. Moreover, they only surveyed consumers and did not examine how fashion retailers used social media activities to engage consumers. Since this research seeks to explore how fashion retail SMEs in emerging markets such as Bangladesh use social media for engaging consumers, the following section now elaborates upon the fashion industry in the emerging market and Bangladesh.

2.6.1. Fashion Industry in the Emerging Markets

Although there appears to be no officially recognised definition of an emerging market, according to the IMF World Economic Outlook, 39 countries are classified as "advanced economies" based on characteristics such as high per capita income, exports of a variety of goods and services, and increased integration into the world financial system. The remaining nations are categorised as having economies that are "emerging or developing." According to IMF (2021), an economy generally progresses from a low-income economy to an underdeveloped, pre-industrial, and industrial economy, with increasing quality of life during each advancement. Essentially, an emerging market economy is one that is growing and becoming increasingly integrated with international markets.

As one of the world's fastest-growing economies over the past ten years, Bangladesh has an impressive track record of growth and development, according to the World Bank (2022) and IMF (2022). This growth has been fuelled by a demographic dividend, robust ready-made garment (RMG) exports, remittances, and stable macroeconomic conditions. Bangladesh is one

of the emerging economies among 40 emerging economies globally (IMF 2022). Bangladesh achieved lower middle-income status in 2015, and by 2031, it is anticipated that it would reach the upper middle-income level (World Bank 2022). Based on factors including macroeconomic stability, political maturity, the openness of trade and investment policies, and the standard of education, the international investment bank Goldman Sachs compiled a list of the nations with the fastest expanding economies. Goldman Sachs' evaluation labelled Bangladesh as one of the 11 fastest-growing economies in the world (Bader, Alonaizi and Gadhoum 2017). In the twenty-first century, it is predicted that the economies of these 11 nations would grow to be the largest in the world. However, the World Bank (2022) report cautions that in order for Bangladesh to achieve upper middle-income status, it will need to create jobs and employment opportunities, increase human capital and a skilled labour force, improve infrastructure, and create a policy environment that attracts private investments. It will also need to diversify its exports beyond the RMG sector and strengthen its financial sector.

About 2% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) or $3,000 billion is contributed by the fashion industry globally (Adeola, Moradeyo, Muogboh and Adisa 2021). According to McKinsey and Company's 2016 fashion report, the apparel industry is expanding quickly in emerging nations. The report stated that the growth rate of the fashion industry in developing nations is expected to reach 5 percent by 2025 from 3 percent. According to McKinsey's State of Fashion 2018 report, more than half of garment and footwear sales will take place outside of Europe and North America in the near future, meaning that the west will no longer be the worldwide stronghold for fashion sales. The growth will primarily occur in emerging economies across Asia–Pacific, Latin America, and other regions. According to Euromonitor International's forecast for 2022, emerging economies will continue to have the most promising prospects for growth. Despite the fact that developed markets are predicted to perform significantly better than emerging markets, emerging markets are projected to account for 74% of absolute value growth from 2016 to 2021, and apparel and footwear in emerging markets were only worth USD133 million less in 2021 than in developed markets.

2.6.1.1. *Fashion Industry in Bangladesh*

Retailing is a traditional trade in Bangladesh and like in other developing countries of the world, the retail industry in Bangladesh is dominated by small players (Ali and Faroque 2017). The retail sector also plays a significant role in the Bangladeshi economy as it contributed USD 60,432.46 million from 2021- June 2022 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2022). Bangladesh

has a large and growing population of around 168 million as of July 2022 (IMF 2022), resulting in an increasing need for clothing; the local demand for clothing items is growing by approximately 10 percent annually (Chowdhury and Akter 2018). The demand for clothing as well as the population is expected to continue to rise in Bangladesh over the medium term (Bader, Alonaizi and Gadhoum 2017), presenting more opportunities to fashion retailers. Bangladesh is also on track to become a middle-income country within the next decade (McKinsey and Company 2022; World Bank 2022); the country's average per capita income was $2227 in the fiscal year 2020-2021, up from $2064 in the previous year (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2022). As consumers' per capita income rises, their disposable income is also expected to increase, eventually resulting in increased expenditure on fashion goods. Munir et al. (2015) categorised the Bangladeshi population based on their income and identified 20% Bangladeshi population as the middle class, this category is expected to grow to 25% by 2025 and reach 33% by 2030. Additionally, Bangladesh is also one of the top producers of ready-made garment (RMG) products and export RMG products worldwide (Islam, Rahman and Hossain 2014). Due to easy access to locally produced RMG products and increasing demand in the local market, the number of fashion retail businesses that operate in the Bangladeshi market is also constantly increasing.

With the economies becoming more advanced, the markets are becomingly increasingly digital (Pew 2018; Myovella, Karacuka, Haucap 2020). Businesses, including firms within the fashion industry, are using modern technologies (e.g., social media) in their business processes (McKinsey and Company 2018). The emergence and adoption of social media have offered several benefits to consumers such as accessibility, variety of options, comparability and competitive prices (Dwivedi et al. 2020). Social media is widely adopted by Bangladeshi fashion retailers (both large brands and SMEs) in order to keep up with the rapidly transforming business landscape as well as to create further business opportunities (Dwivedi et al. 2020). SMEs in Bangladesh, similar to many other SMEs in other emerging economies, are resource-constrained hence they appear to be using social media to acquire and serve consumers in a cost-efficient manner. A starting point for this research was the anticipation that an investigation into the social media marketing communications of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs is expected to reveal how businesses in the fiercely competitive industries of emerging economies are using Facebook marketing communications in their business operations whilst also revealing whether or not their Facebook activities are effective for engaging consumers

and thereby resulting in increased revenues and growth. It was thought that a research study on Bangladesh might yield numerous valuable insights for many other emerging economies that are also transitioning from developing economies to developed economies.

2.7. Social Media marketing communications of SMEs

In order for SMEs to succeed in the marketplace, they should be able to communicate information about the firm, the products they sell, the quality, the attributes and the advantages of these products (Kallier 2017). According to Cacciolatti and Fearne (2013), marketing communications add value to consumers by giving them reasons to buy a product from a company, resulting in increased revenue for the company. Despite the fact that marketing is seen as a critical component of an SME's success, past research has revealed that SMEs lack resources and marketing communication abilities (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Franco et al. 2014). According to studies, there is frequently a dearth of marketing knowledge and financial resources to undertake marketing communication initiatives in SMEs (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Mpofu and Chigwende 2013). SMEs have to compete with larger companies with far more resources at their disposal to promote their goods and services. (Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015). The company's environment, the business's abilities and resources, and the owner's qualities all affect SMEs' marketing communication efforts. (Kallier 2017). The owners usually make decisions within SMEs, for example, the owner's instinct is used to manage the marketing decision of SMEs (Seyyedamiri and Faghih 2015). The marketing communication operations of SMEs are less formal than those of bigger corporations, and SMEs are more responsive to the external business environment rather than having a proactive marketing plan (Seyyedamiri and Faghih 2015). In reality, as previously noted, SMEs' marketing tactics, including marketing communications programmes, are more likely to be random, informal, unstructured, spontaneous, and reactive, as well as adhere to the industrial environment, than in a large company (Gabrielli and Balboni 2010; Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012).

Factors such as operating environment, competition, consumer behaviour changes influence SMEs to adopt social media technologies (McCann and Barlow 2015). Changes in consumers' behaviour, and the digitalisation of the economy, competitors moving online pressure SMEs to extend their operations online. The digitalisation of business operation requires the acquisition

of technological infrastructure, skills, and other resources, which are most challenging for SMEs. Still, social media provides user-friendly platforms for businesses, including SMEs, to digitalise their operations and integrated communication, sales and distributions channels (Valos et al. 2016). Ritz et al. (2019) identified that SMEs are influenced to utilise social media marketing by factors such as perceived economic advantage, sense of control, self-improvement, simplicity of use, and perceived usefulness. The way consumers access information about products and services is changing according to Devereux, Grimmer, and Grimmer (2020), the relevance of traditional marketing methods is rapidly becoming obsolete in the modern marketplace. As a result, SMEs must swiftly react to market developments and employ the most effective marketing tactics to fulfil consumers' expectations.

A review of the extant literature reveals that SMEs use social media for a variety of purposes. Chokpitakkul and Anantachart (2020) researched Thai SMEs' social media communication methods from the standpoint of brand communication by thematically analysing 3,147 Facebook posts from eight award-winning Thai SMEs between 2015 and 2017. They discovered that SMEs utilise brand positioning to communicate brand identity and brand personality through greetings and wishes, tips and techniques, situational content, good deeds, cheer-up quotes, thank-you letters, and speaking character. Marketing mix; contest, gift, games; consumer survey; special discount for followers; and employment announcement were among the brand-related marketing activities employed by SMEs. Thai SMEs post their award, consumer reviews, press recognition, co-branding, and celebrity endorsement in the secondary association. Chokpitakkul and Anantachart (2020) pointed out that social media is a significant part of SMEs' brand communications, however, they did not provide recommendations on the most effective social media marketing strategies. Furthermore, they only examined the brand communication of award-winning SMEs from various industries, so their findings may not be representative of SMEs in general.

Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti (2016) researched six Italian and Spanish fashion retail SMEs and summarised that to achieve the social media marketing objectives (e.g., awareness, e-WOM, viral advertising, maximising social media presence, interacting with consumers and increasing sales), SMEs should post promotional and sales-related activities, share influencers and public figures endorsement, thank consumers for using their products, conduct regular product promotions, invite consumer for online and offline events, and crowdsource ideas through contest and competition. Similarly, Ashworth (2016) did qualitative

research in the UK to investigate how online, e-SME develop relationships with consumers through social media and argued that effective relationship management contributes substantially towards the survival of SMEs. Although the findings of Ananda et al. (2016) and Ashworth (2016) are valuable, they may not be relevant to developing nations like Bangladesh since SMEs in developed countries function differently from those in developing countries (Rahayu and Day 2017).

In the precise context of Bangladesh, Salam, Shams and Hoque (2019) investigated social media marketing strategies of SMEs and suggested that using relational marketing through social media can build relationships with consumers and boost performance and sustainability. They argued that relationship marketing is a dynamic marketing strategy that SMEs should adopt. Consumer buying decisions are not exclusively based on the quality and price of the products but also the firm's consumer relationship. They suggested that in the current global economy, relational marketing is the lifeblood to acquire and retain consumers. Hence, by conducting a structured survey of 384 owners in Bangladesh and employing cluster random sampling, Salam, Shams, and Hoque (2019) explored the impacts of relational marketing on SMEs' performance. Their study found that relational strategy has a significant effect on Bangladeshi SMEs' performance, and social media significantly moderate the impact of relational marketing on SMEs' performance in Bangladesh. The findings of Salam, Shams, and Hoque (2019) indeed provided new insights about Bangladeshi SMEs and their social media usage, however, they explored the use of social media by SMEs across multiple industries from a relational perspective only. Therefore, the wider applications of social media in SME operations may have been overlooked and their findings may not represent SMEs' social media activities in the fashion retail industry.

However, an extensive review of the literature suggests that no study was previously conducted in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to explore their Facebook communication practices and to evaluate their effectiveness for consumer engagement. This research, therefore, seeks to fill this knowledge gap in the literature by investigating Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. As this research also seeks to make strategic recommendations to SMEs regarding effective Facebook communication strategies for increasing consumer engagement and ultimately increasing revenues and enhancing business performance, the following section now reviews the existing literature related to potential benefits of social media to SMEs along with potential challenges.

2.8. Benefits and Challenges of Social Media Marketing Communications to SMEs

2.8.1. Benefits of Social Media Marketing Communications to SMEs

A review of the existing literature revealed numerous potential benefits of social media communications for SMEs as presented below:

a. Exposure to the broader market

SMEs' operations are usually limited to their local geographical boundaries due to the smaller business size and limited resources. Social media can allow SMEs to access the broader market beyond their local boundary. Social media has become a standard communication channel for businesses in the past decade (Cawsey and Rowley 2016; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016). Facebook and other social media platforms provide a channel for SMEs to connect and interact with the consumer directly (Berthon et al. 2012) and SMEs can create brand awareness through social media (Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016 Mumtaz 2019), enabling them to maintain consumer loyalty (Rugova and Prenaj 2016). In addition, social media provide exponential growth opportunities to businesses through viral dissemination of information over the internet, referred to as viral marketing (Musa et al. 2016).

b. Creation and management of brand image

Social media presence can help SMEs not only to create the desired brand image but also to maintain it for the long term. Creating and maintaining a positive brand image can significantly impact brand reputations and influence consumers' attitudes toward the brand (Musa et al. 2016). Consumers regard social media as more trustworthy sources of information than the traditional marketing communications tools, which are often controlled by large corporations, as a result, businesses have boosted their social media marketing costs and are anticipated to continue to do so (Dolan et al. 2017; Malesev and Cherry 2021; Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden 2011). SMEs can develop the desired brand image in consumers ' minds by

having effective social media strategies and regular management of communication content (Malesev and Cherry 2021).

c. Reduced consumer acquisition and retention costs

Small businesses with limited resources may now attract new consumers at cheaper rates thanks to social media, giving them a chance to compete with larger corporations (Nickell, Rollins and Hellman 2013). Acquiring new consumers via social media is cheaper than through traditional advertising (Rugova and Prenaj 2016). Using social media platforms do not require extensive IT infrastructure or technical skills due to social media's user-friendly user interfaces (Gehl 2015). Businesses are increasingly using social media as a way to connect and interact with their current and potential consumers (Stelzner 2013). Besides, the usage of social media effectively establishes a channel for maintaining consumer connections and enhancing consumer retention (Maecker 2016; Dwivedi et al. 2021; Li 2021). In addition, social media provide opportunities to communicate in mass with existing consumers, potentially saving large consumer relationship management costs to SMEs (Rathore and Ilavarasan 2018).

d. Community building

According to Kusumasondjaja (2018), having queries responded by fans or followers is one of the substantial advantages businesses can have from social media. According to Donal et al. (2017), social media sites are a perfect platform for product and brand advocacy, consumer-led content development, and consumer co-created product innovations, and they can also help SMEs construct online social media communities. Business interest in social media is driven by a successful brand presence in social media, the size of the audience, and the amount of engagement accessible in those social media channels (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). In particular, research reveals that social media has revolutionised the tools and techniques corporations use to communicate, promote their brand, and establish brand communities for business-to-consumer (B2C) businesses (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009). WOM communication has been shifted to social media platforms because of the internet technology and these could provide several opportunities to SMEs for not only consumer acquisition but also to develop online forums where a user's query is answered by another user.

e. Co-creation and innovation

Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) describe how social media allows internet users to produce and share content and the users of the internet produce a variety of content that includes brands and products, making companies less important in communicating brands. In the open-source branding environment of social media, brand owners must release control and adopt strategies to deal with the conflicts that come with co-creating a brand, with ramifications for established branding truths (Christodoulides 2009; Fournier and Avery 2011). Therefore, social media could be a valuable tool for SMEs to co-create their brand by building an online brand community (Hajli et al. 2017). Because social media allows users to create and share information, consumers frequently share their thoughts on the items and companies they have purchased. In most cases, such reviews provide opportunities for businesses to modify their offerings. Moreover, social media creates an opportunity for innovative idea generation, and SMEs can take it as an opportunity to co-create new products and redesign existing products after considering consumers' feedback.

f. Improving performance and profitability

By gaining access to knowledge of consumers' needs and expectations, the use of social media can enhance business performance and improve product quality (Schultz and Peltier 2013). Since SMEs have limited resources available for research and development (R&D), they could utilise social media for understanding consumer experiences related to their products and services and make necessary changes to improve them. Several studies indicate a positive relationship with firm turnover and growth with social media usage (e.g., Gecti and Dastan 2013; Paniagua and Sapena 2014; Du and Jiang 2015; Lee et al. 2015). According to research conducted by Paniagua and Sapena (2014) in Spain, the number of "following" and "likes" has a favourable impact on a company's share value. Similarly, Du and Jiang (2015) found that using social media is linked to higher stock prices and asset returns. According to Lee et al. (2015), SMEs that trust social media networks have seen favourable development.

g. Access to consumer data

Social media platforms provide competitive advantages to organisations by providing insights into consumer demographics and making marketing campaigns effective (Rahman, Zanuddin and Suberamanian 2016; Rana and Kumar 2016). Celine (2012) claimed that one of the most

significant advantages of advertising on social media is the ability to target consumers based on a range of characteristics such as age, gender, geographic area, hobbies, and a variety of other details, as a result, this information may be utilised to reach the company's target market. Targeting the right audiences makes marketing cost-effective (Rugova and Prenaj 2016) and significantly increases sales and profitability, and these provide SMEs with opportunities to develop effective marketing campaigns.

In summary, social media can empower SMEs to boost their communication with consumers by opening a channel for personal selling, e-WOM, interactive marketing, direct marketing, affordable advertising, public relation, sales promotion, event and experience marketing. Personal selling marketing through social media leads to increased interaction with consumers, open direct communication channels with consumers, and increased e-WOM marketing, which helps build trust and reputation. Moreover, SMEs can use social media for representation through sales promotion and advertisement, public relations, engage with the consumer by interacting with them and conduct market research through social listening.

2.8.2. Challenges of Social Media Communications for SMEs

A review of the literature identified numerous challenges SMEs face whilst communicating with the consumer via social media. SMEs face challenges in the process of social media adoption as well as regular and effective management of content. In this research, it is considered relevant to examine the challenges SMEs face in the process of social media communication because strategic recommendations being made to SMEs would not be highly effective and practical if the challenges SMEs face are not well understood.

a. Resource limitations

Resource limitation is one of the main challenges SMEs faces during social media adoption and use (Wamba and Carter 2015). This is because SMEs are generally small organisations and have limited financial and human resources available to them. Prior empirical studies that implemented the Resources Bases View framework indicated higher social media use requires extra spending (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown 2013; Wang and Kim 2017). Nonetheless, Castronovo and Hung (2012) argued that social media is an alternative marketing channel, and it has opened new opportunities for firms that are lacking resources, knowledge and skills. However, although using the social media platform on smaller scales may not directly occur

extra financial costs to firms, its effective use indeed requires extra time and human resources, which subsequently leads to added financial costs to the organisation. In addition, SMEs usually do not usually have specialised skills, and it can be a challenge to them for succeeding in highly competitive marketplaces (Toucher and Rutherford 2009; Eggers et al. 2017). Therefore, resource limitation is considered a challenge SMEs face during the adoption and management of social media communications.

b. Lack of effective ROI measurement metric

Another important barrier to SMEs adopting social media communications is the lack of an appropriate return on investment (ROI) metric (Öztamur and Karakadılar 2014; Rugova and Prenaj 2016). Although ROI metrics for SMEs was developed by McCann and Barlow (2015), its comprehension and adoption may not be straightforward for SMEs managers and owners. The cost of social media use can be easily measurable, but the return on investment is hard to calculate (Schaupp and Bélanger 2014). Thus, SMEs cannot determine whether or not investing in social media communications yields any positive returns (Cawsey and Rowley 2016). Although, social media may not be limited to tangible returns as social media may give the opportunity to acquire new consumers, create connections, raise brand recognition, and promote the brand online, in addition to other tangible benefits (Michaelidou et al. 2011). Some researchers state that social media objectives should be brand communication, consumer engagement, brand awareness and building a brand image (Dessart et al. 2015; Coursaris et al. 2016). Dutot and Bergeron (2016) also believe that key performance indicators should not be restricted to the amount of money spent by consumers; instead, businesses should assess their consumers' lifetime value. Nonetheless, SMEs appear to be hesitant about investing in social media communications in absence of effective ROI measurement metrics, hence it is considered as one of the challenges SMEs face during social media adoption.

c. Regular Content Management

One of the issues that SMEs encounter when utilising social media for marketing communications is maintaining regular content production (Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016). Content creativity is a critical success factor in social media communication (Rugova and Prenaj 2016), and to stay on the consumers' radar, SMEs need to produce new content regularly. Doing so helps SMEs to involve in a continuous relationship with their

consumers. Eggers et al. (2017) found that, compared to large firms, SMEs are less active in terms of new content creation and management. Effective content management or brand message management is crucial in social media as purchase intention is positively correlated with brand messaging content (Coursaris et al. 2016). However, producing new content regularly requires creativity and time of employees or owners of the SMEs, and it could be a daunting task for SME owners that have limited time and creativity.

d. Complaint handling difficulties

Consumers now have more power than firms, which makes it more challenging to handle complaints on social media (Cawsey and Rowley 2016; Wang and Kim 2017), because an unsatisfied consumer can spread negative word of mouth (WOM) across multiple social media sites and rapidly tarnish the reputation of a business, especially if a company is an SME – as they have limited time and resources to address individual complaints immediately. Rugova and Prenaj (2016) argued that ineffective and irresponsible use of social media can be fatal for an organisation. SMEs should design their communication strategy and train their employees to use social media responsibly before engaging in communication to ensure that social media channels are utilised in a productive way for them (Schaupp and Bélanger 2014). If a complaint is not addressed on time, it can go viral and damage the company's e-reputation substantially (Rugova and Prenaj 2016). However, this requires skills and resources, which SMEs generally lack. Thus, complaint handling difficulties is identified as one of the challenges SMEs faces in the process of management of social media communications.

In general, given the nature of SMEs, they face difficulties during both social media adoption and management. Initially, they are not highly motivated to adopt social media as a channel of marketing communications as they tend to be unclear about the financial benefits it brings to them. They continue to confront difficulties after embracing social media because they may lack the resources and knowledge to successfully manage social media operations in a way that generates optimal results. The next section of this chapter now reviews social media communication strategies to understand how firms use social media and whether or not they apply to SMEs.

2.9. Social Media Communication Strategies

Although various ways in which organisations use social media were identified in the literature, no one-fits-all strategy was observed. This is because different firms have different characteristics, and they need individual and custom-tailored strategies to meet their specific needs. A review of the existing literature revealed several conceptualisations regarding how organisations 'should' use social media as a tool for marketing communication. A number of studies have recommended a strategic approach to social media use and planning (e.g., Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Keegan and Rowley 2017; Parsons and Lepkowska-White 2018).

McCann and Barlow (2015) conducted a study to assess social media return on investment (ROI) in the context of Scottish SMEs, proposed a three-stage framework for social media ROI, as well as guidelines for SMEs on how to quantify social media marketing ROI. The framework includes three stages, namely planning, implementation and evaluation as shown in figure 2.2.
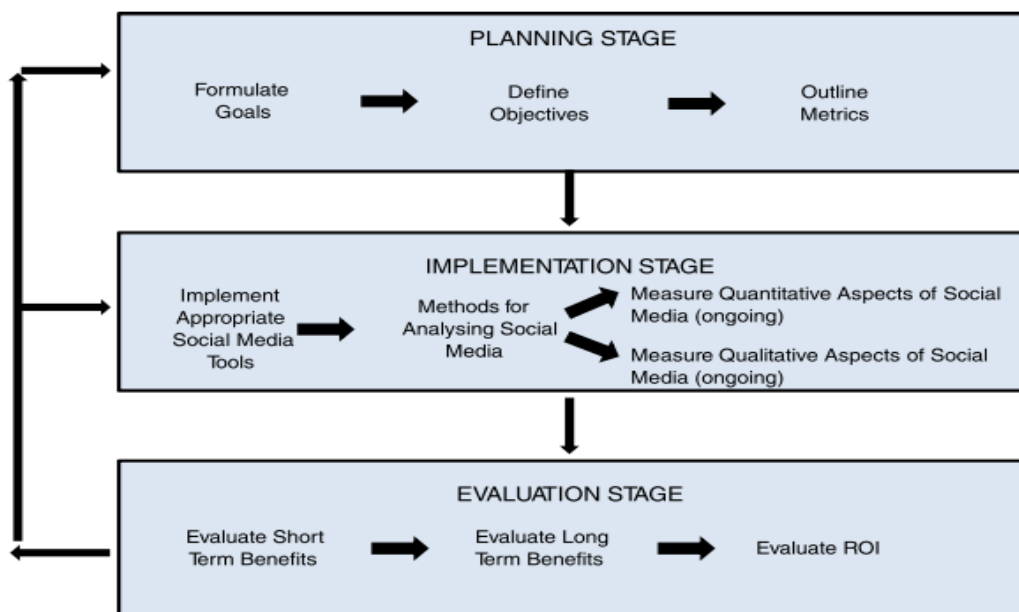
Figure 2-2: Framework for measuring social media ROI

Source: McCann and Barlow (2015:284)

According to McCann and Barlow (2015), SMEs should set goals, define objectives, and provide appropriate metrics for monitoring the impact of social media in the planning stage. Implementing relevant social media tools, techniques for analysing social media, and continual

monitoring of social media's quantitative and qualitative aspects are all part of the second stage. The third step involves an assessment of both short- and long-term advantages, as well as a longer-term ROI. McCann and Barlow (2015: 284) concluded that "social media demands a long-term investment, and the social media is all about 'people' and 'relationships', and organisations should be prepared to participate in dialogue and open conversation and spend time developing effective relationships with consumers to ensure positive outcomes".

However, McCann and Barlow's (2015) three-stage framework was criticised by Keegan and Rowley (2017) due to being too generic, lacking quantification, and having difficulties in measuring outcomes. To overcome the limitations of McCann and Barlow's (2015) three-stage framework, Keegan and Rowley (2017) presented a six-step social media marketing evaluation framework: specify evaluation objectives, identify key performance indicators (KPIs), identify metrics, collect data, analyse data, generate reports, and make management decisions. They also provided a formal definition for evaluating social media marketing communication, "social media marketing evaluation is a strategic management process that commences with the identification of social media marketing objectives, proceeds to the selection of appropriate KPIs and metrics, involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, to populate metrics and generate insights, which are distilled into report format and concludes with management decision making that influences future campaign objectives and strategies" (Keegan and Rowley 2017: 25).

McCann and Barlow's (2015) framework is useful for strategic planning and implementing social media within businesses, but its practical applications may be limited, especially for SMEs (Kallier 2017). This is because SMEs' have limited resources and expertise to make such plans (Kallier 2017). Additionally, most of these frameworks focused only on the strategic aspects of social media implementation. Therefore, there is a lack of clarity about SMEs' day-to-day social media practices and their effectiveness. In addition, Keegan and Rowley's (2017) six-stage social media marketing evaluation framework was developed based on qualitative research that interviewed social media experts, hence it may not be widely generalisable.

A qualitative case comparison research conducted by Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy (2014) between the UK football sector and pure-play SME retailers to analyse their strategic approaches in social media strategy adoption led to the identification of four foci of social

media marketing: strategic marketing, marketing communication, brand and community, plus monitoring and evaluation, as shown in figure 2.3.

Figure 2-3: Strategic Considerations for SM Communication

Source: Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy (2014: 116)

Strategy marketing, according to Rowley, Ashworth, and McCarthy (2014), refers to an organisation's overall strategic approach to its social media marketing operations, as characterised by the balance between push and hard-sell vs pull and relationship marketing. Marketing communications refers to the strategic plan applied to marketing communications via different social media channels, including messages, contents, and procedures used to drive consumer dialogues and involvement; they classified these as sales-oriented vs. market-oriented. Brand and Community Focus is concerned with the strategic approach to brand development, control, and ownership, as well as the attitude toward community participation with the brand, as measured by in-house control vs co-creation and community integration. Monitoring and evaluation is the final step of the model, and it refers to the strategic approach to monitoring and evaluating tactics of social media, which is defined in terms of quantitative KPIs vs qualitative inquiry-based e-dialogue. Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy (2014) found big brands such as the football sector adopted hard-sell strategic marketing strategy, sales-oriented communication strategy, in-house control of brand and community and highly depend on quantitative KPIs. In contrast, SMEs pure-play fashion retailers adopted a relational pull

marketing strategy, market-oriented communication, brand co-creation and community building and evaluated the effectiveness qualitatively. Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy's (2014) comparative study makes some significant contribution to strategic social media marketing communication literature as they shed light on the distinct differences in marketing strategies of big brands and smaller companies. However, their findings may have little applicability in the context of Bangladeshi SMEs given that SMEs in the developed countries operate differently from those in the developing (Rahayu and Day 2017).

In addition to the conceptualisations of McCann and Barlow (2015) and Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy (2014), numerous other conceptualisations and social media marketing strategies are available in the literature. Kwok and Yu (2013) reported that Facebook posts describing a company's activities are more popular than those highlighting sales or marketing. Finding the correct content to publish the messages in social media is critical because consumers may reject some marketer-generated content, as highly promotional messages may cause consumers to cease following a company online (Fox and Longart 2016). As a result, enabling a company to be accessible to consumer participation via social media, fostering dialogue and recommendation may be an important component of managing a business's social media presence and influence (McCann and Barlow 2015; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). Nonetheless, as identified by de Vries, Veer, and de Vries (2018), direct marketing to one's social media followers may not automatically result in an increase in sales. Instead, it may hinder future consumer involvement by giving the impression that firms are solely engaged in one-way marketing or transactional relationships (Fox and Longart 2016), firms should instead adopt a two-way interactive approach to build a relationship (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2014).

Several studies suggest that by leveraging social media effectively, businesses can establish productive relationships and reshape and alter the nature of communications, thus transforming their relationships with stakeholders (de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2014; Tench and Jones 2015). In order to accomplish this, brands should focus on building brand communities and engaging their followers rather than simply counting followers (Kusumasondjaja 2018). As a result, concentrating on developing fewer but tighter ties with followers on social media makes it an effective platform for relationship marketing (de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). Considering a large number of consumers actively interact with organisations via social media at any given point, it seems prudent to establish an efficient and effective habit of maintaining an organisation's social media profile. However, it's crucial

to be cautious when choosing content for online publishing because being too accessible to consumers via social media might lead to increased negative comments about the organisation (de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). Nevertheless, Parsons and Lepkowska-White (2018) argue that firms should not be afraid of engaging with consumers as dialogues help to build the relationship, enhance consumers engagement, acquire new consumers. Two-way communications help to personalise the consumer experience and increase feedback (Parsons and Lepkowska-White 2018; Levy and Gvili 2015). Despite numerous studies on social media marketing strategies being available in the literature, the number of studies in the context of SMEs' social media marketing strategies is limited and no previous study was conducted to explore the best Facebook communication practices for fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh. This research, therefore, seeks to make a contribution to the knowledge by exploring how fashion retail SMEs communicate on social media and thereby evaluating whether the current strategies of SMEs are effective for engaging consumers in an attempt to identify the most effective social media communication strategies for consumer engagement.

Although social media have only been around for 18 years, they have unquestionably transformed the lives of individuals and companies around the world. With the increased popularity of social media, the number of academic studies conducted on them has increased too. However, the existing research mainly appears to focus on developed economies. SMEs in emerging and developed economies operate under different social, economic, and political circumstances, hence it is considered relevant to distinguish how SMEs in emerging economies differ from developed countries. The next section now discusses in detail the classification of SMEs in the West and in Bangladesh along with the unique challenges faced by SMEs in Bangladesh.

2.10. Classification of SMEs in Bangladesh Vs in the West

SMEs around the world make substantial contributions to the economies by supporting economic growth, innovation and employment (Kim, Lee and Lee 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Wamba and Carter 2015; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Kumar 2017; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). SMEs represent about 90% of businesses globally, creating more than 50% of employment and contributing up to 40% of national income (GDP) in emerging economies (World Bank 2020). A vibrant and growing SME sector is a critical factor for growth in both

developed and developing countries (Kumar 2017; Aga, Francis and Meza 2015). The overall economic contributions of SMEs to GDP differ in developing and developed countries. Aga, Francis and Meza (2015) note that SMEs make almost 50% contribution to GDP in developed countries whilst only accounting for 10% contribution to GDP in developing countries.

According to OECD (2017), SMEs are defined differently in different nations' legal frameworks because a firm's size is correlated with the size of the domestic economy. For example, according to the European Commission (2016), micro-enterprises are those that have fewer than 10 employees and yearly revenue of up to EUR 2 million. Small businesses are those that have less than 50 employees and yearly revenue of less than EUR 10 million. Medium-sized enterprises are defined as enterprises that employ fewer than 250 people and have an annual turnover below EUR 50 million. Whereas the Bangladeshi government classifies SMEs in the service industry as firms that employ 16 to 50 people and have assets value BDT 10 lakh to 2 crores [1 Euro = 97.18 BDT rate on 1st August 2022] excluding the fixed assets as small enterprises, and firms that employ 51 to 120 workers and have investments worth BDT 2 crore to 30 crores excluding the fixed assets as medium enterprises. In general, it can be noted that the sizes of SMEs are smaller in Bangladesh compared to the UK and other European countries. Most of the South Asian SMEs are very small (Kumar 2017) and this may be because firms that are commonly considered micro-enterprises are considered SMEs in South Asian countries such as Bangladesh.

2.10.1. Distinctive challenges faced by SMEs in Bangladesh

Although the vast majority of challenges faced by SMEs around the world, in general, are comparable, some of the challenges faced by SMEs in emerging economies such as Bangladesh are unique. A review of the literature suggested that there are three key areas in which SMEs in Bangladesh are disproportionality disadvantaged than SMEs in developed markets: availability of financial support (Alauddin and Chowdhury 2015; Hoque and Awang 2016; Hoque et al. 2016; Hoque et al. 2017; Rahman 2019; Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019), availability of managerial experiences or skilled workforce (Hussain and Shah 2015; Hoque and Awang 2016; Hoque et al. 2018; Rahman 2019; Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019), and availability of expert knowledge about the market and the industry (Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019).

Seventy percent of smaller firms lack access to credit in the emerging market (Sultan 2019). Similar to other emerging markets, Bangladeshi SMEs face obstacles in relation to accessing credit (Alauddin and Chowdhury 2015; Hoque and Awang 2016; Hoque et al. 2016; Hoque et al. 2017; Rahman 2019; Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019). This is because SMEs in Bangladesh are rarely financed by banks, which is only around 10% (Hoque et al. 2017; Andalib and Halim 2019). Banks appear to be unwilling to support in terms of providing loans, thus SMEs often source their finance from microfinance institutions with higher interest rates (Hoque et al. 2017). This increases their operating costs, thereby making them less competitive in the market. On the other hand, SMEs in developed markets such as the UK, the USA and the EU appear to have easier access to finance; SMEs can borrow from different high street Banks or access government funding through different schemes (BIS 2013). However, the loan application success rate is still higher for large organisations in the European markets (ECB 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was prevalent how governments in developed economies were willing to support SMEs. For example, the UK government provided support to SMEs through various schemes: SME business grants, business disruptions loans and bounce bank loans (GOV.UK 2020). Such lack of access to necessary finance for SMEs in the emerging markets is affecting them disproportionally as not only has it made them less competitive but also affected their research and development capabilities.

SMEs in Bangladesh also do not have access to an experienced and skilled workforce (Hussain and Shah 2015; Hoque and Awang 2016; Hoque et al. 2018; Rahman 2019; Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019). The efficient functioning of entrepreneurs' SMEs is also hindered by a lack of managerial experience, training, and business skills (Rahman 2019). According to Andalib and Halim (2019), business owners must be able to interact with their staff, and they must possess the knowledge and abilities to inspire them and put them in the best positions to do their tasks. Moreover, due to financial constraints, SMEs are often not able to hire experienced managers or employees. In addition, there is limited availability of an experienced workforce in the labour markets in Bangladesh, which creates unique challenges for Bangladeshi SMEs.

Another challenge Bangladeshi SMEs face is they lack access to expert knowledge regarding the market and the industry (Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019). Emerging economies such as Bangladesh have a limited number of market and industry experts available for supporting SMEs compared to other developed markets (Sultan 2019). For example, developed

countries like the UK offers research support for business development, especially for SMEs' development (BIS 2020). Moreover, SMEs in the UK and other developed countries have access to market data and expert advice whenever they need them. For the purpose of accelerating economic growth and achieving more inclusive development, it is critical to give SMEs the tools they need to adapt, prosper in an open environment, and take a more active role in digital transformation (OECD 2017).

The revolution of the internet and social media first started in the western developed markets, hence, the businesses in these developed economies now become advanced users of digital technologies. SMEs in the western markets used various social media platforms in their organisations to enhance their businesses process and achieve their objectives (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Carter 2014; Connolly 2015; Shabgahi 2015; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016). However, the digitalisation process in Bangladesh started just over five to seven years ago and still this market is in the growing stage to become an advanced user of technologies. Hence, it was thought that exploring this newly emerging digital market might bring out new insights into their social communication practices.

2.11. Chapter Summary

This chapter of the thesis reviewed the extant literature related to marketing communication and social media marketing communication in order to investigate how prior studies conceptualised social media marketing communications. A review of existing literature revealed that there are several social media communication frameworks already available but most of these frameworks either focused on the strategic implementation or strategic communication, primarily in the context of developed countries. However, little is known about the social media communication practices of SMEs, particularly in the context of Bangladesh. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how SMEs in developing countries such as Bangladesh operate on social media and what kind of social media communication strategies, they use by examining SMEs in the fashion retail industry of Bangladesh as a case. The following chapter now presents a critical review of the existing literature on marketing communication theories and social media consumer engagement and highlights the theoretical underpinning of this research.

Chapter Three: Marketing Communications and Consumer Engagement

3.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to select the underpinning theories for this research upon critically reviewing existing theories related to marketing communications and consumer engagement. In this chapter, several theories (e.g., interpersonal communication theory, media richness theory, uses and gratification theory and cultivation theory) that are potentially relevant for social media marketing of fashion retail SMEs are critically reviewed and their applicability to the fashion retail sector is evaluated. Although there are many communication theories in the literature, most of these theories have been developed in light of traditional media such as radio, television, and print media. Some of these theories have also been adopted by researchers in the field of social media marketing. The primary communication theories that prior social media studies have applied are uses and gratification theory (UGT) (adopted by Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack 2018; Lee and Ma 2012; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017), cultivation theory (adopted by Ho-Shen and Yen 2016), media richness theory (adopted by D'Urso and Rains 2008; Ogara, Koh and Prybutok 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tseng et al. 2017) and salesperson interpersonal communication theory (adopted by Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Upon critically reviewing the existing theories and evaluating whether they can be used in the context of fashion retail SMEs' social media marketing, a decision was made to adopt interpersonal communication theory and media richness theory in this research.

This chapter is organised in the following manner. The theoretical underpinning of this research is presented in section 3.2 by reviewing four communication theories and providing justifications for selecting interpersonal salesperson communication theory and media richness theory in this research. A critical review of the social media consumer engagement literature is presented in section 3.3 of this chapter and the method of measuring consumer engagement by considering behavioural engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares is detailed. Section 3.4 highlights the knowledge gaps, which is followed by the conceptual framework of this research in section 3.5. Finally, section 3.6 presents a summary of this chapter.

3.2. Theoretical Underpinnings of the Research

This section of the chapter reviews four communication theories namely salesperson interpersonal communication theory, media richness theory, uses and gratification theory and cultivation theory and provides justifications for selecting media richness and interpersonal communication theory as the theoretical underpinning of this research.

3.2.1. Interpersonal Communication Theory

Sheth (1976) established salesperson interpersonal communication theory (SICT) as a complete marketing paradigm that includes buyer-seller interactions in both household and corporate marketing. In other words, it explains how buyers and sellers engage at retail shops for consumer items, as well as between sales representatives and formal organisation purchasing agents. It's also broad enough to cover all sorts of buyer-seller contacts, including interpersonal (face-to-face), written, and even telecommunication. SICT was first applied to categorise social media brand contents by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) to analyse corporate brands' Facebook communication for generating consumer interactions. Later on, Kusumasondjaja (2018) applied SICT to categorise social media post contents of leading Indonesian brands from three different social media platforms. Figure 3.1 shows the buyer-seller interaction aspect of SICT as conceptualised by Sheth (1976).

BUYER		SELLER	
Content of Communication	**Style of Communication**	**Content of Communication**	**Style of Communication**
1. Functional Utility 2. Social-Organisational Utility 3. Situational Utility 4. Emotional Utility 5. Curiosity Utility	1. Task Oriented Style 2. Interaction Oriented Style 3. Self Oriented Style	1. Functional Utility 2. Social-Organisational Utility 3. Situational Utility 4. Emotional Utility 5. Curiosity Utility	1. Task Oriented Style 2. Interaction Oriented Style 3. Self Oriented Style

Figure 3-1: Buyer-seller interaction aspect of SICT

Source: Sheth (1976)

In its development process, SICT has purposefully avoided extrapolating any well-known interpersonal communication theory from the behavioural sciences (Sheth 1976). Instead, an attempt is made to conceptualise the topic from a management standpoint, using as many theories and hypotheses from behavioural sciences as appear appropriate to give insights into why and how certain buyer-seller interactions work to both sides' satisfaction while others do not (Sheth 1976). SICT's central hypothesis is that whether a certain buyer-seller interaction will succeed or not is a consequence of two separate aspects of interaction (Sheth 1976). The first component is communication content, which represents the substantive features of both parties' goals. It comprises recommending, providing, marketing, or negotiating a set of product-specific utilities and their associated expectations.

While Sheth (1976) has focused only on the dimensions of product-specific utilities, it is necessary to state here that the seller's and buyer's expectations for a certain product or service frequently do not align, resulting in the transaction failing to be completed properly and satisfactorily. The 'types' of orientations of communication are the second determinants of buyer-seller contact. It indicates the structure, routine, or etiquette that the consumer and seller use in their interactions (Sheth 1976; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Sheth (1976) suggested that the buyer's and seller's preferences and normative expectations about the interaction process are reflected in the interaction style. Sheth (1976) explained it further that much of the hunt for the supersalesman is focused on determining the manner of highly effective salespeople's interactions in the context of organisational marketing. The process of interacting between a consumer and a seller is considered as a transaction with many impacts or implications. The buyer-seller contact is thought to serve any of the following five tasks, similar to the influence of advertising (Sheth 1976):

a. Become more aware of one another's expectations for the product or service.
b. Remind each other of previous successful transactions and the results of their acts.
c. Encourage each other's behaviour when it comes to selling the product or service.
d. Intensify expectations in order to anticipate each other's behavioural acts.
e. Try to persuade each other to adjust their expectations.

Under the second dimension of communication, Sheth (1976) proposed a framework for salesperson interpersonal communication orientation: task-orientation, interaction-orientation, and self-orientation. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, only two academic studies (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015 and Kusumasondjaja 2018) have adopted SICT to categorise

and analyse social media communication. Compared to traditional one-way advertising theories, salesperson interpersonal communication theory supports two-ways interaction, which is one of the fundamental principles of social media communication and thus applicable in the social media communication context. Prior applications of the theory (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018) further attest to the suitability of the SICT in a social media communication study. Originally SICT was developed in the context of real-life face-to-face buyer-seller interaction in 1976, and it was later adopted by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja (2018) in their social media studies. Unlike one-directional theories of communication, SICT allows two-directional interactions and appears more applicable in the social media context. Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja (2018) studies condsidered each social media post only contain one type of orientation. However, due to technological advancement, multiple messages can be delivered through a single social media post (Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018); for instance, video posts and Facebook live videos may contain multiple orientations. Therefore, SICT may need some modifications to fully capture how firms interact with consumers in social media.

3.2.2. Media Richness Theory

Daft and Lengel (1984) media richness theory (MRT), which is based on information processing theory, is one of the most extensively used theories in the marketing communication literature. MRT, according to D'Urso and Rains (2008), is intended to enhance organisational information flow by requiring managers to follow channel selection methods to make the most efficient use of media for communication. Rich media is more capable of decreasing ambiguity than lean media, according to MRT. Communication channels have a set of purposes and qualities that impact their capacity to transmit information (Daft and Lengel 1986; Tseng et al. 2017). As a result, MRT is concerned with a communication channel's capacity to transmit messages carrying a large amount of data. Media richness comprises of four dimensions: immediacy, language variety, multiple cues and a confidential source. Immediacy refers to the ability to communicate quickly, language variety refers to the ability to organise information succinctly to improve understandability, multiple cues refer to the ability to send multiple signals, and confidentiality refers to the ability to communicate personal feelings and emotions on a confidential basis (Iodhia 2012 and Tseng et al. 2017).
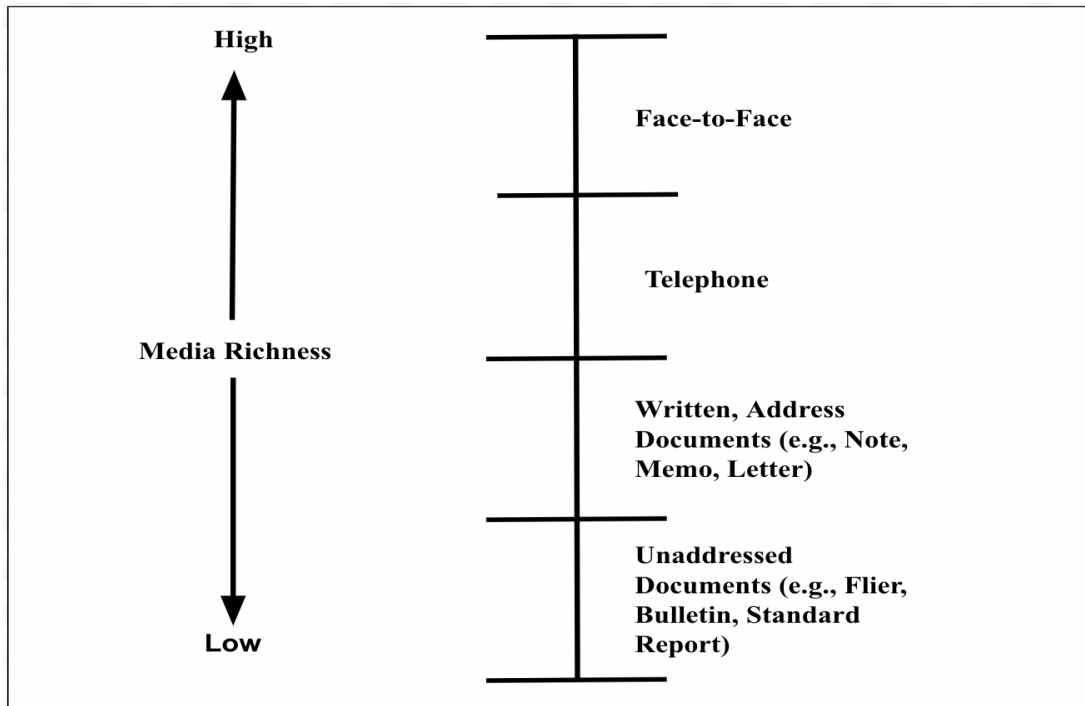
Figure 3-2: Media Richness Theory

Source: Daft, Lengel and Trevino (1987)

Media richness is the transmission process of information richness (Badger, Kaminsky and Behrend 2014). Face-to-face (visual), telephone (audio), personal written (letters, memos), formal written (bulletins, papers), and numeric formal (computer output) media are some of the features that influence information richness (Vickery et al. 2004). Face-to-face communication is the richest communication medium, according to the four aspects of the media richness hypothesis, since it may offer feedback; various useful cues include body language, natural expression, and voice inflexions. The individually written paper, on the other hand, is the leanest medium since it does not receive a quick response (Lan and Sie 2010). Richer media, according to Dennis and Kinney (1998), allow users to communicate more quickly and give a better means to grasp ambiguous signals, resulting in higher performance on equivocal tasks. Rather than selecting media, MRT is used to assess the effectiveness of media consumption under various scenarios.

