

DESIGNING A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN FOR FOOD BUSINESS
IN SAUDI ARABIA

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
ABDULLAH FARAJ
ADVISER: DR. DAVID SUMNER

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

May 2014

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Chapter I

Introduction

Throughout the years, many people believe that technology is changing society in many ways and perspectives in different areas. With these changes, social media has occupied a prominent place in people's lives. In fact, social media have changed the nature of communication and interaction of people with each other. Thus social media has become recognized as the most effective and unique way of interaction between the public around the world. Billions of people worldwide have used different platforms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram to interact with each other since its first introduction. Since social media first emerged in the world of Internet, a lot of attention has been paid to this phenomenon and the fact is the number of users of social media has increased rapidly in the past few years. In December 2013, Facebook reported that they reached 1.11 billion Facebook active users worldwide at the end of 2013. Moreover, Twitter in February 5, 2014 announced that the company has 241 million monthly active users in fourth quarter of 2013 with 500 million Tweets are sent per day.

Nowadays, social media plays a major role not only as an entertainment tool, but an important role in the way we communicate with each other, exchange information, and find the latest news. People depend on social media in many different aspects in life; many organizations and corporations recognized this opportunity as a publicity tool. Social media has revolutionized the way organizations and corporations manage their relationship with their public. In addition, social media have made it very easy for businesses to reach their consumers about brands or products. It provides for any business, corporation with solid platform to promote and advertise

their ideas, brands and products.

Social media considers a great platform for businesses to reach their publics and customers with targeted messages and new products. Social media offers a huge opportunity for business to have effective interaction with the audience in a direct way. Social media is capable of shaping the public perceptions for any business, brand or product. The reason is because social media allows the information to flow quickly and constantly to a large target of public.

Many studies have been conducted in this area in order to explore how social media could be effective as marketing tool for business. Researchers examined the role of social media in businesses in different aspects. They found that social media could offer an advanced and unique interaction platform for business in order to promote a product, identify the public needs, maintain relationship with public, send messages and communicate with them during crisis (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Reitz, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010 stated that some businesses used social media to help them create a platform of communication with the public, manage their relationship with the consumers, advertise new brands, and even to respond to any issue.

Lately, people in Saudi Arabia began using social media as any other country in the region. In fact, the use of social media has attracted millions of Saudis. Social media has become an important communication and interaction platform between individuals within the Saudi society especially among younger generation. It became a daily use among young people in Saudi Arabia. In fact, social media has become a habit for many people in Saudi Arabia.

According to a recent study in the region, the number of Twitter and Facebook users in 2013 had rapid growth in Saudi Arabia from the year before. The Social Clinic (2014) reported

that Facebook in 2013 has more than 7.8 million users from Saudi Arabia, with increase of six million users over the year before. Moreover, the number of Twitter users is estimated to approach five million active users in Saudi Arabia (The Social Clinic, 2014). This study implies that the number of users of twitter increase from 2012 with three million active users.

Despite the popularity of Facebook and Twitter among individuals in Saudi Arabia, it is still believed that the use of social media is new to many businesses. Many researchers believe that businesses in Saudi Arabia still do not know the power of using social media as a tool of marketing. For this reason, researchers argue that businesses need to change their way of communication with public and to start using social media in order to keep up the public interests. Moreover, the reason for their argument is that social media can create an advantage for the business in the way of shifting the nature of communication with the public from the traditional method to more develop and direct one.

Therefore, the purpose of this project is to interview twelve food businesses to determine their use of social media platforms to reach out their public. As a result of these interviews with the food business managers, supervisors and marketing directors, this project attempts to discover the best use of social media for the food businesses in Saudi Arabia to have a beneficial effect on the business. Thus this project will involve interviews with twelve food business managers, supervisors and marketing directors to determine their usage of social media platforms to reach their public. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the best usage of social media of food businesses within Saudi Arabia and its beneficial effects on the business.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Social media definition:

Many say that it is difficult to find an accurate definition for the concept of social media. However, some scholars and professionals have tried to define the concept of social media. According to Kaplan and Haenlin (2010, p.61), the definition of social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC).” Moreover, the following is another definition of social media is by Public Relations Society of America PRSA (2011) which cited Dykeman (2008), who said that social media refers to the tool that make individuals communicate and exchange messages online.

There are different types of social media sites with different ways of engagement. Some of these social media focus on discussion, communication and sharing such as Facebook and Twitter. While other social media sites are primarily interested on specific functions such as posting videos in YouTube or Vine, or uploading pictures in Instagram.

