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Research Paper

The Effect of Social Networking Tools on the SMEs Domain: an empirical study in the Nineveh Governorate-Iraq

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Abstract

The main goal of this work is to reveal the effect of Social Networking Tools (SNT) on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) domain. The work has been done in the food field in Nineveh region-Iraq. The author has selected Facebook application as a tool of social network, this represents the independent variable. Whereas the dependent variables consist of customer retention and customer involvement. Standard questionnaire has been prepared in order to collect the data from the samples. Collected data have been analyzed using SPSS-20 software package. It was founded that the use of Facebook as a tool of SNT will rapidly increase the promotion and motivate consumers in order to engage with the respected industry. The results also illustrate that there is a relation and influence between SNT usage and both of; customer retention and customer involvement.

Keywords

Social Networking, Social Networking Tools, Costumer Involvement and Retention, Small and Medium Enterprises.

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ورقة بحثية

تأثير أدوات الشبكات الاجتماعية على مجال المشاريع المتوسطة والصغيرة: دراسة تجريبية في محافظة نينوى–العراق

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المستخلص

إن الهدف الرئيس من هذا العمل هو الكشف عن تأثير أدوات الشبكات الاجتماعية (SNT) في مجال عمل الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة (SMEs). تم انجاز البحث الحالي في مجال الصناعة والتسويق الغذائي بمنطقة نينوى - العراق. اختار الباحث تطبيق فيسبوك أداة للشبكة الاجتماعية، والذي يمثل المتغير المستقل. في حين إن المتغيرات التابعة هي كل من الاحتفاظ بالزبون ومشاركة الزبون. تم إعداد استبيان قياسي لجمع البيانات من العينات. وتم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها باستخدام حزمة برامج SPSS-20. وقد ثبت أن استخدام تطبيق فيسبوك أداة من أدوات شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي سيزيد من فاعلية العملية الترويجية وايضاً تحفيز المستهلكين من أجل الاندماج في الصناعة ذات العلاقة. توضح النتائج أيضا أن هناك علاقة ارتباط وأثر بين استخدام ادوات شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي وكلا من الاحتفاظ بالزبون ومشاركة الزبون.

الكلمات الرئيسة

الشبكات الاجتماعية ، أدوات الشبكات الاجتماعية ، مشاركة والاحتفاظ بالزبائن ، المشاريع الصغيرة والمتوسطة.

مجلة

تنمية الرافدين

(TANRA): **مجلة علمية، فصلية، دولية، مفتوحة الوصول، محكمة.**

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1. Introduction:

These days, utilization of "Information and Communication Technologies" ICT has made a big change in numerous facets of the humane lives and its effect is increasing in diverse sectors. This has been supported by the emerging of second generation of web-based communities like "blogs, wikis, and social networking tools" which is targeting the beginning of: collaboration, creativity, and sharing amongst customers instead of just sending and/or receiving emails and retrieve information. Depending on this, consumers will become more empowered throughout having data on the "Web 2.0.", furthermore, customer relationships with the company that serves them will be improved (Anshari and Almunawar, 2012). The relationship with the consumer is more and more influenced by a consumer community existing on social networks. As a result, the method of association with the consumer is made has been changed throughout history course (Ngai, *et al.*, 2015). The expansion of these days' technologies has largely enabled clients to quickly and with fewer difficulties collect information about the supply of diverse goods and services. It will also make it easy for customers to find out the best with highest quality providers. The customer is capable to select and to make a decision about who will provide the best offer (Habul *et al*., 2012). This paper is keen to present a conceptual framework for which Nineveh's SMEs adoption the tools of social networking in order to involvement consumers within its marketing activities and towards customer's retention.