MRT has been modified following the emergence and widespread adoption of electronic media. Because externally recordable and computer processable memory aspects have now become a fundamental component of modern communication, Iodhia (2012) has expanded Sproull's (1991) work on MRT. A medium's ability to address several audiences is referred to

as its multiple addressability. The attribute of being externally recordable emphasises that a medium should be able to offer a record of the communication process. Electronic components, such as search and analysis tools, can be used in the communication process using computer processable memory.

The notion of media richness has been applied to a variety of domains. Lee, Kozar, and Larsen (2009) combined media richness theory, flow theory, and the technology acceptance model to see if they could explain e-learning technology adoption. Media richness self-disclosure was adopted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as a factor for defining social media. According to Li et al. (2012), media richness is an important aspect that influences the consumer experience. Moreover, Chen (2016) highlights that modern information and communication technologies are a critical benefit of enabling concurrency, which refers to technologies to facilitate interaction. Some other studies have applied media richness theory to justify the richness of email (Lee, Kozar and Larsen 2009) and instant mobile messaging (MIM) as communication media (Ogara, Koh and Prybutok 2014).

In addition, MRT has also been extensively adopted in social media research. Researchers have focused on some elements of media richness to examine the impact on consumer engagement in social media. For instance, a study by Tafesse (2015) examined the content strategies in Facebook and analysed the effect of content vividness and content types on the consumer's response and found that vividness and content types have a positive impact on consumers response. Luarn, Lin and Chiu (2015) examined the influence of vividness and interactivity on Facebook consumers engagement, and findings also suggested that vividness has a significant impact on Facebook consumer engagement. Both Tafesse (2015) and Luarn, Lin and Chiu (2015) examined the social media activities of large organisations and there are not enough considerations about the applicability of MRT in the context of SMEs' social media communication. Experimental communication research in news media channels suggested that images substantially affect opinions and behaviour more than texts. Another study by Zailskaitė-Jakštė et al. (2017) in social media analysed the effects of colours on the popularity of visual brand-related posts. Their study suggested that black, grey, and brown are often used in more popular brand content images. While Kusumasondjaja (2018) stated that a sufficient level of richness is suspected to impact consumer responses toward social media posts and calls for further investigation into this standpoint. Although many studies analysed the media richness effect in the social media communication context, most of them investigated large

firms (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Luarn, Lin and Chiu 2015; Zailskaitė-Jakštė et al. 2017). Hence, there is a limited understanding of the impacts of media richness on consumer engagement in the context of SMEs' social media communication. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse SMEs' social communication to assess the effect of media richness on consumer engagement.

3.2.3. Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory was developed in 1960s by Gerbner, is one of the three most often recognised ideas in the field of mass communication (Morgan and Shanahan 2010). This theory was first proposed to explain why those who watch a lot of television have a distorted perspective of reality. Their perception of reality begins to be shaped by what they see on television rather than what is happening in the actual world (Dahl, 2018). Even if television shows are regarded as fictitious, according to Bandura (2009), the cultivation effects persist. Cultivation theory, according to Morgan and Shanahan (2010), is more important today than it was previously, suggesting that overall media consumption has increased considerably. Consuming material has never been simpler than it is now, due to widespread use of social media. Cultivation effects have also been reported in virtual worlds and online gaming environment (Williams 2006). As a result, they are likely to apply to other forms of media in the same way that they would to conventional media.
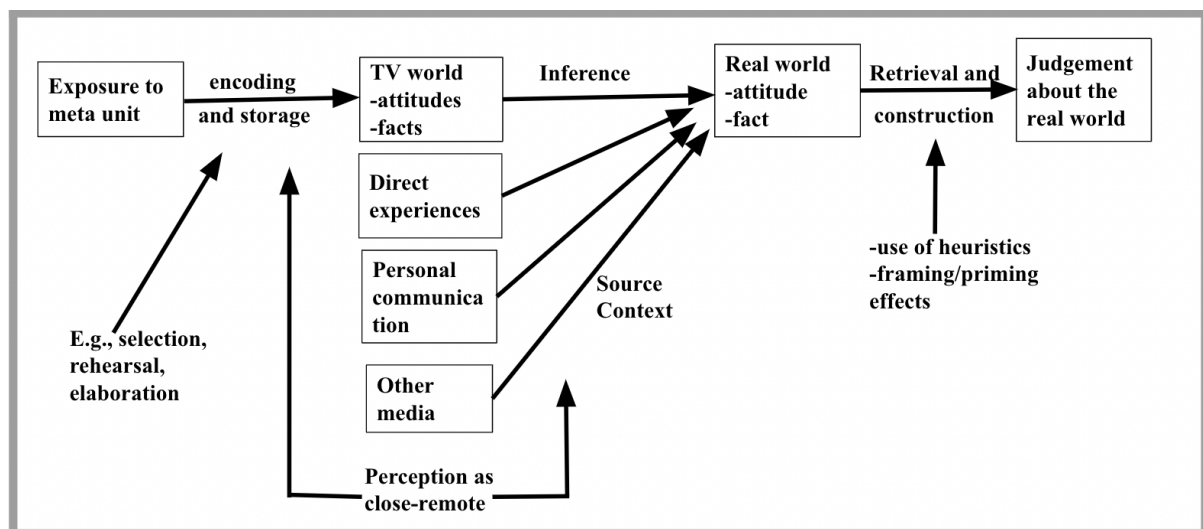
Figure 3-3: Cultivation Theory

Source: (Gerbner 1960)

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However, Ho-Shen and Yen (2016) examined the role of cultivation in social media branding and trust. Their findings suggest that there is a small cultivation effect on social media and brand trust because social media allows two-way communication, and sometimes it creates negative comments about brands when an individual is being exposed to more negative comments due to a higher level of social media use; it eventually may create a negative perception about brands. According to Chong et al. (2012), there are two sorts of cultivation effects in media consumption: 'first-order' and 'second-order' impacts. The first-order effects are related to immediate sensory alterations, whereas the second-order effects are more subtle and are related to a person's beliefs and values. First-order effects are more widely researched, and generally more extensive, and second-order effects are less well examined (Shrum et al. 2011). However, research demonstrates that first-order and second-order effects are not necessarily connected, and that they are two distinct psychological notions (Hawkins and Pingree 1982). According to Dahl (2018), first-order effects are the outcome of reasonably factual information being retrieved from memory and second-order impacts are the outcome of present values and judgments being updated as a result of media exposure, which is a slow and gradual process. These judgements, as well as the progressive adoption or updating of evaluations, are made more often because they happen naturally, such as while viewing an advertisement or reading a status update.

One of the critical principles behind cultivation theory is repeated exposure over time. Despite the substantial evidence linking media exposure to behavioural or belief changes, Dahl (2018) argues that the utility of media exposure in commercial advertising contexts is restricted due to the high frequency of exposure required. A meta-analysis of prior studies revealed that the effects are relatively minor (Morgan, Shanahan and Signorelli 2009). It's important to remember, though, that even a minor influence can have major implications when multiplied. Dahl (2018) further argues that when customers follow brands or interact with firms on social media networks, the communications they receive from the brands are more likely to be recurrent and repeated over time, which is a requirement for cultivation effects to occur. However, cultivation theory was initially developed to assess how crime and violent programmes affect viewers' perceptions, which change viewers' perceptions. In the context in which cultivation theory was conceptualised, the dissemination of information was one-way, and the viewer communities could rarely engage in critical discussions like they can do in social media. As a result, the impacts of cultivation in the context of social media marketing communications may vary.

3.2.4. Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratification theory (UGT) is also one of the most adopted theories by social media communication researchers (adopted by Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack 2018; Bae 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Gao and Feng 2016; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017). This theory was initially developed by Katz (1959) in the context of traditional mass media communication, and eventually, it is being used to examine internet usage (Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017). This theory has emerged from the criticism of popular agenda-setting theory, the active audience being one of the key assumptions of UGT. Where media consumption serves a specific purpose, audiences choose the media that best satisfy their needs (Quan-Haase and Young 2010). In essence, UGT suggests that individuals seek gratification for their needs or wants when using specific media channels. Several studies have used UGT theoretical frame from consumers' perspective in social media research to identify consumers' needs and gratifications (e.g., Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack 2018; Bae 2018; Karnik et al. 2013). Others have used the UGT framework from a brand communication perspective, which can engage consumers to their social media content (Dolan et al. 2019; Gao and Feng 2016; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017).
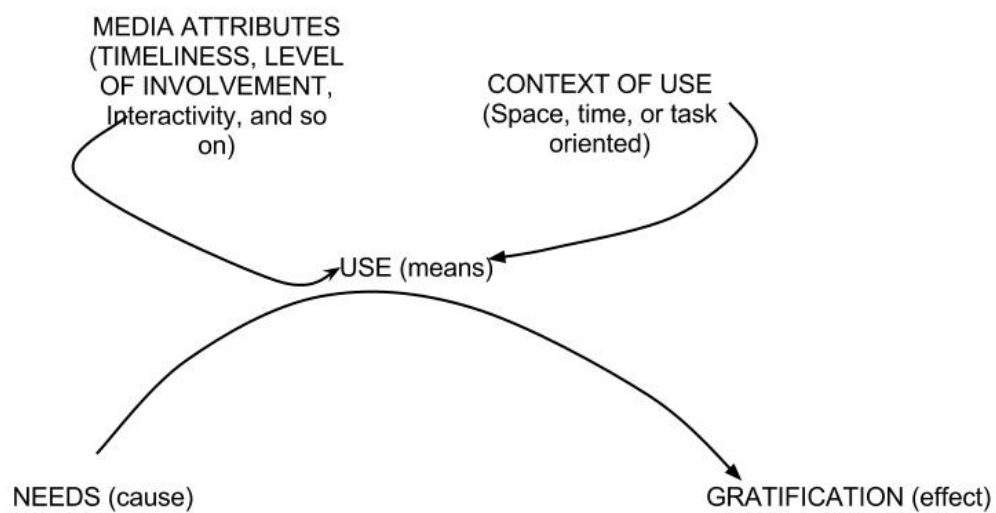
Figure 3-4: Uses and Gratification Theory

Source: Katz (1959)

Figure 3.4 explains how the uses and gratification theory functions. In contrast to other media effect theories like the cultivation theory and agenda setting theory that focus on "what does media do to people", the UGT concentrates on "what do people do with media?" in the particular context of media usage and media features (Katz 1959; Menon 2022). According to the UGT, the audience is the product consumer, and media contents are readily available products. The key questions UGT answers are "why do people use media and what do they use them for" The UGT explains how people purposefully select different media types to meet specific needs such as improving knowledge, relaxation, social relationships, and entertainment (Menon and Meghana 2021). The UGT professes that audiences are free to pick a certain medium depending on its attributes to satisfy their specific needs, as they play an active role in the media selection process. According to the UGT, it is the responsibility of the audience to select, interpret, and incorporate media into their own life in order to obtain gratification.

The main distinction between the UGT method and traditional media impacts research (e.g., cultivation theory) is that in the former, audiences actively use media to meet their needs, whereas, in the latter, audiences are treated as passive receivers on whom mass media can have direct influence (Lee and Ma 2012; Rubin 2009). According to Dunne, Lawlor, and Rowley (2010), the UGT viewpoint may assist to explain the role of active users' motives, which includes consumer choice of new media, reasons for using the internet and social networks, engagement in online communities, and content production for discussion boards.

Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack's (2018) analysis indicates two strands of research in the UGT. The first strand investigates interpersonal and individual requirements on social media in a manner comparable to that of a previously published UGT framework. Several studies have found that social contact, knowledge, and amusement are the most significant requirements to satisfy when utilising social networking sites (Brandtzaeg and Heim 2011; Quan-Haase and Young 2010; Rohm, Kaltcheva and Milne 2013). The second strand arose relatively recently as businesses expanded their social media presence. Consumers' demands while interacting with brands in a business situation are the focus of this strand. Research of this strand explores how consumers behave concerning their social media use (Gao and Feng 2016). Individuals seek marketing material that interests them and meets their requirements as firms establish their social media presences, which is the polar opposite of how "pull"

marketing methods function (Heinonen 2011). UGT is sometimes viewed as a natural theoretical lens to analyse social media exposure and behaviour because of its emphasis on interaction and capacity to serve mass, interpersonal, and commercial communication (e.g., Phua, Jin and Kim 2017).

Furthermore, UGT has been used in developing media decision-making since it may assist in measuring client stimulations of media consumption and access (Jun and Lee 2007). The knowledge of users' gratifications can drive and govern interactions between users and brands on social media. Green and Peloza (2014) claimed that it can also pose challenges to the brand marketers to match their message content to the gratification consumers seek from social media. Understanding what sorts of gratifications social media users desire is crucial for marketers, according to Gao and Feng (2016). They want to direct consumers with appropriate content to ensure they have engaged actively through these channels. Effective social media involvement may promote sales and raise brand recognition, according to Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017). Bae (2018) applied UGT to explore the discrepancy between gratification obtained and gratification hunted from social media sites and identified that it has a favourable effect on consumer satisfaction and social media retention. It is clear from the above discussion that UGT is a consumer-centric theory and would be suitable for researchers trying to explore consumers' motivation for social media use, but not as useful for a researcher trying to explore consumer engagement from brand perspectives.

3.2.5. The Theoretical Standpoint of this Research

Several earlier studies in the field of social media communication have classified media orientations using the frameworks of traditional advertising and traditional mass media communication theoretical lenses (e.g., Labrecque 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Deng et al. 2020), but the distinctive characteristics of social media as an interactive platform have received little attention. Compared to UGT and cultivation theory, interpersonal communication theory is more relevant for categorising and analysing SMEs' Facebook communication strategies for several reasons. Firstly, one of the main goals of seller-buyer interactions is to establish strong, long-term relationships, which is also one of the main goals of social media marketers (Evans 2012; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015). Secondly, In a social media context, there are two-way exchanges between sellers and buyers, which the interpersonal communication theory addresses as well (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015;

Kusumasondjaja 2018). Consumers may connect with SMEs' Facebook sites by posting questions and receiving replies about products and services, similar to how they interact with salespeople in retail stores by asking inquiries about things. Consumers may engage with the brand through these one-to-one conversations on social media (Labrecque 2014). Thirdly, similar to how each salesman has three separate orientations (task, interaction, and self), additional research in the social media context have found that the same three orientations exist in the social media context (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Therefore, this research adopts a salesman's interpersonal communication theory for categorising and analysing SMEs' Facebook communication strategies. However, some recent studies also noted that there can be multiple message appeals in a single social media post (Tafesse and Wien 2018; Kusumasondjaja 2018); for example, live streaming in social media usually contains more than one type of message appeal. Therefore, this research proposes a reconceptualising of the buyer-seller interactions aspect of SICT by adding a new dimension 'mixed-orientation' to the pre-existing three-dimensional of SICT. In order to enhance the applicability of SICT in social media contexts, this research will follow the following conceptualisation (table 3.1). The proposed reconceptualisation aligns with the recommendations of Tafesse and Wien (2018) and Kusumasondjaja (2018) and is expected to more accurately reflect the social media communication strategies of SMEs.

Table 3-1: Post categorization framework for this research

Orientations	Definition and Post Appeals
Task orientation	Persuasive statements or graphics relevant to the brand's product, selling, or marketing activities are included in posts (e.g., Generating revenues). **Message appeals:** Without invoking specific emotions, messages stating facts or stressing practical benefits for utilising the brand, such as comfort, convenience, quality, dependability, efficiency, or durability.
Interaction orientation	Personal words or quotations, greetings on national or festive day celebrations, publishing of brand's consumers' images or videos, requests for involvement in conversation, questions and answers, or interactive reaction (i.e., enhancing consumer engagement). **Message appeals:** Messages that emphasise and evoke emotions such as happiness, sadness, love, romance, sensuality, caring for others, shame, or terror without properly expressing facts or the product's practical merits.
Self-orientation	News, information, or a narrative about the firm or its goods, a corporate-sponsored event, programme, or campaign, or a photo or video of an employee, management, or staff member. **Message appeals:** Thought leadership or showing industry knowledge, product expertise of salesperson (i.e., Increasing brand awareness)
Mixed orientation	Posts that contain two or more orientations **Message appeals**: Posts that emphasise and evoke emotions while explaining facts and product practical benefits. (Consumer Engagement and Revenues)

Sources: (Sheth 1976; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018)

It is expected that the adoption of the above framework will enhance the applicability of Sheth's (1976) SICT by extending it and making it applicable in social media research. In the current research, the adoption of the above framework will enable a more accurate and richer categorisation of how fashion retail SMEs communicate with their followers. The researcher will also be able to comprehend the best social media communication strategies for higher consumer engagement.

Upon categorising communication orientations and their effectiveness in terms of achieving greater consumer engagement, this research also seeks to explore what types of media fashion retail SMEs use to communicate with their consumers in general and whether or not they use

specific media types for communicating specific messages. To classify the different media types that fashion retail SMEs use for social media communications, media richness theory is selected as one of the theoretical lenses in this study because media plays an important role in communication to convey the messages clearly and effectively (de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020). The importance of an appropriate media section and its role in communication effectiveness have been discussed in section 3.2.2 of this chapter.

As previously mentioned, this research seeks to explore the key social media communication strategies of fashion retail SMEs and then evaluate their effectiveness in terms of achieving greater consumer engagement. The subsequent section of this chapter now reviews the existing literature in relation to social media consumer engagement in order to identify a framework for measuring social media consumer engagement.

3.3. Social Media Consumer Engagement

3.3.1. Consumer engagement

A comprehensive literature review indicated that there is no universally accepted definition of 'engagement' as it has been defined differently in various contexts. According to Schultz and Peltier (2013), consumer engagement is an unclear idea that academics and marketers need to better define, conceptualise, and operationalise in order to measure the strength of the relationship between brands and consumers. Bordie et al. (2011) defined consumer engagement as a motivational state that occurs during co-creative experiences with brands, whereas Sashi (2012) stated that consumer engagement focuses on building consumer trust, commitments, and long-term relationships by offering them greater value than competitors. Similarly, Pansari and Kumar (2017) argue that in order for a consumer to engage with a brand, brands need to be able to develop emotional bonding with consumers through trust and commitment. Overall, consumer engagement is understood as a multi-dimensional construct in the literature, and it can be achieved through cognitive, behavioural and emotional processes.

Prior research on consumer and brand relationships mostly focused on assessing purchase behaviour as a firm's success indicator. However, such assessments overlook consumers' active

participation in influencing a larger network of entities, such as future consumers and the wider public (Roberts and Alpert 2010; Sashi 2012; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Multiple sales-focused marketing research considered purchase, satisfaction and repeat purchase as factors necessary for consumer engagement (Roberts and Alpert 2010; Sashi 2012). However, consumer focus relationship marketing scholars moved from the sales-focused definitions. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014: 154) focused on "cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions" whilst Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) defined it as "a cognitive, affective, and behavioural commitment to an active relationship with the brand". They considered engagement as a multidimensional aspect as a consumer has to go through awareness, emotion, and behavioural steps to become engaged. A study conducted by Syrdal and Briggs (2018:18) defined social media engagement as "a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement". Although Syrdal and Briggs (2018) considered both practitioners' and consumers' perspectives in their research, they only defined engagement from consumers' perspective. Moreover, their definition only focused on the psychological state of mind, so it could be argued that all human acts are processed first in the psychological state of mind. Then, they come into behavioural effect. Based on this definition, social media engagement can only be measured through consumer surveys; however, surveys may only be able to grab their experiences and thoughts, which may not be the actual actions or effects of those thoughts. As this research focuses on social media consumer engagement, definitions specifically related to social media consumer engagement were reviewed. The section below reviews the definitions of social media consumer engagements.

3.3.2. Social media consumer engagement

A review of the literature revealed several definitions of consumer engagement in the context of social media. The table below presents some of the key definitions observed in the literature.

Table 3-2: Key Definitions of Social Media Engagement

Sources	Definitions
Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014: 154)	"a consumer's positively valence brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions".
Calder et al. (2016: 40)	"a psychological state that occurs under interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object, under a specific set of context-dependent conditions, and exists as a dynamic, iterative process in which other relational concepts are antecedents and consequences".
Barger, Peltier and Schultz (2016: 5)	"a set of measurable actions that consumers take on social media in response to brand-related content: reacting to content (e.g., likes), commenting on content (e.g., Facebook comments, Twitter replies), sharing content with others (e.g., Facebook shares, Twitter retweets), and posting user-generated content (e.g., product reviews, Facebook posts about brands)".
Briggs and Syrdal (2018:18)	"a psychological state of mind experienced when consuming social media content in which an individual is highly absorbed in the content and experiences a sense of excitement".

"Social media engagement" is a significant marketing aim and performance statistic, according to modern marketing researchers (e.g., McKinsey and Company 2014; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016; Barger, Peltier and Schultz 2016; Syrdal and Briggs 2018; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). However, it is worth noting that there is no agreement on just what this type of engagement involves. Because social media platforms have enabled consumers to become active co-producers or inventors of value for businesses, organisations must understand consumer experiences during consumer-brand interactions on social media (Choi, Ko, and Kim 2016). Because it is vital to understand the behaviours of "individuals who connect with firms without necessarily purchasing", hence understanding customer engagement is critical to a long-term success of a firm (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012: 127). The behavioural element of consumer engagement is one of the most well-known conceptualisations. For instance, Van Doorn et al. (2010: 253) defined consumer engagement as "the consumers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase". Brand loyalty, concentric marketing, marketing orientation, consumer connection

management, relationship marketing, and social networks, according to Schultz and Peltier (2013), may all be used to measure engagement.

In addition, after acknowledging the presence of brand engagement antecedents and consequences, and after conducting a thorough analysis of the literature on brand engagement, Calder et al. (2016: 40) defined brand engagement as "a psychological state that occurs by interactive, co-creative consumer experiences with a focal agent/object, under a specific set of context-dependent conditions, and exists as a dynamic, iterative process in which other relational concepts are antecedents and consequences". According to Barger and Labrecque (2013), because of the interactive and co-creative nature of social media, the antecedents and impacts of brand engagement may be investigated utilising important social media use indicators such as expressions of agreement, ratings, comments, and shares. Additionally, considering the antecedents and outcomes of social media engagement, Barger, Peltier and Schultz (2016: 5) operationalised social media consumer engagement as "a set of measurable actions that consumers take on social media in response to brand-related content: reacting to content (e.g., likes), commenting on content (e.g., Facebook comments, Twitter replies), sharing content with others (e.g., Facebook shares, Twitter retweets), and posting user-generated content (e.g., product reviews, Facebook posts about brands)". Barger, Peltier and Schultz (2016) conceptualised the reasons for consumers' engagement with content as antecedents, and these antecedents were divided into five categories: brand, consumer, product, content, and social media-related aspects. Similarly, "consequences" describe the likely outcomes of consumer participation, which are separated into effects on brands, goods, consumers, content, and markets. Consumer engagement on social media, according to some researchers, may be described as a consumer's involvement with a company's social media post (Oh, Roumani, Nwankpa and Hu 2017; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020).

Social media usage has increased consumer-brand engagements (Dessart et al. 2015; Wang and Kim 2017). Dolan et al. (2017) observed that social media provides increased flexibility and visibility of marketing content, changing how individuals and organisations interact. One of the main reasons for its appeal among businesses is that social media platforms provide both enterprises and consumers with new methods to interact with one another (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2015). Companies want to interact with devoted consumers and manage their impressions about the goods, as well as disseminate information and learn from them (Brodie et al. 2013). Social networking has become a mainstream phenomenon with a wide

demographic appeal (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Interactive consumer experiences via social media have a substantial impact on many aspects of consumer behaviour, including information acquisition, buying behaviour, and post-purchase interaction. According to Abney et al. (2017), social media's pervasiveness has reached a stage where certain consumers rely on social network sites for interpersonal connections rather than face-to-face contacts. Abney et al. (2017) also stated that marketers should be aware of the presence of social media and its usefulness as a communication medium, as well as use it as a focal point for developing marketing strategies.

3.3.3. Typology of consumer engagement

Academics who use a one-dimensional viewpoint in their study tend to use a behavioural approach to engagement. While some studies saw engagement as a multifaceted concept (e.g., Vivek et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2010; Hollebeek 2013; Dessart et al. 2016), others focused just on a single dimension (e.g., behavioural) (e.g., van Doorn et al. 2010; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Schivinski et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020).

3.3.3.1. *The multidimensional perspective of consumer Engagement*

There is no unanimity among researchers in terms of categorising multidimensional consumer engagement. The cognitive dimension has been described as   absorption by Hollebeek (2011), attention by Higgis and Scholer (2009), active and persistent cognitive processing by Mollen and Wilson (2010). The emotional component includes emotions such as enthusiasm, passion and intrinsic joy (Hollebeek 2011; Vivek et al. 2012; Calder et al. 2018). Finally, interaction, vigour, and activation indicate the behavioural component (Patterson et al. 2006; Hollebeek 2011; Vivek et al. 2012). Vivek et al. (2012), for example, suggested both emotional and cognitive aspects of engagement are adequate for assessing engagement; nevertheless, as the authors largely explored interactions, their study appears to have concentrated mostly on the behavioural aspect of consumer involvement.

Mollen and Wilson (2010) looked at engagement from the lens of online experience, and they identified three separate experimental states in their conceptual work: perceived interaction, telepresence, and engagement. They proposed that active, persistent, cognitive processing, as well as instrumental and experimental value attainment components, make up engagement.

This concept adds interaction to previous engagement research, which is especially important in the online context. While there is no universal definition of engagement in social media research, researchers agree that engagement scales can range from low to high (Brodie et al. 2011; Vivek et al. 2012). Many authors also mention the motivating component of engagement (Higgins and Scholer 2009; van Doorn et al. 2010; Vivek et al. 2012;). Roberts and Alpert (2010) created a framework that recognised five stages of consumer engagement: (1) purchase; (2) repurchase; (3) subscription to other products/services; (4) referral; and (5) advocacy, and consumers at levels (3) to (5) were considered engaged, suggesting that they are loyal to the brand and promote it through WOM communications.

According to Sashi (2012), consumer engagement turns on consumers by forming emotional bonds with them in relational exchanges, and the interactivity features of social media dramatically facilitate the process of establishing long-term and intimate relationships between sellers and buyers based on trust and commitment. Sashi (2012: 258) suggests that "mere purchase of a product does not signify consumer engagement. If the purchase results in satisfaction, perhaps the buyer will engage in repeat purchases, and retention is likely. Still, even satisfaction and retention do not necessarily signify consumer engagement, though they increase its likelihood. Absent satisfaction, it is unlikely retention will occur. Retention over time leads to loyalty but not necessarily consumer engagement. Only if loyal consumers develop feelings of intimacy and emotional attachment and are turned on and become fans of the product, brand, or company does it result in consumer engagement". By incorporating practitioners' viewpoints, Sashi (2012) suggested a cycle of social media consumer engagement model with seven steps: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy, and engagement.

Sashi (2012) also suggested four steps relational matrix of consumer engagement: transactional consumer, delight consumer, loyal consumer and fans, where he indicated the transactional consumer is in the lowest level of engagement and fan is the highest level of engagement. However, Sashi's (2012) model is a sales focused model rather than social media centric as it requires actual purchases and missing any steps from the cycle does not lead to consumer engagement. Although Roberts and Alpert (2010) and Sashi (2012) claimed that purchase is necessary for the consumer engagement process, this should not be considered a condition. This is due to the fact that consumer engagement extends beyond the purchase of goods and services in the digital age (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Brodie et al. 2011; de Vries, Veer

and de Vries 2018; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien, 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger, 2020; Gummerus et al. 2012; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). This is especially true in the case of social media consumer engagement, where consumers may not always buy things but do connect with businesses.

3.3.3.2. *Behavioural dimension of consumer engagement*

Most behavioural expressions of consumer engagement, according to Libai (2011), are closely tied to social media and participation through digital technology channels. As a result, a more complete study focusing on a range of diverse behavioural expressions in the context of social media consumer engagement is urgently needed in the academic literature. While there is no universal classification of digital consumer engagement behaviours, some scholars suggest that they include (but are not limited to) a variety of consumer behaviours that can have a direct impact on the company/brand or consumers, such as e-WOM activities, blogging, writing reviews, "liking," commenting, and sharing content (van Doorn et al. 2010; Muntinga, Moorman and Smit 2011; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016; Schivinski et al. 2019). All of these behaviours, according to Javornik and Mandelli (2012), are non-transactional, meaning that engagement is about consumer-brand connections rather than purchases.

Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) established a Consumer Online Brand-Related Activities Framework (COBRA). Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016: 5) validated the COBRA framework from a social media consumer engagement perspective and redefined social media consumer engagement as a "set of online activities on the part of the consumer that is related to a brand, and which vary in the levels of interaction and engagement with the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content". Initially, Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) offered COBRA as a unifying framework for brand-related consumer interactions, but they did not address the idea of consumer engagement. Later, Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016) redefined the COBRA framework as consumer social media behavioural expressions. COBRA distinguishes various degrees of brand-related actions by categorising them into three categories, which are shown as a continuum: (1) consuming (2) contributing and (3) creating. (Muntinga, Moorman and Smit 2011; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016; Schivinski et al. 2019). While the COBRA framework adds to the expanding body of knowledge about consumer behaviour in online contexts, it is not without limitations. COBRA does not differentiate between positive

and negative behaviours; as Hollebeek and Chen (2014) highlighted, consumer engagement encompasses both positive and negative behaviour manifestations.

The hierarchy of effect (HOE) model suggests that there are three sequential steps in the purchase decision making process: when an unaware consumer becomes aware of the product or service in the cognitive stage, they may become affected by liking the product/ service or disliking it (negatively engaged) and finally, in the conative stage they may purchase it and become loyal (Hutter et al. 2013). Hollebeek and Chen's (2014) multi-dimensions of consumer engagement approach suggests similar types of effect as highlighted by the HOE model stating the first type of engagement is cognitive when consumers acquire information about the product/services, in the emotional engagement, consumers can have both positive emotions by liking the product/service or dislike in case of negative engagement, and finally, in behavioural engagement, consumers can purchase the product and become committed to the company (Hollebeek and Chen 2014). The table below summarises the dimensions of consumer engagement considered by some significant studies on social media consumer engagement.

Table 3-3: Consumer Engagement Models

Sources	Model Names	Dimensions
Hutter et al. (2013)	HOE model	Cognitive (Awareness and Knowledge)
		Affective (Liking, Preference, Conviction)
		Conative (Purchase & Loyalty)
Hollebeek and Chen (2014)	Consumer Engagement	Cognitive
		Emotional
		Behavioural
Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016)	COBRA	Consuming
		Contributing
		Creating

Businesses seek to achieve behaviourally engaged consumers that make purchases and interact with brands. Furthermore, as a result of the social media revolution, consumers engage in a variety of business-related ways that did not exist previously. Ratings, comments, and shares are just a few of the behavioural data that are publicly available to assess how consumers engage with brands (Barger et al. 2016; Kunz et al. 2017; Pentina et al. 2018). Behavioural

engagement is the highest level of engagement; based on the HOE model, behavioural engagement does not occur unless there is cognitive and affective or emotional engagement.

For assessing how SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail sector engage their consumer on Facebook, (Barger, Peltier and Schultz 2016) definition of social media consumer engagement has been adopted in this research. According to (Barger, Peltier and Schultz 2016), social media consumer engagement is *"a set of measurable actions that consumers take on social media in response to brand-related content."* Upon an extensive review of literature on social media marketing (such as De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Yuki 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Swani et al. 2017; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019), it was determined that (Barger, Peltier and Schultz 2016) definition more accurately reflects how brands and consumers engage across social media. Considering 'measurable actions' such as likes, comments, and shares along with other consumer-generated content such as reviews can be a more realistic measurement metric for measuring social media consumer engagement, not only because they reflect the popularity of a brand amongst their consumers but also the consumers' willingness to engage with brands. The definition of Peltier and Schultz (2016) is comprehensive as it summarises the approach followed by several other social media consumer engagement researchers. For example, De Vries et al. (2012) measured consumer engagement using the number of comments and likes, Tafesse (2015) used the number of likes and shares, Yuki (2015) measured with the number of shares, Swani and Milne (2017) adopted like and comment on Facebook posts, Swani et al. (2017) used likes and comments, CvijiKj and Michahelles (2013), Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt (2017), Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015), and Dolan et al. (2019) adopted like, comments and shares, Tafesse and Wien (2018) used likes and shares, whilst Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer (2020) used likes and comments. As all these studies successfully used measurable consumer engagement metrics such as like, comments, and shares, the definition of (Barger, Peltier and Schultz 2016) is considered most appropriate for this research.

3.3.4. Consumer Engagement in Fashion Marketing

3.3.4.1. Fashion Marketing

Fashion refers to objects or trends that are popular for a short period of time; it is commonly used to describe various product categories such as technology, clothing, cars, food, lifestyles, and business sectors, as well as the characteristics of individual individuals (Hines and Bruce 2012). An individual who is 'fashionable' embraces the aspects of what is fashionable and captivating during a particular period. As Kontu (2015: 30) cited Lipovetsky (2002) in details, *"fashion is a specific form of social change, independent of any particular object; it is first and foremost a social mechanism characterised by a particularly brief time span and by more or less fanciful shifts that enable it to affect quite diverse spheres of collective life"*. Another factor that is often attached to fashion is a psychological or intangible 'something extra', which Kawamura (2018: 4) clarifies in the context of clothing as *"not visual clothing but is the invisible elements included in clothing"*. In this study, fashion refers to clothing and the changes in perception that are not only labelled as new and trendy but also include the understanding that fashion is clothing with something extra that makes it particularly desirable to the mass population. This research specifically focuses on fashion in the context of clothing by concentrating on the Indian subcontinental non-luxury fashion clothing products (e.g., Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani boutique dresses including one piece, two pieces, three pieces, Lawn, Kurti, Kamdani, Salwar Kameez, Saree, Shirt, T-shirt, Polo, Jeans, Panjabi, other ready-made garments and accessories). These subcontinental non-luxury fashion have high demands in the Bangladeshi fashion market.

Compared with other forms of marketing, fashion marketing requires a significantly greater focus on promotion and communication aspects than marketing in general (Barnes 2013). Moreover, the fashion sector is a fast-paced environment with rapidly changing fashion trends, which requires brands to constantly comprehend and reflect on the changing customer needs (Easey 2009). Due to such attributes of the fashion industry (e.g., short-term popularity, limited life expectancy and seasonality), effective marketing is critical to the success of a brand in the fashion industry (Kontu 2015).

Fashion marketing has some unique characteristics (e.g., short-term popularity, limited life expectancy and driven by seasonality) that make effective fashion marketing challenging. Barnes (2013: 194) argues that effective fashion marketing involves *"understanding the*

complex needs and wants of consumers of fashion and orienting both strategic and operational business activities to satisfy those demands". However, in the precise context of fashion marketing, merely understanding consumer needs and satisfying them might not suffice as Bruno Remaury, a fashion scholar (quoted in Tungate 2012: 6) asserts that *"traditional marketing is based on need. You take a product that corresponds to existing demand and attempts to prove that your product is the best in its category. But fashion is based on creating a need where, in reality, there is none. Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire".* Hence, effective fashion marketing should involve satisfying consumer needs whilst also stimulating their desires.

Barnes (2013) suggests that fashion marketing activities should add value to the core product to satisfy the consumer's need as well as exceed their expectations. For example, protection and cover are the primary benefits or functions of clothing. Several other factors are important to fashion consumers such as design, style, and brand and all these attributes operate at expected and augmented levels (Hines and Bruce 2012). Psychological or intangible 'something extra' factors can add additional characteristics to fashion marketing (Kawamura 2018). Since social media provides new and improved techniques for expressing the intangible features of a product or a brand to its consumers, the psychological or unseen component of "something extra" makes fashion a particularly attractive topic of examination for social media research. However, whilst offering 'something extra', it is important to consider the needs and requirements of the consumers so that the consumers find new offerings desirable. Engaging consumers in business processes can be a way of understanding their needs and requirements.

3.3.4.2.   *Consumer Engagement and Fashion Marketing*

As aforementioned, consumer engagement can be a method for enhancing the effectiveness of fashion marketing. Generally, the level of consumer engagement is relatively high in terms of fashion products. The FCB involvement grid classifies fashion items as high and affective consumer involvement products, making them one of the most engaging product categories in both offline and online settings (Żyminkowska and Rupik 2015). Although a large number of studies have been conducted in the fashion brands' consumer engagement context, most of these studies focused on luxury fashion brands (e.g., Dhaoui 2014; Kim and Kim 2014; Lourerio, Maximiano and Panchapakesan 2018; Giakoumaki and Krepapa 2019; Ko, Costello and Taylor 2019; Grassi 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021; Nyadzayo, Johnson and Rossi 2021; Paintsil and Kim 2021; Duong and Sung 2021). The characteristics of luxury fashion brands

are different from non-luxury fashion brands, and the demographics of their consumers differ too. Hence the nature of consumer engagement as well as the purpose of consumer engagement may differ across these two consumer groups. According to Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2019), consumers frequently perceive luxury brands as being of high quality, providing genuine value through functional or emotional benefits, having a prestigious reputation in the market, commanding a high price, and inspiring a strong connection with the consumer.

Luxury brands frequently serve as symbols that link consumers to a distinct ideology and social position, high-quality features and design (Heine 2010), exclusivity (Phau and Prendergast 2000), historical legacy and authenticity (Bastien and Kapferer 2008; Vigneron and Johnson 2004). Luxury brands enable customers to obtain large psychological benefits that have a risk-reduction function, in addition to serving as symbols of quality and offering functional benefits (Berthon, Pitt, Parent and Berthon 2009). A growing percentage of customers partake in symbolic consumption and favour specific brands because their personalities and the symbolic personalities of the companies are compatible (Heine 2010). As a result, luxury products frequently provide customers with a sense of pride, satisfaction, and success (Sung et al. 2015). It can be synthesised from the above discussion that luxury brands' consumer engagement is mostly driven by psychological factors and consumers of luxury brands are generally emotionally connected to their favourite brands.

However, luxury brands mostly serve the top of the pyramid segment of the consumer market, representing a relatively small proportion of the entire fashion industry globally. However, there are many other brands in the fashion industry to fulfil the needs of large consumer groups who have no particular interest in luxury fashion products. The non-luxury fashion market is currently dominated by fast-fashion products which create short-term popularity in the market occasionally with new trends, new designs, and seasonal and events-based fashion products (Cillo et al. 2016). The concept of consumer engagement is not extensively discussed in the context of non-luxury fashion marketing context in the literature, leaving room for further exploration.

3.3.4.3. *Factors of consumer engagement in non-luxury fashion marketing*

As previously stated, factors of consumer engagement in the context of luxury fashion marketing are fairly well-known. These factors include high quality, social status, prestige,

emotional connection with a brand, etc. A review of the literature identified that the factors of non-luxury fashion marketing are similar to the factors of luxury fashion marketing with some distinctions. However, in the specific context of non-luxury fashion marketing, consumers were not primarily motivated by factors such as quality and prestige. The factors of non-luxury fashion marketing identified in the literature are grouped into three categories, namely customer involvement, social influence, and relationship with brands.

a. Consumer Involvement

Consumer involvement is viewed as an intrinsic component of the consumer engagement process (Bowden 2009). The term "involvement" has been used to describe a consumer's level of care and passion for a product that may be related to his or her ego, self-concept, passion, or value system (Lourerio, Maximiano and Panchapakesan 2018; Aziz and Ahmed 2021; Naeem and Ozuem 2021). Żyminkowska and Rupik (2015) consider involvement as a prerequisite for consumer engagement and fashion products are considered items that can stimulate high and affective consumer involvement. Passion for fashion goods is also identified as a factor that leads to consumers engaging with non-luxury brands. Mukherjee (2020) states that passion is an extremely positive feeling toward a particular fashion brand. Similarly, self-image is also considered to influence consumer engagement (Giakoumaki and Krepapa 2019; Wang and Lee 2020; Nyadzayo, Johnson and Rossi 2020), because it indicates how consumers would like others to see them.

b.   Social Influence

Social influence has become an effective motivational factor for fashion consumer engagement (Prentice and Lourerio 2018; Lourerio, Maximiano and Panchapakesan 2018; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021; Naeem and Ozuem 2021; Shen 2021). Three key elements of social trends highlighted by Naeem and Ozuem (2021) are social passion, social tendency and social like of fashion brands. Social actors and personalities who can increase social motivation, engagement, and brand loyalty are referred to as social passion by Naeem and Ozuem (2021). Shen (2021) considered their social influencers. Consumers think those who are socially passionate are better knowledgeable about societal trends, fashion, design, and other experiences. People are now more interested in fashion gurus and celebrities so they can learn about the latest trends and what these people are wearing on a daily basis. In contrast, a social tendency is a propensity that is brought about by society toward a particular line of clothing

(Naeem and Ozuem 2021). Depending on their valuable experiences and knowledge of fashion brands, crowd dynamics or fashion gurus could produce social tendencies. Shen (2021) asserts that individuals are drawn to and engage with fashion brands through the knowledge and experience of professionals in the field of fashion. Similar to this, Naeem and Ozuem (2021) defined social liking as following the advice of friends, the wisdom of the crowd, opinion leaders, and celebrities. Social like is associated with sources and the weight of people's opinions, which can affect how engaged they are with a brand. The increasing use of social media appears to be greatly enhancing the level of consumer engagement with fashion brands.

c.   Relationship with Brands

A brand's relationship with its consumers is also considered an important factor for fashion consumer engagement (Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). Park and Ha (2021) suggested that a brand can build a joyful relationship with its consumers to enhance their engagement. Interactivity between a brand and its consumers' relationship with them (Liu, Shin and Burns 2021; Aziz and Ahmed 2021). Other studies also found that such joyous interactivity is positively related to consumer engagement (Kim and Kim 2014; Rachmah and Mayangsari 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). In the context of Indonesian local fashion brands, Rachmah and Mayangsari (2020) revealed that, along with entertainment, promotion and remuneration also enhance consumer engagement. Promotion and remuneration increase the affordability of fashion products and ultimately motivate consumers to purchase them.

3.3.5. Measuring Facebook consumer engagement

Several scholars have measured consumer engagement across brands' social media content. Consumer engagement measures such as endorsement, feedback, dialogue, and recommendation were calculated by Dhaoui (2014). Similarly, Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016) indicated that there are three categories of online consumer behaviour engagement (i.e., consumption, contribution and creation). According to Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011), the three types of brand engagement behaviours are passive consumption – which is the least active, contribution which is moderately active, and creation which is highly active.

Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016) proposed consumer behavioural metrics based on the COBRA framework to measure consumer social media engagement. They took a

holistic view of social media engagement to capture different social media behaviours. Social media empower consumers to interact with brands and express their satisfaction, dissatisfaction, attitude, and commitment to their posts (Barger et al. 2016). Consumer behaviour manifestos such as following, like, disliking, commenting, and sharing are automatically saved in real-time, and media companies may utilise them to develop data-driven insights (Barger et al. 2016; Kunz et al. 2017). These data may be analysed on an individual or aggregated basis to help brand managers improve engagement initiatives while also strengthening the value-generating cycle.

According to research by Athwal, Istanbulluoglu and McCormack (2018) consumers follow companies on social media platforms to meet utilitarian and hedonic demands, such as staying up to date on promotional activities, knowing about new product lines, and being able to openly support the brand. However, according to Kusumasondjaja (2018), the effectiveness of social media marketing is determined not only by the number of brand followers on social media platforms but also by the amount of engagement between the brand and its followers. According to Khan (2017), engagement in the social media context refers to users' purposeful responses to online material provided on platforms through actions such as like, sharing, and commenting. In this case, engagement refers to active participation rather than passive viewing.

According to Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) and Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016), social media consumer engagement could be indifferent from such active or passive, and positive or negative. In this research, consumers' active (e.g., like, comment, and shares) engagement and all of these behaviours are considered positive engagement. The rationale for considering positive engagement is consumers' engagement data in this research is collected from SMEs' Facebook pages. Where SMEs have a limited number of followers, they can filter the negative comments on the posts and delete them individually. Thus, there may be alterations to the discloser of negative comments in public. On the other hand, only active engagement is measured because this data is readily available to external parties. To calculate the passive engagement (e.g., consumers' consumption behaviour), the researcher needs to have administrative access to SMEs' social media accounts, which the researcher did not have, hence only like, comment and share metrics were used to measure the post effectiveness. Several other studies have adopted similar matrices to measure social media consumer engagement (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; de Vries, Veer and

de Vries 2018; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020).

On Facebook, consumers can reply to a post by liking, commenting and sharing. Escobar-Rodrguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) suggested that pushing the 'like' button is easier and faster than making a 'comment,' and that it is more impersonal than a share, demonstrating that 'like' has a lower degree of involvement than 'comment'. Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015), as well as Kusumasondjaja (2018), believe that commenting on social media is a more active reaction than like. They believe it is strongly related to social ties; users are more likely to comment on content released on social media if their social relationships with the company are strong (Ellison et al. 2014). Furthermore, some people share materials that have already been shared on social media with their online connections. On Facebook, it is known as 'sharing' as this particular behaviour is related to engagement with the knowledge and information source, forwarding online material is rated the greatest measure of engagement in the online world (Malhotra et al. 2012). When people share a brand's official social media postings, they may be indicating that they are interested in the brand's information and demonstrating their dedication by making the post viral.

Consumers' social media engagement was assessed in several studies by the number of likes, shares, and comments made on content posted on social media sites (e.g., Chen, Kim and Lin 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse 2015; Tafesse and Wien 2018). These three indicators are considered appropriate to represent consumers' responsive behaviours toward social networking sites such as Facebook. Consumer engagement in social media determines the popularity of brand postings and the reach of target groups (Zailskaite-Jakste et al. 2017). As a result, businesses are attempting to boost their effect on consumers through the use of social media interaction tactics. In this research, the same approach used by previous researchers will be used for measuring consumer engagement scores of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook posts. Further elaborations on how this research utilises likes, comments, and shares associated with each Facebook post is made in the Research Methodology chapter of this thesis.

3.3.6. Tie Strength and Consumer Engagement

The subjective feelings of closeness, affinities, and psychological bonds with another person are referred to as ties (Zarouali et al. 2018; Ma et al. 2021). Granovetter (1973:1361) defined social tie as *''a combination of the amount of time, the degree of emotional intensity, the level of intimacy, and the degree of reciprocity between two individuals''* and classified it into strong ties and weak ties in terms of tie strengths. Greater tie strengths boost interpersonal trust, fostering associations of intimacy, support, and proximity (Ma et al. 2021). Determinations of the closeness of a particular relationship are the most popular way to gauge the strength of a tie; hence, close friends are classified as having strong ties, whereas acquaintances or friends of friends are given weak values (Lin and Utz 2015). However, it is not necessary that a strong tie is more important than a weak tie in all instances. For example, in terms of job search, weak links with acquaintances are significantly more important than strong ties with close friends, according to Granovetter (1973). Hu et al. (2019) argued that Granovetter's finding initially appears paradoxical because strong ties can be expected to be more helpful in job-seeking for several reasons. For example, people with strong ties interact more frequently (Granovetter 1973), They probably share intimate physical or emotional proximity (Zarouali et al. 2018), and they are also aware of one another's needs and preferences (Chung and Tsai 2009).