As mentioned earlier, there are so many popular social media sites worldwide. In addition, this project focused just on the use of twitter as a social media platform. Twitter refers to a “micro-blogging” platform, which allows individual to communicate with 140 characters or less in a direct way with the population (Micek & Whitelock, 2009). Twitter offers considerable an easy access to users to share messages in a short time. According to Lusted (2011) “This service allowed users to share their status what they were doing at a given moment simply and easily, in just 140 characters of type” (p. 71). Also Lusted stated that Twitter had its origins from texting and SMS. For that reason Twitter limits their users to share their messages in 140

characters or less to have simple and unique way of communication. Texting in the cellphone is limited to 160 characters. Therefore, the innovators of Twitter determined to use this limitation in their platform (Lusted, 2011). Twitter offers to users to share their information in their account profile and to look for the top trending topic among twitter users. Twitter allows you to follow other users and to see other user's tweets and hashtags. (Kwak, Lee, Park, and Moon, 2010)

The role of social media in business:

As mentioned, social media has changed the way the world conducts business. Nowadays, social media plays an active role in business. Many researchers have identified the role of social media in business and how social media can benefit business. Pliska (2012), said that social media is an extension for public relations because it aids businesses to build relationship with their customers by providing a direct communication and targeting their publics. Social media allows businesses to open a dialogue with customers in order to reach out and find what interests them. (Pliska, 2012)

Many recent studies have been conducted on the adoption of social media by public relations for the organizations and businesses. One study by Deuze (2007), emphasizes that social media is a tool for public relations practitioners to assist the organizations or the business, and to have a two-way communication with the audience in order to maintain the relationship with them. Also Wright and Hinson (2010) found out in their study that social media has the ability to influence to how public relations practitioners interact with the public in a direct and effective way. Social media offers a massive power to public relations practitioners for building relationship between the businesses with the public. (Wright and Hinson, 2010)

The roles of social media in business differ based on the objective of the business. Social media allows business to do publicity for the business, develop a solid relationship with the customers, manage a crisis, provide the public with information that they need, and to develop a personal interaction with the public. (Chiera, 2013; Davis, 2011; Goldfine, 2011)

On the other hand, Pliska (2012) focuses in describing the role of Twitter in business. He said that Twitter offers an informal technique on reaching the public than other type of social media platforms such as LinkedIn. The reason for that is because the use of Twitter is limited to 140 characters in one message. So it is difficult for businesses to reach the public in formal way (Pliska, 2012). According to Pliska (2012, p.50), "Tweets are short messages that update you on the latest news. This can be a very beneficial to the user since user typically may be the first to know any breaking news." Being at the top of the news will help the business to be recognized.

Social media in businesses in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia:

Recently, social media has gained lot of attention in the Middle East for businesses. Many studies in the region have examined the use of Facebook and Twitter in marketing for the business. These studies were focused on presenting how social media can be effective as a marketing tool in the Arab region. They believe that social media is effective for the business due to the increase of the use of social media among Arab people. (Abdalsameea, 2012; Al Ghamdi & Reilly, 2013; Al Jabre, 2013; Al Tenaiji & Cader, 2010; Eid, 2012; Koshy, 2012).

One study explores the role of social media in business in the United Arab Emirates. Koshy (2012) argues that social media has become very powerful tool of communication in the United Arab Emirates. In the past few years, the use of social media has increased quickly among people in The UAE, which opens a great platform for many businesses to reach out to their consumers with products and brands as advertisement tool. (Koshy, 2012)

Another study was conducted in the United Arab Emirates about how important social media is in the businesses' practices. Al Jenaibi (2011) stated that the role of social media in the UAE is similar to any other use of social media in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria. Al Jenaibi (2011) said that social media has a positive impact on businesses in the UAE because it played big role in delivering the information. People in the UAE have recognized the popularity of social media platforms in the past few years. So people adopted this phenomenon in order to keep with the world. Young people are considered to be the most active users of social media in the UAE (Al Jenaibi, 2011). Businesses need to develop channels in social media, so they can communicate with public in order promote their business.

On the other hand, Egypt is considered to be one of the leading countries to adopt social media in marketing. A recent study explains the role of social media in promoting tourism in Egypt. Abdalsameea (2012) believes that social media has a strong impact on increasing tourism in Egypt due to the increase users of Facebook and Twitter. This study shows that the traditional marketing tools do not attract the audience any more. So the use of social media has been recognized as an effective way of communication. The reason for that is because people now want to have direct and constant interaction with the companies. Abdalsameea (2012) found that many companies and organizations in Egypt used Facebook and Twitter to promote for the best locations in Egypt to visit. The number of interaction with the audience by social media would help the business to have more effective way to promote the business than the traditional ways.

Social media also has been recognized in Saudi Arabia. Facebook and Twitter have attracted many individuals in Saudi Arabia, and became an important aspect in the life of Saudi people as well as in making decisions (Al Jabre, 2013). It is believed that social media attracted Saudis for many reasons. Individual in Saudi Arabia used Facebook and Twitter for

entertainment and to communicate with their friends and family, to find what is new in fashion industry, what is popular in the world, and if there any new restaurant open near to them. People in Saudi Arabia spend a lot of time in social media seeking information. (Al Jabre, 2013)

Many researchers believed that businesses in Saudi Arabia do not understand the effective use of social media to interact with their customers; not just in Saudi Arabia, but other countries in the Middle East face the same issue. Many companies in the Middle East do not make effective use of social media websites for their business. (Bayt.com, 2012)

Based on some research, advertising has shifted from the traditional ways by promoting through TV and newspaper to the use of social media. According to Al Saud & Khan (2013, p.5) “As we live in fast paced world; social media has just made it faster. We have seen the changes it has made in only five years which traditional media took decades to create.” Also Koshy (2013) argues that the traditional advertising has been decreased in 2012 in the UAE. Businesses focused on promoting their products via Twitter and Facebook. (Koshy, 2013)

