SOCIAL MEDIA OVERCOMING IMPEDIMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY FORMULATION BY SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the impediments of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) on their current Social Media (SM) adoption and implementation at Central Business District (CBD) located at Phitsanulok, using a data sample of 398 surveys, incorporating with 21 interviews from ownerships and top executives that already adopted and implemented SM. The quantitative survey was used to gain a broad understanding of crucial impediments of SM adoption. The qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to gain deeper insight into top executive that encountered obstacles of such implementation. The descriptive and inferential analysis was conducted for surveys, while the applied thematic approach was selected for interview analysis to describe insight situation. The finding reveals that lack of time and knowledge, top management support together with unclear SM practical plan and uncertainty of technology change, are critical hurdles for the successful implementation and development SM, while security breach and privacy issues are not considered as major important obstacles. The novel contributions of this study is to propose solutions feasible for SMEs based on their existing resources and capabilities to cope with such impediments by using theoretical resource based view to describe situation.

KEYWORDS: 1) SOCIAL MEDIA 2) IMPEDIMENTS 3) MIXED METHOD 4) SMES 5) RBV

Introduction

Thailand SMEs have been recognized as engines of economic growth, development and employment in the country. With the pandemic of COVID-19, the economic impact of COVID-19 has been severe leading to the contribution of SMEs to gross domestic product (GDP) is still low. To support Thailand's economy, the government has stepped in with sizable stimulus packages for businesses, as well as the service sector, which contributes to a significant proportion of Thailand's economy. Meanwhile, SMEs themselves recognize that it is crucial for them to for them to adapt the new conditions brought about by the rapid technological changes to stay competitive. Thus, the adoption of SM usage practices is to fit a company's culture and its customer appeal. However, not all SM platforms are appropriate for all business types and also not all SMEs can develop operational and managerial capabilities since some of those could not possess those unique characteristics that are unable to deploy such characteristics advantageously, or may be heavily constrained by resources in order to cope with issues of SM adoption (Beier & Wagner, 2016; Grant, 1991).

Even though there have a growing number of research studies on the obstacles of SM adoption and implementation in different context of countries and types of business, so far there has been little empirically based and rigorous academic research reported on how to handle with the challenges faced with by SMEs. With lack of a business plan and unclear to implement the plan as obstacles arise can create structural problems for SMEs that are ultimately insurmountable. The use of SM presence by SMEs have relatively superficial with a lack of planning, unconventional and unsophisticated in its use, this resulting in a lack of business case study and practices related to reasons for unwillingness, abandonment or rejections of SM adoption among SMEs, are as yet unknown. Consequences, SMEs overlook the importance of effective business planning incorporating SM usage prior to opening their doors.

Research objectives

The objectives of this research includes 1) exploring the impediments of successful SM adoption by SMEs from ownership perspectives located at Central Business District (CBD), Phitsanulok. 2) Proposing a practicable approach to overcome of such impediments for SMEs using resource-based approach (i.e. Resource based View theory) to describe resources and capabilities that SMEs should have to steer SM usage to remove impediments faced by them.

Literature Review

Implications of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and SM usage

Previous research reveals that SM implementation could not be equally beneficial to all business sizes and sectors due to resources constraints in foundation (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014, p. 120). Different size classes of business faces a unique set of obstacles and challenges stemming from SM usage; consequently, they tend to follow different paths based on different sets of resource endowments and business characteristics used to generate their managerial and operational capabilities (Eldin, Elnour, & Hassan, 2020, p. 341; Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014). Recent research suggesting that the barrier of SM implementation includes:

Lack of knowledge and time: SM encompass a diverse number of platforms, each specializing in the delivery of different media. Over time, such platforms have extended to smartphone and all gadgets and electronic devices. Businesses have opportunities to conduct with consumers and prospects across abroad range of platforms and to interact two-way symmetrical communication between the business and customer vice versa. However, some businesses are eager to adopt new technologies whereas others are lagging behind. Thus, knowledge on how to utilize SM for business purposes, skills and time contribution for such SM activities, are critically required. In the same vein, a lack of such ability acts could be considered as impediments to adopt and implement SM effectively (Dahnil et al., 2014, p. 123). The combination of technical knowledge, skills, abilities, and other valuable characteristics among the workforce that determine its SM usage potential, is required (Roberts, Piller, & Lüttgens, 2016, p. 119).