According to Granovetter (1973), weak bonds can exist between people who do not have a great deal in common Therefore, weak ties not only supply non-redundant information but also serve as vital gateways for information to go quickly and widely inside a network. Granovetter (1973: 1366) theorised that *''whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse a greater social distance, when pass through weak ties rather than strong,''* which is known as the ''*strength of weak ties''* theory. In terms of WOM communication, Hu et al. (2019) criticised Granovetter's strength of weak ties theory, arguing that due to the development of different media channels, advertisements do a great deal of work to transmit information to a large number of audiences. Hence, the weak ties theory can be considered less relevant today, whereas strong ties play an important role in WOM communication.

A differential equation model was utilised by Zhang et al. (2015) to demonstrate that weak relationships can result in higher sales than strong ties, particularly for high-quality companies. This is so that customers can draw more precise conclusions about quality from the non-convergent data from weak ties. A large-scale field test by Godes and Mayzlin (2009) also showed that WOM between weak relationships is more effective than that between strong ties

at boosting sales. Both the volume of communication and the use of personal language are significant predictors of relationship intimacy, according to research by Gilbert and Karahalios (2009) that examined numerous measures of relationship strength on social media. Weak ties offer us unique knowledge and connect us to opportunities outside of our immediate circles, while strong ties are thought to provide stronger emotional support and be more influential. Using an analysis of a mobile call network, Onnela et al. (2007) showed that people tend to communicate more when they are in clusters, but weak ties that serve as bridges between clusters see less traffic. All of these research studies suggest that weak ties are more beneficial to marketing in any circumstance. Levin and Cross (2004) looked at the role of dyadic social ties in the dissemination of beneficial information. They discovered that weak relationships promote knowledge transmission when the degree of trustworthiness is controlled, whereas strong ties favour the reception of useful knowledge more than weak ties. As a result, it is generally agreed in word-of-mouth (WOM) studies that weak links have a larger macro-level impact than strong ties on the propagation of WOM and that marketers can purposefully encourage WOM between weak ties to optimise WOM campaigns.

Hu et al. (2019), on the other hand, disputed this notion on the grounds that, in reality, marketers frequently mix a WOM campaign into other marketing activities, typically advertising. Hu et al. (2019) used an agent-based modelling strategy to show that, while advertising is one source of information flow, the WOM that is most successful at promoting product growth is produced by strong ties as opposed to weak ties. The justification for this is straightforward: advertising competes with weak ties for the global distribution of information, and weak ties' global reach is often regarded as their key advantage over strong links. The weak-tie theory, which is commonly accepted in the WOM literature, is also called into question by You and Hon (2019), who also hypothesised that the impact of strong relationships on the market-level dissemination of WOM can be substantially bigger than that of weak ties. In weak and strong social ties contexts, Ma et al.'s (2021) analysis looked at the impact of the online shopping experience on customer involvement and online purchase intention. According to their research, word of mouth from close friends and family members was more persuasive for cognitive participation and had a greater impact on purchase intentions in that situation.

Social networks are made up of connections between people and between people and other entities (Gao et al. 2018). Social tie strength, as it relates to social networking sites, is a general feeling of the emotional depth of a connection to another person (You and Hon 2019). In a

social network, tie strength assesses a relationship's quality in terms of proximity, intimacy, and support (Gao et al. 2018). Strong-tie networks, for instance, consist of our close friends and relatives with whom we share a safe and intimate relationship. A weak-tie network, on the other hand, consists of strangers, new acquaintances, and friends of friends, from whom we may not receive as much emotional support but who we nonetheless rely on to stay up to date with information (Gilbert 2012; You and Hon 2019). Strong relationships, which are typically based on human bonding, are said to work on the basis of familiarity, according to Granovetter (1973). So, followers on social media may be thought of as having weak ties. Members of the social media community, however, can be regarded as having close ties.

According to Weng et al. (2015), the vast majority of social media interaction events take place among people with strong social ties. Shen et al. (2016) looked into the variables that affect the effectiveness of communication when consumers share advertisements (peer-to-peer) on Facebook. They found that the social tie is a significant moderator of the effects of message format and advertising literacy on communication effectiveness. According to Hu et al. (2019), consumers are becoming less receptive to communications from businesses and WOM interactions are easily accessible through internet platforms. Similar to this, Bakshy et al. (2012) discovered that strong ties are individually more effective than weak ties for spreading information (external URLs) on Facebook. Consumers' Facebook e-word-of-mouth behaviour is significantly impacted by interpersonal influence and social capital (strong tie) within social tie networks (Hsu and Tran 2013).

According to the theory of source credibility, people are most likely to believe a source they trust (Wilson and Haig 2013). Strong ties are seen to make a source more reliable and reputable than those with weak ones. Customers may be more emotionally and cognitively engaged with information that comes from stronger links because of their increased source credibility and persuasiveness (Ma et al. 2021). Due to their credibility, in particular, information and suggestions from contacts with strong relationships have a stronger impact on purchase intentions than those from contacts with weak ties (Wang and Chang 2013; Ma et al. 2021). However, it is known that negative WOM spreads more quickly than positive WOM in a market since it is unavoidable (Goldenberg et al. 2007). Additionally, customers tend to share good WOM with weak ties but negative WOM with strong ties, which is an intriguing observation (Dubois et al. 2016).

The ties' strength and relationship closeness are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. Several studies have confirmed that social ties affect users' attitudes, emotions, and behaviours (Wang and Chang 2013; Koo 2016; Mattke et al. 2020; Mostafa 2021). Gvili and Levy (2018) suggested that marketing communication practitioners should note that the strength of social ties plays a key role in spreading e-WOM on social networking sites effectively and it should be employed as a part of social media marketing strategy to enhance the tie strength. Gao et al. (2018) also emphasised the importance of establishing market-based relational ties with social media users in local markets in the context of an international brand when they operate in cross-cultural environments. Gao et al. (2018) suggested that to build these relational ties with social media users in the local market they should provide monetary and functional incentives to users. However, SMEs do not usually have sufficient resources to offer such incentives (Nakara et al. 2012). Large businesses with ample resources have the opportunity to use additional resources to communicate their messages and promote their businesses, they can use multiple channels to communicate and reach out to potential customers. They can use their financial resources and an expert workforce to build ties with their customers (Gao et al. 2018). SMEs, however, often cannot do such activities to promote their business in multiple channels due to their resource constraint. Rather, they have the opportunity to grow organically using social media channels. Moreover, SMEs mainly concentrate on the local market. Hence it makes sense that building and maintaining ties through social media may be cost-effective and easier for SMEs than large organisations. A study by Kozan and Akdeniz (2014) tested whether strong or weak ties account for small business growth in Turkey. Results showed that strong ties are positively related to both types of growth: product expansion and knowledge acquisition. In contrast, weak ties have no effect on small business growth in either area. However, Kozan and Akdeniz's (2014) study was conducted in the offline context, and they did not consider customers' point of view.

Prior studies also revealed that tie strength also influences social media consumer engagement. For example, the analysis of sufficient configurations for click- and view-through intentions offers a sophisticated viewpoint on social media user behaviour and social influence, Mattke et al. (2020) evaluated the social tie strength in a herd behaviour scenario. According to research, clicking on sponsored information that was previously not thought to be worthwhile can even be influenced by a close friends "like" that is regarded to be more informed. Mostafa (2021) investigated whether and how the e-empowerment of consumers mediates the impact of social capital on consumer engagement with Facebook brand pages. Results indicate that

consumer e-empowerment mediates the relationship between consumer involvement and social capital. Specifically, the effect of both bridging (weak tie) and bonding (strong tie) social capitals on consumer engagement is partially mediated by consumer e-empowerment. Therefore, in the context of fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication, strong ties may be more beneficial for SMEs than weak ties, this is primarily due to the fact that in the social media setting, strong ties often work as a gateway to disseminate information outside of the SMEs' social media community circle, which helps to enhance social media consumer engagement. Additionally, strong ties can influence buying intentions for fashion brands (Nueem and Ozuem 2021). Therefore, SME fashion retailers may need to focus on building strong social media communities around their brands and continually engage with them to build direct and strong ties.

3.3.7. Effects of social media communication strategies on consumer engagement

The social media world has grown dramatically over the last decade, as evidenced by several empirical research (e.g., McCorkindale 2010; Swani et al. 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Ashley and Tuten 2015; Tafesse 2015; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019). Most of these studies have been conducted to understand what social media strategies are most effective in terms of consumer engagement. As shown in table 3.4, past researchers have classified social media posts based on their message appeals and media types and evaluated their impacts on consumer engagement. Researchers have categorised different social media communication strategies using content analysis strategy (Araujo et al. 2015; Swani et al. 2016) and examined behavioural engagement of consumers across different communication strategies for identifying the best social media communication strategies.

Table 3-4: Summary of relevant past studies

Study	Method and Data Collection	Post categorisation strategies	Industry	Culture	Measurement of Engagement	Significant Findings
De Vries et al. (2012)	Method: Quantitative research Collected 355 Facebook brand posts across six product categories from 11 International brands	Informational Entertainment Transformational	In six product categories (i.e., Food, Accessories, Leisure wear, Alcoholic beverages, Cosmetics and Mobile phones)	Study on international brands.	Number of comments and likes	Likes and comments were negatively correlated with entertainment but likes and comments were unaffected by informative content.
CvijiKj and Michahelles (2013)	Method: Quantitative research Facebook: 5035 From 100 Brands pages in the food and beverage industry	Information Entertainment Remuneration	In the food and beverage industry	In Switzerland	Number of comments, shares and likes	More likes, comments, and shares were created by entertainment; more likes and comments were generated by information; more comments were generated by remuneration.

Ashley and Tuten (2015)	Method: Quantitative research Multiple Social networking sites of 28 top brands	Functional appeal, Emotional appeal Experiential appeal,	Top brands from multiple industries	In the USA	Engagement Score published by Engagemendb (2009)	The Engagement Score was strongly connected with experiential attractiveness and rewards.
Tafesse (2015)	Method: Quantitative research Facebook: 195 Posts from UK automobile companies	Informational Entertainment Transactional	In the Automobile industry	In the UK	Number of likes and shares	Informational material received more likes and shares than entertaining content, while instructive content received more shares than transactional content.
Kim, Spiller and Hitache (2015)	Method: Quantitative research Facebook; 1086 brand posts from 100 brands in the Best Global Brands 2012	Task-oriented Self-oriented Interaction-oriented	In Five different industries (i.e., convenience,	Best Global Brands in the USA	Number of comments, shares and like	In comparison to interaction- and self-oriented messages, task-oriented messages received more likes, shares, and comments.

Yuki (2015)	Method: Quantitative research Multiple Platform: 2000 most share posts	Storytelling Social currency Functional Emotional	Multiple industries	In the USA	Measures only Shares	On Facebook, content that makes users "look good" and "feel happy," as well as content that is helpful and conveys emotional tales, was shared more frequently.
Tafesse and Wien (2018)	Method: Quantitative research Facebook: 290 posts from top 20 brands across multiple industries	Informational Interactional Transformational	Top brands from multiple industries	In the UK	Number shares and likes	The most effective driver of consumer behavioural engagement is the transformational message strategy, while informational and interactional message strategies show no significant difference.
Kusumasondjaja (2018)	Method: Quantitative research Multiple social networking sites: 10752 posts	Informational Mixed appeal Emotional Self-orientation, interaction orientation task orientation	Top brands from multiple industries	In Indonesia	Number of comments and likes	Interactive entertainment postings were effective on Facebook, educational appeals in effective on Twitter and instructive and entertaining appeals were effective on Instagram.

	43 leading brands in Indonesia					
Dolan et al. (2019)	Method: Quantitative research Facebook: 2450 posts from Australian Wine Brands	Informational Entertaining Emotional Remunerational	Wine Industry	In Australia	Comment, Share, and Like	The most successful form of the post was the entertaining one.
Rachmah and Mayangsari (2020)	Method: Quantitative survey of 172 Instagram users	Entertaining Informational Remunerational	Fashion Industry	In Indonesia	Like, Comments, and Follow	Entertaining post has the most substantial influence on consumer engagement.
Liu, Shin and Burns (2021)	Method: Quantitative Twitter: 3.78 million tweets from 15 multinational top luxury fashion brands	Interaction, Entertainment, Customisation and Trendiness	Fashion industry	Multinational brands	Retweets and likes	Findings reveal that interaction, entertainment, and trendiness dimensions of luxury brands significantly increase consumer engagement.

As shown in Table 3.4, researchers have categorised the social media communication strategies of brands in various approaches (e.g., informational, emotional, task-oriented, self-oriented, and interaction-orientated). As there is no unanimously agreed approach for categorising communication strategies, it may have been resulted in the findings being diverse. This issue was also acknowledged by Tafesse and Wien (2018). Moreover, all of the studies in above table 3.4 were conducted in the context of large brands' social media communication, hence the findings may not apply to SMEs. Additionally, in many cases, their findings were contradictory (i.e., de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012, Swani et al. 2013, and Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015), and this difference could be due to the size of the organisations or industries they investigated.

Despite the fact that social media communication has become an important aspect of an organisation's marketing communication mix, previous research has mostly focused on large businesses (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Yuki 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Swani et al. 2017; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019). In addition, previous empirical studies have used multiple approaches for categorising Facebook posts, for example, De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) categorised them into entertainment, informational and transformational; Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) into entertainment, information and remuneration; Ashely and Tuten (2015) into functional, experiential and emotional; Tafesse (2015) into Entertainment, informational and transactional; and Tafesse and Wien (2018) into entertainment, informational and interactional. However, all these conceptualisations may not effectively capture how brands communicate via Facebook. For example, Tafesse and Wein (2018) studied the top 20 UK automobile companies and classified their Facebook content into entertainment, informational and interactional posts and did not consider the promotional appeal into their classifications, however, promotional messages are one of the commonly used message appeals in Facebook. Moreover, the one-way push marketing theory may not be an effective tool to capture the whole range of activities in multi-directional social media channels. Hence, there remains a lack of clarity in terms of the approach for investigating social media communication activities. Therefore, considering the interactive nature of social media, the salesperson interpersonal communication framework was considered most appropriate to examine the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies (further justifications in section 3.2.5).

In the precise context of SMEs, no prior research was conducted to examine the best social media communication strategies for achieving a higher level of consumer engagement by categorising social media communication strategies in four categories, namely task orientation, interaction orientation, self-orientation and mixed orientations, and measuring Facebook consumer engagement by using likes, comments, and shares. Therefore, an investigation into SMEs' Facebook communication practices for identifying the best communication strategies for achieving higher consumer engagement that can bridge the existing knowledge gap whilst adding substantial value to the literature. This research, therefore, takes Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication activities as a case in order to explore what kind of communication strategies SMEs use for social media communications and what are the most effective strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement.

3.4.   Knowledge Gap

An extensive review of the literature (presented in chapter two and three of this thesis) revealed that numerous studies were conducted on social media marketing communication strategies and consumer engagement previously within the fashion industry; however, they primarily focused on large and luxury brands (e.g., De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Swani et al. 2017; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). Some of the previous studies that were conducted in the domain of social media marketing of SMEs focused only on the strategic adoption and implementation of social media (e.g., Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016). A review of the literature revealed that no prior research was conducted to explore the best Facebook communication strategies for achieving a higher level of consumer engagement in the context of fashion retail SMEs. This research, therefore, seeks to fill the existing knowledge gap in the literature by investigating Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities and deploying the salesman's interpersonal communication framework and measuring Facebook consumer engagement by likes, comments and shares. There is a need for a new investigation because the results obtained from studies in large global brands may have little practical use for SMEs whose communication strategies differ from big brands due to their unique characteristics such

as limited resources and limited brand recognition (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020).

For exploring the social media marketing communication strategies of fashion retail SMEs, Salesman's interpersonal communication framework will be used as a guide in this research. Salesman's interpersonal communication framework has been widely used in the traditional marketing communication literature (e.g., Sheth 1976; William and Spore 1986; Labrecque 2014), and with the emergence of social media, it has also been used in social media marketing communication literature (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). However, social media marketing communications differ from traditional marketing communications as social media communications tend to be more interactive (Valos et al. 2016). A review of the literature indicates that the implication of the Salesman's interpersonal communication framework in social media marketing communications may be limited following the technological advancement of social media platforms and the increased popularity of marketing communications with multiple orientations across social media platforms (Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018). Therefore, upon acknowledging a need for a reconceptualisation of the Salesman's interpersonal communication framework in the context of social media marketing communications, a reconceptualization was proposed in section 3.2.5. However, the framework is yet to be validated by the data. This research, therefore, seeks to test the proposed framework in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs in an attempt to make contributions to the literature by expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

As aforementioned, numerous studies have been conducted on SMEs to investigate strategic adoption and implementation of social media (e.g., Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016); however, no prior study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of different social media marketing communication strategies in terms of engaging consumers across social media, particularly in the context of fashion retail SMEs. Therefore, there is a knowledge vacuum regarding the understanding of the most effective social media marketing strategies for fashion retail SMEs. Additionally, there is also a lack of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of different media types (e.g., text, image, video, live media) in terms of engaging consumers across social media in the context of fashion retail SMEs. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating the

most appropriate social media marketing communication strategies and media types for enhancing consumer engagement on Facebook.

Furthermore, this research seeks to make recommendations to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs for developing effective social media marketing strategies for achieving higher consumer engagement thereby increasing revenues and profitability. In order to be able to make effective recommendations, understanding the challenges SMEs face during social media communications and the potential benefits of social media communications is important. A review of the existing literature indicated that no empirical study investigated the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. Although prior studies argue that SMEs are yet to grasp the full potential of social media due to the lack of broader knowledge about social media usage (norm and cultures) and opportunities and challenges (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen, 2012; Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015; Canovi and Pucciarelli 2019; Chatterjee and Kumar Kar 2020), not many empirical studies have been conducted to understand them, particularly in Bangladesh. Although there are some studies in Bangladesh about the prospect and problems of social media, they are mainly desk research (e.g., Bhuyan 2014; Abdin 2017). This research seeks to conduct an empirical research study by interviewing practitioners in the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector for exploring the benefits and challenges of Facebook as a communication tool in order to fill an existing knowledge gap in the literature.

3.5. Conceptual Framework of the Research

As previously discussed, only a few research studies (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018) applied the salesman's interpersonal communication framework to analyse social media communication strategies of brands. Most prior studies (e.g., Tafesse and Wien 2018; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021) used advertising literature to examine corporate social media brands' pages and classified the post in myriad variables. The majority of the studies analysed corporate brands' social media pages in the light of advertising models developed for the traditional media channel and large established brands. However, social media are interactive channels, and conventional one-way communication frameworks may not be appropriate for social media studies. Hence, it was considered relevant to reconceptualise the salesman's interpersonal communication framework by including an

additional dimension 'mixed orientations' for appropriately representing social media communication strategies of SMEs (elaborations provided in section 3.2.5). In addition, media richness was found to plays important role in affecting consumer engagement levels across brands' Facebook posts (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015). Therefore, based on the review of the literature, it is concluded that a higher level of consumer engagement can be achieved if appropriate media types are selected for conveying specific messages and having a higher engagement, in turn, leads to being able to grasp more business opportunities. Hence, the following framework is conceptualised.
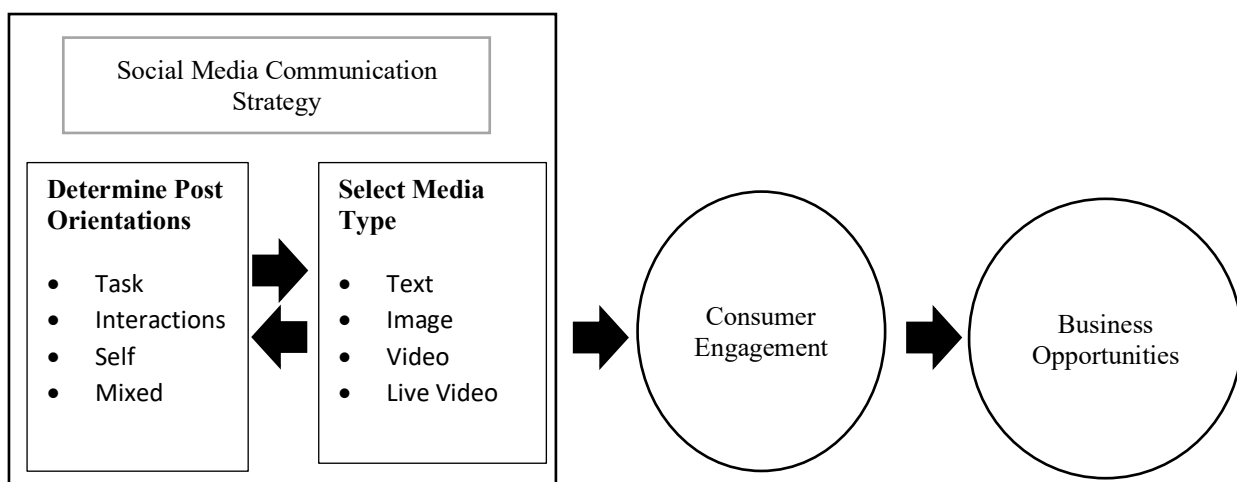
Figure 3-5: Research Conceptual Framework

Source: The Author

3.5.1. Media type and post-orientations

The media richness theory of Daft, Lengel and Trevino (1987) argued that different media types vary in their capacity to convey information cues and message equivocality and media selection and message performance are interrelated. Daft, Lengel and Trevino (1987) highlighted that richer media are preferred for ambiguous communications and less rich media for unequivocal communications. Ledbetter (2014) stated that appropriate media selection is critical to a communication's success and using inappropriate media selection could lead to confusion. In social media marketing communications, businesses have options to use numerous media types (e.g., image, text, videos) for conveying different messages. It makes the job of marketers further difficult, particularly when they have no clarity on what media

should be used for conveying messages that contain specific message appeals. Ishii, Lyons and Carr (2019) highlighted marketers rarely consider the appropriateness of media type whilst designing a communication strategy, which has resulted in marketing communications not being highly effective. The following hypothesis is developed to examine whether or not fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh use different media types for different post orientations.

H1: SMEs use different media types for conveying different messages whilst communicating via social media

3.5.2. Consumer engagement across different post orientations

Numerous studies were conducted to understand the roles posts with different message appeals have in generating consumers' engagement across various industries and social media platforms (e.g., de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Rodríguez and Fernández 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018). The findings of previous studies are inconsistent in terms of determining the most appropriate orientations of posts for enhancing consumer engagement; for example, Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) found entertaining contents were most influential in generating likes, comments and shares – informational content received a higher number of likes and comments but lower number of shares whilst remunerative contents received higher of comments but lower number of likes and shares. Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) found task-oriented posts more effective than interaction-oriented posts for facilitating a higher level of consumer engagement. The findings of Rodríguez and Fernández (2017) suggested that marketing (task and interactional) contents are more effective than self-oriented content for achieving a higher level of consumer engagement.

Other studies found interaction-oriented posts are also beneficial for maintaining a good level of consumer engagement (Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Rodríguez and Fernández 2017). Nonetheless, the existing findings may be context-specific and not generalisable to fashion retail SMEs. For example, Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) analysed 1086 Facebook posts from 92 international brands in five different categories and found that international brands were using interaction-oriented posts most frequently; however, to secure a higher level of consumer engagement task-oriented posts were more effective. Kusumasondjaja (2018) examined the pages of 43 prominent Indonesian businesses on three social media platforms (e.g., Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram) and discovered that posts with an interaction orientation earned the most likes and comments, while posts with a self-direction received the least. Kusumasondjaja (2018) also revealed that informational posts were effective on Twitter but when brand contents with emotive and mixed appeals were placed on Facebook and Instagram, they garnered the most likes and comments. Another investigation of 46 international leading fashion brands' Facebook posts by Rodríguez and Fernández (2017) also revealed that the level of engagement across self-oriented posts was the lowest whilst marketing contents mixed of task and interaction-oriented contents (e.g., promotional and call for action post considered as marketing posts) created greater consumer engagement. These findings make contributions by further supporting the claim of Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) by signifying social media interactions are mainly dependent on the requirements and motives of consumers. Based on this evidence, it is hypothesised that social media consumer engagement levels differ across posts with different message orientations.

H2: The level of social media consumer engagement differs across different post orientations

3.5.3. Consumer engagement across different media types

In social media marketing communications, posts with images are the most widely used media format as they are not only faster to publish but also can convey multiple messages at once (Cvijikj et al. 2011; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Rodríguez and Fernández 2017). Prior studies investigated global fashion retail brands and revealed that posts with photos receive more consumer responses than videos and texts (Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Rodríguez and Fernández 2017). Consumers may choose not to watch videos because they believe it would take up too much of their time, or they may believe there are too many (competing) news feed items from friends and companies. Thus, they may opt not to watch videos on social media platforms even though videos tend to be far richer than images (Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015). According to previous research, posts published in forms that force users to spend more time engaging with the content earn lower engagement than those published in formats that allow them to absorb the information fast (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Rodríguez and Fernández 2017). However, De Vries et al. (2012) claimed that video posts further stimulate the senses and generate more engagement. Touchette, Schanski and Lee

(2015) argued that consumers do not interpret entertainment as a 'waste of time', but as a 'way of fun and joy' through the brand pages; hence they tend to engage more on posts with videos.

Alamäki, Pesonen and Dirin (2019) suggested that consumers remember the details of the videos for a longer time. They highlighted instructive videos are better than seductive videos in triggering increased purchase intention. Furthermore, Tseng et al. (2017) and Maity, Dass, and Kumar (2018) discovered that marketing advertising with greater media richness had a favourable impact on consumer decision-making because rich media conveys more information. Overall, the literature indicates that social media consumer engagement depends on the media used in communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: The level of social media consumer engagement differs across different media types

3.6.   Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to identify the knowledge gap in the literature that can be filled through an empirical investigation of fashion retail SMEs' social media activities and strategies and how they impact the level of consumer engagement. The first part of this chapter focused on determining the appropriate theoretical perspective for this research and critically discussed four communication theories. Upon critical discussions of potentially relevant theories, SICT and MRT were chosen as the research's theoretical perspective for analysing social media communication for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. This is because SICT provides clear guidance to capture SMEs' communication orientations while interacting with the consumer in social media and MRT guides in the process of selecting the most appropriate media for yielding the most desirable outcomes.

The second part of this chapter reviewed the literature related to social media consumer engagement. The literature review revealed two key schools of thought regarding consumer engagement: multi-dimensional perspective and single-dimensional perspective. The multi-dimensional perspective divided engagement into three categories: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, whereas the single dimension considers only the behavioral aspect of the engagement. In this study, the behavioral dimension (e.g., like, comment, and share) was selected as social media consumer engagement can be better measured by examining consumer

behaviors. The final section of this chapter highlighted the knowledge gaps that this research is addressing along with the research conceptual framework. The forthcoming chapter of this thesis discusses the methodological aspects of this research.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1. Chapter Overview

This research seeks to identify the most effective strategies for fashion retail SMEs' social media marketing communication by exploring SMEs' common Facebook communication activities and evaluating their effectiveness for consumer engagement. To achieve the aim of this research, four research objectives were formulated in chapter one of this thesis. This research adopted a multimethod case study research design with a mixed-methods research strategy under the pragmatism philosophy to achieve these objectives. A qualitative netnography research was conducted by observing 20 Bangladeshi SME fashion retailers, to identify their Facebook communication practices and strategies. Similarly, a quantitative content analysis of 2409 Facebook posts was undertaken to measure the level of consumer engagement across different communication orientations and media types. Finally, semi-structured interviews with 12 SMEs owners and managers of the selected Bangladeshi SME fashion retailers were conducted to explore the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool for marketing communication and consumer engagement.

A detailed report of the research techniques applied to this thesis is presented in this chapter. Section 4.2 discusses the philosophical assumptions, followed by a portrayal of the research design in section 4.3. A detailed explanation of data collection methods and theoretical justifications of data collections and sample selection process followed during this research in section 4.4, section 4.5 presents the pilot studies, followed by the process of data analysis (e.g., qualitative thematic and quantitative content) in section 4.6. In section 4.7, there is a detailed description of research quality, followed by ethical considerations taken during the research in section 4.8 and section 4.9 concludes the methodology chapter. The main structure of this chapter is illustrated in the diagram below.
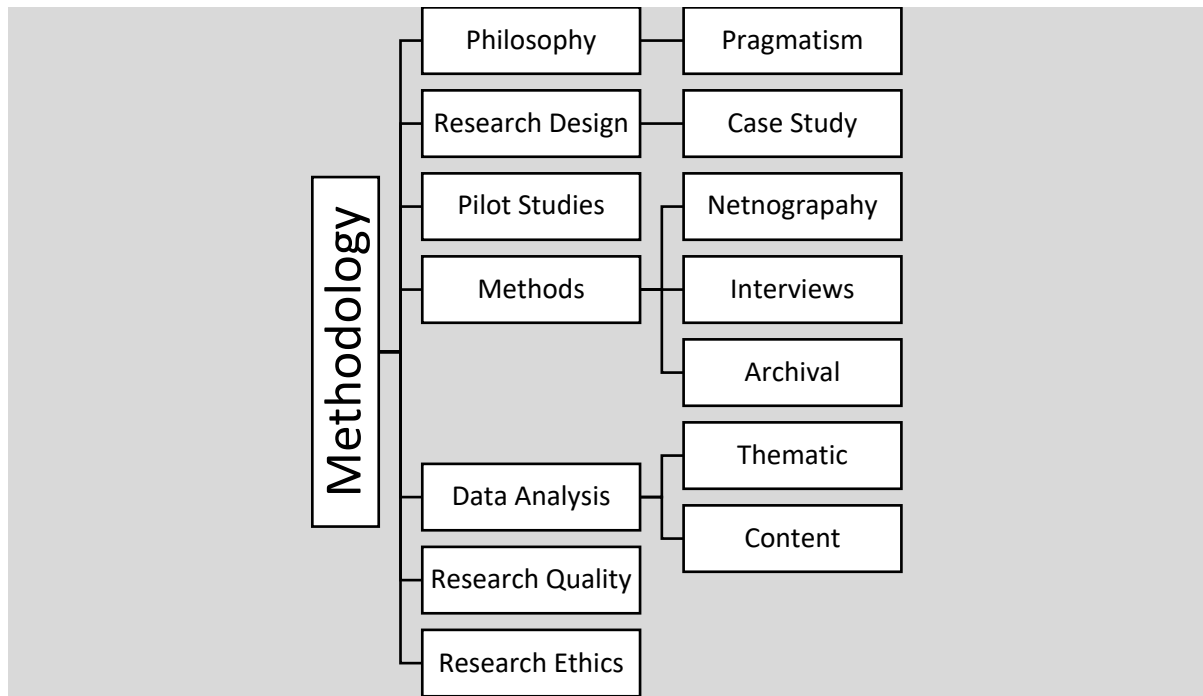
Figure 4-1: Structure of the Methodology Chapter

Source: The Author

4.2. Philosophical Assumptions

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019: 130) define the "research philosophy as the set of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge". Lincoln and Guba (1990: 5) suggests research philosophy as a worldview and defines it as "a basic set of beliefs that guide the actions of researchers". Burrell and Morgan (2016) state that consciously or subconsciously, researchers make several assumptions in every stage of their research. Ontology and epistemology are two critical assumptions in the research process that directly and indirectly influence social science research. Ontology concerns about the nature of reality, whilst epistemology concerns inquiry about the truth or human knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

4.2.1. Ontological Assumptions

The term "ontology" refers to a set of beliefs about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe 2015). Although this may appear abstract and far removed from the actual study endeavour, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) contend that ontological assumptions impact how the researcher views and analyses the research objects. There are two ontological

stances: objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Ontologically, objectivism believes realities are absolute and social constructs exist independently of people's awareness of them; in contrast, subjectivism argues reality is based on perceptions of social actors; hence the construction of reality requires social interactions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). In other words, subjectivism and objectivism are two opposing extremes as objectivism follows scientific principles generally used in natural sciences which argues that social reality is an external factor. In contrast, subjectivism considers that the social phenomenon being studied is directly influenced by the research participant's values, beliefs, understandings, and emotions (Sekaran and Bougie 2016; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

To evaluate SME's Facebook communication practices, this research considered both subjective and objective approaches in a way that they complement each other; for instance, to investigate the effectiveness of different styles and strategies of Facebook communication and the roles of media types in generating consumer engagement, for this part of the research, an objective approach was deemed appropriate. Adopting an objective approach allowed me to measure consumer engagement through observable, measurable facts (i.e., number of likes, comments, and shares received by each Facebook post of selected SMEs) through testing hypotheses (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019).

On the other hand, the subjective approach was considered appropriate to explore SMEs' current social media communication practices because it allowed me to be a part of the research process and thus better comprehend the social phenomena under investigation (Sekaran and Bougie 2016). As a part of the subjective investigation, I interviewed SMEs' owners and managers to gather their perceptions and experiences regarding the benefits and challenges they face whilst communicate and engage with consumer on Facebook. As a researcher, I actively collected, analysed, and interpreted data. This active engagement in the investigation enabled me to apply 'radical reflexibility' to create meanings by reflecting on data concerning research questions and objectives (Sekaran and Bougie 2016). An ontologically significant portion of this research was conducted based on the subjectivism perspective, believing reality is constructed by social actors such as SMEs' owners and managers through interactions with their consumers in different channels.

4.2.2. Epistemological Assumptions

Bryman and Bell (2015: 15) suggest that "epistemology is concerned with assumptions about how knowledge is created, what constitutes acceptable knowledge, and how knowledge is communicated to others". Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe (2015) state that epistemology refers to the most appropriate way of inquiring about the nature of the world, the sources and the limits of knowledge. Epistemology, according to Crotty (2014), displays and explains "how we know" and "what we know," as well as determining the conditions by which justified knowledge is achievable. Positivism and interpretivism are two main epistemological extremes in social science (Bryman and Bell 2015). Positivism stance of epistemology believes that there is an objective reality that can be discovered via the deduction method, which involves using scientific measures to construct and evaluate hypotheses that lead to the discovery of a presumed objective truth (Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe 2015). Interpretivism is the assumption that can best find out about reality by exploring the perception of individuals what they believe in it (Bryman and Bell 2015). Positivism philosophy is predominantly followed in the area of natural science (Bryman and Bell 2015). As Easterby-Smith, Jackson and Thorpe (2015) write, knowledge is created using scientific measurements by formulating and testing hypotheses under the positivist philosophy.

In contrast, interpretivism was developed as a critique of positivism and believes social phenomena can be investigated subjectively (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019; Bryman and Bell 2015). Researchers who prefer interpretivism reject the idea that there is an objective reality, as the approach does not assume a pre-existing reality and therefore emphasises the active engagement of people in the creation of reality (Bryman and Bell 2015). Instead, interpretivist researchers believe that truth is constructed based on social interactions.

The research problem led this research, and I adopted a pragmatic philosophy for answering the research question. In pragmatism philosophy, the research problem generally initiates a study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Unlike positivism and interpretivism, pragmatism does not strictly dictate following either a subjective or an objective approach. Pragmatist researchers assert that such methods are only applicable when they support actions (Kelemen and Rumens 2008). This study began as a result of a knowledge vacuum in the literature, namely a lack of awareness of the best Facebook communication strategies for fashion retail SMEs for consumer engagement. To identify the best strategies for social media consumer

engagement, fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication activities were assessed both subjectively and objectively. A pragmatist researcher reconciles objective and subjective concepts, facts and values, and knowledge and experiences (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019; Kaushik and Walsh 2019; Turyahikayo 2021). This research heavily relies on ontological subjectivists and epistemological interpretivism to investigate the research problem. This study also took a stance of ontological objectivism and epistemological positivism to analyse the level of consumer engagement quantitively. Therefore, this research was guided by the pragmatism research philosophy because it allowed the researcher to choose the most suitable research methods which is appropriate for data collection and analysis to answer the research question.

This research applied the tools supported by interpretivism philosophy such as netnography observation and semi-structured interviews because Denscombe (2000) stresses that interpretivism philosophy is suitable to understand not only 'what' is happening, e.g., what SMEs are communicating to engage with consumers, but also to understand 'why' they are happening. Given that business phenomena are complex, Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that using an entirely objective approach in business research may be inappropriate. According to Shaw (1999), SME research focuses on the views, experiences, and behaviours of business owners and managers who believe in themselves and have an opinion on their social environment. The study of SMEs may benefit from qualitative research, with emphasis on social construction and in-depth analysis, according to Shaw (1999). Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) claim that only the contact between the researcher and respondents can gather and enhance thoughts and opinions as authentic or valid personal constructions. Thus, instead of starting with a theory, interpretivism generates or inductively produces a theory or pattern of meaning as the inquiry progresses (Creswell 2014). Interpretivism is a stance for qualitative research that employs interviews, observation, ethnography, and case studies (Anderson 2013; Creswell 2014; Bryman and Bell 2015). This ensures that the investigator and respondent have a sufficient dialogue to construct a meaningful reality.

4.3. Research Design

The research design refers to a predetermined plan that guides the entire research process (Wilson 2014). Research design is combined of research objectives, sources of data collection, data analysis techniques, and strategies to deal with ethical concerns (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill 2019). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) specified research design as a 'blueprint' used for data collection, measurement, and data analysis for answering the research questions. Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) describe research design as a framework for data gathering and data analysis that is most suited to achieve the objectives of the research. According to Nowell et al. (2017:16), a well-formulated research design presents "the argument for the logical steps which will be taken to link the research question(s) and issues to data collection, analysis and interpretation in a coherent way". This study follows the following research framework for achieving the research objectives.
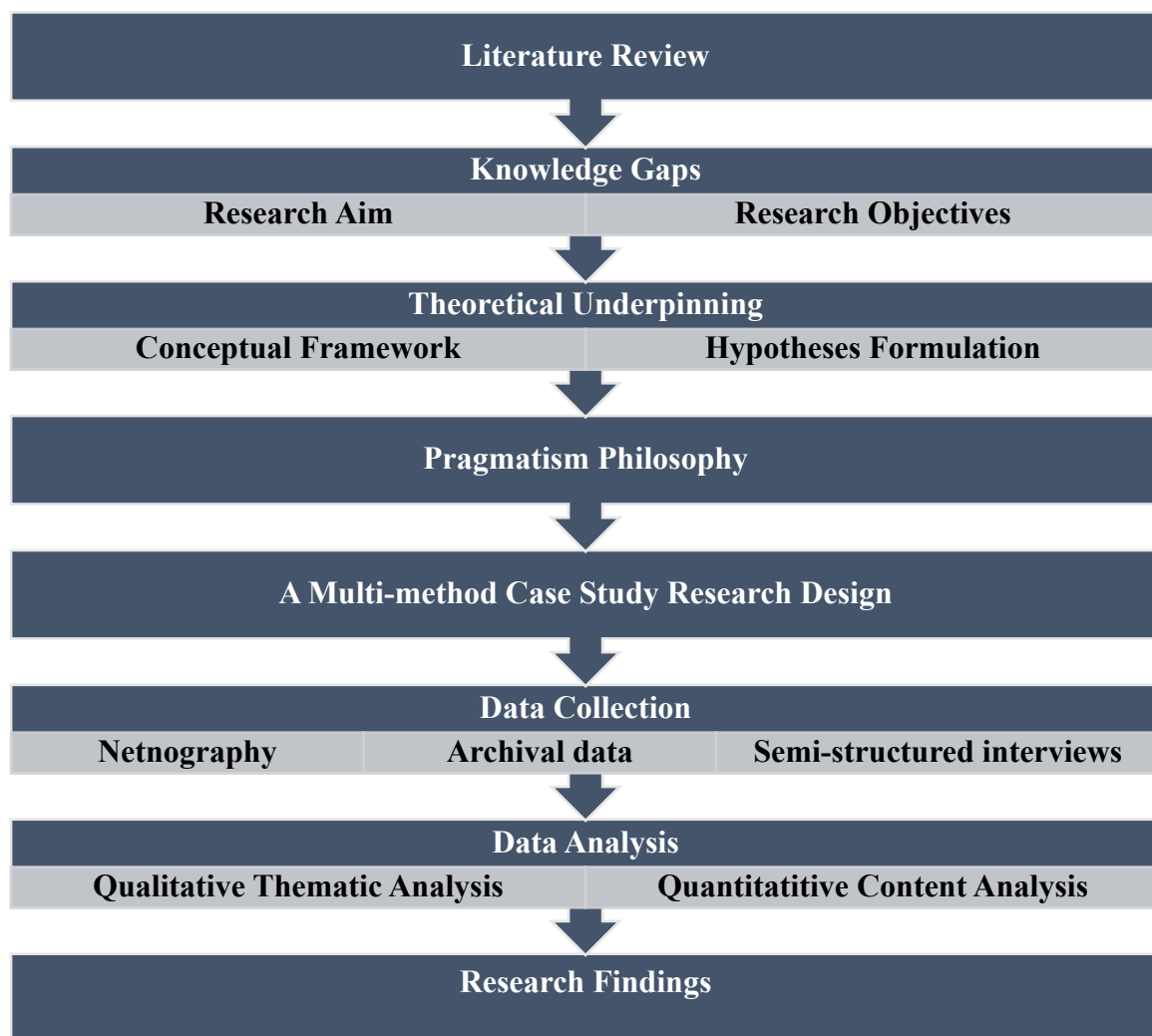
Figure: 4-2: Framework of this Research

Source: The Author

A critical review of existing literature in Chapters Two and Three revealed that there is a limited understanding of SMEs' social media communication strategies. Only a few research studies

focused on social media consumer engagement of SMEs, and no research specifically focused on fashion retail SMEs. After reviewing the extant literature regarding SMEs' social media communication, consumer engagement, benefits and challenges associated with social media communication, this research developed a conceptual framework and formulated hypotheses in chapter three. The previous section of this chapter provided discussions on the philosophical assumptions of this research along with justifications.

The case study was chosen as a suitable research design because it provides the researcher with the greatest amount of flexibility in conducting a study by incorporating multiple tools and techniques for data collection and analysis (Yin 2014; 2018). A case study, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), is often seen as particular and restricted (in time and space), for example, a phenomenon chosen for examination, and the phenomenon of interest might be a person, process, event, group, or organisation. Symon and Cassell (2012) suggested that the research question determines which organisation or context constitutes an appropriate case study. This research focused on the Bangladeshi fashion retail industry, particularly on SME fashion retailers, their Facebook communication strategies, consumer engagement related to their Facebook communications, benefits and challenges involving their Facebook communications were chosen phenomena for analysis. A group of 20 SMEs were selected for this research to gather evidence of more comprehensive communication activities to understand the current industry practices better. Yin (2018) suggested that a set of cases will produce strong evidence than a single case. The selected cases consisted of 20 Bangladeshi SME fashion retailers, and it was considered that selecting multiple companies may represent the industry better than a single SME.

This research also sought to explore how Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities influence their consumer engagement and utilised three different data collection instruments: observations, archival data review, and semi-structured interviews to collect the primary research data. According to Yin (2014), a case study research strategy helps researchers to answer "how" and "why" questions in order to comprehend the nature and complexity of business life. Yin (2014) also suggests that in areas where research studies are scarce, the case study research design could be a helpful tool. The case study research design allowed the researcher to critically investigate current communication strategies, evaluate their effectiveness in increasing consumer engagement, and identify opportunities and challenges involving social media communication to determine the best strategies for SMEs' social media

consumer engagement. According to Cepeda and Martin (2005), the case study is ideal for management research because it allows the researcher to examine many elements of management, learn about 'state-of-the-art' advancements, and produce theories from practices.

This research utilised multiple methods for data collection and analysis and draw a complete picture of SMEs' Facebook communication practices, consumer engagement, benefits and challenges. Bryman and Bell (2015) highlighted that qualitative researchers widely use case study research as it provides flexibility in the collection and analysis of data. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that, under the case study design, researchers can collect data through multiple methods using several qualitative and quantitative research techniques such as interviews, participant observation and questionnaires in the same study.

4.4. Research Methods

In this research, the major portion of the primary data was collected using the qualitative methods (i.e., netnography and semi-structured interviews), hence this research leans towards the interpretivism-qualitative continuum. The mixed-methods research method was identified as the most appropriate method to explore and evaluate the fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication practices to identify the most effective strategies for consumer engagement. Bryman and Bell (2015) constructed nine combinations for mixed-methods research based on the priority and sequence decisions. This research follows the following complementary mix-methods research method:

Qualitative ⟹ Quantitative ⟹ Qualitative Follow-up
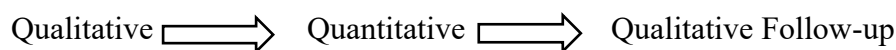
Figure 4-3: Mixed-Methods Research

Source: (Bryman and Bell 2015)

Firstly, to identify the Bangladeshi SME fashion retailers' current social media communication strategies, a qualitative observation was conducted for four months using netnography research (Kozinets 2015; Bryman and Buchanan 2018) for monitoring Facebook communication activities of 20 SME fashion retailers and their consumers. Secondly, to evaluate the effectiveness of current communication strategies for consumers engagement, a quantitative

method was used to examine how consumer engagement levels differ across different media types and post orientations (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015). Subsequently, qualitative follow-up research was used for evaluating the benefits and challenges involving using Facebook as SMEs' marketing communication tool. During the qualitative follow-up research, twelve semi-structured interviews with SMEs' owners and managers were conducted.

Quantitative and qualitative methods are significantly different from one another and follow certain principles specific to each method (Given 2008; Bhattacharjee 2012). In contrast, the qualitative method involves the analysis of data from observations and interviews and the strengths of findings are impacted by their analytical and integration skills, as well as their knowledge of the social phenomena from which they gather data (Bhattacharjee 2012). Qualitative techniques, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), are research approaches that provide conclusions which are not reliant on statistical processes or other quantitative methods. Additionally, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that qualitative researchers are more interested in lived experiences, behavioural patterns, social movements, cultural phenomena and organisational processes.

Given that little is known in terms of how SMEs communicate with their consumers on Facebook, it was necessary to identify SMEs' current Facebook communication activities in order to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of such communication activities for engaging consumers. Based on the above discussions, a qualitative method was found appropriate to capture current industry practices in social media. Thus, to determine the current practices, I adopted the online observation method of SMEs' Facebook pages, defined as a 'netnography', which involves conducting ethnographic research over the internet (Kozinet 2015). During the netnography, I observed the daily activities of SMEs and their interactions with consumers. As a part of the data collection process, screenshots of activities were collected in a word document along with descriptive field notes to make sense of data. Van Esch and Van Esch (2013) suggested that, in qualitative research, making sense of phenomena must be emphasised to understand the experience. Further details of the first qualitative data collection process are presented in the netnography section of this chapter (detail in section 4.4.1.1).

Similarly, for quantitative research, hypotheses were developed to assess the effectiveness of SMEs' communication activities for enhancing consumer engagement upon considering the salesperson interpersonal communication theory and the media richness theory. Both inductive

and deductive approaches were used to create a coding frame for quantitative data analysis. The primary codes were identified through reviewing the extant literature and later modified and finalised based on the findings of common social media strategies from netnography research. Quantitative content analysis was conducted to prepare the data for statistical analysis to identify the best practices for consumer engagement. SMEs' Facebook communication activities were evaluated by considering the level of consumer engagement received by each Facebook post type. Statistical analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses. Further detail of the quantitative data collection and analysis process is detailed in the latter part of this chapter (detail in section 4.4.2).

