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# Social media usage among small enterprises during Covid-19 pandemic

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**Abstract:** *When Covid-19 pandemic struck the country and Malaysian government enacted the Movement Control Order, business operations were disrupted. Social media has become an essential platform for merchants to market their products and ensure business survival. Most small businesses have begun to use social media as a marketing tool, mainly since Covid-19 spread throughout the country. Despite this, few studies have been conducted to determine the extent of such consumption among small traders. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the level of social media usage as a marketing tool among small enterprises. Two hundred seventeen questionnaires were collected from entrepreneurs in the service sector throughout Selangor using snowball sampling. Gender and the year of business existence were factors in social media usage. These findings will be of interest to those who are interested in entrepreneur behaviour in relation to social media usage and the continued development of Malaysia's social media usage as a marketing tool.*

**Keywords:** *demographic factors, entrepreneur, usage of social media, marketing tool, snowballing sampling*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of social media has raised the issue of its usage as a marketing tool, which in turn not only attracted big firm with limitless resources but also entrepreneurs with small resources (Williams-Morgan, 2017). Social media is used to communicate with other individual with a shared story, videos and pictures (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, social media as a marketing tool is used by entrepreneur to engage with present customers, attract new customer and build business presence in online market (Eagleman, 2013; Turan & Kara, 2018).

As social media as a marketing tool have gained popularity, more entrepreneurs have looked for using social media in their business activities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). According (Deloitte, 2020), it is estimated that the high penetration of smartphones and extensive use of mobile applications have become the core of local digital life. More so, with the penetration of smartphones has advanced the use of mobile applications especially in social media usage.

The rapid growth of social media as a marketing tool in Malaysia is influenced by the demand of local markets (Hassan, Shiratuddin, and Ab Salam, 2015). At present digital economic is estimated to be at RM 270 billion (Malaysian Economic Statistics, 2018). Concerning the findings of a survey run by Malaysian Communication Multimedia Corporation (MCMC), the number of entrepreneurs who use social media as a marketing tool is still limited. It was indicated that only 16.9% of the internet users are using the internet to sell goods/services, and

only 0.5% claimed to be online sellers (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2018).

It is highly important to examine the underlying factors that might influence the entrepreneur's usage of social media as a marketing tool. As most studies were performed in developed countries, there might be some socio-demographics differences in social media adoption and entrepreneur behaviour. Based on past study by (Lubua & Pretorius, 2018; Nzeku & Duffett, 2021) found that age, gender, and ethnic also affect the social media commerce usage.

Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021) noted that social media usage has positive relationship with different age group, but gender was found not related to social media usage as a marketing tool. Despite the numerous studies investigating the links between demographic factors and the prospect of social media usage, to date, research bears contradictory results. To this end, the following question arise: Do demographic factors (gender, age, and experiences in business) related to social media usage as a marketing tool for entrepreneurs in Malaysia? What are the usage patterns towards social media among Malaysian entrepreneurs? The results of this study contribute to the literature by measuring how demographics factors influence social media usage as a marketing tool, specifically among Malaysian entrepreneurs.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

As social media becomes more popular as a marketing tool (Markos-Kujbus & Gáti, 2012), more entrepreneurs are willing to use or adopt social media as a marketing tool for their business. Study by Idemudia, Adeola, Raisinghani and Achebo (2017) showed gender as a significant factor in an adoption of social media. According to Nzeku and Duffett (2021), there was a relatively justifiable distribution between male and female respondents who affects social media adoption.

These past studies are also supported by Adwan and Noor (2021) who noted that boys mainly utilize social media for communication and interaction, while girls utilize social networking sites for educational reasons. Similarly, Al-Azawei (2018) suggested that females are more likely than males to believe that social networking is entertaining and males are more likely than females to participate in social networking because of social influences. Interestingly, past study by Hooda and Ankur (2018) also suggest female users ticked more on social media advertisements and made more purchases contrasted to their opposite number.

In the demographic portrayal of entrepreneurs, age is another factor considered important in influencing usage of social media as a marketing tool. According to Hruska and Maresova (2020) a strong negative correlation was found when comparing age and social media use. As estimated, the greater the age, the less social media the respondent uses. Moreover, older people do not follow social media trends as much, or they just stay on one of their favourite social media platforms. However, there are also past study that found participant between 22 to 29 years old consider social media as more drama than it should be (Lennon, Rentfro, & Curran, 2012).

