

Qualitative Analysis of Leadership and Social Media Use by SMEs and Family Business During the Pandemic Outbreak in 2020

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the social media platforms' functions and their numbers (Applications Downloaded, Active User, Views, Shares) that SMEs and family business in Australia can use with minimum cost. Early this year, the Australian government had to take necessary decisions and in a short period to control the pandemic from spreading across the nation. Thus, it left many businesses unprepared to cope with the changes and caused many businesses in Sydney CDB either limiting their activities or closed due to tough restriction such as social distancing, no more air travels overseas and interstates, work from home and online study. Unlike any national companies in Australia, SMEs and family business have limited resources to shift or cope with the situations. The thesis will focus on consumer behaviour, as these restrictions will change the way consumer do their activities and influencing another consumer in the social media era, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others, using 6Cs Parent Model a model on how consumer engaging with company's content which measures through like, comments, and shares. It will explore the number of users before the restrictions apply and after, and how users using the social media platforms will affecting SMEs and family business. Furthermore, the outcome of this study to encourage SMEs and especially family businesses utilising social media to communicating, promoting, growing, expanding and keep consumers' awareness of their business. The objectives of this to help SMEs and family business to go through a rough time during the pandemic outbreak and keep their brands or businesses on consumer's mind and helping and growing SMEs and family business audiences or expands their market. A qualitative research approach, along with internet questionnaires using survey monkey platforms and any sources of information in this thesis, will be cited.

Introduction

The early year of 2020, many leaders of countries have taken unpopular decisions yet necessary to protect their nations from the pandemic that can devastate them even further. It also happens to leaders and management of many SMEs and family business in Australia, in 2019 many retailers, many had failed to meet the changing of consumer's expectation such as did not utilise the data they had and technologies, as many still rely on traditional and costly programs [1].

The failure of sustainability of SMEs and family business due to the poor judgement and nepotism when passes on the ownership to the next one [2]. Therefore, succession planning is necessary mainly on the family business side as the transfer of ownership to a different generation [3]. SMEs and family businesses were playing essential roles in Australian economy both on gross domestic products of 35 per cent and 44 per cent of the Australian workforce. They accounted for nearly 98% of businesses and on average each Australian SMEs generating annual turnover A\$ 200,000 up to A\$ 2 million. Moreover, most of the business owner, nearly into their retirement age between 45 and 59 accounted for 35% [4]. Many SMEs and family business affected during this unprecedented time, some able to stand through this challenging time, and some decided to end their business to cope with the situation.

Technology innovation has transformed and changing many things in the last 20 years alone and disrupting many traditional businesses who have run for

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years without fearing any threats, however, technologies itself is the threats and the opportunities. Tech-bubble was the term for the early time technology from 1997 to 2000 were stock prices rose to five-fold [5]. Until today era where start-up term become common social application to the financial sector that is known as Fintech. Furthermore, taxi businesses for instance which disrupted by Uber and any other ride-share companies that grow in the last ten years, in New South Wales, Australia value of taxi license had nosedived more than half in average [6].

Technology not merely creating and disrupting toward traditional businesses, it also creates a new economy and jobs that did not exist a few years ago. For instance, from ridesharing to food delivery services had created a new term called sharing economy or collaborative consumption. However, sharing has been practising by people from years before, these economic model that defined as activities based on peer to peer to conduct the transaction either goods or services through community-based applications [7]. In Australia, the taxation office determined that sharing economy is an economic transaction where people share assets or services for a fee that conducted through a digital platform (2020). Thus, many new jobs created through this activity that never existed or people unable to access due to highly regulated or did not meet the requirements.

Australia officially went into recession per 3rd June 2020 in the first time in the last 29 years as the GDP growth went below zero as the bushfires rampaged from the end of 2019 until early 2020 followed by unprecedented times due to COVID-19 outbreak early 2020 as well as the fall in consumer and government spending [8,9]. Thus, forced any government across the world, including Scott Morrison's government to take necessary actions and regulation as measurements to mitigate the damages both on people's lives and economy [10]. Recession will negatively affect many businesses, and in the United Kingdom, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) severe immediate when it starts where 4 out of 10 SMEs suffered in employment and almost half of it had their sales number deteriorated [11].