After analysing the netnography research data and quantitative content analysis of SMEs' Facebook posts and consumer engagement, a follow-up qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) was conducted to explore the benefits and challenges fashion retail SMEs face during social media marketing. According to Symon and Cassell (2012), management practitioners, especially those in SMEs, place greater value on qualitative research outputs than on quantitative outputs. Because "the development of small firms and the behaviour of owner-managers often do not fit neatly into models associated with traditional quantitative approaches, detailed descriptions have much to offer" (Symon and Cassell 2012: 163). Qualitative study aids in the acquisition of deep, relevant insights into areas that may contribute to an organisation's performance, particularly in the SME setting where the field of study is under-researched (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets 2013). During the netnography research, a large amount of qualitative data was gathered, including the SMEs' conversations with consumers and the field notes for further analysis. According to Gummeson (2013), qualitative research should be conducted in complex settings and this complexity can be defined and understood through in-depth analysis of each case. The qualitative technique is useful in explaining the complexity involved since the research objectives include exploring rich data and requiring a study of category or context-specific phenomena (Creswell 2014). Thus, in this research, a decision was made to follow a mixed-methods approach that primarily leans towards the interpretive-qualitative continuum for investigating Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies and exploring the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool. Below, how different methods were used in this research is detailed:

4.4.1. Qualitative Research Method

As aforementioned, this research utilises two qualitative data collection instruments, namely netnography and semi-structured interviews. Below, both of these instruments are reviewed and how they were utilised in this research is elaborated.

4.4.1.1.   *Netnography*

For qualitative data collection, this study first adopted the 'netnography' research method to observe fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities for exploring their current Facebook communication strategies. When an ethnography research study is conducted over the internet-mediated environment, it is called netnography (Kozinets 2010; 2015; Bryman and Buchanan 2018), therefore, this netnography study followed the same principles of the ethnography method. Kozinets (2015:1) defines netnography as a "social science method to present a new approach to conducting ethical and thorough ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and research representation". According to Burrows (2014), ethnography is a study technique in which an ethnographer intensively observes, documents, and participates in the everyday life of another culture before writing a detailed description of that society. Thus, I utilised the netnography method to observe fashion retail SMEs' daily activities and interactions with consumers on Facebook. I also produced field notes with descriptive details about their daily activities and interactions to identify their current social media communication strategies.

Due to the advancement of communication technologies and the development of social networking platforms, an increasing number of communications and interactions are happening in the virtual space (Hutter et al. 2013). Hence, netnography research is being increasingly popular amongst marketing practitioners and researchers (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016; Loureiro, Serra and Guerreiro 2019). Virtual communities, according to De Valck et al. (2009), provide thorough descriptions of how consumers act. This technological development enables a netnographer to closely observe businesses and consumers' activities and capture them for study and analysis (Morais, Santos and Gonçalves 2020). During the netnography research, I observed how SMEs communicated with their followers on Facebook. I also participated in SMEs' Facebook live events. Compared to ethnography, the major advantage of netnography is every interaction is recorded in the

virtual platform and due to the openness of the social media platforms, there is a higher possibility to capture all relevant information and fewer chances to miss important ones. However, due to the storage of all information in the platform, it creates an overload of information and that can pose a challenge for novice researchers to identify the necessary information (De Valck et al. 2009). As part of the netnography research, one of the important steps is to identify the sample for data collection. As Kozinets (2015) suggested while selecting a sample, a netnography researcher should follow certain criteria such as focusing on factors such as research question-related segments, higher traffics of communications, interactions, and the richness of information availability.

4.4.1.1.1. SME Selection Criteria for Netnography

In this research, I applied the purposive sampling technique to select the sample of SME fashion retailers. Taherdoost (2016) defines sampling as the process of identifying population units from which samples are drawn. Purposive sampling also called 'judgemental sampling' (Taherdoost 2016), is a commonly used sampling technique in social science. Purposive sampling allowed me to select the most suitable SMEs to answer the research question (Taherdoost 2016). The researcher's practical knowledge of the research field, the accessible literature, and the evidence from prior studies should be utilised to inform and choose the sample (Rahi 2017). In this research, I chose Facebook as a platform for the observation because it is the most popular social media platform in Bangladesh (Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019; Tabassum 2019), and a large number of fashion retailers including the country's top fashion brands such as Yellow, Richman, Arong and so on are actively using this platform (Socialbakers 2020).

Many SMEs are operating in the fashion industry in Bangladesh. SME fashion retailers that actively operate on Facebook were chosen for this study because they operate in one of the fastest-growing e-retail spaces in Bangladesh. The Facebook marketplace has been identified as an F-commerce or Facebook-commerce (Zabeen, Ara and Sharowar 2013; Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019; Tabassum 2019; Shirmin and Sultan 2020). For the purpose of the study, it was thought suitable to choose SMEs that were most likely to be instructive or 'theoretically beneficial' in meeting the research goals (Yin 2014; 2018). The sampling approach used in this study was divided into two stages. To begin,

prospective samples were identified using the selection criteria mentioned below in order to identify the most suitable SMEs for this study.

Criterion 1*: SME fashion retailers must have been operating on Facebook for at least three years.*

This filtering criterion was used because Lewis and Harris (2006) suggested that most SMEs and e-businesses fail within 18 months. Thus, SMEs selected in this research were required to be well-established on Facebook and survived beyond the two years of the critical period, allowing the researcher to collect more reliable data from learned and experienced entrepreneurs.

Criterion 2: *Active presence on Facebook and publishing at least three posts per week.*

There is no definitive answer for the optimal number of posts per day; however, most studies agree that posting once per day is optimal, and to be considered as an active user of the platform, the business should post a minimum of three posts per week (Connolly 2015; Myers 2020). According to one study by a marketing firm, pages with less than 10,000 followers saw a 50% decline in interaction per post if they posted more than once each day (Hubspot 2015). However, they also suggested that the frequency of posts mostly depends on the followers' age range, interest and Facebook habits. Moreover, Kozinets (2010: 2015) explained that highly active social media pages should be observed to gain rich data for research.

Criterion 3: *Actively selling, promoting, and communicating with consumers through Facebook.*

Yin (2014; 2018) suggested that the most informative sample should be selected for a case study research study to get theoretical insight and achieve the research objectives. Similarly, Kozinets (2015) suggested that for netnography analysis, participants (e.g., segment, organisation, groups) should be selected after considering the research question and objectives. Hence, to collect the most relevant data, the following steps were considered before finalising what SMEs to approach for recruiting in the study.

To find eligible SME fashion retailers for this study, many online searches were made utilising search engines such as Google and Bing, as well as the Facebook search feature, using keywords such as 'Bangladesh,' 'Fashion brand,' and 'Retail'. SME fashion retailers were identified based on their Facebook home page descriptions and ensuring they sell clothing products. Over 50 SME fashion retailers were identified from the initial searches. All 50 SME fashion retailers' official Facebook pages were further reviewed to determine the most theoretically useful ones, as Yin (2014; 2018) suggested. Reflecting on Yin's (2014; 2018) suggestions for case selection, this study applied the following criteria for netnography sample selection as suggested by Kozinets (2015).

- Sample should be relevant to achieve research objectives
- The sample includes a site with a high number of postings
- Sample should be using various messaging techniques
- Sample with descriptive and rich data
- Sample should engage and interact with consumers regularly using the platform.

By embracing the purposive sampling technique with the above two-step organisation selection criterion, 20 SMEs were selected for final observation. The table below now presents the profiles of selected SMEs for this research.

Table: 4-1: SME Samples related information (as of April 2019)

Serial Number	Company	Location	Size (no of staffs)	Years of Facebook Trading	No of Facebook Followers
1	SME-1	Facebook only	8-12	2016	62538
2	SME-2	Dhak, BD	10-15	2012	1040963
3	SME-3	Dhaka, BD	12-15	2014	1024735
4	SME-4	Dhaka, BD	50-60	2014	536477
5	SME-5	Dhaka, BD	12-15	2017	335378
6	SME-6	Dhaka, BD	10-15	2014	420142
7	SME-7	Dhaka, BD	10-12	2012	521576
8	SME-8	Dhaka, BD	10-12	2015	59874
9	SME-9	Dhaka, BD	100-120	2013	150359
10	SME-10	Dhaka, BD	40-50	2017	81199
11	SME-11	Dhaka, BD	100-120	2013	716968
12	SME-12	Dhaka, BD	100-120	2008	488336
13	SME-13	Dhaka BD	40-60	2014	674384
14	SME-14	Dhaka BD	100-120	2010	2346954
15	SME-15	Only Facebook	8-10	2014	112239
16	SME-16	Dhaka, BD	100-120	2013	223052
17	SME-17	Dhaka, BD	60-80	2010	465388
18	SME-18	Dhaka, BD	40-50	2012	96988
19	SME-19	Dhaka, BD	45-60	2010	294085
20	SME-20	Dhaka, BD	40-50	2016	62956

Source: The Author

I selected 20 SMEs for final observation and the collection of netnography data. Although there is no clear recommendation on what sample size is optimal for a netnography study, numerous academics have offered criteria for choosing sample sizes based on the research methodology, such as case studies, ethnographies, grounded theory, or focus group discussions (e.g., Bell, Bryman and Harley 2019; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Marshall et al. 2013; Charmaz 2014; Saunders and Townsend 2016; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2019). In qualitative research,

sample sizes should not be so large that it is difficult to extract rich and diverse data. In contrast, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) contend that the sample should also not be too small to be difficult to achieve 'data saturation' or 'theoretical saturation'. Previous studies on SMEs and social media research used a variety of sample sizes; for example, Connolly (2015) observed 12 UK sports retail SMEs for his study, Tafesse and Wien (2018) collected data from 20 large UK automobile companies, de Vries, Veer and de Vries collected data from 18 New Zealand SMEs from the bakery industry, Wagner et al. (2017) analysed Facebook page of 10 automobile brands, Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti (2016) collected data from six Italian and Spanish fashion retail SMEs, and Chokpitakkul and Anantachart (2020) analysed the Facebook communication of eight Thai SMEs' Facebook pages. The number of SMEs selected for this research is consistent with the average number of samples used by previous researchers.

4.4.1.1.2. Justification for the time frame and Data Collection

The netnography research data was collected over four months (from January 2019 to April 2019) by observing 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities and their interactions with consumers to identify their social media communication practices. According to Ashley and Tuten (2015), a four-week timeframe on social media is suitable for reviewing a wide range of posts. Tafesse and Wien (2018) collected Facebook data within a four-week window from 20 brand pages. Whereas Swani and Milne (2017) used only one week's Facebook data, and Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer (2020) analysed one-month data for their research. Hence, four months of netnography was considered extensive and appropriate for this study to capture SMEs' Facebook communication activities. A decision was made to collect data over four months because merely exploring one or two months may not be enough to capture all their communication strategies; for instance, the short window of data collection could be influenced by a particular event (e.g., Eid festival); hence data collected during this time may not be considered as standard practices. Prior studies collected social media data for content analysis based on the pre-selected framework rather than identifying actual industry practices. However, this research aimed to explore fashion retail SMEs' common social media communication strategies; hence, a four-month window was appropriate for the highest number of individual Facebook activities. Nevertheless, I have been closely observing SMEs' Facebook activities throughout the sample selection process over six months to become

familiar with their norms and cultures. According to Kozinets (2015), collecting and analysing netnography data requires researchers to join and actively engaging in communities in order to become familiar with the background and cultural characteristics of the communities.

I followed selected SMEs' Facebook pages regularly by clicking follow and like buttons; I also joined SMEs' Facebook communities where opportunities were available to extract rich insights about their Facebook communications. I was able to observe SMEs' Facebook posts regularly by following their Facebook pages. The research data observed comprised Facebook posts published by the SME fashion retailers, including text, pictures, videos, Facebook live streams, and consumer responses (e.g., consumers' comments on the posts). During the netnography research, I attended SMEs' Facebook live public events and watched them, observed consumers' responses and took notes of those events. I reviewed their video posts, read textual posts, and also read their followers' comments on each post. I captured screenshots of SMEs' Facebook posts and took descriptive notes about each post as just capturing the screenshot may not be enough given that data were to be analysed at the end of the data collection process. Without a contextual description of the posts, actual interpretation may be lost during the data analysis process. Reflective field notes were taken throughout the observation period as evidence of SMEs' unique and everyday practices, along with screenshots of the posts and all the data were saved in a word document for further analysis. Written reflections, according to Kozinets (2015), are typically essential for contextualising data collected during netnography. The written field notes were helpful in this study for analysing and contextualising data, as well as recognising codes and emergent themes.

4.4.1.1.3. Advantages of netnography over ethnography

Although netnography is an electronic type of ethnography, having access to a massive quantity of digitally preserved social interactions, as well as live access to individuals online, completely transforms ethnography (Bryman and Buchanan 2018). Netnography is a new research approach that is 'consumer-centric,' allowing small and large firms to constantly improve their consumer and industry expertise by monitoring their consumers' online behaviour, particularly in social media (Kozinets 2015). It allows the social media sector to learn how consumers' value co-creation drives online product development (Kozinets 2015). Nowadays, increasing interactions are happening in social media, and netnography has become an effective tool for

capturing and interpreting these interactions. This research applied netnography to understand fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication practices and consumer responses. Ethnography is used to examine people's behaviour and the practices of organisations in real settings, however, observing online communities through netnography offers many benefits over traditional ethnography approaches.

Firstly, during the netnography, I observed SMEs' communication and consumers' responses unobtrusively and interpreted their social media behaviours. Conducting a netnography research also enabled me to observe natural information exchanges that influence the opinions of SMEs Facebook followers and evaluate SMEs' communications and how they were being perceived by their consumers (Kozinets 2015; Madsen 2016). Online communities can be studied without invading their privacy or interfering with their activities, according to de Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009). Focus groups, personal interviews, and classic ethnographies, on the other hand, cannot be done unobtrusively. Secondly, I was able to perform netnography remotely by following SMEs' activities over the internet; virtual communities are available at any time and may be explored from behind the researcher's desk (Bryman and Buchanan 2018). Finally, in contrast to traditional ethnography, netnography was less time consuming and more cost-efficient; for instance, it saved me travelling time and cost and allowed flexibility to access participants anytime. Due to ongoing access to informants, Kozinets (2015) stressed that virtual community and social media research are less time demanding and cost-effective.

4.4.1.1.4. Challenges experienced whilst conducting netnography research

Despite having many advantages, a netnography research study can be affected by some challenges too. As a netnography researcher, initially, I found it challenging to locate the necessary and relevant data in the natural social media setting because there was plenty of information scattered, and communications were unidirectional (Kulavuz-Onal 2015; Corrêa and Rozados 2017; Morais, Santos and Gonçalves 2020). Kozinets (2015) and Morais, Santos and Gonçalves (2020) cautioned that because there is so much material available online, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by it. Given the vast amount of information available on Facebook, I faced comparable difficulties. However, I overcome this challenge by following the conceptual model developed in chapter three and staying focused on the research aim and

objectives. Kozinets (2015) also noted that a netnography researcher misses the richness of in-person communication, tonal shifts of the participants, their body language and eye movements, etc. However, with the advancement of technology, I feel this limitation of online textual communication has become an opportunity for social media researchers because social media allow multimedia posts, including text, images, video and even live video streaming options.

4.4.1.2.   Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews were also conducted in this research as interviews are valuable instruments for social science studies for extracting a rich set of relevant data from the respondents (Sekaran and Bougie 2016). Interviews are generally categorised into three types based on how they are conducted, for instance, unstructured, structured and semi-structured (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Semi-structured interviews were used for this study because they are particularly useful for uncovering new insights and patterns since they are not just in-depth but also provide respondents with the freedom to explore new subjects and ask questions (Wilson 2014). Interviews can be conducted in two formats: one-to-one and one-to-many. One-to-one interviews include telephone interviews and face to face interviews, whilst one-to-many interviews refer to focus group discussions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). In this study, Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' owners and managers were interviewed to evaluate SMEs' Facebook communication activities and identify the opportunities and challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool. I chose one-to-one interviews as it allows us to discuss issues in an in-depth manner. The semi-structured interviews operationalised in this research were extremely helpful in discovering new insights about the benefits and challenges of SMEs' Facebook communication. It also minimised the risks of respondents misunderstanding the question and providing false information as I had a chance to clarify the matter to the respondents instantly.

Although interviews are highly useful data collection instruments, Robson (1993) argued that the lack of standardisation on unstructured interviews may raise reliability concerns. To ensure the reliability of findings, the research adopted semi-structured interviews for this research and considered the themes and questions identified in the literature in the interview question designing process. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) suggested that the success of an interview relies on the interviewer's capabilities and social skills. Where a researcher cannot connect with the

respondents adequately, they may not be able to extract essential information. Issues such as interviewer bias could also arise due to the attitude or tone of the interviewer. As an interviewer, I followed multiple steps to develop interview questions, such as reading interview-related literature for dos and don'ts, discussions with supervisors, pilot interviews, and feedback from the participants of pilot studies. In some cases, interviewees could find discussing specific topics unpleasant, leading to them providing untruthful responses (Wilson 2014). Before commencing interviews, every participant was informed that they could skip any question if they felt uncomfortable answering them.

4.4.1.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews Sample Size and Justifications

One-to-one semi-structured interviews with twelve owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were conducted for this study to explore the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool for communication and consumer engagement. One-to-one semi-structured interviews with twelve owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were conducted for this study to explore the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool for communication and consumer engagement. I contacted all 20 SMEs' owners and managers chosen for netnography observation and requested them to participate in the interview. However, only 12 of them volunteered to participate in this research. Deciding the number of participants and types of participants required for a study is crucial in qualitative research (Saunders and Townsend 2015). In this research, I interviewed the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' owners and managers upon considering their knowledge and experiences. I made attempts to include at least one participant each from all 20 SMEs considered in this research; however, it was not possible to include the representatives of all 20 SMEs as managers and owners from eight SMEs either did not respond or stated that they were not willing to participate. This research relies entirely on the voluntary participation of respondents and therefore no participants were forced to participate in any way. Forcing participants to participate in a research study not only causes ethical concerns but also can result in participants providing false information (Nijhawan 2013). Nevertheless, the focus of this study was on data quality and utility. Hence, the goal was not to consider a large number of people, rather it was to choose individuals who could be the most suitable for achieving the research objectives. During the interviews, careful consideration was also given to 'data saturation'. Upon conducting the 12th interview, I was convinced that data saturation was achieved hence a decision was made not to recruit further participants for the interview.

This research focused on the homogeneous group of participants as they were selected from the fashion retail industry in Bangladesh. Regarding the most appropriate number of participants for a qualitative study, scholars have provided diverse suggestions. For example, Marshall et al. (2013) recommend that 20-30 participants are suitable for grounded theory research and 15-20 participants for a single case study research. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested 5-25 participants depending on the research purpose, Creswell (2014) suggested 3-5 participants from each case study, Adler and Adler (2012) recommended 12-60 participants, and Saunders (2012) recommended that 4-12 participants are sufficient for homogeneous populations and 12-30 participants are required for the heterogeneous population.

Prior studies in social media and SMEs conducted with a diverse number of interviews. For example, Connolly (2015) interviewed 15 social media experts, Shabgahi (2015) interviewed 21 participants, and Ananda, Hernandez-Garcia and Lamberti (2016) conducted only six interviews for their research. Chen, Ji and Min (2017) conducted 28 interviews with 419 social media posts content analysis. In line with the previous studies and considering the research objectives, amount of data required for the research, and time constraints, for this study, 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out. The population of this research is homogeneous as they were chosen from the same industry (e.g., fashion retail) and same business size (e.g., SME); thus, the selected sample size is in line with the recommendation of Saunders (2012). Although it was predicted that the number of interviews could change over the data collection process, as a researcher, I ensured that the data supports the conclusion. The next section now elaborates upon the steps followed for recruiting the participants for this research.

4.4.1.2.2. Recruitment of Interview Participants

Initially, selected SMEs' Facebook administrative coordinators and managers were emailed or messaged directly through Facebook Messenger. A total of 55 invitations were sent to 50 different fashion retail SMEs' owners, managers and Facebook coordinators requesting to participate in this research. In the first round of invitations, only eight people showed their willingness to participate, and I listed them as potential research participants. In the second round of the participant recruitment process, I made several phone calls to SMEs' owners and managers and also tried to contact them through my friends and family networks. Another 13 more potential participants showed their willingness to participate when I contacted them

through direct phone calls and personal contacts, making the number of total shortlisted participants 21. Eventually, to recruit the participants that are most knowledgeable for answering the research questions, several participant selection criteria were employed by asking participants about their experiences and involvement with SMEs and social media. Only the participants that satisfied the following criteria were considered for the study:

- At least two years of industry experiences
- Currently representing an SME fashion retailer in social media
- Involvement in SMEs' strategic decision making and implementation.
- Experience in social media engagement and enhancing reputation.

The key focus was to ensure all participants selected for the final interview phase have considerable experience working in SMEs, social media environments, are involved in strategic decision-making for using social media, and may deal with consumers in social media platforms. Participants that fulfilled those criteria were considered SME's social media experts; hence it was assumed that participants' experiences could provide some useful insight into understanding the phenomenon. Upon evaluating each participant's knowledge, experience, and involvement in SMEs' social media communication activities, a total of 12 participants were selected for the final interviews. Participants from the selected netnograohy SMEs were prioritised in the recruitment process to have better insight about their Facebook communication practices. Recruiting the participants for the research was a challenging process as the vast majority of the initially contacted participants were either unresponsive or unwilling to participate. Kuttainen and Lexhagen (2011) highlighted the difficulties in obtaining access to SMEs for research purposes, citing the fact that SME owners and managers have limited free time due to having to complete various organisational responsibilities. The table below presents the profile of the interview participants recruited for this research.

Table: 4-2: The Profile of Interview Participants

Interviewee Code	Gender	Role in the SME	Number of Employees	Experience in the industry (in years)
P1	Male	Social Media Manager	8-12	2
P2	Female	Social Media Coordinator	10-15	2
P3	Male	Manager	12-15	3
P4	Male	Owner	50-60	5
P5	Female	Owner	12-15	3
P6	Male	Manager	10-15	2.5
P7	Male	Manager	30-35	4
P8	Male	Owner	10-12	2
P9	Male	Manager	8-12	3
P10	Male	Manager	40-45	3.5
P11	Female	Owner	45-50	3
P12	Female	Manager	15-20	4

Source: The Author

4.4.1.2.3. Process of interview data collection

The interview questions were designed in the English language by carefully considering the existing literature. The finalised interview questions were then translated into Bengali as interviews were carried out in the participants' native language (e.g., Bengali) and then translated back into English with the help of a bilingual research student to achieve high accuracy by following the approach suggested by Chen, Ji and Men (2017).

The interviews were conducted between August 2019 to February 2020 in two stages. In the first stage, seven interviews were managed on a face-to-face basis between August 2019 and September 2019. Each interviewee was contacted in advance to confirm the interview date and time. I also sent an email notification to participants two days before the interview schedule as a reminder. To provide participants with the most comfort, all face-to-face interviews were done at their workplaces. I arrived at the meeting place 15 minutes before the scheduled time to make necessary preparations so that no participant had to wait. At the start of the interviews,

firstly, I introduced myself and then began the conversations with informal talks, explained to them the reasons for conducting this study, how interest in business and social media led me to conduct this research. Such informal discussion fosters a nice and comfortable atmosphere for interviewing as previously suggested by Hove and Anda (2005). I constantly showed appreciation by speaking about how the interviewees' contribution was critical to this research, as doing so can help increase the reliability of the responses (Hove and Anda 2005).

At the beginning of the formal interview process, research participant information sheet was provided to each interviewee (appended in Appendix 1). Each participant was given time to read the participant information sheet. Afterwards, they were asked if they wanted to know more about this study and I then briefly highlighted the participants' rights and confirmed their participation is entirely voluntary. They were informed that they are not bound to answer every question asked in the interview process, and they are not bound to give any reason for not responding. They were also told that they could withdraw from the interviews without giving any reason at any stage of the interview. I also explained that interviews would be audio recorded for data analysis, and the recording will be safely destroyed upon completing this research and associated projects. It was assured that the personal information of all interviewees, including their organisations, would be kept anonymous. Once all the necessary information were explained, the consent form was given to sign (appended in Appendix 2). All 12 participants were happy to continue with the interviews and gave their consent to carry on.

Throughout the interviews, I maintained a calm and relaxed posture to make the participants feel comfortable. Participants were provided with opportunities to ask questions at any stage of the interviews. Throughout the interviews, I tried to remain non-judgmental and compassionate; participants were free to express themselves and were encouraged to add more ideas, thoughts, and remarks.

Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, have been criticised for the risk of dialogues deviating from the research's main topic when the researcher builds on the participants' comments (Wilson 2014; Adams 2015). To avoid this, an interview strategy was created before conducting interviews as a guide to guarantee that all of the important and relevant areas of the interview were covered, which can be found in appendix 3. Following guidance from the literature (e.g., Rubin and Rubin 2005; Chen, Ji and Men 2017), An interview guide was developed, beginning with rapport-building questions and progressing to open-ended primary

topics and possibly probing questions. For example, to get to know the interviewees, questions were asked to start the dialogue., "Tell me a bit about your main responsibilities?" and "What kind of problems do you handle every day?" Probing and follow-up questions were used to get more thorough replies and descriptions., such as ''Why?'' ''How?'' or ''Can you please give some examples?'' The participants were thanked for their participation and their valuable contributions to the research after the interviews. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 80 minutes.

The second phase of the interviews was conducted by using the Skype and Microsoft Team App as I was away in the UK. It was impossible to complete all face-to-face interviews in the first stage of data collection due to the limited time in Bangladesh and schedule conflicts. Moreover, there are some benefits of two-stage data collection as it provided me with an opportunity to familiarise myself with the previously collected data and overcome the shortcomings of the first stage data in the second stage. Moreover, I was also able to assess whether or not the collected data can satisfactorily answer the research questions or if there is a need to conduct more interviews to achieve theoretical saturation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Following a preliminary analysis of the first set of interviews data, I determined that to achieve the research objective and theoretical saturation further data were required. Hence, I decided to conduct second stage of interviews.

The second stage of interviews followed a similar approach to the first stage; once interviewees agreed to participate in the research, the interview was scheduled at the participant's convenient date and time. A reminder email was sent two days before the scheduled interview date to each participant. A virtual team meeting was created in the Microsoft Team; the meeting link was shared with participants with a detailed explanation on how to join the meeting. Altogether, five interviews were carried out in the second phase of data collection. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees for further analysis purposes. Out of five interviewees, two participants were not comfortable with video interviews; hence, they kept their videos turned off during the interview.

Although virtual interviews tend to be convenient and cost-effective, I faced some challenges too. For instance, the major problem was internet connectivity; there was no internet connection during one of the interviews due to the load shedding in Bangladesh. The interview was delayed as we waited for an internet connection. On the other hand, the face-to-face interview was also

not challenge-free as well as I had to conduct an interview twice due to an issue with the recording device. At the end of the first face-to-face interview, I found out that the whole interview was not recorded. I turned on the recorder; it was a flashing red and I thought it started recording, but I found out that the recorder was in standby mode and needed another click to start recording. I lost the interview entirely, and I had to re-interview the participant on another occasion. However, after this incident, I gave extra care to interview recordings as the loss of interview data was infuriating. At the end, 12 interviews were conducted successfully, and emails were sent to all participants by thanking them for their participation and appreciating their time and contributions to this research. All interview data were analysed using the thematic data analysing approach—further detail of thematic data analysis is presented in chapter 4.5.1.

4.4.2. Quantitative Research Method

4.4.2.1. Content Analysis

Upon completing four months of netnography observation, two months of Facebook activities of 20 fashion retail SMEs were archived for quantitative content analysis by reviewing the number of Facebook consumer interactions (i.e., likes, comments, and shares). For two months (15th January 2019 to 15th March 2019), I archived the Facebook activities of 20 SMEs. The archival data was collected to identify the patterns of Facebook communication strategies of SMEs and evaluate the effectiveness of communications for consumer engagement (e.g., engagement). Two thousand four hundred and nine (2409) posts were archived within two months, including the number of consumer interactions (e.g., like, comment, and share) on each post to explore and evaluate Facebook communication activities of SMEs.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) suggested that archival data can be collected from various sources, including governments, non-governmental agencies, and other organisations. In this research, archival data were collected from fashion retail SMEs' Facebook pages. Facebook allows users to upload their posts in their Facebook timeline where previous posts remain in the past activities list unless users delete them regularly. Due to all (or the majority) of the activities being stored on Facebook and being available in the past activity list, they can be considered archival data. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) state that archival data can be found in a structured format such as a database or spreadsheet or in unstructured form –

which is not easy to process in their current format. Structured data can be found in numerical or word form; however, unstructured data typically comprises text, photo, video, and other numerical data. In this research, archival data was collected in an unstructured format. It consisted of SMEs' Facebook posts, including text, photo, video, and Facebook live events and the number of consumer interactions on each post.

All of the data were archived in HTML format for further analysis. All information was visual in this file format, and I reviewed them using internet explorer. Data consisted of post message types, media types, and the number of consumer interactions (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) on each post. All the information was identifiable in save format. However, SMEs' video and live posts were not retrievable from the saved HTML files; thus, video and live posts were revisited on SMEs' Facebook pages; videos were archived according to the date and time of the post while coding them. Whilst collecting the quantitative data, this research followed a similar approach followed by previous studies (e.g., Ashley and Tuten 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020)

4.4.2.1.1. Content Analysis Sample Size and Justifications

Tafesse and Wien (2018) suggest that, before deciding the sample size for a research study, the need for generalisation, the cost of data collection, and the time limit of the study should be considered. Previous studies on social media research used a diverse range of sample sizes. For instance, De Vries et al. (2012) used a unit of 355 Facebook posts from 11 international brands, Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) chose a unit of 1086 Facebook posts from 100 top global brands, and Yuki (2015) selected 2000 most shared posts from multiple social media platforms. Consistent with prior literature, SMEs' Facebook posts covering two months were sampled from each SME's Facebook page (15th January 2019 to 15th March 2019) in this research. According to Ashley and Tuten (2015), a four-week window on social media is sufficient enough to publish a diverse range of postings. Tafesse and Wien (2018) collected 290 brand posts in a four-week window from 20 brand pages. At the same time, Swani and Milne (2017) used 1467 Facebook posts from 213 accounts collected over one week. Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer (2020) analysed 2,607 posts across three platforms from 109 business pages over one month. In order to cover maximum diversity, this research used a sample from two months window.

Although there are thousands of fashion retail SMEs operating in Bangladesh, only 20 SMEs were selected to examine their communication activities after carefully analysing how often they use Facebook for marketing communications. As this study seeks to identify the current industry practices, I adopted a multi-method sequential case study research design – as highlighted in section 4.3. The use of a multi-method sequential approach enabled me to firstly gather and examine the information that is already available in the public domain and subsequently evaluate the findings of the quantitative analysis by interviewing individuals working in the industry. SMEs' Facebook communication practices were first summarised through netnography. Subsequently, the effectiveness of the identified practices was quantitatively assessed by assessing their effectiveness in terms of enhancing consumer engagement across Facebook. Further, follow-up qualitative interviews of SMEs' owners and managers were conducted for explaining the research findings as well as to further understand the challenges faced by SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail industry.

As aforementioned, a total of 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' 2409 Facebook posts were investigated for exploring and evaluating SMEs social media marketing communication activities. Existing studies in the area of social media marketing communications for SMEs also used a similar number of posts in their research. For example, Connolly (2015) analysed 12 UK sports retail e-SMEs, investigating 2882 posts from six different social media platforms; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti (2016) analysed six Italian and Spanish SMEs, analysing 1487 Facebook posts over one year; Chen, Ji and Men (2017) analysed 25 Chinese start-up companies, reviewing 419 posts from two different social media platform; de Vries, Veer and de Vries (2018) analysed 18 New Zealand SME bakeries, investigating a total of 1702 posts from three different social media platforms; and Anadachart and Chokpitakul (2020) analysed eight Thai SMEs' 3147 Facebook posts over three years.

Upon examining the sample size used by previous similar studies, it is apparent that the sample size used in this study is larger than most comparable studies. Although it is often preferable to have larger samples so that robust generalisations can be drawn, various factors such as time, access, and resources were carefully considered whilst deciding the number of samples to be examined. After carefully examining the resources available to the researcher as well as the sample size used by previous researchers, a rational decision was made to examine the Facebook communication activities of 20 SMEs only.

4.5. Pilot Study and Changes Made

In this research, before starting the primary data collection, three different pilot studies were conducted: netnography, archival data collection, and semi-structured interviews. Pilot studies are critical to any research's success as they help calibrate the data collection scales and ensure that the scales are fit for purpose (Al-Eisawi 2014; Malmqvist et al. 2019). A well-executed pilot study can prevent the potential loss of time and money by ensuring measurement instruments are reliable before collecting large-scale data. Pilot studies also help to assess whether variables and measures are operationalised to the correct level (Kim 2010).

Firstly, two weeks of pilot netnography was conducted on two fashion retail SMEs' official Facebook pages. SMEs for the pilot study were selected following the same scanning process as for the main study. Pilot netnography research provided an opportunity to identify relevant challenges and opportunities involving a netnography research process, including data collection, data storing and analysis. Most importantly, the pilot study helped me to shape the boundary of data collection and highlighted the focus areas for the main study. Initially, I planned to conduct the main netnography research for six months; however, after the pilot study, and considering the amount of data was gathered in two weeks from two SMEs, the data collection duration was reduced to four months only.

Additionally, a pilot study was conducted as a part of the quantitative research as well. During the pilot study, 100 Facebook posts from five fashion retail SMEs were reviewed and saved in HTML format for further review and analysis. Subsequently, the number of likes, comments, and shares related to each post was recorded, and a brief statistical analysis was conducted. This pilot study confirmed that the coding framework operationalised for the research is appropriate and can effectively capture the current social media communication strategies of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

Finally, two semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure that the pre-determined interview protocols and approaches were adequate for achieving the research objectives. Although each interview was initially anticipated to last for approximately 40 minutes, the actual interviews lasted around 55 minutes during the pilot study. The plot interviews helped the researcher better understand the time required to conduct each interview and plan accordingly. Based on this learning, the participant information sheet informed participants

that the interview would last for approximately an hour during the main interviews. The pilot study also helped enhance the researcher's interview skills, such as engaging actively with participants, building rapport, being an active listener, and so on (Malmqvist et al. 2019). Analysing the pilot interview transcripts helped me to modify the interview questions for simplifying the data collection process. For example, when I asked the participants regarding their 'social media digital marketing' they were confused about the meaning of the term. Thus, in the main data collection process, I reworded the term as 'promoting and marketing their company on Facebook'. At the end of the interviews, respondents were requested to provide suggestions for improving the interview process and interview questions. They recommended that some of the terms used in the interview questions feel like academic jargon; therefore, changes were made by further simplifying them and replacing academic terms used in the questions with everyday terms. For example, the word 'engagement' was replaced with 'interaction'. Similarly, 'virtual marketplace' was replaced by 'selling via Facebook'.

4.6.   Data Analysis

4.6.1.   Data Transcription and Translation

All the evidence related to SMEs' social media communication activities were collected in the original language during this research. SMEs in the sample generally used two languages in their Facebook posts: Bengali (Local language) and English. However, netnography field notes were written in English. The netnography data were analysed in the original language. Subsequently, important findings were translated into English; this back-translation method is a tool for quality assessment for cross-cultural studies (Tyupa 2011). A similar approach was taken by Chen, Ji and Men (2017) in their research. An example of SME's Facebook post in Bengali and translation are presented below:

SME's Original Post: *"আমাদের প্রিয় বোনের ভালবাসা, আমাদের প্রিয় বোন হাসিনার ভালবাসায় আমরা আবেগ আপ্লুত, এটি আমাদের সন্তুষ্টি। আমাদের এত ভালবাসার জন্য বোনকে অনেক ধন্যবাদ"*.
Translation: *"Love of our favourite sister. We are inundated by the love of our favourite sister Hasina. This is our satisfaction. Thanks a lot for loving us so much, sister".*

All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Bengali language to allow participants to remain comfortable and to express their views clearly. Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill (2019) acknowledged that transcribing research data is a time-consuming process as an hour of interview transcription usually take 8-10 hours to transcribe. The researcher had a similar experience during the initial data transcribing procedures. However, the researcher realised that transcribing all data is not necessary for this research purpose. Hence, the researcher only transcribed the relevant sections of the interviews for further analysis by following the approach suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019). Moreover, for better accuracy, interview transcripts were double-checked by a bilingual person (Tyupa 2011). Quotations included in the thesis were double-checked by another bilingual person to ensure that they were accurate and reflected the expressions of the participants.

This research utilises both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Two different data analysis approaches were used to analyse the research data: the qualitative research data collected through netnography, and semi-structured interviews were analysed using a thematic data analysis process. In contrast, the quantitative research data were analysed using statistical tests. By definition, data is unprocessed intelligence that has to be analysed and interpreted before it can be used (Bryman and Bell 2015). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2007), data analysis tries to provide a framework for articulating the core of what the data reveals by providing a feeling, reducing volume, identifying patterns, and themes. A framework, according to Hackett and Strickland (2018), is a way of qualitative data analysis that provides researchers with a systematic structure for managing, analysing, and identifying themes, and is especially beneficial when dealing with huge amounts of text. Similarly, Smith and Firth (2011) also state that such a structured framework provides helpful guidance to novice researchers. Thus, different frameworks were followed for the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

4.6.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

4.6.2.1. Thematic Analysis

In this study, netnography and interview data were analysed using a thematic data analysis technique. Thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that is structured but flexible and reflexive (Braun and Clarke 2021). Thematic analysis, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), may be used to analyse interviews, observation, documents, diaries, and websites. Thematic analysis is used to find common themes or patterns in data.

Braun and Clarke (2006:78) refer to thematic analysis as a "foundational method for qualitative analysis" in their very first publication on thematic analysis. There are various methods for analysing qualitative data. Since Braun and Clarke's (2006) publication of the article on thematic analysis, it becomes a popular and commonly adopted approach for qualitative data analysis in social science studies.

A thematic analysis' versatility allows it to be used in both inductive and deductive ways (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Furthermore, when a research study seeks to investigate the present practices of any individual or organisation, thematic analysis is useful since it allows for the generation of coding and categorising data into themes (Alhojailan 2012). Furthermore, the theme analysis technique emphasises the goal of validation to ensure a comprehensive picture of the study (Braun and Clarke 2021). This method aids the researcher in understanding the intricacies and chronology of how the raw data was used. Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate when the researcher examines the data to discover common themes and thoughts from multiple participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). As a result, thematic analysis was considered as an appropriate method for analysing the qualitative data in this study.

Using manual thematic analysis enabled me to connect with the rich data. Each interview tape was listened to several times to transcribe it. Transcripts were re-read again during the data coding and condensing process. The study progressed from "pre-understandings" (literature review) to "initial understanding" (primary observation) to "to a new level of understanding" (full-scale research study) (Morgan and Nica 2020).

Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-step procedure for doing theme analysis. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) recognised that the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) is helpful for qualitative researchers. This research adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework because it provides a systematic approach that is easy to follow and flexible. Moreover, it is one of the most used frameworks for thematic data analysis (Connally 2015; Shabgahi 2015). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide step-by-step guidance on how to conduct thematic analysis of qualitative research data. These steps are a) data familiarisation, b) data coding, c) search for themes and relationships, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and f) producing the report. It is critical to emphasise that thematic analysis is not a "linear" but rather a "recursive" process (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Table 4-3: Steps of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Process Description
1. Familiarising with Data	Data transcription, reading, re-reading and jotting down initial thoughts.
2. Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting data characteristics across the full data collection and collecting data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for Themes	Organising codes into prospective themes and collecting all required data for each potential theme.
4. Reviewing Themes	Creating a thematic map of the analysis by checking if the themes function with the coded extracts (level-1) and the whole data set (level-2).
5. Defining & Naming Themes	Continuous analysis to fine-tune the specifics of each topic as well as the overall story told by the study, resulting in unambiguous definitions and titles for each theme.
6. Producing the Report	This is the last chance for analysis. The final analysis of the extracts, tying the inquiry to the research topic and literature and generating a scholarly report of the study.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

Below, the processes of the analysis followed in this research are discussed in detail:

Step 1: Data Familiarisation

I collected all the data through interactions; hence, I had some prior knowledge of the data. During the process of data collection, some initial analytics interests also arose. Regardless of initial thoughts and ideas, it is vital for researchers to immerse in the data to the extent that help them to familiarise themselves with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun and Clarke 2006). Before starting the formal data analysis process, I organised all data through back translation and transcription (see details in section 4.5), which required me to listen to the recording multiple times, reading and re-reading the transcripts for accuracy and verification; for instance, I read and re-read interview transcripts and netnography field notes as well as the evidence of practices which were collected as screenshots of SMEs' Facebook posts to make sense of them. Moreover, formal data analysis started with reading and re-reading the data transcripts because Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021) suggested that "immersion usually involves

'repeated reading' of the data and actively reading the data helps in searching for meanings, patterns, and codes". Before coding the data set, I read each transcript twice because Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021) suggested before coding, it's critical to read the complete data set at least once. Although reading and re-reading data sets was very time-consuming, Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021) cautioned against being selective or missing this phase since familiarity with the data serves as the foundation for the subsequent analytical phases. They also suggested taking notes during this phase. During this familiarisation phase, I read and re-read the data set thoroughly, highlighted the interesting ideas, and took notes for coding.

Step 2: Generating initial Codes

The second phase began with a preliminary list of data-related concepts generated in the previous phase. Following that, the data was used to generate initial codes. The codes identify a characteristic of the data: semantic content or latent that looked to be intriguing and is referred to as "the most basic segment of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Braun and Clarke 2006; 2021). Braun and Clarke's (2006) second phase of thematic analysis emphasise assigning code for the research data, and they suggest that there are several ways of coding extracts. As I coded manually, I took notes, using highlighters to indicate potential text patterns and organising data into meaningful groups. First, I prepared a list of theory-driven codes identified from the literature; when the new codes emerged, I added them into new code categories. All data were initially coded and collated in this phase. The table below presents some examples of coding.

Table 4-4: Initial Coding examples of netnography and interview data

Coding Examples	Codes Assigned
Coding example SME's Facebook Post আমি হলাম মুরগীর মালিক.. 🙂🙂 ফেসবুকটা যেন মুরগির খাঁচা, কিছুক্ষণ পর পর খুলে দেখতে হয় কেউ ডিম পেড়েছে কিনা। Translation: *"I am the owner of Hens, Facebook like a henhouse time to time I have to open it to see if anyone laid eggs"*.	Non-business-related humorous post, entertainment, an approach to build a relationship,
Coding example of a section of interview transcript	
"As a small business with limited resources(C-1), we don't have the opportunities to create awareness of our business or products like other large businesses. Certainly, I think social media created a huge opportunity for small businesses like us (C-2). We use Facebook to communicate our existing and potential consumers; whenever we promote our businesses (C-3), we try to focus on product quality and prices; as you know, lots of competitors are out in the markets, and many businesses sell similar products, and there are not many differences among them,(C-4), (however, I always highlight the product benefits that give them (consumer) a sense of awareness (C-5), what they don't get from other companies, I also try to emphasis on the strength of our products to try to help them to identify the right quality products."	*CODE-1: resource limitation* *CODE-2: opportunity of creating awareness.* *CODE-3: Business Promotion* *CODE-4: Challenges of market competition,* *CODE-5: Awareness*

Source: The Author

Step 3: Searching for Themes

The third phase begins with a long list of the codes discovered in the previous stage's data set. In this phase, codes with similar meanings were grouped, and initial themes were identified to express each group of codes and assigned a theme to each group. Essentially, codes were analysed, and different codes were combined to form an overarching theme. I used visual

representations to sort the different codes into themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Initial code map was created with the codes and themes, which helped me better understand the link between different codes and themes, thereby seeing relationships between different themes. However, some codes were left without assigning any theme, and they were grouped into different categories. Some examples of the initial thematic map are presented in the figure below.
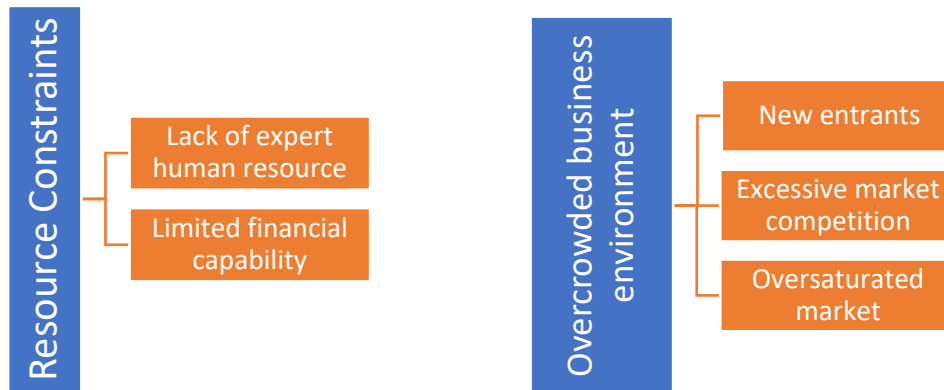
Figure 4-4: Examples of emerging codes and themes.

<div align="right">Source: The Author</div>

Step 4: Reviewing the Themes

There were two tiers of evaluating and refining the themes in this phase. The first step was to go over the coded data extracts; for instance, I revisited and read all the collated sections for each theme to check the consistency and coherency in the pattern; some of the codes and themes were even modified and renamed in this phase when there were inconsistencies. The second level involved a similar procedure but with the complete dataset. At this stage, I double-checked the dataset's themes for validity. Moreover, I also checked the accuracy of the thematic map in the reflection of meanings evident in the dataset as a whole. The entire dataset was re-read for two purposes in this phase, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestions. The first step was to see if the themes were compatible with collected data set. The second step was to code any new data inside themes that had been overlooked during the earlier phases of coding. If the map does not suit the data set, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), the analyst should examine and refine the coding until a good thematic map is created. However, Braun and Clarke (2006: 92) warned that "as coding data and generating themes could go on ad infinitum, it is important not to get over-enthusiastic with endless re-coding. It is impossible to

provide clear guidelines on when to stop, but when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop!"

