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Note if anything has been removed from thesis.

**Fig 2.2 p48 and fig 2.4 p56. Pages 102-239 (published papers). Appendix 4 p300-349 (emails etc).**

When referring to this work, the full bibliographic details must be given as follows:

Harridge-March, S (2012). *Exploring customer trust and relationships in the online environment*. PhD thesis. Oxford Brookes University.

# EXPLORING CUSTOMER TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

By

Sally Patricia N. Harridge-March

This work is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Oxford Brookes University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy on the basis of published work. Unless otherwise stated, this work is that of the author and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award at any other University.

Date: July 2012

*In memory of Professor Reva Brown, my first motivator and source of inspiration*

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank many people who have been involved in my work and helped me organise these publications into this thesis. The encouragement I have received has been timely, thoughtful and helpful. First, and most importantly, I would like to thank my research partners and co-authors, Sarah Quinton and Nicolas Virtsonis, with whom I have collaborated on many papers, including some of those presented here. Secondly, my thanks are due to Dr. Jackie Clarke, Professor Lyndon Simkin and Dr. David Bowen for their enthusiasm for my work and encouragement to complete this thesis. Finally, I give thanks to my husband, David March, for bullying me into thinking about putting together my publications as a PhD thesis and his continued support, nagging and encouragement to complete it.

## ***Abstract***

This thesis presents eleven selected publications concerning trust and relationships in the online environment. The evolution of the research over ten years showcases the author's dedication to the practical application of marketing for the benefit of organisations and individuals alongside contribution to academic knowledge.

The advent of new technology by way of the internet has added a new dimension to the complexity of marketing strategy and, from a practical point of view, marketers need to incorporate cutting edge technology into their strategic thinking. Existing literature at the time that the author started this research was at the nascent stage and over the period of the research, it became obvious that technology could be used as a tool to help build relationships. Conversely, customers demonstrated varying degrees of trust in both the technologies and the organisations using online-based tools. It became essential, therefore, for organisations to appear trustworthy in order for customers to engage with online marketing platforms and subsequently entrust their purchasing activities to the online environment.

The research appraised in this thesis makes a significant contribution to knowledge about marketing in the online environment and the implications of engendering consumer trust. Six key contributions to knowledge are claimed as a result of this work. Firstly, a framework for using online marketing strategically has been developed. Secondly, an analysis of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework is provided. Thirdly, the author introduces the notion that trust in a brand influences online behaviour by reducing perceived risk, leading to consumers committing to online purchasing. Fourthly, online brand elements used to create credibility of a B2B brand are identified. Fifthly, the author presents an identification of how structural elements of websites can be utilized to differentiate online brands from competitors' offerings. Finally, the author puts forward the proposition that marketers can learn from relationships between contributors to online social networks.

The researcher has utilised a variety of deliberately chosen methodologies, most of which are qualitative. The thesis also contains three secondary contributions related to research design. These are the use of a bought-in, permission-based email list, the innovative use of netnography to elicit rich data from online discussion forums and, finally, content analysis of websites.

The work concludes by offering eight recommendations for future research directions.

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Chapter Overview**

This thesis is based on a collection of eleven papers published over the period 2003 to 2009 (see section 1.3 below) whilst working at Oxford Brookes University (Faculty of Business, Marketing and Operations Management Department). This chapter introduces the programme of research undertaken and lists the aims of this collection of papers submitted in part fulfilment for the PhD by Published Work. The chapter also outlines the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Rationale and importance of the topic**

Online marketing has become a fundamental part of marketing over the last twenty years. Using the search term 'online marketing' shows 3,467 academic papers published up until 2003, compared to 11,327 to 2012. Similarly, indicatively using the search term 'e-marketing' generates 13,521 papers up to 2003 and 31,975 publications up until 2012. The popularity of online marketing in both academic and practitioner press is a reflection of how important the topic is perceived. According to OFCOM (2011) more than three quarters of UK households now have internet access and

almost three quarters of users now shop online. According to CRR research commissioned by Kellkoo in 2012 (Online Retailing 2012), this figure represents 12% of retail sales. UK online sales generated £68.2bn of revenue during 2011 through 37m internet shoppers, making the UK the leading e-retail economy (IMRG 2012). Because of the rapid adoption of technology, but comparatively low percentage of online sales, it is important for both academics and practitioners to understand how consumers view technology and the advantages and disadvantages of using it for purchasing purposes. Trust and relationships are especially important for consumers in the online environment in order to overcome perceptions of riskiness in purchasing online.

Similarly, consumers are motivated to both contribute to and take notice of product reviews and/or social media platforms in which brands and online suppliers are discussed (O'Brien 2011) and this has led to consumers being able to voice opinions about brands. This is contrary to the traditional role of the marketer to control what is said about their brands in the media. Consequently, understanding the power of social media to comment on brands has become essential for the contemporary marketing manager.

The author has been responsible for teaching under-graduate and post-graduate students the value of incorporating online marketing into marketing strategy. She has also led 'Knowledge Transfer' and consultancy projects that focused on the use of technology to aid marketers improve relationships with customers. This experience has reinforced the author's determination to apply contemporary thinking to practical marketing endeavours and to consider the implications for those working in varied organisations.

### ***1.3 Programme of Research and Objectives***

The author started this programme of research after overhearing a colleague's conversation with an undergraduate student. The colleague was advising the student that online marketing was not suitable as a dissertation topic, because, he said, there was insufficient academic research on which to base any study. This accidental eavesdropping was the catalyst for the author to explore a fledgling research topic and make it her own. An initial investigation into the academic literature determined that there was a need to position online marketing within an overall strategic marketing framework and this led to the author conducting both conceptual and empirical research. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, the author adopted a pragmatic philosophy (Burke Johnson

2004). This meant that research methods of qualitative and quantitative nature could be mixed fruitfully to answer current and relevant research questions. Moreover, the researcher was keen to embrace topical, avant-garde and novel research methods which were well suited to the exploratory nature of the research into a fresh and under-developed topic.

This programme of research is designed to increase knowledge of both marketing strategy and building trust and relationships in the arena of online marketing. Unlike a traditionally designed PhD, where a number of research objectives are outlined at the start of the research period, the research appraised here grew organically over a period of approximately nine years. One publication fed into another and so many are interlinked. The topic of the research grew more complicated over time, developing greater complexity and focus. During the latter stages of the research, this led to the author researching phenomena that did not exist at the start of the programme. The research augments existing marketing theory, develops new frameworks for use by academics and has practical implications for those marketing professionals charged with designing marketing strategy. Specifically, the objectives of this thesis are to:

- 1 Examine online marketing as part of the marketing



framework

- 2 Explore and evaluate the concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment
- 3 Build a framework for brand positioning in the online environment
- 4 Investigate the use of online forums by customers in the online environment, using wine forums as an example
- 5 Develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers

Some of the research undertaken uses wine marketing as its focus. However, most of the results are applicable to other sectors and disciplines.

Whilst not the primary aim of the research, the author made important discoveries about the use of innovative research methods throughout the period of research and these are highlighted in section 1.6

#### ***1.4 List of Published Works***

The published works on which this thesis is based are tabulated in Table 1.1

Paper Number	Authors	Title of Article
Paper 1	Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2003). (claiming 50% of this paper).	On-line Wine – Strategic or Tactical? <i>International Journal of Wine Marketing</i> , Vol. 15, No 1, pp. 34-41
Paper 2	Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2003). (claiming 50% of this paper).	Strategic Interactive Marketing of Wine On-Line – a case of Evolution, <i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i> , Vol. 21, No. 7, pp. 357-362
Paper 3	Harridge-March, S. (2004).	Electronic Marketing: The New Kid on the Block, <i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i> , Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 297-309
Paper 4	Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S. (2005) (claiming 50% of this paper).	Initiation of Trust and Management of Risk in On-Line Retailing: UK On-Line Wine Market, <i>International Journal of Wine Marketing</i> , Vol. 17, No 2, pp. 5-20
Paper 5	Harridge-March, S. (2006).	Can building trust overcome customer perceived risk online? <i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i> , Vol. 24, Issue 7, pp. 746-761
Paper 6	Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2006). (claiming 50% of this paper).	The management of risk and initiation of trust in online purchasing: UK online wine market, <i>International Journal of Information Technology and Management</i> , Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 267-278

Paper 7	Harridge-March, S. (2008).	Guest editorial, <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , Vol. 26, No. 7 pp: 460-464
Paper 8	Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2008). (claiming 50% of this paper)	Trust and online wine purchasing: insights into UK Consumer Behaviour, <i>International Journal of Wine Business Research</i> , Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 68-85
Paper 9	Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2008). (claiming 50% of this paper)	Website Elements in B2B online communications: A case from the UK Print Industry, <i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i> , Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 699-718
Paper 10	Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S (2009). (claiming 50% of this paper)	Virtual Snakes and Ladders: Social Networks and the Relationship Marketing Loyalty Ladder, <i>The Marketing Review</i> , Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 171-181
Paper 11	Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2009). (claiming 50% of this paper)	Brand positioning in the B2B online environment: A case from the UK Print industry, <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , Vol. 16, No. 8, pp. 556-570

**Table 1.1 A Tabulation of the publications contained within the thesis**

For the purposes of introduction, the author outlines below the development of the body of work with reference to specific papers.

### ***1.5 Statement of coherence of the published works***

This research has grown out of a desire to make sense of cutting-edge technology for marketing purposes. The rapid development of internet-based technology has had a major impact on the practice of marketing. Concurrently, academic research in this area has also increased exponentially, as explained in 1.2.

Many different terms are used interchangeably to describe the publications and the activities researched, according to different applications of technology and preferences of individual researchers. These terms include E-Marketing, E-Commerce, Internet Marketing, Web Marketing, Online Marketing, Electronic Marketing and E-Tail. In order to avoid confusion, this thesis will use the term 'online marketing' except when citing the work of others.

The publications presented here include work of both generalist and specialist nature, but what they have in common is the role of the internet in communicating and interacting with customers. The terms 'online marketing', 'e-marketing', 'internet marketing', 'web marketing' and 'electronic marketing' can all be used to describe and categorise every paper presented in this thesis.

At the start of the programme of research, the utilisation of the interactive web was rare and user-generated content non-existent and the academic literature was also scant (see figure 2.1). The publications contained within this thesis build on one another as technology developed, as practitioners adopted online marketing and consumers became more sophisticated in their exploitation of online tools. The thread that binds all of these papers together is the building of trust and forming of relationships in the online environment; latterly intra-customer relationships within online forums.

A number of contributions to knowledge are claimed for this body of research, as follows:

### ***1.6 Contributions to Knowledge***

There are six key contributions to knowledge that result from this body of research. The contributions to knowledge arose from many years of research during the advancement of online marketing and are therefore presented in a chronological order. They are as follows:

- A framework for using online marketing strategically  
(Contribution A)
- An analysis of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework (Contribution B).

- The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online (Contribution C).
- The identification of effective online brand elements used to create credibility of a B2B brand. (Contribution D).
- An identification of how structural elements of websites can be utilised to differentiate online brands from competitors' offerings (Contribution E).
- The proposition that marketers can learn from relationships between contributors to online social networks (Contribution F).

The papers have been cited in the PhD theses of other researchers, many working outside the European Union and USA. As a result of her work in researching online marketing, the author was invited to head-up the Special Interest Group for E-Marketing contained within the UK Academy of Marketing, the Learned Society catering for the needs of marketing researchers, educators and professionals. Whilst in post as Chair, the author organised the first Special Interest Group Conference on E-Marketing. This event took place in 2008 at Oxford Brookes University.

The earlier papers presented here examine whether online retail marketing encompassed strategic thought or was merely a tactic employed by retailers, 'bolted on' to their existing distribution or communication channels. Later papers progressed to concentrate on trust and risk in the online environment and how relationships between internet users are important to marketers.

Almost all of the papers develop frameworks to assist marketers in the use of effective online marketing. These frameworks are also of use to existing and future scholars in the marketing arena. Table 1.2 is offered as an aide memoire to summarise the association(s) between the eleven papers, each of the five research aims and the six key contributions to knowledge.

