

TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE MANIPULATION AS THREATS IN THE ONLINE RETAIL BUSINESS

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Abstract

The facilitation of technology has enabled customers to conduct online transactions regardless of geographical boundaries. However, the cut-throat nature of business often trumps observance of ethics as retailers appear not to do enough to protect consumers from becoming victims of scams. Christensen's theory of disruptive technology was used as a lens to show how the emergence of new technology may pose a threat to the continued existence of established markets and expose customers to online scammers. The study purposively sampled messages posted on two Facebook pages which claim to represent Tekkie Town, a sneakers store in South Africa, and responses from some users. To enhance chances of making an informed analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis was used to examine language techniques utilized by online advertisers, legit and fake, and comments from customers regarding their online shopping experiences. Results indicate retailers do not take special attention to monitor fake websites designed to scam their clients. Instead, it is customers who end up alerting stores to fake posts. We encourage business managers to uphold excellence practices and protect their customers by taking special measures to prevent scammers from easily copying their logos and scamming customers, which could harm their businesses.

Keywords: Ethics, language, marketing, scammers, retailers, consumer protection.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Though online retail business was already on an upward trajectory before the onset of COVID-19, its impact on the increase in online transactions is indisputable. Imposition of lockdowns by many countries following proclamation of COVID-19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020 inspired a boom in the online retail business (Adak et al., 2022; CM.com Report, 2022). COVID-19

“accelerated pre-existing consumer trends: declining consumer confidence and a growing preference” for online transactions (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2020, p.1); “revolutionized” (Morel, 2021; Anand et al., 2023) and “supercharged” online services (Morgan, 2021). Major retail chains rapidly expanded their online services through acquisition and launching new brands (Research and Markets, 2022).

In South Africa, a report by the Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman (CGSO) indicated that, after President Cyril Ramaphosa’s announcement of a national lockdown in March 2020, online shopping rose by 23 percentage in 12 months (BusinessTech, 2022). CM.com’s 2022 report reflected growth in online transactions in South Africa, with 48% of the participants utilizing e-commerce to shop for groceries. Seventy-one percent of the 2000 participants expressed satisfaction with ‘immediate’ responses to online inquiries. In 2022, South Africa posted a 35% growth in online retail, leaving the country’s online retail space at R55-billion, from 2021 which had 40% growth to close at R42.3-billion. Citing World Wide Worx managing director, principal analyst Arthur Goldstuck, as describing the windfall as “the pandemic dividend,” The Media Online (2023) states that “The 2020 boom in home deliveries has continued for the past two years, as retailers compete aggressively in every area of online shopping.” Cowling (2024, para 1) notes that online retailing has been relentless in its fecundity: from January 2024, 43 percent of e-commerce (buying and selling of goods and services over the internet) transactions in South Africa were made through credit cards.

Research and Markets (2022) highlights the growing significance of logistics, warehousing, and delivery, as well as the apprehension among independent retailers regarding the substantial investment required for technology and distribution capability. Online retail service providers, although they have their merits, have not been without their fair share of criticism. The charge sheet includes unfair practices like using vague terms to overcharge clients, delivering goods which are a far cry from what they advertise and, in extreme cases, non-delivering (Hu, Rabinovich & Hou, 2015). According to the CM.com’s 2022 report, clients expressed dissatisfaction with delays in receiving relevant responses caused by the repetitive questioning of automated responses, leading to a preference for human beings who can display empathy. 27% of the complaints received in 2020/21 were from online shoppers (BusinessTech, 2022). In as much as COVID-19 created an opportunity for a windfall, it also placed online retailers under pressure to deal with a sudden upsurge of orders. To put this into perspective, in March 2020 “complaints related to online shopping accounted for only 6% of total complaints received by the Ombud but this figure increased sharply to 27% of total complaints in the 2021 financial year” (Tembedza, 2022, para3).

