CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, the data analyses and its interpretations are presented. In this chapter, the summary of findings is presented along with discussion on these findings.

6.1. FINDINGS

The following section presents the summary of the hypotheses under the objectives of this study.

Objective 1:

To explore the field-specific, customer-specific, country specific opportunities and difficulties faced by the social media service vendors in Oman, in terms of Oman’s socio-political, regulatory and economic scenario.

- The vendors believe that among the different social management modes (In-house management or complete outsourcing or a mixture of in-house and outsourced management), partial In-house Social media management with partial support by vendors is the most common social media management mode in Oman (53.30%) while complete outsourcing of social media management to vendors was the second common mode (31.10%). Complete in-house management was the least common at 15.60%. This was in line with the companies’ point of view which showed that majority of the companies (51.1%) prefer partial in-house management of social media with partial support by vendors whereas 37.8% prefer to completely outsource their social media management to vendors while only 11.1% of the companies would like to completely manage their social media in-house. The findings further indicate that among the companies in Oman with different social management modes, some service areas like “Social Media Strategy Planning”, “Social media consulting”, “Social media Page Design & Development”, “Ad management on social media” and “Measurement & Analytics” are significant which implies that these outsourced services are selected by companies based on the management mode opted. On the other hand, Outsourced services
like “Social Media In-house training by experts”, “Social copywriting and content development”, “Marketing through social media platforms,” “Social Media Competitions & campaigns” and “Social Media Monitoring” are not significant implying that there is no significant difference in the way companies perceive these outsourced services and the management mode applicable for these companies.

- Most of the social media areas that are challenging to manage in-house are positively correlated with the services outsourced by the companies. “Social Media Strategy Planning” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”, “Social Media Consulting”, “Social media in-house training by experts”, “Social media Page Design & Development” and “Social media competitions and campaigns” and is significant. “Social media page design and development as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning” and “Social Media Page Design & Development” and is significant.

- “Creating online reach & Brand Awareness (Likes, Followers, Connections etc.)” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”, “Social Media Consulting”, “Social Media In-house training by experts” and “Marketing through social media platforms” and is significant. “Community Management” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”. “Social Media Consulting”, “Social Media Page Design & Development”, “Marketing through social media platforms”, “Social Media Competitions & Campaigns”, and “Ad management on social media” and is significant.

- “Marketing through social media platforms (Sweepstakes, Contests etc.)” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”. “Marketing through social media platforms”, and “Social Media Competitions & Campaigns” and is significant. “Social copywriting and content development” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”, and “Social copywriting and content development” and is significant.

- “Graphic design” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”, and “Social copywriting and content development” and is significant. “Content Management” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning”,...
“Social copywriting and content development” and “Social Media Monitoring” and is significant. “Reputation Management” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services, “Social Media Strategy Planning” and is significant.

- “Social Media Monitoring” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services “Social copywriting and content development” and is significant.

- “Measurement & Analytics” as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services “Social Media Strategy Planning”, and Social Media Consulting” and is significant. Assessment of ROI as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media services “Social media strategy planning” and is significant. The other in-house challenges and preferred outsourcing services are insignificant.

- There is a significant association between the popular language among social media users in Oman and language used by vendors on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, implying that vendors are in the right direction.

- There is no significant difference in the cost effectiveness of Social Media services between the required budget groups, implying the vendors believe their services are cost effective across all groups of required budget.

- The findings reveals that the availability of social media resources like Graphic Designer, Visual Media expert, Advertisement Professional, Copy writer, Programmer are positively correlated with the perceptions of availability of skilled resources in Oman and also significant. Availability of Social media expert and Marketing Strategist are insignificant, implying that these resources are not commonly available in Oman.

- The supportive factors for businesses and the challenging regulations/policies in Oman do not have any relationship and are insignificant. However, some of the governmental regulations/policies in Oman that are challenging for vendors are significantly correlated with the Challenging aspects in Oman for social media marketing in Oman.