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
Paper 1	✓				✓	✓	✓				
Paper 2	✓				✓	✓	✓				
Paper 3	✓				✓	✓	✓				
Paper 4	✓	✓			✓			✓			
Paper 5	✓	✓			✓			✓			
Paper 6	✓	✓			✓			✓			
Paper 7	✓						✓				
Paper 8	✓	✓			✓			✓			
Paper 9	✓		✓		✓					✓	
Paper 10	✓			✓	✓						✓
Paper 11	✓		✓		✓				✓		

**Table 1.2 An illustration of which research publications contribute to each of the research objectives and contributions to knowledge. Source: Author**

In addition to the key contributions to knowledge demonstrated in Table 1.2, a number of secondary contributions are claimed, as illustrated in Table 1.3. These relate to the innovative use of research design and are further explained in Chapter 3.



<b>Paper Number</b>	<b>Online questionnaire to collect data from bought-in email list of respondents</b>	<b>Content Analysis of websites employed</b>	<b>Netnography undertaken to acquire rich data from online discussion forums</b>
8	✓		
10			✓
9 and 11		✓	

**Table 1.3: Innovative Application of Research Design Source: Author**

### ***1.7 Structure of the thesis***

The first section in Chapter 4 contains an overview of each of the eleven submitted publications (1 to 11), explaining how each paper originated and summarises the key contribution to knowledge and overall thrust. The author appraises the contribution of each paper to the objectives and the whole programme of research. The second section contains copies of the eleven (11) papers submitted for the doctorate. Many of these publications were worked on concurrently but have been completed and published at different times owing to the various constraints of the journals for which they were destined.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion for the thesis and presents eight proposals for areas of future research. Appendix 1

contains the references used throughout this thesis. Appendix 2 provides a list of citations of the publications within this thesis which verifies their impact. Appendix 3 contains confirmation of the contribution made by the author by the co-authors of papers 1,2,4,6 8,9,10 and 11. Finally, Appendix 4 includes several invitations to review academic papers and books demonstrating the perceived influence of the author in the academic area in question. It also contains other items of evidence attesting to the author's credibility as an acknowledged expert in the area, including invitations to supervise PhD students.

The thesis is structured as a logical progression. However, the reader may choose to read the publications presented in Chapter 4 first, and then continue to read the Critical Appraisal and Literature Overview in Chapter 2, as this route will be equally easy to follow. Each of the papers contains relevant literature, is a stand-alone piece of work and can be read independently of the others presented.

## **2 CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter delineates the body of research, the aims of these papers and explains how each paper was developed.

Although each individual paper has a comprehensive literature review, this chapter puts the publications in context of research in each area of interest, including both long-accepted publications and the latest thinking on the subjects.

### **2.2 Contextual positioning**

This section reviews the relevant literature relating to the aims of the submitted work. These are to (i) Examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework; (ii) Explore the concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment; (iii) Build a framework for brand positioning in the online environment; (iv) Investigate the use of online forums by customers in the online environment, using wine forums as an example; and (v) Develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers.

Each of the published papers presented as part of this thesis appraises the relevant literature at the time of publication.

Because this topic has developed rapidly, it has generated significant academic interest. Thus, the literature has widened and published research is more comprehensive. This chapter combines both the literature presented in the papers with more recent literature to verify the relevance of the author's research. The context and contribution of the author's publications will be explained so that the discussion that follows relates clearly to the extent of knowledge at the time of the publications resulting from the research undertaken. The five subject areas within the literature review comprise; the development of internet marketing in relation to marketing as a discipline, relationships in online communities, trust in the online environment, relationships within communities and branding online. The author has highlighted under each subject area, which of the published papers were influenced by the topic in question.

### ***2.3 Contemporary Marketing and Online Marketing***

This thesis concerns marketing and the way it has advanced as a result of the availability of marketing online. There have been many definitions of marketing ranging from a philosophy, a function and a strategy (Gibson *et al*, 1993). By 1998, Boone and Kurtz enhanced the American Marketing Association's definition of 1960 to include building and maintaining customer relationships. This development is

particularly relevant to this thesis because the author's work focuses on relationships between organisations and their customers as well as intra-customer relationships. Since then, marketing has evolved from being simply concerned with profit-making activities to an all-embracing ethos which drives an organisation in a customer-centric manner as acknowledged by The UK's professional body for marketers, The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2007) and the American Marketing Association (2008).

The latter defines marketing as:

*"Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."*

These later attempts to define marketing include an acknowledgement that marketing is concerned with more than the transaction and should consider wider stakeholders than the traditional vendor and consumer relationship.

Contemporary marketing, for the purposes of this thesis, has been defined by the author as:

*"The strategic management function that plans and implements marketing activities to develop long term relationships in order to meet organisational objectives, whilst satisfying stakeholders' and customers' changing needs".*

Whilst it is accepted that marketing is used outside the realm of commercial enterprises, this thesis focuses only on

organisations that market products with a view to achieving a profitable outcome. Early marketing writers developed the ideas of McCarthy (1960) in promoting the 4Ps of marketing (the marketing mix), subsequently updated by Booms and Bitner, 1981 to the 7Ps to be more appropriate for the marketing of services. Marketers could manipulate the elements of this mix in order to bring about their marketing objectives within organisational constraints, or in response to changes in the external environment (Kotler, 1997; Slater *et al*, 2010) including those of customer needs.

Changing customer needs are particularly relevant to this body of research because technology has forced both marketers and consumers to change the way they conduct business (Parsons, 1997). The author has devoted many years researching the influence of technology on marketing. Her research originated in 2003 when online marketing in the UK was relatively unusual. Her initial work focused on how the marketing concept was beginning to change because of the opportunities that marketers had to include online marketing within their activities.

## **2.4 Online marketing as part of contemporary marketing**

Papers 1, 2 and 3 are closely concerned with this topic. See Table 1.2
--

Today's marketing management has been forced to incorporate online marketing as part of the practice (Davis *et al*, 1999), particularly as a platform for transactions (Phelan, 1996; Doherty *et al*, 1999; Reibstein, 2002; Chong *et al*, 2010). The technologies which brought about the internet have developed rapidly and revolutionised communications between business and consumers (Mowery and Simcoe, 2002). Whilst the internet has become part of people's daily life, it is important to stress that the World Wide Web (WWW) was only invented 20 years ago (Wang and Chen, 2010). Given that 42.6% of UK consumers buy something online at least once a week (eCommera, 2010) it is worth reminding ourselves that the first recognised sales transaction occurred as late as 1994, some eighteen years ago at the time of writing (Gilbert, 2004). As those using the online environment at that time were predominantly technical people, it follows that the first-acknowledged online transaction was for computer equipment (by The Internet Shopping Network).

<b>Consumer Viewpoint</b>	<b>Academic Literature Approaches</b>	<b>Marketer Viewpoint</b>
<b>Moving towards multi-channel purchasing</b>	<b>Internet marketing E-marketing Online marketing E-business</b>	<b>Terms almost indistinguishable</b>
<b>Convenient Cost Effective</b>	<b>Distribution Tool</b>	<b>Improved Reach Saves Cost</b>
<b>Aids pre-purchase research Improved communication (pre and post purchase)</b>	<b>Communications Tool</b>	<b>Enables personalisation Data gathering through Interaction</b>

**Table 2.1 A Summary of the Development of Online Marketing from Consumer, Academic and Marketer Perspectives. Source: Author**



Table 2.1 identifies three different perspectives of the advent of internet technologies. The first column highlights how the consumer has viewed online marketing, the second highlights the key academic issues from the literature and the final column presents the marketing practitioner implications.

The internet has witnessed a number of phases since its inception. At first it was primarily for the use of researchers and academics but shifted from public to private administration which brought about the emergence of a market for access using telecommunications networks, leading to commercial content and applications (Mowery and Simcoe, 2002).

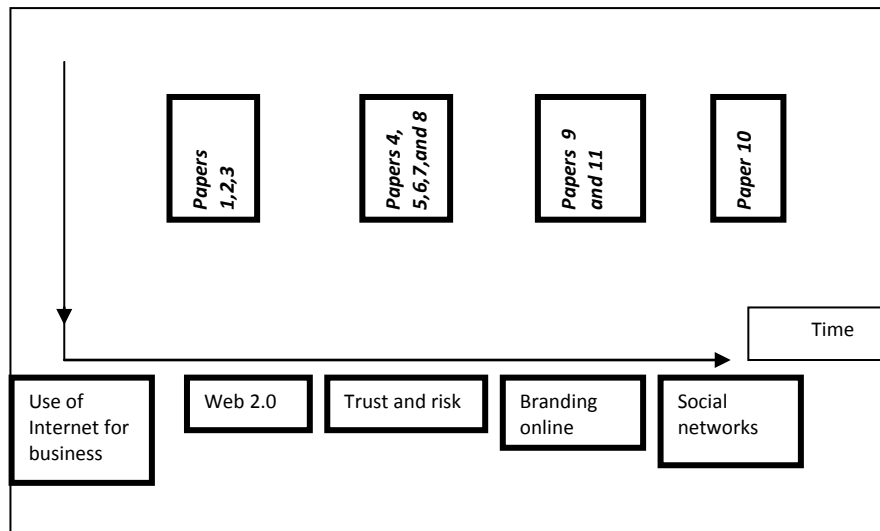
Following the advent of Web 2.0 (the interactive web) marketers and consumers could interact. With Web 2.0 no special technological capability or skills are needed to access and utilise online resources. This development has meant a rapid acceptance of the technology, there being 2,095,006,005 users world wide as of March 2011, which is the latest available data (Internet World Stats 2011). Research undertaken on behalf of AMD by YouGov in the autumn of 2008 concluded that internet access was more important than a car, demonstrating the rapid adoption of the technology (YouGov, 2008).

Throughout the development of the World Wide Web, individuals have continually adapted and changed the way in which they interact with the web and those hosting sites within it (Lascau and Clow, 2008). It is now the user who is in control of the way that they access information, taking control away from the marketer (Robins, 2000). Browsers now utilise online resources for pre-purchase research and comparison (Forrester, 2011), as well as reviewing and commenting on goods and service experiences (Huang & Yang, 2008). Customers have the opportunity to produce their own materials which may be in conflict with messages put out by marketers (Webster, 2009; Dahlén *et al*, 2010) who have traditionally sought to control the content of communication about the brand (Berthon *et al*, 2009).

Marketing is conventionally customer-centred and, as a result, marketers have had to respond to customers' desires to access information and source products using latest technology (Stone, 2009). Today's technology-savvy customers expect to be able to view and order what they need through easy to use and efficient channels whilst being entertained and amused by websites. In return for marketers'

efforts to engage their customers, website users can develop affinity and loyalty for specific websites and the brands contained within those websites (Flavian *et al*, 2006).

When the author first commenced research in this emergent field of study, there was relatively little published academic research. Therefore, her research in the subject has provoked interest on the part of other researchers and contributed to knowledge. Figure 2.1 charts where each of the papers contained within this thesis fits into the development of literature. At first, few academics actively researched the topic, resulting in a time lag of academic publications in comparison to practitioner engagement. Further sophistication of the internet resulted in Web 2.0 (or the interactive web) which brought about interest in internet marketing from a relationship point of view. Literature then focused on lack of consumer trust in the online environment. Latterly, the expansion of social media has generated academic interest in the use of social networks for marketing purposes.



**Figure 2.1. Development of themes in the literature over time. Source: Author**

As long ago as 1997, Hoffman and Novak suggested that online marketing has created a new paradigm but this evolving area has developed and widened from being virtually non-existent to being fully integrated into the marketing discipline literature. Online marketing is no longer a separate branch of learning within marketing because it is now pervasive within marketing practice rather than the exception to the rule. Online marketing became an important stream within the marketing literature from the early 2000s (Pandya and Arenyeka-Diamond, 2002).

