

# The Extent Of Social Media Practices In Malaysian Sme: Migrating From Adoption To Measurement

Noraniza Binti Md Jani<sup>a</sup>, Mohd Hafiz bin Zakaria<sup>a</sup>, Zulisman bin Maksom<sup>a</sup>,  
Md. Shariff Bin M. Haniff<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Malaysia

<sup>b</sup> Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka, Malaysia

Email of corresponding author: [P031610004@student.utem.my](mailto:P031610004@student.utem.my)

## ABSTRACT

Social media is leveraged by businesses at a discernible pace. Most often social media is used to instill brand awareness, to stimulate communication, to facilitate relationships, to spur information exchange and innovation, to track customers' voice, and so forth. Despite the increasing imperative to the varieties of business routines, the measurement aspects of social media marketing initiatives are limitedly discussed. Furthermore, the literature has found the lack of firms' sensitivity to measurement activities or success indicators for their social media marketing investments. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the extent of social media measurement practices in business from two contexts: first, in the prominent platform of social networking sites, and second, in the perspective of Malaysian SMEs. A preliminary investigation was conducted with 30 respondents from selected industry groups in services and manufacturing sectors to acquire the well-informed data in the SMEs of the southern region. The findings have shaped several themes of social media adoption and evaluation practices for Malaysian SMEs. Accordingly, the barriers and future directions of measurement efforts on social media platform are discussed.

Keywords : social media, measurement, SNS, SME, Malaysia

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous social media has entered the mainstream to rapidly transforming the common practices in many firms (Stockdale, Ahmed and Scheepers, 2012; Meske and Stieglitz, 2013; Kadam and Ayarekar, 2014; Constantinides, 2014). A sudden proliferation rate in social media adoption recently has proven the importance of this disruptive technology. WeAreSocial (2016) has reported that nearly 1 in 3 of the world's population is using social media. Malaysia is identified among the highest in the ASEAN region that have the most users of social media. With 67.7% of social network penetration, it is a clear indication of its widespread use in the business field (Malaysia Digital Association, 2016). A recent survey by Adobe suggested that as many as 70% of Malaysians turn to social media platforms to research and find out more about the products (Marketing-Interactive, 2015). In line with the statistics, SME Annual Report 2016/2017 has reported that most of SMEs (85.4%) were selling products and services online through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. As consumers race to these nascent channels, most businesses are impelled to comply with the aim to reach broader customers and outlined mission objectives.

Despite the spectacular growth of social media use in business worldwide, there are signs of firms' weakening performances in social media initiatives. These issues stem from the incapability of firms to strategically use social media and measure the success of their initiatives (Bartholomew, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015; Effing and Spil, 2016). Although some firms evaluate their marketing efforts through social media, they are lacking adequate knowledge and workforce to fully understand how to place a well-planned integrated social media strategies that align collectively the multi-channels objectives, the structural business and the organizational goals (Owyang, 2010; Lovett, 2011). This resonates even in developing countries when social media employment among firms has become a new concern (Oztamur and Karakadilar, 2014;

Kadam and Ayarekar, 2014). In Malaysia, the Government has reported the status of poor uptake and low marketing strategies as SMEs' weaknesses in leveraging the technology-related adoption (SME Master Plan 2012-2020, p.51; SME Annual Report 2016/2017). Even though many SMEs have been capitalized the use of social media to modernize their business operational activities, there is still a problem arising from the practice. SMEs still be seen not well-recognized the indicators to quantify their business-related activities on a digital platform. As revealed by PwC (2014), most of the Malaysian firms (57%) did not track the direct impact of social media activities on their business performance such as through ROI.

At this stage, the literature that focuses on the assessment of social media by small firms is still in the stage of infancy in Malaysian perspective. Therefore, there is a key force that warrants the urgent necessity among Malaysian SMEs to implement measurement in their leveraged efforts through social media platform. Unless the measurement is embedded in their strategic actions, it will inhibit the competitive advantage and lower the maximum potential of SMEs in reaching the impressive achievements (Jusoh and Parnell, 2008; SME Master Plan 2012-2020). Following the disclosure of the stated issue, this study pinned a focus on the question, namely "*How well do Malaysian SME measure their social media initiatives?*".