2. Literature Survey

In this section, author tried to demonstrate some of the related previous work. Cornejo in 2017, introduced his work under title "Social media impact on consumers food choice". He examined the customers' decisions before visiting any restaurant. This has been done through determination the type of food choice "behavior" of the customer. The main conclusion of the work was the possibility of food testing from consumers depending on what is sharing from food industry firms by social media tools. Ioanid *et al.*, (2018) studied the impact of social networks on SMEs innovation potential. This study highlighted the involving other parties like consumers and suppliers into innovation process through using social network. Perumal *et al.*(2017) presented their study about the use of "social media in food and beverages industry". The work examines the elements influencing utilization of social media being a marketing media. They highlighted that 'brand awareness' and 'customer acquisition and retention' have strong relationship with using of social media, whereas 'information platform' and 'feedback' have negative relationship with the using of social media. Öztamur and Karakadılar (2014) accomplished a work about the role of social media as a new marketing strategy tool in small and medium enterprises domain. The study highlighted this relation in the firm performance perspective. Facebook and Twitter were the social networking tools which have been used as a measurement. It was doing a comparison between four Turkish and American firms. The findings refer that the Turkish firms are quite better in terms of applying the required strategies and factors when compared to

American firm's social media use. Another study about the adoption and use of social media in SMEs, has been conducted and investigated by Meske and Stieglitz (2013). This effort related to measure the benefits from the using of social media application by German small and medium entrepreneurs. Target respondents were 190 decision - makers in the selected SMEs. The work, found that these enterprises are using social media for the enhancement and supporting of the internal collaboration between employees, beside the improvement of the knowledge management. Alshamaila (2018) presented his study about the usage of social network site in the context of small and medium sized businesses in Jordan. The motivations and barriers implications of using SNSs have been investigated. Also, the determination of decision making in selected area has been tested in order to highlight the implication of SNS in the small and medium sized businesses. The finding of the study referred to the three motivating factors as a result of using SNS; interactivity, community demand, and relative advantage. Whereas the barriers adoption was; negative comments and reviews, firm readiness, low awareness, and top management trust. A very interested paper in this respect, has been given by Annisa and Mahendrawathi (2019) the work was very interested due to the model theory that has been introduced. The main goal of the work was to provide a new view of the applying information technology in the SMEs. As such it was an attempt to fill the gap for how the SMEs can reap from the use of social media application. Authors have dependent on the "Honeycomb Model" to take a benefit from recruit social media to support functional levels of the SMEs. Furthermore, researchers refer that social media can support business process performance level in the said arena. Depending on the previous contribution in the literature survey, the current study is agreeing with Annisa and Mahendrawathi (2019). Social networking tools would be a great technique to be engaged with daily process level of SMEs. In more detail, the managerial implication of the current work is related to reducing advertising costs beside the information transmission between the company and its employees. This will lead to the consumer retention as well as consumer involvement with functional process as feedback source about firms' downsides services or its product's response to the client's needs.

3. Literature Review

Recently, in most countries, Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are dominate the commercial and industrial infrastructure. SMEs are imperative to financial development in terms of pushing the improvement wheel and making unused employments, particularly high-growth ones decreasing recessionary pressures and maintaining survival. In developing countries SMEs segment become one of the latest key issues since this sector may sustain the livelihood of many people directly or indirectly (Al Baghlani, 2018). Johansson and Corvera (2012) emphasizes that the key advantages for applying SNT in SMEs daily activities are cost savings and getting closer to the customer. Furthermore, SNT can provide SMEs sector a vast opportunity in order to raise their presence and enlarge their sales (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016).

