



The Nexus between Social Media Adoption and the Performance of MSSEs in Sri Lanka: An Exploratory Study Based on Gampaha District

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of social media has influenced how businesses conduct their daily operations. Research on social media and MSSEs is still in its early stages, and there is growing interest from academia for more studies and inquiry in this field. This paper aims to present a qualitative analysis of the nexus between social media adoption and the performance of businesses, focusing on Sri Lanka's micro and small-scale enterprises. In this paper, an interpretive philosophy as the researcher's view has been adopted. The study includes semi-structured interviews of twelve micro and small-scale business owners selected using the purposeful sampling technique, and the thematic analysis was used to answer the research question. The study conclusions provide important insights that could guide Sri Lanka MSSEs in understanding social media and its benefits in emerging markets affecting business performance. The findings also point out activities that business owners can utilize to intensify the performance of the business. The paper suggests the importance of using social media as a practical marketing tool despite the mere presence on the web and the use of various web 2.0 tools instead of only depending on Facebook to enhance business performance. Further, this paper has implications for practitioners and researchers interested in exploring social media adoption in MSSEs in a developing country.

Keywords: Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises, Performance, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Micro and small-scale enterprises (MSSEs, hereafter) play a vital role in the economic development of countries because of their contribution to reducing unemployment and increasing GDP per capita (Nuseir, 2018). According to the statistics, more than 75% of the industrial establishment in Sri Lanka consists of MSSEs (Pemarathna, 2019). Since the number of entities is significant, successive governments focused on developing micro, small and medium enterprises to boost economic activities with the intention of reducing poverty in Sri Lanka (Vijayakumar, 2013). However, to attain these said targets, it is vitally necessary for any business organization to have an online presence in this digital age. Whether it's a micro, small, medium, or a larger firm, getting the business

organization online will the organization reap significant benefits since technology and the internet has become revolutionary-driven factors for every business organization in modern markets and economies (Langley et al., 2021; Pikhart & Klimova, 2020).

In some cases, MSSEs have to perform business operations similar to medium and large organizations in the same business environment, sometimes as competitors in a competitive market economy. However, in contrast to the resources owned by larger organizations, MSSEs lack capital and human resources with limited access; and globalization and regulations put MSSEs under more competitive pressure from the outside world. Despite the above facts, as

discussed by Vijayakumar (2013) and Yoshino and Hesary (2016), one of the common barriers to MSSEs development is the lack of information and communication technologies adoption and ineffective use of those technologies (Kuruwitaarachchi et al., 2020). Sri Lanka has a significantly developed online market with companies and 10.10 million internet users (DataReportal, 2020) who perform buying and selling activities. Unfortunately, many small businesses do not have enough resources to retain in the competition and connect with all online users due to the reasons mentioned above. However, with the advancement of internet and web 2.0 technology, MSSEs stood a chance to enhance their operations in the modern marketplace under a low budget using the internet and digital media.

Authors Hewage and Weerasekara (2020) discovered 6 million (in 2018) active social media users in Sri Lanka. With the emergence of web 2.0 technology for businesses, apart from an essential website, consumers who use social media tend to look for a blog, a Facebook page, an Instagram account, and another web 2.0 enable social media websites. Because, nowadays, most people prefer to make purchases online since it is simple, convenient, and saves time and travel. Therefore, social media is a better alternative for micro and small business units since most social media sites provide cost-free and low-cost services to the users (Genç & Öksüz 2015).

Though it is a concerning issue that MSSEs are disadvantaged in the current competitive world regarding business performance and profit margins compared to medium and large businesses, owing to a lack of usage of techniques such as social media in business operations, marketing, and advertising campaigns. As a result, research must be conducted to identify and highlight the possible activities and the importance of social media so that MSSEs may compete economically and commercially with quickly developing enterprises. Researchers have addressed a number of these critical questions and discussed the challenges in adopting social media tools. Still, there remain significant challenges on the lack of consistency in

theoretical frameworks (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015) and conceptualizing social media value and its effect on the performance of businesses (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). This is true for MSSEs using social media in Sri Lanka. Because MSSEs are better positioned to share important information to discover unique consumer demands and modify their goods and services to meet those needs. As a result, including social media in MSSE operations can have a significant beneficial influence on their performance. Therefore, The present study has been conducted to fill the existing gap of the knowledge base of the subject. Thus, the study intends to achieve the following objectives; (a) To identify possible business operations that MSSEs can do through social media. (b) To recognize the importance of social media adoption for the MSSEs performance in the Gampaha district.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the following literature review presents the methodology employed by the researchers throughout the study. Next, the study's findings have been shown under the themes and sub-themes developed by the authors. Finally, the discussion and conclusion of the research have been presented with significant discoveries and suggestions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Micro and Small Businesses