In this phase, I revisited the collated extracts and codes concerning each theme to identify their relationships. This reflective process was repeated several times to formulate a satisfactory thematic map that fit the research question's context. An example of a thematic map is present in the following figure.
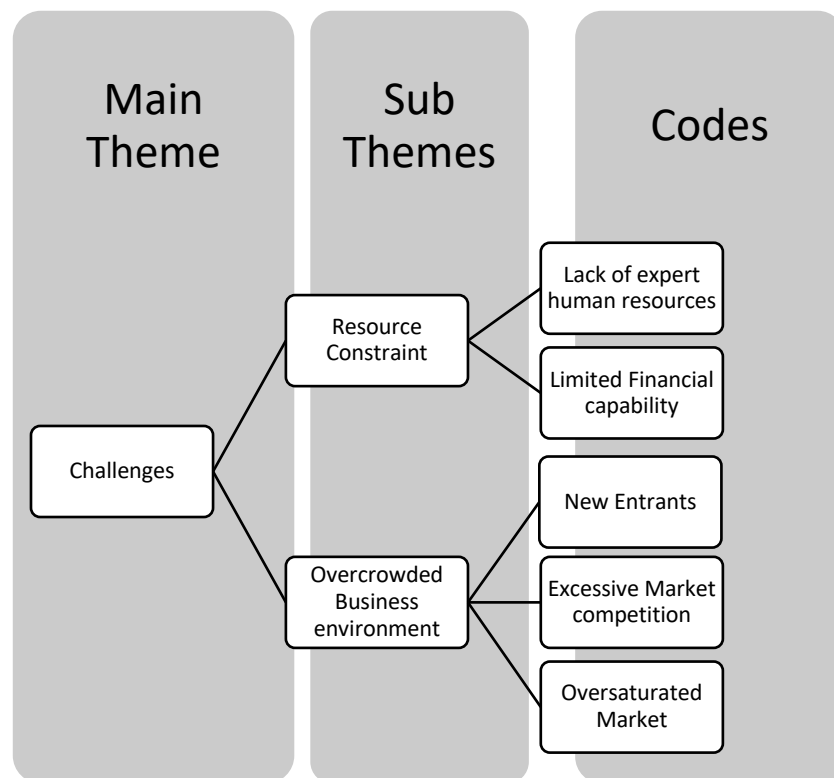
Figure 4-5: Thematic Map

Source: The Author

Step 5: Defining and naming the themes

The fifth phase began with a satisfactory thematic map identified in step 4; an example of a thematic map is presented in figure 4.6. At this point, further steps were taken to define and refine the final themes of the analysis and collate data within themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined 'define and refine' as establishing the 'essence' of each theme and defining what component of the data each theme captures. Thus, to identify the essence of each theme, I performed a thorough investigation. In addition to these, I tried to find each theme's story and

how they fit into the broader context of the overall story that the data suggest about the research questions. It was necessary to consider each theme's themes and ensure there was not too much overlap between them. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) stress that themes need to clearly define what they are and what they are not by the end of this phase. They recommend using a couple of words to define the breadth and content of each topic as a test. If that isn't the case, the theme may need to be refined more. For example, "Cost-Effective Marketing Channel" was identified as one of the themes. It was defined that "Facebook provides a cost-effective marketing platform for promoting and marketing products. SMEs have been able to boost their sales by utilising the marketing features of Facebook".

Step 6: Report Generation

The sixth phase began with a collection of completely developed topics and continued through the report's final analysis and writing. Braun and Clarke (2006: 93) recommended that "the task of the write-up of thematic analysis is to tell the complicated story of data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. The analysis must provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes". Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, I created a final analysis report that included enough evidence of the themes in the data as well as enough data extracts to show the themes' prevalence. Particularly vivid quotes were chosen that capture the theme's essence in the report without unnecessary complexity. The thematic analysis report of this research can be found in chapter five of this thesis.

Overall, the thematic data analysis is a reflective process; the analysis of the texts was performed ongoing iteratively. Reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes were part of the data analysis steps to better understand the data and their underlying patterns across cases.

4.6.3. Quantitative Data Analysis

In this research, archival data collected from Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook accounts were initially categorised and quantified using content analysis, and they were subsequently analysed using SPSS. Bryman and Bell (2015: 291) define content analysis as "an approach to analysing documents and text that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and a systematic and replicable manner". Content analysis is one of the key processes for analysing textual information, according to Zhang (2015), regardless of

where the material originates from, such as consumer interviews or online e-WOM debates. One of the most important elements is the use of categories, which are frequently taken from theoretical models, where categories are introduced to empirical data rather than produced from it; nonetheless, they are evaluated against the framework regularly and adjusted as needed (Nowell et al. 2017).

To supplement the observational data, a content analysis was undertaken when the netnography was completed. Although netnography data mostly represented information from the standpoint of SMEs insights from content analysis gave distinct perspectives from their consumers as well. Quantitative content analysis was utilised in this study to corroborate the most commonly used social media methods identified during the netnography research and to determine the most successful communication activities for increasing consumer engagement. Prior to conducting the content analysis, a coding frame was finalised. The coding frame was developed using an abductive approach which was driven by theory and data. The main category, in particular, was the first to emerge from the existing *salesperson interpersonal communication framework* (adopted by Sheth 1976; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018) and the *media richness framework* (adopted by De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017) to map the SMEs' Facebook strategies into the theories of social media communications. The initial coding frame was reconceptualised upon considering the findings of the netnography observation to reflect SMEs' Facebook communication activities and strategies better.

The interpersonal communication framework initially contained three main coding categories: task orientation, interaction orientation, and self-orientation. However, based on the review of the literature and upon evaluating the applicability of the interpersonal communication framework, a new conceptualisation was proposed in chapter 3.2.2 to better represent how SMEs interact across social media. The netnography findings of the research confirmed the validity of the framework in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, enabling the researcher to reconceptualise the interpersonal communication framework by adding an additional dimension called mixed orientation. Another set of coding was derived from the *media richness theory* and was operationalised as text, photo, video, and Facebook live. The table below presents the coding framework used for content analysis.

Table: 4-5 Coding Framework for content analysis

Post Orientations	Themes associated with the practices
Task-orientation	Product-related marketing posts, persuasive posts, advertising posts, discounted or price promotional posts.
Interaction-orientation	Occasional greeting, invitation, personal stories sharing, mentioning consumer's name in the post, community activities, contests and competitions, educating consumers, emotional, inspirational and humorous.
Self-orientation	The authenticity of business, the origin of its products, business-related public announcement, celebrity endorsement, claiming business credibility (reputation and image management), co-branding or Association with other brands.
Mixed orientation	Multiple orientations in a single post. For example, interacting with followers, asking for interaction, unwrapping new products, explaining the features and quality of the product, responding to followers' queries (instance feedback) and focusing on sales through social and relational approaches.
Media Richness categories	1. Facebook Live, 2. Video, 3. Photo or Images, 4. Text

Sources: (de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018)

The number of likes, comments, and shares obtained by each post was used to measure consumer engagement in this study. Similar matrices were used by other researchers in social media posts analysis (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020) whilst measuring the level of consumer engagement related to each post.

For calculating the level of consumer engagement related to each post, behavioural data (likes, comments, and shares) related to each post was used. Such behavioural data helped to understand how each post is perceived by consumers. In order to ensure the number of likes, comments, and shares is proportionate to a SMEs online presence, the total number of interactions received by individual posts was divided by the total number of followers the SME has on Facebook. Similar approach was also used by previous researchers (Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017).

To quantitatively analyse the data and identify the most effective Facebook communication strategies for enhancing consumer engagement, the collected data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. SPSS is one of the widely used statistical analysis software for social science (Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020). The entered data were then carefully examined, cross-checked, and accurately labelled. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) suggested cross-examining at least 10% of total data to ensure they are correctly entered. To ensure this, approximately 250 samples were cross-examined, and no inaccuracies were identified.

Data editing is a critical part of quantitative data analysis as it helps detect and correct inconsistent, illogical, and illegal data (Sekaran and Bougie 2016). Careful considerations were given whilst assessing the consistency and legitimacy of the collected data. After dealing with data cleaning procedures, 2409 posts were subjected to further analysis. A series of statistical tests such as frequency analysis, chi-square independent test, crosstabulation, one-way ANOVA, and sets of post hoc Tukey HSD tests were conducted to identify the relationship between variables and to test the research hypotheses. The following table presents the research hypotheses and tests conducted for achieving them.

Table 4-6: A List of Research Hypotheses

No	Hypotheses	Tests
H1	$H1_0$: There is no statistically significant relationship between Facebook post orientation and media richness in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs $H1_1$: There is a statistically significant relationship between Facebook post orientation and media richness in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs	Chi-Square Test
H2	$H2_0$: There is no statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different communication styles in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs $H2_1$: There is a statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different communication styles in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs	One Way ANOVA
H3	$H3_0$: There is no statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different media types in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs $H3_1$: There is a statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different media types in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs	One Way ANOVA

Source: The Author

4.7. Research Quality

In natural science and quantitative social science, reliability and validity are two important criteria for determining the quality of a study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). This research applied these criteria to assess the quality of the study. Reliability, for example, is concerned with the measuring scales' replication and internal consistency (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill 2019). Leung (2015) claims that in a quantitative study, reliability refers to the exact replicability of the processes and the effects. In terms of reliability, this research followed the approaches used by prior studies (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018), who also analysed Facebook posts in different contexts using the same statistical tool (ANOVA and Post hoc tests) to identify the relationships between variables.

The validity, on the other hand, relates to the appropriateness of the measurement, the correctness of the analysis, and the generalisability of the conclusions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Oliver (2010) argued validity to be a compulsory requirement for all types of studies. In this research, likes, comments, and shares matrices were used to measure the level of active consumer engagement; the same matrices were used in the prior studies (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Swani and Milne 2017; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020), hence the content validity was achieved.

As the major portion of this research is based on qualitative data, the research quality aspect was carefully considered. Some scholars used the terminology 'research quality' slightly differently for assessing the quality of a qualitative research study; for example, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and Kirk and Miller (1986) used terms internal reliability, external reliability, internal validity and external validity for qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that due to the interpretivism philosophy concerns with social reality, using quantitative research quality criteria cannot be justified for a qualitative research study. As a result, they offered four alternative criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, namely Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility: The criterion of credibility is similar to the criterion of internal validity (Bryman and Bell 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Based on the interpretivism assumption, multiple realities exist in the social world (Bryman and Bell 2015). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) suggest that, for ensuring credibility, a qualitative researcher should emphasise the representation of participants' socially constructed reality which match what participants intended. To ensure the credibility of the research, I cross-checked the interview transcripts with participants. I also reflect on the accuracy of data and the findings by involving in discussions with my supervisors, who are experts in qualitative research.

Transferability: External validity or generalisability has a related criterion to transferability (Bryman and Bell 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). Because qualitative research often requires a thorough examination of a small population, proving external validity may not be the goal of a qualitative researcher (Bryman and Bell 2015). Guba and Lincoln (1985: 316) claimed that whether the findings "hold in a different context or the same situation at a different period" is an empirical issue. However, in terms of transferability, Geertz (1973) argued that a qualitative researcher should be encouraged to produce thick description which allows making judgements about the possible transferability of the finding to another context. In this research, to deal with the transferability aspects of the findings, I provided a full description of research context, questions, aim and objectives, methods, findings and interpretations.

Dependability: This is the parallel criterion to reliability which refers to establishing the merit of the research (Bryman and Bell 2015). Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested that to ensure dependability, a researcher should keep complete records of all phases of the research process such as formulating research questions, selection of research participants, interview transcripts and data analysis decisions in an accessible manner. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) In this case refer to dependability implies keeping track of any changes so that others can benefit. To increase the dependability of this research, I recorded all the processes and any changes made during the study process were thoroughly reviewed by my research supervisors and approved. I also audio-recorded all interviews, which I plan to keep until the completion of this research.

Confirmability: This is not related to any quantitative quality criteria, but it parallels with objectivity. Confirmability, according to Bryman and Bell (2015), is concerned with verifying that the researcher behaved in good faith while acknowledging that total neutrality is impossible in business research. To ensure confirmability as a researcher, I acted in good faith and tried not to allow my own beliefs or theoretical tendencies to affect my study findings to ensure confirmability.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

The term "research ethics" refers to the set of principles that regulate a researcher's behaviour when it comes to the rights of respondents and other parties that are directly or indirectly engaged in the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). McAreavey and Muir (2011)

suggest that ethical considerations should constantly guide a researcher's behaviours throughout the research process. Complying with ethical principles and assuring confidentiality and anonymity increases the reliability of findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). The section below presents the relevant ethical principles and actions considered during the research process.

4.8.1. Principles of Research Ethics

The researcher obtained ethics approval for this research from *York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee* which has been presented in the appendix 4. Additionally, to comply with all relevant ethical principles outlined by Collis and Hussey (2014), Bryman and Bell (2015), and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), the following actions were taken.

Table 4-7: Ethical Principles

Ethical Principles	Actions Taken
GDPR Act 2018	GDPR only applies to EU citizens and businesses in the EU. Although the research data was collected outside of the EU, the collected data is stored and handled in the UK. Therefore, GDPR was followed throughout the process of the research.
Integrity and honesty of the researcher	Participants were offered clarity about the research processes and their rights through the participant information sheet. The researcher provided further information on the request. No deception was involved, and the research was free of financial returns. All participants were treated fairly.
Avoidance of harm	All efforts were made in ensuring participants were not harmed in any way during the research process. Careful considerations were given to both physical and psychological factors. Due to the nature of this research, no participant was physically or psychologically harmed.

Dignity	The participant's dignity was greatly respected. I used my social skills to avoid causing anxiety and discomfort among participants during the interview process.
Informed consent	Before the interview, participants were made fully aware of the participation implications. Participants had full rights to withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reasons. Only the participants that gave their consent were requested to participate in the interview.
Privacy and confidentiality	Careful consideration was given to the privacy of participants. Personal data that could individually identify participants (e.g., name, address, exact age, ID numbers) were not requested. Participants were repeatedly assured about the confidentiality of their responses.
Voluntary participation and right to withdraw	Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and all interview participants had the right to withdraw at any phase of the research. They were fully allowed to skip questions that they felt uncomfortable answering.
Misinterpretation	To avoid any misinterpretations, participants were supplied with the researcher's contact information. They were suggested to contact the researcher (via university email) in case of any confusion.
Data Management	Raw data is only accessible to the researcher. Collected physical interviews data is stored in a locked and protected location, and they will be destroyed after the successful completion of the research. All collected data are electronically stored in a password protected One Drive storage and only used for the sole purpose of analysis. Under any circumstances, the collected data will not be given to any third party. All participants were well-informed regarding the data management process before participating in the interviews.

Safety of the Researcher	The safety of the researcher was maintained by using a university email address. Where participants were contacted via social sites, privacy settings of the related social sites were adjusted to ensure participants could not access the researcher's personal information.

As a researcher, I had to deal directly with the participants during semi-structured interviews. This research relied on the voluntary participation of the respondents, and this was communicated to the participants before the interviews (King and Horrocks 2016). In addition, I assured participants regarding confidentiality and anonymity of their responses and the study's purpose was briefly outlined (Hove and Anda 2005; King and Horrocks 2016; Valenzuela and Shrivastava 2008). The participants were provided with the information sheet a few days before the interviews so that they could understand the nature of the interview and feel comfortable discussing the research questions (Hove and Anda 2005). Before the face-to-face interviews, a paper copy was also supplied in case the interviewees wanted to take another look and refresh their memory. A consent form was also given to the participants to read and sign (King and Horrocks 2016) which was given along with the participant information sheet. In addition, permissions to audio-record the conversations were also obtained (Daly and Kille 2014; Teijlingen 2014). To ensure all participants can provide informed consent, only applicants aged 18 or over were allowed to participate. The ethics committee of York St John University approved this research study after satisfying all relevant ethical criteria.

4.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to determine the most appropriate research design for achieving the research objectives. After carefully evaluating all key research philosophies and their suitability for exploring SMEs' Facebook marketing communication strategies as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies for engaging consumers, a decision was made to adopt a pragmatic philosophy that primarily leans towards interpretivism continuum. As there is limited understanding about Facebook communication practices of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, a qualitative-interpretivist approach was considered most appropriate since it allows to explore new insights through netnography observations and semi-structured interviews.

This research utilises three data collection instruments: netnography, archival data review, and semi-structured interviews. During the study, a netnography investigation was conducted over four months by reviewing 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication activities to identify their everyday social media communication practices and strategies. To analyse SMEs' Facebook communication strategies' effectiveness, 20 SMEs' Facebook activities were reviewed over two months and the number of likes, comments and shares received by their 2409 Facebook posts was quantitatively recorded. During this research, interviews with 12 fashion retail SME' owners and managers were also conducted to get an insight into their experiences regarding the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool for marketing communications. For the analysis of the data, qualitative data was analysed using manual thematic analysis, whilst the quantitative data was analysed using various statistical tests such as One-Way ANOVA and Chi-Square tests. The subsequent chapter now presents the findings of the study.

Chapter Five: Findings

5.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the research findings. Findings are presented in three sections, initially, netnography findings from analysis of Facebook activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are presented in section 5.2 which is followed by the quantitative findings from the analysis of their Facebook posts in section 5.3. Finally, qualitative findings from the interviews with SMEs managers and owners are presented in section 5.4.

5.2. Findings of Netnography Research

Data from the netnography study were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (2006), a detailed description was presented in the methodology chapter (see section 4.6.2). Results of the analysis identified 14 common Facebook communication practices of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. The identified practices are grouped into four main Facebook communication strategies based on their strategic orientations as presented in table 5.1.

Table 5-1: Findings of the Netnography Research

S.N.	SMC Strategy	Themes Related to SMEs' SMC Practices/Activities
1	Task-orientation	➢ Products Advertisement ➢ Sales Promotion ➢ Simplifying the ordering and delivery processes
2	Inaction-orientation	➢ Educating followers ➢ Organising creative Events for Followers ➢ Community building ➢ Individual recognition of followers ➢ Responsiveness to consumer comments
3	Self-orientation	➢ Consumer Review ➢ Claiming Authenticity of Products ➢ Celebrity Endorsement ➢ Business Related Update
4	Mixed orientation	➢ Visual Posting ➢ Instant and attentive reciprocal communication

Source: The Author

Below, the common communication practices are detailed. While reporting findings specific to each theme, SME codes are used to protect SMEs' anonymity.

5.2.1. Task-Oriented Strategies

The findings of the netnography revealed several Facebook marketing communication techniques used by Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs for attracting the attention of current and potential consumers. All 20 SMEs in the sample actively used Facebook posts to attract consumer attention, create awareness, and sell their products. SMEs' Facebook posts containing sales-focused information about the products and services are considered a task-oriented communication strategy. Since task-oriented communication is goal-oriented and intentional, salespeople (or consumers) who choose this approach are most concerned with reaching their objectives as quickly as possible (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015). This approach is similar to the traditional push marketing strategy (Kusumasondjaja 2018). During the observation, I identified three commonly used communication practices of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs that were considered purely task oriented. The identified practices include product advertisement, sales promotion, straightforward ordering and service delivery options.

5.2.1.1. Products advertisement

During the netnography research, I observed that SMEs used Facebook vastly as an advertising platform. To attract the followers' attention, SMEs used various advertising techniques such as taking pre-orders, launching new fashion collections, and presenting existing collections. SMEs' advertising-related posts contained product-related information as they primarily focused on describing products and emphasising their functional benefits such as comfort, convenience, quality, reliability, durability, and usability. This advertising post also contained information about restocking high demand products. The advertising-related posts had a mixture of both texts and multimedia, and they were published to get consumer attention. Therefore, these advertisements were solely task oriented. Below, some of the examples of advertising-related communications are presented.

> Taking pre-order, price - 6100 tk, 100 tk extra for delivery, shirt; semi stitched mukesh worked pure Chinon with heavy leather gotta thread and artificial mirror worked sleeve, dupptta; pure banarsi dola silk with thread and artificial mirror work, bottom; unstiched 2.75 mtr pure shantoon, size up to 48 chests. [included product images]
>
> (SME-15)

> We have launched our Falgun (seasonal) Collection at all outlets. Cotton printed saree, Code: SARI-CT-MK-548. Price: 2995+VAT. [included product images]
>
> (SME-12)

KHOOBSURAT KARANDI AVENTUS COLLECTION Embroidered Karandi Shirt, Embroidered Karandi Sleeves, Embroidered Chiffon Dupatta, Plain Matching Trouser. [included product images]

<div align="right">(SME-8).</div>

Products related advertisements were commonly used in Facebook posts by SMEs during both introduction of new products and the promotion of existing products. These types of posts usually lacked interactivity due to the one-way nature of product-focused advertising. These highly sell-focused posts were mainly used for one-way information dissemination and to generate awareness about their fashion collections rather than looking for interaction. Although this advertising approach is prevalent among fashion retail SMEs, consumer engagement was relatively low in this post category due to the lack of interactivity.

How audiences reacted to advertising-related posts differed from other types of posts too. The most common reactions on these posts were instant reactions (e.g., likes and emojis). These posts attracted very few comments regarding the descriptions and price of products when such information was missing in the post. For example, consumers' comments on advertising posts:

Price, please?

<div align="right">(A consumer of SME-8).</div>

Are there any other colours available?

<div align="right">(A consumer of SME-8)</div>

Although advertising posts generated a minimum number of comments, they appeared to attract consumers' genuine interest in the products that could potentially result in a purchase. It appeared that some SMEs in the sample were trying to capitalise on consumer interactions by hiding product-related information and just posting attractive photos of the dresses – requiring consumers to contact for more details. It was observed that consumers rarely shared advertising-related posts with their friends and families.

5.2.1.2.   *Sales promotion*

Sales promotion was observed as another commonly used Facebook communication practice utilised by SMEs in the sample. For sales promotion, they published promotional posts, intending to drive sales and positive behaviours (e.g., advocacy and actual purchase). As observed, SMEs also used Facebook posts to offer monetary incentives such as price

promotions and discounted products to their followers to increase consumers' desire for the products. Below, some of the evidence related to promotional posts are presented:

Final sales only 2 days left! Flat 50% off!

(SME 14)

Winter sales alert! Up to 70% off on selected items for a limited time only! Prep for the upcoming chilly waves with the season's warmest sale!

(SME 13).

A price discount is an overall marketing communication strategy to attract consumers by providing an extra value or incentive, encouraging consumers to purchase the discounted products immediately (Yin and Huang 2014; Lee and Chen-Yu 2018). SMEs in the sample utilised this strategy to encourage consumers to purchase their products. Similar to the prominent fashion retailers, SME fashion retailers were also applying promotional techniques to engage consumers and generate sales revenue. This technique was utilised by all 20 SMEs.

A review of consumer comments suggested that consumers were highly interested in parodic sales promotions. Some of the examples are presented below:

When is this sale ending?

(A consumer of SME-13)

Is the sale available in the local store?

(A consumer of SME-14)

The findings indicate that Facebook greatly facilitates the opportunity for fashion retail SMEs to promote financial incentives to their current and prospective consumers. Due to the competitive nature of online retailing, financial promotions may help them establish connections with many potential consumers. The average consumer's engagement was higher in the promotional post than advertisement-focused posts. The main consumer reaction to this type of post was like, followed by comments mainly inquiring about the products and the purchasing processes.

5.2.1.3.   *Simplifying ordering and delivering processes*

Some additional task-oriented activities of Facebook communications used by SMEs also involved providing consumers with details so that ordering and delivering of goods is clear. To

make the purchase process easy for the consumer, most SMEs provided clear ordering steps. For example, SMEs (12) posted how consumers can use bKash for making easy payments.

> How to make payment with bKash (instructions), it's very easy, you can shop now 24 hours, why late, let start shopping now!
>
> (SME-12)

> "You can pay now with bKash, Rocket or Nagad!!!
>
> (SME-8)

Other SMEs also posted to inform consumers regarding the delivery of products. To gain consumer trust and make the buying process convenient for consumers, some SMEs, especially the small retailers, offered cash on delivery services in Dhaka. This information was communicated to consumers via Facebook posts regularly.

> Our cash on delivery service is only available within Dhaka city
>
> (SME-17)

100 Taka Extra delivery charge. Collection available from your local Sundar Bone Courier Centre
> (SME-10)

Same day Cash on delivery available within the Dhaka
> (SME-20)

These communications were frequent but failed to generate a high level of consumer interest as the level of consumer engagement across these posts was comparatively low. This may have been due to the fact that these posts generally utilised less graphic (i.e., photos, videos) and primarily used texts.

5.2.2. Interactions Oriented Strategies

As an essential component of seller-buyer engagement, interaction-oriented communications emphasise socialising and building personal relationships; this is because relationships play vital roles in the success of social media communication (Ashworth 2016). As observed, SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh were using multiple relationship-building techniques while communicating on Facebook. The key activities involved communicating details that are not directly related to the brand or company itself, but personal statements or quotes, occasional greetings on national and cultural festivals, posting consumers photos, requesting participation in discussion, questions and answers sessions, interactive responses, sharing personal stories and so on. It also included messages emphasising emotions such as inspirations, entertainment,

happiness, sadness, love, and enjoyment. Below, interactions-oriented Facebook communication activities of SMEs are detailed:

5.2.2.1. *Educating followers*

As a part of developing consumer interests and sharing their expertise to build credibility, SMEs were involved in educating followers regarding the current trends of fashion and how consumers can dress in different events and festivals. For example, SME-3, SME-7 and SME-8 conducted Facebook Lives for party wears, SME-17 presented their special wedding collections, and SME-9 presented their comfortable traditional clothing (saree) collections. SME-1 shared a photo highlighting how traditional dresses can be worn modestly, for example:

> *You can wear a net saree in a modest way too!!! Pretty client IA (accompanied by an image)*

> *(SME-1)*

Similarly, sharing knowledge and educating consumers was observed to bring several direct and indirect benefits to SMEs. Sharing knowledge with followers about the current trend and fashion was seen to help SMEs build trust among the consumers and possibly increase the credibility and reliability of their products. It may also have helped SMEs increase sales as educated consumers appeared more eager to buy the products. One of the commonly used educational mediums was Facebook live streaming, which appeared to provide SMEs sufficient time to explain the products' benefits to the consumers. For instance, during Facebook live streaming, consumers expressed their admiration of the products as well as their keenness to purchase them.

> *Wow! I love this dress*

> (A consumer of SME-3)

> *How do I place an order for this dress?*

> (A consumer of SME-7)

The number of posts focusing on educating followers were limited. However, they appeared very effective in stimulating consumer desires as many consumer interactions indicated they are eager to buy the products. Nevertheless, judging from how SMEs interacted, these posts

were designed to create wider awareness of the product ranges than merely selling specific products.

5.2.2.2. *Organising creative events for followers*

Organising creative contests or competitions was another tactic used by SMEs in the sample to create consumers' interest in their products. It was observed that providing incentives for contest participants attracted a high level of consumers' attention. SME-13 organised a new year and valentine photo-sharing contest for followers where the most interacted photos were selected as the winners. SME-14 tagged drawing competitions for children. These competitions were needed the active participation of consumers; SMEs encouraged other followers to judge by voting the contents that they admired the most. Few SMEs (i.e., SME-2, SME-3, SME-5) conducted similar events through Facebook live and provided financial incentives to followers that actively interacted. For example, SME-2 posted:

Live Sharing Competition, you can win this dress; please share more and more.

(SME-2)

It was observed that SMEs organised these competitions occasionally, but the consumers' interactions were significantly high in these types of posts. Followers seemed highly engaged with SMEs during these events and some were even requesting more similar events. For example, a consumer of SME-2 posted:

Is today's Live sharing competition on?

(A consumer of SME-2)

Creative events and competitions with reward gift boxes appeared to have generated excitement among consumers and showed their intention to participate in greater numbers.

5.2.2.3. *Community building*

SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh were also using Facebook to build their online communities. The observed SMEs' Facebook communities were both private groups (managed by SMEs) and public groups (mainly by third parties such as fans). As a part of the research process, I joined these groups to observe how SMEs communicate with followers (elaborations

provided in chapter four). During the research, I witnessed that SMEs had a strong relationship with their private community members and these community members were highly supportive of SMEs. Building a digital community may help an SME build a loyal consumer base, which may help them increase the advocacy of their business and increase the interactivity and engagement in the posts. Such community-building activities can help to strengthen the relationship between a company and its community members. Identifying the most active community members and rewarding them may increase brand advocacy, ultimately motivating fans to spread positive word of mouth.

SME-5, SME-7 and SME-8 used their Facebook community to diversify the products by introducing new product lines. SME-8 and SME-7, on the other hand, offered new jewellery collections as part of their new business development processes. In addition, SME-5 introduced cosmetics products on top of their fashion clothing collection. It was observed that community members were not only orally supportive of SMEs introducing new products, but they also purchased the latest products and provided positive reviews in the community. Although building a community seemed beneficial to SMEs in numerous ways, only a few SMEs in the sample engaged in these activities.

5.2.2.4.   *Individual recognition of followers*

SMEs in the sample used techniques such as individual recognition of followers to build direct connections with them. They did this by selecting 'top fans' and writing personal messages via their Facebook posts. These top fans were highly engaged consumers of SMEs; they engaged with SMEs as well as other consumers. On several occasions, it was noticed that these top fans were defending SMEs; for instance, on one occasion, one of the SME-7's followers raised complaints about advertising the same product every day and not bringing new collections, the complaint was responded to by a 'top fan' stating new collections are underway. SMEs in the sample actively appreciated the contributions of these top fans along with other consumers, for example:

> Thank you so much, Dear SA, for your sweet review and also, thanks for sharing your cute pictures with us wearing our Pakistani collection.
>
> (SME-5)
>
> I am in love with the photos, FNA; you are so beautiful, MashAllah!
>
> (SME-1)

As observed, Facebook can be an effective channel for cultivating long-term relationships with consumers at personal levels. SME appeared to have built personal relationships by engaging with consumers directly and motivating them to engage further by appreciating their contributions and support. This strategy appeared very useful in terms of engaging consumers regularly.

It was observed that SMEs in the sample posted greetings to their followers in cultural and national events to start a conversation or develop a relationship with followers. All of the SMEs in the sample used greetings-related posts to engage with their consumers in events such as New Year, Valentine's Day, Ramadan, Eid, and Puja celebrations, for example:

Happy New Year

(SME-2)

Happy Eid to all of You

(SME-10)

Best wishes for all our patrons celebrating Durga Puja: May Goddess Durga blesses you with lots of prosperity, happiness, wealth and good fortune.

(SME-12)

In most cases, the greetings-related post contained graphical images that are related to the specific events. In terms of consumer engagement, these types of posts did not generate a high level of consumer engagement. Some interactions received by these posts include likes and comments, but such posts were rarely shared. The average level of consumers' interest in these posts could be because consumers may perceive such greetings as generic. Moreover, During the research, it was evident that many SMEs tried to develop personal connections with consumers by sharing personal stories of SME owners. Out of 20 SMEs, six SME owners shared their personal stories with their fans on Facebook. Two female SME owners (SME-4 and SME-17) shared their business success stories related to being women entrepreneurs in the industry along with the challenges they faced. These posts generated a high level of follower engagements as many consumers engaged through likes, comments, and shares. Some of the consumer comments are listed below:

Congratulation! You worked hard, and you deserved it.

(A consumer of SME-8)

We are always with you.

(A consumer of SME-8)

Thanks for sharing the experiences; it gives me the hope to start my business.

(A consumer of SME-8)

Posts that contained success stories of the owners received a high level of consumer engagement. In addition to success stories, some SMEs also shared personal stories. For instance, three SME owners (SME-3, SME-4 and SME-6) shared their newborn babies' photos with their followers, which attracted a high number of engagements. As observed in the sample, sharing personal and professional stories helped SMEs to generate a high level of consumer engagement and potentially to develop long-term personal connections.

Some SMEs also used Facebook posts to develop emotional attachments with their followers. Their posts typically used emotion-laden languages, inspiring stories, or humour and jokes to arouse affective responses, such as fun, excitement, wonder, and so forth. Some SMEs were observed posting inspirational stories and quotes on their Facebook pages from time to time. For example, SME-5 shared an emotional story on how a woman plays different roles in various stages in her life and how she takes responsibilities to manage chores as a mother, wife, sister, or daughter. Some other SMEs used humour to generate interactions, for example:

I am the owner of Hens, Facebook like a henhouse time to time I have to open it to see if anyone laid eggs.

(SME-4)

Husband asks: Why are you packing your baggage?
Wife replies: I will stay in my father's house for a month.
Husband: Who will manage this house?
Wife: I will handle it online from my father's house.

(SME-5)

Images were also utilised to interact with consumers by infusing emotion, such as inspiration and humour, to motivate consumers, which might assist to build trust and connection with followers. Most emotional posts were posted in text form, while some contained graphical images, emojis, and video content. Followers mainly interacted with this type of post through likes and emojis. On average, emotional content in video format attracted higher engagement than texts or photos. As these inspirational posts were non-transitional and many followers interacted by liking these posts. These types of posts may help SMEs to form stronger relationships with consumers.

5.2.2.5. *Responsiveness to consumer comments*

Responding to consumers' comments or queries effectively could provide an opportunity for an organisation to connect with them and support them in completing their purchases (Van Vaerenbergh and Varga 2019). Consumers may see the responsiveness as reassurance of reliability on the business and its offerings (Naeem 2019). It was observed in this research that most SMEs were responsive to their consumers' queries. Examples of some consumers' queries and business responses are listed below:

A consumer commented on SME-12's Facebook page: "*how I get your products online?"* SME-12 provided their online store link to the consumers. Another consumer enquired about product price on SME-17's Facebook page: "*what is the price of this dress?"* SME-17 responded to the query "*please check your inbox*". SME-17 replied to every single comment individually. In contrast, smaller fashion retailers seemed less responsive to consumers' comments; for example, in the case of SME-3, a consumer commented, *"I love your collection, I would like to place an order, how I do it?*" SME-3 did not give any response to this consumer. Such a lack of response can lead to consumer frustrations and potentially tarnish the reputation of an organisation. One of the consumers of SME 4 appeared extremely frustrated due to the lack of response of SME 4 and commented "*why are you doing business just to show your face?*".

Overall, some SMEs were able to effectively utilise Facebook features of engaging with consumers via comments so that they were able to win consumer trust whilst for others, not being able to use the features appropriately led to increased consumer frustrations and loss of business reputation.

5.2.3. Self-Oriented Strategies

Self-oriented communications refer to communicating personal attributes or experiences. This research focuses on fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication rather than individual salesperson characteristics. Hence, self-orientation refers to the communication orientation of the SME itself rather than individual employees of the SME. SMEs in the sample used self-oriented communication strategies to claim the authenticity of their business, confirm the origin of their products, make business-related public announcements, highlight celebrity endorsements of brands, and promote co-branding or association with other brands.

5.2.3.1. *Reposting consumer reviews*

Brand trust and reputation are invaluable, particularly in an online business environment. To build trust and reputations and motivate their consumers, SMEs in the sample posted regarding how they delivered the service and quality products they promised. Small fashion retailers appeared to be trying to build their reputation by posting consumers' comments and reviews on their pages to gain potential consumers' trust. When consumers shared their positive experiences, most of the SMEs in the sample published those comments on their Facebook pages, for example:

> Dear Apu, today just opened that package just awesome. Both of them are very nice collection, Apu both dresses are very pretty. Thanks a million, Apu, SALAM and Regards
>
> (SME-7)
>
> The product quality is very good, and they delivered the product at the quickest possible time. I like their professionalism and very much looking forward to shopping with them again.
>
> (SME-6)
>
> Thank you so much for the lovely dress and the quick delivery.
>
> (SME-1)
>
> The dress quality is very good and very fast delivery. Thank you so much, and love you.
>
> (SME-8)

Most of these posts were in text format and occasionally included a photo of the product in question. In terms of consumer engagement, consumers mainly engaged just like the post, however, comments and shares were rarely received by these kinds of posts.

In an online marketplace, the role of consumer review may be considered a complementary source of information used by businesses to modify their offerings whilst consumers use them to reduce the uncertainty associated with purchasing decisions (Kanani 2021). The disposition of consumer comments results from satisfaction with the product or service when the comment is positive. As a result, this emotional condition may be linked to the favourable spread of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). If e-WOM is negative, however, it is predicted to influence the valence of the relationship consumers to have with the SME, hence affecting the credibility and trustworthiness of the SME. So, in terms of negative e-WOM, SMEs should behave with transparency and effectiveness and demonstrate that they are keen to take responsibility if something goes wrong. This will eventually help to build prospective consumers' trust.

5.2.3.2. Claiming authenticity of products

SMEs in the sample were using Facebook posts to claim the origin of their product to create consumers' awareness about the authenticity of their business as well as the products. Most of the SMEs appeared to use these types of posts to gain consumer trust and create prospective consumers' interest. Due to similarities in the sub-continental cultures and a strong influence of Indian and Pakistani women's wear and high demand for those products in Bangladesh, most smaller brands emphasised their association with established Indian and Pakistani brands in an attempt to convince consumers that they sell high-quality products, for example:

> Indian collection FR cross-culture fabric network emb, top: net
>
> (SME-2)
>
> Original Pakistani Collection Ramsha, Tawakal, Khoobsurat, Inbox us for details
>
> (SME-3)

On the other hand, some medium-size fashion retailers appeared to promote local manufacturing.

> Try our made in Bangladesh products and be proud of our nation.
>
> (SME-12)
>
> Fashion wear developed and produced by local artisans and designers of SME-14
>
> *(SME-14)*

The level of consumer engagement on posts related to claiming authenticity was considerably low. This may be because the SMEs were only focusing on raising consumer interest rather than enhancing engagement levels. These types of posts mostly received likes but rarely received comments or shares.

5.2.3.3. Celebrity endorsements

It was observed that SMEs published Facebook posts to capitalise on celebrity endorsements. When a famous public figure wore their design, SMEs shared photos of the celebrity on Facebook. For example, one SME posted a picture and an interview link of one of their clients who works as a TV presenter.

> Most favourite [celebrity name] wearing our golden saree with a soft glam, look this time! She is one of the prettiest clients I ever had. Full interview [link]

<div align="right">(SME-1)</div>

Another SME posted pictures of a celebrity model and an actress wearing their dresses.

> [celebrity name] in our dress

<div align="right">(SME-5)</div>

One of the SMEs in the sample (SME-17) invited a celebrity cricket star to the opening ceremony of their new retail stores, whilst another one (SME-11) asked a social media influencer to create social awareness. It was observed that the posts that involved celebrities generated higher consumer engagements. Based on the analysis, it was noted that celebrity association with products or businesses can indeed help to enhance the level of consumer engagement.

5.2.3.4. *Business updates*

Business updates were another commonly used awareness creating technique used by SMEs. SME fashion retailers in the sample used their Facebook posts to make business-related public announcements in order to make consumers aware of the new changes. For instance, SME-12 announced about moving their store to another location.

> Valued Consumers, WE ARE MOVING! [Reasons & location]

<div align="right">(SME-12)</div>

SMEs also used Facebook posts to announce the openings of new stores.

> We are in your city, closer to you now, Grand opening on 20th January, opening special offer available for first 7days (address) [….]."

<div align="right">(SME-4)</div>

Regarding consumer engagement, these posts received high engagement with many fans liking the posts whilst some enquiring further information about the location and opening dates. The findings suggest that such announcements may help SMEs build relationships whilst keeping followers engaged.

5.2.4. Mixed Oriented Strategies

The advancement in social media technologies allows users to disseminate multiple messages in a single post. During the research process, I observed that SMEs in the sample used multimedia features of Facebook such as Facebook Live, photos, graphics, and videos to attract the current and potential consumers' attention. These communications contained more than one message appeal in a single Facebook post. The presence of multiple orientations in a single post is defined as mixed orientation in this research. One of the examples of mixed-orientation related activities is selling products through social and relational approaches.

SMEs included photos on most of their Facebook posts along with some written texts. Different types of posts were used by SMEs by including various media features. These posts were used to visually share products available in the organisation for making the consumers aware of them. Below, an example of *visual posting* is presented.
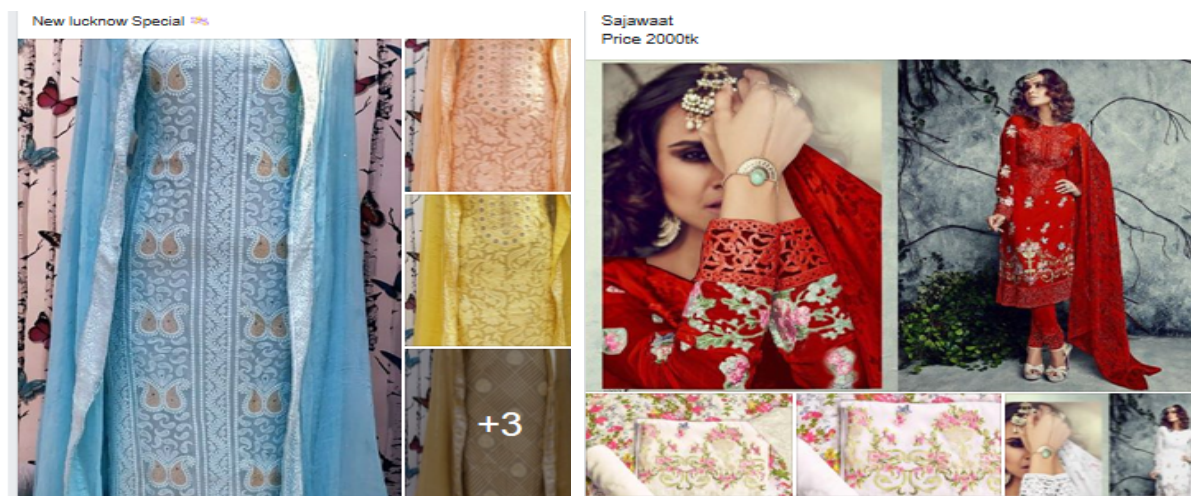
Figure 5-1: Visual Posting

(Source: SME-4's Facebook Page)

The product being promoted usually appeared to be the focal point of the posted image in a visual posting, and the main emphasis on this type of post was perhaps to stimulate consumers' thoughts on how the product may enhance their lives. Adding a visual element (e.g., photos/images/video) to any post increases its visibility to consumers. During the research, it was observed that most of the SMEs were utilising multimedia visual posting strategies by adding photos, video, and Facebook live to visualise posts. Such visualisations may help to

increase the consumers' attention and interaction with posts. It was observed that SMEs with more variety in their Facebook posts had more engagement compared to the others.

Facebook Live has become a common medium of *instant and attentive reciprocal communications* among SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh. Due to its popularity among consumers, some women fashion wear SMEs were streaming up to two live sessions each day (SME-2, SME-3, SME-4, SME-7 and SME-8). Some of these SMEs have recruited more than one Facebook Live presenter. Usually, during Facebook Live, SMEs' owners, managers, or employees present their product collections to their followers. The length of Facebook Live, on average, lasted between 20 to 60 minutes and multiple messages were conveyed during each session. During Facebook Live, followers can ask questions to the presenter, who then answers their query instantly in written text or verbally. During Facebook Live sessions, presenters in the sample used not only persuasive product-oriented remarks but also some interactives and consumers engaging remarks such as reading aloud followers' names who have joined the event, asking them how they are doing, requesting them to send feedback through commenting, and asking them to share the Facebook Live with their friends.

During Facebook Live, the followers (audiences) play an active role by directly engaging through liking, commenting, and sharing. On average, Facebook Live posts received higher consumer interactions (i.e., likes, comments, and shares) compared to other media types (i.e., video, photo, and text). It may suggest that consumers prefer these types of live events because they can actively discuss an item or ask for further information and receive instant help, when necessary. The popularity of Facebook Live among consumers indicate that a single live post can speed up consumer journey due to real-time interactions and the availability of adequate information to make purchase decisions. Each Facebook Live observed during this research had a higher number of consumers' comments; however, many of these comments were elementary such as "Hi" and "Hello" and these types of comments many not highly useful in terms of revenue generation. Nonetheless, Facebook Live events were rich and highly engaging, thus they may hold high potential to build effective relationships with consumers. Some SMEs also re-posted their previous live events (i.e., SME-5, SME-7, SME-15 and SME-18). However, these re-posted live posts did not attract the same level of consumer engagement as the original live posts.

5.2.5. Summary of Netnography Findings

This netnography research aimed to explore social media marketing communication activities and strategies of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs by reviewing 20 SMEs' Facebook activities over four months. This research identified 14 commonly used Facebook communication activities and they were categorised into four different communication strategies, namely task-oriented communication strategies, interactions-oriented communication strategies, self-oriented communication strategies, and mixed oriented communication strategies. In order to categorise the social media marketing communication strategies of SMEs, the Salesman Interpersonal Communication Theory (SICT) was used. During the analysis, it was observed that some of the social media marketing communication activities of fashion retail SMEs did not fall under the pre-existing dimensions of the SICT; therefore, the model was reconceptualised to better represent the social media marketing communication activities of fashion retail SMEs by adding 'mixed-orientation' dimension.

As observed during the analysis of netnography data, traditional sales-focused communications were widely used in fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication. These sales-focused communications (categorised as task-oriented communication strategy) received a low level of consumers' interactions. An analysis of consumers' comments on task-oriented communications revealed that consumers generally made inquiries about the products' price and materials. Although the level of consumers' engagement through comments was limited in the task-oriented communication, they seemed fit for creating consumer interest in the products. In addition, SMEs were conducting numerous activities for creating and maintaining interactions with the consumers by posting interaction-oriented posts. These posts received a higher level of consumer engagement through comments in comparison to task-oriented communication strategies. However, most of these comments in the interaction-oriented posts were related to socialising and relationships building and may have limited direct influence on SMEs' sales and revenues. Besides, a common trend of using Facebook Live streaming was noticeable during the netnography research. SMEs in the sample effectively used the multimedia features of Facebook by visualising their posts by using a combination of texts, photos and graphics, as well as videos and Facebook live. These real-time and highly interactive live communications generated a high level of consumer engagement and interactions.

As a part of this research, the netnography research played an important role in identifying the common social media marketing communication activities and strategies of fashion retail SMEs. The following section of this chapter now evaluates the effectiveness of the identified social media communication strategies in terms of enhancing the level of social media consumer engagement.

5.3. Quantitative Data Analysis and Findings

5.3.1. Quantitative Data Collection

The second objective of this research was developed to identify the impacts of different communication strategies and media richness on social media consumer engagement in the context of fashion retail SMEs. This research took Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook as a case and statistically examined them to investigate the relationships between the above research variables. SMEs' Facebook posts were categorised based on two theoretical frameworks identified in the literature: the salesman's interpersonal communication framework and media richness theory. SMEs' communication strategies were categorised into four types, namely task orientation, interaction orientation, self-orientation, and mixed-orientation and media used for communications were also categorised into four different types, namely text, image, video, and Facebook Live.

In addition, consumer engagement specific to individual Facebook posts were calculated based on the interactions (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) each post received. The calculation process and criteria for doing so have been already elaborated in chapter three of this thesis. A total of 2409 valid posts related to 20 fashion retail SMEs' two-month Facebook activities were considered for this research, and data related to each post was recorded. The collected data were coded into SPSS for further analysis. The coding frame was developed combining concept-driven and data-driven strategies. In particular, the main categories were derived from the existing salesperson interpersonal communication framework and media richness framework to map the SMEs' Facebook practices onto the theory of social media communication. Similarly, the subcategories or the Facebook content strategies of SMEs were specified by exploring the Facebook posts of fashion retail SMEs to capture the uniqueness of Facebook communication in consumer engagement through netnography. Table 5.2 presents the finalised coding frame for the research.