From the late 1990s to the current day most organisations have introduced some form of internet presence (Doherty *et al*, 1999, Phelan, 1996, Reibstein, 2002; Doherty and Chadwick,

2009). Some enterprises use their websites purely for conveying information whilst others use them for more sophisticated purposes including online transactions or entering into a dialogue with their customers (Lockett and Blackman, 2001).

In the early 2000s it was thought that the medium presented great commercial potential because of its cost savings (Hackney and Griffiths, 2002; Pandya and Arenyeka-Diamond, 2002) and this encouraged many organisations to use the internet as complementary, or even as an alternative, to their existing marketing activities, adding variety to the channels available (Webb, 2002). Other business benefits included a reduction in the time-lag to market, increasing the reach of both communications and potential markets, learning about customers, the facility to customise goods and services and the potential for one-to-one marketing (Biswas and Krishnam, 2004; Harris and Rae, 2010). Three different types of organisation began to emerge – those who did not use any form of online marketing, those who integrated online marketing into their operations (described as ‘clicks and bricks’ or ‘clicks and mortar organisations’) and those whose business functions were conducted solely in the online environment, described as ‘pureplay’ organisations (Ashworth *et al*, 2006).

Some businesses came about only because of the technical capabilities of internet technologies (for example Amazon, iTunes, Lastminute.com and EBay), without which they could not exist. Initially, many commercial entities experimented with online operations and rushed to have an online presence because they thought they ought to (Doherty *et al*, 2009; Schoenbachler and Gordon, 2002). Activity was aimed at getting customers to buy online instead of in the store so to achieve operational advantages (Graham *et al*, 1996). However, customers need to perceive a greater personal benefit from purchasing online. This is often lower cost or some other greater benefit such as convenience (Bromage, 2001; Bevan and Murphy, 2001; Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011). Promotion online has been seen by some marketers as more attractive than offline media despite customer aversion to the intrusive nature of some messages (O'Connor and Galvin, 2001; Rettie *et al*, 2002). However, the direct nature of online marketing has enabled immediate communication and response (Allan and Chudry, 2000).

Much research was undertaken in the area of the dimensions that consumers consider important when evaluating online experiences, such as functional elements (Lascau and Clow, 2008); perceived ease of use (Madu and Madu, 2002); site

design (Cox and Dale, 2002); security (Lee and Lin, 2005) and quality of outcome (Bauer *et al*, 2006). These dimensions, with the benefit of hindsight, seem to only tell part of the story as they are visit and transaction specific. Whilst some marketers may be satisfied with a single website visit or transaction, the trend has moved towards building longer-term relationships with customers in order to maximise revenue over longer periods of time (Harker and Egan, 2006).

Nowadays, websites are designed with the aim of creating 'sustained engagement' (Harris and Rae (2010) or playfulness (Bonera 2011) i.e. keeping the customer interested and sufficiently engaged to make them re-visit the site often and be positively engaged with the brand through their experience(s) online. Shopping online has been deemed to have hedonic incentives in addition to more rational incentives, such as convenience (Al-Maghrabi and Dennis, 2011). This reinforces the idea that online marketing invokes an emotional rather than rational or logical response on the part of the browser, which ties in with the emotional response demonstrated by loyalty to specific websites. The positive and pleasurable experiences achieved by customers during visits to online marketing sites could fall into the domain of customer experience management, a concept that embraces both

relationship management and the quality of the experience (Palmer, 2010).

In recent years, the internet has facilitated communication between users, leading to the so-called “social web” that may embrace a variety of sites designed expressly for the purpose of social networking in the online environment. Such websites not only allow existing friends to communicate virtually, but also facilitate strangers to connect to each other based on their shared interests, opinions or activities (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Initially designed for younger people, such as students, examples include Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and Twitter. However, research published by the UK’s Office of National Statistics (2011) show that over half of UK internet browsers use social networking sites.

Social networks include more specialist consumer forums that internet users can utilise to exchange opinions or seek information on a specific subject, such as travel advice, high-involvement purchases or computer games. In such virtual environments, contributors share experiences and express their judgements, beliefs and attitudes to marketers’ offerings.



Over the last twenty years, research and opinion about consumer behaviour when undertaking pre-purchase research or undertaking a transaction has been very popular.

Consumer decision making has been changed by technology both in terms of pre-purchase information gathering, actual and post-purchase behaviour. The author has concentrated on the building of trust and relationships in the online environment as a pre-cursor to online marketers acquiring customers. Her most recent research has investigated how consumers develop relationships through their common interests and experiences through the exploitation of social media.

## ***2.5 Relationships within the online environment***

**Papers 1, 2 and 11 are closely concerned with this topic.**

**See table 1.2**

Traditionally, marketing has been the strategic function charged with developing relationships with customers (Varadarajan, 2010). Acquiring retaining and developing a meaningful relationship with new customers has become imperative to the contemporary marketer (Boujena and Johnston, 2011). The activities that organisations undertake in order to develop long term and meaningful relationships with

customers is 'relationship marketing', a term which is often used as an all-embracing phrase to describe direct marketing or database marketing (Tapp, 2005), activities which have been 'fashionable' for approximately twenty years (Harker and Egan, 2006). This is because organisations that are able to get to know their customers by acquiring relevant data are more likely to develop long-term and meaningful, trusting relationships with their customers (Kogut & Zander, 1993; Casielles *et al*, 2005; Vavra, 1995).

Relationship Marketing is currently considered a management approach to cover all marketing activities and generate important advantages in its implementation, both in firms and for customers. However, there is much dissent about what relationship marketing entails. Frow *et al*, (2011) make a distinction between relationship marketing, which involves all the parties to a marketing relationship including intermediaries and other influencers, and CRM and Customer Management:

*"CRM involves the strategic management of relationships utilising, where appropriate, technological tools" (p.79)*

This leads the reader to understand that most of what is called relationship marketing in today's parlance is, by their definition, customer relationship management.

Whilst customers may perceive the benefit of disclosing information about their likes and preferences they may be reluctant to do so owing to privacy concerns (Zimmer *et al*, 2010), an issue discussed further in section 2.7 regarding trust and risk in the online environment. Further, some customers show a reluctance to develop a relationship with an organisation despite concentrated efforts at relationship-building on the part of the marketer. However, organisations are more likely to be successful in this regard by concentrating their efforts at an individual and personal level (Palmatier *et al*, 2008).

Technology facilitates the collection of data from customers' online website visits, such as interests and preferences, and this knowledge enables behavioural-tailoring of marketing activity (Gilmore, 2008, Biswas and Krishnam, 2004) and can assist in understanding customers' pre-purchase choice processes (Bucklin *et al*, 2002). Whilst marketers may have undertaken segmentation activities as second-nature, the act of segmentation pushes them to classify customers as part of a group of like-minded people rather than as individuals (Nwakanma *et al*, 2007), which would be counter-productive.

Organisations can appear to anticipate individual customer needs more easily than before with the advent of database technologies (O'Malley and Tynan 2000), by personalising messages and making individually-tailored offers based on customer needs (Nwakanma *et al*, 2007).

However, Leahy (2011) avows that much relationship marketing is actually impersonal and intrusive. In other words, it is anything but relationship marketing but mass-marketing by any other name. One early proponent of relationship marketing, Christian Grönroos, outlined four components of relationship marketing: communication, action, dialogue and value (Grönroos, 1998). Grönroos suggested that organisations have to make a commitment to communicate with their customers, enter into a dialogue, offer something of value and take action on feedback and communications in a personal and tailored manner. In the early days of online marketing, this was not as easy as one would think. Having the technical capability to build systems that allow for customer interaction and staff available to manage such dialogues proved a barrier for many companies. Browsers also needed to perceive such communications as valuable rather than just more marketing hyperbole.

Grönroos' components of relationship marketing were proposed for organisations practising relationship marketing in general and not specifically in the online environment, nevertheless, the foundations are equally transferable to the online environment. Customers may want a relationship with an organisation and a key success factor of relationship marketing is trust (Chattananchriston and Trimetsoontorn, 2011). Paper 1 in this thesis uses these components to judge whether wine providers practise relationship marketing, further developed in Paper 2. The latter puts forward a continuum of strategic online marketing. Paper 11 considers relationships between members of a social network.

## ***2.6 Relationships With and Between Customers***

**Papers 1, 2 and 11 are closely concerned with this topic.**

**See Table 1.2**

Marketers have traditionally viewed relationships as beneficial as longer-term relationships reflect the importance of co-operation and trust between the parties involved and consequently result in sales over a longer period of time (Jušcius and Grigate 2011). This may be because the relationship offers competitive advantage which is difficult to

copy (Sherrell and Bejou, 2007). Customers have become cynical about the claims of marketers and, therefore, are more likely to believe information given to them by a friend or by a contact in a social network or by viral marketing (Bampo *et al*, 2008), some of which may be 'unplanned, unsolicited brand encounters' (Dahlén *et al*, 2010). Online communities (often called 'social media') have facilitated the exchange of information and brought about brand democratisation (Neisser, 2006). In other words, marketers have been forced to release control about what is said about their brand in the media.

Because of the potential power and influence of intra-customer communication, it may be that an ideal customer is one who buys little and/or on an infrequent basis but has the potential to influence many new customer purchases (Smith and Zook, 2011). Contemporary marketers have found themselves focussing on technology and innovation in order to help them build brand relationships (Harris and Rae 2010) but may find that customer-driven marketing messages are random and unmanageable (Bampo *et al*, 2008) because of the democratisation outlined above where customers have become co-producers of product and/or brand information (Shao, 2009).

Given the move towards developing long-term relationships, rather than purely a one-off transaction, the author was interested to see how this philosophy might be transferred to the online retail environment. Together with her research partner, she investigated the online offerings of wine retailers, which resulted in the publication of Papers 1 and 2. These two papers contribute to the achievement of objectives 1 and 5.

## ***2.7 Personalisation***

<p><b>All papers are closely concerned with this topic. See Table 1.2.</b></p>
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Since the early 1980s, marketers have moved away from mass marketing and have tended to adopt segmentation strategies that involved profiling and multi-variable targeting strategies. New technology has been influential in bringing about this very important change on the practice of marketing (Goldsmith, 2004) whereby marketers can use data acquired through customer website interaction (Jackson, 2007) and offer web content tailored for every visitor.

Constantinides (2006) highlighted the weakness of the

traditional mass marketing mix in 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing, caused by the lack of personalisation. Traditional approaches based on mass marketing techniques are unlikely to be so effective in contemporary marketing, where customers expect a degree of interaction and tailoring. Therefore, marketers have concentrated on personalisation in order to improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts (Vesanen, 2007). This personalisation involves studying specific relevant data from consumers through the leverage of existing databases (Fahimfard and Imandoust, 2011) and offering a specific product or message to an individual customer, marketed solely to them (Zhang 2011). Marketers may avoid extreme degrees of personalisation because they find it difficult or impossible to integrate marketing and computing systems (Vesanen and Raulas, 2006). Arora *et al*, (2008) put forward the suggestion that there is a difference between personalisation and customisation, where personalisation is a deliberate manipulation of the marketing mix by the marketer aimed at a specific customer. On the other hand, customisation is dictated by the customer who requires a specific feature of the marketing mix tailored to their own needs.