Besides that, year of business existence (experience) has also been reported as a significant factor affecting entrepreneur's attitudes towards social media usage as a marketing tool. According to Venkatesh, Michael, Gordon, and Fred (2003) experience on using a certain system will significantly affect the intention and usage of the said system. The more experience a worker on using the system, will affect the usage of the system at the end. In this situation, an entrepreneur who has years of experience in doing business and found social media as an effective marketing tool will use the social media in business.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### *Sampling design and measures*

Demographic data taken and analysed to describe the use of social media as a marketing tool. The sample of this study is among entrepreneurs who use social media in the service sector in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. The reason for choosing Selangor is due to Selangor is the highest number of existing entrepreneurs compared to other states in Malaysia (Economic Survey 2016). This study chose to use the snowballing method to select respondents because there is no available data about entrepreneur and the type of social media they used.

This study involved contacting the entrepreneurs and asking for a referral from them to answer the questionnaires. The questionnaire is in google form and submitted via WhatsApp to the entrepreneurs that agreed to answer it. A total of 800 entrepreneurs were contacted but only 234 questionnaires were received back. Subsequently, data checks are carried out to ensure that the data are useful, reliable, and valid for use in the study. Only 217 questionnaires can be used for further analysis.

For social media usage instrument consists of 5 questions which have seven points of Likert scale that measures how far a person uses social media as a marketing tool. The scale for the items used with 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat disagree, 4= Neutral, 5= Somewhat agree, 6= Agree and Strongly agree=7.

A reliability analysis revealed Cronbach Alpha of 0.857, for social media usage indicating a high degree of internal consistency. Descriptive statistics, independent-sample t-test and analysis of variance ANOVA were used to identify the statistical significance of demographic characteristics towards social media usage. The level of significance is set at  $p = .05$ .

### 4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

#### *Demographic profile social media usage pattern*

The description of the sample shown in Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents' age was 21 to 30 years old (43.8%). They were 18.9% male ( $n=41$ ) and 81.1% ( $n=176$ ) females. Most of the respondents have certificate/diploma ( $n=78$ ; 35.9%), and bachelor's degree ( $n= 75$ ; 34.6%).

According to the SME definition, the respondents' businesses could be classified into medium, small, and micro-sized companies. It shows that 174 respondents were micro-enterprise, 30 medium-size businesses, and 13 were small firm's entrepreneurs. Most of the respondents ( $n=91$ ; 41.9 %) had been operated for less than a year, and 78 (35.9%) respondents had been operated between 1 to 4 years.

**Table 1. Demographic profile of respondent( $n=217$ )**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
18-20	62	28.6
21-30	95	43.8
31-40	25	11.5
41-50	24	11.1
More than 51 years old	11	5.1
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
Male	41	18.9
Female	176	81.1

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
Single	142	65.4
Married	73	33.6
Divorced	2	0.9
<b>Highest Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
PMR/SRP/LCE	3	1.4
SPM/SVM/MCE	36	16.6
STPM/HSC	12	5.5
CERTIFICATE/DIPLOMA	78	35.9
DEGREE	75	34.6
MASTER	11	5.1
PhD	2	0.9
<b>Total of Employee</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
< 5 workers	174	80.2
5 < 30 workers	30	13.8
30 < 75 workers	6	2.8
75 > 200 workers	7	3.2
<b>Year of existence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
< 1 year	91	41.9
1 - 4 years	78	35.9
5 - 10 years	30	13.8
11 - 20 years	10	4.6
> 20 years	8	3.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The respondents were asked to indicate types of social media they used with related to social media usage as a marketing tool. All the entrepreneurs (n=217, 100%) indicated that they used varying types of social media as a marketing tool.

Based on Table 2, most of the respondents (n=194; 89.4%) prefer to use WhatsApp, followed by Instagram 183 (84.3%), Facebook 167 (77%), Twitter 44( 20.3%) and other social media (n=40; 18.4%). The least category of social media use was YouTube, having only 15 (6.9 %) responses.