The popularity of Facebook and Twitter created an advantage for businesses in Saudi Arabia to be part of the publicity practice. Many businesses and companies need to recognize the popularity of social media, so they need to realize that the adoption of social media platform would help their business to be successful. (Eid, 2012)

Statement of the Problem:

Social media has become a very powerful tool of communication in Saudi Arabia. It has opened a great platform for many businesses for advertising, marketing and publicizing their products and brands to reach out to their consumers. This project aims to discuss how effective social media is in shifting some food businesses, which are using social media platforms to create huge brands within the Saudi society. Designing one social media platform for food chain

within Saudi Arabia, which can be integrated with popular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, can develop a comprehensive new style for advertising, marketing and publicizing products and brands among business owners as well as customers.

This project argues that social media should be considered a subset of traditional advertising, marketing and publicizing tool for businesses within Saudi Arabia because of its position in the marketplace. This project examined the current use of social media within food businesses in Saudi Arabia to determine how social media is being used. This capstone project aids marketers and public relations practitioners to develop social media plan for the business in order to improve the advertising and publicizing platform. Moreover, this project will to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What innovative social media technologies could Saudi Arabian businesses use?

RQ2: Is social media more effective than the traditional media in attracting customers?

RQ3: How has social media changed marketing techniques for Saudi Arabian business?

Chapter III

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, an interview was conducted with some local food in businesses in Saudi Arabia. These interviews were performed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The reason for that is because Jeddah is considered the second largest city in Saudi Arabia after the capital city Riyadh. Jeddah also is considered the first choice in Saudi Arabia for many enterprises and place to spend vacations. A list of some food businesses was selected to participate in this project. Twelve food businesses were included in the interview sample. The sample includes; Goodies Restaurant, Ketchup Restaurant, Olio Italian Restaurant, The Counter Burger, Fotor Faris, Countryside House, Shobak pie, Amo Hamza, 19th Century Burger, Classic burger Tea Yana and Papia Restaurant. In order to be selected in the sample, the restaurant has to be a new small business. Because of the distance and the time difference between Jeddah and Muncie, these interviews were conducted by some of the researcher colleagues in public relations in Jeddah.

This project is basically a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the role and importance of social media as an effective marketing tool for the business. The purpose of choosing interviews for this study is to understand how these businesses engage with the public, how they use social media and what type of information they share in social media. Moreover, to determine the types of social media platform that businesses preferred to engage with the public. Conducting interviews would help us to compare between the uses of social media in these food business in order to develop a best plan of using social media in food businesses in Saudi Arabia.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face by Ahmed Shukri, a public relations graduate and Yazeed Keshash, a professional journalist. Supervisors, managers and marketing employees

were involved in the interviews. Each interview has the same set of questions in the same order. The interview questions were developed based on the research questions so it could help us to understand the role of social media in Saudi food businesses. The interview questions addressed the use of social media, strategy of publicity, and the challenges in engaging with the public, and to answer research questions. The interview questions were divided into four categories. These questions were categorized based on the direction of the answers. The first category is general questions, which addresses to understand who are the key publics of the business and the process of engaging with the costumers. The second part consists of questions that related to the use of social media in business. The second part of the interview questions was asked to respondents who used any social media platforms. The third part of the interview addresses respondents that do not use social media in their business. This part was developed to understand why they do not use social media, and how they communicate with the public in order to understand their needs. The final part is also some general questions on regard the type of information that they share with the public and the limitation of using social media.

These interview questions were developed in English language. However, in order to have an accurate response from participants, respondents were interviewed in Arabic language, with the assistance of Ahmed Shukri and Yazeed Keshash in Jeddah. Then the responses of the participants were translated into English. All interviews were completed from March 2 to March 14, 2014. Interviews were approximately between 20-30 minutes in length with each respondent. The following were subjects to the interview:

- Amjed Serdar, Restaurant Manager, Fotor Faris. Interviewed by Yazeed Keshash, Mar. 5, 2014.
- Rawad Gazal, Restaurant Manager, Goodies Restaurant. Interviewed by Yazeed

Keshash, Mar. 2, 2014.

- Jeremiah Gallevo, Restaurant Manager, Ketchup Restaurant. Interviewed by Yazeed Keshash, Mar. 5, 2014.
- Molham Al Jandly, Restaurant Manger, Shobak Pie Interviewed by Yazeed Keshash, Mar. 14, 2014.
- Fahad Al Mansour, Marketing Director, Classic Burger. Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 12, 2014.
- Khaled Abdullah, Marketing Director, Countryside House, Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 5, 2014.
- Mohammed Melsassi, Restaurant Manger, Tea Yana. Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 4, 2014.
- Mohammed Mahmoud, Restaurant Supervisor, Papia. Interviewed by Yazeed Keshash, Mar. 7, 2014.
- Fahad Al-Arifi, Restaurant Manager, 19th Century Burger. Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 5, 2014.
- Hamdi Huwaydi, Director of Marketing, Amo Hamza. Interviewed by Yazeed Keshash, Mar. 3, 2014.
- Bahie Eldin, Restaurant Manager, Olio Italian Restaurant. Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 7, 2014.
- Atef Ahmed, Marketing Director, The Counter Burger. Interviewed by Ahmed Shukri, Mar. 10, 2014.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this capstone project is to design a social media plan for food businesses in Saudi Arabia to create an effective tool of communication with the customers. Utilizing social media to be used as marketing tool for the business is relatively new in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this project is developed to provide appropriate information in order to design a comprehensive social media plan for food businesses in Saudi Arabia.

