



Original Research Article

Adoption of Social Media Marketing Among Agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia

Nolila Mohd Nawil*, Najihah Baharudin¹, Nurul Nadia Ramli¹

¹Department of Agribusiness and Bioresource Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: Nolila Mohd Nawil, Department of Agribusiness and Bioresource Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia; nolila@upm.edu.my

Abstract: Social media has become one of the main platforms for businesses across the globe to market products or services. However, some entrepreneurs remain doubtful over the efficacy of social media marketing relative to conventional marketing in attracting interests from their targeted audience of diverse backgrounds. Besides, social media is known primarily as the medium for people around the world to socialise with everyone, despite marketing their products or services, especially agro-based products. Inadequate knowledge on how to utilise the platform to market their products by using social media have refrained them from using social media marketing in their business because they require more time and assistance to learn how to employ social media marketing. Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate the adoption of social media marketing among agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire via an online survey. The questionnaires were distributed through social media platforms and via email to the targeted respondents using a purposive sampling method. A total of 113 respondents from 12 states in Peninsular Malaysia participated in this study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive, Chi-square and factor analysis. The results indicated that the adoption level of social media marketing among agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia is on the medium high level, and the highest and most adopted social media platform is Facebook. The results of Chi-square analysis showed that only types of agro-based business operated has an association with the adoption of social media marketing among agropreneurs. Factor analysis discovered four latent factors on the adoption of social media marketing among agropreneurs, namely perceived usefulness, social influence, perceived ease of use and facilitating conditions. Hence, entrepreneurs who are already adopted social media marketing should cooperate and create an association of online agropreneurs to encourage other entrepreneurs to start embracing social media marketing.

Keywords: adoption; agropreneurs; social media; Peninsular Malaysia; SMEs

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1. Introduction

The transformation of a country's agriculture depends on the availability and ease of access to the advanced technologies provided by the relevant stakeholders in the sector to develop human resources. Entrepreneurship is widely known to be the engine of economic growth for a country, while developing human resources. According to the Ministry of Entrepreneur and Co-operative Development (MECD), an entrepreneur is an individual who has the reputation of providing innovative products or services, which is also characterised by resilience and competitiveness in creating values. An entrepreneur is also able to embrace any risks or uncertainties and assumes full responsibility for the outcome. The conceptual and operational development of entrepreneurship has become increasingly important in Malaysia. Sahri (2007) defined entrepreneurs as people who are engaged in an enterprise or a business, whether in production, agriculture, service or livestock. Jarkko *et al.* (2006) coined the term *agropreneurs* that derive from *agro*, agriculture and *preneur*, entrepreneur. It is a term used to define entrepreneurial farmers who aspire to excel in a farming business. As it is, agropreneurs should diversify their operations by setting up businesses that can boost their profits and allowing them to survive on the farm. Thus, an agropreneur is someone who uses agriculture to build his or her business. On the other hand, Richards and Bulkley (2007) defined agricultural entrepreneurs or agropreneurs as someone, who performs all activities that assist farmers in regulating a free market economy. In Malaysia, efforts have been made by the relevant stakeholders to increase the competitiveness of agropreneurs by encouraging the use of new technology such as digital marketing, specifically social media.

When digital marketing was introduced, communication has grown into more cybernetic than physical over time. In the era of global digitalisation and the introduction of new technologies, most of the activities are transformed from classical marketing to digital marketing due to the relatively lower cost of studying and the processing speed of big data has enhanced product promotion (Robul, 2020). For the past few years, social media has become a global phenomenon. The development of social media does not indicate any signs of ending or moving backward, and it is very vibrant (Gaber & Wright, 2014). According to Statista (2020), the record of global active internet users is totaled at 4.54 billion, with over 3.8 billion active users of social media. Social media has become the foundation of electronic communications that people use to share information, personal messages, ideas and other contents for online communities. Social media as defined by Safko and Brake (2009) refers to activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using conversational media.

The widespread global adoption of social media has shaped social engagement among individuals, community and society. As of January 2015, there are 1.685 billion globally active mobile social accounts, which constitute 23% of the penetration. In 2020, there are an estimated 3.6 billion users of social media, and it is projected to increase further up to 4.41 billion in 2025 (Statista, 2020). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019), the population of Malaysia in 2019 is estimated at 32.6 million, which is an increase from