The aim of this paper is to discuss the extent of social media measurement practices in marketing area from two contexts: first, in the prominent platform of social networking sites (SNS hereafter), and second, in the perspective of Malaysian SMEs that located in the southern region. The remainder of the paper will work as follows. The second section presents a review of the study, followed by the methods. With the demographic analysis obtained, the findings will be discussed in the next section. Finally, this study provides the measurement barriers and directions toward the future research.

## **2 STUDY BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Disclosure of Social Media in Business**

Social media encompasses a broad continuum of online channels and platforms that can facilitate collaborative creation and dissemination of information. Based on their scope and applicability, Aichner and Jacob (2015) have classified the wide social media platform into thirteen categories. The prominence is including blogs, microblogs, forums, business networks, collaborative projects, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social games, and social networking sites. A large number of scholars claim that social media is different from Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Berthon et al., 2012) in terms of scope, typology, and business models. In fact, Web 2.0 become the pillar of social media technology to sprout and allows the implementation of its applications and platforms.

The literature on social media adoption are focusing these emerging technologies on various aspects; a vehicle for communication and promotion (Constantinides, 2014), a strategic tool for marketing (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015), a medium to nurture and sustain customers (Zain and Saidu, 2016), an element to facilitate online communities (Clark et al., 2017), an avenue for strategic competitiveness (He et al., 2015) and an indicator to improve business process performance (Smits and Mogos, 2013). As mentioned above, the context of this study narrows the scope to SNS channels due to their popularity as a tool for businesses and the ability to attract a fast-growing number of consumers.

### **2.2 Relevance of Social Media For SMEs**

The small business environment is inhibited by financial, resources and technical constraints. However, this industry is harnessing more often social media effectively to improve external communications with stakeholders and to produce long-term value creation from the development of relationships (Gordon, 2009; Fischer and Reuber, 2011). Social media has proven to be increasingly relevant to SMEs in terms of easy use, relatively quick, low-cost method of connecting customers, facilitative features and less technical

platforms (Fischer and Reuber, 2011; Broekemier, Chau and Seshadri, 2015).

SME Annual Report 2016/2017 has presented a discernible increase in the usage of social media to promote and market firms' products and services to 85.4% (1Q 2014:12.1%, 1Q 2016:78.2%), indicating the absorption of this technology is increasingly noticeable among businesses. Such wave of adoption has indeed been expected as social media seems to be compulsory for small online entrepreneurs as presented through current observations, reports, and newspaper clippings. In addition, SMEs often have limited resources to undertake in-house marketing activities or to engage a good marketing consultant (SME Master Plan 2012-2020, p.55), making the online marketing through social media as a good platform in enabling SMEs to gain some advantages in the latest wave of technology including the wider reach of market and business opportunities (Meske and Stieglitz, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015; SME Annual Report 2016/2017).

### **2.3 The Obligation Of Social Media Measurement**

A social media measurement is defined as a process to gauge, explain and report the success of social media initiatives by using metrics to generate the outcome required by firms to ascertain the successful alignment with social media and business objectives and corporate goals. The need to measure social media endeavors such as brand posts and product campaigns is a growing concern for firms (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Aichner and Jacob, 2015; Marzouk, 2016). This stage can be seen as a continuation of the widespread adoption of this technology that provides firms with indicators to improving the performance of business processes (Smits and Mogos, 2013).

Metrics are certainly needed to measure and evaluate all business-related activities via social media. Farris et al. (2006) define a metric as a measuring system that quantifies a trend, dynamic, or characteristic. Therefore he has categorized metrics to four different types: amounts (e.g., volumes, sales), percentages (e.g., fractions or decimals), counts (e.g., unit sales or a number of competitors), ratings (e.g., scales), and indices (e.g., price index). Further, businesses are compulsory to employ Key Performance Indicator (KPI), measures that help firms understand how they are doing against their target objectives. The sound KPI will signalize that marketing strategies are properly aligned with the business mission and corporate goals (Owyang, 2010; Lovett, 2011).