Objective 2:

To determine the perceived scope and need of the social media services among a cross section of companies in Oman.
There is significant association between Status of social media activity and Social media marketing future plans.

Among the companies who are currently non-users of social media, there is significant difference in the perception of social media restrictions between non users who intend to begin social media marketing and non-users of social media who do not have any immediate plans of using social media. The scenario is poised for a change as the SM tide indicates.

There is significant difference between companies who are currently users and non-users of social media with regard to the aspects like “Social Media Strategy Planning development”, “Social media Page Design Development”, “Content Creation”, “Content Management”, and “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness” that companies find challenging to manage in-house.

As regards social media aspects like Social Media Marketing Competitions, Monitoring Reputation Management, Analytics Assessment, Social media Training for staff there is no significant difference between users and non-users of social media with reference to the challenges they pose for in-house management.

There is significant difference in ‘Social Media Strategy Planning Development’ and ‘Creating online reach/Brand Awareness’ as challenging aspects of social media in-house management among companies who have and who do not have social media resources within company.

There is significant difference in ‘Awareness of competitors’ use of social media’ between companies who are currently users and non-users of social media while there is no significant difference in the perception regarding ‘Acceptance of social media marketing by people’ between companies who are currently users and non-users of social media.

One may conclude that there is universal tendency among businesses to perceive social media as accepted by general public whereas the awareness about competitors’ use of these media for their businesses wary among these companies and could perhaps influence their own adoption of social media. There is also significant difference in the Awareness of competitors’ use of social media between companies who have and who do not have social media resources within company.

The findings show that there is significant difference in the perception of Social Media restrictions in Oman between the three segments of companies (Service sector, Financial
Sector & Industrial sector). This implies that the Social media restrictions faced/perceived by companies in Oman differ depending on the type of sector they belong to.

- The findings show that there is significant difference between the three segments of companies (Service Sector, Financial Sector & Industrial sector) in terms of viewing ‘To improve focus on core business’, ‘To effect improvement in cost level or cost reduction’. ‘To gain access to specific knowledge expertise and tools in social media’. ‘To save time and efforts’ as factors for outsourcing their social media. Hence for all the four SM Factors there is significant difference between the three different sectors.

- Acceptance of social media marketing by people is significant implying future allocations of budget could be based on the perceptions of acceptance.

- ‘To save time and efforts’ and ‘To effect improvement in cost level or cost reduction’ are significant, implying the objectives of time and cost reduction as factors for outsourcing social media varies based on the different groups of future budgets.

- The social media management aspects like “Social Media Strategy Planning Development”, “Social Media Page Design Development”, “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness”, “Monitoring Reputation Management”, “Analytics Assessment” and “Social media training for staff” are not significant. This implies that both companies who prefer to outsource their social media as well as companies who prefer to manage their social media In-house find these highly challenging to perform in-house.

- On the other hand, among the companies with different Social management modes of interest, the social media management aspects like Content Creation, Content Management and Social Media Marketing Competitions are significant, implying that there is a significant difference in the way companies perceive these aspects as challenges which could be a reason for selecting the management mode applicable for these aspects.

- The challenges like “Social Media Strategy Planning Development” (0.335), “Content Creation” (0.354), “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness” (0.334) and “Monitoring Reputation Management” (0.455) are positively correlated with “lack of know-how” and also significant. The other challenges like content management, Social Media Marketing competitions, Analytics Assessment and Social Media Training for Staff are not significant.

- In the TAM analyses of companies, regression analyses reveal that there is a positive association between companies’ perceived usefulness of outsourcing social media
management and its attitude towards social media marketing and this positive association is also seen between companies’ “perceived ease of use of social media management” and their “attitude towards social media marketing”.

6.2. DISCUSSION

The major findings of the study have been incorporated into the SWOT Analyses performed on the literature review.