For that purpose, interviews were conducted with twelve food businesses in Saudi Arabia to explore the role of social media in those businesses and to collect appropriate information about how social media plan should be developed for Saudi businesses. Interviews were completed by seven managers, four marketing directors and one restaurant supervisor. The gender of all respondents is male and ages between 25 and 40. Interviews were accomplished in period of two weeks. This method was used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What innovative social media technologies could Saudi Arabian businesses use?

As a result from the interviews, most of respondents admitted that they used social media as a way of communication with the public. Seventy five percent of interviewed businesses claimed that they adopted social media to help them to reach out to the public with their messages. The use of social media is mainly for promoting and advertising (Amjed Serdar, 2014; Atef Ahmed, 2014; Bahie Eldin, 2014; Hamdi Huwaydi, 2014; Fahad Al Mansour, March, 2014; Jeremiah Gallevo, 2014; Khaled Abdullah, 2014; Molham Al Jandly, 2014; Rawad Gazal, 2014).

Amjed Serdar (2014) said, “We are heavily relying on social media, especially Twitter in branding our products. We became known in Jeddah through Twitter” However, the researcher noticed that there are not much of interactions with the public. When interviewers asked the

respondents for what purpose do your business use social media, all of them respond that they use social media mainly for promoting the products of the business and its name.

In fact one respondent admitted that social media is only used for prompting for the business. Molham Al Jandly (2014) said, “We know that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram offer huge opportunity for us to engage with the public in different perspectives. Yet the focus of the business for now is just to distribute our messages and promote our name and goods to be notice in the public.”

On the other hand, 25 percent of respondents said that they preferred using a traditional method more than adopting social media. Just three respondents acknowledged that they do not have Facebook or Twitter accounts, or they have accounts but they do not use it. The fact is they do not prefer the use of social media to engage with the customers. They depend on official websites, radio and billboard to target their publics with messages. For example, Mohammed Melsassi (2014) stated, “We only depend on official website and radio to communicate with the public because this method showed a lot of success over the years.”

Another respondent said that his staff hesitates to use social media because of its negative impact. Fahad Al-Arifi (2014) said, “ We have some hesitations in involving with the public through social media because nowadays everyone is capable to make any rumor about a restaurant and how bad is this restaurant and people will believe this story.” He also stated that it is hard to manage the entire negative and the positive comments that are posted by people in social media. Fahad Al-Arifi (2014) said, “If we focus on correcting these rumors, we will not be able to continue the business in such environment. It will take a lot of time to look for bad comment in Twitter or Facebook. ”

All respondents that used social media used variety of platforms to engage with the public. They all agree in using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as main platforms of communication with the public. Some said that they use different social media sites. However, they all agree that Twitter offers the most effective platform to engage with the public because it is more popular nowadays than other social media sites. Another reason for that is because Twitter provides them with a direct way of communication with the public. They said that in Twitter they could send short messages, upload videos about the store, and share some images about the food and the menu. Therefore, those businesses heavily rely on Twitter to promote their names. According to Amjed Serdar (2014), “We use Twitter in Fotor Faris to engage with the public because it is very popular among young people and it is reachable to all people.” Also another respondent stated that it is easy and fast to get people through Twitter these days. The reason for that is because in twitter we could send our messages in short texts and upload videos and pictures for our goods.” (Fahad Al Mansour, 2014)

From the findings, it was noticed that the use of social media might not be the best use of engaging with the public. The reason for that is because the use of social media in those interviewed food businesses is basically limited only in spreading the messages to the public without utilizing other features of social media such as getting feedbacks, replying on complaints or other features that social media provides. Businesses which were interviewed used social media only to share their content with the public. Social media is only used for one-way communication by most of Saudi businesses.

Moreover, the findings show that there is no comprehensive social media plan in those businesses. One respondent stated that there is no specific strategy in using social media. Atef Ahmed (2014) said that he and his staff, “Use Twitter and Facebook just to spread the messages

to many users, which they depend on other users to continue spreading these messages.

Two other respondents admitted that they struggled in identifying the accurate strategy so it could help them to communicate with the public (Hamdi Huwaydi, 2014; Bahie Eldin, 2014). Therefore, they use social media only as a one-way of communication, just for advertisements. This implies that those businesses need to have a comprehensive plan for the use of social media so they could depend on it to manage their relationship with the customers.