### **2.4 The Challenge of Measuring Social Media Initiatives**

There is a need for an effective social media measurement tool to capture, quantify, and analyze tremendous data source in multimedia formats across multiple social media channels. The enormous User-Generated-Content (UGC) mediated by the social platform, to some extent, has overwhelmed many firms and sometimes go beyond control.

Thus, questions have been raised about the challenges to the measurement approach in the highly interactive platform (Peters et al., 2013; Barger, 2013; Bartholomew, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015). Social media can be clearly differentiated from traditional media based on their unique features (Peters et al., 2013). Therefore, firms need the integration of tangible measures (simple, quick to develop, compulsory to implement and easy to count for a final result, for instance, reach, and view), and intangible measures (difficult and requires the longer time to formulate and execute, for instance a measure to assess advocates). Without neglecting each other, the firm must take into account the ability of both types of measures in assessing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts (Owyang, 2010; Lovett, 2011; Smits and Mogos, 2013; Marzouk, 2016).

Firms typically rely on analytical tools, such as Facebook Insights and Google Analytics that have mastered the use of firms' social media analysts. An analytic dashboard usually places a variety of metrics from tangible and intangible categories that help monitor

progress, identify patterns and trends, and predict social media outcomes.

### 3 METHODS

The preliminary investigation was conducted by employing a quantitative approach to aim for well-informed data in regards to the extent of social media measurement practices in Malaysian SMEs. The objectives of the survey are 1) to obtain updated information on the use of social media, in particular, SNS for their products and services marketing efforts; 2) to ascertain the level and practice of measurement efforts through the medium of SNS. Malaysian SMEs located in the southern region in which participate actively in the prominent platform of SNS has become a target population for this survey. The sampling frame was businesses from manufacturing and services sectors where the data were drawn from the list provided by SME Corporation Malaysia (Malacca branch).

The development of the questionnaire adopted the five sequential steps posited by Radhakrishna (2007) consisting of research background, questionnaire conceptualization, format and data analysis, and establishing validity and reliability. The questionnaire was divided into four parts namely profile of respondent and SME, their experience in SNS adoption and measurement practices as well as experience with customers in SNS communities. Questions were comprised of closed-ended, open-ended and semi-opened format. It was later validated by four academic experts and four industry representatives and was distributed to 30 respondents encompassing of SMEs in services and manufacturing sectors. The data were collected from the respondents through e-mail and face-to-face approach then analyzed using Microsoft Excel software to generate demographic and statistical information.

### 4 FINDINGS

Findings from the survey are classified into three areas ; business profile, social networking site adoption and measurement presented Table 1 – 3. The business profile represents the overview of firms that were involved as survey respondents (refer Table1). Most of the respondents have been operating within the industry beyond their maturity and the business that runs food and beverages is the largest group.

FINDIN	ITEMS/SUBITEMS		%
BUSINESS PROFILE	SECTOR	MANUFACTURING	30.0%
		SERVICES	70.0%
	CATEGORY	MICROENTERPRISE	53.3%
		SMALL	33.3%
		MEDIUM	13.3%
	INDUSTRY GROUPS	FOOD BEVERAGES	23.3%
		EDUCATION AND TRAINING	16.7%
		SERVICES PROVIDER	13.3%
		BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL	10.0%
		OTHERS	36.7%
	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	< 2 YEARS	20.0%
		2 - 5 YEARS	23.3%
		6 - 10 YEARS	26.7%
> 10 YEARS		30.0%	