**Figure 2.2 Arora et al (2008) 'Firm Choice on Level of Personalisation', Marketing Letters, July 2008, Vol. 19, Issue 3-4, pp 305-321, (diagram on p. 310)**

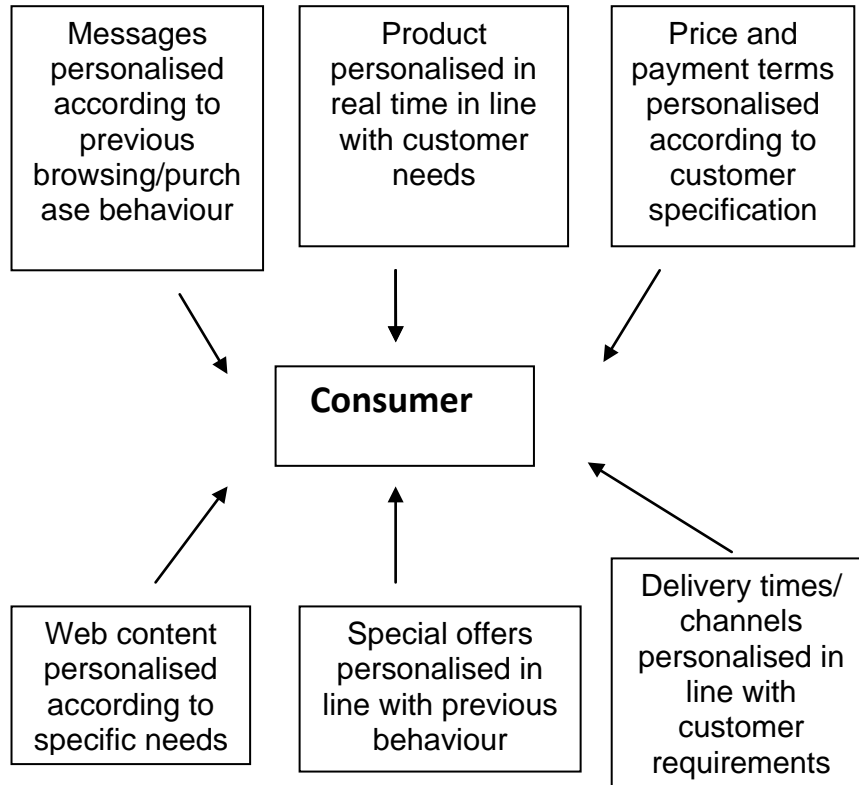
Figure 2.2 shows the spectrum of personalisation, where at one end of the scale (0), marketers offer no personalisation at all, and at the other (1), offer extreme personalisation, building on the idea of one-to-one marketing, first promoted by Peppers & Rogers (1993). Personalisation necessitates marketers knowing about customer preferences and matching marketing output to those preferences and evaluating whether the output matches customer requirements (Murthi and Sarkar, 2003). This matching may include customer data and profiles, dialogues, analysis of data, design of appropriate systems and measurement and analysis of marketing output (Vesanan and Raulas, 2006). The strategy leads to more relevant, timely and acceptable communications which may lead to enhanced customer perception. As a result, communications may be seen as useful rather than invasive and unwanted. Customers

may wish to volunteer information about themselves that enables marketers to better target them with appropriate messages (Zimmer *et al*, 2010).

It is logical to assume that the online environment is better suited to personalisation than traditional marketing. This is because marketers can learn from the interactions that they have with the customer and/or their search patterns and browsing behaviour online. As well as marketers individualising their efforts on behalf of customers, individual customers have their own personal search criteria and questions that they need to be able to satisfy.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the detail of personalisation in the online environment, where pre-browsing messages, product, price and delivery options can all be personalised. This correlates to the 'extreme personalisation' suggested by Arora *et al*, (2008) in Figure 2.2. For example, a customer may put together their own product specification from a menu of options, pay a price constructed on their level of loyalty and choose a delivery method which suits their requirements, such as collection from store or choosing a specific time slot for home delivery. Online marketing has enabled organisations

and individuals much more flexibility in the specific contract into which they enter. Each transaction is specific to that customer at that time because of the personalisation enabled by online marketing.



**Figure 2.3 Personalisation in the on-line environment.**  
**Source: Author**

There has been much research related to the influence of website design, usability and perceived trust of online suppliers that lead to website satisfaction and loyalty (Lascu and Clow, 2008), implying that customers only considered the marketer and themselves when interacting with websites.

Latterly, however, it has become evident that individual browsers and potential purchasers are influenced by others.

In traditional models of purchase behaviour, customers often seek out opinion from others within their own social sphere, such as friends, family members and peers. However, in the online environment, this social sphere can be widened considerably. Because personalisation is really important to online marketing, all papers included in this thesis are indirectly influenced by this topic.

## **2.8 Influencers**

<p><b>Paper 10 is closely concerned with this topic. See Table 1.2</b></p>
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It has long been accepted that customers are potentially influenced by a wide variety of people, such as their peer group, families and others, for example celebrities (Dix *et al*, 2010; Seock and Hathcote, 2010), opinion leaders (Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988) and perceived experts (Price and Feick, 1984). These inter-personal influencers may bring about sway through persuasion; a desire to conform or by observational learning (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). In

the online environment, key influencers may be individuals who contribute to social networks or online discussion forums because these online facilities provide an environment within which individuals offer opinions and experiences of organisations and brands. These judgements have the potential to influence the decision making of others. This e-Word of Mouth (eWOM) falls into two categories of influence; opinion based and behaviour-based (Cheung *et al*, 2012). The former implies that consumers are influenced by the opinions of others and the latter that they are influenced by the actual purchase behaviour reported by others.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) reported that posters on social networks often develop relationships with other members in a forum because of their shared interest(s) and loyalty to each other. The online forum allows individuals to interact with one another and form strong relationships that can impact on their behaviour. This relationship is underpinned through the shared communication and is hard to copy (Morgan, cited in Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000). This online word of mouth confirmation of a firm's bona fides has the potential to tip the balance in the customer's mind about whether to buy or not to buy. This is especially important in the online environment because there are more perceived risks than in offline

transactions. Consumers are motivated to contribute to review sites or forums for diverse reasons. One motive is reciprocity, in that posters expect to get valuable information in exchange for knowledge that they offer themselves (Kollack, 1999).

Others post because writing about their purchases is a form of self-exhibition (Cova and Pace, 2006) or because they wish to gain prestige from offering their opinions in a manner of self-representation (Schau and Gilly 2003; Nonnecke *et al*, 2004), be part of a community (Horrigan *et al*, 2001) or because they feel very strongly about the issue in question (Gelb and Sundaram 2002). From a consumer point of view, having access to many differing opinions can lead to confusion (Matzler *et al*, 2007) but positive viewpoints have the effect of building trust in specific brands or organisations (Mazhar *et al*, 2012). The author and her research partner were interested to discover how online networks could influence consumer behaviour and their research led to a number of conference papers and the publication of Paper 10.

## **2.9 Trust and risk**

**Papers 4, 5, 6, 7 are closely concerned with this topic.**

**See Table 1.2**

### **2.9.1 Trust**

Trust is a complex state that arises through individuals being unsure about the motives and intentions of others (Kramer, 1999), although the word is associated with favourable expectations (Möllering, 2001). As such, trust is an expectation about the behaviour of other members of the society in which people live or by which they are ruled (Barber, 1983). It is likely, therefore, that trust involves cultural mores as well as emotionally and socially-based responses. Without trust, societies would not be able to function (Simmel, 1990) and, more relevant to this thesis, business activities would be more problematic.

Riegelsberger *et al* (2003) suggest that trust is a way of reducing complexity and that it acts as a heuristic in complex decision-making when the decision includes risk. Thus, trust is an especially important factor when there is some kind of choice to be made, as in entering into a purchasing relationship. For this reason, Walsh and Mitchell (2010) hold

that trust is one of the most important marketing outcomes.

Trust can be bestowed on a person, an object (product), an organisation (a business), an institution (the government) or a role (a professional of some kind).

How people acquire trust and the functional properties and consequences are much debated. Trust may be acquired by a rational process based on what is known about the other party, and also the incentive of that other party to honour the trust bestowed upon him, her or it (Hardin, 1992). Conversely, it can be an emotional and social response to others or to society as a whole (Kramer, 1999). Trust can be a conduit through which consumers can infer knowledge about providers, leading to faith, as Möllering (2001, p. 412) describes it, trust is

“the mental process of leaping.....across the gorge of the unknowable”.

Trust bridges what people interpret from what they perceive and their expectations about the object of their potential trust and, therefore, is subjective (Hardin, 1993). Khodyakov (2007) suggested that trust is a process of positive anticipation of the reliability of another's actions based on reputation, the current circumstances, assumptions about an organisation's possible actions and the perception of honesty and morality of



the other party.

The model in Figure 2.4 illustrates the precursors of trust and shows the necessity of trust to enable customers to take considered risks (Mayer *et al*, 1995). Although this model was developed for use in the offline world, there is every likelihood that trust in the online environment is similar. Many writers link trust to the willingness to be vulnerable whilst yet having positive expectations of the intentions of others, especially if a relationship already exists (Mayer *et al*, 1995; Lewis and Weigart, 1985; Schurr and Ozane, 1985).

**Figure 2.4 'Proposed Model of Trust' Mayer, R., David, J. and Schoorman, F. (1995) 'An integrative model of organisation trust; *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 709-734**

A person's propensity or disposition to trust has its roots in personality psychology (Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha, 2003), possibly mitigated by previous experience (Rotter, 1971).

Prior research has reported that previous positive experience has the effect of increasing trust (Pavlou and Chellappa, 2001; Rutter, 2000) and this, coupled with an individual consumer's propensity to trust, is likely to effect how an organisation is perceived. This has been linked to the trust that marketers attempt to initiate in order to enter into a relationship (Paul and McDaniel, 2004). Customers may infer trustworthiness if they believe that organisations hold consumer interests as more important than their own interests (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Likewise, the power of referrals by word of mouth and peers, real-world and virtual, can impact on the initiation of trust.

Much thought has been given to understanding consumer behaviour in the online environment (Macdonald and Uncles, 2007; Liebermann and Stashevsky, 2002). Researchers have paid attention to how consumers make decisions online (Constantinides, 2004; Chan and Chen, 2008). Whilst most researchers and practising marketers believe that consumers

behave rationally when purchasing online (Smith and Rupp, 2003; Palvia, 2009), there are many other factors that influence the behaviour of online consumers, such as web-site satisfaction (Chiou and Shen, 2006), trust (Hahn & Kim, 2009), ease of use, on-site shopping resources and trust seals (Krishnamurthy, 2001), customer personality (Ranaweera *et al*, 2008), visual design and navigation (Cyr, 2008), customer's degree of receptiveness to innovation (Bigne-Alcañiz *et al*, 2008), savviness (Macdonald and Uncles 2007), customer convenience and value (Lokken, 2003; Nicholls and Watson, 2005) and perception of online shopping environments (Demangeot & Broderick, 2007).

Recent research by Bonera (2011) has determined that consumers' behaviour is not rational but includes an emotional context revealed when the playfulness characteristics of a website enhances the user's behavioural intention to buy online. Nevertheless, the issues of consumer risk and the need for trust in the e-tailer have dominated the literature on internet retailing for some fifteen years or so (for example Fortin *et al*, 2002; McKnight *et al*, 2002; Grabner-Krauter & Kaluska 2003; Pavlou and Gefen 2004; Verhagen *et al*, 2006; Eastlick and Lotz (2011).

Table 2.2. shows the development of the trust concept over time and links this to academic debate and consequences for online marketers.

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Debate</b>	<b>Online Marketing Practitioner implications</b>
Trust in business	Trust between consumer and business is necessary for good business relationship	Existed prior to birth of online marketing but equally relevant to online marketing.
Trust in online mechanism	Internet perceived to be less trustworthy owing to lack of technological skills, lack of financial security and privacy concerns	Online marketers need to instil trust on the part of the consumer using third-party trust cues, and reassurances about privacy and safety
Trust of organisations online	It is difficult to judge online organisations' trustworthiness because of lack of inter-personal interaction	Personalisation of messages and individual reassurances about delivery and fulfilment needed to encourage trust on part of the consumer
Trust between contributors online	Consumers trust each others' opinions about products and experiences and act upon recommendations given by others	Online marketers need to listen to the conversations of consumers and act in response to any concerns voiced

**Table 2.2 Development of the Concept of Trust and consequences for Online Marketers. Source: Author.**

### **2.9.2 Risk**

Risk exists when there is any uncertainty that things will turn out as anticipated. As Bauer (1967) suggests, consumer behaviour involves risk because consumers cannot be sure that their interactions with organisations will go smoothly. Each consumer has their own idea about what risk is and this may vary according to the prevailing circumstances (Stone and Grønhaug, 1993). Consumers tend to use their own judgement to decide whether something is risky or not, based on previous experience or word of mouth from others.