In the other side, all of the three respondents that do not use social media agree that they are afraid of entering the social media environment because of lack of knowledge toward social media and the negative comments that they would receive from some people, which could hurt their business. Also they have concerns on how they would deal with complaints from customers. In fact, one business said that if they use of social media to engage with the public, they would face some backlash from some unsatisfied customers, which could lead to affect their relationship with other customers. According to Mohammed Mahmoud (2014), “The restaurant has a suggestion box in order to ask customers to write their complaints and suggestion. This method would help us to respond to the complaints without letting other customers to know about the issue. He also stated that if someone tried to reach us on social media platform to make a complaint, other users would recognize that we have an issue, which would create a massive opportunity for some people to make negative comments about the restaurant, which would make us under a lot of fire. (Mohammed Mahmoud, 2014)

RQ2: Is social media more effective than the traditional media in attracting customers?

As previously stated, most of the food businesses that were interviewed recognized the importance of using social media as a marketing tool for the business. Some of the respondents admitted that they switched from traditional tools of publicity to social media platforms. One

respondent said, “We used to promote for our products on radio and word of mouth. However, after we adopted social media, we became more recognized in the public” (Bahie Eldin, 2014). This implies that those businesses have recognized the popularity of social media among young people in Saudi Arabia, which they are considered the key public of most of the food businesses. This is similar to what Eid (2012) stated, when he said that Facebook and Twitter attracted many young Saudis so it creates good opportunity for many business to have interact with them and open direct dialogue in order to improve the business relationships with the public.

Many respondents who use social media said the main reason for using social media is because it is very popular. For example Khaled Abdullah (2014) said, “Social media has become extremely popular tool of communication among people. Thus it occupied a big part of people's life and become a sign of advanced development.” Another respondent stated that smartphones offer easy access for users to check on their Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts 24 hours and anywhere. Nowadays every person in Saudi Arabia is carrying at least one or two smartphone, which they use to access their Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts (Jeremiah Gallevo, 2014). This implies that this use of social media will help the business to maintain its relationship with the current customers and to reach more potential customers in a short time and to be exposed more in the public.

RQ3: How has social media changed marketing techniques for Saudi Arabian businesses?

Many businesses in Saudi Arabia identified the power of social media, which became an important tool to shift a lot of aspects within the society. Thus social media enforced its power within Saudi society, and it opens a great platform for some local businesses. Analysis identified that social media changed how businesses promote their names and products in the public. There are significant changes in the strategies in sending the messages.

Many respondents concur that social media has vital role in marketing and building a strong relationships with the customers. Fahad Al Mansour, Marketing Director at Classic Burger (2014) said, “Social media allows us to spread widely because the messages in social media transferred faster than the use of traditional methods.” Another respondent stated that social media is relatively low cost and offers more effective channels than the traditional method. Atef Ahmed (2014) said, “The main reason for adopting social media is because it is much cheaper than the traditional methods and more effective. Social media allowed us to reach more people in short time.”

Moreover, several respondents expressed that they recognized how effective the spreading the word in social media for their businesses. Atef Ahmed (2014) also stated, “Businesses in Saudi Arabia used to depend on the word of mouth to distribute the messages and it was effective to be exposed more in the public. However, with the emergence of social media, spreading the messages became faster and easier for the business.” Relying on others to spread the information about the business in social media, helped many businesses to reach a larger number of people than before.

The use of word of mouth in marketing in Saudi Arabia was very popular in the past. As previously mentioned, many food businesses depend on current customers to share their experience on regard the food and the service with others to increases the business exposure (Kamili, 2014). Some respondents consider the use of social media as a development tool of the word of mouth technique.

In fact, one of the respondents that used social media emphasized, “Social media is the new generation of the word-of-mouth marketing because many people carry out the messages

and distributed to others” (Atef Ahmed, 2014). He said there are some active users in Twitter and Facebook, which they considered influential to many people in Saudi Arabia (Atef Ahmed, 2014). Also Rawad Gazal (2014) supported the same claim when he said, “Many people in Saudi Arabia trust those influencers and their opinions. The use of word of mouth in social media is more credible to many people in Saudi Arabia.” With social media influencers can post positive comment about the restaurant and its food and their followers will see it as a recommendation so they will be motivate to make an action toward the business. (Kamili, 2014)

Another change in marketing in Saudi Arabia is the direct communication. As stated above, social media created a direct bridge between businesses and the public. All respondents admitted that social media allows direct communication with potential customers. For example, one respondent declared that his staff used to have a huge gap between their business and its customers using traditional methods. However, social media has filled this gap with direct channels of communication, when they used social media sites. (Molham Al Jandly, 2014)

Chapter V

Body of the Project

This research collected data based on interviews, which were conducted in Saudi Arabia regarding the use of social media in food businesses. The use of social media grows so fast among individuals in Saudi Arabia. Many businesses recognized this growth so they began to use it as a tool of communication with public. Although the result of the interviews shows that many businesses shifted to the use of social media to share their messages with the public, the research recognized that the use of social media is limited to share information about their business. The research discovered that there is no interaction between the business and the public, which is considered not a best use of social media. This chapter therefore will present the best practice of social media in Saudi Arabia, which were drawn from the similarities, and the best use of social media in the interviewed food businesses. The main objective to this study is to establish appropriate and exhaustive social media strategy to aid food businesses in Saudi Arabia to improve the engagement procedure in food businesses so they could have better relationship with the public. Based on the interviews with Saudi food businesses on regard their use of social media, the following strategies were developed in order help these businesses to have a major tool of communication between their business and the key public.