3.1. Social Networking Tools

Social Networking Tools (SNT) represents online social relations focuses on connection which empower costumers in order to construct online profiling toward digital media. Generally, the prevalent types of SNT services could be expressed from mailing list community, e-mail service, and instant messenger. Newly, SNT which is based on "Web 2.0 technology" like, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, Facebook, Friendster, etc., have speedily facilitate ease of networking social, ease of participation, and peer-to-peer collaboration (Anshari and Almunawar, 2012). Furthermore, SNT represents a very good way towards build and control online community which brings people together. In resent information era, SNT allows individual to be connected and manage existing relationship even with the companies (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 20013). SNT are exchangeable used as Social networking sites or Social Media. Its applications empower users to associate by making individual data profiles, allowing friends to access those profiles, and enabling them to send and receive emails messages between each other (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). SNT empower all people having internet to entrance any pages created by organizations and communicate about personal things (Palmer and Lewis, 2009). The quick development of social commerce is primarily due to the fast dissemination of SNT like Facebook and Twitter. This will change conventional firm processes by giving better client shopping understanding such as "access to friends purchasing experiences, real-time sharing of purchase actions with friends before final purchase decisions" (Zhou et al., 2011). This will help organizational staff to find out costumer's thoughts about enterprises products, services, and brands. Furthermore, a positive experience of the organization's output will be given to the Internet users (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2011).

3.2. Facebook Application

First of all, the author has preferred to dependent on Facebook as a tool of SN. This, because this tool is the most popular among the social media users around the country. The new phenomena related to the communication between individuals has been widely separated in 2004. A young student called Mark Zuckerberg and his collogues in Cambridge University, produced a new method of the interaction in order to allow the students to connect together. This technique named "Facebook". In the beginning the range of the application was only for the use in the Universities. After that, business world has paid great attention to the possibility of benefiting from the technology. The Creation of profile page including personal information, was the crucial condition for personal interactive to be done (Brügger, 2015). It has a great capacity in order create personal relations and direct individuals to enter an unfamiliar social environment. Facebook application, allows people to express themselves, seek information, and interact together (Ainin *et al*., 2015). Organizations can easily take an advantage from creating their own profile on Facebook. This step will help to disseminate data and information related to the firm's products and services. This action will be a very good way in order to transfer from the target of build a relationship with the clients to the target of reaching them

directly. Furthermore, such community is relevant to the marketers, as they will be able to identify consumers Desires and needs. This will help them to formulate marketing strategies besides creating market segmentation (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2013).

3.3 Customer Involvement

This term implies involving the client in activities related to development and improvement of new goods including; advertise assessment, supply chain, market evaluation, and technical meetings. Customer involvement represents a platform in order to get better understanding of the future market demands (Ghafari *et al*., 2011). It represents the main key character of any service, besides gaining more competitive advantage. Customer involvement emphasizes a close-up relationship between organizations and clients. As a result, the enterprises will have benefits from customer participation throughout improvements of firm performance (Anning-Dorson, 2018). Moreover, consumes could be involved with the organization business activities through firms' efforts towards building and controlling online community which brings clients around products and services. In today's information age, customer involvement lets individual to be connected and managed depending on the current relationship even with the companies (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 20013).

3.4 Customer Retention

It has been referred that the customer satisfaction represents a main key of the customer retention. Satisfaction is a priority of the consumer decision for continue or terminate a business relationship. Social networks can play a high role towards direct accountability around customer groups and addressing the particular problems of customer's discontent, thus increasing the retention rate. At the same time, Social networks can empower organizations efficiently and effectively towards retaining customers (Anning - Dorson, 2018). In the same context, organizational social networks tools could be a helpful way in the enhancement of consumer self- service and enables them which let the organizations to decrease costs through managing and increasing number of customer's transactions effectively (Anshari and Almunawar, 2012). There is no doubt that the process of consumer retention has a direct and great effect on the making profitability. As well as, customer retention could be more difficult and more expensive comparing with get new client. The difficulties reason is due to the high competition towards those customers. The reality is that the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) represents the main way to help companies in leveraging the information and experience in retention and development of a profitable consumer portfolio (Yilmaz and Ferman, 2017).