MSSEs play a vital role in all economies globally (Malwenna, 2019), especially in developing economies like Sri Lanka (Advocata Institute, 2020). These sectors contribute mainly to the country's gross domestic product by participating in the mainstream economy and becoming the source of income to a portion of the population by providing employment opportunities (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020). Tambunan (2019) has identified the importance of MSSEs in several areas, including (i) having a large distribution across rural areas and, therefore, critical for rural economic growth; (ii) the willingness to absorb large number of staff; (iii) especially in rural areas, as a hub for entrepreneurship and business skill growth; (iv) as a conduit of women's market opportunities. Apart from those, MSSEs serve as a nursery for all large future businesses

(Adikari et al., 2017). Most of the large companies that operated currently originated as MSSEs in the past (Department of census and statistics n.d.). However, according to Rizos et al. (2016), very few researches have identified the barriers and drivers to growth in micro and small business sectors.

As per the USAID project in 1995, Micro-enterprises were identified as minor, casually systematized, non-agricultural business organizations (Lucock et al., 1995). Currently, Sri Lanka does not have predetermined criteria for MSSEs (Welmilla, Weerakkody, & Ediriweera, 2011). Instead, different agencies use different standards based on their objectives, and there is no consistency between them (Department of census and statistics n.d.). However, the National Policy Framework for Small and Medium Enterprises

Development report (2016) by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce in Sri Lanka identified a criterion-based (Table 1) survey results conducted by Census and Statistics Department 2013/14. The study used to define MSSEs by referring to employees and turnover of manufacturing service sectors (Cooray, 2003).

However, in the current context, evaluating the effect of micro-enterprise activities is challenging. Many managers are involved in more than one economic activity and often have various sources and uses of funds generated and used in business and personal events. However, it is complicated to distinct out the costs and benefits of each activity. The lack or scarcity of appropriate records further confounds this problem (Lucock et al. 1995).

Table -01- The Total Turnover of the Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises and Persons Engaged

Sector	Sample Column	Sample Column	Sample Column	Sample Column
Manufacturing	Annual Turnover	Rs. Mn. 251 - 750	Rs. Mn. 16 - 250	Less than Rs. Mn. 15
	No. of Employees	51 - 300	11 - 50	Less than 10
Service	Annual Turnover	Rs. Mn. 251 - 750	Rs. Mn. 16 - 250	Less than Rs. Mn. 15
	No. of Employees	51 - 200	11 - 50	Less than 10

Source: Report on Listing Stage Economic Census 2013/14

Social Media

As defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61), social media is "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Web 2.0 applications, especially online social networks, have made a remarkable comeback in the last decade. Many businesses use them as marketing tools because of the large number of consumers who use these networks (Mata & Quesada, 2014). Web 2.0 is the set of tools to alter web pages to become interactive media so that users can act together socially, giving rise to social commerce and, in due course, Facebook commerce. The terms and tools related to the same are described briefly for web 2.0, social media, and Facebook commerce (Esmacili &

Hashemi, 2019). Web 2.0 describes the technological advances in computer hardware and software that have allowed computer users to create content, which interacts with other users and enables interoperability (Han, 2012). For example, user-friendly interactive websites provide richer content to users and encourage involvement. There is a shift in the computer user's role from a passive role, such as repossessing information from the internet to a function that involves interacting as part of a community, information creation, design, and collaboration (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

According to Kapoor et al. (2018), social media refers to websites that promote relationships between users of diverse backgrounds, resulting in a complex social structure. Moreover, social media can be identified as a group of Internet-based

applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). User-Generated Content (UGC) is often used to describe users' content using various social media applications. Here in inquiry and decision-making are supported by user-generated content. User-generated content drives these applications and is particularly influential in multiple environments, including purchasing/selling behaviors, entrepreneurship, political problems, and venture capitalism (Greenwood & Gopal, 2015). Few other websites that use Web 2.0 tools include Blogger, Flickr, Google Docs, Picasa, Skype, Wikipedia, and WordPress. In the last few years, academics and professionals have discussed and studied social media's various aspects, and organizations use social media primarily to seek input from their stakeholders (Phang et al., 2013). The most important aspect of social media is accessibility for many users (Carter, 2014).