Lack of SM sophistication as a strategy: SM could be considered as a part of marketing tools or even corporate strategy. Although as recently reported by the Digital 2020 Global Overview, the uptake of SM by Thais businesses has continually increased over the years with 48 per cent of SMEs and 79 per cent of large businesses being present on SM (Kemp, 2020), there were not yet any standard approaches for SM strategic formulation. This imply that a lack of alignment of business and SM strategy might be causing issues to fully SM adoption (Hassan Zadeh & Jeyaraj, 2018, p. 125). Lack of alignment may stem from an unclear existing marketing strategy or simply use it without having priorities which creates inappropriate tactics leading to short-term vision that results from the common practice of advertising, selling and pulling campaigns or content rather than focusing in details of SM platforms or formulating channel strategy. Consequence, once business have a number of SM platforms leading to a method of complexity used by SMEs (Roengtam, 2020, p. 221). Also, without sophisticated system measurement of SM usage (Dahnil et al., 2014, p. 123) could leads to unidentified target and customers (Genç & Öksüz, 2015, p. 298)

Top management support

Research indicating that top executive support has been identified as one of the most important factors in the success of SM adoption and implementation (Bogea & Brito, 2018, p. 12; Trainor et al., 2014, p. 5). Ownership/leaders who are well informed about emerging technologies can encourage their staff to consider their use (Naeem, 2020, pp. 1979-1998). Ownerships/leaders who are positively disposed towards SM deployment encourage and support the new technology and innovation (Lin & McDonough, 2011, p. 497). Therefore, owners facilitates employee empowerment and provides commitment to ensure the required resources for adoption and to signal support to internal stakeholders (e.g. top executives/managers and employees) of the importance of adopting such new SM platforms (Oliveira, Thomas, & Espadanal, 2014, pp. 497-510). However, research reveals that business can work well without the use of SM (Pesonen, Mikkonen, Makkonen, & Honkanen, 2013, p. 728) if leaders have ability through the creation of a knowledge sharing organizational culture (Lin & McDonough, 2011, p. 500). This imply that leaders who may not have a technical knowledge aspects in IT, Marketing and Innovation, but having a vision, setting goals, and providing a supportive training system in SMEs that will allow the transfer of knowledge required to make use of the new tools at the same time modify the employees' attitude towards technological change.

Changes of technology

Research suggesting that the changes of technology impacts on the decision making of SM adoption (Beier & Wagner, 2016, pp. 1-18). This results from the change in customer's behavior via SM platform. Research from Beier and Wagner (2016, p. 11) indicating that age of executives and business size (in terms of revenues) impacts on the adoption of SM. New technology change has direct impact on the environment, function, process and performance of business lead to achieve goal—change resistances and barriers will be appeared due the results of reactions and behaving based on different interpretations. This imply that, from owner perspectives, SM landscape will definitely change in a near future as a result it seems they preference to wait and postpone their future investment in fully SM implementation until new better technologies have been developed.

Security breach and privacy issues

Recent research demonstrated initial SM effects on the job security in terms of time wasting, security breaches, transparency, risks, privacy issues and other specific negative aspects (Beier & Wagner, 2016; Bhimani, Mention, & Barlatier, 2019, p. 760; Ghobakhloo & Tang Sai, 2013; Pesonen et al., 2013) that make SM platform not suitable for all types of business, particularly those dealing with the personal privacy information of customers where the use of SM (if can potentially lead to the disclosure of confidential information and damage the brand and reputation of companies.

Methodology

The data comprises survey and semi-structured theme interviews in SMEs among 21 top executives and 398 survey respondents in CBD, Phitsanulok. This research method chosen is a mixed methods based on concurrent approaches as its research strategy (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The main focus is not on generalizations but on obtaining in-depth knowledge of a certain phenomenon. This approach enables the development of a rich, comprehensive view of SM that describes and explains the current patterns of SM adoption and implementation by SMEs in Phitsanulok's CBD.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data were conducted concurrently and collected data at the same period of time. Such approach is intended to merge and compare the outcomes of both types of data analysis that is mutually complement each other (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The target participants were SMEs owners, top executives/managers and those who is a key drivers of SM adoption. Even though the empirical data were collected concurrently but were analysed separately based on the mixed method design proposed by Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009). The quantitative data from the surveys were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews analysed using thematic analysis by applying the principles of grounded theory to support thematic coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

