

Outcome measures of social media adoption by SME business in Middle East

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Abstract

Social media is one of enormous platform utilized for the developement of Bussiness operations, improvement commercial turnovers, enhancing the strong relationships, goodwill between the customers & business of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs). Social media utilization is major element to idenfity the loopwholes and crucial factors that support to identify the appropriate solutions to address the business challenges and implement efficient business plan for the SMEs. Primary intention of research investigation was to indenfity and ensure the variables that influence the outcome measures of business

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operations at Middle East Region SMEs by the adoption of Social Media. A comprehensive literature review was conducted on the existing papers and identified potential research gaps. Five independent factors were identified such as search engine optimization (SE), content marketing (CM), technological innovation (TI), value generation (VG), and customer engagement (CE). Additionally outcome measures were derived based on adoption of social media. Research study adopted a quantitative approach. The questionnaire instrument was utilized for the data collection with total of 45 questions including demographic questions (specifically in Middle East Region), and circulated through online and acknowledged by 463 members. Study adopted SmartPLS 4 software to derive the results from the collected data and were clearly mentioned. It was concluded that five independent variables such as search engine optimization, content marketing, technological innovation, value generation and customer engagement have a positive and significant impact on sustainable advantage, digital entrepreneurship, customer value, brand awareness and creation of trust which are outcome measures of social media adoption. Additionally, technological innovation variable act as a moderator on the association between value generation and outcome measures of adoption of social media. The implication of research study indicate that SME owners should adopt and implement the social media practices to reap the diverse advantages.

Subject Classification: 68M99.

Keywords: Customer engagement, Brand awareness, Creation of trust, Value generation, Technology innovation.

I. Introduction

SMEs are categorized into three specific terms such as “Microbusiness”, “Small business” and “Medium business”, which are purely based on the company's net worth and yearly turnover revenue. Adoption of digitalization has a serious impact on the customer engagement and develop attractions based on the life requirements. Customers are able to acquire their day-to-day essentials & fulfill needs through the utilization of sophisticated mobile applications and e-commerce websites [42]. Social media brought major impact on every person involved and noted that mostly people spending time on the different medias. Hence, it is essential to study further and identify the impact factors on SME businesses [3]. Based on the previous studies, it is clear that the social media is a vast & huge domain that stimulates further investigation and studies. Social media enables to attract new consumers, develop & maintained relationships with existing clients [38]. Social media platforms support the SMEs businesses to sustain in the market for a long period of time and successfully withstand in the market [1].

Advantages of utilizing social network include enhance sales profitability, brand image establishment, cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and

the ability to connect strongly with the client. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, social networking techniques have been utilized with great efficacy [45]. Social media utilization enables to publish the new posts and share it, allowing users to contact with people all over the world, and connects them with groups that share common interests. It is successful in reaching the intended audience, and it is an essential tool for marketing managers [22]. Notable usage of social media gives businesses with efficient communication channels as well as an opportunity to develop and boost their companies' reputations [8]. Majority of Qatar's SMEs are actively involved marketing their goods and services via social media platforms, and many of them have also made financial investments in online marketplaces [33]. The portion of the economy that is comprised of SME businesses which acts as a backbone for many national economies; hence, the more research is recommended and significant on SME businesses [44].

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis

Business owners of SMEs to utilize social media for assisting the customers to conclude and easy making decision to purchases and trading [7]. Interaction in online social media variable encounter a positive effect on intention of customer and attracts to purchase the products and services [43]. Content sharing variable mediates the relationship between firm performance [47]. The enticing nature of customers raise curiosity having a positive impact on innovation prices of products and performance of finance that is assured by suppliers [30]. The method statement through which customers are attracted and engaged with company's businesses phase completely transformed after evolution of artificial intelligence. While adopting new technology, merchants should ensure to maintaining their customers' trust and provide high quality level services. However, Adoption of AI is even more crucial for businesses. Therefore, trust plays a very vital part in the development of relationships and interactions with the customers [2]. Incorporating the entrepreneurship in the early stages of studies results in increase in business success [20]. The environmental component is not having an effect on the production of value for the organization [48]. Social and governance aspects lead to impose a productive effect on both value and profit for the organization [5].