Perceived risk may prevent customers from purchasing, for example if they are unable to try-on an item of clothing (Khakimdjanova and Park, 2005; Then and DeLong, 1999). It has a moderating effect on behaviour because consumers are keen not to make a decision which is likely to have negative outcomes. For this reason, shoppers may search for additional information in order to reduce the potential risk (Taylor, 1974; Prendergast *et al*, 2010). Shoppers may make a (mental) short-list of brands they are prepared to consider to avoid risk (Mitchell, 1999) Similarly, they may consider specific online retailer brands that they are willing to use or use websites as a tool for conducting pre-purchasing research. Reduction of risk is important in retail and marketing (Shim and

Lee, 2011).

Thus, the importance of branding in the online environment is strong and has the effect of reducing the perception of riskiness on the part of consumers. Academics have established various parameters of risk – financial, social, time, performance, psychological and physical (Beardon and Mason, 1978), all of which can be encountered in the online environment. Consumer perception of risk may be reduced through experience with the brand and/or product provider, so the longer the relationship, the less likely the consumer will consider a purchase risky.

### ***2.10 Trust and Risk Online***

In the online environment, trust is particularly important to developing a relationship because marketers are unable to cultivate inter-personal liking as in the offline environment (Einwiller *et al*, 2000; Nicholson *et al*, 2001; Palvia 2009). The parameters of risk outlined in 2.9 are relevant to online purchases. For example, time risk (Roselius 1971) may apply to the time spent online, if a website has broken links or is difficult to negotiate. Conversely, time can be saved through the convenience of online shopping as opposed to visiting the

mall or high street. For online marketing, additional risk parameters may be encountered. Technological risk (Liebermann and Stashevsky, 2002) is the fear of innovations such as the internet and the potential risk of using them – for example acquiring viruses. Further, financial risk and the perceived lack of security over financial security have also been highlighted in research into online marketing (Salisbury *et al*, 2001; Liebermann and Stashevsky, 2002).

Performance risk may be experienced if purchases made online fail to be delivered or arrive damaged, incomplete or are incorrect. Whilst physical risk is unlikely in the online environment, some consumers may be concerned about purchasing a product when the exact ingredients or components are unknown, worrying that they may be caused physical damage by goods that are of inferior quality.

The author was curious to discover whether there was a balance between trust and risk in the online environment – in other words, if a consumer had sufficient trust in the brand or product or organisation, whether this would counter-balance any perception of risk. This research resulted in the publication of Paper 6, a wholly theoretical and conceptual

paper. Concurrently, the author and her research partner investigated the initiation of trust in the online environment as it relates to online wine purchasing. This research led to further publications - Papers 4, 5, and 8. Reference to Table 1.2 indicates claims towards contribution to knowledge and research objectives.

### ***2.11 Branding online***

**Papers 9 and 11 are closely concerned with this topic.**

**See Table 1.2**

As indicated in 2.7 above, branding in the online environment has the potential to reduce risk and enhance long-term relationships. At a basic level, a brand is a reassuring symbol to consumers of product quality and, as such, is an important differentiator in a crowded market place.

Branding is a central component of marketing (Chartered Institute of Marketing 2007). Understanding how customers relate to brands and how marketers can build and portray them to customers has become increasingly significant (de Chernatony *et al*, 2011). The concept of brand positioning portrays how a brand is perceived by consumers in relation to other brands available in that market. Often, brands are perceived by customers to be valuable along more than one



dimension (Doyle, 1975). For this reason, an organisation's brands may be deliberately positioned using multiple dimensions in order to differentiate from competitors' brands by creating brand associations in the minds of consumers (Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Leister, 2003). These dimensions should be of value and importance to a customer. Brand positioning can impact on the performance of the organisation, both positively and negatively (Blankson *et al*, 2004) as brands are assets of an organisation that should last over a long period of time (Murphy, 1988).

Thus, the positioning strategy chosen and operationalised by an organisation is fundamentally of great consequence. Branding in the online environment is an area that hitherto has not been widely researched. Aaker (2010) highlights that the dynamic online world adds an extra dimension to branding that makes branding strategies more complex. Writers such as Christodoulides and De Chernatony (2004) and Okazaki (2006) have realised that branding online may be different and have devoted time to understanding what those differences might mean, although Rowley (2004) stresses that it may be difficult to split online and offline branding, as one should reflect the other. However, online branding should add value to an offline experience.

Motion (2001) explains that online branding benefits from a network of partnerships and links with other brands to add credibility. Therefore, the links that a brand owner makes to other respected brands, such as trade associations, strengthen the weight of their own brand. The author and her research partner investigated branding in the online environment for a particular market sector – UK print suppliers – the results of which are contained in Papers 9 and 11. These papers demonstrate not only how organisations position themselves by what they say about themselves in their websites but also in what part of the website they say it. These papers meet objective 3 of this body of research and provide a framework for academics and practitioners to use, thus contributing to objective 5.

Paper 9 is somewhat more technical in terms of website construction and may also assist web designers to structure websites better with a closer fit to marketing and branding objectives.

## ***2.12 Online Forums and Marketing***

**Paper 10 is closely concerned with this topic. Please See Table 1.2**

It is said that word of mouth (WOM) has a strong influence on consumer behaviour, and eWOM using online resources is also an important part of information gathering and influence on decision making (Huang and Yang, 2008; Miller and Lammas, 2010). Consumers now have the facility to collect information and opinion through reading online reviews. These may be orchestrated by the brand owner or be part of a virtual community which is consumer-run. These forums are often referred to as 'social networks' or 'online review sites'.

Such sites were classified by Armstrong and Hagel (1996) into four different types: communities of interest, communities of relationship, communities of transaction and communities of practice. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus is on communities of interest. This is because consumers contribute to and take notice of the contributions of others in regard to products which they are interested in purchasing (Fisher, 2009).

Sites are made up of people with different experiences and different backgrounds. What individuals have in common is their interest in the product in question. Because of this affinity, the opinion of others can be compelling. Previous research by Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2004) showed that the content of online reviews affected subsequent purchase behaviour. Over the last few years, many online forums have been developed to enable devotees (or detractors) of brands to discuss the benefits or downfalls of products and brands. Many of these consumer-driven forums and review sites have become key opinion leaders and formers for some markets, for example Tripadvisor.com for travel related topics.

An online community provides consumers with the facility to express an opinion or learn more about a specific topic in a low-risk environment. Much of the content is either personal opinion or is based on publicly available material (Mortensen and Walker 2002). The author became interested in this phenomenon because of the co-creation behind the production of the sites and the fact that it seemed that the contributors and browsers (or members) of the site would need trust in the credibility and bona fides of those who gave their opinion. This

notion resulted in the publication of Paper 10. Table 2.3 demonstrates the extension of the concept of online trust following the advent of social media

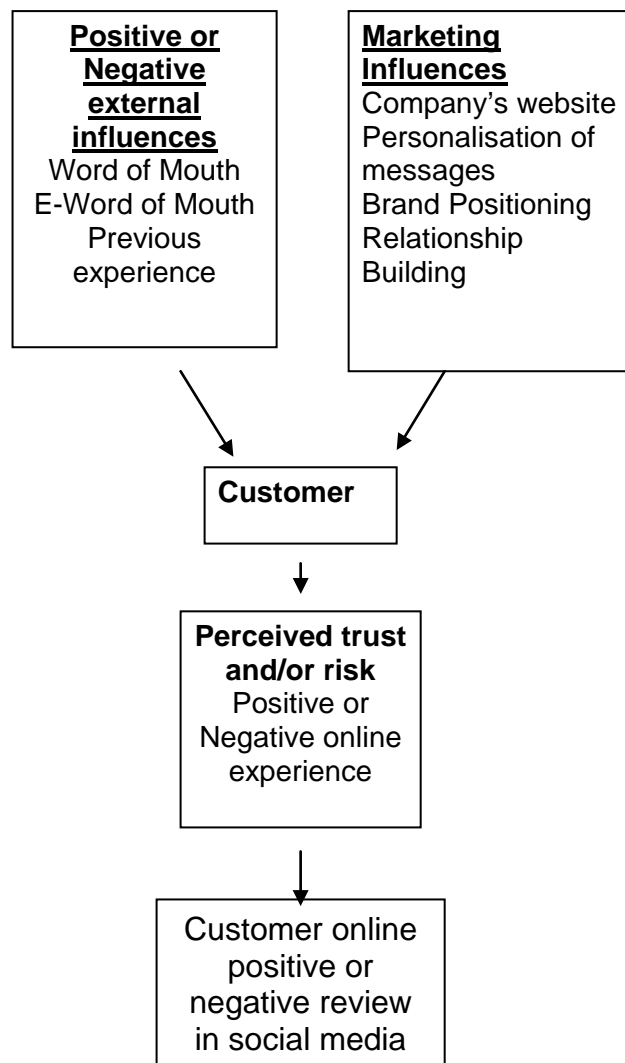
<b>INFLUENCING THE CONSUMER</b>	<b>EXCHANGE OF INFLUENCE</b>	<b>INFLUENCED BY THE CONSUMER</b>
<b>Off – line</b>		
Celebrities Peer Group Family Perceived Experts	Peer Group Family Social contacts	Peer Group Family Social Contacts
<b>On – line (E Word of Mouth)</b>		
On-line Discussion Forums, Social Networks		
<b>INCOMING OPINIONS</b> Trusted Contributors Fact finding Building Trust	<b>DISCUSSION OF OPINIONS WITH OTHERS</b> e.g. Reciprocity, shared interests and loyalties Being part of Community	<b>OWN OPINIONS EXPRESSED TO OTHERS</b> Self-exhibition, prestige. Having and exhibiting strong feelings
	<b>CUSTOMER</b>	
<b>OTHER PEOPLES' BEHAVIOUR</b>  Positive / negative reviews of actual goods or services purchased	<b>REVIEW OF PURCHASE OR EXPERIENCE</b>  Added to on-line forum of review site	<b>PURCHASE</b>  Subsequent favourable/ unfavourable on-line review or comments

**Table 2.3 – An extension of online trust after the advent of social media. Source: Author**

Similar to the problem of the organisation wishing to build trust in the online environment, it seemed that the usefulness and validity of a social network or forum would be dictated by the quality of the reviews and the contributors themselves. Lee *et al* (2011) believe that online reviews are more trustworthy than advertisements and thus are more likely to have a strong effect on consumer decision making. Huang *et al* (2011) suggest that the more peripheral information a user has about the contribution, the better acceptance the reader will have about that information, which can create a ripple effect, where the original source of the review has the potential to influence far more people than just the initial reader. This is achieved by readers inviting friends to share in the information, by passing it on in other forums and by commenting on the opinion in off-world environments.

### ***2.13 Conceptual model of effective online marketing***

Having reviewed all the relevant themes and streams within the literature, the author has developed the following diagram, shown in Figure 2.5, to illustrate to the reader their relevance to this body of work.



**Figure 2. 5 Literature Streams relating to Online Marketing and this thesis. Source: Author**

### ***2.14 Contribution to knowledge***

The papers presented here have made a significant contribution to the research in online marketing and the specific issues of developing trust and relationships in the online environment. Table 1.2 makes explicit the claims for

key contributions to knowledge for each of the papers appraised in this thesis. Additionally, Table 1.3 itemises secondary contributions to knowledge claimed in respect of innovative research design. These papers have played a part in the development of a multiplicity of research initiatives in differing market segments, thus demonstrating that the concepts are transferable to other sectors and environments. Indeed, many of the eleven papers have even been cited in research investigating different disciplines, such as computer software applications, tourism and politics. The breadth of impact of these publications can be seen by examining the list of citations in Appendix 2.

The papers have been downloaded from the publishers' website(s) many times. For example, reference to Emerald's website shows that Paper 3 has been downloaded 5,715 times at the time of writing this thesis.

The reader is referred to Table 1.2 which correlates Contributions to Knowledge with each of the papers within this thesis.