Justification

In Australia, mortar and brick retailers in mid-January 2020, before the

pandemic outbreak, had to close stores across the country. They are the notable retailers' such Harris Scarfe and EB Games (GameStop in the United States trading as GME) with proper management and leadership style yet failed to cope the changing [12]. The condition is worsening by tight competition from overseas, especially in the fashion industry, where Australian retailers failed to react.

Many notable companies in their field such as automotive, fast food industries, and financial have shifted or split their advertising campaign on social media platforms, and these easily seen on YouTube or Facebook on specific videos that uploaded by users or content creators. Study of social media advertising in Vietnam found that it positively influenced consumer perceived value of the platform advertising that leads to purchase intention [13].

Furthermore, several companies in the consumer technology products had gained the benefit from utilising these platforms, Sony and Dell, for instance, generating additional U\$ 1.6 million and U\$ 3 million respectively [14,15]. Small business owners in the United States has recorded double since 2009 in social media adoption that mainly utilised to penetrating and identifying new customers [16].

One of the biggest conferences that take place in Los Angeles since 1995, Electronic Entertainment Expo, attracted many notable companies mainly from gaming industry such as Microsoft, Nintendo, Sega, Sony PlayStation and many more [17]. However, many of them have left the conferences, like Sony PlayStation, mainly utilising social media such as YouTube and Twitter and Blizzard Entertainment through their Blizzcon that also accessible through social media platforms [18,19].

Despite the popularity of the platforms, researchers still trying to measure the precise count primarily on the return on investment (ROI) or how many of those people who interact with the platforms are turn into sales. Nevertheless, companies advertising spending on digital platforms predicted more than 50% compare to traditional advertising [20]. Furthermore, the platform itself offered many benefits for SMEs and family business. It allowed them to customise and personalise their messages, determine the spending budget and desire target market [14], forecasting through consumer engagement attracting new market and building loyalty that leads to sales and brand awareness.

The purpose of this research is to explore the consumer behaviour and demographic and gather information on social media platforms such as most downloaded application, number of users, activities (Views, Likes, comments and Shares) that cause businesses adopting the platforms as an integral part of business activity. Furthermore, this research will gather information from reputable journal articles and data from reliable companies along with online surveys by utilising Survey Monkey services to collect the information to explore the social media platforms that have become part of the business activities. Moreover, predicting the trend of the platform by looking at other aspects such as sales of devices and internet penetration, and social media companies itself to maintain during digital detoxification movement [21].

Statement of the Problem

Many businesses have adopted social media platforms as part of their operational activities, and it even created new jobs that did not exist 20 years ago such as content creator and manager who are utilising social media for public relations [22]. Despite the dispute of the benefits of social media toward the company's performance due to measurability on return on investment (ROI), yet many still utilising and adopting social media [23]. Despite the positive impact on SMEs and family business that were using the platforms, a study found that on between 40 to 80 countries when it measured resulted in a negative correlation between economic growth and social media [20].

Study on SMEs in Malaysia on adopting social media, especially Facebook using an integrated model and statistical analysis using survey questionnaires it showed positive correlation on both financially and non-

financial [24]. Furthermore, in the United States, a study using two surveys and semi-structured methodology on companies who operate in tourist destination area also showed a positive impact on driving consumer awareness, engagement, and even collaborating mutual relationship with other local businesses [25].

In this research, the purpose is to explore and find deeper understanding information on social media itself that make small and medium enterprises and family businesses to utilise the platform and leadership style for uncertain situation and involved, despite the impact still debatable among the academics. This business research proposal will be aligned with Cluster 3: Leadership and Management of Start-ups, SMEs and Family Business.

Problem: Covid-19 and Government regulations have changed consumer behaviour and the way consumer spending and shopping.

Objective: Utilising potential social media to benefiting and helping SMEs and Family business

Research Questions

Q1. What does social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and others) numbers (Downloaded applications, views, likes, comments and shares) meaning that may benefit SMEs and family business?

Q2. What leadership style suits the 2020 situation that devastating many sectors?

Q3. What is the consumer demographic in 2020 and the relationship with the social media platforms?

