

UNIVERSITY OF XXX

**THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO IMPROVE AGILITY IN SOUTH
AFRICAN FASHION INDUSTRY SUPPLY CHAINS.**

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Executive Summary

Brief statement of the problem: The entrance of international brands into the South African apparel market has increased the amount of competition in the industry. In order to compete with the seemingly more flexible and responsive supply chains of these international brands, South African companies have, in recent times, made substantial efforts to increase the agility of their supply chains. For continuous improvement to take place in this area, in-depth research on utilising new technologies, such as social media, to improve agility, would thus be useful to help South African brands meet the international benchmarks already set for agile supply chains in the industry.

Brief background information: Agility is an important element of the fashion industry's supply chain. South African apparel companies have, therefore, been making efforts to improve the agility of their supply chains. Although these efforts are significant, the country has still not met the benchmarks set by international competitors, in terms of implementing agility. Internationally, social media has surfaced as a potentially cost-effective tool for improving the performance of supply chains, through increasing visibility, flexibility, responsiveness, and ultimately agility. However, the tool has not, to the researcher's knowledge, been acknowledged in the South African market, as being valuable to other functions, other than Marketing. As international research continues on the topic, social media has increasingly become a potentially revolutionary tool for use in volatile supply chains.

Research Questions:

- Is there a perceived need to improve agility of South African fashion industry supply chains?
- To what extent are South African fashion industry stakeholders virtually integrated?
- How sensitive and responsive are current practices of the industry, to the market changes in demand?
- How effective are current strategies used for process integration?
- How successful are existing strategies to helping focal companies coordinate strategic relationships with their network of stakeholders?

- Using findings of an empirical, are there opportunities for the adoption of social media in South African fashion industry supply chains?

Theoretical framework: The research will be based on the Agile Supply Chain framework established by Harrison, Christopher and Van Hoek, in 1999. This framework gives characteristics of agile supply chains, which the researcher will use to analyse if the proposed technology is able to improve. The framework makes use of four areas to analyse in order to determine if a supply chain is agile; market sensitivity, virtual integration, process integration and network based.

Methodology: Quantitative research methods shall be used for the study. Data shall be collected through the distribution of questionnaires to twenty executives and managers and forty supply chain officers in Edcon, Mr Price Group, Truworths and The Foschini Group. The data shall be analysed using descriptive methods of analysis.

Introduction

The fashion industry is a highly volatile industry characterised by perishable products and the need for short lead times, so as to meet the demands of customers and mitigate the pressures caused by changing styles and seasons (Harrison and van Hoek, 2011: 237). This volatility of the modern fashion global market has seen many international retail brands, such as Zara, enforcing agile supply chain practices that enable them to stock a larger variety of collections, in order to become more responsive to the impulsive market and reduce the risks of extended supply chains (Bhatia and Asai, 2007: 3). In South Africa, agility has recently been recognised as a vital focal area (Tukker, 2013), with some large retail companies seeking ways to improve this.

This study aims to determine the potential role for social media to improve agility in South African fashion industry supply chains. Using the Agile Supply Chain framework, it seeks to identify current needs and challenges of the industry, in terms of reaching the optimum level of agility. These needs shall be used to determine if there are opportunities for social media adoption in the fashion industry supply chain.

Background of the study

Harrison and van Hoek (2011:236) described agility as a means of using information from the end-customer to organise the operations and logistics of a supply chain. The focus of agile supply chains, such as those of the fashion industry, is on what the target market demands. The supply chain then works backwards to be responsive and flexible in order to efficiently satisfy the needs of these end-customers (Harrison and van Hoek, 2011:236). For example, every four to six weeks, Zara, uses agile supply chain practices to coordinate its network of 300 subcontractors, located in different geographical areas (Christopher, Lowson and Peck, 2004: 371), to provide its customers with new clothing collections in each of its 426 stores (Bhatia and Asai, 2007: 3).