The Evolution of Technology and Social Media Adoption of Users

Social networking is used for several purposes. First, it is a vital part of human lives because it increases interactions and networking between users with similar interests. In 2012, the online social networking application Facebook surpassed the one billion active user mark, making it the first social network to do so (Statista, 2020). Simultaneously, every 01 minutes, 10 hours of content were uploaded to the video-sharing platform, YouTube (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Some researchers have shown that 2.34 billion people worldwide use social media (Montalvo, 2011). This disruptive technological growth is not inadequate for juveniles, either; members of Generation X, now 35–44 years old, progressively more populate the ranks of joiners, onlookers, and detractors (Perrin, 2015). Consequently, it is judicious to say that social media symbolizes a groundbreaking new trend that should concentrate on businesses functioning in the online space, for that matter (Joinson, 2008).

Due to the technological enhancement of social media, networks are becoming more and

more persuasive nowadays, and it has moved into people's daily practices (Owusu-ansah et al., 2015). As a social media platform, Facebook identified seven unique uses and gratifications that motivated people to use social media in their lives: social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updating (Thackeray et al., 2008). An excellent way to think about social media is that human beings share ideas, cooperate, and cooperate to create art, thinking, commerce, energetic argument and discourse, and find people who might be good friends, allies, and lovers. Mayfield (2007) emphasized that concern about some perceptions regarding social media. It is the best marketing tool and is not the only online communication method, transmission, and collaboration but also cultivations among interconnected and social media networks. It is a more interdependent network, and it helps to enrich the organization's capabilities. (Soloman, 2013). The fundamental metamorphosis between the generic definitions and business definition of social media is that the users have been substituted with the customers/consumers, thereby unbridling many opportunities for businesses and shifting power to the consumers. (Mohammadpour, Arbatani, & Gholipour, 2014)

ICT and Social Media Adoption in Organizational Contexts

Many companies have been able to do Business from anywhere globally thanks to Internet-enabled communication media (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011). Many published scholars have considered the adoption of various types of ICT-based technological innovations in organizations. According to Orlikowski (1992), identified technology is either an objective, external force that significantly impacts organization properties such as structure, that human activity is a form of technology, and that technology results from strategic decision-making and social activity. In today's digital economy, ICT-based organisms' settlement has become central prominence for governments and organizations (Levy & Powell, 2003; Hashim, 2015). Moreover, ICT has become a catalytic agent for organizational change when

businesses find themselves in a hastily technically changing environment (Hafedh, 2017).

Micro-businesses have irreplaceable features that help them race with large initiatives, admittance, and take on new technologies in their business procedures regarding micro-enterprise-level technology adoption. They are frequently seen as vigorous establishments and are expected to quickly adapt to modern ICT technologies (Fong, 2001). Also, because of their size and nature, they lean towards more malleable and modest organizational structures than large enterprises, which allows them to be more pioneering in their response to ups and downs in the environment. In this type of enterprise, a single person, the business owner, may take both functioning and tactical decisions. Thus, owners' and managers' assertiveness, skills, and ICT circumstantial work as a driving force for accepting and investing in ICT. In other words, in micro-enterprises, it is most often a single person's accountability to inaugurate goals and needs concerning ICTs and magistrate the potential of ICTs in their enterprises. Owing to the above characteristics of microenterprises, the introduction of ICT tools and rapid development in this area are becoming gradually more critical (Kapurubandara, 2009). These tools have become a crucial element in competing globally, with microenterprises being acquainted with the central importance of ICT to their success. There is substantial evidence that microenterprises engage with many technological innovations (Hafedh, 2017)

According to Lucock et al. 1995, micro-enterprises are not a uniform group but vary in several ways. For example, microenterprise owner-managers unlike from each other in their age and educational level, their boldness towards e-Business, their point of entrepreneurship, market and export orientation, their business objectives and their degree of inclination for face-to-face interaction with customers, strategic focus, customer orientation, business growth, business processes, owner attitude and social networks, level of e-Business knowledge and skills. Besides, they note metamorphoses under pressure from customers and suppliers to

use e-Business (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Microenterprise has frequently wriggled to adopt technology in line with their absence of skills, resources, and technical knowledge compared with large firms. However, Web 2.0 provides microenterprises with a prospect to overcome these hitches. Moreover, the internet has tremendously reduced marketing costs than outmoded methods (Harris, 2008).

Among all social media tools, the most commonly used SNS, Facebook, is preferred more commonly by small entrepreneurs for its simple-minded and user-friendly environment. The adoption and usage of internal social media applications in the organization, named "Enterprise 2.0," has recently sparked a lot of research attention (Meske & Stieglitz, 2013). As a result, more businesses engage with these resources by providing connections and facilities from their Facebook and Twitter pages, resulting in collaborative brand communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

According to the study, planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell 2012), based on the nature of the research problem and the questions that will be asked to address the problem. In addition, in this study, qualitative methods were used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2009). Before carrying out the analysis, identify the philosophical approach on which the research is carried out. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), different researchers may have different assumptions about the nature of truth and knowledge and its acquisition. This study used the interpretivism nature of social constructivism since the study leads to developing a new understanding of the phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Furthermore, the greatest attention here is given to the understanding of the ways through which people experience the social world.