Table: 5-2 Final Coding Frame

SMC Strategies	SMEs Facebook Communication Activities
Task-orientation	Because task-oriented communication is particularly goal-oriented and intentional, salespeople (or consumers) who choose this approach are most concerned with reaching their objectives as quickly as possible (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). E.g., product-related marketing posts, persuasive posts, advertising posts, discounted or priced promotional posts. *Themes identified from netnography* ➢ Products Advertisement ➢ Sales Promotion ➢ Communicating ordering and delivering processes
Interaction-orientation	As an important aspect of seller-buyer contact, interaction-oriented communication promotes socialising and forming personal ties (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). E.g., occasional Greetings, invitations, personal stories sharing, mentioning consumer's name on posts, community activities, contests and competitions, educating consumers, emotional, inspirational and humorous. *Themes identified from netnography* ➢ Educating followers ➢ Organising creative Events for Followers ➢ Community building ➢ Individual recognition of followers ➢ Responsiveness to consumer comments
Self-orientation	When dealing with others, self-oriented communication refers to those who are focused on their particular characteristics or experiences (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). E.g., claiming the authenticity of the business, the origin of its products, business-related public announcement, celebrity endorsement, claiming business credibility, co-branding or association with other brands. *Themes identified from netnography* ➢ Consumer Review ➢ Claiming Authenticity of Products ➢ Celebrity Endorsement ➢ Business Related Update
Mixed orientation	Multiple orientations in a single post. They are focusing on sales through social and relational approaches. E.g., interacting with followers, asking for interaction, unwrapping new products, explaining the features and quality of the product, responding to followers' queries (instance feedback). *Themes identified from netnography* ➢ Visual postings ➢ Instant and attentive reciprocal communication

Before investigating how different communicational styles and media richness affect social media consumer engagement in Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, a descriptive analysis is conducted to describe the dataset.

5.3.2. Descriptive Findings

Descriptive findings of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication trend are presented in the following section.

5.3.2.1. *Frequency Analysis of the Reviewed Facebook Posts*

Table 5.3 shows that the highest number of posts were gathered from SME-5 (9.4%, n=227 posts), whilst the lowest percentage of posts were collected from SME-18 (2.1%, n=51 posts). The data was collected between 15th January 2019 and 15th March 2019, and all posts made by the selected SMEs during that period were considered. As the data shows, at least 5 out of 20 SMEs, on average, posted more than three posts per day (e.g., SME-3, SME-5, SME-6, SME-7 and SME-14). However, 4 SMEs posted only one post on an average day on Facebook (e.g., SME-9, SME-15, SME-17, and SME-18).

Table 5-3: SMEs' Facebook Post Frequency from 15th January 2019 to 15th March 2019

Frequency of SMEs' Facebook Posts		
SMEs	Number of posts (N)	Frequency (%)
SME-1	113	4.7
SME-2	142	5.9
SME-3	193	8.0
SME-4	174	7.2
SME-5	227	9.4
SME-6	189	7.8
SME-7	212	8.8
SME-8	91	3.8
SME-9	67	2.8
SME-10	94	3.9
SME-11	76	3.2
SME-12	136	5.6
SME-13	110	4.6
SME-14	179	7.4
SME-15	58	2.4
SME-16	91	3.8
SME-17	52	2.2
SME-18	51	2.1
SME-19	84	3.5
SME-20	70	2.9
Total	2409	100.0

Source: The Author

5.3.2.2. *Communication Orientations of reviewed Facebook Posts*

Based on the findings of the netnography research (presented in section 5.2), this research categorised Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' posts into four different orientations. As identified by this research and reported in table 5.4, the highest percentage of posts published by SMEs were task-oriented (60.8%, n=1465). The second most common category was mixed-

oriented (19.2%, n=462), and that was followed by interaction-oriented posts (12.7%, n=307) and self-oriented posts (7.3%, n=175).

Table 5-4: SMEs' Post Frequency based on Communication orientation

Communication Orientation		
	Number (N)	Frequency (%)
Task-orientation	1465	60.8
Interaction-orientation	307	12.7
Self-orientation	175	7.3
Mixed orientation	462	19.2
Total	2409	100.0

Source: The Author

5.3.2.3.   *Post Categorisation based on Media Richness*

As aforementioned, Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook posts were classified into four different media richness categories. As observed, SMEs posted most of their Facebook posts containing images (65.6%, n=1581), and the least published media type was text (5.9%, n=141). During the same period, a total of 466 (19.3%) Facebook Lives were conducted, and 221 (9.2%) videos were posted. Although texts are more convenient media types to publish than Facebook Live, video and image posts, SME fashion retailers used texts the least. The most popular media used for Facebook posts by fashion retail SMEs is the photo/image.

Table 5-5: SMEs' Post Frequency based on Media Richness

Media Type		
	Number (N)	Frequency (%)
Live	466	19.3
Image	1581	65.6
Video	221	9.2
Text	141	5.9
Total	2409	100.0

Source: The Author

5.3.3. Inferential Analysis

After extensively reviewing the existing literature, chapter three of this thesis outlined multiple hypotheses. The hypotheses were revisited in chapter four and respective null hypotheses were formulated. Chapter four also stated the tests being conducted for testing each hypothesis (see section 4.6.3). This part of this chapter now tests the outlined hypotheses in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

5.3.3.1. Testing of Hypothesis 1: Relationships between Post Orientation and Media Richness

A Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationships between communication styles (orientations) and media types adopted in Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook posts using the following equation:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

X^2 = Chi-Squared

E = Expected Value

O = Observed Value

Equation 1: Pearson Chi-Square

A statistically significant relationship was observed between different communication styles and media types in the sample X^2 (9, N = 2409) = 2535.55, p < .05 (.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis $H1_0$ was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis $H1_1$ was accepted. The result of the Chi-Square test is presented in table 5.6 below.

Table 5-6: Result of Chi-Square Test

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2534.552[a]	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	2403.524	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	669.493	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2409		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.24.			

Source: The Author

Table 5-7 now presents the findings of crosstabulation tests between media type categories and post orientation categories.

Table 5-7: SMEs' Facebook Posts Communication Orientations and Media Richness

Communication Styles * Media Types Crosstabulation							
			Media types				Total
			Live	Image	Video	Text	
CO M_ Sty le	Task-orientation	Count	4	1231	170	60	1465
		% within COM_style	0.3%	84.0%	11.6%	4.1%	100.0%
		% within Media_types	0.9%	77.9%	76.9%	42.6%	60.8%
		% of Total	0.2%	51.1%	7.1%	2.5%	60.8%
	Interaction-orientation	Count	0	242	29	36	307
		% within COM_style	0.0%	78.8%	9.4%	11.7%	100.0%
		% within Media_types	0.0%	15.3%	13.1%	25.5%	12.7%
		% of Total	0.0%	10.0%	1.2%	1.5%	12.7%
	Self-orientation	Count	0	108	22	45	175
		% within COM_style	0.0%	61.7%	12.6%	25.7%	100.0%
		% within Media_types	0.0%	6.8%	10.0%	31.9%	7.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	4.5%	0.9%	1.9%	7.3%
	Mixed orientation	Count	462	0	0	0	462
		% within COM_style	100.0 %	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Media_types	99.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.2%
		% of Total	19.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.2%
Total		Count	466	1581	221	141	2409
		% within COM_style	19.3%	65.6%	9.2%	5.9%	100.0%
		% within Media_types	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	19.3%	65.6%	9.2%	5.9%	100.0%

Source: The Author

Results of crosstabulation test (presented in table 5-7) highlighted that a vast majority of the posts (60.8%) were task-oriented, whilst only 7.3% of the total reviewed posts focused on promoting brand awareness (e.g., self-orientation). As presented, nearly all Facebook Live posts (99.1%) had mixed orientations, and Facebook Live posts accounted for almost one fifth

(19.2%) of the total posts. The SMEs mainly used images to maintain consumer relationships (e.g., interaction orientation) to maintain consumer relationships (78.8%). Image, on average, was the most used media across all distinct categories, namely task orientation (84%), interaction orientation (78.8%), and self-orientation (61.7%). On the contrary, the usage of video and text varied depending on the direction of the posts. For example, for task-oriented posts, texts were the least used post category (4.1%). Regarding interaction orientation and self-orientation, videos were least common with 9.4% and 12.6% of posts containing videos, respectively.

5.3.3.2. *Testing of Hypothesis 2: Difference in the level of consumer engagement across different communication styles*

To assess the differences in consumer engagement level across different communication styles, the analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) test was used. The sample contained a total of 2409 valid posts. Before conducting one-way ANOVA, a descriptive analysis of communication styles and engagement scores was conducted.

Table 5-8: Descriptive statistics of communication style and engagement score

Descriptive								
Engagement Score								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Task orientation	1465	.1305	.31612	.00826	.1143	.1467	.00	5.70
Interaction orientation	306	.1337	.31393	.01795	.0984	.1691	.00	2.89
Self-orientation	175	.1052	.19049	.01440	.0768	.1337	.00	1.62
Mixed	462	.2480	.28821	.01341	.2217	.2744	.02	3.64
Total	2409	.1516	.30668	.00625	.1394	.1639	.00	5.70

Source: The Author

As identified in table 5-8, the mean engagement score for the mixed oriented post (M = 0.25, SD = 0.29) is higher than the task oriented (M = 0.13, SD = 0.32), interaction oriented (M = 0.13, SD = 0.31) and self-oriented (M = 0.11, SD= 0.19) posts. In order to assess if these differences are statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted.

The one-way ANOVA test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of consumer engagement *[F (3, 2409) = 19.66, p<.05 (0.00)]* across four different communication styles. Therefore, the null hypothesis $H2_0$ was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis $H2_1$ was accepted. Table 5-9 below presents the result of the test.

Table 5-9: The result of one-way ANOVA of communication styles and engagement score

ANOVA					
Engagement Score					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.421	3	1.807	19.658	.000
Within Groups	220.970	2406	.092		
Total	226.391	2409			

Source: The Author

To further understand how each post category differs from the other, a series of Tukey post hoc tests were conducted. Table 5.10 presents the findings of the test.

Table 5-10: Multiple Comparisons (Tukey HSD)

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Engagement Score						
Tukey HSD						
(I) COM_style	(J) COM_style	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Task orientation	Interaction orientation	-.00322	.01906	.998	-.0522	.0458
	Self-orientation	.02530	.02425	.724	-.0370	.0876
	Mixed	-.11751*	.01618	.000	-.1591	-.0759
Interaction orientation	Task orientation	.00322	.01906	.998	-.0458	.0522
	Self-orientation	.02852	.02873	.754	-.0454	.1024
	Mixed	-.11429*	.02235	.000	-.1717	-.0568
Self-orientation	Task orientation	-.02530	.02425	.724	-.0876	.0370
	Interaction orientation	-.02852	.02873	.754	-.1024	.0454
	Mixed	-.14281*	.02691	.000	-.2120	-.0736
Mixed	Task orientation	.11751*	.01618	.000	.0759	.1591
	Interaction orientation	.11429	.02235	.000	.0568	.1717
	Self-orientation	.14281*	.02691	.000	.0736	.2120
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Source: The Author

As identified in table 5-10, posts with mixed orientation attracted a significantly larger amount of consumer engagement whilst no statistically significant mean difference in level of consumer engagement across other orientations was observed. As presented in table 5-10, mixed oriented posts received significantly higher engagement than task oriented *(MD = 0.118, p < .05 (.000)),* interaction oriented *(MD=0.114, p < .05 (.000)),* and self-oriented *(MD =0.142, p < .05 (.000)).*

Although the above findings showed significant differences in overall consumer engagement across four communication styles, the results did not explicitly classify what engagement behaviour (e.g., like, comment, and share) was most popular across different communication styles. Therefore, some further analyses included three behavioural variables, namely likes, comments, and shares. Table 5-11 below presents the descriptive statistics concerning each behavioural variable.

Table 5-11 presents the descriptive statistics of SMEs' Facebook posts' likes, comments, and shares across four different communication orientations. As identified, on average, each post in the sample received 555 likes (SD =1862), 42 comments (SD = 99), and 31 shares (SD = 118). These findings indicate 'like' is the most common engagement behaviour related to fashion retail SMEs' Facebook posts.

Table 5-11: Descriptive statistics of like, comment, shares; and communication styles

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Like	Task orientation	1465	485.71	1144.227	29.895	427.06	544.35	0	16000
	Interaction orientation	307	798.33	4398.273	251.023	304.38	1292.27	0	67000
	Self-orientation	175	259.31	493.077	37.273	185.75	332.88	6	4600
	Mixed	462	726.66	954.411	44.403	639.40	813.92	10	12000
	Total	2409	555.31	1862.443	37.946	480.90	629.72	0	67000
Comments	Task orientation	1465	11.90	27.334	.714	10.50	13.30	0	483
	Interaction orientation	307	26.78	130.816	7.466	12.09	41.47	0	2000
	Self-orientation	175	7.66	13.222	1.000	5.69	9.64	0	94
	Mixed	462	160.43	140.319	6.528	147.60	173.26	3	935
	Total	2409	41.97	98.836	2.014	38.02	45.92	0	2000
Shares	Task orientation	1465	4.47	10.609	.277	3.93	5.01	0	156
	Interaction orientation	306	6.26	19.823	1.133	4.03	8.49	0	203
	Self-orientation	175	6.86	26.125	1.975	2.97	10.76	0	296
	Mixed	462	139.40	236.991	11.026	117.74	161.07	0	1500
	Total	2409	30.76	117.169	2.388	26.08	35.44	0	1500

Source: The Author

Concerning the popularity of different communication styles, on average, interaction-oriented posts generated the highest number of likes (M=798, SD = 4398) whilst self-oriented posts attracted the least number of likes (M= 259, SD = 493). In terms of comments, mixed oriented posts received the largest number of comments (M = 160, SD = 140) and interaction-oriented post generated the second-highest number of comments (M= 26, SD = 130). SMEs' self-oriented posts generated the least number of post comments (M= 7, SD = 13), and for task-oriented posts mean was 11. Finally, mixed-oriented post was the most shared post (M = 139, SD = 237) whilst posts with task orientation had the least shared (M = 4, SD = 11). Three one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to assess whether or not there is any statistical significance in the above differences. Table 5-12 presents the results of the tests.

Table 5-12: Results of ANOVA tests (likes, comments, and shares)

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Likes	Between Groups	54124681.678	3	18041560.559	5.229	.001
	Within Groups	8298489385.307	2405	3450515.337		
	Total	8352614066.985	2408			
Comments	Between Groups	8084882.780	3	2694960.927	419.842	.000
	Within Groups	15437673.412	2405	6418.991		
	Total	23522556.192	2408			
Shares	Between Groups	6749580.839	3	2249860.280	205.690	.000
	Within Groups	26295273.460	2404	10938.134		
	Total	33044854.299	2409			

Source: The Author

The analyses revealed that there is a significant difference in likes *[F (3, 2407) = 5.229, p<0.05 (0.001)]* across different communication styles. The tests also revealed a statistically significant difference in comments *[F (3, 2407) = 419.842, p<0.05 (0.00)]* and shares *[F (3, 2407) = 205.690, p <0.05 (0.000)]* across different communication styles.

To further assess how each post category differed from each other in terms of receiving likes, comments, and shares, a series of Tukey post hoc tests were conducted. Table 5-13 presents the findings of the test.

Table 5-13: Multiple comparisons Tukey HSD test

Multiple Comparisons							
Tukey HSD							
Dependent Variable	(I) COM_style	(J) COM_style	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Likes	Task orientation	Interaction orientation	-312.620*	116.597	.037	-612.37	-12.87
		Self-orientation	226.392	148.568	.423	-155.55	608.34
		Mixed	-240.952	99.116	.072	-495.76	13.86
	Interaction orientation	Task orientation	312.620*	116.597	.037	12.87	612.37
		Self-orientation	539.011*	175.945	.012	86.69	991.34
		Mixed	71.668	136.778	.953	-279.96	423.30
	Self-orientation	Task orientation	-226.392	148.568	.423	-608.34	155.55
		Interaction orientation	-539.011*	175.945	.012	-991.34	-86.69
		Mixed	-467.344*	164.881	.024	-891.23	-43.46
	Mixed	Task orientation	240.952	99.116	.072	-13.86	495.76
		Interaction orientation	-71.668	136.778	.953	-423.30	279.96
		Self-orientation	467.344*	164.881	.024	43.46	891.23
Comments	Task orientation	Interaction orientation	-14.884*	5.029	.016	-27.81	-1.96
		Self-orientation	4.235	6.408	.912	-12.24	20.71
		Mixed	-148.533*	4.275	.000	-159.52	-137.54
	Interaction orientation	Task orientation	14.884*	5.029	.016	1.96	27.81
		Self-orientation	19.119	7.589	.057	-.39	38.63
		Mixed	-133.649*	5.899	.000	-148.82	-118.48
		Task orientation	-4.235	6.408	.912	-20.71	12.24

			Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	Self-orientation	Interaction orientation	-19.119	7.589	.057	-38.63	.39
		Mixed	-152.768*	7.112	.000	-171.05	-134.49
	Mixed	Task orientation	148.533*	4.275	.000	137.54	159.52
		Interaction orientation	133.649*	5.899	.000	118.48	148.82
		Self-orientation	152.768*	7.112	.000	134.49	171.05
Shares	Task orientation	Interaction orientation	-1.789	6.574	.993	-18.69	15.11
		Self-orientation	-2.394	8.365	.992	-23.90	19.11
		Mixed	-134.936*	5.580	.000	-149.28	-120.59
	Interaction orientation	Task orientation	1.789	6.574	.993	-15.11	18.69
		Self-orientation	-.605	9.912	1.000	-26.09	24.88
		Mixed	-133.147*	7.709	.000	-152.96	-113.33
	Self-orientation	Task orientation	2.394	8.365	.992	-19.11	23.90
		Interaction orientation	.605	9.912	1.000	-24.88	26.09
		Mixed	-132.542*	9.283	.000	-156.41	-108.68
	Mixed	Task orientation	134.936*	5.580	.000	120.59	149.28
		Interaction orientation	133.147*	7.709	.000	113.33	152.96
		Self-orientation	132.542*	9.283	.000	108.68	156.41
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.							

The tests results revealed that in terms of receiving comments and shares, mixed oriented posts received significantly more comments and shares in comparison to other communication styles. In terms of comments, mixed-oriented posts received significantly more comments than task oriented *(MD = 149, p < .05 (.000)),* interaction oriented *(MD=134, p < .05 (.000)),* and self-oriented *(MD =153, p < .05 (.000)).* Similarly, mixed-oriented posts also received significantly more shares than task oriented *(MD = 135, p < .05 (.000)),* interaction oriented *(MD=133, p < .05 (.000)),* and self-oriented *(MD =133, p < .05 (.000)).* Differences were also observed in terms of posts with different orientations receiving likes. For example, interaction-oriented posts received significantly more likes than task oriented *(MD = 312, p < .05 (.04)) and* self-oriented *(MD =549, p < .05 (.01))* posts.

5.3.3.3. Testing of Hypotheses 3: Differences in the level of consumer engagement across different media types

One way ANOVA test was conducted to assess the differences in the level of consumer engagement across different media types (e.g., Facebook Live, images, videos, and texts). Table 5-14 presents the descriptive analysis of different media types and engagement scores.

Table 5-14: Descriptive statistics of Engagement score across media types

Descriptive								
Engagement Score								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Live	466	.2465	.28745	.01332	.2203	.2727	.02	3.64
Image	1580	.1363	.33113	.00833	.1200	.1527	.00	5.70
Video	221	.1215	.18861	.01269	.0965	.1466	.00	1.13
Text	141	.0571	.08391	.00707	.0431	.0710	.00	.63
Total	2409	.1516	.30668	.00625	.1394	.1639	.00	5.70

Source: The Author

As presented above, on average, the engagement score for the Facebook Live posts (M = 0.24, SD = 0.29) was higher than image (M = 0.14, SD = 0.33), video (M = 0.12, SD = 0.31) and texts (M = 0.06, SD= 0.08). In order to examine if these differences are statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The table 5-15 presents the result of the test.

Table 5-15: One-way ANOVA test result of media types and engagement score

ANOVA					
Engagement Score					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.026	3	2.009	21.914	.000
Within Groups	220.365	2404	.092		
Total	226.391	2407			

Source: The Author

As presented above, a significant difference in engagement scores across four different media types used by Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs was identified in the sample *[F (3, 2407) = 21.91, p<.05 (0.00)]*. Therefore, the null hypothesis $H3_0$ was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis $H3_1$ was accepted.

To have better insights on how each media type differs from each other in terms of consumer engagement, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted. Table 5-16 below presents the findings of the tests.

Table 5-16: Multiple comparisons of engagement score based on media types

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Engagement Score						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Media_types	(J) Media_types	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Live	Image	.11019*	.01596	.000	.0692	.1512
	Video	.12496*	.02473	.000	.0614	.1885
	Text	.18944*	.02910	.000	.1146	.2643
Image	Live	-.11019*	.01596	.000	-.1512	-.0692
	Video	.01477	.02174	.905	-.0411	.0707
	Text	.07925*	.02661	.016	.0108	.1477
Video	Live	-.12496*	.02473	.000	-.1885	-.0614
	Image	-.01477	.02174	.905	-.0707	.0411
	Text	.06448	.03263	.197	-.0194	.1484
Text	Live	-.18944*	.02910	.000	-.2643	-.1146
	Image	-.07925*	.02661	.016	-.1477	-.0108
	Video	-.06448	.03263	.197	-.1484	.0194
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Source: The Author

The table above shows that live (Facebook Live) media gathered a significantly larger consumer engagement. Live media posts received significantly higher engagement than posts

with images *(MD = 0.11, p < .05 (.000))*, videos *(MD=0.12, p < .05 (.000))*, and texts *(MD =0.19, p < .05 (.000))*. Similarly, posts with images attracted more consumer engagement than texts *(MD =0.08, p < .05 (.016))*. There was no significant difference in consumer engagement between posts with videos and images or posts with videos and texts. The findings indicate that, in terms of gathering higher engagement, live posts are most effective, followed by images. Posts containing only texts or videos were identified as the least effective methods of consumer engagement.

To assess which engagement behaviour (e.g., like, comment, and share) is most common across different media types (Facebook Live, images, videos, and texts), further analyses were conducted by including three behavioural variables, namely likes, comments, and shares. Below, descriptive statistics related to each behavioural variable is presented in table 4-17.

Table 5-17: Descriptive statistics of like, comment, share and media types

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
Descriptive									
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Likes	Live	466	723.22	951.057	44.057	636.65	809.80	10	12000
	Image	1581	550.65	2211.165	55.610	441.57	659.72	0	67000
	Video	221	479.65	864.778	58.171	365.00	594.29	4	7100
	Text	141	171.25	227.408	19.151	133.39	209.11	6	1100
	Total	2409	555.31	1862.443	37.946	480.90	629.72	0	67000
Comments	Live	466	159.36	140.238	6.496	146.60	172.13	0	935
	Image	1581	12.93	58.542	1.472	10.04	15.82	0	2000
	Video	221	22.43	62.324	4.192	14.17	30.69	0	512
	Text	141	10.30	30.058	2.531	5.29	15.30	0	249
	Total	2409	41.97	98.836	2.014	38.02	45.92	0	2000
Shares	Live	466	138.37	236.243	10.944	116.86	159.87	0	1500
	Image	1580	3.87	10.122	.255	3.37	4.37	0	203
	Video	221	14.08	29.686	1.997	10.14	18.01	0	296
	Text	141	2.53	13.429	1.131	.30	4.77	0	156
	Total	2408	30.76	117.169	2.388	26.08	35.44	0	1500

Source: The Author

Table 5.17 presents the descriptive statistics of SMEs' Facebook posts' likes, comments, and shares across four media types: Facebook lives, images, videos, and texts. On average, each live post received 723 (SD = 951) likes, whilst posts containing images, videos and texts received 551 (SD = 2211), 480 (SD = 865), and 171 (SD = 227) likes, respectively. Similarly,

each live post received 159 (SD = 140) comments, whilst posts with images received 13 (SD = 59) comments, posts with videos received 22 (SD = 62) comments, and posts containing only texts received 10 (SD = 30) comments. Finally, on average, each live post was shared 138 (SD = 236) times, whilst posts with images, videos and texts were shared 4 (SD = 10), 14 (SD = 30), and 3 (SD = 13) times, respectively. To identify whether or not these mean differences are statistically significant, three One-Way ANOVA tests were conducted, and the results are presented in table 5-18 below.

Table 5-18: Results of ANOVA tests likes, comments, and shares across media types

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Likes	Between Groups	35236026.616	3	11745342.205	3.396	.017
	Within Groups	8317378040.369	2405	3458369.248		
	Total	8352614066.985	2408			
Comments	Between Groups	7981504.777	3	2660501.592	411.716	.000
	Within Groups	15541051.415	2405	6461.976		
	Total	23522556.192	2408			
Shares	Between Groups	6711905.313	3	2237301.771	204.249	.000
	Within Groups	26332948.986	2404	10953.806		
	Total	33044854.299	2407			

Source: The Author

The analyses indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in likes *[F (3, 2407) = 3.396, p<0.05 (0.017)]* across different media types. The tests also revealed a statistically significant difference in comments *[F (3, 2407) = 411.7, p<0.05 (0.00)]* and shares *[F (3, 2407) = 204.24, p <0.05 (0.000)]* across different media types. Tukey post hoc tests were

conducted to understand how each media type differed in receiving likes, comments, and shares. Table 5-19 presents the findings of the tests.

Table 5-19: Multiple comparisons (Tukey HSD tests)

Multiple Comparisons							
Tukey HSD							
Dependent Variable	(I) Media_types	(J) Media_types	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Likes	Live	Image	172.575	98.025	.293	-79.43	424.58
		Video	243.574	151.889	.377	-146.91	634.05
		Text	551.973*	178.742	.011	92.46	1011.49
	Image	Live	-172.575	98.025	.293	-424.58	79.43
		Video	70.999	133.552	.951	-272.34	414.34
		Text	379.398	163.447	.093	-40.80	799.59
	Video	Live	-243.574	151.889	.377	-634.05	146.91
		Image	-70.999	133.552	.951	-414.34	272.34
		Text	308.399	200.440	.414	-206.90	823.70
	Text	Live	-551.973*	178.742	.011	-1011.49	-92.46
		Image	-379.398	163.447	.093	-799.59	40.80
		Video	-308.399	200.440	.414	-823.70	206.90
Comments	Live	Image	146.437*	4.237	.000	135.54	157.33
		Video	136.935*	6.566	.000	120.06	153.81
		Text	149.067*	7.726	.000	129.20	168.93
	Image	Live	-146.437*	4.237	.000	-157.33	-135.54
		Video	-9.502	5.773	.353	-24.34	5.34
		Text	2.630	7.065	.982	-15.53	20.79
	Video	Live	-136.935*	6.566	.000	-153.81	-120.06
		Image	9.502	5.773	.353	-5.34	24.34

		Text	12.132	8.664	.499	-10.14	34.41
	Text	Live	-149.067*	7.726	.000	-168.93	-129.20
		Image	-2.630	7.065	.982	-20.79	15.53
		Video	-12.132	8.664	.499	-34.41	10.14
Shares	Live	Image	134.493*	5.517	.000	120.31	148.68
		Video	124.290*	8.548	.000	102.31	146.27
		Text	135.835*	10.059	.000	109.97	161.70
	Image	Live	-134.493*	5.517	.000	-148.68	-120.31
		Video	-10.203	7.516	.526	-29.53	9.12
		Text	1.342	9.199	.999	-22.31	24.99
	Video	Live	-124.290*	8.548	.000	-146.27	-102.31
		Image	10.203	7.516	.526	-9.12	29.53
		Text	11.545	11.281	.736	-17.46	40.55
	Text	Live	-135.835*	10.059	.000	-161.70	-109.97
		Image	-1.342	9.199	.999	-24.99	22.31
		Video	-11.545	11.281	.736	-40.55	17.46

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: The Author

As presented in the table 5.19, in terms of receiving comments and shares, live posts (Facebook Live) received significantly more comments and shares in comparison to posts with texts, images, and videos. Live posts received significantly more comments than posts with images *(MD = 146, p < .05 (.000)),* posts with videos *(MD=137, p < .05 (.000)),* and posts with texts *(MD =149, p < .05 (.000)).* Likewise, on average, live posts also received significantly more shares than posts with images *(MD = 134, p < .05 (.000)),* posts with videos *(MD=124, p < .05 (.000)),* and posts with texts *(MD =136, p < .05 (.000)).* These findings of the research indicate that live posts are most effective in terms of engaging consumers on Facebook.

5.3.4. Summary of Quantitative Findings

This section of the chapter investigated the effectiveness of different social media marketing communication strategies used by Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs in terms of enhancing the level of social media consumer engagement. The previous section of this chapter (section 5.2) identified 14 common social media marketing communication activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and they were categorised into four distinct social media marketing communication strategies by closely following the Salesman's Interpersonal Communications Theory. During this quantitative research, a total of 2409 Facebook posts from 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were reviewed and the posts were categorised based on the framework reconceptualised by this research and proposed in section 5.3.1. Additionally, behavioural social media consumer engagement related information (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) related to each post was also collected. Moreover, posts were also categorised based on their media richness in accordance with the Media Richness Theory.

Multiple statistical analyses of the collected research data revealed a statistically significant difference in the level of consumer engagement across different social media communication strategies and revealed 'mixed social media marketing communication strategy' as the most effective strategy in terms of engaging consumers across Facebook in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. Additionally, the findings of this research also indicate that consumer engagement is higher across posts containing richer media. For example, the richest form of social media communication (e.g., Facebook Live) had a significantly higher level of consumer engagement than other less-rich forms of media (e.g., text and image).

This section of the chapter revealed that, in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, communication strategies that have multiple orientations and contain richer media create greater consumer engagement across social media. These findings add substantial meanings to the netnography findings by revealing the most appropriate social media marketing communication strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement. The subsequent section of this chapter now seeks to uncover how SMEs benefit by using Facebook and the challenges they face whilst using Facebook as a tool for communication in an attempt to have a broader understanding of social media marketing communications and thereby be able to provide robust recommendations to both academics and practitioners.

5.4. Findings of the Interviews

As aforementioned, twelve interviews were conducted with owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to identify the benefits and challenges involving Facebook communications. The table below presents the profile of the interview participants.

Table 5-20: Profile of Interview Participants

Interviewee Code	Gender	Role in the SME	Number of Employees	Experience in the industry (in years)
P1	Male	Social Media Manager	8-12	2
P2	Female	Social Media Coordinator	10-15	2
P3	Male	Manager	12-15	3
P4	Male	Owner	50-60	5
P5	Female	Owner	12-15	3
P6	Male	Manager	10-15	2.5
P7	Male	Manager	30-35	4
P8	Male	Owner	10-12	2
P9	Male	Manager	8-12	3
P10	Male	Manager	40-45	3.5
P11	Female	Owner	45-50	3
P12	Female	Manager	15-20	4

Source: The Author

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the qualitative research data and generate themes. A detailed description of the interview data analysis process is discussed in the methodology chapter (see section 4.6). The findings of the research are presented under two themes: benefits for using Facebook as a marketing communication tool by SMEs and the challenges SMEs face during Facebook communications.

5.4.3. Benefits for using Facebook as a marketing communication tool

During the interview, participants were requested to share their perceptions on the benefits of adopting Facebook in their business processes. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts

revealed various themes. The table below highlights the themes observed in each participant's response.

Table 5-21: Summary of Key Themes (Benefits)

Benefits of using Facebook as a marketing communication tool						
Themes Participants	Accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues	Cost-effective digital marketing	Relationship building	Increasing brand awareness	Value co-creation	Spreading positive e-WOM
P1	X	X		X	X	
P2			X	X	X	X
P3	X					
P4	X	X	X	X	X	X
P5	X	X	X	X	X	X
P6	X	X				
P7	X	X	X	X		
P8	X	X	X			X
P9		X				X
P10			X			X
P11	X				X	
P12			X	X		

Source: The Author

5.4.3.2. *Accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues*

Nearly all the participants of this research acknowledged that Facebook has become a virtual marketplace where they can communicate with consumers digitally and generate revenues. This has encouraged them to enter the Facebook marketplace and actively operate there. As participants stated, Facebook helps them perform several essential business activities virtually – these ranges from simply interacting with consumers to closing sales. For example:

> Certainly, social media has a direct impact on sales. When there is an advertisement of a product, consumers have a choice or option to justify and compare with other Facebook pages. It's like a marketplace; rather than be in a physical shopping mall Facebook is more convenient for consumers now; they can now shop from home, compare the price and quality of the products, and even there are opportunities to see what others are saying about the products, or

they can ask other users about the products information, [......] Facebook helps them to make purchase decision easily; therefore, I would say Facebook is used a virtual marketplace and sales is the usual matter here.

(P4)

As observed during the research, the popularity of the Facebook marketplace has grown so tremendously that some SMEs are selling their products through Facebook only, for example, another participant responded:

Definity, Facebook is helping us generating sales; as you know, we are doing business only on Facebook, and all the sales come from this channel. I used to do personal selling when I used to go to university, but it's been more than a year; I am only doing business in Facebook now.

(P5)

Whilst other participants witnessed an increase in in-store sales due to engaging with consumers on Facebook. They stated that engagements on Facebook could indeed convert into in-store sales.

Social media help us to increase the sales in two ways from the Facebook posts consumer can choose their products, and they can buy it just visiting the local outlet or whenever, there is no nearby outlet available they can order from our Facebook pages, especially outside the city and we deliver the products at their addresses, so advertising in Facebook boost the sales in shops and online (Facebook)."

(P1)

When we get noticed by Facebook users, there is a high possibility that we can get prospective consumers and make sales to them.

(P7)

Respondents felt that Facebook is helping them to spread product awareness as well as to maximise exposure to the market.

Online shopping is a new trend in Bangladesh. Many consumers are still determined to buy their clothing in person from the shop; they want to see the dress, touch it, and feel it before they buy them. But these opportunities are limited online, so the awareness of the business and its products are very crucial for online businesses like us.

(P11)

The first thing we do in social media is let people know about our business, what we do, what are products we sell. This is because as people become aware of our business, the chance of getting consumers will also increase and it would be perfect for our business.

(P8)

Our main target is to promote our business first, and I think Facebook makes it easy for us now because there are many people are out there actively using Facebook, when they will know about us, we have the best chance to get our consumers from them.

(P6)

As can be seen, Facebook enabled them to maximise their exposure, allowing them to access consumers from the wider market. Participants believed that shopping trend is changing in the market, hence, to keep pace with growing online shopping trends, they are actively operating on Facebook.

The respondents perceived that exposing themselves to potential consumers through Facebook increases their chances of sales and revenues. They also believed that Facebook has provided them with an unconventional but efficient platform for reaching out to a large number of consumers and communicating with them. For example, research participants stated:

> We try to provide all necessary information in the post to help consumers to make their decision to purchase the product.
>
> (P7)

> Our business is only on Facebook; we do not use any other channel to sell our products, we rely only on Facebook.
>
> (P5)

> Posting our products on Facebook not only generates revenues online but also increase the sales in the store, for example, we have many followers on Facebook, and they see our products whenever we post them, but they may not buy it online if they like it, they can visit our local shop, consumers bring the Facebook photo in the store to look for the same product.
>
> (P3)

Participants in the interviews believed that Facebook has become a channel for selling their products online. They felt Facebook is not only a platform for socialising but also has grown as a catalogue service for shopping. A few participants acknowledged that they established their business solely on Facebook which indicates that Facebook is indeed providing them with a great opportunity to conduct business. Participants were also asked regarding how they utilise Facebook for increasing revenues. One of the managers shared that he organises two Facebook live sessions every week in order to promote their new products with consumers. He stated that they focus on making the sessions entertaining so that consumers can have a joyful shopping experience. As explained by him, such sessions lead to an instant surge in sales.

> We organise two Facebook Live sessions per week. One session is conducted on Monday whilst other is on Thursday. I recruit presenters for hosting live sessions, and we discuss presentation strategies before starting each session. Our consumers are fun-loving, so I ask my presenters to share jokes and make the environment fun. We make half of our weekly sales during these two Live sessions.
>
> (P9)

Another participant revealed that they use posts with detailed videos about their products accompanied by a link that directs consumers to their website.

> Regularly, we try to create a short video presentation of top-selling products and post it on Facebook by including a link to our website. When consumers come to our website, they can also see other products that are available.

<div align="right">(P12)</div>

In general, participants in the sample stated that they use various approaches for generating sales via Facebook. Many used Facebook live regularly whilst some simply relied on redirecting traffic to their websites. Nonetheless, from the participants' responses, it could be concluded that they generally used mixed-oriented communication strategies with a specific focus on achieving certain tasks such as generating revenues via Facebook.

5.4.3.3. Cost-effective digital marketing

Research participants believed that Facebook provides them with a cost-effective marketing channel for promoting and marketing their products. It was noted by the interviewees that they have been able to boost their sales by utilising the marketing features of Facebook. For example:

> We can promote our page and product using the Facebook booster within our budget, and it helps us to reach potential consumers. I think it is good value for money.

<div align="right">(P5)</div>

> We can organise our marketing activities on Facebook; we place our product in Facebook, we launch our new products here and offer product discounts to our consumers.

<div align="right">(P4)</div>

> The sales campaign we often used on Facebook; it boosts sales.

<div align="right">(P9)</div>

Participants revealed that they are not only able to reduce the marketing costs by using Facebook, but they are also able to provide detailed information about new product ranges as soon as the product is manufactured. One of the participants stated that they always post new products information on Facebook to inform potential buyers.

> We always post our new collection on Facebook with product images.

<div align="right">(P6)</div>

Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, in general, appeared to actively use Facebook as an alternative to the conventional marketing channels such as television, radio, and print media. They believe that Facebook is more effective than traditional media as it allows them to target specific consumer segments that are most likely to purchase the products, eventually reducing costs and increasing effectiveness. For example:

> Social media is cost-effective than any other marketing channel, and I think it is more visible than any other media channels as we can see how many consumers we reach through social media. For example, if we put an advertisement on TV, we don't know how many people are watching the advertisement. But social media make it easier we can track everything, including how many people view our posts and how many of them react to a particular post [….] and we can see what is happening on it.
>
> (P8)

> We used to do marketing in city billboards and newspapers, but we stopped doing that almost over a year because social media attract more people, so we now focus on social media only. Moreover, in social media, you can see how many people see your post and how many of them interact with the posts, we can give as many updates as we want every day at no cost, but in the billboard and newspapers, this option is limited, news in the social media spread fast, and we can get instant responses too.
>
> (P1)

Participant (P1) manages a medium-sized fashion retail organisation. Before the popularity of social media, his organisation used to advertise on city billboards and national newspapers; however, they have now stopped marketing through those traditional channels, entirely focusing on social media. As the participant believed, that social media has reduced their marketing cost whilst increasing visibility and allowing them to see the number of people that have seen their posts on social media. Moreover, by using Facebook marketing, they can send several marketing updates within a day, which is not usually possible with newspapers or billboard marketing.

Moreover, a number of other participants also believed that Facebook has emerged as a substitute for websites. Most SMEs cannot build and manage their websites due to the high costs and the lack of expert human resource that is required to manage them. SMEs found that social media, especially Facebook, can act as an alternative option for the website.

> I think social media is the best option for SME business like us at this moment in Bangladesh than having a website because it does not need any additional cost to be in social media and we have our consumers already in social media, whereas, if we get a website, we have to do additional marketing along with the websites and its maintenance costs.
>
> (P7)

The above participant, P7, emphasised the efficacy of social media over a website. Whilst reducing the building and maintenance costs, social media help to reduce the marketing cost too. This is because websites require additional marketing to direct the consumer to the website. Social media is a kind of ready-made market where consumers are already actively engaging with businesses.

It was evident from the interviews that participants believed Facebook as an effective marketing channel for promoting their businesses and products. It was also recognised by participants that they are not only able to communicate upcoming new products with potential consumers but also able to reduce their cost of communication. One of the participants elaborated how he uses Facebook to reduce marketing expenses:

> We are a women's clothing brand; we only sell ladies' fashion products, especially Indian and Pakistani ladies wears, and our target consumers are women aged between 18 and 35 years. Using Facebook, we can specifically target our specific consumer segment and market our products. This has reduced our marketing costs and increased the effectiveness of marketing.

(P2)

Another participant also echoed the views of the above participant.

> Facebook allows us to post different content in various lengths. In the case of video posts, we post them for free, unless we want to promote them further. If we want to do this same sort of marketing through other channels, we could not afford it.

(P6)

It was evident from the participants' experiences that using Facebook as a marketing communication tool provided SMEs with an affordable option to market their products by posting various types of content and targeting specific consumer segments.

5.4.3.4. Relationship building

Several participants in the sample believed that Facebook has facilitated consumer acquisition and helped in consumer retention. It has enabled them to connect regularly with existing consumers and perhaps even to secure repeat purchases from them. For example:

> We don't want to sell once to a consumer; rather, we want to keep them with us for a lifetime. So, we need to keep a good relationship with our consumers
>
> (P5)

> You know it is hard to get a new consumer compared to that; retaining an existing consumer is easy, but we need to maintain consumer relationships effectively.
>
> (P8)

> Wherever we do business online or offline we want to build a relationship with the consumers, Facebook makes it more accessible to consumers and maintain their contact without any additional effort as we can directly send messages and greeting to our consumer through Facebook messenger and contact are automatically saved and organised in the messenger list.
>
> (P2)

As indicated by the respondents, maintaining a good relationship with consumers is very important for the survival and success of an SME. Participants also believed that Facebook is helping them to connect and maintain relationships with existing consumers and attract potential consumers.

Several participants felt that maintaining consumer relationships is crucial for businesses to survive in the long run. Facebook not only provides a broader virtual marketplace for fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh, but many participants believed that it also provides an affordable way to connect and engage with consumers.

> Social media is playing a vital role in the industry we work in (fashion retail), in our industry, we always have to keep up to date with the consumers, I would say we have to keep consumers informed about our products and new collections and Facebook is helping us to communicate with consumers directly. Facebook is more visible compared to other communication channels as we can see how many people we reach out to, how many of them interact with us, what they are saying about us and what types of products they are liking.
>
> (P12)

Facebook gives chances for SMEs to maintain relationships with consumers and keep them engaged with their businesses. One of the participants emphasised the importance of effective consumer relationships for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs due to the high competition and high availability of substitute products.

> Normally, what I see people are still very sceptical about the social media businesses in Bangladesh. It is not easy to make sales of something instantly, but they believe in it once they bought, trust the company, and make repeat purchases. When we talk to them on Facebook, we try to build a relationship with them because we don't want them to be single purchase consumers; we want to do business with them for a lifetime, and I think it's happening in social

media, for example, one of my consumers who regularly shop from us when she lived in Dhaka. However, she has been transferred to another city due to her job, and she still buys from us.

(P10)

As observed in the response of the above participant, P5, using social media can indeed increase consumer loyalty. When the consumers are loyal, they make repeat purchases, eventually increasing the sustainability of the business. Surprisingly, not all participants shared the view that Facebook helps build relationships at a personal level. Some of the participants asserted that physical market environments are far better to interact with consumers personally.

> Although Facebook allows us to access to boundaryless market, there are lots of people in the social media, and it may not be possible to build a personal relationship with most of them [……] I think the physical store is more effective for managing the relationship with local consumers.
>
> (P4)

> Facebook is not necessarily helping us to build a relationship because in the Facebook you can even see the consumer who is talking to you, same for the consumers, in case of a large number of followers response you might not get chance to answer everyone query. But yes, it is an effective channel for small business like us who has small consumers base as we can treat every consumer individually.
>
> (P7)

Nevertheless, most respondents agreed that Facebook is indeed an excellent platform for consumer engagement and relationships. Therefore, a platform for building effective consumer relationships was identified as one of the key motivations for using Facebook as a communication tool. Participants were asked how they approach consumers to build a relationship. One participant suggested that:

> Some of the basic things we do to build relationship with consumers include responding their queries on time, organising online competitions, identifying the regular and active consumers in the Facebook live and acknowledging their names.
>
> (P11)

Another participant highlighted that they use Facebook live posts to build relationships.

> Using Facebook is helping us a lot to build relationships with our consumers. For example, we conduct four to five Facebook live sessions every week and these really give us chances to get consumer feedback whilst connecting with them, [.....] yes, we get a lot of order from each Facebook live but it also help us to build relationship.
>
> (P6)

In general, participants suggested that they use various approaches to build a relationship with consumers. Some participants believed that Facebook live sessions help them to increase sales and build relationships. Based on the participants' comments, it can be concluded they commonly use mixed-orientation strategies for building a relationship.

5.4.3.5.Increasing brand awareness

All respondents in the sample acknowledged that they are increasingly using Facebook in recent years to build brand awareness in the market. The participants mentioned that they are utilising various features of Facebook for disseminating business-related information such as posting product pictures, broadcasting live events, and allowing consumers to peek into available products and services remotely and conveniently, for example:

> Through social media posts we can now inform our consumers about the new collections, sales and discounts, whenever we post on Facebook, we add pictures of the products, so that consumers can make up their mind which one they like and now they don't have to travel to the shop to choose the products they want to buy.
>
> (P1)

> As a small business, we didn't have the opportunities to create awareness of our business or products like other large businesses. Certainly, I think Facebook give us a huge opportunity. We use Facebook to communicate our existing and potential consumers [.......] however; I always highlight the product benefits that give them (consumers) a sense of awareness of what they don't get from other companies; I also try to emphasise the strength of our products to try to help them to identify the right quality products.
>
> (P4)

Another participant felt that it is important for their businesses to be active on Facebook as most of the consumers use Facebook and being active in this platform is essential to reach out to those consumers regularly.

> These days, we cannot operate without social media; everyone is using Facebook now, there is no other way to keep the consumers connected with businesses without being active on Facebook, to reach consumers and inform them about the business and its products, I think it is now essential for every business from small to large to be a presence in social media platforms.
>
> (P2)

Additionally, other respondents believed that Facebook provided SMEs with an opportunity to reach a wider population across the country, which would not have been possible otherwise. Conventionally, only large companies with stores across the country could target consumers on a national scale.

First of all, I would say social media like Facebook has created an open market space for us. Normally, when I run a shop in the market, I only get those consumers who visit the market, but we get ordered from around Bangladesh on social media. We deliver the products to those consumers as well. I cannot imagine without social media how that could be possible for small business like us. We can easily reach consumers as more people are actively using Facebook.

(P5)

As a business, we can reach consumers very easily through Facebook because almost everyone uses Facebook now. You know how people are addicted to social media; they visit Facebook quite a few times within an hour, so there is an opportunity to get noticed by them from all across the country.

(P7)

Based on the participants' responses it was perceived that they adopted Facebook as they perceived it as an effective tool for reaching out to a wider market and building brand awareness. Most of the participants also believed that because of Facebook, SMEs were able to be noticed by the people on a national scale, and they were able to engage with consumers located at dispersing geological locations. Therefore, building awareness was identified as one of the key motivations for using Facebook. Participants were also asked regarding the activities they conduct to build brand awareness on Facebook. One of the participants stated that they publish posts with photos regularly.

I think by being active and visible in social media we can build our brand awareness. For that we post relevant photos regularly in our brand pages, and every Friday we offer special discount in our Facebook page.

(P9)

Another participant mentioned that they purchase promotion packages from Facebook.

We post regularly about the products we sell and sometimes we also buy booster service from Facebook to promote our page.

(P11)

One of the managers in the sample appeared well-informed about Facebook communication strategies that are best for building brand awareness.

We do different sort of things to build awareness about our brand, I think what is important to reach out new people to build awareness about brand and different types of posts work differently, [....] what I meant here some posts may end up reaching existing followers and some posts can reach people outside our page followers' group. [....] for examples if a post receives a lot of shares, it may become viral, which has great chance to reach out to new people.

(P10)

Overall, regular posting and advertising were common approaches taken by most of the participants to build their brand awareness. Interestingly one participant gives insight that getting more shares on their post for reaching out to individuals that are not aware of the brand

yet. Generally, it can be noted that SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail sector used multiple strategies for raising brand awareness.