While the concept of agility is still in its infancy in the South African market, some of the country's large and competitive retailers have recently implemented fast fashion strategies to keep up with the global competitive arena. For example, before implementing new responsive strategies into its supply chain, The Foschini Group took 180 days to transform concepts into

clothing items to be sold in retail stores. However, since the restructuring of its supply chain, The Foschini Group takes up to 100 days from concept to outlet (Business Day, 2011). Although the lead time is not as competitive as the four to six weeks, international companies such as Zara take (Bhatia and Asai, 2007: 3), this is a significant improvement on the strategies used in the past. However, it is clear that there is a need for improvement.

Following objectives to find new ways of increasing supply chain agility, attention on social media as an agile supply chain tool is rapidly growing. However, its adoption in the supply chain industry is still significantly slow. Gonzalez (2013) compared the current slow adoption of social media, in the supply chain, to that of the internet in 1996. Although a number of companies remain skeptical of using social media tools to improve their supply chains, many others have gained significant benefits from implementing them in this area (Howells, 2011). Companies such as Microsoft have pioneered the usage of social media in their supply chains, paving the way for other establishments to follow suit. Microsoft has done this through Yammer, an internal integration tool (Miller, 2013). Other tools such as Enterprise Social Software (Mazel, 2013), SourceMap (Weaver, 2013), Social Text and the Social Enterprise Resource Planning tool have been utilised by companies to enhance integration and visibility, which are key areas of agile supply chains. This study therefore, aims to determine the role that social media can play, to improve agility in fashion industry supply chains in South Africa.

Research Problem

The global fashion industry has become more competitive, with the emergence of globalisation, changing consumer behaviour (Tukker, 2013) and the removal of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) (Morris, Barnes, and Esselaar, no date: 7). For example, between 2002 and 2006, imports from China into South Africa increased by 480% (Le Roux, 2006). In addition, internationally popular retailers such as Zara, Top Shop and H&M were introduced into the South African market, causing a significant number of local apparel companies to lose their market share and close down (Witepski, 2014).

With global sourcing also growing, the fashion industry is prone to other risks such as longer lead times (Christopher et al., 2004: 368) and vulnerability to international uncertainties

(Simchi-Levi et al, 2008). Improved agility will thus raise the industry's responsiveness, speed, flexibility, competitiveness and ultimately reduce the costs of uncertainty (Christopher et al., 2004).

While South African fashion companies have made significant efforts to improve their agility, the gap in performance between the agile supply chains of international companies and those of local companies, is still considerably wide. According to Tukker (2013), South African apparel companies mainly focus on reducing costs which hampers their supply chain responsiveness and flexibility. Research on ways to improve agility is thus an important area for the industry. If the study is conducted, the South African fashion industry may be provided with a cost-effective method for improving agility and reducing its vulnerability to international brands.

Research questions

The main research question of the study is, '*Are there opportunities present for social media to increase agility in South African fashion industry supply chains?*' This main question has been further broken down into several smaller questions to guide the research process.

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- Is there a perceived need to improve agility of South African fashion industry supply chains?
- To what extent are South African fashion industry stakeholders virtually integrated?
- How sensitive and responsive are current practices of the industry, to the market changes in demand?
- How effective are current strategies used for process integration?
- How successful are existing strategies to helping focal companies coordinate strategic relationships with their network of stakeholders?
- Using findings of an empirical, are there opportunities for the adoption of social media in South African fashion industry supply chains?

Research objectives

Research objectives were formulated in order to direct the research course. The objectives for this study are:

- To assess whether there is a perceived need to improve agility of South African fashion industry supply chains.
- To identify the level of virtual integration of stakeholders in the South African fashion supply chain.
- To assess the industry's current sensitivity and responsiveness to market changes.
- To evaluate the extent to which existing technologies, used in the South African fashion industry, facilitate process integration.
- To recognise how efficiently strategic relationships are presently coordinated in the complex fashion supply chain in South Africa.
- To deduce from the findings of an empirical, if there are opportunities for the adoption of social media in South African fashion industry supply chains.

Literature review

The Agile Supply Chain framework shall be used to construct and direct the literature review for the study. In order to identify if social media is a potentially viable tool to use for improving agility, an exploratory and descriptive study based on the chosen framework will be necessary.