6.2.1. Strengths {S}

6.2.1.1. (S1) Partial & Complete social media management

The majority of the vendors (66.67%) were providing complete management of client’s social media related services while 24.44% were providing only partial management, with a la carte services. Only 8.89% were providing only consultancy & Training services. This indicates that most of the vendors are well placed in terms of their service offerings.

According to the vendors, a mixture of In-house and outsourced management is most common with businesses in Oman and is more sought after than complete outsourcing while complete in-house management was the least common. This was in line with the companies’ point of view which showed that majority of the companies prefer partial in-house management of social media with partial support by vendors. Hence there is confirmation on both sides of vendors and client companies regarding the capabilities and utilization of SM service offerings be they complete or partial outsourcing by the client companies.

From the findings, it is seen that although the most common mode of social media management in Oman is a mix of in-house and outsourced management, most of the vendors were capable of offering complete social media management and were offering comprehensive management as a service. Thus, the vendors can implement strategies such as offering cost benefits or other incentives to regular customers to transform from partial to complete outsourcing. On the other hand, in the cases of businesses with smaller social media budgets, vendors are better positioned to promote individual a la carte services covering every aspect of the social media marketing spectrum.
6.2.1.2. (S2) Capability of offering different SM activities

Currently “Social Media Strategy Planning” as a service is the most commonly offered social media service, followed by “Social Media Consulting”. All the surveyed vendors are aiming to offer these two services in the future.

The majority of vendors currently offer quite varied services such as Social Media Page Design Development, Marketing through social media platforms, Ad management on social media, Social Media Monitoring, Social copywriting and content development, Social Media Competitions campaigns and Measurement Analytics and many more vendors were planning to offer these services in future.

However, only less than half of the vendors (46.7%) were currently offering Social Media In-house Training by experts. This stands to change as the survey projects that 82.2% of the vendors aim to offer this service in future.

Business Profile Page was the most common activity undertaken by vendors on Facebook followed by Posting of Information & Multimedia related to company, Posting of Information & multimedia of interest to public, Facebook Ads and others. Sponsored Stories, Applications, Open Graph were amongst the least common activities undertaken, with Open Graph being the least.

In the case of YouTube, Company Channel Page was the most common activity undertaken, followed by Posting of videos related to company, Posting of videos of interest to public and Video Ads, with Video Ads being the least common activity undertaken.

In the case of Twitter, the study shows that Business Profile Page was the most common activity undertaken, followed by Tweeting of Information & Multimedia related to company, Tweeting of Information & multimedia of interest to public, Twitter Ads and others, Contests, campaigns, Twitter cards, Promoted Accounts and Promoted Trends were amongst the least common activities undertaken with Promoted Trends being the least.

It is also seen that for Instagram, Company Page Profile was the most common activity undertaken, followed by Posting of Multimedia related to company, Posting of multimedia of
interest to public, Sponsored updates and Instagram Ads, with Instagram Ads being the least common activities undertaken.

On LinkedIn, too Company Page Profile was the most common activity undertaken. This was followed by Posting of Information & Multimedia related to company, Posting of Information & multimedia of interest to public, LinkedIn Groups Participation, LinkedIn Ads, Sponsored InMail and Sponsored updates, with Sponsored updates being the least common activity undertaken.

6.2.1.3. (S3) SM Platforms Serviced

Facebook is the clear leader in social media platforms among public as well as companies and the vendors are in line with this usage and are focusing their services most on Facebook related activities. The other services provided is as per their perception of the popularity of these services which differs from that of the companies surveyed except for LinkedIn which is the least focused on platform by both companies as well as vendors.

But the question that remains is whether vendors should go by the perceived popularity of the SM Platforms or create innovative strategies to influence the perception of public at large. The popularity among general users would also be an indication of the platforms that needs to be focused on as businesses would need to be active on social media as per the platforms used by their intended online audiences. However, there may be other platforms which may be better suitable for a company or product than Facebook which could be focused upon in tandem with Facebook. Select SM services could be promoted as well.