5.4.3.6. *Value co-creation*

Value co-creation is a process where businesses involved their consumers to generate ideas and designs to innovate something new. Consumers' active participation is one of the prerequisite in the value co-creation process. Several participants in the sample recognised that they are motivated to use Facebook because they can gather information regarding emerging market trends by engaging with consumers. SMEs requested their consumers' opinions through Facebook whilst developing new products, for example:

> Well, we get lots of feedback from the consumers and other people too who may not buy the product from us, but they bought it from other retailers, they also shared their experiences with other consumers [......]. Of course, we observed our social media community and even keep an eye on every post that people are saying about us. Yes, we look out our community and competitors what they are saying and doing [......], and we use that information for product improvement or even new products development and restocking up the high demand products.
>
> (P4)

> We listen to the consumers what they are saying about our products, we pass this information to other departments, they use that information to develop new products, but in most cases, I would say 80% cases company follow its procedures […].
>
> (P1)

In addition, some SMEs also utilised Facebook to peek into their competitors' activities. These provided them with the much-needed ideas for developing products that are consistent with the requirements of the market.

> Everyone is using social media, including businesses and consumers, so it becomes straightforward to check what consumers are buying most on social media and what other businesses are doing. For example, when we launch new products, we check how much other businesses are charging similar products so that we can sell our product at a competitive price.
>
> (P5)

Some of the participants also mentioned that they regularly collect data for improving products and services. They actively considered consumers' comments and feedback for enhancing the quality of products and services. For example:

> Yes, we keep a record of consumers' email and also consumer social media information in the messenger, we monitor their comments closely and take their feedback seriously to know consumer preferences and communicate these to higher management.
>
> (P2)

> Well, our Facebook moderator constantly keep an eye on our business Facebook pages as Facebook creates an easy channel for consumers' feedback, they (consumers) can now easily comment on our posts or make a complaint about the products; however, we do use this information for improvement.
>
> (P11)

Overall, the participants felt that, by using Facebook, they were able to gather creative ideas from consumers that eventually helped them to develop products that can more accurately serve consumers' requirements. Participants were asked to provide some examples regarding the range of activities they do to co-create value with consumers. One of the participants highlighted that:

> We regularly collect consumer feedback about their preferences, for example, on some occasions, we conduct Facebook polls on what types of product followers want to see in the next Facebook Live. This gives us insights regarding what our consumers really want.
>
> (P3)

It was observed that by engaging with consumers regarding their preferences and interests, SME brands were not only able to engage with them but also, they were developing a loyal consumer base in the process.

5.4.1.6 Spreading positive e-WOM

Social media such as Facebook provides individuals to share their experiences. SMEs in the sample were found to be motivated to use social media as they were able to spread positive consumer feedback to win the trusts of potential consumers. Participants highlighted that such positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) of consumers play crucial role in winning potential consumers' trust.

> As I said earlier that people don't want to trust everyone in social media, but once they bought any product and they received their expected product, than they started to trust and when they have trust on a business, then they recommend their friends and family about that business. We get lots of consumers who come through recommendations of other consumers. I think consumers' recommendation transferred the trust to others as well.
>
> (P5)

> We get a lot of consumers through recommendation, and when we give incentives such live share competition, we get lots of responses this way, not only that when friends and family recommend someone about a business, it works very well, as they just trust the business blindly,

normally to get someone's trust is very difficult in social media environment until unless they buy something from us, but there is an easy way to gain trust through consumers' recommendation.

(P9)

Yea, I think the recommendation is more effective in social media and let's say for an example when someone buys any dresses from us, and they wear it and posted on their social media other people can see it, and they can be interested in the dresses ever their friends and family can show their interest about it, and naturally they ask where they have got this dress, and can usually recommend them the shop or Facebook page they buy it from [.....] this type of friends and family suggestion brings a lot of consumers to our page [.....] in Facebook it is easier to share information with others as followers can tag our page to other just in a click.

(P8)

SMEs also regularly shared positive feedback on their Facebook pages (elaborated in section 5.2). Several participants in the sample perceived that sharing consumer experiences on Facebook has helped them to spread positive e-WOM about their businesses, eventually helping them with the marketing of products and ultimately generating higher revenues. Participants were also asked what techniques they use to spread e-WOM on Facebook. One participant suggested that they reward certain members. Although this strategy appeared manipulative, participants stated that it is a common practice amongst Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

Everyone is not going to say something good about you in social media, for this you need loyal consumers. We reward our community members for being member of our group. We offer special discount for them.

(P12)

Another participant argued that they take the more genuine approach and focus on the quality of products and services for achieving positive reviews.

Giving quality products, on time, friendly services help to get positive consumer review about our pages and it helpful for us to grow our business. New consumers mostly review the rating and feedback on the page before they make purchases.

(P2)

Generally, participants believed that Facebook is extremely useful for spreading positive e-WOM and they used multiple strategies to achieve that. Some genuinely focused on improving the products and services whilst others provided specific initiatives to generate positive feedback.

5.4.4. Challenges of using Facebook as a communicational tool for SMEs

A thematic analysis of the research data revealed four key themes involving the challenges associated with using Facebook as a communicational tool. Identified themes include an increase in negative feedback, the lack of privacy and theft of intellectual properties, the lack of expert human resources for managing digital content, and an overcrowded virtual marketplace.

Table 5-22: Summary of Key Themes (Challenges)

Challenges of using Facebook as a communicational tool for SMEs				
Themes / Participants	Increase in negative feedbacks	Theft of intellectual properties	The lack of expert human resources for managing digital contents	Overcrowded virtual marketplace
P1		X	X	X
P2			X	
P3			X	X
P4	X	X	X	X
P5	X	X		X
P6	X			
P7			X	X
P8	X	X		X
P9	X	X		
P10	X	X		
P11			X	X
P12	X		X	

Source: The Author

Each of the challenge is discussed below:

5.4.4.2.Increase in negative feedback

All of the participants in the sample perceived that one of the main challenges of Facebook communication is an increase in negative comments. Most participants believed that any

negative comment, whether genuine or fabricated, severely impact SMEs for a long time. For example:

> There is the challenge of fake consumers or attention seekers who buy products and intentionally leave negative feedback for extra benefits. [……] This negative feedback also impacts on other consumers. You know social media business is susceptible one negative feedback can drive away many potential consumers.
>
> (P10)

Participants felt that a negative review discourages many potential consumers from buying and significantly reduces the entire business's credibility. If SMEs do not deal with such comments effectively, it can result in long term business implications.

> Negative comment is very dangerous for our social media-based business, because of the negative feedback other consumers just avoid the business page, sometimes it's happened that consumer bought a product from other page and the product was not good, when those unsatisfied consumers comments on our posts it also creates a challenge for us, as other tend to believe that our products would be the same quality.
>
> (P5)
>
> Feedback is important for business improvement, but negative feedback in social media is challenging for a small business like us. It can be dangerous for small businesses, if we do not handle them correctly.
>
> (P8)

Nearly all of the participants dreaded negative feedback as such feedback can go 'viral', eventually damaging the organisation's reputation permanently. Nonetheless, some of the participants showed confidence that, if handled accurately, negative feedback can indeed be turned into positive service experiences. For example:

> Negative feedback sometimes can be challenging to deal with, but if we can handle it in the first instance, it could bring positive results. For example, once, I had a consumer complaint on our official Facebook page about a product they bought from us that was not good quality. The dress colour was washed away in the first wash, and the dress quality was inferior. When I noticed the consumer's post, I apologised and recommended her exchange the product from our nearest outlet. I saw other consumers were appreciating this and some of them acknowledged they had received similar service from us.
>
> (P9)

> Whenever we had any issues regarding our service or products, we always let our consumers know in advance and appreciate their patience and understanding.
>
> (P11)

> Whenever we see any unreasonable feedback on our page, we deal with them promptly, for example, once we had a complaint that we are an unlicensed business, and we are doing illegal business in the Facebook, and we responded to the complainer with challenged that our business is fully licensed, and we pay tax and vat and we also posted out tax and vat payment receipt.
>
> (P12)

> When we see any unsatisfied consumers, we try to put special attention to them, for instance, we were having some miscommunication about a product deliver with one of our consumers,

we did not only apologise to her personally but also post in our Facebook page by acknowledging our fault and appreciating her patience and lovely behaviours.

(P6)

It was evident from participants' response that increased negative feedback is one of the significant challenges SMEs faces in social media communication.

5.4.4.3. Theft of intellectual properties

Many of the participants in the sample believed that whilst providing various business opportunities, Facebook also made them vulnerable to the theft of intellectual properties. Competitors are constantly searching for better designs in the fashion retailing industry, and they can easily copy others' ideas and take away their uniqueness and competitive market advantages. For example:

> I feel the openness of social media creates another challenge because competitors can see everything we do.
>
> (P10)

> It is effortless to be copied by others which kills the competitiveness of our business sometimes because when more competitors come up with similar products or ideas, you will lose your competitiveness in the market as you won't be unique any more everyone is doing the same things or selling the same products."
>
> (P4)

> We run a small business, we try to design our products, we work hard on it, but what happens is when any of our designs get popular in the market, we find that other people are also producing the same designer products. It's so frustrating.
>
> (P9)

> I first designed the pocket saree in Bangladesh, but I learned that some Indian producers are starting to produce the same products within a month. I think this is one of the big challenges for creative small business-like us.
>
> (P5)

It was evident from participants' statements that they were frustrated about the loss of their creative works. Based on the participants' views, it can be interpreted that with the openness of social media and the lack of regulatory bodies, creative SMEs quickly lose their intellectual properties. Therefore, the theft of intellectual property remains one of the critical challenges associated with SMEs' Facebook communications.

5.4.4.4. *The lack of expert human resources for managing digital contents*

Most of the participants in the sample stated that they have limited availability of resources for conducting business. Hence, they cannot afford to hire extra employees to manage their social media activities. Instead of recruiting skilful employees, they usually share a diverse range of responsibilities with a small team. Thus, this lack of expert human resources to effectively manage Facebook appears to be one of the major challenges they are facing.

> I think lack of social media expertise impact on communication as you know I am running this sole trader business, I do not have any advance knowledge of social media used for business purpose and I am not able to justify everything I do in social media, as many times I caught out by sending irrelevant or wrong types of post in the wrong time.
>
> (P4)

> Overall, there is a lack of social media expert in Bangladesh, whoever is good in this area they mostly hired by large firms and their demand is also very high, we cannot afford them to employ in our small business, I think this scenario is almost same for every small business.
>
> (P3)

> I have spent most of my time in the business, including ordering the stock, delivering consumer products and also look after social media; most of the time, I took a selfie to give product updates to consumers, as we are a small business we cannot afford to hire expert staff for this Facebook business, I am doing several tasks by myself, sometimes it becomes difficult to manage enough time to utilise every single opportunity of social media.
>
> (P5)

Such lack of skilled human resources appears to have reduced the effectiveness of their Facebook marketing communications. This is because the online market environment is rapidly changing, and to cope with this ever-changing marketplace, SMEs must continue to innovate and keep producing attention-grabbing content. Participants believed that content management is crucial to maintaining a high level of consumer engagement because engagement mostly depends on post content. One of the participants explains the challenges involving managing digital content as follows:

> Oh, yes, sometimes we face challenges from the consumers' end. We see the same content receiving different reactions from different consumers. Every consumer has a different teste, so sometimes it's difficult to have everyone on board with the same content.
>
> (P7)

> We have to try to be as creative as possible whenever we post something on social media, and you know it's a daunting task to use the new technique every time, but we try.
>
> (P2)

> Posting something new every day is challenging for us as we had to do a lot of tasks every day, we struggle with time for creating new posts.
>
> (P12)

Some participants also believed that one of the key reasons for the lack of skilled human resources is related to lack of financial capability because many SMEs are relatively new in the market or a growing phase and they suffer from financial difficulties regularly. For example:

> As a growing small business, we face challenges of financial constrain and expert human resources. Because of financial binding, we can do everything we want; for example, as a new business, we need to do more promotion and boost on Facebook, but it requires more spending; similarly, as a fashion retail company, we also want to go for a model photoshoot which requires expertise or investment, but as a small company we have prioritised where should invest our limited capital.
>
> (P3)

Some of the SME managers found a new way of tackling this challenge. In events where they lack the expertise or time to complete specific tasks, they outsourced the task or recruited freelance professionals by paying particular fees. For example:

> We outsource people for our photoshoots like a professional photographer with photo editing service and models, so we do not have to worry about those works, we get the photos from them as per our requirement, and we post on our Facebook page.
>
> (P1)

> We are a small business, and we do not have the resource and capability like other large brands. We also want to do the model photoshoot and make video content, but we do not have the resources. However, we want to post this type of content regularly; as you know, quality content can bring more consumer engagement to our page, but we cannot afford it, so we do it occasionally and event-based and get service from model photoshoot and video creating and editing agency.
>
> (P3)

> We are a ladies-wear business, mostly we do Facebook live, I used to do it myself, but I become busy with other things, I can manage enough time to do enough life. As we expanded our business and demand is also increased, so I hired two more people to do Facebook Live from our page.
>
> (P12)

Nevertheless, most respondents struggled with content management; therefore, managing digital content is one of the key challenges involving social media communication.

5.4.4.5.Overcrowded virtual marketplace

With a low barrier to entry, the fashion retail online marketplace in Bangladesh is heavily saturated, with companies of all sizes trading online 24 hours every day. With many competitors and countless substitute products, SMEs struggle tremendously to stand out and develop their brand image. All participants in the sample believed that overcrowded Facebook marketplace is one of the key challenges they face, for example:

> One of the major challenges we are facing in social media is excessive business presence, business in social media is growing like rice plants.
>
> (P7)

> There is a trend of showing up, therefore, to show up many people doing social media businesses, you might find that there is a businessperson almost every family and consumers don't want to go out to buy from others. This situation is pausing a challenge for us to survive in the long run.
>
> (P5)

Similarly, other participants also believed that Facebook business become a trend among Bangladeshi entrepreneurs.

> Social media business has become a fashionable trend for many people, they are doing not businesses for livelihood or society rather they are doing it just to show up, to introduce themselves as an entrepreneur.
>
> (P1)

> They are many inexperienced people trying to use social media to earn money, and they compete with other businesses […...] total social media business environment will be chaotic and unsustainable for many businesses [….] we appreciate the opportunities social media created, but there is a strong need for a concise regulatory plan for this digital market.
>
> (P3)

Many of the online sellers in the virtual marketplace engage in unethical acts for generating revenues. One of the respondents highlighted that an increased sale of counterfeit products on Facebook has severely affected regular businesses by damaging consumer trust.

> Still, many people believe online sales fake products and there is not consumer safety in the online marketplace. For example, a few months earlier, one of my relatives bought a smartphone online and collect it from a delivery company. Still, when he opened the package, he found it was a simple Nokia handset. Still, he paid for a branded smartphone […], so if there is no consumer safety, it is a real risk for the entire online market because the consumer being cheated online, they never shop again online, and it is hazardous for every business.
>
> (P8)

Some participants believed that has become chaotic due to the lack of regulations. They expressed that the market can be significantly improved if a governing body introduces principles to deter unethical and illegal practices.

So many people are trying to make money from social media business without having any business knowledge, and they create unfair competitions in the market [……] within year time this amateur business may disappear from the market, but they are doing permanent damage to our business as we want to continue this business in a long run [….] if there would be some regulations and authorities business has to abide by or has to register to do business in digital media many of these amateur business people think twice before they jump in the social media business.

(P3)

We are happy to pay a fee to register our business if we can do our business in the safe and fair environment […...] it also boosts consumer confidence to shop with us.

(P5)

We have four high-street shops, and we are also actively doing business in Facebook, we pay tax and vat to government, but you know many people just doing business only in Facebook, and many of them are not paying the tax and vat, and they can sell product cheaper than us and this is unfair and posing challenge to us […...] if there is a compulsory business registration process for every business, we would have a fair business environment in the digital media.

(P11)

As market regulation is out of SMEs' control, many participants suggested government interference to regulate the online market. Such rules can help to manage the overcrowded virtual marketplace by controlling fraudulent and illegal activities. Nonetheless, for the time being, a crowded virtual market remains one of the critical challenges faced by SMEs.

5.4.5. Summary of Interview Findings

To explore the benefits of using Facebook as a marketing communication tool and to uncover the challenges SMEs face whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication, a total of 12 managers and owners of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were interviewed in this research. A thematic analysis of the interview data identified six key benefits of using Facebook: accessing the virtual marketplace and increasing revenues, cost-effective digital marketing, relationship building, increasing brand awareness, value co-creation, and spreading positive e-WOM. This research also revealed four challenges of using Facebook as a communication and consumer engagement tool: increase in negative feedback, theft of intellectual properties, the lack of

human resources for managing digital contents, and overcrowded virtual marketplace. These findings provide an understanding of the social media marketing of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and the challenges involved with using Facebook as a tool for communication. It is anticipated that by having a contextual understanding of what Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs seek to achieve from Facebook and what kind of challenges they face in the process of Facebook marketing communications, the researcher will be able to identify the best strategies of social media marketing communication for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and provide informed recommendations to the stakeholders.

5.5.   Chapter Summary

This research sought to explore the common social media marketing communication activities and strategies of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing the level of consumer engagement across social media in an attempt to model the best strategies of social media marketing communication that contribute towards higher consumer engagement. The research data was collected from the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector, and mixed-method research combined with qualitative and quantitative strategy was employed. An archival data repository (Facebook) was accessed to collect the quantitative data, whilst netnography research and semi-structured interviews were conducted for collecting the qualitative research data.

To explore the common social media marketing communication strategies of fashion retail SMEs, netnography research was conducted by reviewing the Facebook activities of 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. The research data were collected for four months. The netnography data was analysed using thematic analysis, and 14 common social media communication activities were identified. The salesman's interpersonal communication framework was employed for categorising the identified activities. That led to a reconceptualisation of the buyer-seller interaction aspect of the salesman's interpersonal communication framework by adding a new dimension called 'mixed-orientations'.

Upon identifying the social media marketing communication strategies of fashion retail SMEs, the identified strategies were examined quantitatively to assess their effectiveness for enhancing the level of social media consumer engagement. To do so, a total of 2409 Facebook

posts of 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were reviewed. To calculate the level of consumer engagement related to each post, likes, comments, and shares related to each were collected. Upon conducting multiple ANOVA tests, it was identified that communication strategies with mixed orientations tend to gather the highest level of consumer engagement across social media; thus, to maximise the social media consumer engagement levels, fashion retail SMEs should focus on regularly posting content with mixed orientations. Besides, statistical tests were also conducted to identify the most effective media types for enhancing consumer engagement across social media. This research identified that posts with richer media generate a higher level of social media consumer engagement. Richer media such as Facebook Live generated a significantly more significant number of likes, comments, and shares than other media such as text, image, and video.

Finally, to offer effective recommendations to the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, it was considered relevant to explore why SMEs adopt Facebook in their business processes and what kind of challenges they face whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication. Having clearly understood the contextual benefits and challenges, it is anticipated that the researcher will be able to evaluate the identified strategies through multiple perspectives and make more realistic practical recommendations to the practitioners. After interviewing 12 managers and owners of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and conducting thematic analysis of the interview data, six benefits of using Facebook as a tool for marketing communications, namely accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues, cost-effective digital marketing, relationship building, increasing brand awareness, value co-creation, and spreading positive e-WOM were identified. Besides, this research also revealed four key challenges of using Facebook as a tool for marketing communications including an increase in negative feedback, theft of intellectual properties, the lack of human resources for managing digital contents, and an overcrowded virtual marketplace. The following chapter (Chapter Six) now discusses these findings by locating them in a broader context and highlighting their theoretical and practical contributions.

Chapter Six: Discussions

6.1.   Introduction

This research was initiated to explore SMEs' common Facebook communication activities and strategies and evaluate their effectiveness in engaging consumers in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector. Chapters Five of this thesis presented the research findings; in this chapter, the findings of this study are discussed, and their significance to both the body of literature and the professional practices are highlighted by locating them in the broader context of literature. In this chapter, a comprehensive strategic framework for Facebook consumer engagement is proposed after carefully evaluating the research findings related to the relationships between social media post orientations, media types and consumer engagement, as well as the benefits and the challenges involved in SMEs' Facebook communications. The proposed framework seeks to simplify the process of Facebook communications and to enhance the level of consumer engagement of fashion retail SMEs whilst contributing to the body of knowledge.

The discussion chapter of the thesis is presented in the following format. The reconceptualisation of salesperson interpersonal communication theory in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication is discussed in section 6.2. The role of different communication orientations on Facebook consumer engagement is discussed in section 6.3, followed by the role of media richness on Facebook consumer engagement in section 6.4. The benefits and challenges of SMEs' Facebook communication are presented and discussed in section 6.5. Section 6.6 presents the strategies for Facebook consumer engagement and growth for fashion retail SMEs and finally, section 6.7, summarises this chapter.
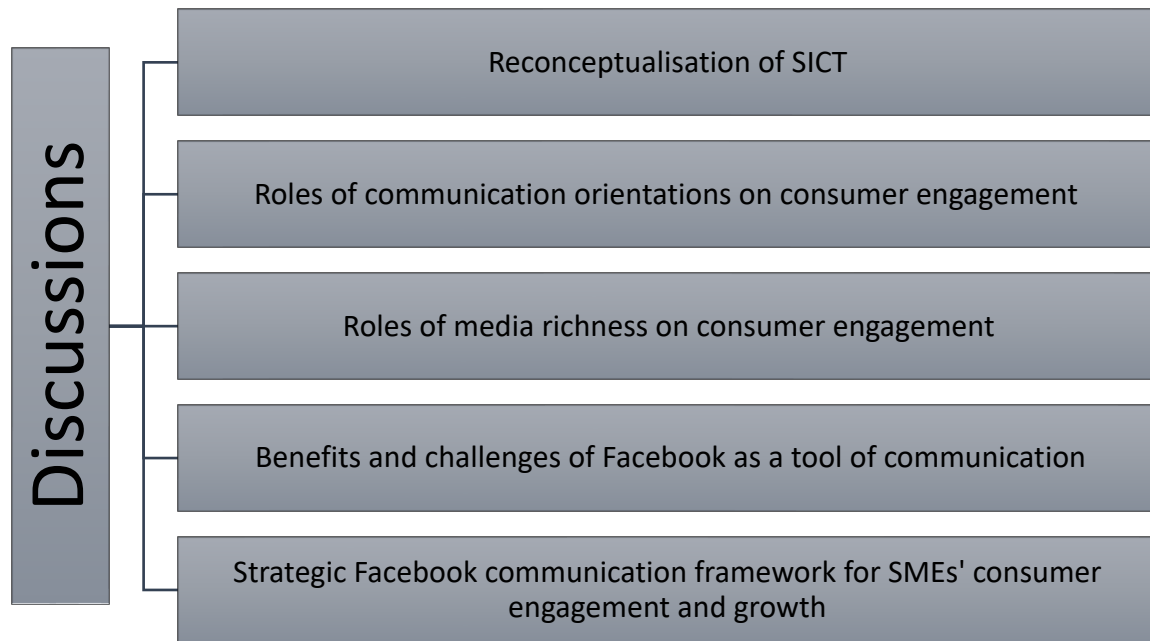
Figure 6-1: Structure of Chapter Six

Source: The Author

6.2. Reconceptualisation of Salesperson Interpersonal Communication Theory in the context of Facebook communication of fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh

This research adopted Sheth's (1976) salesperson interpersonal communication theory (SICT) as one of the theoretical foundations of this research. SICT was applied in social media communications studies by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja (2018), focusing on large multinational corporate brands' social media communication strategies. However, it was not previously employed in the context of SMEs. Deng et al. (2020) suggested exploring SICT as a future research agenda in the social media context. Therefore, this research makes contributions to the knowledge by applying the buyer-seller interpersonal communication aspect of SICT in the context of fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication.

This research reconceptualised the buyer-seller interpersonal communication aspect of SICT in the context of fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication by adding an additional

dimension called mixed orientation. A review of the literature revealed that although there were numerous theories on traditional communication strategies (e.g., uses and gratification, cultivation and so on), they do not capture the interactive aspects of social media communication. Hence, there was a knowledge gap in the literature that needed to be addressed. There was a need for reconceptualising SICT in order to better represent the strategies used by fashion retail SMEs for Facebook communication. This is because the findings of the netnography research (presented in section 5.2) revealed that a considerable proportion of SMEs' Facebook communication strategies contained multiple orientations and those communication strategies were highly influential in grasping consumers' interests (detailed in section 5.3). This may be because SMEs use more unconventional methods of communication, and they are flexible to apply new techniques (Isaac 2014). Frequency analysis of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook posts showed almost 20% of the posts contained mixed orientations (detailed in section 5.3).

The figure below presents the reconceptualised SICT in the context of fashion retail SMEs' social media communication.
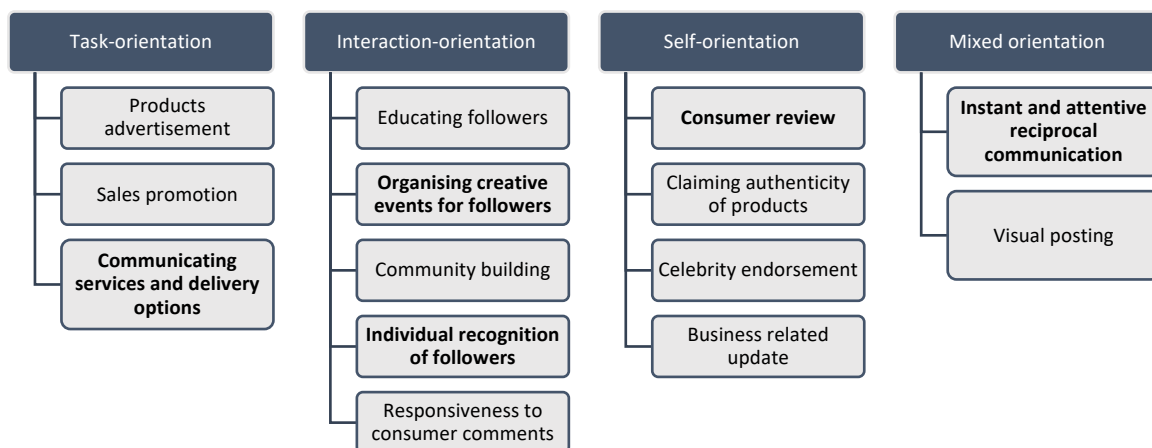

Figure 6-2: SICT for Bangladeshi Fashion Retail SMEs' Facebook Communications

Source: The Author

This research revealed that the buyer-seller interaction aspect of SICT is valid in the context of fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication contexts as well. However, an additional dimension 'mixed-orientation' was necessary to more accurately represent how fashion retail

SMEs in Bangladesh communicate with their consumers on Facebook. Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja (2018) previously applied SICT to analyse Facebook communication strategies of large brands. However, they considered that Facebook post can only contain a single orientation, which is not the case anymore as Facebook allows individuals to post rich contents that have multiple orientations (Tafesse and Wien 2018). Rather, in the sample, it was noted that SMEs are frequently using mixed orientated posts on Facebook as research participants felt that these posts were more effective in grasping consumers' attentions. Hence, the above conceptualisation overcomes the limitation of Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja's (2018) studies and provide a framework for future researchers with a more accurate way of investigating fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies by applying reconceptualised SICT. Although Kusumasondjaja (2018) did not consider mixed-orientated communication strategies in their research, they did acknowledge that mixed-orientation may exist in social media communication and recommended further researchers to consider it. Therefore the proposed conceptualisation is consistent with the recommendations of Kusumasondjaja (2018). The proposed conceptualisation is also consistent with Tafesse and Wien (2018), who also acknowledged the existence of posts with multiple message appeals. The proposed reconceptualisation not only makes the theoretical contribution to the literature by including mixed-orientation dimension with exiting SICT but also makes contributions to the field of social media research by revealing the common Facebook communication practices of fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh.

In the above conceptualisation (Figure 6.1), Facebook communication activities and strategies of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are presented. Most of the identified Facebook communication practices of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are consistent with the findings of previous social media studies. For examples, past studies identified that SMEs use social media for advertisement and sales promotion media (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Chen, Ji and Min 2017; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Educating followers, developing a personal and emotional connection, community building and responsiveness to consumers were also identified by past researchers in the SME context (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Chen, Ji and Min 2017; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). Consumer review, claiming authenticity, celebrity endorsement, business updates and visual posting are some other activities also noted by other researchers in the

context of SMEs' social media communications (Chen, Ji and Min 2017; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). The findings of this research indicate that the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs may also use social media (i.e., Facebook) for similar purposes. This may be because the above features of social media are useful to SMEs for achieving specific tasks (i.e., making sales), building relationships with consumers through interactions, and promoting brand image. SMEs around the world are utilising those features in a way that brings tangible benefits to their organisations. Therefore, current research makes contributions to the literature by confirming Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs also operate in similar ways to other SMEs around the world.

Despite confirming the existing literature, this research also identified some unique Facebook communication activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. SMEs in the sample used Facebook to communicate service delivery options with consumers, individually recognises consumers, organise a creative event for consumers, and conduct instant and attentive reciprocal communication with consumers. These new findings indicate that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are utilising Facebook even more effectively than their foreign counterparts. This may be because the fashion retail marketplace in Bangladeshi is extremely competitive, hence SMEs are in constant need of identifying innovative ways of communicating with consumers that can yield better business results. Nevertheless, these new findings add fresh insights to the literature and make contributions to the body of knowledge.

6.3. The role of different communication strategies on Facebook consumer engagement

Consumer engagement is essential for the success as well as the survival of businesses in social media. However, a review of extant literature indicated that the relationship between social media communication strategies and consumer engagement in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs was not clearly understood (elaborated in section 3.4). This research sought to fill the existing knowledge gap by investigating fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication practices and strategies and their role in consumer engagement. This research identified a statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different communication strategies in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications. As specified by this research, fashion retail SMEs mainly used task-oriented

posts for Facebook communications, whilst the posts with mixed orientations were most effective in generating a higher level of consumer engagement. A review of engagement level across the individual measurement scale (e.g., like, comment, and share) showed that interaction-oriented posts gathered the highest proportion of likes whilst mixed-oriented posts attracted the highest proportions of comments and shares, indicating mixed-oriented positions not only drew a higher level of consumer engagement but they also generated more meaningful engagements that are essential for developing a loyal consumer base and increase the market reach (Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Schivinski et al. 2019). Several studies suggest forwarding online information (i.e., share) is deemed the strongest indicator of engagement in the online environment as this particular behaviour is associated with engagement with the knowledge and the information source (Malhotra et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2014; Bakshy, Messing and Adamic 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018).

This research identified that SMEs in Bangladeshi fashion retail used Facebook for several task-oriented activities (see figure 6.1). The netnography findings revealed that Facebook was used for product advertisement, sales promotion, and communicating ordering and delivering processes to the consumers. As identified from the quantitative analysis, task-orientated posts were the most commonly used Facebook posts in the sample as over 60% of all posts analysed were task-oriented. For publishing posts with task orientations, SMEs in the sample mainly used images (84%), followed by videos (11.6%), texts (4.1%) and Facebook live (0.3%), respectively. Previous research in the domain of social media communications has also noted that firms use social media for these purposes in various contexts. For example, in the context of large brands' social media communication several studies identified that advertising and sales promotion are commonly used communication techniques in social media (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018). In the context of SMEs, multiple studies also noted Facebook as a common platform for advertising and sales promotion (e.g., Chen, Ji and Min 2017; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs in the sample, whilst using Facebook for product advertisement, sales promotion, were also using Facebook for communicating ordering and delivering processes with consumers. From the analysis, it appears that SMEs in the sample were able to use Facebook for various task focus activities. This may be because SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs operate in an

extremely competitive virtual marketplace (reported in section 5.4), which requires them to identify new ways to serve consumers to remain competitive (Sarker and Ashrafi 2018; Rahman and Mannan 2018).

Similarly, this research also revealed that Bangladeshi fashion SMEs conducted multiple Facebook activities to interact with consumers. The netnogrpahy findings indicated that interaction-oriented posts were used for educating followers, organising creative events for followers, community building, individual recognition of followers, for developing personal connection and emotional attachments and being responsive to consumer comments. These findings were also confirmed by interview participants as they perceived interactions with consumers help them to receive positive feedback and thereby to promote positive e-WOM, and to build a relationship and emotional attachment with consumers. Interaction-oriented communication promotes socialising and forming personal ties (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018). Frequency analysis of SMEs Facebook posts identified that only a small percentage of SMEs' communication was contained interaction orientation, however, these posts were highly effective in terms of generating likes. Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) found interactive oriented content (i.e., entertaining content) were most influential in generating likes, comments and shares. Kusumasondjaja (2018) also noted that posts with interaction orientation (i.e., emotional appeals) received the most likes and comments. Several other studies also confirmed the effectiveness of the relational approach (i.e., interaction orientation) over sales-focused communication in social media context (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019).

Additionally, SMEs in the sample use four types of self-oriented activities, namely consumer review, claiming authenticity of products, celebrity endorsement and business-related updates on Facebook. The quantitative findings identified self-orientation as the least used communication practice in fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication. It was also identified that self-orientation posts attracted the least consumer engagement. SMEs used the leanest media to communicate these messages. These findings are consistent with Kusumasondjaja (2018) who analysed leading Indonesian brands and found self-orientation was the least used communication strategy by brand and they also received the least consumer engagement.

In contrast, the interview participants believed that establishing a good brand image is critical to succeed in the competitive marketplace, however, overexposing a brand's products can bring risks such as the theft of intellectual properties. It appeared that SMEs in the sample were unaware of the long-term business opportunities that can be gained through establishing a good brand image. Brand management is one of the common challenges faced by SMEs in general as they tend to have limited resources (Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016) hence they may give limited focus on growing their brands. In addition, SMEs also have limited expertise, hence they are well known for having brand management problems (Eggers et al. 2017). Nonetheless, it is critical for SMEs to develop a good brand image as it helps them to become 'identifiable' (Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020) in a crowded marketplace, which "not only increases their visibility and credibility, but also distinguishes them from competitors, and acquires more market share" Some of the ways in which Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs could develop credible brand image could include promoting sustainability, diversity, and equality (Flores-Hernández 2020).

During the netnography, it was also observed that SMEs in the sample used posts that contained more than one specific orientation. These posts mainly involved conducting Facebook Live sessions and, on average, one in five posts of SMEs in the sample contained more than one orientation (mixed orientations). Statistical analysis indicated that these types of posts were highly useful in terms of generating higher consumer engagement. Mixed oriented posts of the SMEs in the sample received significantly more comments and shares than other post categories. During the interviews, managers and owners of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs stated that they use these posts to generate revenues, build a relationship with consumers, and reach out to the wider marketplace. However, they faced challenges such as a lack of expert human resources and lack of time to conduct these activities. Although no prior study specifically incorporated a mixed-orientation strategy in their research, a study by Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) indicated that marketing contents task and interactional may be more effective than self-oriented content for achieving a higher level of consumer engagement. This indicates that mixing more than one orientation in a post may indeed contribute to higher consumer engagement. The figure below presents the key findings on the role of different communication orientations on Facebook consumer engagement.
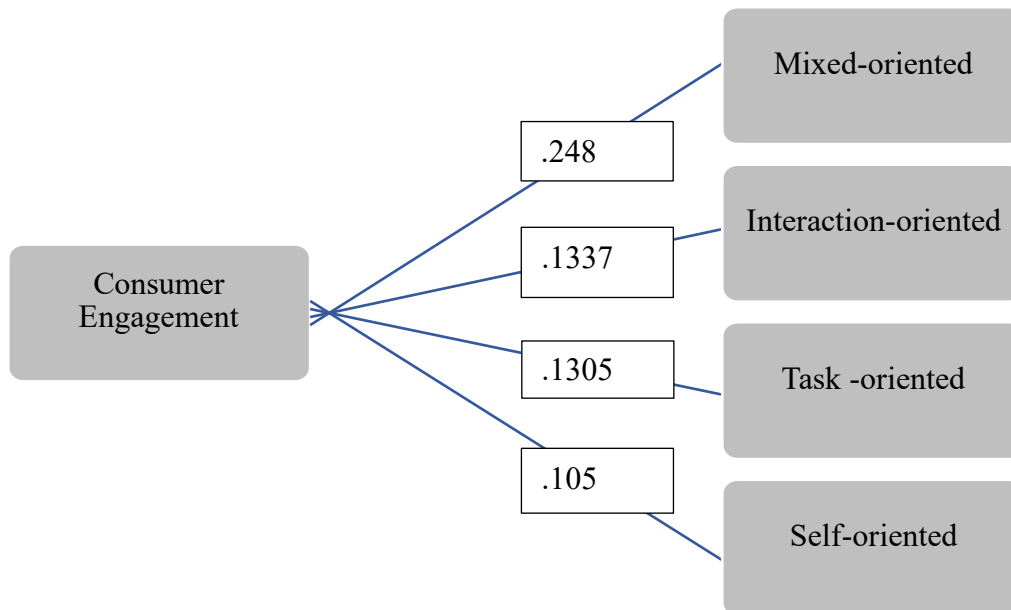
Figure 6-3: The level of Consumer Engagement across different communication strategies

Source: The Author

As previously highlighted in section 3.3.4, no prior study was conducted in fashion retail SMEs to identify the most effective communication strategies for enhancing consumer engagement. Thus, the findings of this research make substantial contributions to the literature by identifying the most effective Facebook marketing communication strategy that can lead to increased consumer engagement. Previous studies noted various findings in relation to the most effective social media communication strategies for enhancing consumer engagement. For example, Kim, Spiller and Hettche's (2015) study found task-oriented Facebook communication strategies as more effective in consumer engagement than other strategies in the context of prominent global brands. This study considered an additional dimension 'mixed-orientations' which was not considered by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015), which resulted in the findings of this research being unique. Nevertheless, the second most effective communication strategy identified by this research was interaction-oriented, which is different from what Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) findings. The reason for this may be because SMEs differ significantly from larger brands in terms of how they operate and conduct social media activities (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Seyyedamiri and Faghih 2015; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020). On the contrary, consumers of global brands may possess different motivations than local SME brands when engaging with the organisation in social media (Labrecque 2014; Kim, Spiller and

Hettche 2015). Nonetheless, as this research only investigated 20 fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities, solely based on the findings of this research, it cannot be fully ascertained that the most effective Facebook marketing strategies indeed differ in terms of large global brands and SMEs. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers investigate it by investigating SMEs across different sectors. The findings of this research, however, make contributions to the literature by adding new insights and opening new rooms for further research.

6.4.   The role of media richness on Facebook consumer engagement

This research contributes to the media richness theory by further confirming its applicability in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications. As highlighted in section 3.2.2, media choice plays an essential role in message clarity, and credibility and some media are considered more credible than others (Ang et al. 2018). Richer media can reduce the ambiguity of the message communicated through them (Daft and Lengel 1986; Tseng et al. 2017). Firstly, earlier studies (e.g., De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Ashley and Tuten 2015) that applied media richness theory in social media communication research did not consider the Facebook Live streaming feature as this service was only first introduced by Facebook in 2016. Since its introduction, Facebook live has become increasingly popular among consumers and businesses (Sultan and Sharmin 2020), this was also observed during netnography observation of this research. Although some studies considered Facebook live in Facebook communication research, they did not examine it from the perspective of media richness theory. For example, in one study Ang et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of Facebook Live as a channel for storytelling while Sultan and Sharmin (2020) examined women entrepreneurs' adoption of Facebook Live from the technology acceptance model (TAM) perspective.

To fill the knowledge gap in the literature by identifying the most effective media type for enhancing the level of Facebook consumer engagement of fashion retail SMEs, this research analysed 2409 Facebook posts from 20 fashion retail SMEs. Upon conducting multiple statistical analyses, it was identified that the level of Facebook consumer engagement significantly differs across different media types (e.g., texts, images, videos, and Facebook live), with consumer engagement being significantly higher on Facebook live posts than posts with texts, photos, and videos. As identified, although fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh use

images most frequently whilst communicating on Facebook, Facebook Live is the most effective media type for generating a higher level of consumer engagement.

Among 2409 posts selected for this research, more than half of them contained images. Using photo is a common trend on Facebook communications in general (e.g., Cvijikj et al. 2011; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017) and Bangladeshi fashion SMEs were no exception. During the interviews, managers were requested to explain why they primarily use images whilst communicating on Facebook. As reported in (section 5.4), SMEs in the sample mainly used images because it is easy and quick to post and catches a lot of consumers' attention comparison to texts. They noted that posting media such as videos and Facebook live is a time-consuming process and requires a lot of resources. Organisations generally post images because not only images can be posted fast but also, they can convey multiple messages at once (Cvijikj et al. 2011; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017).

Although the photo is being widely used by Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs, just like other organisations around the world, the findings of this research indicate that Facebook Live is the most effective media to generate a higher level of consumer engagement in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications. Prior studies such as Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013), Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) investigated large global brands and revealed that posts with photos tend to receive more consumer responses than posts with videos and texts. It is important to note that prior studies did not consider Facebook Live in their research, hence findings cannot be compared. Nonetheless, the findings of this research contribute to the literature by indicating that there may be a new form of media type (Facebook Live) that is more effective in generating a higher level of consumer engagement during Facebook communications. However, further research on various contexts is necessary to ascertain whether or not this new insight can be generalisable beyond the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications.

There may be several reasons why Facebook Live is more effective in terms of generating higher interactions than other media types in terms of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs Facebook communications. Firstly, in the sample, on average, each Facebook Live post lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. During these sessions, consumers could interact directly with

SMEs and ask questions. Consumers may find joining the live events exciting and enjoyable and tend to perceive the live event as credible and genuine (Xu et al. 2020; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut 2020). In addition, another reason behind fashion retail SMEs' Facebook live posts gathering a significantly higher level of consumer engagement could be SMEs, as observed in the sample, were taking a more personal and relational (informal) approach while communicating with their consumers, than larger brands who often take structured and formal way to communicate with their consumers (Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017). Based on the findings of the research, the following model is conceptualised to reflect the effectiveness of media type for enhancing the level of consumer engagement in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. The findings are conceptualised in an order with Facebook Live being the most effective and the richest media format in Facebook communication (placed on the top) and the text being placed at the bottom for being the least effective and the leanest media in Facebook communication in the context of Bangladeshi Fashion retail SMEs.
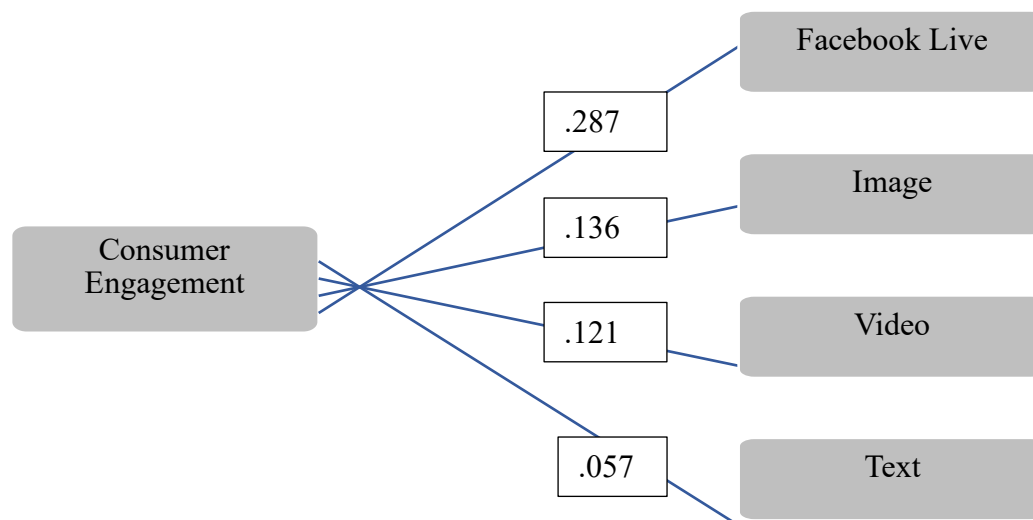
Figure 6-4: The level of Consumer Engagement across media types

Source: The Author

Chapter (3.2.2) of this thesis reviewed the media richness theory of (Daft and Lengel 1984) in an attempt to understand the role different media types, play in terms of the effectiveness of communication. The media richness theory was previously applied in the context of social media communication. For example, Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) applied media richness theory in analysing Facebook communication of large multinational brands and confirmed

photo as the richest and most effective media in Facebook communication. Similarly, Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández (2017) also concluded image is the richest and the most effective media in generating consumer responses. As aforementioned, these studies were conducted prior to the introduction of Facebook Live, hence they were unable to capture the usefulness of Facebook Live for communicating on social media. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first research to apply media richness theory in the context of Facebook communications of SMEs by considering Facebook Live as a media type. The findings noted Facebook Live as the richest media type for Facebook communications as it can act as a substitute for physical face-to-face interactions in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs Facebook communications. Facebook Live was not only the richest media type but also the most effective for consumer engagement. This finding of this research supported the media richness theory and enhanced the media richness theory in the Facebook communication context by highlighting Facebook live as the richest media of communication.

6.5. Benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool of communication for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs

To address the existing knowledge gap and to be able to propose the most effective Facebook marketing communication strategies to fashion retail SMEs, this research also investigated the benefits and challenges involving using Facebook as a marketing communication tool. The review of the literature identified that, although there were numerous studies conducted to investigate what kind of opportunities social media provide to businesses (e.g., Schultz and Peltier 2013; Gecti and Dastan 2013; Martínez-Núñez and Pérez-Aguiar 2014; Paniagua and Sapena 2014; Du and Jiang 2015; Lee et al. 2015), no prior empirical evidence was found in the context of fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh. Thus, the findings of this research add substantial new knowledge to the literature by filling the existing knowledge void. This research identified six benefits and four challenges after analysing the perceptions of 12 owners and managers of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

This research identified that SMEs are using Facebook to access virtual marketplace, and it provides them access to the broader market, eventually providing possibilities of increased sales. By using Facebook, SMEs in the sample were not only able to reach wider consumer segments but were also able to reduce operational costs significantly. Effective use of social

media is long known to enhance business performance (e.g., Schultz and Peltier 2013; Gecti and Dastan 2013; Martínez-Núñez and Pérez-Aguiar 2014; Paniagua and Sapena 2014; Du and Jiang 2015; Lee et al. 2015). Previous studies in large firms suggested that social media adoption positively influences a firm's value (Paniagua and Sapena 2014) and stock prices (Du and Jiang 2015). Lee et al.'s (2015) study on social media usage in SMEs found that CEOs who believe in social media and utilise them in day-to-day business operations could grow rapidly.

Similarly, participants believed that Facebook provides cost-effective advertisement opportunities for creating awareness about their products and services. They also indicated that Facebook provided them with a chance to promote and advertise their businesses by utilising easily accessible marketing tools. They recognised that Facebook allowed them to communicate with consumers in a group or individually. Social media has become an effective medium of communication for businesses (Cawsey and Rowley 2016; Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski 2016), and it was observed in the case of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs too. Rugova and Prenaj (2016) found social media presence helps SMEs to exposure their brand in the market as it is a powerful advertising tool as it can reach a wider audience rapidly whilst allowing to attract and influence consumers to make purchase decisions (Chen, Ji and Men 2017; Ananda et al. 2016; Hassan et al. 2015; Mumtaz 2019; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Kapoor et al. 2018; Jacobson et al. 2020; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020).