Social media and the agile supply chain

Compared to conventional supply chains, agile supply chains are driven by information-sharing due to the fact that they are centred on responsiveness and flexibility (Christopher et al., 2004: 369). Social media, which is sometimes referred to as the Web 2.0 has surfaced as a potential information-sharing device. It is defined by O’Leary (2011: 4) as ‘*internet-based applications that allow for the development of user generated information and provides a forum for users to interact with each other*’. Although in its infancy in the supply chain, it has stirred some interest from researchers such as Gonzalez (2013) and O’Leary (2011). While the benefits of social media have been widely researched in the Marketing industry, it is apparent through literature, that very few companies have acknowledged or utilised social media’s potential from a supply chain standpoint. However, research from authors such as Gonzalez (2013) and O’Leary (2011) argues that there are several suitable social media applications valuable to the supply chain.

Uses of social media in the agile supply chain

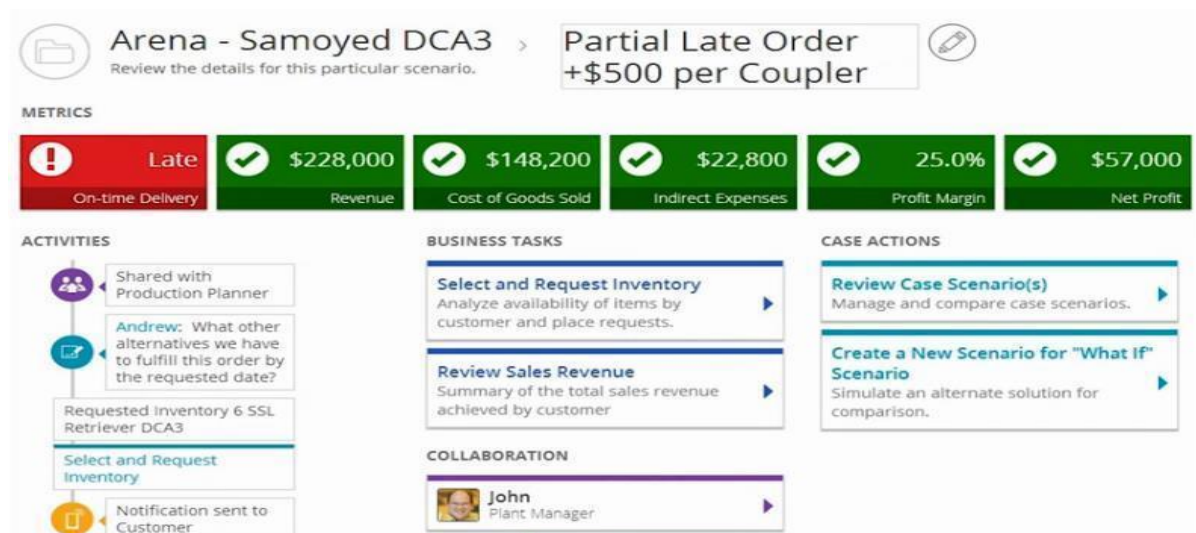
There are four dimensions of the Agile Supply Chain Framework; virtual integration, market sensitivity, process integration and network based (Christopher et al, 2004: 371). These will be used to identify areas in which social media is currently implemented in the supply chain.

Virtual Integration

Virtual integration connects supply chain stakeholders through the collaboration and exchange of real-time information (Christopher et al, 2004: 370). Due to the outsourcing of various processes, to external stakeholders, which expose supply chains to a variety of risks and uncertainties, Risk Management through collaborative planning, end-to-end visibility and information-sharing is necessary (Christopher et al, 2004: 371).