32.4 million in 2018 with the urbanisation rate is 76.6% of the total population. As of January 2020, Malaysia's active internet users accounted for 27.1 million with active social media users accounted for 81% of the total population (Statista, 2020). Malaysian users of social media spend on, an average of three hours and 27 minutes a day on any devices. In all the social networking platforms, Facebook has been the leading website with a remarkable rise over the last few years (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2014). The report by Bigdomain.my (2019) found that Facebook is a popular site among Internet users in Malaysia with 23 million Facebook users and it is expected to hit 24.2 million users in 2023, up from 23 million in 2018. Besides Facebook, the other top five social media platforms used by Malaysians are Youtube, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok. Besides, Hashim *et al.* (2016) revealed that most entrepreneurs believed social commerce is the future way of doing businesses and every entrepreneur needs to connect with social media not only to discuss products and services with customers, but also as a mean to facilitate entrepreneurs in making vital and critical business decisions. Interestingly, social media is also achieving popularity in the agriculture sector. The major platforms for the dissemination of agricultural information include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs. Ultimately, exploiting social media for enhanced communication is not a choice but a necessity because agriculture is one of the major sectors with great importance as part of the nation's engine growth. Thus, the objective of this study is to determine factors influencing the adoption of social media marketing among agro-based entrepreneurs or agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Social media has been used widely by business organisations in conducting their marketing activities, whether they are selling products or services. Social media functions as an instrument for socialisation and communication based on the viewpoint of the individual, whereas from the business viewpoint, social media functions as a medium by which businesses connect with clientele as a whole (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hutton & Fosdick, 2011; Che Nawi *et al.*, 2019). Remarkably, social media needed only a few years to grab the attention and time of Internet users since its inception. The adoption of social media has since expanded (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2014; Ahmad *et al.*, 2019) and has changed the way of interaction between consumers and organisations (Akman & Mishra, 2017). Parveen *et al.* (2015) stated that the competency and performance of institutions such as development in information, approachability and enrichment on customer service and relations activities can be better by social media. Cox (2012) described that businesses are capable of networking with clienteles to attain an improved understanding of customer requirements and build connections by using social media. Chmielecki (2014) noted that marketers are able to get a way and a voice to converse with prospective customers and partners through social network media. The adoption of marketing strategies based on social media has tremendously improved the interaction of the firms with consumers; improve the marketing strategies based on consumer feedback as well as helping in gaining marketing information (Galati *et al.*, 2017). The adoption of social media for business

procedures that motivates consumer and business commitment levels is indeed a rising trend (Tuten & Angermeier, 2013).

Social media has been recognised as a viable marketing tactic by many organizations across the globe to reach their key audiences. Dahnil *et al.* (2014) characterised social media marketing as involving the marketing of products, brands, services, thoughts and information via the social media platform and can be recognised as an emerging business routine. According to Barefoot and Szabo (2010), social media marketing is characterised as utilizing the sites of social networking as channels to promote or advertise a company and selling products. Eagleman (2013) described social media as a unique form of marketing and communication strategy. Further, Gensler *et al.* (2013) stated that a brand's performance may be affected by online presence via social media in accomplishing marketing actions. Hence, social media marketing is indeed an emerging trend that is quickly evolving, and with the advancement of social media platforms, businesses are able to reach their targeted audiences faster.

Razak and Latip (2016) further proposed the use of social media as a collaborative platform. It allows companies to form a brand image and brand awareness, boost sales and captivate new customers, and secure present customers. In fact, Shahizan *et al.* (2012) affirmed that well-established companies in Malaysia have broadly embraced social media as a marketing tool. Hong *et al.* (2015), on the other hand, declare social media as a trend among the younger generation and business partners, as indicated by an overwhelming marketer (92%) based on Hubspot's 2014 figures, that social media marketing is the key to boosting business development. Thus, in ensuring their business can cover a wider market and customers, agropreneurs need to use social media marketing as one of the means in running the business.

3. Materials and Methods

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire via an online survey. The questionnaires were distributed through social media platforms and via email to the targeted respondents using a purposive sampling method. A total of 113 respondents from 12 states in Peninsular Malaysia participated in this study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis, Chi-square analysis and factor analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the fundamental features of the data in this study. It described the respondents' profiles and their adoption of social media marketing in business. Meanwhile, Chi-square analysis was carried out to identify the association between respondent's business profiles and the adoption of a social media marketing platform. Factor analysis, on the other hand, was utilised to determine the latent factors influencing the adoption of social media marketing platforms among agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia.

4. Results and Discussions

This section discussed the findings of the study, which were analysed using descriptive, Chi-square and factor analysis.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the sample as well as the business profile of the respondents of this study. In terms of the types of agro-based business operated by the respondents, this study has classified the types into seven categories as outlined in Table 1. Most of the respondents were operating in the food processing business, which constituted 28% (32) of respondents. This is followed by animal rearing business with 20% (23) respondents and farming business with 19% (21) respondents. Approximately, 11% (12 respondents) of the total respondents were operating fisheries and aquaculture business. There were around 10% (11 respondents) and 4% (five respondents), respectively, of respondents involved in floriculture business and plantation businesses. .