The principal aim of this study is to examine how two Facebook pages claiming to represent Tekkie Town structured their messages to appeal to Facebook users and the customer reactions. Shedding

light on the usage of language by online retailers to promote their products, we expose distinguishing features that can separate genuine online dealers from bogus ones through our innovative analyzing techniques. These assist send a message of caution to online retailers to monitor the existence of counterfeit stores to safeguard their customers. The paper also educates customers on how to evaluate online information they encounter critically.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The study adopts Christensen's theory of disruptive technology as its theoretical standpoint because it is suitable for the examination of the impact of technology on transactions. The central premise to this theory is that the emergence of new technology lowers costs and increases the efficacy of doing things. However, rapid innovations may ultimately pose a threat to the continued existence of established markets. Christensen coined the terms, "disruptive technology" and "disruptive innovation" to describe "the processes by which an organization transforms labor, capital, materials, and information into products and services of greater value" (1997, p.9). The two terms represent shifts in the way business operates, with new market players benefiting at the expense of established ones. Among other examples, Christensen cites Honda, Kawasaki and Yamaha's introduction of small off-road motorcycles in North America and Europe as "disruptive technologies" to Harley-Davidson and BMW's large and powerful cycles and transistors emergence as an alternative to vacuum tubes (1997, p.11).

Furthermore, Christensen avers that well-managed companies disregard "principles of disruptive innovation" with disastrous consequences. Inversely, if leaders within organizations embrace innovations to fulfill their operations, "coming to grips with the way the world works," such organizations are likely to post impressive results. Another element of "the failure framework," according to Christensen, is when established companies dismiss disruptive technologies as a rational consideration. This is because products of disruptive technologies are cheaper and more convenient, promising profits that are often popularized in emerging markets. Additionally, loyal customers of established businesses typically avoid disruptive technologies. It is ironic, therefore, that companies that are responsive to their loyal clients often realize the importance of leveraging disruptive technologies when it is too late. This appears to endorse Packard's argument that advertisers who he pejoratively describes as "the hidden persuaders" only study behaviours of their customers to find ways of manipulating them (1957, p.ii). Christensen invokes the "theory of resource dependence" (p.14) advanced by the likes of Pfeffer and Salan to explain how leaders' realization of the importance of timeously availing products to clients is key to the survival of their organizations. Furthermore, organizations that are early adopters of technology gain greater advantages compared to those who wait and observe.

Nevertheless, Christensen's characterization of this phenomenon has a main limitation because it assumes established players and new entrants cannot coexist as the former is pushed into oblivion, even though many businesses now operate through hybrid, physical and online transactions (Shekar, Anjali & Pavithra, 2017). In addition, it appears as though Christensen has a deterministic attitude towards technology. Citing well-managed companies which did all the right things such as adopting competitive habits, listening to their customers and equipping themselves with new technology but still lost their market share implies that organizations ought to prioritize technology, yet it is a means to an end which they can utilize to suit their needs. However, the theory of disruptive technology remains useful in recognizing the ubiquity of technology and its indispensability in this age.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is another theory of interest in this study that examines the use of language. CDA derives its 'critical' nature from the Frankfurt School, a group of Neo-Marxists who call for a change in the social system (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Discourse is "based upon a view of semiosis as an irreducible part of material social processes" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122) and unpacks "hidden assumptions in received and naturalized historical accounts, with a particular emphasis on the language used in their elaboration" (Flowerdew, 2012, p.17). Ideology, a set of belief systems or philosophies by which an individual or group is identified, is a central element of CDA. Marxist scholars have a pejorative view of ideology which they accuse of instilling a "false consciousness" (Mohr, 2023, p.249). The fluidity of CDA manifests itself in its utilization by people who seek to legitimate authority and those who are agitating for a change in the status quo, which makes it a site of contestation between competing forces (v Dijk, 2006). Halliday observes that "language evolves in response to the specific demands of the society in which it is used" (1978, p.7) and (1994) characterizes language as a "social act"). Similarly, Wodak and Meyer (2009) acknowledge the role of socialization in creation and interpretation of messages. Hall (2007) considers discourse as a means of representation, specifically a form of knowledge pertaining to a certain subject. Therefore, CDA decodes hidden meaning "based upon a view of semiosis as an irreducible part of material social processes" (Fairclough, 2001, p.122).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Disruptive technology "applies to business, education, and healthcare as a low-level entrant into the marketplace" (Oroszi, 2020, p.449). Technology has always evolved to suit societal needs so it can be argued that it is as old as humanity itself. The likes of McLuhan (1964) and Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) have acknowledged the social transformative role of technology. As early as 1939, Joseph Schumpeter characterized innovation as "both the creator and destroyer of corporations and entire industries (Shek, Anjali & Pavithra, 2017, p.1). Nonetheless, the rapid rate at which technology is changing has earned this era, the moniker, the Technology Age (McCausland, King, Bartholomew,