An article by Computer Economics (2014) argued that Supply Chain Planning (SCP) problems arise when unforeseen events occur and actions that have repercussions on other stakeholders, requiring their approval, need to be taken immediately. Traditionally, this information would be communicated using telephones, meetings or emails however, these have their limitations. Social media has been seen as a better means of communicating and integrating with large groups of individuals, during SCP, as a result of its ability to broadcast information to a greater number of people, in different geographical locations, at once (O’Leary, 2011: 123). According to O’ Leary (2011: 123), social media features easily allow the individual applications to enable users to generate information and choose which stakeholders of the supply chain should have access to the information, facilitating privacy and security of vital data and reducing spam. New social media user interfaces by Kinaxis (refer to Figure 1) also allow for cross-functional integration through enabling planners to automatically select internal and external stakeholders who would be immediately affected by the SCP decisions, capturing the decisions from each of the participants and allowing all users to see how each proposed resolution will affect the organisation and the relevant stakeholders involved. Automatic updates on desktops and other smart devices, make the decisions easily accessible from any device (Computer Economics, 2014).

Figure 1: Kinaxis User interface



Source: Computer Economics, 2014

O' Leary (2011: 123) also suggested the use of '*prediction markets*' which enable supply chains to become aware of potentially disruptive events as they occur. For example, real-time information about disruptive weather conditions, accidents and road closures, may be communicated via applications such as Twitter. This may enable stakeholders of the supply chain to improve Supply Chain Risk Management through responding quickly to these risks, such as, by changing delivery routes, expediting orders or even rescheduling (Computer Economics, 2014), to decrease delays and long lead times resulting from such unforeseen events.

O'Leary (2011: 125) further noted that platforms such as Twitter can also be used as a means to communicate with consumers and stakeholders about the arrivals and departure of shipments, thus increasing customer service delivery and facilitating end-to-end visibility, through easy tracking of products.

Market Sensitivity

Market sensitivity shows how easily and efficiently the supply chain can capture relevant and useful information about the needs and wants of customers in the fashion industry supply chain (Christopher et al, 2004: 371). Initiating two-way conversations with supply chain stakeholders or monitoring user-generated information from final customers such as fashion influencers and their followers, through blogs and other social media platforms, for example Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, is not only important for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (O'Leary, 2011) but it can enable companies to become more aware of the responses potential consumers have to particular products and services and the feedback and expectations of consumers. This information is useful for increasing accuracy in future demand for trends and facilitates speed-to-market, better prediction of emerging trends and responsiveness to the needs of customers and other stakeholders. Knowledge on this is relevant as an input to a supply chain's scheduling and production capacity (Heizer and Render, 2011: 137). It is also useful for product assortment planning and better product placements within stores, through analysing what consumers discuss on social platforms (Natoli, 2013).

Process Integration

Process Integration focuses on the seamless integration of processes, product design and movement (Christopher et al., 2004: 371). Internal integration is seen with companies such as

Microsoft which has utilised Yammer, a social media tool with similar characteristics as Twitter and Facebook, to communicate with over 100 000 of its employees globally (Miller, 2013). Through this tool, Microsoft employees have found an open and quick platform to communicate ideas and share content. This has allowed better means for internal integration, innovation, responsiveness and transparency amongst employees (Miller, 2013). External integration can be seen through Source Map, which is a platform which not only allows companies and customers to see the origins of each element of a final product, but allows stakeholders to collaborate during product design (Herrera, 2011).

Network based

With over 300 small subcontractors involved in Zara's network, Zara requires a very strategic approach to managing each of these relationships, in order for them to be beneficial to the company achieving its goals (Christopher et al, 2004: 371). The network based dimension thus, evaluates the extended supply chain's capacity to sustain strategic relationships with the focal company's stakeholders (Christopher et al, 2004: 371). Weaver (2013) discussed the potential social media has for enabling companies to facilitate Supplier Relationship Management (SRM). The author suggested the potential that tools, like Google+, have for helping companies administer training of suppliers online. Weaver (2013) further commended social media initiatives such as Supplier Wire, which enables suppliers of all sizes to improve their performance, through provision of '*educational material, video tips and supplier testimonials*'. Such initiatives establish trust between companies and their suppliers and enable the sharing and implementation of best practices throughout the supply chain, to improve system-wide performance.