## ***2.15 Limitations of the Research***

The author's papers presented in this thesis are a sample of over a decade's research whilst employed at Oxford Brookes University resulting from her personal interests in both wine and technology. Although research in wine marketing is a niche subject area in the UK, there are many academics researching aspects of wine marketing internationally. The marketing of wine online, like other online markets, is a relatively young discipline. The author was one of the first in the U.K. to publish papers on this subject. Many of the papers presented here have won acclaim in the realm of wine marketing internationally but may be of lesser importance to more generalist online marketing researchers because of this very specialism.

Nevertheless, academics researching in other marketing spheres have perceived the usefulness of the research design as well as the outcomes, as evidenced by the citations supplied in Appendix 2. Whilst the author's earliest research concerned combining themes for her chosen subject matter, she soon embraced a more generalist approach in researching aspects of online marketing that could be relevant to many

different niches, i.e. relationship building, trust development and branding online.

The author's research philosophy has always been to make sense of what is happening, in this case, in the *virtual* world, to help academics and practitioners comprehend how best to utilise new technology for marketing purposes. During this programme of research, it is likely that 'truth' has changed owing to consumer experience. By nature an interpretivist she used a variety of qualitative research methods to understand the way consumers experience, feel and behave when using interactive technology. Nevertheless, having explored trust with small samples of respondents, later papers utilised a positivist approach using a larger sample to further confirm earlier results.

One state-of-the-art method employed, netnography, has been perceived by some to be ethically questionable, a fact acknowledged by the author in Paper 10. However, this method of online ethnography has been accepted by the academic community as one which provides rich data for analysis (Bengry-Howell *et al*, 2011), although it is generally

perceived to be under-utilised (Xun and Reynolds 2010).

Netnography can offer an intimate knowledge of the consumer which makes it an attractive proposition for ethnographic researchers.

Table 2.4 comments on the limitations of the methods utilised throughout the programme of research.

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Method(s)</b>	<b>Potential Weaknesses</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	Analysis of websites	Own framework designed (hitherto unproven) Small sample	<i>Developmental exploratory work Sample was rigorously constructed</i>
2	Analysis of websites	Own framework designed (hitherto unproven) Small sample	<i>Developmental exploratory work Sample was rigorously constructed</i>
3	Concept development from literature review	No primary empirical research	<i>Used accepted framework to make sense of new phenomenon</i>
4	Analysis of focus group interviews	Relatively small sample, UK Based only	<i>Rich data Exploratory research formed basis of further research in Paper 8</i>
5	<i>Concept development from literature review</i>	<i>No primary empirical research</i>	<i>Concept fed into work presented in Papers 4, 6, 8</i>

6	Analysis of Focus Group Interviews	Relatively small sample, UK-Based only	<i>Exploratory research formed basis of further research in Paper 8</i>
8	Statistical analysis of data from online questionnaire	Large sample of declared wine buyers	<i>Builds on research in papers 4 and 6.</i>
9	Analysis of websites by content analysis	Industry-specific sample of B2B suppliers. Some elements cannot be included – e.g. colour	<i>Paper made recommendations for future research</i>
10	Net-nography	Debate about ethicality of method	<i>Provides rich data in real time. Data are in the public domain.</i>
11	Analysis of websites by content analysis	Industry-specific sample of B2B suppliers	<i>Provides real data in real time. Data are in the public domain.</i>

**Table 2.4 – A summary of the methods used by Papers 1-11 (excluding Paper 7, which is an Opinion Piece)**

As the academic area of online marketing is constantly changing, it is inevitable that some of the work presented here will be considered dated or perhaps naïve. It is worth stressing that some of these papers were published at the very nascence of UK-academic interest in online marketing and, as

such, have provided the platform for ongoing work over the period of this research. Further reference to the list of citations in Appendix 2 will show that many of the papers presented in this thesis have been cited in very recent papers in many different countries of the world.

## **3 METHODS**

### **3.1 Chapter Overview**

Each of the eleven papers presented here explains and justifies the method chosen to explore the topic and attain the research aims. However, it is worth stressing the variety of research designs used throughout this body of work and that each method was selected as a deliberate strategy to best meet the aims and objectives of each individual piece of research. Each of the following methods were incorporated into the research designs: Literature reviews for concept development; Document analysis; Content analysis; Netnography; Focus groups; Online data collection using questionnaires; Statistical analysis.

Although the methods utilised were not the prime purpose of these publications, other researchers and academics have found their use noteworthy and it is for this reason that secondary contributions to knowledge are claimed relating to the innovative design and application of methods (as stated in Table 1.3), The pertinent issues are outlined, as follows.

### ***3.2 Literature Reviews***

Each of the papers within this thesis was constructed after consultation of the most recent literature available at the time of research. The reviews of the literature served two purposes. Firstly, reference to published research assisted in research design and secondly, for papers 3 and 6, the existing knowledge served as a basis of concept development, resulting in wholly theoretical papers.

### ***3.3 Document Analysis***

Documents are often used as a data source in research, however the use of websites as documents is relatively new. In the research presented in Papers 9 and 11, the text within each website becomes the text available for analysis (Bowen, 2009). The purpose of undertaking document analysis is to develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The researcher makes use of the information which, in this case, is available in the social environment for which it is intended. The sample examined in this research was produced by organisations for the attention of internet browsers. It can be assumed that the documents are authentic and are therefore valid as true documentary evidence. Papers 9 and 11 were produced using this method.

### **3.4 Content Analysis**

Content analysis is often undertaken when examining transcripts of interviews and/or documentary analysis. In the case of the research presented here, content analysis was utilised both for focus group discussions (Paper 4) and for examining the text within websites (Paper 11). The author deliberately chose not to utilise computer programmes to aid with analysing the data. Rather, it was felt that manual analysis would aid clearer comprehension of the issues involved. Krippendorf (2004) suggests that content analysis is a technique that is both systematic and objective and that it can be conducted either in a qualitative, exploratory manner or can result in quantitative data for further analysis. Papers 4 and 11 use a hybrid approach.

### **3.5 Netnography**

In addition to the topic of online marketing being cutting edge, the use of netnography as a tool for research by marketing academics is also relatively recent, being devised by Kozinets (1998) for studying online communities, yet Yang *et al'*s (2006) review of management research methodologies used in 1296 papers published in academic journals found no examples of the use of netnography. Nevertheless, the authors recommended it for future research projects. Paper 10 is one



of the first published academic papers using the method.

Kozinets (1998; 2010) promoted netnography as a method by which to study cultures and communities which exist only in cyberspace or the virtual world (Bowler, 2010). Normal access to such communities would be difficult, if not impossible, so netnography uses the techniques of passive or covert observation to study the behaviour of online cultures or communities (Xun and Reynolds 2010). Alternatively, the researcher may opt to use netnography to undertake participant observation. (Bowler, 2010). Both options utilise the postings and discussions of the members of a forum as a basis for analysis. The research presented in this thesis using netnography was initially produced as a conference paper at the Academy of Marketing's annual conference in 2008. The editor of *The Marketing Review* (Dr. Jim Blythe) indicated that the subject was of interest and asked that it be developed into a journal article. The published journal article is presented as paper 10 in this thesis.

There has been much debate regarding the benefit of researchers remaining covert observers within a discussion forum as opposed to declaring their presence and role as

researchers (for example, see Langer and Beckman 2005). For the purpose of this research, the author decided to remain covert to avoid affecting the natural conversations within the network. The literature on the use of this method highlights the potential ethical issues arising from covert observation, nevertheless the material analysed is within the public domain and no contributor is identifiable within the research.

### **3.6 *Focus Groups***

Focus groups are a valuable tool in collecting qualitative data. Often they are used as a precursor to collecting quantitative data, as is the case with this research. Focus groups were utilised as the data collection method for Paper 4 of this paper, which summarises the findings of the first phase of research that was continued in Papers 5, 6 and 8. It is acknowledged that the findings from five focus groups cannot represent the views of the entire UK population. Nevertheless, some pertinent insights were obtained relating to the UK buyers' inclination to trust and the triggers for the initiation of trust in the online environment.

### **3.7 *Online Data Collection using Questionnaire***

Whilst the methods used are fundamentally important and contribute to achieving the research outcomes, on occasion they are developmental in themselves. For example, the use of bought-in commercial lists for online data collection using a

questionnaire is a novel method of ensuring that the resulting data are not skewed by using student or small samples. In the research published in paper 8, a list-broker was approached to supply a list of email addresses for people who have purchased wine in the online environment. This meant that the sample utilised for data collection was both relevant and appropriate for the research in question. The method has been taken up by other researchers in other fields of research, for example see Waite and Harrison (2011) in their research into financial services. Their paper references the author's conference paper that was a precursor to paper 8 presented in this thesis.

### ***3.8 Statistical Analysis***

Statistical analysis of results obtained through the use of an online questionnaire is presented in Paper 8. The data were imported remotely from a specially commissioned website, unique at Oxford Brookes University. These data were then transferred to a temporary email address and from there were imported into a spreadsheet for analysis using SPSS. Paired T-Tests were applied to the data.

### ***3.9 Conclusions***

A wide variety of data collection methods has been adopted throughout this research. Whilst the research philosophy of the author tends towards qualitative research, she

acknowledges that this may not be appropriate for each of the research aims. For this reason, a positivist approach was utilised for one of the papers presented in this thesis and a hybrid approach for another

Because of the cutting-edge and fast-moving environment being researched, some of the methods for data collection adopted technologically advanced solutions or controversial approaches, both of which demonstrate innovation in achieving research objectives.

This ground breaking work has been emulated by other researchers, providing evidence for the claim of originality in research design.

## **4 PUBLICATIONS 1 TO 11**

This section contains the text of the eleven papers and an introduction that explains how each paper came about and how it relates to the literature in Chapter 2.

### **4.1 An introduction to and summary of the papers**

The following paragraphs introduce each paper, summarise briefly how each adds to the research objectives and contributions to knowledge. An excerpt from 1.2 is presented at the start of each introduction to individual papers.

#### **4.1.1 Introduction to Paper 1**

**Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S (2003) On-line Wine – Strategic or Tactical? *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 15, No 1, pp. 34-41 (claiming 50% of this article).**

<b>OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Paper 1</b>	✓				✓	✓	✓				

This paper was written in collaboration with Sarah Quinton, with whom the author undertook a wide range of research.

The paper arose as a result of the authors' interest in both the advent of relationship building through the use of online marketing and marketing of wine. Consequently, this paper combines these two areas by using the four components of relationship marketing put forward by Grönroos (1998) in order

to analyse and assess the online marketing offerings of UK wine retailers. This paper contributes to Objectives 1 and 5 of this thesis and Contributions to Knowledge A (A framework for using online marketing strategically) and Contribution to Knowledge B (An outline of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework). Although the paper is focused on the arena of wine marketing, researchers in other academic disciplines have found the work relevant (see citations in Appendix 2).

**4.1.2 Introduction to Paper 2**

**Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2003) Strategic Interactive Marketing of Wine On-Line – a case of Evolution, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 21, No 7, pp. 357-362 (claiming 50% of this article).**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 2</b>	✓				✓	✓	✓				

Paper 2, constructed at the same time as Paper 3, analyses the online relationship marketing activities of wine providers to judge whether they are either strategic or tactical in nature. At the time the research was undertaken, Web 2.0 was not well developed and online interactivity was sparse when compared with today’s online marketing environment. The paper presents a strategic online marketing continuum which marketers and academics can use for planning and analysis

purposes, thus contributing to both Objective 1 (to examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework) and Objective 5 (to develop frameworks to assist marketing managers) as well Contribution to Knowledge A (A framework for using online marketing strategically) and Contribution to Knowledge B (an outline of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework). The paper has been cited by researchers in wine marketing and also by researchers investigating entrepreneurial marketing, online branding and online marketing in general, demonstrating its wider recognition of contribution to knowledge (see citations in Appendix 3).