- **Determine the business objectives and goals.**

Many professionals encourage identifying the objectives and goals for the use of social media. Setting specific goals and objectives would help the business to identify the direction of the marketing process. Here are some recommended objectives and goals for Saudi food businesses:

Goals:

1. To establish social media as one of the primary tools of communication between businesses and the target public.
2. To utilize social media officially among the Saudi food businesses for publicizing their brands/products.
3. To enable food businesses to provide their innovative services and quality goods to the community of Saudi Arabia.

Objectives:

1. Increase knowledge about food businesses utilizing social media to provide their innovative services to customers.
 2. Establish appropriate social media strategy to aid improving the relations with the customers and the society.
 3. Increase the use of social media within the food organizations.
 4. Set food organizations as an example for other organizations in different fields to adopt the concept.
- **Design integrated social media platform to provide the customers with innovative services.**

Design a social media platform with the help of social media specialist or designer that integrates together all the popular social media sites Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. The research identified that several food businesses do not use social media to interact with their customers. Social media platform designs as friendly user and easy to adopt by many organizations. Focusing on one social media platform to engage with customers would

help the business to have sufficient relationship with them. Twitter is the most popular social media platform in Saudi Arabia, according to The Social Clinic report (2014). And from the interviews, some respondents preferred Twitter to engage with customers due to its popularity. Moreover this social media platform should be designed to provide the customers with the necessary information about food business and restaurants. Also it will provide to the customers with restaurants' innovative services. These innovative services can include ordering online and food delivery since it is not quite offered by many food businesses.

- **Follow and listen to your followers.**

Twitter is an excellent platform to engage with the public. So the business needs to attract many users in order to be visible. Began to follow people around you on Twitter. The Twitter search engine is an excellent method to find and follow people. Encourage your current customers to follow you in Twitter in order to provide them with offers and what is new. Give them some promotions and rewards to follow your business and share it with others. On the other hand, business needs to monitor their page daily and update their information so their followers keep up with them. Also it is very important to look for what their followers are saying about them in order to respond to any complaint or question. This will open two-way communication with the users. So replying on complaints and questions is very necessary for business to manage its relationship with current customers and build new relationships with potential customers.

- **Share images, video and links in your Tweets.**

Twitter should be used not only for sending words to your followers. It also can be used to share images, short videos and links for the business. People love to see images, videos and links because it brings them closer to the business. The use of this kind of messages will allow the users to receive the information in a simpler way and faster. Engage with your follower on

regard the menu items by images. Take pictures of the food you offer and share it in Twitter.

Also encouraging your followers to retweet to others in order to reach as many possible users or to share their food and experiment with photos. Moreover, encourage them to upload their favorite food in the restaurant.

- **Use one or two hashtags to reach more Twitter users.**

Using unique hashtags will help the business to attract many people and to expand your target. Creating your own brand hashtag will help the business to manage its relationship and make the name of the business more visible. Also this could be used during campaign for promotions and rewards. The use of hashtags will allow the followers to interact during the duration of the promotion and offer. Moreover, using trendy hashtags would help the business to engage many people. Twitter allows people to see which hashtag is very popular among users. So the business has the ability to engage with many users through these hashtags.

- **Partnering with other platforms in twitter that involve with food business.**

Utilizing other platforms in Twitter that involve with food business for customers reviews, public rating, ranking, governmental issues such as awareness of fines, shutting down restaurants and rewards. There are some platforms in Saudi Arabia that have this interest in Twitter such as Saudi Restaurants page and Jeddah Restaurants page. This could make users active with the business, which will generate a strong relationship with users.

- **Engage with Twitter's influencer users.**

Encourage Twitter's influential users in Saudi Arabia to engage with them. As a PR practitioner, it is preferred to raise awareness about the business by using influencers as third party endorsement. As previously mentioned in the result chapter, the word of mouth is very big tool of marketing in Saudi Arabia. Also the results of the interview emphasizes that Twitter

offers such a thing. Now some influencer users in Twitter have the ability to make an impact on others. Thus it is very important to the business to grab these influencer's attentions so they play a role in distributing the business messages in order to generate sustainable relationship with customers or public.

- **Use mention to reach more users in Twitter.**

Twitter offers a way for the business to be visible. Twitter mentions help users to see who mentioned them in their Tweets. So this could be beneficial to the business to monitor what users are saying about the business in order to reply on their comments. Another benefit from mention is the ability to allow other users who are not your follower to recognize your name, which could help them to reach for potential future customers.

- **Use the search engine in Twitter to search for any Tweet about your business.**

Businesses could use the engine search in Twitter to look for comments and complaints from customers in order to reply and answer their questions. Similar to the previous point, the search engine in Twitter allows the business to manage what people are saying about your food business. In addition, the search engine in Twitter allows users to search with some restrict in order to see what you are looking for. For example, if you looking to search for people near you to provide them with offers and today's menu, you could use filtration to limited the search only for people who are near the restaurant.