Feyre, Ahmad & Finkelstein, 2015, p.1). Christensen (1997, p.95) asserts that the impact of disruptive technology has been felt extensively in retailing, with discounters overtaking traditional department and variety stores.

Marketing is a vital cog in promoting businesses and advertising is the lifeblood of every industry since advertisements are everywhere and influence everyone (González Ruiz, 2014) and consumers can buy “almost everything anywhere and at any time” (Yang, Van Quang & Thi Nguyen, 2020, p.1). Lines between online and offline transactions have been blurred by technology. Through algorithms and analysis of big data, retailers can assess client needs, place advertisements that are relevant to a niche, among other things. Regardless of where one transacts, the conduct that is expected from operators is basically the same: “ethical issues surrounding e-commerce are similar to the ethics of traditional brick-and-mortar retailing” (Limbu, Wolf & Lunsford, 2011, p.72).

There has been a groundswell of research on online transactions; in 2013, “there were more than 600 studies available discussing e-business adoption only” (Bucko, Kakalejščík & Ferencová (2018, p. 3). These studies underscore the need for providers of goods and services to place a premium on customer retention by listening to their requests and delivering them. However, dishonesty is not an entirely recent allegation against advertising which has been accused of being an ‘elixir of life in the culture industry’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2010, p.215) and snake oil” (Gainty, 2021, para 8). Commenting on how advertisers seek to appeal to targeted audience, Packard bemoaned that “many of us are being influenced and manipulated—far more than we realize (1957, p.i). De Lange, R. W. (2020) cites a testosterone booster supplement which misled consumers by using inappropriate scientific terminology and research as proof of its effectiveness.

Individuals can use pseudonyms to engage in unethical practices such as misleading advertising and selling products of poor quality, taking advantage of the ubiquitous nature of technological affordances like the internet, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (Yang & Van Quang & Thi Nguyen, 2020, p.1). Van Gensen (2024) notes that deepfakes, false images which are generated by artificial intelligence are used to mislead online users. Van Gensen adds that some states in America have crafted legislation to deal with deepfakes especially if it pertains to elections or is of an explicit nature. Lefi and Sghaier (2024) acknowledge that, while technology has benefits, it can equally be problematic for users and companies.

In South Africa, the Competition Act, No. 89 of 1998 (the Act) established three independent statutory bodies: The Competition Commission (Commission), the Competition Tribunal (Tribunal) and the Competition Appeal Court (CAC) to regulate how firms compete in the market. In terms of their roles, the Commission focuses on investigations and prosecutions, whereas the Tribunal functions as a court.

The CAC handles appeals against decisions of the Tribunal. Though the three bodies are autonomous from each other and the State, the Commission and Tribunal account to the department of trade, industry and competition (DTIC), whereas the CAC falls under the judiciary (Competition Commission, 2024).

Laws which pertain to online trading and other laws which regulate the sale of all goods and services govern online retailers. Under Section 15 (1) of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act, 1972 (Act No.54 of 1972), South African health minister, Joe Phaahla amended the act in 2023. Part 1: 2 (2) of the law compels anyone wishing to produce, donate, import or sell to “provide accurate information regarding the characteristics, origin, composition, quality, nutritive value, nature or other properties of a foodstuff and the time and place of its manufacture to the consumer” (Department of Health, 2023, p.39). In addition, the law stipulates that a product must bear a “use by” date which, like “expiration date” means it should not be consumed as doing so would endanger the life of a consumer (Department of Health, 2023, p.25).