As mentioned in the chapter, the role of the researchers takes a more significant influence on this research area. The researcher's skills with the industry experiences and connections significantly impact this type of study and become a part of the context for the analysis and the results (Bricki, 2007). Considering the purpose of this study, an exploratory method was used to investigate. The exploratory method enables finding new insights into a certain phenomenon and clarifying the precise nature of the problem (Saunders et al., 2009). The participants selected for this study had experience doing business through social media and businesses at micro and small-scale enterprises. This study focused on the quality of data collected, fitting and necessary for qualitative research using a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling provides the opportunity to choose information-rich participants. The sample was a purposefully selected group of 12 micro-level business owners in Gampaha district Sri Lanka, using social media activities to their businesses.

A pilot case study was conducted to test the researcher's interview technique, test the interview questions for appropriateness, and determine each interview's appropriate time requirement. The pilot study was conducted with the two micro-business owners in the Gampaha area, matching the sample. Researchers employed an indirect interview method, and interviews in the pilot study were reasons to change the interview protocol because the researcher understood the questions' order had to change. Another change had to make on the interviewees connecting methods because they are busy; since the study is based on micro-business, most owners are busy with day-to-day business activities. Therefore, the researcher conducted a few interviews through telephone conversations rather than direct meetings and interviews.

After providing consent, participants were interviewed by the researchers. Each participant's interview lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour. The researchers held three telephone interviews, and similarly, Facebook messages were also received from them. Each participant received the same questions in the

same order, which improved study reliability. It enables the researcher to understand and capture participants' points of view without predetermining those points of view through a prior selection of questionnaire categories and capturing participants' terms (Brickci, 2007). The interviewer's skills, combined with a semi-structured interview format, enable them to maintain a more conversational atmosphere and trust in the empathic relationship with interviewees (Bryman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews enjoy its popularity because they are flexible, accessible, and intelligible. More importantly, they are capable of disclosing essential and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior. Often it is the most effective and convenient means of gathering information (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Because it has its basis in human conversation, it allows the skillful interviewer to modify the style, pace, and order of questions to evoke the interviewee's fullest responses.

Furthermore, by retaining credibility and transferability, this study was able to develop trustworthiness. When a researcher tests what the study is meant to test, the study's reliability is established. Researchers used the member checking process to build credibility in this analysis, also known as participant or respondent validation (Shenton, 2004; Harper & Cole, 2012). Inviting a participant to review the transcript of their interview can improve the data's accuracy. It can allow participants to rewrite their story by removing excerpts that they believe no longer reflect their experience or negatively depict them (Birt et al., 2016). This study used thematic analysis for the data analysis purpose, and the authors began by reading and rereading transcripts to discover probable themes. After reviewing the initial codes, the authors considered keeping the original codes' diversity while creating overarching components and higher-level sub-themes. Next, the authors have identified that the quotes are congruent with the overarching themes. Finally, after the final review of the themes and naming themes, the authors continued the write-up.

As the code of conduct, this study followed the ethical guidelines proposed by the Market Research Society (2014). As a result, it was determined that the study was not harmful to

anybody and did not violate any ethical standards. All respondents were contacted via email and asked to participate in an interview. To ensure the respondents' privacy, the responses acquired during the interviews were utilized anonymously within the study. During the interview, before the interview, and after the interview, every responder was invited to ask questions.

FINDINGS

The interview began with a general overview of the business's promotion activities, motives of the owners, social media usage, including the platforms they use, when they started, how easy the social media websites are to use, and the desire to use it regularly. During the data analysis process, the authors have identified the following themes and sub-themes of the study.

1. Motives
2. Social media activities
2.1 Brand awareness
2.2 Consumer Engagement
3. Performance
4. Attitudes towards SM
4.1 Negativity
4.2 Source of knowledge

Motives

According to the findings, respondents mentioned different motives for social media engagement, including work-life balance and the need for low-cost advertising methods. However, most of them use social media to expand their audience, mainly to reach a new customer base and loyal customers. Moreover, businesses are interested in knowing what the consumers think about the overall business page, profile, updates, product information, user review comments, and seeing how many people "like" them. Therefore, almost every business owner believes that social media supports them in reaching a bigger audience, existing and potential, and convincing sales.

Respondents have emphasized how social media balance working life and save time while continuously developing products.