The financial performance of the company has been influenced by the digital marketing tools and the payments that have been done digitally. As a result, business proprietors should ensure the implementation of digital

technology for their company's transactions in order to facilitate and support to alleviate the financial performance [39]. Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty factors got influences by the assets and liabilities [36]. The willingness to take financial risks, understanding of financial matters, and access to financial resources are all factors that determine an organization's capacity to remain financially viable [53]. Formulating business strategy should place an emphasis on financial considerations for maintaining long-term sustainability of the business [23]. The majority of financial technology firms were able to effectively convert the majority of their new visitors into customers during the COVID-19 crisis. The organizations that are receiving a significant amount of website traffic are likely to convert their new visitors into customers [35]. The quality of the customer connection, the quality of the material that is created, the stickiness, and the customer's attitude toward the brand all have an influence on the customer's willingness to behave loyally [52]. Optimized and non-optimized websites exhibit a disparity in quality. Websites that have been optimized achieve high ranks. Website administrators should prioritize the optimization of their organization's webpages [37]. According to the analysis, social media is both participatory and instructive, most of the social media tools is used in advertising cultural events [12]. The majority of the research that was looked at indicates that traditional marketing methods are being replaced by social media marketing. As the process of digitization has begun to permeate every aspect of society, traditional marketing methods have been augmented with the assistance of digital marketing technologies and believed that doing so is an effective path for customer engagement [32]. Purchase intentions were affected by three aspects, including the quality of the service provided, electronic-word of mouth, and marketing through social media channels. Business owners need to focus on marketing tactics and technology proficiencies related to social media marketing for increasing the purchasing intentions of SME clients [4]. Social media marketing is influenced by generosity, trust, a willingness to take suggestions, and active engagement [19]. Following the implementation of more robust strategies for managing relationships with customers, the bank's reputation began to improve. The customer relationship management acts as a mediator between the relationship of social media marketing & image of the brand [49]. Customer relationship management have a strong impact on loyalty of the customer, customer trust on the company, happiness of customer, & the quality of bonding with customers [25]. Managers must maintain the stronger bonding with the customer which drives the customer continuity [29].

It is necessary to have good content that is innovative, interesting, and relational in order to interact with customers through a social media networking platforms [31]. Metrics of customer behavior does not have effect on willingness to like the post, share the post, or comment on an existing or new post. The act of like a post is a way for individuals to express their opinions. According to the measures of consumer behavior, however, the likes, comments, and shares are barely observed and do not alter the perceived level of assistance [46]. Authors focused on the textual qualities of the messages that are posted on social media. A post that includes simple text that is easy to comprehend and read, is lengthy having more than 321 characters, and has a strong and a greater number of hashtags is more likely to obtain higher levels of interaction and exposure [16]. Attitude can be viewed in three dimensions responding emotionally, responding intellectually and reacting conatively to the object of one's attitude. The marketing technique of "influencer marketing" is one that is rapidly expanding [51]. The assessments on customers of an organization produces a high impact on future profit of the company. These assessments are made by measuring level of customer satisfaction & bonding level with company [13]. There is an impact of perceived behaviors over an extended duration of time. Consumers' favorable opinions of a company's activities do not affect the company's financial profits; but same perceptions do influence the company's profitability indirectly through customer satisfaction. This highlights how important it is to communicate new innovations, and especially initiatives related to corporate social responsibility [15].

Since the restaurant industry is so fiercely competitive, the managers need to use social media platforms, focus on growing their online brand, boosting online advertisements and obtaining wider reach, and keep the post-service quality high, all of which are important factors in the competition [40]. At the time of pandemic period, most of the SMEs have learned about the social media technologies, its usage and showed positive responses to adopt platforms to market their goods & engage with their consumers. Intentions for adopting of social media technologies is influenced by several factors, including technological, organizational, and environmental context, as well as social media literacy [11]. The authors conducted in-depth research on the three factors, including customer relationship management, quality of service, and customer loyalty. Both client loyalty depends on the relationship management with customers and the quality of services provided to the customers [28].