Review of Literature

The OECD or Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017) explained that SMEs is varied across countries and for statistic measurement purpose, OECD defines SMEs are firms who employed up to 249 people which classified into three such as Micro who employed 1 to 9 people, Small from 10 to 49 and Medium from 50 to 249. Furthermore, SMEs defined as a jobs creator and many of them who work on technology-based products and services, in the United States they have significant contribution toward country GDP, and in Europe, SMEs is the biggest employer [26]. Despite the significant contribution, SMEs are prone to market failure due to their limitation on information, financial support, and other factors that many larger companies have easy access.

Adoption of new technology is inevitable at this era, from previous cases it proved that unwillingness to change and adapt lead to disaster, many big companies had suffered from this, for instance, Blockbuster who was the giant in rental entertainment lost to a newcomer like Netflix and records companies to Apple Music [27,28]. SMEs in Spain found that the benefit of social media is used to gathers external information that able to help them to innovate to add to their competitiveness key. Furthermore, social media also helping SMEs and family businesses to market their goods and services like many big companies, which limited by capital, now with a lower cost they able to produce an effective and efficient campaign with the desired target market and easy to operates according to their needs [29,30]. Despite no precise measurement of the benefits of social media, 65% of SMEs are keen to use it [31].

The study by Asur and Huberman [32] found that Twitter can be used to predicting the future, for instance on the box office movie, where this is proven to creates hypes or trends among the community. Famous movie from the last few years Avengers: Infinity Wars, one of the stars influencing the whole world with his tweets become the biggest opening movie in the United States alone and worldwide [33]. Therefore, it may become one of the many factors that drive social media adoption in many businesses.

Social media not only useful in the business environment only, but it is also affecting many aspects of society. The latest movement that triggers

movement throughout the world is the death of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 was captured and shared on social media has caused civil unrest in the United States and movement of black lives matter around the world in the UK, Canada, France, and Australia [34]. Communication nowadays has increasing smoothly for many people to communicate, this appropriately utilised by the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, for his political communication media that lead to his winning. On the other hand, it could bring destructive outcome if it wrongly uses like what happens in Arab spring that social media playing a central role and more effective than traditional mass media, the study believes the communication process may be applicable in other socioeconomic environments [35].

Both Google and Facebook are trying to provide internet to 4.5 billion people who currently offline and mostly located in the remote area where infrastructure has not well established due to many factors [36]. Furthermore, nearly 4.57 billion people are active on the internet per April 2020, thus, between 2017 to 2020 an additional of more than 1 billion people have access to the internet [37]. If these were realised it would result in more people to have access to the internet and maybe more people will be using social media, as many technology-based companies are relying on advertising fees as one of their primary income.

Evaluation of Current Theory and Practice

Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a process involving a pre-purchase, purchasing, and post-purchasing phases, however, it cover more comprehensive than the process itself as consumer alone playing many roles and it comes in many forms it can be an adult or children [38]. According to Blackwell and Miniard [39] consumer behaviour is a process of selecting, purchasing, dispose or consuming the products or services, including the buying decision process. The previous study found various result in term of social media implication on the consumer on apparel in the Facebook platform through a fan page and collected information on both consumer-generated content and marketer generated content. However, they found that user-generated content had a more substantial impact on consumer behaviour compared to marketer generated content despite the lagged in economic values in their findings [40]. Therefore, based on the previous study, consumer behaviour is a process of specific steps before the final decision to buying goods or services and post-purchasing where goods or services consumed, and social media have positive correlation toward consumer behaviour on products or services.

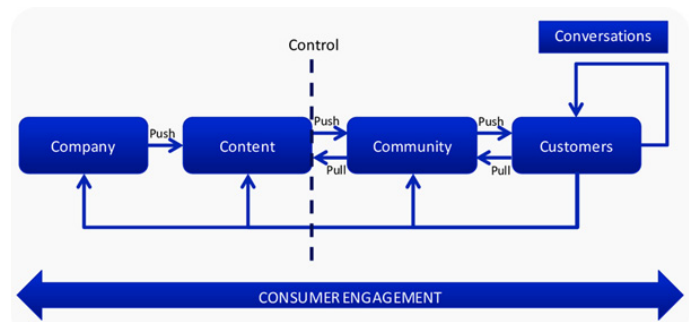
The internet has changed and one of the main catalysts on how customers behaving, as the social media has given them control, information and power in the market process that can cause an issue, however, if with the right move social media will not only helping many SMEs and family business to survive, it also thriving during uncertain situation [41].

