

Research Article

Investigating Social Media Marketing Adoption among Homestay Operators in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media has revolutionized communication, connectivity quality, and information consumption, making it an indispensable element in human daily lives. As such, social media marketing has emerged as a crucial tool for businesses to promote their products and services. In the case of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia, however, found that the adoption of social media marketing remains low, particularly among homestay operators. This study aimed to investigate the factors that influence homestay operators in Malaysia to adopt social media as a marketing medium. By employing a cross-sectional research design, a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect responses from a total of 208 homestay operators in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor. The results generated by the Structural Equation Modeling revealed that customer pressure and preference, as well as competitive pressure, have a significant impact on social media marketing adoption compared to perceived cost and digital skills. Significantly, this study provides valuable insights to the authorities to understand more about social media marketing adoption among homestay operators in Malaysia so that effective strategies can be highlighted to encourage SMEs in Malaysia to fully utilize new technology for business purposes. Overall, SMEs need to employ new technologies, specifically social media marketing for business growth as it provides extensive and effective connectivity at low cost.

Keywords: Social media marketing; Homestay operators; Social media adoption; Small Medium Enterprises; New technologies

INTRODUCTION

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) today has shown the transformation of the Internet entering a new phase (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). The use of the Internet changed when the transformation process it underwent shifted from a browsing medium to a transaction medium that enables users to engage in various online activities. Today, the Internet is not only used for personal purposes but also for business sustainability.

There are five roles of the Internet in business, and they involve communication, promotion, product distribution, management, and research (Carson, 2005). The transformation process of the Internet continues to occur over time, moving from a transaction medium to a social medium that offers two-way communication. This new generation of the Internet is known as social media, and it has changed users' knowledge, needs, and expectations in terms of search, information sharing, and decision-making processes (Rejeb et al., 2022). Nowadays, the public has started using social media as a business platform for things involving buying and selling, making inquiries, and obtaining feedback (Gunelius, 2011). Through the characteristics of social media such as being easily accessible, affordable, and fast, it makes today's information sharing more focused on uploading images and videos through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Chan & Guillet, 2011).

Previous studies have also mentioned that the development of the tourism industry today is influenced by the characteristics of social media that further facilitate business activities between service providers and tourists (Alrashid, 2012). In addition, Mohamad (2022a) argues that the influence of social media should not be ignored by tourism businesses if they want to remain competitive in the market. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry in particular, they need to understand and adapt to market changes in order to leverage the opportunities created by social media as well as market their products and services (Litvin et al., 2018; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). This also applies to budget accommodation sectors such as budget hotels, homestays, guesthouses, chalets, and motels, which are seen to have limited resources and primarily focus on the local market and existing businesses (Mohamad, 2022b). Various factors will influence a budget accommodation establishment to adopt social media as their marketing medium, which include the size of the organization, culture, market trends, cost, competition, and infrastructure. However, there is still a research void on the adoption of social media marketing among homestay operators, particularly in Malaysia.

Research on the topic of social media is still insufficient despite its significance and its potential as an effective marketing tool. Existing studies primarily focus on social media usage in large corporations, but seem to neglect its adoption by entrepreneurs, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). Consequently, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the current level, patterns, and factors that influence the utilization of social media as a marketing tool, specifically from the perspective of Malaysia (Abu Bakar & Ahmad Zaini, 2022). Hence, this study aimed to investigate factors that influence the homestay operators in Malaysia, particularly in Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor to adopt social media as their marketing medium.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing Adoption

Generally, social media marketing can help SMEs to increase website traffic, create conversations with audiences, enhance brand awareness, generate a brand identity and positive brand association, and encourage communication and interaction with audiences (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). Social media marketing includes activities like posting text, images, videos, and other content that drives audience engagement. The more engagement between SMEs and the audience, the easier it is for SMEs to achieve their marketing goals (Mohamad, 2022b). Previous studies consistently indicated that the adoption of social media as a marketing medium has positively increased business performance, generated sales, and enhanced business

relationships with customers (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022). In Malaysia, the adoption of ICT among SMEs is still low. This could be due to a lack of information, skills, or resources, all of which are required to use social media for marketing goals in an efficient manner (Abu Bakar & Ahmad Zaini, 2022; Appel et al., 2019).