In terms of monthly income earning from the operated business, it can be categorised into eight groups, as presented in Table 1. Most of the respondents belonged to the income levels of less than RM 1,500, which constitutes of 32% respondents. Respondents with a monthly income earning between RM 1,501 to RM 3,000 composed the second-highest percentage which is 26% 3 respondents, followed by the group of RM 3,001 to RM 4,500 which constitutes 17% respondents and 10% respondents of the respondents fall into RM 4,501 to RM 6,000 level. The income levels of RM 6,001 to RM 7,500 and more than RM 10,001 each constitutes 5% respondents of the total respondents.

Meanwhile, there were only 3% of respondents earning between RM 7,501 to RM 8,500 and 2% earning at RM 8,501 to RM 10,000 income level. The result outlined in Table 1 showed that most of the respondents have been involved in the business for less than two years, accounting for 39% (44 respondents) of the total respondents. This is followed by 34% with two to four years of involvement, 14% with five to seven years, 8% for more than 10 years and the least have been between eight to 10 years, accounting 5% from the total respondents.

Table 1. Respondent's business profiles.

Demographic Variables	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Type of Business		
Farming	21	19
Animal Rearing	23	20
Fisheries and Aquaculture	12	11
Plantation	5	4
Food Processing	32	28
Non-Food Processing	9	8
Floriculture	11	10

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Monthly Income		
< RM 1,500	35	32
RM 1,500–RM 3,000	30	27
RM 3,001–RM 4,500	19	17
RM 4,501–RM 6,000	12	11
RM 6,001–RM 7,500	5	4
RM 7,501–RM 8,500	4	3
RM 8,501–RM 10,000	2	2
>RM 10,000	5	4
Years Involved in the Business		
< 2 years	44	39
2–4 years	38	34
5–7 years	6	14
8–10 years	6	5
> 10 years	9	8

Respondents were asked to answer the questions regarding their current level adoption of social media marketing. In the question posed to them, the level of adoption was classified into five levels, notably low, medium-low, medium, medium-high and high. The respondents were required to choose one out of the multiple choices' answers given in the question and rate their own level of adoption, that is, which represents the best of their current adoption level of social media marketing. Table 2 shows the results from the respondents themselves and, it can be clearly seen that most of the respondents rated their adoption level as medium-high level, accounting for 50% of the total respondents. There were about 25% of respondents rated their adoption level of social media marketing as a high level. Meanwhile, a medium level of adoption of social media marketing accounts for 18% respondents. The lowest adoption level rated by the respondents is a medium low, which comprises 7% of the total respondents. There were none of the respondents rated their adoption level of social media marketing as a low level.

Table 2. The adoption level of social media marketing among the respondents.

Adoption level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Medium low	8	7
Medium	20	18
Medium high	57	50
High	28	25

Respondents were also asked which social media platforms they have adopted for their business, and they were allowed to choose more than one answer. As shown in Table 3, an overwhelming majority of the respondents adopted Facebook for their business which was by 97% of respondents. This is relevant because the finding in Global Web Index by US Census Bureau (2014) showed that Facebook usage is the highest accounted for 53% of the

total population in Malaysia. Meanwhile, Instagram is the second most adopted social media platform among the respondents, which comprises 41% of respondents, followed by BlogSpot with 24% respondents. There are 6% respondents of the respondents that adopted Twitter and 5% of respondents adopted Groupon for their business. Only 4% of the respondents adopted YouTube for their business activities. The use of social media marketing is really relevant at the moment because a report by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) revealed that among five popular activities of internet usage among Malaysian, the highest is participating in social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others which accounted for 97.1%.

Table 3. The adoption of social media marketing platform by respondents.

Type of social media	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Facebook	110	97
Instagram	46	41
Twitter	7	6
YouTube	5	4
Blogspot	27	24
Groupon	6	5

4.2 Chi-square Analysis

The Chi-square analysis was employed to analyse the association between the respondent's business profile and the adoption of social media marketing. There are three variables of respondent's business profile tested in this study, which include the types of agro-based business operated, monthly income and years involved in the business. The hypotheses that were developed and tested in this study are as follows:

H1: There is a significant association between respondent's types of agro-based business and the adoption of social media marketing.

H2: There is a significant association between respondent's monthly income and the adoption of social media marketing.

H3: There is a significant association between respondent's years involved in the business and the adoption of social media marketing.

Based on the result of Chi-square analysis placed in Table 4, there is only one variable that was significantly associated with the adoption of social media marketing, which is the type of agro-based business operated by the respondents at 5% significant level ($\alpha= 0.05$). One of the possible reasons is because different types of agro-based business have its own business environment that can influence the decision to adopt social media marketing by the agropreneurs. Besides, the market of different types of agro-based businesses varies and that

affects the readiness of the market to accept social media marketing, which in turn affects the agropreneurs decision to adopt social media marketing.

Table 4. Association between respondent’s business profiles and the adoption of social media marketing.