Table 1 : Demographic of respondents

The finding of SNS adoption demonstrates current practices of firms on leveraging this technology (refer Table 2). The results upon the popularity of the existing SNS channels and the purpose of its use have proven to be consistent with the observations and inputs extracted from the literature study. As recognized in recent literature (Pereira Correia et al., 2014; Lin and Kim, 2016), Facebook, has ranked first (100.0%) as it provides the ability to reach promotions and campaigns to massive audiences, facilitating and expediting service to customers, raising

awareness to prospects as well as facilitates the sharing of ideas and information from marketers and advocates. Firms also classified Instagram (60.0%) as a second important channel, followed by Google Plus (16.7%) and Twitter (13.3%). Although the largest percentage of firm-setting years is more than 10 years (refer Table 1), it is surprising that most of them only use SNS for online marketing less than 2 years. This suggests that the age of the business does not reflect the period of SNS utilization in their marketing efforts. It takes a while for firms to stabilize the business before deciding to engage with online marketing which in their perspective would incur cost and skills to be implemented.

Another finding reveals that firms' owners are the ones most involved in promotion through SNS. Due to most of the respondents are microenterprises, firms seem unable to provide special staff to promote their brand online or hire consultants for this purpose. However, on average firms allocate 2 to 4 staff members to directly involve with SNS marketing. This is viewed as a reasonable effort to look into a continuous and consistent awareness to achieve a predetermined target. The more staff engagement for online promotions, the greater the opportunity for marketers to reach customers to their brands. Firms necessitate having well-trained staff in order to realize business objectives and corporate goals using SNS medium. However, the investigation dismantled nearly a quarter of the total amount have received the official marketing guide at SNS. Whilst, nearly half (46.7%) of firms have budget allocations for SNS investments in product and brand marketing, but slightly few of them (40.0%) give priority to their respective staff training. At the same time, as much as 20.0% firms use full organic marketing that is not charged by SNS channels, 26.7% more organic than paid mechanism, while the rest either balances both or hires consultants. The diversity of these approaches is aimed at optimizing tactics, in order to align their objectives with these mediums, with priority to reduce costs, especially for micro marketers.

Table 3 shows the results of the assessment after SNS utilization for firms to identify whether their marketing efforts are successful. The analysis shows that there is a similar number of firms practicing measurements on SNS efforts compared to those not. Unfortunately, some firms directly ignore measurement practices in their work arising from timing, technical and cost constraints. From a group of firms that practice measurements, 50.0% of them implement it regularly to monitor the progress of their commitment to SNS. A large number of firms see the success of brand promotion at the SNS as an average, meaning there were times when the measures show a good performance, while at other times it may happen otherwise. To find out whether the firm's marketing efforts have succeeded in achieving targets, the scale used is to evaluate performance through existing metrics on SNS interfaces (tangible metrics) or being formulated through the integration of certain metrics (intangible metrics). The success indicators of marketing efforts on every SNS platform are thought to be successful when the activity achieves the targeted objectives, in line with the firm's vision set in a given period. Finally, the analysis reports some common analytical tools used to monitor the performance progress. The results have generated a list of these tools according to their frequency of usage, namely Facebook Insights (34.4%), Instagram Insights (21.9%), Google Analytics (12.5%), Twitter Analytics (6.3%) and others (25.1%). These metrics usually serve as the basis for organizational KPI achievement. The tabulated results (Table 1 – 3) will be derived in the final section for shaping resolution of measurement initiatives by firms for future research.

Table 2 : Statistic of SNS adoption

FINDING 2	ITEMS/SUBITEMS	%	
SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION	CHANNEL POPULARITY	FACEBOOK	100.0%
		INSTAGRAM	60.0%
		GOOGLE PLUS	16.7%
		TWITTER	13.3%
	NUMBER OF ADOPTED YEARS	< 2 YEARS	43.3%
		2 - 5 YEARS	33.3%
		6 - 10 YEARS	13.3%
		> 10 YEARS	10.0%
	RESPONSIBLE PERSON	SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER/BRAND MANAGER/ ADMINISTRATOR	17.9%
		EXECUTIVES	7.7%
		MARKETER/HUMAN RESOURCE	17.9%
		OWNER	53.8%
		OTHERS	2.6%
	STAFF INVOLVEMENT	MORE THAN 10 STAFF MEMBERS	0.0%
		5 - 9 STAFF MEMBERS	6.7%
		2 - 4 STAFF MEMBERS	53.3%
		ONLY 1 STAFF MEMBER	23.1%
		NO STAFF ASSIGNED	16.7%
	STAFF TRAINING	EXTERNAL TRAINING	16.7%
		IN-HOUSE TRAINING	6.7%
SELF-TRAINING		73.3%	
UNCERTAINTY		3.3%	
INVESTMENT	ON SNS TRAINING	46.7%	
	ON STAFF TRAINING	40.0%	
	FUTURE BUDGET	66.7%	