- **Promoting about the business account in Twitter through other methods.**

It is a necessity to promote the business account through and with the help of traditional outlets. Television, radios, newspapers, magazines, posters, word of mouth and billboards are still powerful tool in promotion. This will reach a wider and bigger public including: governmental organizations, food businesses, restaurants, and customers.

- **Register in Qaym website for measurement.**

It is very important to business to measure its success of using social media. Qaym is a website which allow restaurants and food business to evaluate the business interaction with social media users. Qaym provide an evaluation about the business based on their followers' recommendations, comments and complains about the business and its food. Qaym involved in measuring what people say about the business in their website, and in Twitter and Facebook. This will help the business to see whether they achieve their goals and objectives or not.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Overall, this creative project was conducted to design a comprehensive plan for the use of social media to help food businesses in Saudi Arabia to improve their engagement process with the public. The goal of this creative project is how social media could provide an advanced tool for businesses to engage with people. This research noticed that social media has become extremely popular tool of communication among people. Some businesses in Saudi Arabia paid their attention to the popularity of the use of social media. So they adopted the use of social media in their practice to use it as a tool of communication. This project aimed to illustrate how Saudi businesses utilized social media platforms in order to engage with their customers and reach more potential customers.

This project began with the fundamental review of some previous works in the area to understand the role of social media in Saudi businesses. The literature review provided an important implication, and that is social media enforced its power within Saudi society, and it opens a great platform for some local food businesses. According to the literature review social media attracts businesses in Saudi Arabia to develop a way of communication with public in order to promote their business. Social media have a positive impact on businesses because it played big role in regard delivering the information. Many businesses in Saudi Arabia recognized the use of social media as an alternative for the traditional methods of communication. Therefore, they embraced the idea of using social media to take advantage of these platforms to have effective interaction with the public. However, there are some studies suggested that businesses in Saudi Arabia should enhance their use of social media in order to have good relationships with the public.

In order to design a comprehensive a social media guideline for food businesses, interviews were conducted with several food businesses in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The study demonstrates that from the beginning, often businesses in Saudi Arabia do not have effective use of social media because they do not have social media plan to guide them how they should engage with their customers and what kind of information they should provide. This study suggested that the use of social media is restricted for promoting the name of the business. Therefore this project was conducted to illustrate to Saudi food businesses that they need to be active in these platform by interacting with social media users in two-way communication.

Limitations:

There are several limitations in this study. First, the researcher faced some challenges in conducting the interviews personally. As a result of conducting the interview in Saudi Arabia, the researcher could not be involved directly with the interviewees. The reason for that is because of the distance between the researcher and the businesses in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, because of several businesses refused to be interviewed through Skype or e-mail. Therefore, these interviews were conducted by other people, which limited some advantage of face-to-face interview such as the ability to observe the nonverbal behavior, to facilitate more complex questionnaire, or to reach for more detailed answers. Second, the interviewers faced some issue in regard refusing some businesses to participate in this study. There is no specific reason for that. The researcher at the beginning proposed 20 food businesses in Saudi Arabia, but only 12 businesses agreed to participate in this study. Third, the answers of the respondents in the interviews were less in depth, which considered the biggest limitation in this study. There is not much of information from respondents, which make it difficult to understand the role of social

media in these businesses. In addition, this limitation created another disadvantage, which is the difficulty to make generalizations to other businesses in Saudi Arabia.

Future Research/ Recommendation:

To conduct future research for this topic, several recommendations could help the researcher to have further and advanced research implication about the role of social media in Saudi businesses. For future research, A case study of multiple business using social media could be performed to compare how this business utilize social media in comparing with the strategies in this study. Moreover, a study may be conducted on businesses in Saudi Arabia that do not rely on social media as a tool of communication with the public. An interview also could be performed as a methodology for this study in order to understand why these businesses still would not use social media to engage with the public. Using social media as a tool of communication with the customers is relatively new in Saudi Arabia, which offers a good opportunity to study this topic from different perspectives. Future studies should examine how social media is being used among businesses in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter VI

Outside Reviews of the Project

STUDENT: Abdullah Faraj
DEGREE: Master of Arts
MAJOR: Public Relations
March 27, 2014

Evaluated by Hani Basahal

Dear Dr. Sumner:

I'm Hani Basahal. I have a bachelor's degree in Mass Communication with Public Relations from Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK. I had my first work experience in SKAB Holding Company. I used to work in Human Resources Division for one year and three months. I am currently the assistant manager of Employees' Relations department in Bab Rizq Jameel Community Initiative since 2011. I have not personally met Abdullah; he is friend of my friend Hanin Munawar, who kindly asked me to evaluate his creative project in order to complete one of the creative project requirements.

Generally, the project is very well thought out. This kind of study is new and Saudi markets really need it in order to improve and develop through using the technology. This project encourages the Saudi food businesses to take extremely benefits from using social media platforms to create two-way communications with their public. I think that Abdullah made a good decision when he has chosen an interested topic like this to be added to other valuable studies in Saudi PR field.

Abdullah has covered important aspects, which made a solid literature review. Regardless the obstacles (such as distance and time) he faced to collect data, he could use an interview in methodology. Choosing 12 Saudi food businesses from different classes was a smart choice from the researcher, which led to come up with various opinions about using social media as an active tool in marketing, and that is already shown in the result section.

