

SOCIAL NETWORKING OF WOMEN ONLINE BUSINESS: Preliminary Findings In Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

Social connections through networking events has been some type of common methods on creating new business contacts. Nowadays, business social networking has been transformed from traditional to virtual way of engaging. This transformation is the result of social media and internet services. Therefore, the involvement of women to be part of online business become phenomenal all over the world, especially in Southeast Asia. This study was designed to investigate how women online business create and sustain social networking in online business through case study in Sabah. Women online business have their own way to build and maintain social networking in cyberspace. Through in-depth interview with informants, the uniqueness of relations have been formed with stakeholders. The relationships in this online business exist through modern ways based on internet services. Online trust, all the time connected, word of mouth, sharing pages, promote though testimonies are amongst important aspects to build a good social networking in online business. With a good social networking, women online business believe they will sustain and have the ability to maintain the existence of their business in the cyberspace.

Keywords: women online business, online social networking, women and business.

1. Introduction

Virtual services show the other way of creating a social relationship. Internet services boost the users to transform traditional to virtual way of engaging through cyberspace. The relationship that has been formed will affect the way of social interaction in the cyberspace. In other words, the internet –powered has fundamentally changed group-forming in human being (Hayes & Malone, 2009: 5). Internet access in business construct the social fluidity in the cyberspace. Same goes to the women online business, they can create their own approaches to tackle the customers, invisible boundaries and invisible in the context of gender. Women online business have the freedom to be visible in cyberspace because it enables them to interact with netizen without gender bias issues. These developments help the women with a strong potential of empowerment (Marzocchi & Bonewit, 2015: 5). For women all around the world, the internet offers potentially transformative benefits especially opportunity to be entrepreneur (Intel, Dalberg, & GLobeScan, 2012: 30). In connection with the usage of internet, social media plays an important role in online business. According to Scott (2010), social media enables netizen to share ideas, thoughts, content and interpersonal relations. Therefore, social media influenced the way women online business communicate. Communication in social media helps the women online business get to know the potential clients to meet their needs in effective and efficient way (Jucaityte & M Mascinskiene, 2014). This article particularly focus on the elaboration of the way women online business build and maintain their social networking in cyberspace, case study in Sabah. Qualitative method applied in this research through in-depth interview with content analysis to elicit the explanation about each aspects that stated by the informants. Two informants is chosen to represent the case study.

The concept of social media and its impact on communication construct social networking of women online business. Social media is a tool that allowed the users to become an active designer of the content, to communicate with each other actively, create and exchange various information (Garnytor & Perez, 2009). The interaction stability in online business is significant. This is because of interaction through social network enable the entrepreneurs to extend their networking towards more potential customers. Thus, the unique way of women online in terms of build and maintain their social networking through social media will be discussed in this paper.

2. Social Media & Women Online Business

When social network sites emerged, people were given a new structure for connecting to people around them (Boyd, 2015). Women online business take the opportunity to explore social media with the purpose of product marketing strategy through a strong social networking. As emphasized in Whiteley, S., Elliot, K. & Duckworth, C. (2003), there are three facts about women in online business. Firstly women businesses today generate more than half the private

sector output of our gross domestic product. Secondly, women –owned business employ more people than the fortune 500 companies combined, and third women who start business have the same motivation as men self-actualization, personal achievement and autonomy. In this study, the findings show that some of social media being exploited by the women online business, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and World-Wide Web (WWW). The Informants explained that they have been exploiting the social media at the same time. They use Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and WWW as platforms in doing business. Findings show that they are required to use more than one social media to catch the customer’s attention. Furthermore, Informant 1 said that using more than two social media can boost the followers. Informant 2 said that they usually do Social Sync between one social media with another. Based on the findings, social media create opportunities in a high number of social interactions especially for the business side (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). This is found to be the case, women online business seek the opportunities in cyberspace through social media to build their social networking. Skill development in social networking is a starting point for women to be entrepreneurs. These findings fracturing by Moore and Buttner, (1997), that until the beginning of the 1980s almost nothing was known about female entrepreneur.

2.1. Online trust

A key assumption is cyberspace-mediated communication, such as interaction in social media undermine trust because it wipes out the face-to-face interaction (Dutton & Shepherd, 2003). Wallace (2001), argued the reduced communication channel makes it harder to observe vital non-verbal physical cues. Nevertheless, a strong arguments from Ben-ner & Putterman (2002), saying the trust can be enhanced by making effective use of vast amount of information and new forms of online social networks available through internet-based interactions. The findings show that online trust is vital in online business. There are ways as basis to build online trust based on the informant explanation. Informant 1 said that the reputation is one of the way to get the trust from the customers and potential customers. A good reputation of the product will help the women online business to build the customers trust. Resnick (2000), also conclude the reputation as the recommender system or social navigation that provide a mechanism for judging who is trustworthy when parties lack a personal history of past experience with each other.