6.2.1.4.(S4) Cost Effectiveness

Cost effectiveness seems to be a source of disparity. While majority of vendors believe that their services are cost effective, lack of budget for social media marketing is one of the top reasons for companies not availing social media services. It is not difficult to drive home the point that discrete outsourcing of SM services are indeed a cost saving mechanism. It is in fact a matter of cost benefit perspective.

6.2.1.5.(S5) Up-to-date Know-how

The study shows that all vendors discussed proactively new solutions and opportunities with their clients and all vendors were searching new working methods on a daily basis. While
most of the vendors explored new products regularly, however, the frequency for doing the same varied. While some (28.9%) acted on this only on a quarterly basis, the majority of the vendors (40%) explored new products each month. Only 20% were exploring weekly and just 6.7% were exploring daily. Given the fast moving nature of social media trends and the explosive growth, this could perhaps be an area that could be given more attention. Ideally speaking a buoyant market demands 100% vendors’ updation on a daily basis if not on real time integration. Hence the prospects are bright in future.

6.2.1.6. (S6) Ease of Overall Management by businesses

The vendors offer ease to companies in terms of their role in content creation and management. For most of the vendors, their client’s participation in content creation/management was moderate (46.7%) to slight (24.4%) or none (22.2%). But there were vendors also vendors however small their percentage may be, whose client participation was complete 2.2% or high (4.4%)

The vendors were also providing their clients with reports, majority (57.8) % on a monthly basis and weekly basis (33.3%). While a few were providing daily reports, some vendors were giving client reports only quarterly or annually.

Considering that most of the vendors haven’t yet plunged into measurement and analytics part of social media management, clients were on annual or longer contracts, the frequency of reporting could be currently optimal but could gain prominence once measurement and analytics services gain traction.

6.2.2. Weaknesses {W}

6.2.2.1. (W1) Not offering services in regional language

According to most of the vendors, (77.8%), English was the most commonly used language among social media users in Oman while only 22.2% vendors felt that Arabic was being used as the most common language among social media users in Oman.
Also, there is significant association between vendors’ perception of the popular language among social media users in Oman and the Language used by vendors on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

However, as most of the companies who were active on social media utilized both English and Arabic in their activities, providing a mix of languages on all the popular social media would be a strategic advantage to vendors in order to attract clients with wider target audiences or even those whose audiences are restricted to a particular community or region and would help strengthen the vendor’s market positioning.

6.2.2.2. (W2) High Operational Costs

Operational costs seem to be positively correlated with Nationalization policy and Bureaucratic processes as a challenge for vendors. Vendors need to accordingly create or amend business models that take these costs into account.

One possible strategy is to develop and recruit local talents and resources thereby overcoming the hassles of nationalization mandates. Such a strategy would also mitigate other labour & HR related challenges.

6.2.3. Opportunities {O}

6.2.3.1. (O1) Growing Usage of Social Media in Oman.

Growing popularity of SM platforms (FB, Twitter, YT, Instagram & LinkedIn in Oman)

The research findings indicate that social media is having acceptance in Oman, from the perspectives of vendors as well as companies, Facebook is found to be the social media platform that is most popular in Oman, It is also the platform most focused on by companies who are active on social media, The other popular platforms in Oman in the decreasing order of popularity are Instagram, YouTube and Twitter as perceived by vendors and YouTube, Instagram and Twitter as focused on by companies. Among the platforms studied, LinkedIn was considered by vendors as the social media that is least popular and it was the platform least focused on by companies.
6.2.3.2. (O2) Growing Usage of social media by businesses

Despite the awareness of social media in Oman and the awareness of competitors using social media, majority of companies in the study were not yet utilizing social media for their businesses, either in-house or outsourced. For majority of those companies who were utilizing social media, social media is important for their marketing efforts.

Among companies, the awareness of competitors’ use of social media was significantly different between users and non-users of social media.