4. METHODOLOGY

We employed purposive sampling, a non-probability method, to select two Facebook pages that claim to represent Tekkie Town. Keywords such as consumer opinions, techniques used by online retailers, online shopping, e-commerce, in South Africa, among others, were typed into the Google search engine to conduct a comparative analysis based on their structure, which includes the use of words, pictures, individual and collective primary meanings (denotation), and secondary meanings (connotation). However, we discarded most of the results from the Google search because they had limited relevance to the South African context. Tekkie Town was purposefully selected because it is one of South Africa’s leading, homegrown sportswear outlets which recently fell victim to a series of brand impersonation. We conducted a comparative analysis between posts from the verified Tekkie Facebook Page and a bogus one to show the techniques employed by the two pages, as well as how the verified page and Facebook users responded to the bogus page. To identify the real Tekkie Town Page, we prefixed words like authentic and genuine whereas for the other page we prefixed ‘fake’, ‘bogus’ and ‘imitation’ and enclosing the words Tekkie Town in single quotes (‘Tekkie Town’) in contrast to the authentic page which is devoid of the quotes.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), an interdisciplinary concept which gained impetus in the 1980s, was used to provide a nuanced analysis of collected data. The selection of CDA was informed by the fact that it “has become a valuable methodology in the critical analysis of a broad range of topics” because of its eclectic nature (Fadyl, Nicholls & McPherson, 2012, p.478). CDA facilitates analysis of data by

identifying the words used in a text, their frequency, presentation, why they have been selected over others, the relationship between each other, and the implications of all these factors.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzed the structure of a fake and legit Tekkie Town Facebook pages, comparing how they use words, pictures, individual and collective primary meanings (denotation), and secondary meanings (connotation). The findings are presented thematically.

5.1 Tekkie Town's use of advertising techniques

Advertisements basically seek to influence an AIDA response from targeted groups: drawing their Attention, generating Interest, stimulating Desire for advertised products and inspiring Action mainly through buying the product.



Image 1



Image 2

FIGURE 1. 'TEKKIE TOWN' IMAGES

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TekkieTown/posts/682928110611901/>

Creators of the two images (which they pass off as emerging from the real Tekkie Town Facebook Page) employ various techniques of advertising. This contributes towards giving the posts in which the visuals appear a semblance of authenticity. Both texts (Image 1 and Image 2) combine words and colourful pictures, and their graphics are visible enough to attract attention. Without the 'fake' stamp, Image 2 appears genuine though, like Image 1, it has few questionable aspects: the old Tekkie Town logo and the R37 price tag for branded sneakers are not feasible in South Africa's current economic context. The two images were created on the 16th of December 2023, just over a week before Christmas, a time when many South Africans receive their salaries and bonuses so they can afford to be more liberal with their spending.

To complement the graphics, written text has been added to the advertisement. Just as graphics in Image 1 and Image 2, words are used with emojis in the text's body. It should be noted that this text also takes into account a similar post by the same Facebook user, with the only difference being that the other text refers to Nike Airforce sneakers instead of Converse All Stars.

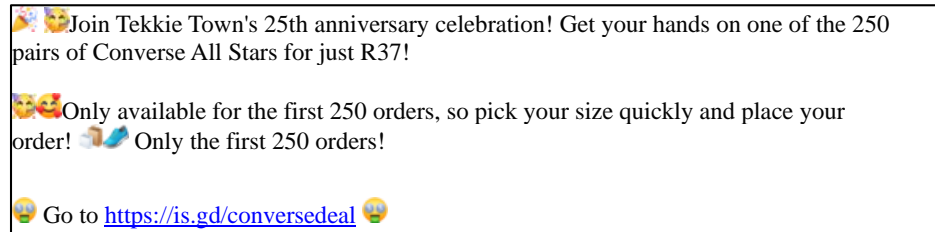


FIGURE 2. BODY OF THE DECEMBER 16 'TEKKIE TOWN' POST

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TekkieTown/posts/682928110611901/>