#### 4.1.3 Introduction to Paper 3

**Harridge-March, S. (2004) Electronic Marketing, The New Kid on the Block, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 297- 309**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 3</b>	✓				✓	✓	✓				

This paper was researched at the same time as Papers 1 and 2. When the author first started researching the use of online marketing, there was very little published in academic journals that made sense of the phenomenon. Whilst practitioners

embraced the use of the internet enthusiastically, research was slower to appear in peer-reviewed journals. The author was keen to make sense of what online marketing could contribute to the discipline, both for her own research purposes and to help students and academics analyse the impact of online marketing to traditional business. This paper attempts to interpret the changes that online marketing has forced upon the traditional marketing mix of Booms and Bitner (1981) and as a result contributes to Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework) and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). It impacts on Contribution to Knowledge A (A framework for using online marketing strategically) and Contribution to Knowledge B (An analysis of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework).

It discusses online marketing as part of contemporary marketing and examines the first endeavours by marketers to utilise the tool. Researched throughout 2003, this paper was published in 2004 and has since become recommended reading for modules at higher education establishments and is cited in textbooks, peer-reviewed journal papers and conference papers. The author acknowledges that the online environment is now a much more complex phenomenon than



when this research commenced, but this article is still cited in papers published as late as 2012 (see list of citations in Appendix 2) as it was one of the first papers to put online marketing into context and has, therefore, made a significant contribution to knowledge.

#### **4.1.4 Introduction to Paper 4**

**Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S. (2005) Initiation of Trust and Management of Risk in On-Line retailing: UK On-Line Wine Market, *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 17, No 2, pp. 5-20 (Claiming 50% of this article)**

<b>OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Paper 4</b>	✓	✓			✓			✓			

This paper arose from the authors' joint interest in wine marketing and that of online marketing. Research in previous papers had highlighted that the issue of trust was of especial interest to online marketers. Given that wine is a high-involvement product, it seemed very important for online wine retailers to develop trust in order for customers to make the decision to purchase. The paper is the first in a series of research relating to trust and online purchasing and develops an illustrative framework that demonstrates the links between trust and risk for online wine purchasers as displayed in Table 4.1.

<b>Elements of Trust</b>	<b>Risk Parameters</b>
Importance of Provider	Social, Psychological, Performance
Reliance on Multiple Channels	Financial, Time, Social, Technological
Familiarity of Mechanism	Financial, Psychological, Time, Technological
Functional	Performance, Time, Financial, Technological
Peripheral	Financial

**Table 4.1 The Links between elements of trust and parameters of risk for online wine purchasers. Source: Authors.**

The paper concludes with the implications for marketers, e-tailers and website designers. This paper contributes towards Objective 2 (To explore and evaluate the concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment) and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). It also plays a part in Contribution to Knowledge C (The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by

reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online).

#### 4.1.5 Introduction to Paper 5

**Harridge-March, S (2006) Can building trust overcome customer perceived risk online? *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 24, Issue 7, pp. 746-761**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 5</b>	✓	✓			✓			✓			

During the course of this programme of research in online marketing, it became apparent that consumer trust was fundamental to the success of strategic marketing.

Consequently, this paper was researched and written at the same time as papers 4 and 6. The author had in mind that trust moderated risk, as suggested by Mayer *et al*, (1995) and conceptualised that trust and risk were two ends of a see-saw, where a paucity of trust would result in an escalation in the perception of risk. Likewise, if consumers had sufficient trust, this would outweigh the potential for risk. Sufficient trust, therefore, could result in the likelihood of customers proceeding with online transactions. This paper outlines how online marketers can build trust in order to overcome various types of perceived risks. Although conceptual in nature, this

paper has been well-received and has been cited by researchers in a variety of academic disciplines, such as purchase of products and services. Paper 5 contributes towards Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework) Objective 2 (To explore and evaluate the concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment) and Objective 5 (to develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). The paper adds to Contribution to Knowledge C (The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online). For a full list of citations, please see Appendix 2.

#### 4.1.6 Introduction to Paper 6

**Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2006) The management of risk and initiation of trust in online purchasing: UK online wine market, *International Journal of Information Technology and Management*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 267-278 (Claiming 50% of this article)**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 6</b>	✓	✓			✓			✓			

Paper 6 resulted from a conference paper presented for the 4th IBM eBusiness Conference, University of Surrey, 2003 that won the 'best-in-track' prize. As a result, the Conference

Organiser, Michael Howley, from University of Surrey, asked that an augmented version of the paper be prepared for publication in a special edition of The International Journal of Information Technology and Management. Paper 6 was one outcome from a body of research that took place between 2003 and 2007, all relating to trust and customer-perceived risk. This piece of research was an exploratory study into what led customers to trust an online wine provider and how these aspects can be linked to risk. Recommendations were made for website designers, online marketers and e-tailers. This paper plays a part in Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework, Objective 2 (To explore and evaluate the concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment) and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers) and Contribution to Knowledge C (The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online) is illustrated by this paper.

#### 4.1.7 Introduction to Paper 7

Harridge-March, S. (2008) Guest Editorial, *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 460-464

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
Paper 7	✓						✓				

One sector that has developed online marketing continuously over the last two decades is that of financial services. Online banking has become a necessity for most banks to offer and is utilised by an increasing number of customers. The area of financial services marketing is of international academic interest. The editor of the journal 'International Journal of Financial Services Marketing' (Professor Jillian Farquhar) suggested that a special edition of the journal should be devoted to online and interactive marketing and requested that the author edit this special edition. Paper 7 presented in this thesis is the editorial piece written by the author to accompany the collection of papers presented in the special issue, published in 2008. The paper contributes towards Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework) and Contribution to Knowledge B (An analysis of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework). Whilst no citations are claimed for this article, it

is included as testament to the author’s perceived expertise in this area. According to the publisher’s website, this paper in its entirety has been downloaded 1001 times at the time of writing.

**4.1.8 Introduction to Paper 8**

**Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2008) Trust and online wine purchasing: insights into UK consumer behaviour, *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 68-85 (claiming 50% of this paper)**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 7</b>	✓	✓			✓			✓			

This paper forms part of the body of work described in 4.1.6. and is a follow-on from work presented in Paper 6. This paper used an innovative method of data collection which has been emulated by other researchers (see Waite *et al*, 2011). A sample of 10,000 UK online wine purchasers was used to determine what influences consumers to trust enough to purchase online. The research highlights some differences between online and offline trust for the purchases of wine, highlights implications and makes some recommendations for marketers. This paper makes contributions towards Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework), Objective 2 (To explore and evaluate the

concepts of trust and risk as they relate to the online environment), and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). The content relates to Contribution to Knowledge C (The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online).

#### 4.1.9 Introduction to Paper 9

**Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2008) Website Elements in B2B online communications: a case from the UK Print Industry, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 26, No.7, pp. 699-718 (claiming 50% of this article).**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 9</b>	✓		✓		✓					✓	

Paper 9 was produced in conjunction with Paper 11, both of which resulted from research undertaken in conjunction with an industrial partner. At the time there was scarce academic research relating to online B2B brands as opposed to consumer brands. The researchers were interested to learn how marketers can convey brand positioning information to customers in the online environment. The information that organisations impart about themselves can be important in positioning the brand in the eyes of their customers and



prospective customers. The manner by which they put over this information leads to perceptions about the organisation which may or may not be the way which was intended. This paper examines sections of a website that organisations use in order to express attributes that they consider important in positioning their brand. The research was undertaken with a sample of organisations from the UK print industry to represent a typical Business to Business organisation. The research was conducted using online content analysis by examining the 'document' of the websites themselves.

This paper contributes towards Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework), Objective 3 (To build a framework for brand positioning in the online environment) and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). The paper also plays a part in Contribution to Knowledge E (An identification of how structural elements of websites which can be utilised to differentiate online brands from competitors' offerings). The framework of communications elements produced is illustrated in Table 4.2 below.

Structural Elements
Corporate Themes
Atmosphere, aesthetic, graphic imagery and multimedia
Ergonomics, navigation and usability
Contact, access and interaction
Customisable elements
Links
Community
Marketing communications integration
Online demonstration
Online price quoting
Online service delivery/integration platforms
Value adding elements
Online data collection

**Table 4.2 Website Communications Elements.**

**Source: Authors**

Paper 9 has been cited by leading brand academics as well as in papers published in 2012. For a full list of citations, please see Appendix 2.

#### 4.1.10 Introduction to Paper 10

**Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S. (2009) *Virtual Snakes and Ladders: Social Networks and the Relationship Marketing Loyalty Ladder*, *The Marketing Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 171-181 (claiming 50% of this paper)**

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Paper 10</b>	✓			✓	✓						✓

This paper was written as part of research undertaken into social networks relating to the purchase of wine. It resulted from an earlier paper (not included here) on the relationships that individuals within forums develop and nurture. This paper contributes to objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework), Objective 4 (To investigate the use of online forums by customers in the online environment, using wine forums as an example) and Objective 5 (to develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). It is concerned with Contribution to Knowledge F (The proposition that marketers can learn from relationships between contributors to online social networks).

At the time of the research, very little academic work had been undertaken in relation to social networks and the impact on marketing. This paper has provided a platform for other

researchers and educationalists. It has formed part of the recommended reading for a number of courses in higher education establishments and definitions contained within it have been included in the website of one of the Chief Examiner's of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, as a resource for both practitioners and students (see <http://fillassociates.co.uk/index.php?page=D%20-%20Social%20Networks>).

It is not just the outcomes of the research in this paper that are noteworthy, but also the methodology used to undertake the research. For a full discussion of the research method, please see section 3.3. and the paper itself. A full list of citations can be found in Appendix 2.

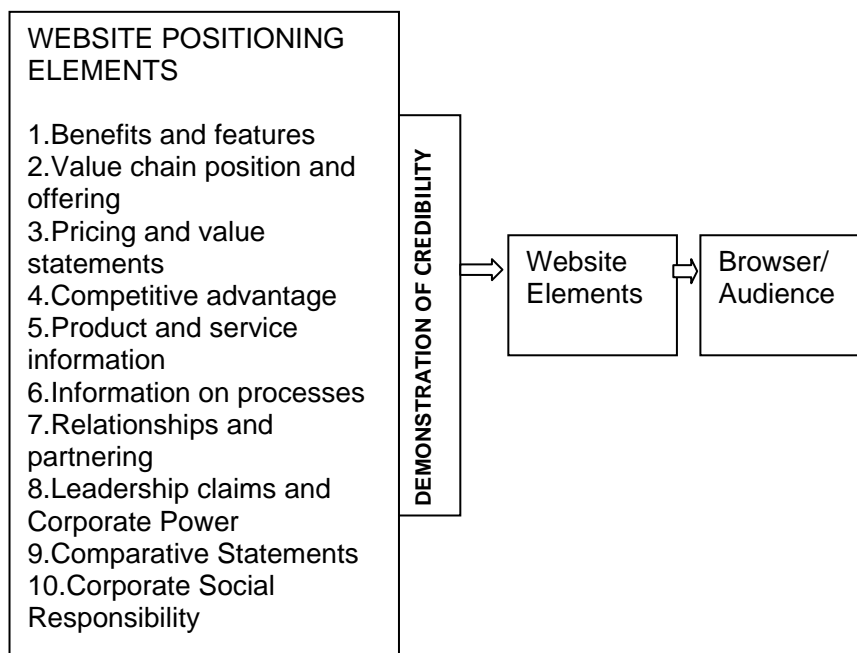
#### 4.1.11 Introduction to Paper 11

***Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2009) Brand positioning in the B2B online environment: A case from the UK Print industry, Journal of Brand Management, Vol. 16, No. 8, pp. 556-570 (claiming 50% of this article)***

OBJECTIVE/ CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	1	2	3	4	5	A	B	C	D	E	F
Paper 11	✓		✓		✓				✓		

Paper 11 is the second publication arising from the research outlined in 4.1.9 and is an analysis of the use of the website brand positioning elements that marketers use in order to educate customers about their brand in the B2B environment.

It is one of the very few papers published in the arena of online branding for business-to-business organisations. A strong brand positioning may have the effect of increasing trust in the brand and, in the online environment, this is imperative. It is not just what marketers say about themselves but how and where they say it on their websites that may be important, as is the subject of Paper 9. This research identifies those positioning elements that act as demonstrations of credibility of the brand, using a sample of websites from one business-to-business sector. The paper outlines the positioning elements, as shown in Figure 4.1 and explicates some implications for online marketing managers.



