CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The previous chapter elaborated on the various aspects of the opportunities and challenges that exist in the social media service industry in Oman, in light of the findings from the study. In the following chapter, the conclusion, recommendations and indications for future research are presented.

7.1. CONCLUSION

This study which is a descriptive study, contributes to the management literature by investigating various aspects of Social Media Management. Further, it examines these aspects through survey method by conducting; Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA), Independent samples T-Test, Chi Square Test, Correlation Analysis and also Technology Acceptance Modeling.

The study emphasizes that there is social media acceptance in Oman and businesses in Oman are awakening to the possibility of availing social media to carry out their marketing and engagement through social media and identifies the prospects that vendors can tap into.

Existing vendors delving in social media services as well potential entrepreneurs can reap benefits from utilizing these opportunities.

However, there are perception gaps, particularly in the social media challenges faced by companies. The potential for Vendors lies in bridging these gaps by tailoring their services & focus according to the needs of the companies and by creating more awareness of the services, their relevance to the business areas and the return of investment for companies. On the entrepreneurial front, there are regional and other challenges which entrepreneurs venturing into social media need to be aware of. The study outlines these challenges which would enable them to take pre-emptive steps to mitigate these challenges.
Creating awareness about the specific services that can be availed by businesses to explore and tap the full potential offered by social media remains an important step. These discussions could also take into consideration the special needs of the particular business and offer a management mode that would be a mixture of in-house and outsourced wherein the capabilities within the organisation can be made best use of to carry out regular or routine activities and functionalities while paid and non-paid marketing functionalities and other niche functionalities within social media platforms could perhaps be better explored as an outsourced service.

This research therefore chalks out the possibilities of entrepreneurship within the area of social media service industry and brings to light not just the opportunities abound but also the challenges that need to be overcome for entrepreneurs in this field in the context of the country, Oman.

Suggestions & Recommendations to the following:

Based on the findings & discussions of the study, the following suggestions are made to vendors, client companies & regulatory bodies for evolving more effective strategies as well as supportive policies.

1. Vendors (SM entrepreneurs)

   - The study portrays that although there is general awareness and acceptance of social media by the public, the management and decision makers of companies in Oman haven’t given much thought to social media for their businesses and products. Vendors need to generate interest and awareness among the corporate on the possibilities afforded by social media. These awareness sessions can also highlight the range and scope of services offered by the social media service vendors. This strategy would especially be beneficial in cases where there barriers in implementation are perceptions, misconceptions and attitudes.

   - In parallel, vendors also now need to explore if the platforms serviced, the services offered and the activities undertaken on each platform are in line with the clients’ requirements and global trends and if these are areas that could be expanded through
innovative offerings and niche services. Niche services and global trends could be added to their portfolio as per the market requirements.

- Vendors need to obtain resources and constantly upgrade skills that will ensure that the latest trends in social media can be captured and be made available to companies in Oman. Towards this end, there should be periodical study of data pertaining to social media usage by people in Sultanate of Oman vis-à-vis their cultural concept which could help the vendors to mix their social media marketing strategies for various companies by appropriately using SM tools.

- Increased focus on training & consulting is the way forward, as companies upskill their employees and create in-house resources for managing their activities in-house resulting in a need for constant upgradation. Vendors could start offering training services and also promote this service for companies who otherwise do not require outsourcing.

- Focus should also be on services that companies find challenging to perform in-house without external support. The study finds a correlation between the in-house functional challenge areas and the outsourced services. As such, it is imperative on the part of vendors to convince the customers of vendor capabilities and the use of such technology to gain competitive advantage.

- Vendors can collect periodical feedback from clients and use that as a source of information to improve the services offered, understand the social media service market and develop strategy to develop competitive advantage. This is especially highly relevant in a conservative economy like that of the Sultanate of Oman where social media usage and its influence on the customers is still at an infant stage.

- It is also recommended that all the digital media vendors join to form a Joint Committee or an Outsourcing Network that can jointly carry out the following:
  - Appoint a reputable auditing or consulting firm to perform an in-depth analysis of the social media service industry, including the financials of the vendors, with a view to producing a report on the industry that highlights the areas where government intervention or changes are required or recommended.
o Engage actively with government and other decision makers through discussions and negotiations on the policies that pertain to the digital media, social media and outsourcing.

o Explore the inhibiting factors among smaller scale companies such as SME’s, startups, micro enterprises towards social media outsourcing. These factors could be further identified and addressed and solutions that are catering to their needs could be tailored in order to broaden the client bases of the vendors.

2. Client Companies

- The research findings suggest that among companies who are active on social media, the full range of capabilities offered by the social media platform of their choice is not being availed and are therefore losing out on optimizing their activities. This can be corrected by availing the services of vendors as a consultant to understand the scope of social media specific to their products and services and decide whether to approach these activities in-house or outsourced. In other words, underutilization of social media tools in promoting their products could jeopardize their competitive edge in the market.