4. Methodology

SMEs represents a main component of the resent economy and spite of the SMEs marketing approaches might be differ from big organizations, SMEs represent more than 80 % of the total number of establishments in the processed

food section. In Iraq, the number of employs for small enterprises is between 1-9 employs and for medium enterprises it's between 10-29 employs. The focuses of this work have been done in food industries. This work included members of Business to Costumer (B2C) SMEs. Actually, as we know the SMEs spending ability on advertising is less than big organizations. This vision could be the main reason to adopt SNT in SMEs domain. Data were collected from the selected SMEs members in Nineveh Governorate-Iraq. Questioners have been randomly distributed among samples. The author tested the adoption of a specific social networking tool, the "Facebook" tool. The samples were asked to explain how their enterprises were engaging with the tool using five-point Likert scale. Target respondents were the employees of the selected SMEs. 69 individual staffs taken randomly. As 69 questionnaires distributed, 56 of them have been collected. 13 of them have been excluded due to missing some data in the questionnaire. The questionnaire has been developed through apply five-point Likert scale in order to measure respondents' ratings. The rating scale included five levels, 5 is "highest" and 1 is the "lowest" ratings. While 2, 3, and 4 are "I don't agree", "Neutral", and "Agree". The questionnaire consists of 15 items about the study; Social Networking Tools (the independent variable) to the Customer Involvement and Customer Retention (the depended variable). It included: (A) 8 items relating to Social Networking; (B) 7 items relating to the Customer Involvement and Customer Retention. All the questions of the questionnaire have been formulated by the author adapted from Anshari and Almunawar (2012), Zhou et al. (2013), Srinivasan *et al.* (2011), Chan *et al.*, 2010 and Ghafari *et al.*, 2011.

The methodology of this work could be clarified throughout the coming main features:

4.1 Problem determination

As the best knowledge of the author there are on works have been studied (locally) the exact idea of the present study. This has motived the author to take a first step in this regard. As the same time this could be considered as the originality of the work. The work problem can be recognized throughout the two main questions:

(a) Is there a "relationship" between Social Networking Tools with both; Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate?

(b) Does Social Networking Tools have an influence on the Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate?

4.2 Hypothesis

The questions posed in the research problem could be answered throughout the next hypotheses:

H1: There is a "significant relationship" between Social Networking Tools with both; Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate.

H2: There is a "significant influence" of Social Networking Tools on the Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate.

4.3 Purposes

This research aims to realize some objectives, such as:

1. To discover "the relationships" between Social Networking Tools with both; Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate.
2. To discover "the influence" of Social Networking Tools on the Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate.

5. Data Analyses and Results Dissections

5.1 Analyzing Sample Characteristics

Table -1- presenting the characteristics of the respondents targeted in this work:

Table (1) : Demography characteristics

Gender							
Male				Female			
Frequency		%		Frequency		%	
38		67.86		18		32.14	
Age							
Below 25		25-35		35-45		Above 45	
Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
12	21.42	24	42.86	12	21.42	8	14.29
Education							
Graduate		diploma certificate		High School-Graduate		other qualification	
Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
66.07	37	5.36	3	19.64	11	8.93	5
Period of Establishment							
3-5 years		6-10 years		11 years and above			
Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency			%
27	48.21	18	32.14	11			19.64

Source: Elaborated by author

- Gender

Out of 56 distributed questionnaires, it has been observed that "males" were 67.86% (n=38) while the "females" were 32.14% (n=18). We conclude from this that the males formed the largest proportion by 67.86%.

- Age

Out of 56 respondents, 14.29% (n=8) are above 45 years, 42.86% (n=24) fall between 25-35 years, 21.43% (n=12) fall below 25 years and 21.42% (n=12) fall between 35-45. As a result, it has been observed that the majority of respondents belong to age between 25-35. This means the most enterprises are managed by young people.

- Education

Out of 56 workers, 66.07% (n=37) were "graduate", 5.36% (n=3) were having diploma certificate,19.64% (n=11) were High School-Graduate, 8.93% (n=5) were having other qualification. This means that the majority of the respondents are having high qualification which is helping their enterprises to take benefits from different internet applications.