This detailed literature review derived five independent variables namely search engine optimization (SE), content marketing (CM), value generation (VG), technological innovation (TI), customer engagement (CE). Additionally, literature review derived one dependent variable called as outcome measures of social media adoption by the small and medium scale companies in Middle East (OM). Value generation (VG) variable has four sub variables namely network performance (VG1), Customer relationship management (VG2), artificial intelligence (VG3), firm ESG performance (VG4), financial results (VG5). The search engine optimization (SE) variable has four sub variables namely organic visitors (SE1), customer experience (SE2), backlinks (SE3), sustainability (SE4), digital marketing tools (SE5). The content marketing (CM) variable has five sub variables namely consumer behavior (CM1), product categories (CM2), impressions (CM3), emotions (CM4) and financial gains (CM5). The technology innovation (TI) variable has five sub variables namely customer expectation (TI1), digital marketing strategy (TI2), organization size (TI3), risk perception (TI4), and customer satisfaction (TI5). The customer engagement (CE) variable contains five sub variables namely decision process (CE1), valuable content (CE2), loyalty (CE3), perceived value (CE4) and word of mouth marketing (CE5). The dependent variable, outcome measures of adopting social media by small & medium scale business in Middle East regions (OM) have five outcome measures namely sustainable advantage (OM1), creation of trust (OM2), brand awareness (OM3), digital entrepreneurship (OM4) and customer value (OM5). The following six hypotheses have been formulated: refer the fig. 1.

H1: Value generation (VG) has a positive and considerable influence on outcome measures of adoption (OM).

H2: Search engine marketing (SE) has a strong impact on outcome measures of adoption (OM).

H3: Content marketing (CM) has a strong and beneficial impact on outcome measures of adoption (OM).

H4: Technological innovations (TI) have a strong impact on outcome measures of adoption (OM).

H5: Customer engagement (CE) has a strong and beneficial impact on outcome measures of adoption (OM).

H6: Technological innovation (TI) moderates the association between value generation and outcome measures of adoption (VG->OM).

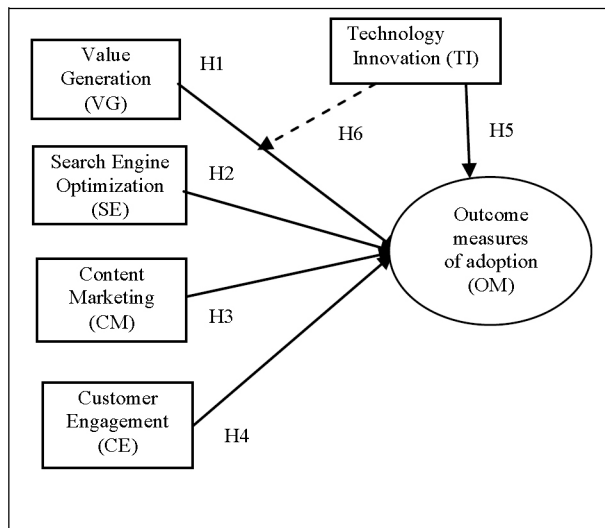


Figure 1
Conceptual Framework (Author's own work)

III. Research Methodology

An objective of this research study is to analyze the factors through the quantitative method that impacts the outcome measures of adopting social media by Small & Medium size business in the Middle East Region. Additionally, to investigate the reasonable effects of mediator and moderator on highlighted dependent variables. Quantitative data collected by method of circulating the questionnaire which is consider as an important tool via social media platforms like Facebook and professional networks like LinkedIn in the Middle East region and facilitate the feedback providers with an opportunity to assess unconditionally the relationships between variables. Study ensure that the questionnaire is responded by the persons involved in different industries related to Small and Medium Enterprise SMEs. Such as CEOs of SMEs, marketing, sales, IT, business development managers, operation managers, digital marketing service providers, made up the majority of respondents to the survey. Feedback from total 463 members were received from various parts of Middle East countries like Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and other part of Middle East region. The collected data was analyzed using SmartPLS 4 software.

Secondary data utilized to derive hypotheses from existing literatures and referred to top journal articles, official websites. In order to determine variable, this study made use of the most recent literature that has been published in 2019 and beyond. Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Semantic Search are the most commonly used search engines for literature.

IV. Results and discussion

The data collected while research studies with the support of questionnaire is reviewed and excluded the following sub variables have namely firms ESG performance (VG4), sustainability (SE4), impressions (CM3), organizational size (TI3) and loyalty (CE3) during the data cleaning process. Based on the data collected, it is identified that data is responded by the qualified and experiences male and female genders in the ratios of 55% and 45% respectively from different firms. Although there was a significant disparity in the number of male and female responders, don't apply a serious bias in the results. Additionally, the collected data studied under different categories in terms of percentage such as Age distribution where the responded participants of 32% are belongs to the age bracket of 20 to 30, 46% fall within the age range of 31 to 40, and 22% are over the age of 41. From the Occupation point of view the 36% of responded participants are work in the SMEs industries, 20% work in the social media industries and 9% & 35 % are stakeholders related to SMEs and digital marketing services respectively. Regarding Geographically, responders from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are recorded as highest percentage of involvement at 42%, followed by United Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) at 27%, State of Qatar at 19%, and other parts of the Middle East region at 12% even though the participants were chosen randomly.