Figure 2 gives a summary of the current uses of social media discussed in the above sections and some of the applications present for use in the supply chain.

Figure 2: Summary of social media usage in the agile supply chain

Virtual Integration	Market Sensitivity	Process Integration	Network Based
● Fast identification and communication of risks. ● Easier SCP. ● Tracking of shipments. ● End-to-end visibility. ● Increased Supply Chain Risk Management. ● Collaborative planning. <i>Kinaxis, Twitter, Source Map</i>	● Two-way conversations with internal and external customers. ● Monitoring of user-generated information. ● Facilitates speed-to-market. ● Better prediction and capturing of emerging trends. ● Responsiveness to the needs of customers and other stakeholders. ● Better product assortment planning and product placements. <i>Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Youtube.</i>	● Seamless integration of processes ● Useful during product design. ● Encourages innovation. ● Collaborative design. ● Allows for transparency. <i>Yammer, Source Map, Social Enterprise Resource Planning, Freight Friend.</i>	● Training of stakeholders. ● Facilitates SRM. ● Improved performance of suppliers. <i>Google+, Supplier Wire, Yammer, Source Map, Social Text, Blogs.</i>

Although adoption is slow, existing research, from authors such as Gonzalez (2013) and O’Leary (2011) shows that the potential use of social media continues to grow, with more companies becoming open to its application and benefits to their supply chains. However, while information continues to grow on the use of social media in the supply chain in general, not much focus has been given to the potential social media has to the agile supply chain. Existing studies have focused largely on the current slow adoption of the technology (Gonzalez, 2013). This study, therefore, aims to match the needs of the South African fashion industry supply chain to the features and potential benefits social media presents.

Theoretical framework

The research will be based on the Agile Supply Chain Framework which was established by Harrison, Christopher and Van Hoek in 1999 (Christopher et al, 2004: 371). The framework was developed to give a more detailed understanding of the components of agile supply chains, in order to determine if various supply chains are agile. The Agile Supply Chain Framework has four dimensions that include virtual integration, market sensitivity, process integration and network based (Christopher et al, 2004: 370). This framework is useful for the study because it will allow the researcher to analyse and measure the extent to which current practices in the South African fashion industry's supply chain, facilitate agility in these four areas. It is also necessary to reveal if social media has the potential to help supply chains improve agility in these areas.

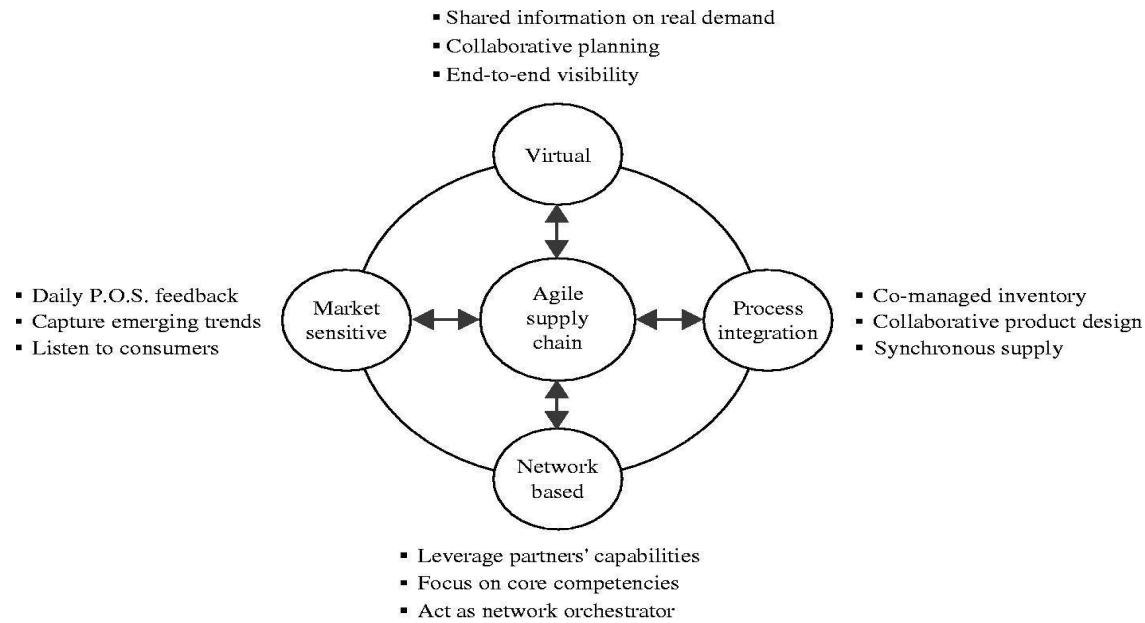
1st Construct: Virtual Integration; According to Christopher et al (2004: 370), this construct shows the ability of the supply chain stakeholders to collaborate and exchange real-time information. The information gathered through this integration can be used to ensure that all supply chain stakeholders utilise the same information in order to meet the real demands of consumers. This construct thus focuses on the need for agile supply chains to maintain end-to-end visibility.