- For companies who prefer to manage their social media in-house, social media consultancy services & training by vendors would help them set up the initial social media activities & get adequate skills to then manage & optimize the activities self-managed as lack of know how was correlated with the in-house challenge areas. Consultancy services can also aid in getting a clear idea of the services offered by vendors and assess their need for the same. Therefore, it is of prime importance for the companies to identify their own strength in terms of managing social media marketing internally and take appropriate decisions with respect to SM management in the firm.

- Companies need to utilize platforms that are better suited for their company, products or services than simply following blindly global trends. In some cases, Facebook could be replaced or complemented by platforms that are better able to reach the intended audience, E.g. Instagram for companies with visual products such as cake shops, boutiques etc. and LinkedIn for purely B2B companies.
Companies need to avail services that are complementary to their other marketing activities and are in alignment with the business model. Towards this end, companies need to carry out SWOT analysis with respect to their current marketing strategy so as to identify further scope for incorporating social media marketing as a part of their long term strategy.

Companies can avail services from vendors offering complete management who may be better suited to offer support for activities that the companies aren’t skilled at or having the resources for. Therefore, companies need to look beyond their own internal capabilities to see how best they could gain competitive advantage by having external vendors to manage their social media marketing.

3. Government (Sultanate ) & Policy makers

- Social Media service vendors must be viewed as entrepreneurs who have the potential to influence the public and promote a digital population, in line with the government vision of a digital economy. This sector should therefore be given priority in privatization in the next five year plans and other immediate policies.
- The bureaucratic hassles involved in setting up and running a business, especially a digital business should be streamlined; governmental regulations, particularly those concerning the labour regulations could be modulated to better suit the needs of the businesses as well as the vendors. There needs to be clarity in the regulations concerning e-business.
- Although Telecommunications had been a priority in the fifth five year plan and Oman is relatively more technologically advanced than other Middle Easter nations, the technological offerings and support could further be enhanced for not just the benefit of companies and vendors but for the public as well.
- As a means of promoting SME development, the use of social media by start-ups and SMEs can be encouraged through awareness sessions, specific incentive, schemes and technological support. Such initiatives from the government would provide further impetus for technological entrepreneurs to come out with more number of ventures that could positively influence employment generation in the country.
On a broader scale, government can improve the availability of local human resources and skilled resources through improved technical and skills education in colleges and universities.
7.2. USEFULNESS OF THE RESEARCH

This study benefits the entrepreneurial and business communities in the following aspects:

- Entrepreneurs currently delving/intending to delve in social media service related business can make use of the research outcomes in terms of the services offered and other operational strategies. Most importantly the research can greatly aid in their understanding of challenges ahead and motivate them to identify the solutions to overcome these perceived barriers.

- Businesses in Oman whose social media management requirements are not being met with currently can be benefited by entrepreneurial vendors who bridge the gap between their needs and the services offered to them; the businesses stand to gain from exploiting further the unlimited potential of social media through increased awareness of and improved access to innovative social media outsourced services by vendors.

- It helps to create awareness among the companies to opt for outsourcing SM activities for their own cost advantage. This would not only improve cost effectiveness of the firm, but also would provide the management enough time to fully concentrate on their core business strategically.

- The vendors acquire a greater confidence to innovate new products and services for mutual benefit of vendors and customer companies. This would create a growing path for this industry whereby firm could gain considerable competitive edge in the market.

- The study is in line with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos’ Vision 2020 wherein it promotes the “Sustainable Development within a Stable Macroeconomic Framework”, “Human Resources Development”, “Diversification of Economy”, and “Development of the Private Sector”.

7.3. **INDICATIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study can be extended to create a model for entrepreneurship in services related to social media management, from the perspective of Oman, which can act as a point of reference for entrepreneurs offering social media associated services.

The study can also be applied conversely to business organisations in Oman, especially start-ups and other small scale businesses, to assess the impact of social media networking and social media marketing on expanding their entrepreneurial reach within and outside of Oman.

Future Research could also look into potential applications of SM services in innovative ways, innovative platforms, new industries, use of data analytics for monitoring the growth of outsourcing SM services etc.

The study could be extended to GCC countries on a larger scale to examine the growth potential in Social Media entrepreneurship. There is enough scope for extending this study for comparisons among social media marketing efforts in developing nations especially that of fast growing economies like India and China.

Another point of focused research is the potential for social media based e-commerce where businesses in GCC and other developing nations can channel sales directly through social media. A comparative study on the guidelines and regulations related to social media e-commerce between Arab nations and other developing nations like India and China could shed light on the specific regulatory changes required at governmental level.