The respondents in the sample stated Facebook is a cost-effective marketing alternative as it is cheaper than traditional marketing channels. Marketing campaigns can be organised on Facebook at minimal costs. Often, social media marketing is free and flexible (Rugova and Prenaj 2016; Rana and Kumar 2016). Although social media marketing is the cost-effective marketing alternative that provides many opportunities to SMEs, with limited resources available to them, the chances of competing with large organisations are limited (Nickell, Rollins and Hellman 2013). Nonetheless, marketing through social media does not require any additional IT infrastructure or technical skills, which provides SMEs with some competitive advantages against big corporations. Prior studies suggested that social media offer opportunities to increase consumer visits to the websites of businesses through links and referrals (Rahman, Zanuddin and Suberamanian 2016; Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016); however, it is not clear that SMEs in the sample enjoyed this benefit as only a

handful of SMEs had their websites. However, those that did have a website did mention that using Facebook has helped them to increase sales.

Moreover, this research also identified that SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail sector are utilising Facebook as a tool for building and enhancing consumer relationships. Participants in the sample recognised that Facebook gives them the flexibility to respond to consumer queries around the clock. This study also found that SMEs set up Facebook communities around their brand pages, which helped them strengthen their relationship with consumers. Stelzner (2013) found that social media provides an interactive communication channel to interact with existing and potential consumers regularly. Donal et al. (2017) claimed that social media sites are an ideal forum for product and brand-related advocacy. Successful brand presence in social media, the size of the potential audience, and the level of interactivity available in social media channels are the key reasons that motivate businesses to adopt social media in their business processes (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

The emergence of social media and its increased global adoption has increased the visibility of marketing content, eventually bringing changes in the way individuals and organisations interact (Dessart et al. 2015; Wang and Kim 2017; Dolan et al. 2017). Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) suggest that social media channels offer both firms and consumers new ways of engaging, one of the key reasons for its popularity amongst businesses. Brodie et al. (2013) suggest companies hope to engage with loyal consumers and influence individuals' perceptions about their products, spread information and learn from their audience. SMEs in the sample greatly benefited from Facebook as they built strong advocate groups or communities, where community members were helping each other and protecting the brands. As discussed, the findings of this research revealed the advantages of using social media as a tool for consumer engagement and communication in the particular context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs from the perspectives of managers and owners of SMEs. The findings indicate that SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs use Facebook for similar reasons as other brands and SMEs around the world. Overall, SMEs in the sample were able to use Facebook in a way that brings numerous benefits to them.

However, managers in the sample also stated that they face several challenges whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication. Managers and owners in the sample felt that having a presence on social media can affect SMEs negatively as well. If a consumer leaves negative

feedback on social media such as Facebook, that can eventually damage the business's reputation. One of the main challenges involving social media communications is highlighted in the literature (e.g., Mangold and Faulds 2009; Carter 2014; McLaughlin 2014; Shabgahi 2015; Cawsey and Rowley 2016; Rana and Kumar 2016; and Rugova and Prenaj 2016). Carter (2014) highlighted that social media, whilst being an excellent tool for convenient communication, can also be a tool for damaging business reputations. Given that consumers can leave negative feedback publicly, other consumers will be able to see those feedback and form judgement about the organisation. In some cases, this feedback may not accurately reflect the circumstances and unfairly affect businesses. Besides, companies may not always have the means to justify or respond to feedback. McLaughlin (2014) stated that, sometimes, businesses may not even have an opportunity to explain these issues. Negative feedback, whether true or not, can be the reason for shaping people's perceptions about the organisation and affect an organisation's reputation negatively in the long run. Although negative feedbacks help in holding businesses accountable and encourage them to provide better services, unfiltered and unverified feedback published in public domains can create existential threats to SMEs.

In addition, this study found overcrowded virtual marketplace is one of the significant challenges for SMEs. The participants stated that, due to the lack of proper market regulation and low entry barriers, the number of sellers in the virtual marketplace is growing substantially, leading to amateur businesses getting easy access to the market. Particularly in the Bangladeshi fashion SME sector, companies with creative design clothing fashion retailers are not protected. They are constantly in fear about the theft of their innovative designs (intellectual property) due to the openness of the virtual market. Besides, SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh face an extreme shortage of expert social marketing employees for running effective marketing campaigns. Due to their resource limitations, SMEs often face challenges in hiring experts (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown 2013; Wamba and Carter 2015; Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016; Wang and Kim 2017; Eggers et al. 2017). Participants in the sample informed that, due to the limited financial capacity of SMEs, they were not in a position to hire skilled personnel for their social media management. In contrast, large brands with ample resources employ talented individuals for their social media communication.

Effective social media content management is another key challenge Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are facing. The lack of an experienced workforce often leads to ineffective management of contents; for example, many SMEs were repeating similar posts (e.g., format, content, and

messages) whilst others were not embracing the opportunities of a new form of communication (e.g., Facebook live). Eggers et al. (2017) identified that, compared to large firms, SMEs are less active in content management. Effective content management is a key challenge SMEs face globally; for example, Rana and Kumar (2016) and Rugova and Prenaj (2016) identified similar issues in the Indian and Albanian SME contexts. Coursaris et al. (2016) argued that brand that effectively manages their contents are more likely to generate higher revenues. However, producing new content regularly requires the creativity and time of employees or owners of SMEs. It could be a daunting task for SMEs with limited financial and human resources (Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016).

These findings of the research shed light on how Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs use Facebook and what kind of challenges they face whilst using it. Although the benefits and challenges of social media usage were well known in the literature, they were not previously known in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. The findings of this research, therefore, make contributions to the literature by adding new insights and filling the existing knowledge gap. These findings indicate that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs also use Facebook for similar reasons as their foreign counterparts and the challenges they face whilst using it is also similar. One of the unique challenges Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs were facing was the "overcrowded virtual marketplace". Which was not identified before in any other social media research context. Therefore, this finding brings new insight into social media literacy in the precise context of the Bangladeshi Facebook fashion retail market. This finding may be useful for SMEs and entrepreneurs who want to establish their businesses in the Bangladeshi virtual Facebook market.

Having understood the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool of communication, the next section now outlines strategies for Facebook consumer engagement and growth.

6.6. Strategic framework for Facebook consumer engagement and growth

This research revealed various interesting insights and made new additions to the literature. SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh used several interactions or relational communication practices they found effective in consumer engagement but used very infrequently. Whereas task-oriented or sales-focused one-way advertising posts frequently generate less consumer

engagement than the interaction and mixed-orientation posts. As it was identified in the netnography that interaction or relationally oriented posts play a vital role in enhancing consumer engagement in mixed oriented posts. Several other studies (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Ashworth 2016; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018) confirmed that the relational approach is the most effective for SMEs' social media communication, compared to one way sales-focused communication. On the other hand, scholars adopted uses and gratification theory also suggest that social media consumers prefer active participation rather than being a passive consumer of the content (Chen, Ji and Men 2017; Swani and Milne 2017; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Dolan et al. 2019). Similarly, several studies found one-way sales-focused communication is not effective in social media (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018).

As discussed in the above sections, different media types attracted different types of behavioural consumer engagements. Particularly, posts with images received more likes than posts with other media whilst Facebook Live posts generated significantly higher comments and shares. Organisations may have different motivations to use social media (Croes 2021). In this research, it was noted that SMEs used Facebook for several reasons. Whilst most of the SMEs in the sample were primarily focusing on increasing sales by reaching wider consumer segments, some were also focusing on building a relationship with existing consumers. Some participants suggested that they seek to achieve repeat purchases as they believed it is a more cost-efficient way of sales. Indeed, it is well established in the literature that the cost of acquiring a new consumer is much higher than the cost of retaining existing consumers (Harvard Business Review 2014; European Business Review 2021). However, to retain existing consumers, SMEs first need to develop their 'unique' and 'recognisable' brand image and develop a consumer base (de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). In order to build a consumer base, SMEs can adopt strategies such as building Facebook communities, organising interactive events and competitions regularly, and rewarding members that contribute most by using interaction-oriented strategies. Upon building a consumer base, SMEs can then primarily focus on serving the consumer base they have developed whilst also seeking to expand their consumer base.

Based on the findings of this research as well as the discussion presented above, prior to determining what social media communication strategies to adopt, SMEs should first determine what they seek to achieve from social media. If an SME is small and has a limited social media

presence, it is appropriate to focus on building communities and making themselves known in the digital marketplace. Whereas, if an SME has already achieved an established presence on social media, it makes perfect sense to target existing consumers to engage with them and thereby generate revenues. The following framework is conceptualised based on the research findings:

Internal Engagement

Appropriate for SMEs with established presence on Facebook

- **Strategy:** Interaction Orientation
- **Media Type:** Photo
- **Engagement Metric:** Likes

External Engagement

Appropriate for SMEs that are new on Facebook

- **Strategy:** Mixed Orientation
- **Media Type:** Facebook Live
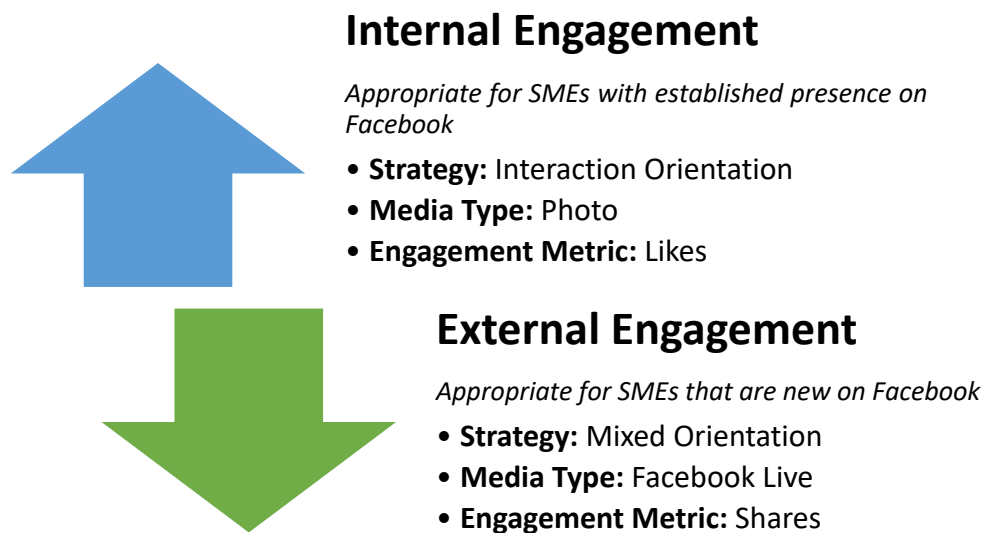- **Engagement Metric:** Shares

Figure 6-5: Strategic framework for consumer engagement

Source: The Author

As can be seen above, for reducing the cost of marketing as well as to make the most of Facebook marketing, fashion retail SMEs that have already a significant social media presence are recommended to focus on internal engagement as it is a cost-effective way of generating sales. They are recommended to use interaction-oriented posts as such posts were identified to be effective in generating a high number of likes. Photo is recommended as a preferred media type for their conversation as it is faster to publish and does not involve higher costs. On the other hand, for SMEs that do not have a significant social media presence, it is recommended that they focus on developing online communities first before focusing on making sales. Based on the findings of this research as well as the findings of previous studies, developing a recognisable and unique brand may be expensive in the short term, it will certainly yield long term business benefits. For growing social media presence, it is recommended that SMEs use mixed oriented strategies by combining all tasks, interactions and self-orientations. Facebook Live is suggested as the most appropriate media type as it is capable of attracting significantly

more shares than other media types. 'Share' is a form of behavioural engagement that allows contents to go 'viral' (Malhotra et al. 2012; Ellison et al. 2014; Bakshy, Messing and Adamic 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Bonsón-Fernández 2017; Kusumasondjaja 2018) and can be highly successful for growing a SMEs online presence rapidly.

6.7.   Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research findings by locating them in a broader context and highlighting their contributions to theory and professional practice. This research sought to explore the most effective Facebook communication strategies for consumer engagement in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' by examining SMEs' common Facebook communication activities and strategies. This research identified that a combination of interaction, self and task orientation (mixed) generates an effective outcome in terms of consumer engagement. On the other hand, the richest media for Facebook communication, Facebook live, is highly interactive and capable of carrying multiple message appeals. It was identified as one of the highly valuable tools for enhancing consumer engagement on Facebook.

One of the theoretical contributions this research includes the reconceptualisation of SICT in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication. This research also remodelled media richness theory in the Facebook communication context of SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh. Further, this research added new insights to the literature regarding the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool of communication in the context of SME fashion retailers in Bangladesh. Finally, this research proposed a strategic Facebook consumer engagement and growth framework for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. The subsequent chapter of this thesis now elaborates upon the contributions of the research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion, Contributions, and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter of this thesis discussed the key findings of this research, compared them with the existing literature, and highlighted their contributions. In this chapter, a summary of the thesis presented, and elaborations are made on how research objectives were achieved. The research objectives outlined in Chapter One of this thesis are revisited, methods used for answering them are described, and the significance of the findings are evaluated. Additionally, research findings' contributions to both knowledge and practice are discussed. Furthermore, recommendations are offered to SME fashion retailers on selecting the most appropriate social media marketing communication strategies to enhance the level of their Facebook consumer engagement. Finally, possible research limitations are outlined, along with suggestions for future research. The structure of this chapter is presented in the figure below:
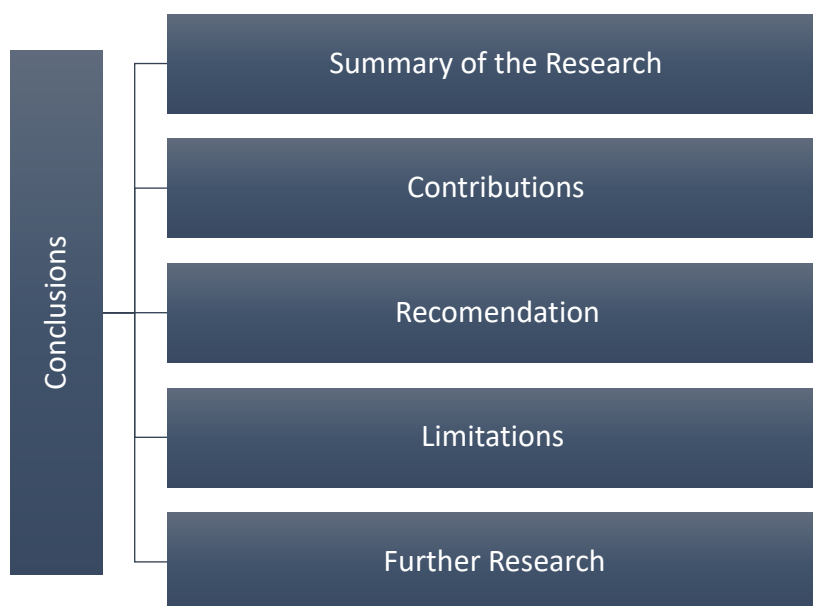

Figure 7-1: Structure of Chapter Seven

Source: The Author

7.2. Summary of the Research

Past studies state that the rapid rise of social media has attracted firms of all sizes to adopt social media channels such as Facebook and firms are now using social media as part of their marketing and branding strategies (Dickey and Lewis 2010; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2015; Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017). Although some studies have been conducted to explore how SMEs use social media the vast majority of them were conducted in the context of developed countries (e.g., Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Connolly 2015; Galati et al. 2017; McCann and Barlow 2015; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020), with only a handful of studies focusing on emerging markets (e.g., Uddin, Chowdhury and Mamun 2017; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019; Wang et al. 2019; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020).

One the other, social media communications' effectiveness has been previously investigated mainly in the context of large global corporate brands (e.g., Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Wagner, Baccarella and Voigt 2017; Tafesse and Wien 2018) and luxury brands (e.g., Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). Many studies also focused on strategic social media adoption and implementation in the SME context (e.g., Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown 2013; Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; Kumar, Anuj and Ayedee 2019). However, a limited amount of research has been done from the perspective of consumer engagement. An extensive review of the literature identified that no prior study was conducted to explore the most effective social media marketing communications strategies of SMEs for enhancing consumer engagement. Thus, there is a gap in the literature.

Consumer engagement is considered as the core aspect of social media marketing communication (Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Deng et al. 2020; Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer 2020; Liu, Shin and Burns 2021). A high level of consumer engagement across social media is important for the success and survival of a firm that primarily operates in the digital environment, as without consumer engagement, organisations are unable to grasp the benefits of social media. In other words, consumer engagement is the prerequisite of achieving the benefits in social media; for example, e-WOM, community, and co-creation are not attainable without active consumer engagement in the social media platforms.

However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior study investigated the Facebook communication activities of fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh from a consumer engagement perspective. This research, therefore, aimed to explore Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies and evaluate their effectiveness on consumer engagement in an attempt to identify the most effective Facebook communication strategies for engaging consumers. Four research objectives were developed to achieve the research aim in chapter one of this thesis. Below how these research objectives were achieved is elaborated.

- **Objective One:** *To identify the common Facebook communication strategies used by fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh.*

To achieve the first research objective, a netnography research strategy was adopted by reviewing 20 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook activities for four months. The analysis revealed that SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail industry used four key communication strategies, namely task-oriented strategies, interaction-oriented strategies, self-oriented strategies and mixed-orientation strategies. As identified, SMEs in the sample used task-oriented strategies for products advertisement, sales promotions, and communicating ordering and delivering processes with consumers. They used interaction-oriented strategies for educating followers, organising creative events for followers, community building, developing personal connections, individual recognition of followers, developing emotional attachments, and responding to consumer comments whilst they used self-oriented strategies for promoting positive consumer reviews, claiming authenticity of products, sharing celebrity endorsement, and providing business-related updates. Finally, SMEs in the sample used mixed-oriented strategies for visual postings, and instant and attentive reciprocal communications. The quantitative findings revealed that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' vast majority of Facebook communication focused on task-oriented communication strategy whilst the lowest number of communications focused on building and strengthening brand image (i.e., self-orientation). Upon critical analysis of the research findings, the existing Salesman Interpersonal Communication Framework was reconceptualised in order to represent the strategies fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh use to communicate with their followers on Facebook more accurately.

- **Objective Two**: *To investigate the impacts of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication strategies on consumer engagement.*

To achieve the second research objective, 2409 posts from 20 selected fashion retail SMEs' Facebook pages were collected from their two-month activities, including the number of consumer interactions on each post (e.g., likes, comments, and shares). They were statistically analysed using SPSS. The frequency analysis of these quantitative data highlights the trends of Bangladeshi SMEs' Facebook communication strategies. The results revealed that task-orientation posts were the most frequently used in communication practices, and the self-oriented posts were the least used. The photo was a highly used media type in SMEs' Facebook communication, and text was the least used media type. It was also found that the most task-oriented strategies included photos, whereas all the mixed-oriented posts were used in Facebook live. The findings of this research confirmed that there is a statistically significant difference in consumer engagement across different communication orientations. Specific to the findings, this research found mixed-oriented post was the most effective, followed by interaction, task, and self-orientation posts in generating overall consumer engagement. In terms of individual engagement level, interaction-oriented posts received the highest post likes, and mixed-oriented posts received the highest number of comments and shares. This research also found statistical significance in consumer engagement across different media types. Facebook live was found most effective media format in generating consumer engagement overall and an individual level.

- **Objective Three:** *To explore the benefits and challenges of using Facebook as a tool of communication from the perspectives of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' owners and managers.*

In addition, to achieve the third research objective, 12 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. A thematic analysis of the interview data identified six benefits of using Facebook, namely accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues, cost-effective digital marketing, relationship building, increasing brand awareness, value co-creation and spreading positive e-WOM for using Facebook. This research also revealed four key challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool. They include an increase in negative feedback, possible theft of intellectual properties, a lack of expert human resources for managing digital content and an overcrowded virtual marketplace. These findings of the research shed light on why Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs use Facebook and what kind of challenges they face whilst

using it. Although the benefits and challenges of social media usage were well known in the literature, they were not previously known in the precise context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

- **Objective Four:** *To recommend the most effective Facebook communication strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement and achieving SMEs' marketing objectives.*

Finally, the fourth objective of this research seeks to make recommendations to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs regarding effective Facebook communication strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement. After carefully discussing the research findings by locating them in the broader literature, section 6.6 of this thesis proposed a strategic framework for Facebook consumer engagement and effective marketing communication for Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. In addition, section 7.4 of this thesis also provides several recommendations to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs as well as the policymakers.

The next section of this chapter now details the contributions of this research and evaluates their applicability and generalisability.

7.3. Contributions of the Research

The contributions of this research are depicted under three categories: theoretical, methodological, and empirical.

7.3.1. Theoretical Contributions

This research makes three theoretical contributions as listed below:

7.3.1.1. *Contribution One: Reconceptualisation of salesperson interpersonal communication theory in the context of Facebook communication of fashion retail SMEs*

Sheth originally developed the salesperson interpersonal communication theory in 1976 to represent buyer-seller interactions in household and organisational marketing contexts (detail discussion presented in section 3.2.1). According to Sheth (1976), sellers adopt different communication orientations to interact with buyers and their selection of orientation has an

impact on sales. Sheth (1976) initially proposed that sellers used three strategic orientations to communicate with buyers: task orientation, interaction orientation, and self-orientation. Sheth (1976) conceptualised buyer-seller interactions by considering face-to-face communications. More recently, Sheth's (1976) conceptualization was adopted by Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja (2018) to investigate how brands communicate with consumers on social media. Past studies of Kim, Spiller and Hettche (2015) and Kusumasondjaja's (2018) considered social media posts only contained a single orientation, but due to technological advancement, SMEs were observed using multiple orientations in a single post.

This research employed the salesperson interpersonal communication theory for exploring how fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh communicate with consumers on Facebook. An analysis of the data led to a reconceptualisation of the salesperson interpersonal communication framework; an additional dimension 'mixed-orientation' was added to the existing framework. This research extended Sheth's (1967) framework by potentially making it relevant to social media. As the proposed reconceptualisation is consistent with the findings of Tafesse and Wien (2018) and Kusumasondjaja (2018), it is expected that this contribution is generalisable to fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications.

7.3.1.2. *Contribution Two: Contributions to the Media Richness Theory*

This research contributes to the media richness theory by identifying the richest media type for social media communication. This research revealed that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs used different types of media to convey different messages. As elaborated in section 5.3.3.3, SMEs in the sample communicated complicated messages (e.g., posts involving mixed orientations) through the richest form of media type such as Facebook live. However, Facebook posts with less ambiguous messages (e.g., posts involving task, interaction, or self-orientation) were conveyed through medium rich or lean media such as images, pre-recorded videos, and texts. Therefore, the findings of this research supported the applicability of media richness theory in the social media context.

Early studies that applied media richness theory in social media research did not consider the live streaming features of Facebook (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015) because this feature was only introduced in 2016, and became a popular option of Facebook communication in the recent time. Although few recent studies analysed the effects of Facebook live from various perspectives (Ang et al.

2018; Sultan and Sharmin 2020), no existing research, thus far, has examined the impact of Facebook live from a media richness perspective. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that analysed Facebook live streaming from a media richness perspective and identified that live streaming is the richest media of communication in Facebook and can be extremely useful for communicating complex messages. The findings of this study support Daft and Lengel's (1986) media richness theory; richer media not only reduce the ambiguity of the messages but also enhance the effectiveness of the messages. Given that media richness theory is one of the highly established theories, both in traditional marketing and social media marketing, it is expected that this contribution can be generalisable across marketing communications of fashion retail SMEs.

7.3.1.3. *Contribution Three: A strategic framework for fashion retail SMEs' social media communication and consumer engagement*

Based on the findings of this research, a framework of the most effective social media communication strategies was proposed to fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh in section 6.6 of this thesis. The framework provides a clear pathway for enhancing Facebook consumer engagement and thereby generating sales by using a combination of different communication strategies and media types. The framework recommends two courses of actions to fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh. If a SME has limited social media presence, it is recommended that they focus on growing their social media presence by using mixed-oriented posts and develop a good and unique brand image that is distinguishable in the crowded marketplace. On the other hand, if a SME has a developed online community, it is recommended that they focus on interaction-oriented posts as such posts were identified to be effective in generating a high number of likes. Photo is recommended as a preferred media type for their conversation as it is faster to publish and does not involve higher costs. The proposed strategies provide clear guidance to the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs whilst adding new insights to the literature.

7.3.2. Empirical Contributions

This research makes the following three empirical contributions to the literature.

7.3.2.1. Contribution One: Identification of the impact of different Facebook communication orientations on consumers engagement in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs

A review of the existing literature revealed that there was a knowledge gap in relation to how fashion retail SMEs' social media consumer engagement differs across different communication orientations. An original research study was conducted by analysing the Facebook communication activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs. This research revealed that mixed and interaction-oriented strategies as the most effective communication strategies for generating higher consumer engagement. Although numerous studies were previously conducted to investigate the impacts of different communication strategies on consumers engagements (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Tafesse and Wien 2018; Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020), no prior study that focused on fashion retail SMEs' social media consumer engagement was identified in the literature. Hence, the findings of this research make a substantial empirical contribution to the body of knowledge by outlining the most effective Facebook communication strategies for enhancing the level of consumer engagement of fashion retail SMEs. Considering fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh have similar organisational structures and operate under a similar market environment (Kumar 2017), this contribution is expected to be generalisable across the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

7.3.2.2. Contribution Two: Identification of the difference in consumers engagement levels across different media types in the context of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs

This research makes another empirical contribution by identifying that the level of consumer engagement varies across different media types used in SMEs' Facebook posts. This research found that Facebook live posts were the most effective media types for consumer engagement in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communications (detail discussion presented in section 5.3.3.3). This finding adds new insight to the SMEs' social

media communication literature. Because several studies investigated the impacts of different media types on consumers engagements in the context of large international brands' social media communication perspective (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang 2012; Cvijikj and Michahelles 2014; Kim, Spiller and Hettche 2015; Tafesse 2015) however, no research was conducted on fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication from a media richness perspective to examine the effects of different media types on consumer engagement. Hence, this research contributes to the literature by bridging an existing knowledge gap. As the finding of this research is based on an analysis of 2409 Facebook posts of SMEs and is consistent with the existing literature, this contribution is anticipated to be generalisable to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs.

7.3.2.3. *Contribution Three: Identification of factors that motivate Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to adopt Facebook and the challenges SMEs face whilst using Facebook as a tool of communication*

A review of the literature identified that no comprehensive empirical study was conducted in the context of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs to explore what SMEs seek to achieve by using Facebook and what sort of challenges they face whilst using Facebook as a communication tool. In order to fill this knowledge gap, this research qualitatively explored the Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs by interviewing 12 managers and owners. This research identified that SMEs use Facebook for accessing virtual marketplace and increasing revenues, conducting cost-effective digital marketing, relationship building, increasing brand awareness, engaging in value co-creation, and spreading positive e-WOM. This research also revealed four key challenges of using Facebook as a communication tool, namely an increase in negative feedback, possible theft of intellectual properties, a lack of expert human resources for managing digital contents and an overcrowded virtual marketplace. These findings make contributions to the literature by adding new insights. However, the generalisability of these contributions may be limited to the SMEs in the sample as participants were recruited from only 12 Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs and the convenience sampling method was used for recruiting participants.

7.3.3. Methodological Contributions

For exploring and evaluating how fashion retail SMEs in Bangladesh use Facebook for marketing communications, this research used a multi-method sequential approach.

Methodologically, most research adopted a single method to analyse SMEs' social media communication: Durkin, Mcgowan and Mckeown (2013), McCann and Barlow (2015), de Vries, Veer and de Vries (2018), and Chokpitakkul and Anantachart (2020) adopted qualitative method, Salam, Shams and Hoque (2019), Amoah and Jibril (2020), Chatterjee and Kumar Kar (2020), and Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer (2020) used quantitative method, whilst Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen (2012) and Chen, Ji and Men (2017) used mix methods by conducting both qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative methods are useful for producing findings that can be generalisable whilst qualitative methods allow to produce of in-depth findings (Smith 2018; Hays and McKibben 2021). In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to overcome the limitations of single method research. Three different data collection instruments, namely netnography, quantitative content analysis, and qualitative semi-structured interviews helped not only to explore what Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are doing but also to evaluate whether or not their activities are effective in achieving their social media marketing objectives. The sequence of methods used in this research proved highly instrumental for exploring a new research territory in an in-depth manner, hence it may provide guidance to future researchers. The adoption of an emerging research method, netnography, may have contributed to the method itself as future researchers are now more aware of how netnography can be adopted in a research study and what kind of challenges a researcher can face during this kind of research.

7.4. Recommendations

This research makes five recommendations to Bangladeshi Fashion retail SMEs and two recommendations to the Bangladesh government. However, it is suggested to consider the generalisability of these recommendations before implementing them as the findings are based on a review of only 20 fashion retail SMEs (elaborated in section 7.5).

7.4.1. Recommendation to Bangladeshi SME Fashion Retailers

Upon discussing the findings of this research, the following five recommendations are made to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' owners and managers:

7.4.1.1. *Focus on building relational ties with consumers*

This research found that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook communication mainly used task-oriented strategies (i.e., sales) rather than building relationships with consumers

(reported in section 5.3.2.2). However, upon an analysis of the effectiveness of the communication strategies of SMEs, it was noted that contents that have mixed orientation and focus on interactional and relational approaches were more effective for achieving higher consumer engagement. Past literature (i.e., de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018; Kusumasondjaja 2018; Salam, Shams and Hoque 2019) noted that through effective consumer relationships, brands can achieve long term consumer loyalty that increases profitability and sustainability of brands. The interview findings of this research also noted that SMEs seek to retain existing consumers and achieve repeat purchases as it is more cost-effective. Moreover, literature on the relational ties suggests that SMEs can enhance their external and internal consumer engagement on social media by increasing the number of strong ties. Therefore, it is recommended that SMEs should focus on adopting more interaction-oriented strategies during their Facebook marketing communications to build more strong ties with consumer. SMEs can engage in interaction-oriented activities by educating followers, organising creative events for followers, community building, individual recognition of followers for developing personal and emotional attachments, and responding to consumer comments.

7.4.1.2. *Develop social media communication plans*

During the interviews, it was observed that Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs did not have specific social media communication plans that guided their Facebook communication activities. SMEs are small-scale businesses and have limited resources, hence they tend not to have specific pre-outlined organisational strategies (McCann and Barlow 2015; Rana and Kumar 2016; Rugova and Prenaj 2016). However, it is critical to outline social media objectives and prepare detailed plans and procedures in order to get the most out of social media platforms (McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; de Vries, Veer and de Vries 2018). Although SMEs' owners and managers had an overall idea about what they seek to achieve through Facebook communications as they stated that by using Facebook, they seek to access the virtual marketplace and increase revenues, conduct cost-effective digital marketing, build relationships with consumers, increase brand awareness, engage in value co-creation, and spread positive e-WOM, they did not have specific plans in place for achieving these. Therefore, it is recommended that SMEs should develop social media communication plans and follow them for maximising the benefits of social media. Given that the social media realm is rapidly changing, it is also recommended that SMEs regularly review and revise their social media communication plans as necessary.

7.4.1.3. Build Facebook communities and incentivise active and contributing members

Facebook provides a feature that enables a business to build a virtual community around it. During netnography research, it was observed that SMEs with virtual communities had a higher level of consumer engagement on their posts and these virtual community members often consider have strong tie with SMEs fashion retailers. Additionally, during interviews, the managers and owners of SMEs stated that some community members work as advocates for SMEs. They refer the SMEs' products to others and also protect SMEs from receiving negative feedback. However, only some SMEs were utilising this feature of Facebook. Given that having a virtual community is expected to increase the level of engagement whilst also strengthening brand-consumer relationships, it is recommended that SMEs form and maintain virtual communities. It is also recommended that SMEs incentivise active and contributing members by appreciating them and providing them financial incentives. In order to rapidly build virtual communities, SMEs could offer incentives (e.g., loyalty offers and community member discounts) to motivate people to join their brand communities.

7.4.1.4. Publish more mixed oriented posts using Facebook Live for higher consumer engagement

This research identified that Facebook live posts with mixed orientations are most effective for generating higher consumer engagement on Facebook. In comparison with other communication strategies, mixed communication strategies received significantly more likes comments and shares. However, only one-fifth of the SMEs' Facebook posts in the sample contained mixed orientations and some SMEs never published these types of posts. Therefore, it is recommended that SMEs focus on publishing mixed oriented posts regularly. Findings of the netnography research suggest that Facebook Live not only increases the visibility of the brand but also enhances consumer engagement by strengthening the relationship with existing and potential consumers through multidirectional interactions (e.g., B2C, C2B, C2C). While publishing a mixed-orientation post, the communication's central focus could be a task, interaction, self, or all. for example, during a Facebook live session, SMEs can combine all these three orientations in a single post. However, some interview participants noted that they lack resources such as time and skill for publishing such posts. To mitigate these, SMEs could recruit local celebrities temporarily. Given that there exists empirical evidence that mixed-oriented posts can indeed enhance consumer engagement and thereby increase sales and profitability, it should give motivation to SME managers to increase spending on such social

media marketing activities. These activities can also help retain existing consumers by building a personal and emotional connection with them. According to the European Business Review (2021) and Harvard Business Review (2014), the cost of consumer retention is much lower than acquiring new consumers. Building relationships with consumers may help increase the rate of consumer retention, thereby reducing the cost of Facebook marketing.

7.4.1.5. *Actively explore new social media trends and utilise them in business processes*

Social media marketing communication activities of Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs appear to be heavily concentrated on Facebook. Under the current circumstances, these activities look well justified given that Facebook is the most widely adopted social media channel in Bangladesh. However, as modern technologies are rapidly transforming, it is necessary for SMEs to actively engage in social media research, training, and digital development programmes in order to explore new social media trends and developments. By doing so, they will be able to understand the recent trends on the platforms that are most commonly used by social media users as well as how other businesses are using different social media channels for different purposes. As previously discussed in the literature in the section 2.4.2, different social media platforms have different functionalities; for example, Facebook is used as a friend and family networking site, LinkedIn as a professional networking site, YouTube as a video sharing site, Instagram as a photo sharing platform, Twitter for micro blogging, and TikTok for mimic video sharing.

The findings of this research indicated that entertaining contents were popular among consumers on Facebook, and it helped SMEs to enhance the level of consumer engagement. SME fashion retailers could try another social media platform called TikTok to produce and share entertaining marketing video content to promote their products. This is because TikTok's popularity is increasing around the world and Bangladesh is not an exception, SMEs can easily make TikTok videos for marketing and entertaining consumers, which could help them to enhance their consumer engagement. On the other hand, building strong ties with consumers has never been more important for SMEs. As identified by this research, SMEs with large social media community members had a higher level of consumer engagement on their Facebook posts. Facebook community members can be considered as consumers with strong ties with SMEs as these community members have been mentioned as top fans in many cases and they were found to spread positive WOM. These community members who have strong

ties with SMEs not only enhance the internal engagement by liking and commenting on SMEs' posts but also play vital roles to make posts viral by sharing the post, which increases the chances of building more weak ties in social media and helps to enhance external engagement. Based on the review of existing literature as well as the findings of this research, it is recommended to Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs that they continually track new social media trends and incorporate adequate strategies for reaching wider audiences.

7.4.2. Recommendations to the Bangladeshi Government

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendation is made to the Bangladeshi Government.

7.4.2.1. *Introduce digital market regulation acts to allow genuine SMEs to foster*

One of the key challenges faced by SMEs during Facebook marketing communications is the lack of market regulation in the overcrowded virtual marketplace. The participants in the sample mentioned that their intellectual properties such as product design and other creative ideas were stolen. In order to create a safer market environment for both SMEs and consumers, it is recommended that the Bangladeshi policymakers introduce digital market regulations that enable creative SMEs to protect their creativity and have a fair chance of competing in the virtual marketplace. Doing so will allow the fashion retail SME sector to prosper, yielding numerous tangible benefits to the government (i.e., increased employment, increased taxes). It is also recommended that the Bangladeshi government establish a digital market regulatory body to monitor the Facebook virtual marketplace. The government can empower exiting associations such as e-CAB (e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh) and SME Foundation of Bangladesh to certify each online business that operates in the Bangladeshi digital marketspace. This business certification will give assurance to consumers to shop confidently from online companies. This will also increase transparency and protect consumers from financial losses.

7.4.2.2. *Develop and implement SME support programmes*

SMEs are well known for their limited resources as opposed to large organisations as highlighted in the literature (Nakara, Benmoussa and Jaouen 2012; Wamba and Carter 2015; McCann and Barlow 2015; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020). Whereas these SMEs are considered the backbone of an economy (Uddin, Chowdhury

and Mamun 2017; Chokpitakkul and Anantachart 2020) as they create opportunities for employment, innovations, economic growth and ultimately contribute to the national GDP (Rowley, Ashworth and McCarthy 2014; Wamba and Carter 2015; McCann and Barlow 2015; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti 2016; De Vries, Veer and De Vries 2018; World Bank 2020). Supporting these SMEs' growth and development would be highly beneficial for the healthy economic growth of any country in the world (Aga, Francis and Rodriguez-Meza 2015; OECD 2017; World Bank 2020). However, some of the key challenges SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail sector were facing included the lack of necessary financial resources as well as the lack of expertise necessary for effectively managing and growing their businesses (Alauddin and Chowdhury 2015; Hoque and Awang 2016; Hoque et al. 2016; Hoque et al. 2017; Rahman 2019; Andalib and Halim 2019; Rahman 2019). It is recommended to the Bangladeshi government they should introduce financial support schemes that support small businesses during adverse economic conditions as well as in the phases of development and growth. In addition, it is also strongly recommended that the Bangladeshi government cooperates with local universities and educational institutions so that they are able to support these SMEs by providing them necessary skills and education for running businesses effectively. Bangladeshi government may be able to extend such non-financial support to SMEs through skill enhancement programmes, particularly for digital skill development training courses for SMEs' owners, managers, and employees through a partnership with different governmental, non-governmental, semi-governmental and private organisations (e.g., institutions such as SME Foundation, e-Commence Association of Bangladesh and partnership with private and public universities).

7.5. Research Limitations

Simon (2013) stated that every study has some limitations, irrespective of how well it may have been designed. The findings of this research may be affected by the following limitations:

Contextual limitations: This research investigated Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs' Facebook marketing communication strategies from the perspective of social media consumer engagement. The research data was collected from the Facebook pages of SMEs. Therefore, the results of this research may not be reflective of other social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Hence, findings may not reflect how consumers engage with SMEs

on other social media platforms. In addition, a total of 20 SMEs' Facebook communication activities were investigated during the analysis of the data. Given that Bangladesh hosts thousands of fashion retail SMEs, the results produced by reviewing a mere 20 SMEs may not be generalisable across the industry. Besides, qualitative findings based on 12 interviews may also not represent the entire picture of the industry. Therefore, the findings of this research may not be representative of the Bangladeshi fashion retail SME sector or fashion retail SMEs in general.

Limited to particular time: Research data were collected between early 2019 to early 2020 and outside of specific events such as national festivals or global events such as a pandemic. As all of the research data were collected in the pre-pandemic stage, the findings of this research do not reflect how SMEs used social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to COVID-19 prevention measures, countries across the world implement various restrictions on their citizens and businesses. People are not allowed travel here and there; non-essential shops and shopping malls were also closed (Verhoef, Noordhoff and Sloot 2022). The number of consumers shopping online increased, resulting in higher consumer engagement with brands across social media. Hence, the findings may not reflect how SMEs communicate during adverse socioeconomic conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the communication strategies that are most effective for higher consumer engagement in these times. However, further research may be able to provide valuable insight by looking at how SMEs reacted to this adverse socioeconomic condition.

Data coding process: All the Facebook posts were coded by the researcher himself. Although specific frameworks available in the literature are used in the coding process, the coding accuracy may also be questioned to a certain extent.

7.6. Further Research

This research was successful in investigating the Facebook communication strategies of SMEs in the fashion retail industry of Bangladesh. As no prior research was previously conducted to examine how SMEs in the Bangladeshi fashion retail industry use Facebook communication, the findings of this research provide contributions to the literature by adding new insights. This research could be extended by following further studies:

Further Research One: Longitudinal time horizon

Considering the time available for completing this research, research data was collected at a single point in time (cross-sectional). A longitudinal future research study could explore SMEs' communication strategies and their effectiveness in increasing audience engagement over a period of time.

Further Research Two: Inclusion of consumer perceptions

Understanding consumers' perspectives this research only considered consumers' behavioural engagement on Facebook. A further research study could interview the consumers of fashion retail SMEs and explore the factors that motivate consumers to engage with brands.

Further Research Three: Remodelling the consumer engagement measurement metrics based on the findings of this research

This research only considered the positive engagement by considering the number of likes, comments, and shares received by Facebook posts. A future research study may consider negative engagement by categorisation of social media engagement variables, for example, distinguishing positive and negative engagement counting unhappy emoji responses and number of negative comments. Future research may calculate consumers' behavioural engagement by also including the number of social media post views. This study has given equal weights to like, comment, and share, however, these behavioural engagement indicators may carry different weights in terms of consumer engagement (as identified from interview findings in this research). Therefore, future researchers may remodel consumer engagement measurement metrics by reconsidering these for a more accurate measurement of Facebook consumer engagement.

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Appendices

Appendix-1: Participants Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title

Analysing the social media communication of SMEs in the fashion retail industry: A case study of Bangladesh.

2. Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why this research is being done and what will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

This study is interested in how Bangladeshi fashion retail SMEs are using social media communication channels to engage their consumers. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify and analyse SMEs' social media communication practices and assess the effectiveness in terms of consumers engagement in their social media content.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are the SMEs' owners, managers or employees and you are responsible for strategic decision making for social media use in the organisation.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement to sign the consent form. You can still withdraw at any time up to one month after the interview, you just have

to email the researcher your intention to withdraw from this research. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawal.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview and the interview will be recorded in audiotape for data transcription. This interview will take around 45 minutes.

7. What do I have to do?

Tapes will be identified only by a code and will not be used or made available for any purpose other than this research project. These tapes will be destroyed at the end of this study.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause any disadvantages. However, some extra time or effort will be required for your organisation for social media exposure or implementing social media plans agreed with the researcher if necessary.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation in this research will add valuable insight into the social media use in SMEs in Bangladesh which will help the researcher to identify the opportunities and challenges of using social media as a communication tool. The findings of this research may help Bangladeshi SMEs to improve their communication and brand images in the market and engage consumers in the social media environment. If you wish researcher will provide interview feedback to you.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I will collect about you and your organisation during this research will be kept strictly confidential. You and your organisation will not be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications. All data will be treated anonymously in reports or publications.

11. Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

Your interviews will be audio/video recorded and they will be only listened to by the researcher to transcribe them. All the audiotape and video will be destroyed after this research.

12. What type of information will be sought from me?

If you are SMEs' owners, managers or employees you will be asked about social media technologies, communication strategies of your organisation especially social media strategies, social media usages, reason of social media use, opportunities and challenges you face.

13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

Results of this research will be published. However, all data will be used anonymously you and your organisation will not be identified in any publications.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is conducted by **Amit Ahammed**, a Bangladeshi research student at York St John University in the UK. I have completed BA (Hons) in Business Management and MSc in Management in the UK. I have experience working with various UK retail businesses. I always had a dream to do something useful for my country, Bangladesh. Therefore, I have undertaken this self-funded research project as part of a PhD research program at York St John University under the supervision of Dr George Boak and Dr Nadine Waehning.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee (Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business).

16. Contacts for further information

Researcher: **Mr Amit Ahammed**, York Business School, York St John University, UK. Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX. Email: amit.ahammed@yorksj.ac.uk

Supervisor: **Dr George Boak**, York Business School, York St John University, UK. Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX. Email: g.boak@yorksj.ac.uk

Supervisor: **Dr Nadine Waehning**, York Business School, York St John University, UK. Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX. Email: n.waehning@yorksj.ac.uk

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact York Business School research lead:

Dr Peter Watt, York Business School, York St John University, UK. Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX. Email: p.watt@yorksj.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this research.

Appendix-2: Consent Form

Name of school: York Business School
Name of researcher: Amit Ahammed
Title of study: Analysing the social media communication of SMEs in the fashion retail industry: A case study of Bangladesh.

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

- I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and/or written form by the researcher.   **YES / NO**
- I understand that this research will involve: one to one semi-structured interview and which will take around 45 minutes to an hour and this interview will be recorded in an audiotape or virtually.

  YES / NO
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to explain. I can withdraw at any time up to one month after the interview by writing an email to the researcher about my intention.   **YES / NO**
- I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidentiality, and I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.   **YES / NO**
- I understand that any audiotape or video material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of this research.   **YES / NO**
- I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with others at York St John University.   **YES / NO**
- I consent to be a participant in the research.   **YES / NO**

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	
Date	

Appendix-3: Interview Guide

Interview Details	• Interviewee: • Code name: • Interview date: • Interview location: • Start time: • Finish time:
Introduction	➢ Thanking participant for taking part in the study ➢ Remind them of the study context, hand in the participants' information sheet and consent forms. ➢ Make sure forms are understood and have verbal or written consent. ➢ Is there any question? ➢ Turn on recording
Interview questions	1. Could you please tell me about your organisation? 2. Could you please tell me what is your role in this organisation is? 3. What are the day-to-day activities you do for being part of this organisation? 4. How do you manage your marketing activities in the organisation? 5. What do you think about social media business value? Please explain. 6. What are the motivations to use Facebook in your organisation? 7. What are activities do you do on Facebook? How? Why? 8. What do you communicate through Facebook? 9. What types of messages or information do you communicate with consumers on Facebook? Why? 10. What do you want to achieve by posting these types of messages? (e.g., Facebook Live). 11. What types of messages get more consumers' attention? Why do you think so? 12. How do you measure the success of a post? is there anything else you do to measure it?

	13. Do you see any difference value in different types of consumer interaction on Facebook?
	14. Do you have any kind of communication plan for Facebook or other social media? Why or why not? If what?
	15. What is the benefits Facebook brought to your organisation?
	16. What do you think about Facebook's impact on sales revenue?
	17. What are the challenges do you face in social media communication?
	18. Have you experienced any unexpected issues while using social media for your organisation? If yes, what are they?
	19. How do you handle them?

Thank you for your time and participation in this research!!!

Appendix-4: Ethics Committee Approval

<div align="right">
York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX

02/03/2018
</div>

York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee
(Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business)

Dear Amit,

Title of study:	An Investigation into the Potential of Web 2.0 technologies to Help Bangladeshi SMEs to Build their Brand Images: A Focus on the Retail Sector.
Ethics reference:	179105322/02032018
Date of submission:	27/01/2018

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the Cross School Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Ethics form	27/01/2018
Consent form	27/01/2018
Key interview questions	27/01/2018
Responses to feedback	01/03/2018

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study.

Yours sincerely,

12th July, 2019

York St John University Cross School Research Ethics Committee
(Health Sciences, Sport, Psychological and Social Sciences and Business)

Dear Amit,

Title of study: Analysing the social media communication for SMEs in Bangladesh: A focus on fashion retail.
Ethics reference: Ahammed_12072019
Date of submission: 05/06/2019

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the Cross School Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval	11/07/2019
Consent form for consumer	11/07/2019
Consumer participant information sheet	11/07/2019
Responses to feedback	11/07/2019

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study.

Yours sincerely,

Nathalie Noret