“The most important thing is the trust from the customer, if they are still 50:50 trust with your product then you will face another difficult problem to continue the business. How to get the trust from the customers? You need to have a good reputation trough testimony of your product” (Informant 1)

“Well, the trust need to be there, or else you couldn’t do much. Your customer need to have the trust on you or your product. Your product

need to be recognized, ya... of course. From the recognition then at least you got their hands” (Informant 2)

Informant 2 stated that the product that they are offering need to be recognized as the credibility for them. It is a positive signal for the entrepreneur as the trust is exist. Informant 2 explained, if the customers recognized their products they have a good history of the product that are offered. As a result, they build a strong trust in the cyberspace and the information they obtain from it (Corritore et. Al, 2003).

2.2. Testimony

Feedback from the customers build the reputation of women online business. Therefore, women online business need to have good feedbacks from customers to utilize it as their weapon to pursue the market of their product. Good viral customers’ testimonial can help the women online business improve their reputation, build the trust and maintain the social networking in cyberspace. Ba & Pavlou (2002), find that testimony affect customer trust. If woman online business built the trust from existing customers and they spread it out through testimonial postings, number of the potential costumers would be raised as well as explained by Informant 1.

“Testimony from the customers are most important thing to boost your reputation. Because of the feedbacks could represent the quality of the products. I always snapped the picture of the testimony and I posted it online. Another thing is, it could be viral! Your customer even double, triple and more.” (Informant 1)

“From the testimony, usually I will get a lot of ‘likes’ at the pictures of the product that I posted. Hashtag of the product I will never forget to put when I post the testimony from the customers” (Informant 2)

The postings of testimony can help women online business to get additional followers to be the potential customers. Indirectly, social networking web become wide spread. Informant 2 said she put the hashtag (#) in each of her customers’ testimonial postings to get recognized by the potential customer. With the hashtag, potential customers just need to put keyword of the product to find some reviews on product that they are looking for. Therefore, testimonial postings and hashtags are powerful in the perspective of women online business. It help women online business to build and improve their social networking in social media.

2.3. All the time connected

Berthon (2012) argued an easy access of the social media can create large number of users. Therefore Ashworth (2011) said that social media benefit the entrepreneur to build a stronger relationship with the customers. Based on the findings, both informants said that they need to be connected to the internet whenever and wherever they are.

“If you are doing online business, you have to be always available. Answer all the questions, response for the orders and payments and of course with the fast response. Let say to be always online.” (Informant 1)

“I have to be connected to the internet. I have to be aware of the notifications from my social media. You know what? The costumer waiting for your response like now if they commented to ask about your product. Once you committed to be in this business, you have no choice! Well I love to do these things, so no problem with me.” (Informant 2)

The statements above showed that all the time connected is related to the prompt response to the customer. The internet is considered a revolutionary way to connect people was emphasized by Hayes, T. & Malone, M. S. (2009). Hayes, T. & Malone, M. S. (2009) mentioned with internet, it allows everyone to create their network access and communicate with the others. The finding showed that customers demand for women online business speedy responses. Anzulis (2012) also stated that the costumers have high expectation of the instant responses through social media. The customers also expect the updates from the women online social media page. It could be updates of the products that being offered or even the current news about general topic.

“Keep posting or update on your social media page is a must. For example, just keep posting the information of my products. Just to keep my social media page alive in attractive way. Or any viral things, current trend and all, those things you have to be well aware, and you can share” (Informant 1)

“One more thing, as a woman online business, I have to be well aware of what is happening. I mean about the current issues and all and I will share these things, but.... It has to be reliable information ya. This is one of the way you can still exist and your followers will see you around in the social media, you know.” (Informant 2)

The statements explained about the important to have regular updates and exist in the cyberspace. The informants stated that they need to keep their social media active through all the postings. The purpose of this is to shows that they are active and ready to receive or response any comments and questions. Because the interaction in cyberspace considered as opportunity or even potential clues to the woman online business. Those activities in the cyberspace represent that they are all the time connected.

2.4. 'Sharing rituals and traditions'

In cyberspace with non face-to-face method communication, the power of 'sharing rituals' is needed. Shared consciousness is the deep sense of connection that members feel toward one another, and the collective sense of difference from others not in the community (Hayes & Melon, 2009).