"...doing business through social media saves my time, and it helps me the lot to develop my products as well as help to balance business and family life."
(Mr.CA)

"...I have a baby, and I do not have any time to maintain an outlet, so I moved to social media to continue my Business. I do every activity on my social media page and profile, and I found that this is very easy and beneficial." (Mrs.SP)

Social Media, especially Facebook, has been identified as a low-cost advertising method to take products to the market and cater to the customers. As a platform where the business can meet end consumers and potential buyers of the product.

"I wanted to know how I can bring my product into the market. I wanted something low cost at the beginning of my advertising; then I started a Facebook page for the business."
(Mrs.TH)

The same respondent emphasized the importance of Facebook as an analytical tool and how it helps analyze and get insights into consumer interaction and purchase behavior. Therefore, respondents use social media as a surveillance mode to gather details about customers, competitors, and markets.

"...learn many things from social media; about how to run business, how to cater customers, and Facebook give clear insights about new trends in the market." (Mrs.TH)

Mr.US highlighted the importance of creating a new user experience to attract customers while getting a competitive advantage by sharing videos and pictures with the customers. According to the respondent, the competition is high even in the restaurant business. Every other business in the field tries to capture the market through various advertising methods (Cole, DeNardin, & Clow, 2017), while our respondent tries to achieve it through social media. So, the motive is to capture the market in a low-cost way (Brink, 2017).

*"...rather than paper advertisement more people like to have fresh experiences with videos and pictures. So, I decide that add social media activities into my Business to grab this type of advantage, and as a low-cost method, this is very beneficial to me."
(Mr.US)*

Mrs.FC has also emphasized the importance of having a cheap and fruitful way to engage with the customers and create a good marketplace.

"After I moved to a home-based business, I wanted simple and effective marketing technique because at that time I had maximum reach level of sales within the family. I need new customers. So, I decided to create a Facebook page and Instagram account because it has become a good marketplace." (Mrs.FC)

Businesses use social media features to promote themselves, communicate with consumers and society, and co-create new features and add-ons that can contribute to the evolution of social media itself (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). According to the findings, MSSEs motives behind the use of social media are. (i) Marketing perspective; to increase online visibility and virtual availability, (ii) The Market Requirement; to endure in the modern market, businesses should operate virtually and (iii) Financial Constraints; operate in low-cost models as a cost reduction technique.

Social Media Activities

Researchers identified that MSSEs owners of Gampaha District engaged in Social Media activities mainly for two reasons, namely to (1) create brand awareness and (2) consumer engagement.

Brand Awareness

The respondents were into social media marketing because they wanted to create a platform to showcase the products and increase brand awareness. Because as MSSEs, business owners are ready to go with a low-cost and highly effective method to increase the awareness of brand availability. Within this social branding concept, businesses mainly use visuals and words as tools in virtual platforms.

Almost all the respondents of the study made Facebook their first choice in brand awareness. Therefore, Facebook has been identified as the first promotional effort they made for their business.

*"We started an Instagram account. But not getting response there. Our reviews are on Facebook." (Mrs.SP)
"At the beginning, I didn't have many promotional activities to promote my products. I only had a Facebook page for my business." (Mrs.NC)*

All of the effort to be present in social media is focused on Facebook; one reason is that Facebook does not need additional work. After setting up the page, the respondents can add more details about their business and product by simply posting a picture with a description. The followers of the page then can easily interact with the content uploaded by the business.

*"We don't have to put in a lot of effort to use Facebook for business. I just use it on my phone and update it regularly." (Mr.US)
"I upload photos of my plants to Facebook through my mobile phone; people who saw my plants visit my outlet and keep asking to add more details about my business. Also, I upload tips about my product manufacturing that also attract new customers." (Mrs.ZF)*

Another respondent added, *"Mainly, I update my business Facebook page with images of my products and update new cake designs I create within the week. (Mrs.DF)*

Another respondent described how the products promote on social media, including the logo and the brand name. The shop owner uses Instagram and Facebook to share photos of the product whenever they develop or update the existing product to a newer version.

"I mainly promote my products, my logo, and my brand name via social media, and also I use this as a tool of market analysis related to my industry."

"I share every special ice cream serving of my outlet via Facebook and Instagram. Regularly I do some changes to the products and promote it via social media." (Mrs.FC)

Few business owners have already developed a website to showcase the product portfolio. However, even to promote the website, they initially used social media.

"I promote my business name by hashtag with every post I upload Instagram. Also, I promote our websites and every contacting method through every post in Instagram." (Mrs.CW)

Another set of respondents mentioned that they started using Facebook even before starting their business. They started utilizing Facebook without much thinking and preparation when they were going to establish a business. They wanted to let people know about their business activities, and they decided that Facebook would be the best platform to employ because of its simplicity of use and low cost. According to Pentina, Koh, and Le (2012), social media is a better suit for smaller companies Because of its greater flexibility and cheaper cost.