The emoji of a party blower, 🎉 two party blowers putting on party hats 🎉🎉 and a smiling face with three hearts across the face which symbolize excitement and extreme greatness 😄 creates a celebratory atmosphere befitting a "25th anniversary celebration!" which the page claims to be imminent. Two emojis of luggage and a sneaker suggest that they are suitable for any form of travel. The green paper on the mouth of the two emojis suggests that the buyer can freely part with the money required for the sneakers because it is a big bargain. Apparently, the youths, people who are 35 years and below, the main users of Facebook and who extensively use emojis, are targeted. Nonetheless, just as anyone, regardless of age can become Facebook savvy, they could be unintended audiences or indeed, targeted since most of them pay for their youthful dependants' expenses so they are aware of youths' preferences.

By playing on people's fears, Imperatives are used to urge followers of the 'fake' Facebook page and Tekkie Town fans to 'act quickly' (read buy the sneakers) lest they miss out. From the outset, readers are advised to "join" others to "get your hands on" the advertised sneakers", "pick" a size and "place" orders. Synonyms like "only" and "just" respectively emphasize scarcity of the sneakers and the low price at which they are being sold: there are "only" 250 pairs which are being sold for "just" R37. Besides portraying this 'first come first serve' scenario', selection of words like the adverb "quickly" which is used twice, heighten the sense of urgency. The post exploits people's desire to belong to an exclusive club (Nike Air Force and Converse All Stars are big brands) which they are advised to "join". Therefore, the impression that the sneakers are selling at R37 on promotion increases chances of them being sold out which supports the post's main idea that customers must quickly place and pay for their orders. Inclusion of an exclamation mark at the end of every sentence and twice, in the middle and at the end of the last two sentences accentuates the call for quick action.

5.2 Appeal to bandwagon

Apparently, scammers use false endorsements to create a veneer of authenticity. In the 'Tekkie Town' post, several Facebook users claim to have received their orders, with one such user stating that the sneakers were couriered to their doorsteps within an hour of placing an order. Several comments seem to justify allegations that they have either been posted by creators of the post or their associates. In the first six comments, four users 'inquire' about the availability of their shoe sizes. A user 'thanks' Tekkie Town for delivering whilst another creates an impression of contentment through four smiling emojis as well as claiming to have received their order and, apparently to appeal to the predominantly Zulu speaking users, remarks in IsiZulu, "Nam sengwatholile awam 😊😊😊😊" (I have also received my pairs of sneakers).

In addition, someone posts a message in which 'Tekkie Town' 'acknowledges' that an order has been placed. They show an email confirming the order has been sent to what looks like an authentic Gmail email address. In large bold font apparently to indicate the need for urgent payment of the order the user is advised to redeem their gift card which means they ought to pay. The 'customer' is prompted to click a link sent to their email for the credits to be deposited into their account (see explanation on phishing below). The words BLACK FRIDAY which are written in large white font stand out on a black and white background to entice users to the timely 'promotion'.

However, the 'Tekkie Town' post attracted negative comments with a user tagging the real Tekkie Town page and informing them that their brand "is being used to scam people" whilst another laments that they made a payment but did not receive the sneakers. Another accuses those who claim to have received their orders of complicity; they are "in the same WhatsApp group. All scammers". This is corroborated by a user who states that false testimonials are part of scammers' *modi operandi* to create the impression that "this is legit". A slightly different perspective is the suggestion by a user that people who have fallen victim to the scam could be behind the positive comments, hoping to lure others to experience the same feeling. However, another user surmises that this is either the work of a well-coordinated syndicate so posters of complimentary comments are doing so because they are "eating together" with creators of the scam or the comments were posted from the scammers' multiple accounts.