**Figure 4.1 Website Positioning elements used to demonstrate credibility of the brand and thus build trust. Source: Authors.**

This paper includes contributions to Objective 1 (To examine online marketing as part of the marketing framework), Objective 3 (To build a framework for brand positioning in the online environment) and Objective 5 (To develop frameworks to assist online marketing managers). It is concerned with Contribution to Knowledge D (The identification of effective online brand elements used to create credibility of a B2B brand). For a full list of citations of this paper, please see Appendix 2.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter brings the thesis to a close by summarising the key and secondary contributions presented by this body of work. The author reflects on these contributions in context of the critical appraisal in Chapter 2. The chapter continues with a reflection on the limitations of the work and makes recommendations about how future research could build on the work of the author.

### **5.2 Key Contributions**

In summary, six key contributions to knowledge arise from the research contained within this thesis. The duration of the period of research was approximately nine years, and the contributions occurred chronologically, each building on the findings of previous work. The key contributions (A-F) are as follows:

Contribution A (A framework for using online marketing strategically) is presented in Papers 1, 2 and 3. At the time these papers were written, there was very little academic work that analysed the contribution of online marketing to overall marketing strategy, particularly in respect of developing ongoing relationships with customers. Contribution A is a valuable

addition to the cadre of researchers specialising in the development of relationships in the online environment.

Contribution B (An analysis of how online marketing fits into the traditional marketing framework) is outlined in Papers 1, 2, 3 and 7 and puts into perspective the role and potential of online marketing to contemporary marketing professionals. Over time, the literature has acknowledged that online marketing is not a separate discipline within the marketing literature but should be an integral part of marketing strategy. These papers explain the function of online marketing, promote strategic usage and highlight potential areas of weakness.

Contribution C (The notion that trust in a brand influences online consumer behaviour by reducing perceived risk which leads to consumers committing to purchasing online) is introduced throughout papers 4, 5, 6 and 8. The suggestion that trust is fundamental to successful online marketing is discussed widely in Chapter 2, sections 2.9 and 2.10. The author presents evidence that trust moderates perceived risk for the online purchaser and, further, suggests ways of inspiring trust on the part of the online shopper in order to counter-balance perceived risk.



Contribution D (The identification of effective online brand elements used to create credibility of a B2B brand) is presented in Paper 11. As discussed in section 2.11, at the time this research was undertaken, online branding had not been widely discussed in academic literature, although it was acknowledged that branding online had the potential to be more complex. Contribution D is a helpful and constructive supplement to the online marketer's branding repertoire because it lays out a framework of elements which can be used in order to position a brand in the online environment.

Contribution E (An identification of how structural elements of websites which can be utilized to differentiate online brands from competitors' offerings) is presented in paper 9. Brand positioning elements presented in Paper 11 may be enhanced by the effective assignment to a specific part of a website. This is a theme which is overlooked in the marketing literature, possibly because it is perceived to be more relevant to web site designers. This contribution is a useful bridge between marketing strategy and the operationalisation of brand positioning strategy in the design of websites.

Contribution F (The proposition that relationships between contributors to online social networks help marketers to use them to their advantage) is offered in Paper 10. At the time of writing, social networks were an exciting opportunity for marketers but very little academic literature existed relating to the strategic use of social networks for understanding consumer behaviour. Contribution F is an early proponent of employing social networks to better understand consumer behaviour.

The work of the author has been accepted by the academic community, demonstrated by publications in academic peer-reviewed journals and the citation of her work in the research of others. It is relevant to stress that citations include papers published in 2011 and 2012, confirming that the author's work is still considered important, even in such a fast-moving academic topic area.

### ***5.3 Secondary Contributions***

Throughout the period of research, the author was keen to embrace methods that were most appropriate to fulfil the research objectives. This involved mixed-method research designs that were innovative, at times controversial, and ground-breaking. Although these contributions are not unique

to this work, they are nevertheless modern, novel and at times pioneering. In the case of data collection using a bought-in commercial list, this technique gave access to respondents who would otherwise been difficult to reach. Further, online data collection is fast, appropriate for the group under investigation (in this case purchasers of wine online) and is cost and energy efficient as many research costs are eliminated. The exploitation of permission-based lists is relatively common in practitioner research but hitherto has not been widespread in academic work. The author suggests that her work creates a bridge between academic and practitioner research which has been emulated by other researchers.

Paper 10 trailblazes the use of netnography in the academic research of marketing which is both innovative and potentially contentious. The continuing popularity of online social media means that products and brands are widely discussed in real time between disparate and potentially far flung consumers. It is logical to presume that marketing practitioners will increasingly need to understand the impact of such discussions on consumer opinion and behaviour and academic researchers will continue to explore the use of netnography as a vehicle for data collection. Consequently, Paper 10 provides a basis for further research into discussion forums and other social

networks.

Papers 9 and 11 employ online content analysis of websites to gather data which, at the time of writing, was novel and inventive. In this research, a hybrid approach was employed, whereby web sites were examined first in a qualitative manner to determine and refine the themes arising from the data. This enabled the definition of the components, the occurrence of which were then measured within the sample.

#### ***5.4 Reflections on limitations***

As with any research of this nature, there are limitations. Many of the samples used to collect data were small and, in consequence, results may be affected. In the case of Papers 9 and 11, a specific business segment was targeted from which to collect data. This was unavoidable owing to the relationship with the commercial sponsor who was a partner to the research. The results from analysis of data from this sample may be specific to that market segment and not transferrable to other business to business market segments. Nevertheless, other academic authors have considered the results useful and have cited them in their own work.

## ***5.5 Future Research Directions***

This work has focused on the building of trust and relationships in the online community. The initiation of trust has been deemed to be beneficial to organisations wishing to build a relationship with their customers. However, there has been a concurrent stream of literature relating to the forging of customer loyalty. It would be appealing and potentially worthwhile to consider whether the establishment of trust and the exploitation of relationships by marketers results in better customer retention and loyalty. Similarly, the author is fascinated by the demonstration of theoretical virtue in the online environment, deliberate or otherwise, and how this might link to aspects of trust development.

The subject of social networks and interaction within the online environment is changing on a day-to-day basis. The use of hand-held devices such as 4G mobile phones and mini-computers will continue to have an impact on how consumers interact with organisations. Future research could build on the work on social networks presented in this thesis; perhaps consider how social networks may develop on a real-time basis. For example, diners taking account of the opinion of others within the same restaurant through accessing online menu reviews.

Other potential areas of research could focus on brand co-creation, product development through customer opinion forums, marketing communications to hand held devices using mobile web access and location marketing, using the individual user's geographic location in order to direct specific messages to them in order to reinforce relationships.

Technology has developed at a phenomenal rate throughout the period of this research. If it continues to advance at a similar pace, there will doubtless be developments for which marketers and societies have no precedents on which to base their applications and for which academic research can provide direction.

The author suggests that one key area for research is how marketers could utilise the intra-customer relationships that consumers have with each other in social networks. How marketers can penetrate that relationship and utilise it for their own advantage, if at all, is an area of potential interest.

Finally, the motivation for posting to online communities needs to be understood. Building on the work of Nonnece *et al*,

(2004) a taxonomy of benefits to contributors and non-contributors to social networks would also be constructive. A comparison of self-representation purchaser behaviour (or the use of an alter-ego?) and actual behaviour may provide insights into how to market to consumers based on their aspirations or their self-representation.

Whatever the form of future research in this area, it is apparent that academics must focus on the strategic capabilities of online marketing for organisations. The speed of technological change demands that businesses and not-for-profit entities keep pace with the requirements of consumers to exploit their online skills for decision making. The rate of change in technology has been challenging for both marketers and academic researchers and it is certain that the velocity of change will continue to be rapid.

In the past, organisations have developed technological solutions without necessarily considering the needs of either the consumer or the marketer. The author suggests that further academic research is undertaken using a cross-disciplinary approach that involves marketers, computing science engineers

and behavioural psychologists to rectify this oversight.



## ***APPENDICES***

APPENDIX 1 - REFERENCES

APPENDIX 2 - CITATIONS OF THE PUBLISHED PAPERS

APPENDIX 3 - CONFIRMATION OF THE AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION TO  
THESE PAPERS

APPENDIX 4 - INVITATIONS TO REVIEW MANUSCRIPTS AND PAPERS AND  
OTHER INDICATORS OF ESTEEM

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## ***Appendix 2 -Citations***

The following is a list of citations of the author's work in academic journals and conference papers. Each of the papers (excepting Paper 7) presented in this thesis has been used in the work of others.

### ***Paper 1***

**Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S (2003) On-line Wine – Strategic or Tactical? *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 15, No 1 pp. 34-41 (claiming 50% of this article).**

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***Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S (2005) Initiation of Trust  
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## ***Paper 9***

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### ***Paper 10***

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## ***Paper 11***

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***Appendix 3 - Letters of confirmation of author's  
contribution to the papers presented in this thesis***

Letter of confirmation of collaboration from Sarah Quinton – the original is available for inspection upon request

To whom it may concern:

I write to confirm that Sally Harridge-March and I collaborated on a number of papers, including those as follows:

Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2003) On-line Wine – Strategic or Tactical? International Journal of Wine Marketing, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 34-41 (Paper 1 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March)

Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2003) Strategic Interactive Marketing of Wine On-Line – a case of Evolution, Marketing Intelligence and Planning, Vol 21, No. 7, pp. 357-362 (Paper 2 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March)

Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S. (2005) Initiation of Trust and Management of Risk in On-Line retailing: Uk On-Line Wine Market, International Journal of Wine Marketing, Vol 17, No. 2, pp. 5-20 (Paper 4 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March)


Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2006) The management of risk and Initiation of Trust in online purchasing: UK online wine marketing, International Journal of Information Technology and Management, Vol 5, No. 4, pp. 267-278 (Paper 6 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March)

Quinton, S. and Harridge-March, S. (2008) Trust and online wine purchasing: insights into UK consumer behaviour, International Journal of Wine Business Research, Vol 20, No. 1, pp. 68-85 (Paper 8 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March)

Harridge-March, S. and Quinton, S. (2009) Virtual Snakes and Ladders: Social Networks and the Relationship marketing Loyalty Ladder, The Marketing Review, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 171-181 (Paper 10 in PhD Thesis for Sally Harridge-March).

In the table overleaf, I have indicated our respective contribution in various aspects of the production of each paper.

Signed and Dated:

  
14 July 2012.  
SARAH E. QUINTON.

This is a copy of the signed original, which is available for  
inspection

Aspect of Paper	Paper 1 SHM	Paper 1 SQ	Paper 2 SHM	Paper 2 SQ	Paper 4 SHM	Paper 4 SQ	Paper 6 SHM	Paper 6 SQ	Paper 8 SHM	Paper 8 SQ	Paper 10 SHM	Paper 10 SQ
Research Conception and Design	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	40 %	60 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %
Literature search and review	60 %	40 %	60 %	40 %	60 %	40 %	50 %	50 %	60 %	40 %	60 %	40 %
Collection of Data	40 %	60 %	40 %	60 %	40 %	60 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	40 %	60 %
Analysis of Data	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	40 %	60 %	50 %	50 %
Construction of paper for academic publishing	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %	50 %



Letter of confirmation of collaboration from Nicolas Virtsonis. The original email is available for inspection on request

Thessaloniki, 19/08/2011

To whom it may concern,

I hereby confirm that Sally Harridge-March is responsible for 50% of the work completed on all our jointly written articles published, which are listed below:

Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2009) 'Brand Positioning in the B2B Online Environment: A Case from the UK Print Industry', *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 16, no. 8, pp. 556-570., June. .

Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2008) 'Website elements in B2B online communications: A case from the UK print industry', *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, vol. 26, no. 7, pp. 699-718, December, ISSN 0263-4503.

Virtsonis, N. and Harridge-March, S. (2007) 'Brand positioning in the B2B online environment: a conceptual framework.'. Paper presented at the Academy of Marketing Conference, Kingston University, July.

Nicolas Virtsonis