**Table 2: types of social media used**

<b>Type of social media used.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
<b>Facebook</b>		
Yes	167	77.0
No	50	23.0
<b>Instagram</b>		
Yes	183	84.3
No	34	15.7
<b>WhatsApp</b>		
Yes	194	89.4
No	23	10.6

<b>YouTube</b> Yes No	15 202	6.9 93.1
<b>Twitter</b> Yes No	44 173	20.3 79.7
<b>Others</b> Yes No	40 177	18.4 81.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Based on Table 3, it was found that majority of respondents 113 (52.1%) upload or download every day per week in social media. It means that among 217 entrepreneurs, the proportion of entrepreneurs who frequency upload or download in social media every day is very high. Out of 217 respondents, 73 respondents (33.6%) have upload or download in social media 2 to 3 times in a week, and 21 (9.7%) of respondents have frequency of 4 to 5 time per week. However, for respondents that upload or download in social media 6 times per week the percentage were only at 4.6% (10).

**Table 3 : Frequency in upload or download in social media**

<b>Frequency in upload or download in social media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (0%)</b>
Every day	113	52.1
2 - 3 times per week	73	33.6
4 - 5 times per week	21	9.7
6 times per week	10	4.6

### **The relationship between gender and social media usage**

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare social media as a marketing tool for males and females. The independent samples t-test shows a statistically significant effect,  $t(47.23) = 2.365$ ,  $p = .023$ . Thus, there is a significant difference in the mean of social media usage for males ( $M = 5.91$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) and females ( $M = 6.37$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). The magnitude of difference in the means (mean difference = -0.459, 95% CI: -.745 to -.172) was very small (eta squared = .044) (Cohen,1988).

### **The relationship between age and usage of social media**

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of age on usage of social media as a marketing tool. There are five age groups of respondents in this survey (18 to 20 years, 21 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, 41 to 50 years, and 51 years and above). There was not a significant effect of age on social media usage at the  $p < .05$  level for the five conditions [ $F(4,212) = 1.623$ ,  $p = .170$ ].

### **Relationship between year of business existence**

A one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted to explain the impact of years of existence in business on usage of social media as a marketing tool. There are five groups of respondents in this survey ( Less than 1 years , 1 to 4 years, 5 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years and more than 20 years). There was a statistically difference at the  $p < .05$  level for the five age groups :  $F(4,212) = 2.601$ ,  $p = .037$ . Despite reading statistical significance, the actual difference in mean squares between groups was small (Cohen,1988). The effect size calculated using eta squared was .047.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Table 4 listed the summary of results in this research. Based on the results, gender, and years of existence seem to be related to the usage of social media as a marketing tool. This is in line with the previous research that supports the relationship between gender and social media usage Idemudia, Adeola, Raisinghani and Achebo (2017), Nzeku and Duffett (2021), and years of existence in business and actual usage (Venkatesh et al, 2003). This could attribute to the sample in this study as most of the respondents are young, within the range of 21 to 30 years old (43.8 %) believed to be very technology savvy and responds positively towards social media usage. Based on Diffusion theory by Roger (1962), the key to adoption is that the person must perceive the idea, behaviour, or product as new or innovative. Young entrepreneurs within the range of 21 and 30 years and 18 to 20 years treat social media as an innovative product that will help in their business activities. Based on the past studies, young people embrace technology in their lifestyle and adapt to it easily (Berkowsky, Sharit, & Czaja, 2017; Meyer, 2011) compare to older people.

**Table 4: Results of the Variable Tested**

Variable	Supported	Not supported
Gender is positively related to usage of social media.	$P = .023$ ( $P < .05$ )	
Age is positively related to usage of social media.		$P = .089$ ( $P > .05$ )
Year of business existence positively related to usage of social media.	$P = .037$ ( $P < .05$ )	

## Limitation and future research

Limitations of this work include focusing on a narrow set of variables and categories such as age, gender, household income, and education. In this respect, the work could be expanded and more information could be collected about social network users, which could then be used for better marketing and customer and user satisfaction. Furthermore, as mentioned in similar social science studies, it is not only the nature of connections among people but also the interdependency of human connections and the socio-economic sphere which may prove beneficial for businesses and social organizations. The quality of these connections should be analysed.

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