5.3 The victims

Amounts totaling R204, R597.57 and R604.53 were deducted from accounts belonging to three different Facebook users whilst the father of a fourth lost R991. Another user explains that scammers deduct varying amounts once they have access to credit card numbers. Two Facebook users who appear to be

a male and a female do not disclose how much was deducted from their accounts. However, it appears as though more women (six) than men (one) fell for the trap, though this could be because men tend to avoid disclosing that they have been scammed for fear of being stigmatized as 'weak'.

5.4 In the nick of time sponsored

Most of the followers of the Tekkie Town Facebook Page confess that they almost fell for the scam until they discovered that the 'store' had just two posts. Apparently, some Facebook users were only spared due to various reasons. A few users thank Tekkie Town for alerting them to the fake post though the post may have been inspired by proactive people like a Matatiele based Tekkie Town customer who posted that they reported the matter to the store's local branch before the store's post warning users of a fake one. Having insufficient funds proved to be a blessing in disguise for two users as the scammers' attempts to deduct R556 and R1060 from their respective accounts hit a brickwall. One user only realized the scam after receiving a text message requesting their bank details. Possibly due to the sophisticated methods that are employed by scammers, another user concedes that they may be scammed someday.

5.5 Comic relief

Despite the gravity of the matter, some Facebook users saw the lighter side, with 'prospective customers' sarcastically remarking "on my way", "how much?", "we coming for leftovers" and promising to make 'a donation' and advising Tekkie Town to reduce its prizes to "beat the scammers at their game". With tongue in cheek, a poster commended their ancestors for foiling the scammers by inspiring them to cancel the transaction at the last minute. Comments like "it was always too good to be true", "I knew", "I saw it thee emojis" and "saw it coming" shows that some users were of the opinion that the 'Tekkie Town' post had red flags. A user who was more blunt, described as idiotic, falling victim to such scams.

5.6 Facebook users are not passive dupes

However, Facebook users and consumers, especially loyal Tekkie Town clients, have demonstrated that they do not easily fall for deception. A cursory glance at the statistics for the two Facebook pages claiming to represent Tekkie Town reflects sharp differences. There is a vast difference in followers, with the authentic Tekkie Town garnering a staggering 784 000 followers and 576 000 likes (verified with a tick) to 'Tekkie Town's paltry 240 followers and even less likes (220). Tekkie Town has achieved a 3.2 out of 5 rating and 572 reviews compared to the dubious 'Tekkie Town's 'not yet rated' status and

1 review which is “based on the opinion of 2 people” (Facebook, n.d). Even that single review which claims to have confirmed with Tekkie Town Boksburg that the ‘Tekkie Town’ page is fake is scathing, ending their comment with one word “SCAM!!!”, with the capital letters and three exclamation marks emphasizing the need for vigilance. This comment attracted a like from a Facebook user who, together with another, thanked the poster in the comment section. Another user recommends “Clarified_Techs” an Instagram page to “take them down or track down who’s behind this immediately”. Nonetheless, two users urge fellow Facebook posters to be vigilant because during the festive season, scammers devise strategies disguised as Black Friday/ December promotions.

It was not until the 19th of December 2023, that the real Tekkie Town Facebook Page warned the public of a bogus page which was using its old blue and yellow logo claiming to sell Nike shoes for R37. In the post, the fashion store advises Facebook users to desist from clicking the link on the imitation account because “it is a scam”, informs users that they only communicate through the website <https://brnw.ch/21wEEHU> and official social media pages and warn people to “beware of scammers”. Accompanying the verbal warnings is an image of the ‘original’ picture accompanying a post from ‘Tekkie Town’ (Image 1) encouraging users to participate in the ‘shop’s 25th anniversary by ordering sneakers for R37. The picture from the authentic Tekkie Town Page (Image 2) captions the image with bold capital letters in stencil font emblazoned “FAKE” diagonally straddling the sneaker in the image used by ‘Tekkie Town’ to get the message across (see also the reference to the real Tekkie Town page’s customer pledge in “What could have gone wrong for the Scammers? In subsequent sections).