2nd Construct: Market Sensitivity; This framework suggests that an agile supply chain should be sensitive to the needs and wants of consumers and this is traditionally revealed by point-of-sale information. (Christopher et al, 2004: 370).

3rd Construct: Process Integration; This construct assesses the ability of the supply chain to seamlessly integrate processes and product movement along the supply chain through 'virtual teams'. This is done so that inventory management and product design are done collaboratively in order to ensure that the supply chain is flexible enough to be responsive to any changes or disruptions that may occur (Christopher et al, 2004: 371).

4th Construct: Network Based; This construct measures the complex supply chain's ability to maintain strategic relationships with stakeholders coordinated by the focal company.

Figure 3: Agile Supply Chain Framework



Source: Christopher et al, 2004: 371.

Application of the theory; this framework will be used to explore the needs and challenges of South African fashion industry supply chain stakeholders and be used to assess the qualities and characteristics of social media which can improve agility:

1st Virtual Integration; This construct will be used to investigate the existing ability of the supply chain stakeholders to collaborate and exchange real-time information through end-to-end visibility. It will then be used to identify social media's ability to integrate stakeholders.

2nd Market Sensitivity; this will help the researcher analyse current practices used to identify the needs of customers and then evaluate social media's ability to capture relevant information about the target market, which will be useful for determining the market's demand for fashion products.

3rd Process integration; using this construct, the study will identify current strategies used to integrate processes in the South African fashion industry's supply chain. It will then be used to measure the ability for social media to seamlessly align processes and inventory management for flexibility and responsiveness to occur.

4th Network based; this idea will allow the researcher to assess current practices used to coordinate stakeholders. It will further be used to measure the ability of social media to help the focal company coordinate and maintain strategic relationships with its network of stakeholders.

The chosen framework will help the researcher analyse the current needs of the industry and identify if social media will help facilitate the various components of an agile supply chain. While the framework will allow the researcher to compare the characteristics of agile supply chains to those of social media, it does not visibly allow the researcher to measure the financial costs and benefits of using social media to increase agility. In order to address this issue, the researcher shall cover the financial costs and benefits of using social media for each of the characteristics presented by the framework. The framework will allow the researcher to give a different perspective for the use of social media, as not just a tool for socialising and marketing but as an investment that can be used to increase the agility of the supply chain. The framework will also be used to investigate both the benefits and challenges of social media in the supply chain.

Significance/Importance of the study

This study, to the researcher's knowledge, is the first to analyse the potential role social media has for improving agility in the South African fashion industry supply chain. The study aims to analyse the importance of agility to the South African fashion industry, the current gaps present in this area and how social media technology can be implemented to bridge these gaps. It shall analyse all aspects of the technology, focusing on how social media can gather relevant information about the market environment, the role the technology may play in terms of contributing to decision-making processes, integrating the supply chain stakeholders and processes along with examining the technology's usability, feasibility and practicality in these areas. The research will contribute to a more clear understanding of social media's role in the fashion industry supply chain. It will benefit the South African economy and preserve the local industry through improving the performance of South African local fashion brands and helping them gain a competitive advantage compared to international brands in the country, competing for the same target markets.