6Cs Parent’s Model

In the technology and internet era have changed the way consumers feels as everything is interconnected, in this model by Parent [42] in the context of Facebook measured the success of the message based on people interaction such as comments, likes, and shares. These features are not only available on the Facebook platform, as many other platforms have similar features that can be used to measure consumer engagement.

The first two is in the control of the company where they push the content toward community, then to customers that lead to communication within the customers that pulled them to community and content or communicating directly to the company. This main context of this study based on this model on how social media can sustain during this pandemic time.

Previously products or services information merely one-way communication that company’s generated content, however, consumers utilising this



Source: Parent et al. (2011).

social media to create, discuss, modify, and share with other users that can significantly influence company’s reputation or image both positively and negatively, yet still ignores this threat and opportunity. Further study found that social media drive consumer’s satisfaction and trustworthiness on institutions than utilising websites alone, as with less information are better than details that generally available on the site [43]. Thus, with social media company able to receive or create significant impact with less.

Methodology

The methodology section, it will provide the research paradigm for this proposal to determine the research design and strategy, sampling design, data collection method, and the method to analyse the data. A research paradigm is how the researcher was engaging the study that been agreed among the research community [44,45]. Before choosing a research paradigm, an understand of philosophy or assumption need to be established that categorised into four: Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, and Methodology [45].

Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of Reality Key Attributes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information collection technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of Value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Methods that will be used

Source: Saunders et al., 2009; Scotland, 2012

Proposed Methodology, Data Sources and Collection Methods

This research will be using the Positivism paradigm with a qualitative approach to data collection, qualitative research design and exploratory case study research strategy will be used. Furthermore, the sampling design will be using the non-probability method of convenience sampling design, while data collecting method using web-based survey questionnaires and literature review and journal articles along with credible business focus organisation such as survey companies and government institutes. Lastly, on data analysis method will adopting the inductive approach and thematic analysis.

Although Positivism paradigm related heavily with the quantitative approach, the qualitative method is also feasible by using non-statistical mean, regularities, and causal relationship cross elements and summarising different patterns into general findings and positivist in qualitative has a positive contribution and suitable to examine the real situation [46-48]. Using thematic data analysis method is due to flexibility, accessibility, and suitable with the qualitative approach and the research limitation [49] and thematic analysis is acting as a translator for both qualitative and quantitative analysis that enables to explain and provides rich information.

Justification of Selected Research Methodology and Data Collection

Due to time constraint, budget limitation and campus location, a non-probability sampling design with the convenience sampling method is chosen due to its flexibility and adaptability and case study strategy are used to find the answer for the research questions. An inductive approach

is to explore quantitative data to define the theory or document collected from literature review or journal articles to draw the answer [50]. Web-based questionnaires are utilised due to its ease of use and similar accuracy as paper-based questionnaires [51] and able to reach more audiences.

The selected thematic analysis it can be used to address broader research questions due to its flexibility, and the data collection methodology and sample size from the traditional to the modern styles and the critical of this analysis method is the quality of the data along with complexity on the topic will providing deep understanding and nuance insight [52].

Expected Contribution of the Research

This research can be important for SMEs and especially to the family business as they are in the fiercest competition market offering the same goods and services in the industries, to have competitive advantages in the market and having clarity on social media platform on its capability and potential. Come from the family business background, this research motivation is to find ways for the family business to be sustained in the market and hopefully expanding and growing into small and medium enterprises and expected to contribute a clear understanding and information on Business and Management Practice for SMEs and family business to thrive even in the most challenging situation and predicting the trend of social media platforms. Understanding the consumer demographic and its behaviour, and information of social media platform [53].

to fill the gap of why many businesses adopting the platforms despite there is no precise measurement on their investment.

Ethical Consideration

This research will be focusing on SMEs and family business in Sydney, Surry Hills, and Pyrmont by observation for the scope of sampling. Five businesses from each location will be used and analyse their social media platforms activity (Followers, likes, comments, and shares). There is no harm or risk on the confidential of the information. The research will be using previous studies, literature reviews, and credible information sources companies such as AC Nielsen and Australian Bureau of Statistic along with the information from the field and questionnaires by utilising Survey Monkey platform to collect it.

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