The quality of the project gives useful concepts about using social media; especially Twitter as an active social media platform for helping the Saudi food businesses. From my perspective, this topic is sensitive since these platforms are updated and changed during time. For that reason, businesses need to be updated too in order to use these platforms in professional way. Creating a social media plan that includes different strategy is an important matter, but I wish if Abdullah could implement this plan on one of the selected food businesses in order to measure the adoption of this project concept.

Here are some points that might be added to the researcher's strategies. I suggest expanding the project through using multiple platforms beside Twitter such as Instagram to attract people through different food pictures form menus. Also, using Twitter to interact with

followers is an important issue, especially when the food business retweets the most beneficial tweets that help to improve its products and services. This step will encourage other followers to communicate with the food business effectively. In addition, keeping touch with customers is essential through doing monthly activities and giving prizes for the winners.

Creating a social media plan to help Saudi food businesses is an interesting idea. In my opinion, this project tries to make sure that these food businesses take extremely benefits from using Twitter as a vital social media platform. The researcher did a good job to make this study valuable in PR field through presenting different strategies that will help Saudi food businesses. Expanding, improving, and implying this study by PR professionals through creating a comprehensive campaign will help Saudi food businesses and other businesses to take advantages from different social media platforms.

Best Regards,
Hani Basahal

Assistant Manager of Employees' Relations department Bab Rizq Jameel
E-mail: hanicom101@gmail.com
Phone number: 00966 54 217 2197

An evaluation of the creative project entitled *Designing social media plan for food business in Saudi Arabia* by the student Abdullah Faraj.

STUDENT: Abdullah Faraj
DEGREE: Master of Arts
MAJOR: Public Relations
March 27, 2014.

Evaluated by Mustafa Mohammed Alfaqeeh

Dear Dr. Sumner:

I'm Mustafa Mohammed Alfaqeeh. I obtained Master degree in Media and Journalism from Misr International privet University. I had worked in Al blad Newspaper, Okaz Newspaper, STC Company, and currently work as a Public Relations manger in The Asseer Company of Journalism. I have known Abdullah through a mutual interest in regarding the work of the PR. So he asked me to evaluate his creative project in order to complete the requirements of the creative project.

This creative project is very well thought, and interested in a way to enhance the electronic and online services within the Saudi society. This study is a new way of looking into the local Saudi markets that must consider in order to develop and improve electronic and online services. Social media is very well adopted among the whole society including, young and old. Therefore, Looking to the Saudi markets through a new angle that is social media is very interested. And can be spread among other businesses and organizations.

Abdullah mentioned in his literature his obstacles that he faced conducting this project such as distance and time differences. But he did not mentioned how these restaurants employees such as supervisors and mangers reacted when introduced the idea of the project introduced to them where they were enthusiastic about it or it was something that they just want to do.

Twitter is one of the most influencing social media within the society. Therefore, choosing Twitter among the other platforms was a good choice since most of people have an account in Twitter. Moreover, using Instagram as a secondary platform to be examining for this project is another good choice. The reason for mentioning this because this platform its best feature is sharing photos. Thus food businesses are usually promoting their menu with photos. Therefore, Saudi food businesses should link with Instagram so photos can play big role in promoting this platform. Nevertheless, this project should be consider to be adopted by other businesses not only food businesses, but also can be adopted by educational businesses, engineering businesses, and others.

This project will help improve the PR role within the companies in Saudi Arabia. Especially that there is misconception of PR practitioners within the society regarding the importance of Public Relations. However, What is next for a practitioner: I think Abdullah or

any other PR practitioner who becomes interested in applying this project should strategic planning for promoting this project.

Really appreciate the work that is offer with this project and I hope for better process for this project.

Kind Regards,
Mustafa Alfaqeeh

Public Relations manager at the Asseer Company of Journalism

E-mail address: mo2005f@hotmail.com

Phone number 00966 55 650 1515

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Part A: (All respondents answer these questioners)

1. What methods have you used to engage with the public?
2. Who is your consumer and do think that they are active in social media?
3. Does your business use social media as a method of engaging with the audience?

Part B: If the answer of question 3 is yes, please answer (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)

4. For what purpose do you use social media?
5. What is the motive that got you to use social media?
6. How often do you use social media, is it frequently or from time to time?
7. Which social media do you use as a way of marketing for your business?
8. Do you think social media changed the attitude of the customers toward your business?
9. Do you reply to any comment or complain in social media?
10. Do have a strategy for replying in social media? And how do you reply?

Part C: If the answer of question 3 is No, (11, 12, 13, 14)

11. Why you did not consider using social media?
12. How do you know that your customers are satisfied with your service?
13. What makes the business still doesn't use the social media especially Twitter in advertising and public relations practices?

14. Do you think social media would help your business as a small food restaurant to become one of the local popular restaurants and how?

15. What type of information that you would share with the public?

Part D: (16, 17) in both situation B & C

16. Do you use the same message in different media channels?

17. What are some of the limitations that you experienced (or would face) when using social media?