Justification

While many companies have dismissed the use of social media as only effective in marketing, a thorough study on the topic will provide the South African fashion industry with more detailed and objective information to make calculated decisions about the value of social media to improving agility in the supply chain. Without this study, South African companies may lag behind supply chain technological developments and become more vulnerable to the negative effects of reduced agility. Without this study, South African companies may also become vulnerable to competition from more agile international brands such as Zara, which can have consequences to the growth of the economy.

Research Methodology

Research Approaches/ Paradigms

Research approaches can be divided into two categories. These categories are qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative approach, which is also known as the *positivists* approach, limits the research to what the researcher can objectively evaluate. Natural-scientific measurements are used which do not take the subjective opinions of respondents into much consideration (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005: 6). The quantitative approach is opposed by the qualitative approach, which is sometimes referred to as the *anti-positivists* approach. This approach maintains that the *positivists* approach should only be used in scientific laboratories and cannot be entirely justified when dealing with human respondents and their behaviours (Welman et al., 2005: 6). The study will make use of quantitative methods of collecting data.

The quantitative method is useful for this study because it is based on objective information. This method was chosen for this study because of its ability to reduce the effects of subjectivity on the objective benefits or costs of social media in the fashion industry (Welman et al., 2005:9).

Study site

The study shall be conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The KwaZulu-Natal province is one of nine provinces in the country. Due to the escalating growth in the region's economy and its proximity to the ports, there are a variety of supply chain stakeholders present in the area, making it suitable for the study.

Target population

The target population for this study is executives and supply chain officers. Edcon, Mr Price Group, Truworths and The Foschini Group shall be the target companies chosen for the study, due to their competitive nature and strategic positions in the South African fashion industry.

Sample

In order to gather the primary data for the study, a sample of the population of fashion industry supply chain stakeholders will be used.

Sampling method

To choose a sample from the population, the researcher shall use non-probability sampling. It was earlier noted in the delimitation that only respondents present in the KwaZulu-Natal area will be used. This reveals that all other possible respondents in areas outside of KwaZulu-Natal, will not have equal opportunities to participate in the study (Welman et al, 2005:67).

Judgment sampling shall be used to choose the companies which the researcher shall use for the sample. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 277), judgment sampling '*involves the choice of subjects who are most advantageously placed or in the best position to provide the information required*'. Edcon, Truworths, Mr Price Group and the Foschini Group have thus been chosen due to their competitive positions in the retail market in South Africa.

Sampling and sample size

The sample size shall be taken from both executives and managers, and supply chain officers in all areas such as Purchasing, Operations and Logistics and Physical distribution, of each of the companies approached for the study. While the choice of technology is strategic and would require the opinions of top management, it can be assumed that supply chain officers in these companies shall make more use of the technology during their daily operations. It would thus be important to gather more information from them. The sample size for this study shall comprise of twenty executives and managers and forty officers.

Data collection instrument

Information for this study shall be gathered using questionnaires. This research instrument is suitable for the study because it will allow the researcher to get an in-depth and objective understanding of the needs of the industry, in order to determine the potential and opportunities social media may have to improve agility.

Questionnaires

There are two types of questions that can be used in questionnaires; open-ended and closed-ended (Welman et al, 2005: 174). Open-ended questions allow for the respondents to give an answer that is not chosen and listed by the researcher on the questionnaire. Closed-ended questions give respondents a list of possible answers to select from. The research shall use a

hybrid of both open-ended and closed-ended questions to give a more balanced response (Welman et al, 2005: 175).

The questionnaires shall be used for all respondents. The questions in these questionnaires shall be based on the theoretical framework and objectives of the study. The questionnaires shall be both physically distributed and electronically distributed to respondents.