- Period of Establishment

Regarding the period of starting the enterprise, the results has shown the Following time categories respectively; 48.21% (n=27) fall between (3-5 years), 32.14% (n=18) fall between (6-10 years), and 19.64% (n=11) fall between (11 years and above).

5.2 Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha has been used in order to test the "internal consistency" as it's shown in the below table.

Table (2): Reliability Statistics

Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
	0.80

Source: SPSS Results

The "alpha coefficient" calculated in the table 1, was 0.80. This indicate that the items have comparatively high internal consistency. Therefore, it would be considered this rate is convenient for the study done.

5.3 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1:

Table (3): The correlation between the independent variable "Social Networking Tools" and dependent variables: Customer Acquisition and Customer retention

Depended variables / Independents variable	Customer Involvement	Customer retention
Social Networking Tools	.427**	.356**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level N= 56

Source: SPSS Results.

In order to verify the main hypothesis one, author implemented correlation test. Main hypothesis one states that "there is a significant relationship between Social Networking Tools and both; Customer Involvement and Customer retention in the selected SMEs in Nineveh Governorate". The table (2) shows that there is a correlation between Social Networking Tools and both; Customer Involvement and Customer retention, as the value of r = .42 for the customer involvement which is significant at 0.01level. As such, the value of r = .35 for the customer retention

which is significant at 0.01level. According to the correlation, first hypothesis has been accepted.

Hypothesis 2:

Table 4
Model Summary of "Regression analysis" between Social Networking Tools with Customer Involvement and Customer retention

Independent variable / Dependent variables	Social Networking Tools					
	R^2	D.F	F		0β	β
			Founded	Sig		
Customer Involvement	.182	2	12.017	.001	2.556	3.467
Customer Retention	.127	54	7.827	.000	.265	2.798

** Correlation is "significant" at 0.01 level N= 56

Source: SPSS Results.

The results denoting that Social Networking Tools being affect Customer Involvement and Customer retention which is clarified in table (3), it has been detected that the coefficient R^2 pointed that the explain difference proportion in Customer Involvement due to the "influence" of Social Networking Tools for Customer Involvement is 18.2%, F (1,54) = 12.01, $p < 0.01$, beta is 2.55 beside t value of 3.46, this is significant at 0.01 level. Also it has been detected that the specifying coefficient R^2 pointed that the explain difference proportion in Customer retention due to the "influence" of Social Networking Tools for Customer Involvement is 12.7%, F (1,54) = 7.82, $p < 0.01$, beta is .26 beside t value of 2.79 this is significant at 0.01 level. According to the results second hypothesis has been accepted.

Conclusions:

In current environment, consumers can organize their associations with companies and achieve power in order to influence other clients in their social network. In the light of the growing dissemination of social networking tools within business environment, it is essential that the organization take in mind the benefits and obstacles associated with their adoption and use. Therefore, it is vital for SMEs to recognize social networking tools such as Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, etc. and trying to apply and use these tools for business growing. This work attempted to highlight the social networking tools that are using and applying from the selected Small and Medium Enterprises in Nineveh Governorate-Iraqi. In general, the contribution of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Iraqi economy remains a neglected area. However basic governmental support to SMEs has been lately started. Based on this work, results have indicated that there is a significance relation between social networking tools and customer involvement, customer retention respectively.

Research limitations and further works:

This study focused on the SMEs working in the field of food and investigated the relation between adopting of Facebook as a tool of social network

and customer retention beside customer involvement. The main limitation of the work is the small sample under test beside the geographical location only in Nineveh, Iraq. So, the generalization of the study will be limited. It's better for the future works to be more general in different provinces. Furthermore, the study could be applying in another industries. Also, the researchers my investigate other tools of SNT like YouTube, Snapchat etc., in order to study the relationship amongst them. Future works could be advised to discover and study the applying of SNT in order to improve and engage with the strategic implementation in SMEs and in other sectors.

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