The collected data assessed with the reliability and validity tests. Reliability and validity are extracted with the support of Cronbach alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) respectively. Referring to the Table 1, it is noted that the Cronbach's alpha values of all constructs are more than 0.70, the OM- construct having the maximum value as 0.785 which. indicates a degree of reliability is ranges from good to outstanding. Average variance extracted values are used to identify Convergent validity. According to authors [17] the threshold value of AVE is 0.5. AVE values of all the constructs are greater than 0.5, it results as the convergent validity

is up to the mark for this model. The AVE values for this model ranges minimum of 0.538 to maximum of 0.586, which indicates the presence of convergent validity in the proposed model.

Convergent validity can be evaluated by using loadings. Table 2 indicates that there are 25 determinants with a loading greater than 0.7, and one determinant with a value of 0.685, which is almost rounded to 0.7. Therefore, this concludes the existence of convergent validity. It is noted that the diagonal values (AVEs) are greater than when compared to its squared correlation values with respective of their associated rows & columns. This model is valid in terms of its ability to discriminate between groups and model has discriminant validity. It also noted that model has no evidence of multicollinearity.

Table 1
Construct reliability and Convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.764	0.586
Content Marketing (CM)	0.721	0.544
Outcome Measures (OM)	0.785	0.538
Search Engine Optimization (SE)	0.721	0.544
Technology Innovation (TI)	0.747	0.569
Value Generations (VG)	0.747	0.568

The value of R^2 for the dependent variable, which represents the outcome of adoption of social media by SME's (OM), is 0.698. This demonstrates that the five contributing variables of the model, value generation (VG), content marketing (CM), search engine optimization (SE), technology innovation (TI), and customer engagement (CE) explain 69.8% of variation in the dependent variable. According to authors [18], the R^2 value of 69.8% achieved by the PLS regression model is considered to be rather high. Five direct relationships and seven indirect relationships are found in the model.

Table 2
Convergent validity using loadings

Construct	CE	CM	OM	SE	TI	VG
CE1	0.743					
CE2	0.771					
CE4	0.810					
CE5	0.734					
CM1		0.753				
CM2		0.714				
CM4		0.735				
CM5		0.747				
OM1			0.700			
OM2			0.685			
OM3			0.748			
OM4			0.751			
OM5			0.780			
SE1				0.757		
SE2				0.732		
SE3				0.713		
SE5				0.747		
TI1					0.718	
TI2					0.775	
TI4					0.743	
TI5					0.781	
VG1						0.737
VG2						0.786
VG3						0.718
VG5						0.772

Table 3
Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis		β -Value	t-Value	p-Value	Result
H1	VG -> OM	0.214	5.090	0.000	supported
H2	SE -> OM	0.140	3.180	0.001	supported
H3	CM -> OM	0.234	6.122	0.000	supported
H4	TI -> OM	0.162	3.184	0.001	supported
H5	CE -> OM	0.137	2.940	0.003	supported
H6	TI x VG -> OM	-0.026	3.322	0.001	supported

The following are the Five direct relationship

1. There is a strong correlation between VG and OM, as mentioned in the Table 3, t-value of 5.090 & a path coefficient value is 0.214 for β_{VG-OM} . This supports the acceptance of the first hypothesis (H1) at a 1% significance level ($t > 2.59$). this result aligns with the existing findings of author [41].
2. A significant relationship between SE and OM exists with t-value of 3.180 and a path coefficient of 0.140 for β_{SE-OM} . This provides evidence of a high connection between the SE and OM at significance level of 1% ($t > 2.59$), hence second hypothesis (H2) is accepted. The findings of [27] provide support to the H2 hypothesis.
3. With t-value of 6.122 and a path coefficient of 0.234 for β_{CM-OM} . This value confirms strong correlation between CM and OM. Thus, third hypothesis (H3) is accepted at a 1% significance level ($t > 2.59$). This result aligns with the existing findings of [50].
4. A strong correlation identified between TI and OM, t-value = 3.184 and $\beta_{TI-OM} = 0.162$. Thus, fourth Hypothesis (H4) is accepted at a 1% significance level ($t > 2.59$). The findings of [9] support H4 hypothesis.
5. The t-value for β_{CE-OM} is 2.940, and its path coefficient is 0.137, indicating a high association between these two variables. At significance level of 1% ($t > 2.59$), Hypothesis 5 (H5) is accepted. The results from author [21] corroborate the H5 hypothesis. All five direct relationships (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5) are confirmed.