For qualitative data collection conducted a total of 21 semi-structured theme interviews in SMEs with 18 owners and 3 mangers (see Table 1). The case companies were selected using purposive sampling since the purpose was to investigate businesses who already had adopted SM and faced with the barriers for such initiatives adoption. The data in the form of audio recordings derived from the individual interviews of participants were initially created as a transcript. Thematic analysis was conducted by using grounded theory approach to process open coding, categorizing, and creating sub-themes of similar phenomena leading to a main 4 main themes. The quality of qualitative data analysis depends on repeated, systematic searching of the data. Finally, quantitative findings from the surveys was used to investigate and describe the

impediments of SM adoption and implementation. Qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews themes were used to explore in depth, the insight details which is problems and challenges associated with such initiatives. Both of findings were integrated and described about phenomena at the end.

Findings

Table 1.1 below provides descriptive results for the impediments variable included in the analyses from survey. The results indicate that lack of knowledge and time coupled with top management support were the three most common impediments to SM adoption reported by SMEs as of high or very high importance (the mean scores of 3.68, 3.47 and 3.22 respectively). Almost 90 % of the 398 respondents reported indicating that SM adoption and implementation were conducted by themselves by owners or either managers, not using external third-party for implementation. This result suggests, not surprisingly, on the context of resource-constrain situation by SMEs. Further analyzed reported, business sized class have significant impacts on knowledge, time and top executive support for SM adoption, also age of business operation impacted on the technological change (df=4, χ^2 =9.289*) that make them reluctant to fully invest on SM. Meanwhile, the restriction of SM knowledge (df=4, χ^2 =9.265*) and executives support (df=4, χ^2 =9.414*) are both still perceived as a major barriers for SM adoption based on age of operation (See Table 2).

Table 1: Descriptive results for the analyzed variables of impediments associated with business size

Impediments	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	All Mean	1-50 employees Mean	50-99 employees Mean	Sig.
Knowledge-related impediments	3.68	0.921	1	5	3.86	3.50	4.18	.000***
Time-related impediments	3.47	0.944	1	5	3.75	3.50	4.07	.004**
Top management-related impediments	3.22	0.981	1	5	3.63	3.42	3.87	.002**
Unclear business strategy-related impediments	2.64	1.060	1	5	2.71	2.58	2.96	.863
Change of technology -related impediments	2.57	1.074	1	5	2.81	2.65	3.01	.622
Privacy leaks-related impediments	2.42	1.094	1	5	2.56	2.31	2.73	.337
Security breaches-related impediments	2.26	1.114	1	5	2.43	2.38	2.54	.448

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 2 : Descriptive results for the analyzed impediments associated with age of business

	N	Knowledge	Time	Executive support	Technology change	Unclear strategy	Security Privacy
Less than 1 year	45	94.33	91.11	89.12	93.33	89.10	84.44
1 to 3 years	71	91.44	95.77	91.44	92.96	90.45	91.55
3 to 5 years	109	92.75	91.74	93.71	96.25	87.97	91.74
5 to 10 years	95	90.65	86.32	94.55	87.37	82.64	89.47
10 years or more	78	89.12	91.84	98.73	90.82	92.86	93.88
Chi-square (df = 4)	398	9.265**	7.675	9.414*	9.289*	6.879	7.145

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Further findings from qualitative semi-interview can also give a meaningful insight into the stumbling block of current SM implementation which leads to 4 main themes described below. At this stage, of 21 respondents (from interviews) had SM at least one platform. Most of them is owner of business (N=18). Over half of the respondents (76 %, N= 16 cases) were from small business size class employing not greater than 50 people and 43 % (N=9 cases) operated in the industry of food and beverages. Business operating period is mostly between 1 to 3 years (N=9 cases). Over of 50 % respondents have at least two official SM sites but 80 % of them do not have official SM strategy as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: demonstrates a sample of respondents characteristic from interviews