It is important to note that to ensure the effectiveness, efficiency, and competitive advantage of SMEs, the applications and utilization of modern ICT are necessary to help improve the growth of SMEs, as well as the economy of a country (Liu et al., 2022). By using social media platforms for marketing purposes, consumers easily connect with businesses' products, services, and brands regardless of time or geographic boundaries. From a business perspective, social media allows SMEs to get feedback from consumers to improve the quality of their products, services, and brands. As social media is based on Web 2.0, it cannot be denied that the use of ICT, including social media marketing can help SMEs to connect, not only with consumers but also with other enterprises to improve their business widely. Scholars have been engaged in discussions regarding the usage of social media by entrepreneurs, and this topic is still at the developmental phase (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022).

Customer Pressure and Preference

Customer pressure and preference refer to the perceptions customers hold regarding the business and its products, as well as their individual needs and preferences. It can be categorized as one of the important elements when it comes to technological adoption (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022). Previous studies on technological adoption among SMEs have consistently proven that customer pressure has a positive correlation with business' intention to adopt the technology (Abdul Jamil et al., 2020; Costea et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Eid et al., 2020). On the other hand, some argue that the adoption of social media marketing is influenced by customer pressure and preferences, as businesses can enhance their profitability through long-lasting relational exchanges that foster strong emotional ties with customers. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H1 Customer pressure and preference have a significant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators (P₁₅).

Perceived Cost

Costs can be characterized as expenditures that can be quantified in monetary or physical terms, yielding corresponding benefits. They are also defined as exchange rates, expenses, or sacrifices made to attain benefits or accomplish specific objectives of consumers (Yamin et al., 2019). Cost is identified as a key technological factor that significantly influences the willingness of SMEs to adopt social media marketing practices as they prefer to communicate with consumers while keeping expenses at low costs (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In other words, if the cost of adopting social media marketing is low, the level of adoption will be increased (Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). Earlier research has proven that cost plays an important role in the acceptance and utilization of technology. A study by Chatterjee and Kar (2020) indicated that naturally, SMEs will be cautious regarding the cost involved in adopting social media marketing. Moreover, there is also a suggestion that perceived cost is an important indicator of social media marketing adoption in developing countries (Rahman et al., 2020). The study found that social media marketing among SMEs in India is significantly affected by costs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H2 Perceived cost has an insignificant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators (P₂₅).

Competitive Pressure

Competitive pressure plays an important role in adopting technology. Competitive pressure refers to the pressure that is expended by competitors in the same industry. As SMEs are vulnerable to plenty of competitors in the same industry, they must exploit the benefit of technology by adopting social media marketing to adapt to the changes in market trends and sustain their presence in the industry. Earlier studies indicated that competitive pressure has a significant effect on social media marketing adoption among SMEs in Malaysia (Abdul Jamil et al., 2020; Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; Eid et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2020), leading the following hypothesis to be formulated:

- H3 Competitive pressure has a significant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators (P₃₅).

Digital Skills

In the era of digitalization, knowledge and digital skills are vital to sustain the growth of SMEs. Previous research has suggested that SMEs need to improve their knowledge and digital skills in order to meet the requirements of market trends and consumers' needs (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). It is worth noting that by improving knowledge and digital skills, SMEs have high capabilities to face digital challenges and market changes. Recent research indicated that knowledge and digital skills among owners of SMEs have a significant impact on social media marketing adoption (Effendi et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2020); Trawnih et al., 2014). Nevertheless, due to a lack of resources, other studies mentioned that digital skills have negative relationships and insignificant impact on social media marketing adoption among SMEs (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Effendi et al., 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H4 Digital skill has an insignificant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators (P₄₅).

Figure 1 exhibits the research framework which developed according to the discussions provided in earlier sections. The research framework indicated the influences of exogenous constructs which are customer pressure and preference, perceived cost, competitive pressure, and digital skills towards the endogenous construct of social media marketing adoption.

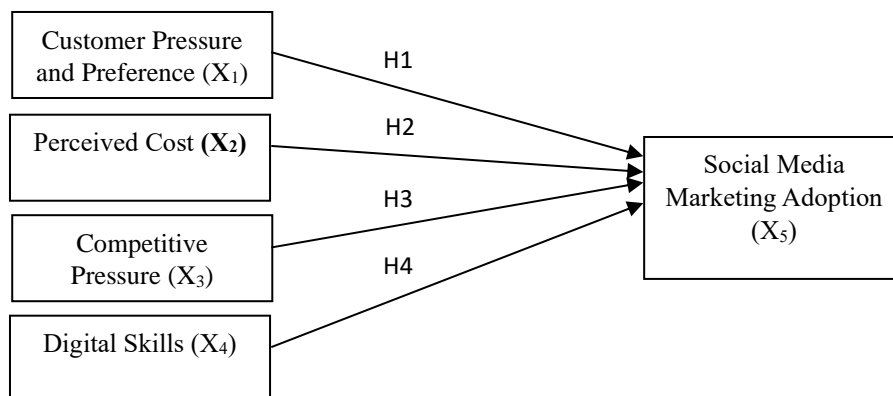


Figure 1. Research Framework.