"We have this group, it's among us, the owner of the business as well. We can share certain info, share problems and solutions. One more thing, we will also help each other to share our page as well, so that when they share, my followers become like boom!" (Informant 1)

"I have the group that really helping me with all my problems. They are always support and give the solutions. We are always chat and discuss to each other. What they know, it's going to be what I know as well. This is going to be our ritual" (Informant 2)

All the online communities have to be mindful of the rituals power (Hayes & Malone, 2009). Based on the result, shared rituals in online community is one of the factor to boost the followers on their social media. In other words, the women online business exploit the group as a medium to expand their social networking. Not only share the knowledge and problems, the group also help each other to share their social media pages. Thus, the sharing knowledge and problems is considered moral support for one and another. Informant 1 said she always get the support from the members of the group about her problems. The members of the group always suggest solutions to every problems. Rather than that, each member of the group shared others social media page as they do the marketing to expand the social networks of other woman. Sharing rituals become a tradition for the women online business.

2.5. Word of mouth

More empirical studies revealed that positive word of mouth has an impact on new consumer attractions (Jones & Reynold, 2006). Mikalef, et.al (2013) said that users tend to share information on a product that they have seen and would be of interest to friends and peers. This is supported with the result.

"The most powerful is among friends and family, they are a good marketing strategy. They informed their friends, colleagues and neighbors. Family and friends will inform their friends, colleagues and neighbors to check my page, either Instagram, Facebook or Website. Sometimes my suppliers also do the same." (Informant 1)

“I always inform my family members, uncles, aunties, cousins and all to promote my social media page to their friends. Some of my regular customers are my auntie’s friends. This way is really help me to expand my social network as well. But then, other customers will do such a thing to let other people know about the product”
(Informant 2)

The intention of social media users to share information with peers about products or services which they find relevant or interesting through such platforms. Finding shows that the cyber community like to share the information among them through social media. The social networking that already created have exploited by the entrepreneurs. The other way to share the information within cyber community is through the offline communication which to spread it out to the peers. Thus, the word of mouth system in women online business both through offline communication and online communication.

2.6. Secret of being center of attention

As women online business, they are being pushed to bring their products up to the center. As discussed with Informant 1, attention from the customers is the key to bring your business visible in cyberspace. At the same time, Informant mentioned that shares their social media pages could soothe their business prestige. In fact, they need the other online business partners to share their pages. Instead of the thoughts about competitors, women online business think about how to exploit this relationship into benefit.

“If everyone talking about you, that means there’s something special with you, either it’s positive or even negative. Well, hmmm it’s the same thing goes to this business. It’s on the internet, how to be recognize? Get the attention! How to do that? Get your friends in the same business to share your page online, or an outstanding testimony, put it up every time you got it, share the good quotes, info or news, those kind of things. Just don’t miss in action!” (Informant 1)

“People always talk negative about attention seeker. But here in this business, make it possible from invisible to visible through online business. And if we talk about women, we are really good to catch the attention huh? Haha... But in this business, you need to build the strategy to get customers attention. For example, put the catchy picture and catchy caption as well, in Instagram for example, put a lot of hashtag for the high possibility for your potential customers to find you” (Informant 2)

Same situation with Informant 2, positive thoughts could have brought them to the better path of their business. Being an attention seeker, Informant 2 declared that it helped them to catch the customers. Positive vibes through sharing some quotes, information and news, hashtags and catchy captions on the picture of the products are among the strategies to be the centre of attention in cyberspace.

2.7. Nonverbal (Language)

Communication through cyberspace predominantly done by nonverbal to describe the messages. The language that one using in cyberspace will affect the relationship with others (Hayes & Malone, 2009). Informant 1 explained that the language is their tools to build a good communication with the customers and potential customers. The definition of the nonverbal communication in women online business broad to the object that they share as to represent themselves. Informant 1 really concerned about what she wants to share and the language that she will use. It need to be polite, understandable and persuasive at the same time.

“One more thing, the language that you’ve used. If I want to post anything on my social media pages, either Facebook or Instagram or Twitter or Website or anything else, I will really concern about the language that I’m using. It has to be polite, easy to understand and persuasive at the same time. Bare in mind, whatever posted on the page will represent yourself and your products. The language is the ammunition“. (Informant 1)

“Okay this is interesting, we’ve been talking about how to catch the customers in online business, how to do that through cyberspace? Of course communicate through the sentences that I’ve posted on your social page. Remember the most important thing in online business is the trust from your customers, they can see it through the language that I’ve used. What else? Through the pictures that I’ve shared, through the news that I’ve been posted”. (Informant 2)

Informant 2 explained through the language they use, it can build the trust between woman online business and the customers. The woman online business mentioned nonverbal communication include the pictures and the news that they’ve been posted. In their standpoint the nonverbal-language include the object that they share which are pictures, info and news, the caption of the pictures should be proper, understandable sentences, persuasive and clear.

This study found some keys to sustain and build social networking among women online business. As the conclusion, online trust, promote though testimony, all the time connected, shared rituals and traditions, word of mouth, secret of being centre of attention and the nonverbal (language) are amongst the important parts to build a good social networking to sustain and maintain the existence of the business in the cyberspace.

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