Case	Position	*Size	Industry sector	Age of operation	*SM sites	Strategy	Knowledge required*
Case 1	Manager	1-50	Food and beverages	< 1 year	1	Informal	Marketing
Case 2	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	< 1 year	1	Informal	IT/Marketing
Case 3	Owner	1-50	Automobiles	>10 years	2	Informal	Innovative
Case 4	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	1-3 years	2	Informal	IT/Marketing
Case 5	Owner	1-50	Commercial	1-3 years	3	Informal	Innovative
Case 6	Owner	1-50	Appliances	1-3 years	2	Informal	Innovative
Case 7	Manager	1-50	Appliances	>10 years	2	Informal	Innovative
Case 8	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	< 1 year	2	Informal	Marketing
Case 9	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	< 1 year	2	Informal	Marketing
Case 10	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	1-3 years	2	Informal	Marketing
Case 11	Owner	1-50	Commercial	1-3 years	3	Informal	Marketing
Case 12	Owner	1-50	Tourism	1-3 years	2	Informal	Marketing
Case 13	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	1-3 years	3	Informal	IT
Case 14	Owner	1-50	Tourism	1-3 years	2	Informal	Innovative
Case 15	Owner	1-50	Food and beverages	1-3 years	3	Informal	Innovative
Case 16	Manager	1-50	Food and beverages	5-10 years	1	Informal	IT/Marketing
Case 17	Owner	50-99	Tourism	>10 years	3	Informal	IT/Marketing
Case 18	Owner	50-99	Commercial	>10 years	3	Formal	IT/Marketing
Case 19	Owner	50-99	Appliances	>10 years	2	Formal	IT/Marketing
Case 20	Owner	50-99	Commercial	>10 years	2	Formal	IT/Marketing
Case 21	Owner	50-99	Automobiles	>10 years	5	Formal	IT/Marketing

Note* Size= Number of employees, SM sites= Number of SM platforms, Biz=business

There are four main themes derived from the 21 respondents related to impediments factor of SM implantation including; (i) Knowledge is a key, (ii) Ready for changes, (iii) Integrated capabilities, and (iv) Uncertainty management.

The **'Knowledge is a key'** theme—related to the awareness and recognition of the importance of knowledge as a necessary condition for SM implementation. Subthemes including leaders knowledge, IT and marketing knowledge, technical knowledge on how to effectively implement SM, share vision across business and employees training. A number of respondent's states that the implementation of their SM initiative was still a

learning process and believed that person who possess IT and marketing knowledge and those understanding of new technologies associated with SM were critical.

Well, we need someone working around that…and those who come up with some like ground-breaking things..[Case 15]

Someone can do both front and back-office processes and working on creating a content plan for future posts or activities coupled with dealing with technical platform of SM. might be IT and marketing people..[Case 19]

The **'Ready for changes'** theme—related to the business capabilities to embed effectively unpredictable new changes of technology and environment. A subthemes include doing a research, observing rivals, steep learning curve, adaptable and applied practices. Most of respondents admitted that they do their own research by observing through publicly available information and imitating rivals by subsequently adapting the best practices that are most relevant to their business or that most fit their culture, resources and customer base.

A lot of it just watching of they do and trying do better and more suitable for us. [Case 11]

Yeah count me in…small business like us have limits the ability to create ground. Watch others and try to improve make us moving forward. [Case 5]

No, I won't …not change the current successful ones (strategy)….To me SM, could develop in-house through observation and adaptation [Case 7]

The **'Integrated capabilities'** theme— related to the firm's ability to integrate existing resources and capabilities to expand and deepen the SM approach. A subtheme includes commitment of top management and support of stakeholder, operational and managerial capabilities. Indeed, for SM, evolving affordances enabled by a diverse IT infrastructure together with executing outsources employment supports firm knowledge management. A number of respondents stating that lack of support from top management due to unclear benefits of SM is major factor which results in a lack of commitment to cooperation which may be due to the absence of strategic long-term goals

So, I think it in term of move technique to the next step would really require commitment of resources to be able to update on a regular basis. Yes I wouldn't get it is still in doubt. [Case 6]

Some companies are also able to afford the cost of using an outsourced for operated and responsible of SM instead of business, but finally they are disappointed with them as is not the actual return on investment of SM initiative.

I'm really quite not happy with outsource performance that employed by us. It's such a long time without any things return back..searching for someone else manipulate it in. [Case 17]

The **'Uncertainty management'** theme related to doubts, concerns and uncertainty about SM adoption expressed by respondents which had led to their reluctance to fully embrace and invest SM. This theme comprised three associated subthemes including: concerns, SM failure, and technological change. There was a general agreement among respondents that the use of multiple SM platform was not appropriate and risky.