The study also indicates that the vast majority of present non-users has plans for social media activities and are accordingly allocating market budget for these activities.

A possible lack of nation-wide penetration of social media services could also be a reason for the vendors to focus their services mainly in the Muscat governorate. This could also indicate a lack of global and nationwide approach and outreach by the vendors. Rather than limiting the focus of their services locally within Oman, the vendors could also potentially look at a global market as their services are of digital nature that could be rendered online.

6.2.3.3. (O3) Growing Interest in outsourced Social Media Management by businesses

The majority of the companies utilizing social media for their businesses utilize a mix of in-house and outsourced services while only 14.3% of the companies who were active on social media were functioning completely in-house with reference to social media. None of the companies who were utilizing social media for their businesses completely outsourced their social media.

It is seen that in the case of the social media platform Facebook, all the companies that were active on social media utilized Facebook in some way or the other. The majority of the companies utilize outsourcing either completely alone or in conjunction with in-house capabilities for marketing related activities on Facebook while majority carried out routine activities completely in-house. In the case of few activities, most of the companies were inactive. In the case of the social media platform YouTube, half of the companies who have begun social media activism do not undertake activities on this platform. Among those who do utilize YouTube, majority utilize outsourcing either alone or in conjunction with in-house capabilities for most services. Only slightly over half of the companies who are active on social media do
utilize Twitter as a platform. Among the Twitter users, the majority utilize outsourcing either alone or in conjunction with in-house capabilities for routine activities, while majority of the companies do not undertake marketing related functionalities on Twitter. As regards the social media platform Instagram, among the companies active on social media, the majority of the companies were having some kind of activity on Instagram. Majority of Instagram utilization were either completely in-house or in conjunction with outsourcing for routine activities. However, most companies were not undertaking marketing functionalities of Instagram. Majority of the companies who are active on social media do utilize LinkedIn as a platform. However, most of the LinkedIn users undertake most activities either completely In-house alone or in conjunction with in-outsourcing while marketing functionalities were not utilized at all by most companies.

According to the vendors, “Marketing through social media platforms” is the most common Outsourced social media services preferred by Oman companies, followed by “social Media Competitions & campaigns”, “Social Media Page Design & Development”, “Social Media strategy Planning”, “Ad management on social media”, “Social Media Monitoring”, “Social Media Consulting”, “Social copywriting and content development”, “Measurement & Analytics” and “Social Media In-house training by experts”, with Social Media In-house training by experts being the least common social media services preferred by Oman companies.

The present study shows that companies are most interested in outsourcing all the services, Social Media Consulting, Strategy Planning & Training, Social Media Page Design & Development, Social copywriting and content development, Social Media Marketing (Competitions & campaigns, ads), Social Media Monitoring Measurement & Analytics for the platform Facebook, followed by Twitter for all services except Social Media Consulting, Strategy Planning & Training. YouTube, was the platform of least interest for companies to outsource any of the five services.

There is significant difference in the Awareness of competitors’ use of social media between companies who have and who do not have social media resources within company.

It is unmistakably seen from the present study that among the companies in Oman with different Social management modes, the preference for at least certain select outsourced services
like, “Social Media Strategy Planning”, “Social Media Consulting”, “Social Media Page Design & Development”, “Ad management on social media” and “Measurement & Analytics” vary implying that companies could prefer these outsourced services based on the management mode opted. This was not the case with services like Social Media In-house training by experts, Social copywriting and content development, Marketing through social media platforms, Social Media Competitions & Campaigns and Social Media Monitoring implying that there is no significant difference in the way companies perceive these outsourced services and the management mode applicable for these companies.

6.2.3.4. (O4) Objectives of social media usage by businesses

“Brand awareness” is seen to be the top objective for companies using social media. This was followed by ‘gaining customer loyalty’, ‘ongoing engagement’, ‘enabling a customer service channel’. Among the surveyed companies, ‘online sales’ was the least important objective for using social media.