METHOD

To conduct this study, a cross-sectional research design and convenience sampling technique were employed. Using a self-administered questionnaire, a total of 208 responses were collected from homestay operators in Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. This sample size is considered valid for further analysis based on two conditions. First, according to the PLS-SEM technique, the minimum number of respondents required for this study is 40 as the rule to calculate sample size is that each structural path in the research model ought to be multiplied by 10 (4 structural paths x 10) (Hair et al., 2014). Second, sample sizes in the range of 100 to 200 are appropriate for large or unknown populations (Hair et al., 2006).

Section A of the research instrument addresses the profile demographic of respondents and questions related to respondent's social media usage for marketing purposes. Section B comprises the social media marketing adoption, customer pressure and preferences, perceived cost, competitive pressure, and owner's knowledge and digital skills, which were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The construct of social media marketing adoption was measured using five items adapted from (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022; Odoom et al., 2017). Five items for customer pressure and preferences construct were retrieved (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022; Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). Six items for the construct of perceived cost were adapted from (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). For the competitive pressure construct, five items were measured based on the study (Ali Abbasi & Abdul Rahim, 2022; Rahman et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2018; Susanto et al., 2021). Lastly, five items from Ali Abbasi and Abdul Rahim (2022) and Rahman et al. (2020) were adapted for the construct of knowledge and digital skills. To test the research hypotheses, an inferential analysis was conducted to perform the PLS-SEM technique using the SmartPLS software. The PLS-SEM technique was engaged to assess the reflective measurement model and structural model.

Results

A total of 208 responses were received from respondents in Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. The majority of the respondents are male (59.1%) while 40.9% are female, which all fall under the age category between 31 to 40 years old (32.7%). Most of them are Malay (56.3%), owners of homestay (38.5%), and have already operated their homestay business for about 1 to 5 years (48.1%). Besides, 52.4% of them have experience using social media for marketing purposes for less than 6 years of which the most preferred social media channels is Facebook (89.9%), followed by Instagram (66.8%), and TikTok (52.4%). The majority of respondents also preferred to upload content such as photos (96.2%), videos (86.5%), and texts (60.6%).

Table 1 shows that the research model meets the requirements of measurement model assessment, where the Cronbach Alpha (α) value and composite reliability (CR) value are above 0.7, with factor loading (λ) value above 0.708 and loaded in their appropriate construct, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is above 0.5. Additionally, results also show that the Fornell-Larcker criteria of which the AVE square root value for each construct is larger than the correlation coefficient value ($\sqrt{AVE} > r$), and the HTMT ratio is above 0.9, indicating research's data is fit to the discriminant validity (Garson, 2016; Hair et al., 2014).

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment

Constructs	Items	λ (> 0.708)	(α) (> 0.7)	CR	AVE	Discriminant Validity
Competitive Pressure	COM1	0.817	0.871	0.907	0.661	YES
	COM2	0.858				
	COM3	0.768				
	COM4	0.794				
	COM5	0.824				
Perceived Cost	COST1	0.836	0.889	0.914	0.64	YES
	COST2	0.804				
	COST3	0.798				
	COST4	0.779				
	COST5	0.781				
	COST6	0.803				
Consumer Preference	CPP1	0.821	0.912	0.934	0.74	YES
	CPP2	0.876				
	CPP3	0.877				
	CPP4	0.878				
	CPP5	0.847				
Digital Skills	KS1	0.844	0.903	0.928	0.721	YES
	KS2	0.827				
	KS3	0.889				
	KS4	0.86				
	KS5	0.823				
Social Media Marketing Adoption	SMMA1	0.8	0.874	0.909	0.666	YES
	SMMA2	0.857				
	SMMA3	0.817				
	SMMA4	0.758				
	SMMA5	0.845				

Inferential analysis revealed through the PLS-SEM technique has indicated that “consumer preference” ($\beta=0.275$, $t= 2.610$, $CI[0.052, 0.478]$) has a significant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators in Malaysia. Consistent with Cao et al. (2018), environmental context such as consumer preference plays an important role in influencing companies to adopt social media marketing. A study by Effendi et al. (2020) indicated that the environmental context is full of uncertainties that are complex and fast. Thus, it is crucial for homestay operators to deeply understand the technological changes and how they can affect the business nature. As people nowadays rely more on online platforms to search for products and do their comparisons, low involvement of new technology will affect the business’s operation. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (P_{15}) is accepted.