Prior to the physical distribution of the questionnaires, appointments shall be made to distribute the questionnaires and respond to any possible queries. Emailing the questionnaires may be an option in the event that respondents are unable to meet with the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaires needs to be analysed for the study. A variety of elements shall be taken into consideration during the analysis of the research instruments. Before data analysis can take place, the researcher shall inspect each of the returned questionnaires to ensure that all questions have been answered. This is necessary to maintain the reliability and validity of the study. In the event that some questions have been omitted, the researcher shall contact the respondents and find the reasons for this. This shall make the researcher aware of any questions that may need more clarity and may be useful to also make the respondents aware of any questions that were unintentionally omitted (Welman et al, 2005: 213).

The information gathered from the questionnaires shall be coded. Descriptive analysis shall be used to analyse data from questionnaires. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) will be used for the analysis and transformation of data (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 365). The data will provide the researcher with trends and other relevant information necessary for the study. This information shall be used to construct the findings of the study (Welman et al, 2005: 214).

Data Quality Control

According to Welman et al (2005:145), *'reliability is concerned with the findings of the research and relates to the credibility of the findings'*. A pre-test shall be conducted to ensure that the questions in the questionnaires are understandable and not ambiguous. A minimum of ten respondents will be sufficient for the pretest. The researcher will also be required to show that the content of the study is valid. Testing for validity will enable the researcher to make certain

that the information collected through the study is representative of the entire population of the South African fashion industry supply chain stakeholders. Validity is necessary to ensure that the research has not deviated from what is reality for the entire population of a study (Welman et al, 2005:142). The instruments will be tested for construct validity. This will show whether the information that the questionnaires are asking for is relevant and useful for the topic at hand (Welman et al, 2005:142). The questions asked shall be based on the conceptual framework used in the study in order to ensure this.

Ethical considerations

Ethical practices shall be maintained throughout the entire research process. All information collected for the secondary data shall be referenced and the authors of these shall be sufficiently acknowledged (Welman et al, 2005:182). In addition, ethical clearance shall be issued before the primary research takes place to ensure that the institution that the researcher will be working through, University of KwaZulu-Natal, is satisfied by the manner in which the data for the study will be collected. All respondents will be asked to participate on a voluntary basis and shall not receive any form of compensation in exchange for their participation. In order to serve as proof of this voluntary participation, an informed consent form shall be given to each of the participants. This form shall give the participants detailed information about the study, why it is being conducted and how the privacy of the information collected will be preserved. Each participant will reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any point before the completion of the study (Welman et al, 2005).

Limitations of the study

There are some limitations to the study. Due to the novelty of the topic, there is limited secondary data available for the construction of the literature review, which is required to give a background on the study. To reduce the effects of this, the researcher shall use descriptive and exploratory research to form the literature review. In addition, the primary research shall be limited to companies present in the KwaZulu-Natal area. In order to address this limitation, retail companies with branches that are also available in other parts of the country shall be included in the sample, as their policies will mostly be consistent throughout the country.

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Appendix A

Research Schedule

Month/Year	Activity	Outcome
August-September 2014	Literature Review	Chapter Two completed
October 2014	Preparation of the research proposal	First draft submitted
November-December 2014	Reviewing the comments made by the supervisor	Amended research proposal focused on supervisor's comments
January 2015	Final amendments to the proposal	Ready for formal academic review
February 2015	Application of Theoretical Framework	Theoretical foundation formulated
	Research methodology	Chapter four completed
	Application for Ethical Clearance	Ethical clearance obtained
March 2015-April 2015	Data collection	Raw data collected
May-June 2015	Data compilation and analysis.	Findings from field study
July 2015	Cleaning of the analysis	Analysis ready
August 2015	Data analysis and presentation	Data analysis and presentation chapter completed
September 2015	Conclusion, recommendations and report	Thesis ready for submission
October 2015	Corrections and binding of final draft	Submission of Thesis

Budget

Item	Estimated Cost in South African Rand
Equipment (laptop, printer, scanner, software)	5,000
Transportation (field study)	5,000
Accommodation	24,000
Services (secretarial, photocopying, printing, and binding)	1,000
Consumables (toner, paper, storage media, and others)	1,000

Miscellaneous	1, 000
Total	R 37,000