As for social media content, the study shows that ‘Promote products and offers’ is the most important purpose of social media content, followed by a few other purposes such as ‘Create or maintain a brand’, ‘Deliver updates’, ‘Add value to the conversation’, ‘Respond to requests’, ‘Provide utility/solve a problem’, ‘Advocate for our fans and their initiatives’. The ‘entertainment’ purpose seems to be the least important purpose of social media content.

6.2.3.5. (O5) Technological Readiness in Oman

The study shows that “Technological Infrastructure (Wireless/ Broadband services)” is the most supportive technological aspect in Oman, followed by ‘Internet penetration’, ‘Smartphone penetration’ and “E-Oman initiatives.”

The findings show that vendors are enabled by the existing technological infrastructure in Oman which is relatively advanced. Internet and smartphone penetration are globally and regionally forecast to grow which would further increase the technological inclination among Omani public and thereby aid in the penetration of social media among public and businesses.
6.2.3.6. (O6) Supportive policies from Government/private organisations for entrepreneurial ventures

The majority of vendors were neutral regarding the environment for entrepreneurial ventures in an oil dependent developing nation like Oman being conducive while 31.1% was in disagreement of the same and 13.3% were in the category of strongly disagreed. Only a mere 2.2% strongly agreed while 15.6% agreed. However, as oil dependency is gradually decreasing and Oman government is increasing focus on entrepreneurial ventures, the nation is set to be more conducive for private sector establishments. Perhaps there is a growing perception of supportive policies for entrepreneurial ventures from the past grossly negative outlook and one may hope the future outlook could be positive.

“Private sector development programs” is the most important factors for business in Oman, followed by SME/entrepreneurship development programs, Free Zones & Business hubs/IT parks, Financial aid from banks, Regulatory framework, Financial aid from government. It is perceived that ‘commercial laws’ is the least important supporting factor. The findings indicate that the enterprises are being supported by various factors. A potential vendor needs to study the supportive factors and make use of these factors while setting up the enterprise.

6.2.3.7. (O7) Factors promoting outsourcing of SMM

According to the vendors, “To improve efficiency in social media management” is the most important reason for outsourcing Social Media Services followed by “To keep up with the latest trends & technological changes in the field of social media”, “To save time and efforts”. Whereas the client companies as per the study felt that “To gain access to specific knowledge, expertise and tools in social media management & marketing” is the most important reason for companies to outsource social media services. And other reasons seem to be “To improve efficiency in social media management”, “To keep up with the latest trends & technological changes in the field of social media.”

While the ranking of factors that promote outsourcing differed between vendors and companies, both vendors as well as companies stated that “To effect improvement in cost level or cost reduction” was the least important reason. Hence the vendors have to be more sensitive to cost factor to make their offerings seem viable for the client companies.
6.2.3.8. (O8) Challenges faced by clients in social media In-house management

According to vendors, “Social Media Strategy Planning” is the most challenging social media area for companies who manage their social media In-house. This was followed by Marketing through social media platforms (Sweepstakes, Contests etc.), Social Media Monitoring, Creating online reach & Brand Awareness (Likes, Followers, Connections etc.). Social Media competitions & campaigns, Measurement & Analytics, Social Media Page Design & Development, Community Management, Ad Management on social media, Reputation Management, Assessment of ROI, Content Management, Social copywriting and content development, and Graphic design.

Among the companies with different Social management modes of interest, there is a significant difference in the way companies perceive aspects like Content Creation, Content Management and Social Media Marketing Competitions as challenges which could be a reason for selecting the management mode applicable for these aspects. Moreover, the challenging areas like “Social Media Strategy Planning Development”, “Content Creation”, “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness” and Monitoring Reputation Management” are positively correlated with lack of know-how among businesses. Thus the study helps to formulate strategies to address the challenges arising in these SM services in particular. Vendors have to see eye to eye with the expectations and concerns of client companies.