Next, perceived cost was found to have an insignificant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators in Malaysia ($\beta=0.166$, $t= 1.955$, $CI[-0.009, 0.330]$). According to Chatterjee and Kar (2020), naturally, SMEs have limited resources to adopt new technology including providing the facilities needed. Thus, it is common for SMEs to be more cautious about cost. It is worth mentioning that to ensure the success of social media marketing,

management needs to provide relevant courses so that the person in charge understands the nature of social media in detail, including how it attracts the target market. Furthermore, they also have to commit in terms of facilities such as the Internet and devices. As most of the homestay operators operate their business on a small scale as it is not the operators' main source of income, the willingness to invest high cost for social media marketing is low (Dube & Sharma, 2018; Effendi et al., 2020). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 (P₂₅) is accepted.

Besides, this study discovered that competitive pressure ($\beta=0.483$, $t=5.015$, $CI[0.274, 0.660]$) has a significant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators in Malaysia. As suggested by previous studies, competitive pressure can be the main motivation factor for business firms to adopt social media marketing (Effendi et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2019). In line with a study by Cao et al. (2018), competitive pressure is the most influential factor in a company's decision to adopt social media marketing. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 (P₃₅) is accepted.

Lastly, digital skills were found to have an insignificant influence on social media marketing adoption among homestay operators in Malaysia ($\beta=0.005$, $t= 0.048$, $CI[-0.189, 0.209]$). Previous studies have suggested that the management of an organization should provide support through continuous training about social media applications usage for business purposes to staff so that they are alert about the latest interactive functions of social media and can utilize them optimally (Abdullah et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2019). Hence, it is worth noting that support from top management of organizations to provide sufficient knowledge and digital skills is one of the important components for organizations in adopting new technology including social media for marketing purposes. However, in the case of SMEs, a lack of resources can be the reason for companies unable to provide sufficient training in social media marketing (Effendi et al., 2020). Due to the size of the company, the top management perceived that they don't need to be experts on social media marketing, and it is sufficient for them to develop knowledge and digital skills based on self-learning. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (P₄₅) is accepted. Table 2 summarizes the result of hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Results Of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	P	Results
H1	Consumer Preferences -> SMM (P ₁₅)	0.275	2.610	0.01*	Accepted
H2	Perceived Cost -> SMM (P ₂₅)	0.166	1.955	0.05	Accepted
H2	Competitive Pressure -> SMM (P ₃₅)	0.483	5.015	0.00*	Accepted
H3	Digital Skills -> SMM (P ₄₅)	0.005	0.047	0.962	Accepted

*Significant level at 0.05

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study expands the body of knowledge on social media adoption and provides significant understanding regardless of how SMEs in the tourism industry, particularly homestay operators accept new technology as their marketing medium. Based on the research findings, the authorities such as the Ministry of Rural Development as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture are expected to be consistently encouraging homestay operators to utilize social media wisely in order to attract tourists' attention to their products. Moreover, homestay operators are also advised to be creative in offering their products or services on social media

as part of their strategies to create tourists' intention to buy the products or services. Furthermore, the management of homestays also has to be supportive and proactive in ensuring the success of social media as a new strategy marketing medium. This may include motivational support as well as providing the facilities needed and relevant training for staff to assimilate knowledge and skills associated with social media marketing. Besides the practical implications, this study recorded some limitations. Firstly, only a few factors are explored in this study. There may be other valuable factors from organizational and technological perspectives that should be highlighted such as the size of an organization, government support, market trend, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and so on (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2020; Alrousan et al., 2021; Salah et al., 2021). Hence, future research is encouraged to venture into this possibility. Secondly, as this study was conducted based on a cross-sectional design by using the PLS-SEM technique, future studies can apply a longitudinal design so that respondents can be assessed in different time frames. By doing this, the effectiveness of social media adoption among homestay operators can be assessed in several phases. Finally, future studies can also implement advanced techniques of analysis such as Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (MSEM) as it is believed to be able to produce more resilient and detailed findings.

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