It's only me take care of it, I don't want a large number of social media channels, lack of knowledge about on how to use it, controlling and putting more efforts into it. I can only use basic functions, we expand our business, I still do not consider to adopt more though. Case 2]

If leaders and managers could not adhere to balance using of applications by a significant business strategy and technology, SM could lead business to failure

It' nice to have… it helps keep in touch, but it's not central to the growth of the business…they will have changed that very much…Line, FB, IG are probably the most questionable for us. As to whether it really fits? [Case 17]

Discussion and implications for practice

As found from the research results, four major impediments to SM implementation are: time-consuming; demand specialized technical skills and knowledge such as marketing and IT; lack of commitment support from leaders; a lack of integrated business resources and capabilities, and uncertainty management. All such findings correspondingly with previous research reported indicating a common barriers for SM adoption including insufficient of knowledge (Dahnil et al., 2014), time, top management support (Bogea & Brito, 2018), unclear business marketing strategy (Hassan Zadeh & Jeyaraj, 2018), technological change (Beier & Wagner, 2016) and uncertainty (Roengtam, 2020). All such impediment are often associated with the simple centralized business structure characteristic of SMEs. This research alo suggests that given their limited resource base for SMEs, they must develop 'Managerial' and 'Operational' and 'Change management' capabilities based on their unique characteristics; such characteristics that can provide a distinct basis for their strategic advantage over their larger counterparts. Such capabilities proposed by this research is underpinned by RBV theory based on resource-based approach for a practical framework develop by Grant (1991, p. 115).

For 'Managerial capabilities'— in coping with knowledge and time impediments. The owner-manager with a managerial capability is a key generator in supporting organizational learning and change, and in aiding the development of an operational capability required for the successful implementation for SMEs. The often limited number of skilled managerial staff within SMEs typically results in the owner-manager being responsible for numerous aspects of management and including a broad range of SM-related functional activities. For acquiring new knowledge training owner-managers should create an informal plan for the SM project and assigns suitable staff to particular tasks. Marketing staff are typically responsible for planning related SM activities, while IT staff are responsible for developing and monitoring technological platforms or applications that are built to support those activities. Training courses and events developed by academic and practitioners from third-party consulting, government agencies and private/public educational institution should be provided to staff.

For 'Operational capabilities'— in coping with top management support and unclear SM plans is ability of business to set a specific skills and routines work developed from existing resource used in solving its problems through configuring its operational resources. At this point, top executives play a crucial role in supporting and helping their staff with a clear SM strategic direction plans. The short, long term SM-related objectives must be created, the role of responsibility for staff must be assigned with specific tasks; for example, who is fully responsible for – (i) posting and creating contents, (ii) dealing and responding to customers, (iii) daily monitoring SM activities, (iv) evaluating or measuring SM usage related to business goals and (v) developing and integrating business program (e.g. CRM and customer database) into SM system. These requires a deep commitment by executives to harnessing the necessary resources for implementing SM-related processes for successful adoption and implementation in the SME context.

For 'Change management capabilities' — in coping with uncertainty related to the change of technology and culture. Owner-manager role is primary to support and assist staff to gain a better understanding of the benefits of SM technology and to most utilise them in the company's operations. The concerns about complexity are attributable to a lack of knowledge about the new technology and resistance to changes in established business processes. This research suggests that managers considering SM technology investments should focus on how these technologies integrate with existing systems to support their firm's capabilities. Thus, creating a shared vision among business members, as well as identifying 'resource gaps' that need to be filled for capability improvement. A business case of SM implementation should be created, the culture of a learning steep curve must be considered. This could be a measurable task for staff learning to operate a new SM functions/platforms that requires specific and repeatable steps.

Conclusion

This paper has reported research that explored the impediments of successful SM adoption by SMEs from ownership perspectives. The study found that lack of time and knowledge, top management support, unclear SM practical plan and uncertainty of technology change, are vital impediments for the successful implementation and adoption of SM. This study also provides a practical solutions feasible for SMEs based on their existing resources and capabilities to cope with such impediments by using theoretical resource based view to describe situation.

Limitations and future research directions

Given this research is limited by its focus only on SMEs that adopted SM, which focus on a single national economic context, the generalizability of this findings and the identification of causality is limited. Apart from replication of this exploratory study in other economies, future research could examine in greater depth, using multiple sources of data based on a longitudinal research design. A strategic framework of SM adoption and implementation for SMEs to remove and mange impediments of such initiative adoption is recommended.

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