Social Media Marketing including Competitions & Campaigns, ads, Sweepstakes etc. posed the biggest challenge for companies for managing their social media in-house.

The availability of resources is a challenge for companies. There is significant difference in “Social Media Strategy Planning Development” and “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness” as challenging aspects of social media in-house management among companies who have and who do not have social media resources within company.

The majority of the social media in-house challenges are positively correlated to one or more of the social media services outsourced by the companies, indicating that outsourcing areas are closely related to in-house challenge areas while some in-house challenges and preferred outsourcing services are insignificant.
There is also significant difference in “Social Media Strategy Planning Development” and “Creating online reach/Brand Awareness” as challenging aspects of social media in-house management among companies who have and who do not have social media resources within company.

Although vendors perceive monitoring related activities to be one of the most challenging social media activities to be carried out by companies in-house (independent of vendors) these services are not yet availed by companies as commonly as other fundamental services like marketing and campaigning. Vendors could implement strategies like trial management thus creating a win-win situation for both vendors and companies.

6.2.4. 6.2.4 Threats {T}

6.2.4.1. T1) Cultural barriers and sensitivities

Cultural barriers seem to be positively correlated with Labor HR policy and Bureaucratic processes as a challenge for vendors while language barrier seems to be positively correlated with Labor HR policy as a challenge for vendors.

The findings also show that there is significant difference in the perception of Social Media restrictions in Oman between the three segments of companies (Service sector, Financial Sector and Industrial Sector) which indicates that the social media restrictions faced/perceived by companies in Oman differ depending on the type of sector they belong to.

Among the companies who are currently non-users of social media there is significant difference in the perception of social media restrictions between non users who intend to begin social media marketing and nonusers of social media who do not have any immediate plans of using social media.

6.2.4.2. (T2) Governmental regulations/policies

The “Nationalization policy” is the most challenging governmental regulations/policies in Oman for business, followed by Labour & HR policy, Bureaucratic processes, Business/commercial laws, Financial Laws, and Media restrictions/censorship.
Some of the governmental regulations/policies in Oman that are challenging for vendors are significantly correlated with the challenging aspects of social media marketing in Oman.

6.2.4.3. (T3) Misconceptions/prejudices about SM

The study shows that Social media management is easy was the most common misconception regarding social media. This was followed by Social Media services are cheap, Social Media is not worthy investment, and Social Media is a passing fad. Although these misconceptions are prevalent now, the growing awareness among vendors and companies however could soon explode all these myths and misgivings.

6.2.4.4. (T4) Concerns against Social Media Marketing

Among companies who are not active on social media, “Management does not find it relevant for their business” is the most common reason for companies for not being active on social media whereas “Lack of acceptance among Oman population” is the least common reason for not utilizing social media for their businesses.

6.2.4.5. (T5) Concerns against outsourcing SMM

There seems to be a perception gap in other aspects that possibly influences companies’ usage of social media services. The top three reasons for companies not availing social media services are “Management does not find it relevant for their business”, “Didn’t think about it yet” and “Lack of budget for social media marketing”. On the other hand, the vendors perceive “Company has not given it much thought”, ‘Company lacks the know-how on how to manage’, and “Company does not find the service cost-effective” as top reasons against outsourcing. The perceptions of client companies and vendors converge on at least two aspects, namely lack of awareness of SM services and their relevance on the part of companies as well as the companies’ budget preparedness for the cost factor.

6.2.4.6. (T6) Measurement of Return of Investment on Social Media

The majority of the companies who were active on social media were in agreement regarding the importance of return of investment. The expected timeline to create ROI was 6 to 12 months for the majority of vendors (44.4%) and was less than 6 months for 40% of vendors. For only 15.60%, it was longer than 12 months.
According to the vendors, ‘Increase in sales’ was the most important parameter in the assessment of ROI/SM success. This was followed by Increase in customer conversation rate, Number of referrals, Number of fans/followers/likes/re-tweets/comments, KPIs and Percentage share of conversation. According to the companies who were active on social media, “Number of fans/followers/likes/re-tweets/comments” is the most important parameter for companies in their assessment of ROI or measurement of success of social media management. This was followed by Percentage share of conversation, Increase in sales, Number of referrals and Increase in customer conversation rate with KPIs being the least important parameter.