"I created my business logo before the launching outlet, and I did my brand promoting via social media." (Mrs.TH)

"I started my Facebook page one week before I start my business. I did some market analysis through Facebook..." (Mr.US)

"We started our Facebook page even before starting our business, and in Gampaha and Colombo, almost everyone uses Facebook." (Mrs.CW)

The main reason for social media marketing is to create a platform for highlighting their brand and creating brand awareness (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Bakar, 2018). Because when it comes to advertising, it would be difficult for small businesses to advertise their product by expensive and paid mediums with limited resources. Moreover, most respondents believed visual impact lots in consumer minds,

and the frequency of updating also adds more success to branding through social media.

"I create a Facebook page and do some photo posting about fried ice cream and share it on followers' timelines. I can say before I start my business, I already found around 75 people who know my products." (Mrs.CW)

"...when I make some new plants, then I update my page and my profile. Also, I share some valuable things on other pages which contribute to my business and my customers." (Mrs.PP)

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), before launching a new product or service, one wants to have some ideas about what people think about it. Therefore, by engaging with prospects and customers via social media, one can ask the fans and followers what colors they prefer or what types of features they want. Thus, one can involve consumers invaluable free market research by asking their opinions and can help establish credibility by showing that their opinions matter.

"I usually update different cake structures on social media because I can have a clear idea of what customers prefer to buy." (Mrs.DF)

"If one customer visits the shop and updates their experience of my products on social media, then their friends also came to my place because of such customers posts." (Mrs.NC)

The literature also shows that networking is a common and appropriate marketing strategy for small businesses. Moreover, the literature underlines that social media are a powerful means for SME owner-managers to build their networks and branding activities (Genç & Öksüz, 2015). According to the respondents' statements, micro-enterprises are using social media to build brand awareness. To achieve this objective, they have used (i) images, (ii) wordings, and (iii) videos.; The common wisdom is that when firms actively manage their Facebook pages by regular posts, this induces more user-generated content (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013).

Consumer Engagement

If you would like your customers to engage with you, you need to give them a reason for doing so. The first step is to listen to your customers. Find out what they would like to hear, what they would like to talk about, what they might find interesting, enjoyable, and valuable (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Moreover, customers expect the firm to respond (regardless of whether they face a service problem), express their brand enthusiasm, offer advice for product improvements, or need answers for technical questions (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013).

Usually, business owners are busy during the daytime when engaging in business activities. However, according to the study respondents, it is necessary to allocate time to engage with customers. Because doing business online will restrict the physical engagement of customers and miss feedback. Therefore, respondents spend a few hours checking customer feedback, product or service reviews, customer comments, and even emails.

"I spend at least 02 03 hours per day responding to my customer's feedbacks/ reviews and their comments on my posts. I always try to inquire customer queries within one day, which makes my customers heavily satisfied." (Mrs.TH)

"...satisfied recommendation or review can gain another ten customers to you. Same goes another way. If one person put a bad review about you, it may cause you to lose your entire market..." (Mrs.FC)

"...that if someone reviews me as the good businessman, even another person personally does not the reviewer still, they tend to choose me just because of that review." (Mr.US)

"I do Daily checking emails and other notifications, and that helps me a lot in attracting orders." (Mrs.SP)

"Also, I spend time answering followers' questions related to manufacturing cakes." (Mr.DF)

Social media is less about explaining why your baking mix, foods, or service is better than anyone else's than it is about engaging others

in open and active conversation. Therefore, participants on Social Media applications desire to engage actively and become producers and consumers of information, so-called "prosumers" (Chandler & Chen, 2015).

"Customers are encouraged to write both favorable and unfavorable evaluations, which is beneficial in terms of having a clear understanding of our business. And it's critical to do so to develop trust." (Mrs.RP)

All of the SMEs interviewed stated that Facebook is assisting them in improving their product and service quality. They also learn what their consumers think about their product, service, and price plan.

"I once received a few negative comments regarding a product's cost. I discovered that the ice cream's pricing is greater than it should be. I was allowed to correct it." (Mrs.FC)

"Once I mistakenly alter the flavor of a cake from one of my customers. I was not aware until she left feedback on my page. Then I could offer her some compensation for the mistake we have made." (Mr.DF)

Every respondent spends their time on consumer engagement activities (Harrigan & Miles, 2014; Shih et al., 2014) through social media to increase their customer base. As well as every business owner relies on that consumer interaction is the key to business continued existence in this contemporary world. Eleven respondents discussed that they always try to respond to customers within one day because they had experienced that positive interaction with consumers results in tremendous growth in business survival. The majority of demographics are part of the digital era; therefore, the firm's survival and business growth (Bhimani et al., 2018), consumer satisfaction (Herzig et al., 2016), and engagement (Hussein & Hassan, 2017) are the most trivial factors.