During analysis of this study seven indirect relationships were identified as follows.

1. Search engine optimization (SE) is mediated through value generation (VG) and points to outcome measures of adopting social media by small and medium size business (OM). This indirect relationship is matched with the findings of author [34].
2. There is positive indirect effect of content marketing (CM) on outcome measures of adoption of social media (OM), through customer engagement (CE) which aligns the findings of author [14].
3. Another positive effect of content marketing (CM) on outcome measures of adoption of social media (OM), through value generation (VG) which aligns the findings of author [26].
4. Technology innovation (TI) positively influences on outcome measures of adoption of social media (OM), where customer engagement (CE) mediates this relationship. This relationship is aligned with the findings of author [6].
5. Technology innovation (TI) has positive impact on outcome measures of social media adoption (OM) where value generation (VG) mediates this relationship. This relationship is aligned with the findings of author [47].
6. Technology innovation (TI) acts as a moderator on relationship between value generation (VG) and outcome measures of adoption of social media (OM). This finding aligned with author [24]. Hence the Hypothesis 6 (H6) is supported.
7. Customer engagement (CE) is mediated by value generation (VG) for outcome measures of adoption of social media (OM). This indirect relationship findings are matching with the findings of author [10].

V. Theoretical and practical implications

This research study analyzes and contributes up to a large extent from the theoretical point of view to the existing database of literatures and development of business strategies which are connected to the context of value generation, technology innovation, search engine optimization, small and medium-sized enterprise, content marketing, and customer engagement. This study contributes to the exiting literatures by confirming and restating the variables which are related to the social media adoption. Even though numerous literatures have been published with respective to

the subject of Social Media adoption, there are countable article's that draws attention to the population's residing in the Middle East region. The study highlighted five factors that influence on SME business. Additionally, this study provides beneficial suggestions with suitable guideline to the business industries owners and managers of SMEs that help to improve business strategic objectives for the development. The social media technologies left a great impact on all individuals involved including all type businesses, the governments, employees, and business owners, top level decision-makers, as well as potential customers. Business can't avoid the adverse effects that have bought by social media technological advancement. Stakeholder forced to accept & implement radical new approaches to diverse social media activities.

This Study research observation assist to suggest the most effective techniques and recommendations for strategic planning to achieves productive SME businesses by implementation of social media. Organic visitors noted as most significant factor for the adoption where business expects to analyzing consumer behavior patterns, business need to create more engaging, relevant, trustworthy content which attract consumers and leads to trust building, gain recognition, gain customer loyalty and sales increase. Second importance factor is financial gains for content marking which can increase the business profit margin by investing in the social media marketing by SMEs.

VI. Conclusion

The main aim of this research investigation was to determine the factors which contributes to outcome measures of adoption of social media by small and medium scale business in Middle East area. A conceptual framework was constructed by employing five independent variables and one dependent variable. Data from participants was collected via an online survey (used questionnaire instrument). Total responses received are 463 responses, and SmartPLS 4 software is used to analyze the collected data. This study identified a total of 12 relationships, consisting of five direct relations and seven indirect relationships. The results concludes that the variables namely value generation, technology innovation, search engine optimization, customer engagement, and content marketing have a beneficial influence on outcome measures of adopting social media by small & medium size companies in Middle East. Customer engagement & value generation acts as a mediator variable in this model, technology innovation act as a moderator on the relationship between value generation

and outcome measures of social media adoption by SME in Middle East region.

VII. Limitation and Future Scope

This research study focused only on the Middle East countries hence further investigations are invited to evaluate this model with the same setting in other countries. As social media field is very vast there are many other factors that may impacting the dependent variable, hence it is advised to extend this study to evaluate and identify other factors that would influence the outcome measure of adoption. As there are so many different industries, this research was not focused on a specific industry; hence, further research will be necessary in the future to apply this research to a particular sector and evaluate the results. This study exclusively analyzed articles published in English. Therefore, future research is encouraged to broaden the scope by include articles written in other languages as well. Several gaps had been identified during the research which is based on the quantitative approach and recommended to perform the further future studies to verify similarities, difference in the results and impact on the outcome measures. Additionally, recommended to evaluate the conceptual framework on a specific industry.

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