Table 3 : Statistic of SNS

FINDING 3	ITEMS/SUBITEMS	%	
SOCIAL MEDIA MEASUREMENT	IMPLEMENTATION STATUS	YES	53.3%
		NO	46.7%
	THE FREQUENT OF MEASUREMENT	VERY OFTEN	18.8%
		ALWAYS	50.0%
		MODERATE	18.8%
		SELDOM	12.5%
	THE LEVEL OF SUCCESS	YES, ALWAYS	31.3%
		YES, AVERAGE	37.5%
		YES, SELDOM	12.5%
		UNCERTAIN	6.3%
		NOT YET	12.5%
	ALIGNMENT WITH GOALS	REVENUE GROWTH	11.1%
		CUSTOMER SERVICE	33.3%
		COST REDUCTION	16.7%
		FIRM PERFORMANCE	16.7%
	ALIGNMENT WITH BUSINESS OBJECTIVES	BRAND EQUITY	19.4%
		OTHERS	2.8%
		BRAND AWARENESS	8.5%
		FOSTER DIALOGUES	6.8%
		IMPROVE SALES	20.3%
ADVOCATES		8.5%	
BRAND LOYALTY		5.1%	
COMMUNITY GROWTH		16.9%	
SATISFACTION		16.9%	
ENGAGEMENT		13.6%	
INNOVATION	3.4%		
ANALYTIC TOOLS USED	GOOGLE ANALYTIC	12.5%	
	FACEBOOK INSIGHTS	34.4%	
	INSTAGRAM INSIGHTS	21.9%	
	TWITTER ANALYTICS	6.3%	
	GOOGLE+	6.3%	

measurement

## 5 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

At this stage, it can be concluded that social media adoption has mastered the key activities of small businesses including marketing and strategic management. However, many firms are facing barriers to the integration of measurement practices into their business routines. It was found that the smaller the size of the firm, the greater their concerns are to spend on three things: 1) brand marketing and advertising on a paid basis, 2) providing adequate and updated formal training and skills to the staff on effective social media adoption, 3) performing measurements on digital marketing practice that depends on the cost and technical knowledge. Plenty of firms leveraged SNS after being influenced by the trends and popularity without a strategic plan, guidelines or understanding a good digital marketing culture. It was also found that most firms still do not place reassessment practices on activities within the SNS medium as a necessity. They have no clear knowledge of SNS's ability to be optimized with various effective use tactics through a bit of investment and technical effort. This results in less impact on satisfactory performance, for instance, an inaccurate metric selection will cause firms to fail on measuring the post results for new product campaigns being run.

With the advent of social media tools and applications, various site metrics across multiple platforms reflect the measurement and analysis of non-standard data, thus affecting the preparation of reports and trends for some figures among businesses in the network. Therefore, firms are insisted to apply the distinct approach that might cause the requirement of qualitative and quantitative measures which is less considered and embraced by traditional and smaller

online marketers. More literature on social media measurement is sought from scholars to find the exact ways of resolving the upcoming more big data analysis on this nascent platform. This study has exposed literary and practitioners in SME Malaysia on understanding the importance of measuring their committed efforts in the SNS medium. The recent analysis provided will contribute the clear figure in regard to what extent do Malaysian SME measure their social media initiatives, as well as meeting the objective of this study.

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