Performance

Every participant (12 out of 12) highlighted that the performance of their businesses has increased after using social media. Out of the total participants, eight respondents mentioned that they had been using social media for their

business before starting their business in real form. The remaining four respondents discussed that they tend to use this social media after a few years of operation. Still, social media positively impacts their sales significantly than the past years of business life.

"Now it has been 03 years for my business. After I joined social media, my sales have increased a lot. In the past, my customer base was limited to this area, but I know I have customers from all over the country." (Mrs.SP)

"...I decided to move my entire business to online-based type because it is very beneficial and cost-effective also, some days I earned 100,000 rupee income totally through social media customers." (Mrs.RP)

"I feel that my customer count is increasing because of that social media promoting about the new business changes; it also helps me increase my daily sales as well." (Mrs.PP)

All of the MSSEs interviewed expressed a desire to expand their efforts to gain a greater benefit from Facebook. Expectations include producing higher-quality material for social media and regularly sharing to enhance performance. Ownership managers' higher involvement in social media activities significantly impacts business performance (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2018).

"Sales increased because of Facebook. Because when I am dealing with my customer base, I found that majority of them came for by knowing my business through the Facebook...." (Mrs.TH)

"From Facebook, I could reach a broad market. Sales were increased, and customers from other provinces also came to buy products." (Mr.CA)

"After I started to post photos of my products on social media, many customers contacted me, and some of them were lived very far from Gampaha but still liked to buy my cakes. They encouraged me to add delivery service also." (Mr.DF)

Attitudes towards SM

Respondents described how social media affects businesses negatively and positively. Researchers of the study have identified those areas and categorized them under the Negativity and Source of knowledge.

Negativity

When it comes to adverse impacts, the size of social media matters a lot. For example, Facebook has over 250 million users globally. This is the kind of enormity social networking sites espouse, and with this comes the license to communicate powerfully. However, when such large numbers of users are involved, there is a danger of something going wrong, and when it does, it happens in a big way (Joinson, 2008). Even social media has some negativities as a source of knowledge (Grimmer, Grimmer, & Mortimer, 2018).

"if one customer is happy, their satisfied recommendation or review can gain another ten customers to you. The same goes another way. If one person puts a bad review about you, it may cause you to lose your entire market just because Facebook or social media is not a website; it's like a global market with more transparency than the real-world market." (Mr.US)

According to Mr.US and Mrs.RP2, competitors act as fake consumers and spread misleading information with bad intentions.

"...our competitors they did some harmful things and spread some fake messages among our customers, but somehow at the moment we can manage those issues" (Mr.US)

"...out of all customers who wanted to contact me are not end customers, they are competitors contact me from fake accounts. Also, I faced my users try to intrude me with the page, and they give fake orders likewise." (Mrs.RP2)

Social media has negative impacts on business performance when considering the trustworthiness of users. However, trust and commitment within personal contact network relationships reduce the risks and uncertainty for the parties involved and improve the

potential for doing good business and building and maintaining value in crucial customer relationships (Durkin, McGowan & McKeown, 2013).

There are a few challenges they discovered for future development and leveraging social media to gain greater benefits. Lack of technological skills and a restricted budget for advertising. It takes effort to grasp all of Facebook's features when you don't know anything about it.

"We just know the basic features of Facebook and use only from a mobile device." (Mrs.TH)

"We're still looking into Facebook, but I'm not familiar with audience targeting." (Mrs.NC)

Source of Knowledge

According to respondents, apart from the marketing perspective, social media can use as a source of knowledge and information for the business. This contains globally updated information related to every industry, and it provides new trends in the market without delay. Also, social media is a cost-effective research tool as well. Overall, most studies point out the positive side of social media and its effect on business performance (Sasatanun & Charoensukmongkol, 2016).

"From social media I able to update my information on the industry, customers, competitors, new trends of the market, new global innovation related to my field and many more." (Mrs.TF)

"...also, it is my market information updater for me. Every day I am gathering new knowledge related to my business via social media." (Mr.DS)

Receiving feedback allowed us to learn which products clients enjoy, why and which products they dislike, and why.