Assessment of ROI as a challenge is positively correlated with the outsourced social media service, “Social Media Strategy Planning.”

Vendors should enhance the use of measurement and analytics to ensure that the objectives can be broken down into measurable parameters which can then be tracked, monitored and presented as reports to the client companies.

Vendors who can monitor these parameters and provide documentary evidence for social media reach through these measurements are thus better positioned to convince clients regarding the success and benefits of social media usage.

6.2.4.7. (T7) Inadequate Budget allocations for SM/Advertising

A bottleneck in the implementation of outsourced social media is the market budget allocated to it by businesses. While half of the vendors believe that a budget of 10%-20% of marketing budget will suffice for availing their social media services, about one third of the vendors (31.1%) believe 21%-30% of marketing budget is required. In the case of around half of the vendors (55.6%), their clients were allotting 10-20% of marketing budget towards social media. However there were others (31.1%) whose clients were allocating less than 10% of marketing budget. In the case of 11.1% of vendors, their clients allocated 21-30% of marketing budget while above 30% of marketing budget was allocated by the clients of 2.2% vendors.

This disparity in the required and actual budget was further highlighted by companies, who were utilizing social media for their businesses, the majority of whom were allotting less than 10% of marketing budget to social media marketing while 38.5% were allotting 10-20% of
marketing budget. Only 15.4% were allotting above 30% of marketing budget to social media marketing.

The findings reveal that there exists a misalignment in the social media budgets allocated by the clients of the vendors, between the values perceived as required by the vendors and as actually received by them. This insufficient allocation of marketing funds could be one of the reasons why some vendors have not initiated certain services.

Lack of budget for social media marketing was agreed as a concern against outsourcing equally by 17.14% of companies who were allocating less than 10% & 10-20% marketing budget to social media in future whereas among 21-30% budget, it was 5.71% and above 30%, it was 8.57%. 5.71% were strongly agreed in both 10-20% and above 30% budget groups.

It is seen that there is significant difference in the perception of ‘Acceptance of Social media marketing by people’ between the five groups of future budgets. There is also significant difference in the importance given to ‘To save time and efforts’ and ‘To effect improvement in cost level or cost reduction’ as objectives for using social media service between the five groups of future budgets.

In a futuristic outlook, the majority of the companies, (31.10%) will be allocating 10-20% of marketing budget to social media in future while 8.90% of companies will be allocating 21-30%. 15.60% will be allocating more than 30% of marketing budget to social media. On the other hand 22.2% of companies will be allocating less than 10%. For 22.2% of companies, their future allocation of marketing budget was not made known. Overall, the future perspective towards social media seems to be bright for companies irrespective of the size of the budgets allotment.

6.2.4.8. (T8) Non-availability of resources

Skilled resources are a requisite for providing social media services with updated know-how. Although the majority of the companies (62.20%) believe they have the resources who can manage their social media, the resource requirements of vendors would be more intensive. The availability of social media, resources like Graphic Designer, Visual Media expert, Advertisement Professional, Copy writer, Programmer are positively correlated with the general availability of skilled resources in Oman and also significant.
Among the common resources utilized in social media management, Graphic Designer was the most easily available resource for social media related activities according to vendors. This was followed by Advertisement Professional, Programmer, Copy Writer, Visual Media expert, Marketing strategist and Social media expert.

Vendors would be strategically placed if they would recruit multi-skilled employees. Vendors would thus need to place focus on ensuring the right mix of required skills within their team, through various means such as overseas recruitment, upskilling the social media skills of other related resources.