5.7 So similar yet so different: What could have gone wrong for the Scammers?

There are so many similarities between the fake Tekkie Town and the authentic one. “Footwear store” marks each of the two pages as the primary identifier and the logos include a circular logo sneaker with a white outline in a predominantly navy-blue background close to the inner circle.



Logo 1 (fake)



Logo 2 (real)

FIGURE 3. TEKKIE TOWN LOGO

Sources: <https://www.facebook.com/TekkieTown/posts/682928110611901/>; <https://tekkietown.co.za/pages/about-us>
Though Logo 1 is an older version of Tekkie Town’s logo, many people may not be able to distinguish it from the current one since they both have the circular logo with a sneaker as a central element. However, there are a few red flags.

At a glance, one can tell that the two logos differ in several ways. The store's motto, "GREAT BRANDS, GREAT PRICES," is emblazoned in white font on the top and at the bottom of the field separating the two circles of Logo 2. The circular shape in Logo 1 is devoid of any letter and has a thin boundary between the inner and outer circles. Where Logo 2 has two yellow boundaries between the two circles, Logo 1 has just one. In Logo 1, the circular logo is flanked by the trademark name, "Tekkie Town" which are written in an eye-catching bold, yellow colour set against a plain background. A closer look inside the circular logos would reveal slight variations.

Furthermore, though it employs persuasive language, the official Tekkie Town Facebook Page is responsive to needs of its customers unlike the fake one which neither claims to care about customers nor offers any tips for avoiding scams. The detailed Tekkie Town page's information (i) section uses superlatives such as 'GREAT' (customer service), "widest" (range of quality branded footwear), prices, personal style like the pronouns "we" and "our" in "we value our customers", emotive language such as pledging to "take the privacy of their [customers'] personal information seriously" as well as offering "great prices". The message for the fake post referred to earlier, claims that the store is celebrating 25 years (in 2023) yet the real Tekkie Town page and website, <https://tekkietown.co.za/pages/about-us> indicates that the store was established in the year 2000 meaning that it has existed for 23 years. These platforms also show that Tekkie Town operates more than 400 stores in South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia and is part of the Pepkor Group of Companies under their Speciality Division, with head offices in George, South Africa. The real Tekkie Town page also lists traceable contact details: telephone number- 044 871 3524. 044 is the area code for George where the footwear store is headquartered, an email account with the company domain: hello@tekkietown.co.za and a hyperlink: http://www.tekkietown.co.za/?utm_source=facebook_page&utm_medium=website_link&utm_campaign=SP&utm_content=SP which directly leads to the store's offers and virtual locations. In contrast, the hyperlinks for 'Tekkie Town' lead to dead ends: clicking the link below:

<https://www.facebook.com/people/Tekkie-Town/61554746385328> yields:



This content isn't available right now

FIGURE 4. IMAGE 1 OF 'TEKKIE TOWN' DEAD END

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Tekkie-Town/61554746385328>

When this happens, it's usually because the owner only shared it with a small group of people, changed who can see it or it's been deleted.

Just as clicking:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=122096404892131710&set=a.122096405996131710> yields:



Sorry, this content isn't available right now

FIGURE 5. IMAGE 2 OF 'TEKKIE TOWN' DEAD END

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Tekkie-Town/61554746385328>

Just as clicking: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Tekkie-Town/61554746385328> yields: this content isn't available right now.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has revealed that e-commerce brings convenience and lowers costs for consumers. However, consumers must remain vigilant, as the lines between scams and genuine promotions can blur. Christensen's theory of disruptive technology showed that the emergence of new technology may ultimately pose a threat to the continued existence of established markets and expose customers to online scammers. CDA indicated that it is important for consumers to use indices such as the number of posts, date posted, language used, omitted information, verifiable contact details and working links to assess the legitimacy of the information they encounter online. It is important for retailers to provide regular education on distinguishing between scams and real sales. Customers should confirm with bona fide firms if they are in doubt and also check comments that are flagged by other users and learn, with caution, from testimonies of victims.

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