"We have a special fried ice cream with different flavors, and we got to know it is trendy as I get feedback from one customer on a local foodies group and the comment section much appreciation from others." (Mrs.FC)

DISCUSSION

This study has contributed to the theory and practice of social media usage in MSSEs by executing semi-structured interviews with twelve micro and small-scale business owners and identifying social media websites' implementation for performance enhancement. Findings generally confirm that social media, specifically online customers and communities are critical for the performance of MSSEs. Brand awareness, enhancing marketing and advertising campaigns, consumer engagement, complaint handling, and effective communication with customers could only be done effectively through social media (Alalwan et al., 2017; Misirlis & Vlachopoulou, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2018; de Vries et al., 2018; Fink et al., 2018; Guha et al., 2018). Social media can greatly support MSSEs to enhance their business which will improve their overall performance (Chatterjee & Kumar Kar, 2020; Cheung et al., 2020 and Tajvidi & Karami, 2017).

Some respondents use several social media platforms (Cant, 2016) to gain a cost edge over traditional marketing and advertising methods (Brink, 2017). This ensures a bigger audience and inevitably works as a customer relationship management (Harrigan & Miles, 2014; Guha et al., 2018) tool for business-to-customer marketing (Kantorová & Bachmann, 2018). Respondents keep posted the business activities, promotional activities, and customer endorsements on social media websites to improve existing customer relationships and attract potential customers (Shih et al., 2014). These engagements in social media activities facilitate a significant breakthrough in brand awareness (Ananda, Hernández-García, & Lamberti, 2017; Ahmad, Ahmad, & Bakar, 2018). Apart from the essential advertising and marketing campaigns, the owners of MSSEs in Gampaha District have different motives, such as working life balance, saving time, and learning (Vivakaran & Maraimalai, 2016) from social media insights. Continuous growth in customers' expectations and satisfaction will eventually lead to enhancing the performance and business growth. The growth from the improved performance is inevitable, and several studies have identified a significant positive relationship between social media

usage and business performance. Significantly, the involvement of owner-managers with higher engagement in social media practices will lead to more increased business performance (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2018).

In addition, the social media act as a source of information and knowledge since business owners search and gather information related to business operations from social media (Fernandes, Belo, & Castela, 2016; Kuhn et al., 2016; Quinton & Wilson, 2016; Wang, Mack, & Maciejewski, 2017). However, as a source of information, social media negatively impacts business performance in some cases (Grimmer, Grimmer, & Mortimer, 2018). This can occur when owner-managers are lack knowledge of using the social media platforms (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015), competitive pressure (Ahani et al., 2017), and customer pressure (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). Overall, the majority of the findings point to the positive role of social media on MSSEs performance. It is believed that using social media as a marketing tool would enhance sales turnover. The findings of this study show that using social media has a favorable and significant impact on MSSEs' performance. The positive impact demonstrates that the better social media is used for MSSEs company operations, the better MSME performance, such as sales, customer relationships, productivity, and innovation, would increase. MSSEs players utilize social media for business operations to sell their products, engage with clients, compete with competitors, and employ other marketing strategies. The findings of this investigation back up previous research by Rana et al. (2019), Elbanna et al. (2019), Sullivan and Koh (2019), Fatima and Bilal (2019), and Chatterjee and Kumar Kar (2020).

CONCLUSION

Most respondents use social media to build communities around their businesses with the purpose of marketing. Social media marketing enables building relations with customers and prospects through regular, low-cost personalized communication, reflecting the move away from mass marketing. The participants also admired the benefits of using social media for any purpose other than sales

and marketing. The present study results point out that the introduction of social media into micro and small-enterprise practices follows the same pattern. The use of social media channels seems to be unplanned and improvised. It is considered a managerial fad that must be adopted, and thus little advanced planning is involved. For most owner-managers, the use of social media is reactive and subject to resistance to change. Indeed, the results suggest that they should be considered practical marketing tools despite their social media presence. This perspective is still relatively unknown to micro-business owners, who do not always handle their presence on the internet formally, a finding that is harmonizing with previous researchers. The purpose of social media use, in this case, is for marketing and Customer Relationship Management.

Most of the focus of social media effectiveness has been oriented toward the initial stages of the social media marketing process, building awareness and consumer engagement with the company and brand. However, both academic and general practitioners' literature has confirmed the effects of social media activity on consumer awareness and engagement. The research findings highlighted those micro-businesses mainly encompassing 02 moves within the social media platform related to their intention of marketing; namely, brand awareness builds through social media and consumer engagement makes through social media.

The findings may help develop a social media strategy for comparable MSSEs and enhance business operations. In addition, competitive advantages can be gained through investigating the uses and benefits of others. However, the study is limited to MSSEs operating in the Gampaha District and closer to the urban area. Future research and investigations will be required that could look at the subject in other regions and the districts in Sri Lanka. Individual case and quantitative studies can also be undertaken in which selected MSSEs of different sectors may participate. Coping strategies to manage disadvantages and deficiencies of social media can also be devised through appropriate studies.

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