Variables	X^2	df	Significant	Decision
Types of agro-based business	13.138	6	0.041*	Reject H_0
Monthly income	6.877	7	0.442	Fail to reject H_0
Years involved in the business	3.626	4	0.459	Fail to reject H_0

4.3 Factor Analysis

The result of factor analysis is presented in Table 5. From the result, it can be seen that four factors were extracted from the factor solution which are perceived usefulness, social influence, perceived ease of use and facilitating conditions. The first factor is labeled as perceived usefulness and it consists of five sub-variables. This factor also appears to be the leading factor with the highest total of variance explained accounted for 24.253. The factor loadings of sub-variables in this factor are “using social media improves the performance of marketing activities of my business” (0.856), “using social media enhances the effectiveness of marketing my product” (0.846), “I find social media useful in doing marketing activities for my business” (0.791), “using social media enables me to accomplish marketing activities more quickly” (0.787) and “functions of social media are very useful for me to do marketing activities for my business” (0.708). The factor of perceived usefulness described in this study conforms with the previous study that was performed in other contexts and involving other technologies (Davis, 1989; Porter & Donthu, 2006). The study found that perceived usefulness is the most significant influencing factor in adoption.

The second factor from the factor analysis result is labeled as social influence. The total variance explained for social influence is 23.395, and it contains four sub-variables. The factor loadings of sub-variables in this factor are “my family think that I should use social media to market my product” (0.877), “my close friends think that I should use social media to market my product” (0.852), “people who influence my behaviour think that I should use social media to market my product” (0.845) and “people who are important to me think that I should use social media to market my product” (0.783). The result indicates that social influence the adoption of social media marketing among agro-based entrepreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia. According to Hong *et al.* (2015), social influence has proven to be the influencing factor in entrepreneurs’ behavioural intention in adopting social media marketing.

Table 5. Factors influencing the adoption of social media among agro-based entrepreneurs.

Items	Factor Loadings			
	F1	F2	F3	F4
Perceived Usefulness				
Using social media improves the performance of marketing activities of my business.	0.856			
Using social media enhances the effectiveness of marketing my product.	0.846			
I find social media useful in doing marketing activities for my business.	0.791			
Using social media enables me to accomplish marketing activities more quickly.	0.787			
Functions of social media are very useful for me to do marketing activities for my business.	0.708			
Social Influence				
My family thinks that I should use social media to market my product.		0.877		
My close friends think that I should use social media to market my product.		0.852		
People who influence my behavior think that I should use social media to market my product.		0.845		
People who are important to me think that I should use social media to market my product.		0.783		
Perceived Ease of Use				
Learning how to use social media for my marketing activities is easy for me.			0.866	
Social media is easy to use in order to accomplish my marketing activities.			0.758	
Overall, I find social media is easy to use to market my product.			0.691	
I find it easy to be skillful in using social media to market my product.			0.691	
Facilitating Condition				
Social media is compatible with other technologies that I used.				0.827
I have the knowledge necessary to use social media to market my product.				0.769
Guidance is available for me to use social media to market my product effectively.				0.707

Items	Factor Loadings			
	F1	F2	F3	F4
A specific person (or group) is available for assistance with system difficulties.				0.642
% of Variance Explained	24.253	23.395	18.557	18.318
Total Variance Explained	24.253	47.648	66.205	84.523
Cronbach's Alpha	0.944	0.921	0.959	0.906

Perceived ease of use is the third recognised factor which also has four sub-variables with the total variance explained of 18.557. The factor loadings of the sub-variables in the third factor are “learning how to use social media for my marketing activities is easy for me” (0.866), “social media is easy to use in order to accomplish my marketing activities” (0.758), “overall, I find social media is easy to use to market my product” (0.691) and “I find it easy to be skillful in using social media to market my product” (0.691). This shows that perceived ease of use is one of the factors that influence the adoption of social media marketing among agro-based entrepreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia. Sago (2013) investigated the use of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google among university students, and the study found that ease of use has a positive influence on social media adoption.

The final factor is named as facilitating conditions. The total variance explained of the factor is 18.318, and four sub-variables pertain to facilitating conditions. The factor loadings of all the sub-variables in this factor are “social media is compatible with other technologies that I used” (0.827), “I have the knowledge necessary to use social media for marketing my product” (0.769), “guidance is available for me to use social media for marketing my product effectively” (0.707), and “a specific person (or group) is available for assistance with system difficulties” (0.642). Facilitating conditions is one of the factors that influence the adoption of social media marketing among agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia. It has also been found that facilitating conditions have a strong positive effect on the adoption of social media marketing by entrepreneurs (Hong *et al.*, 2015). Finally, the results of Cronbach's Alpha scores for all four factors are 0.944, 0.921, 0.959 and 0.906 respectively, which is considered acceptable and reliable.

5. Conclusion

Generally, social media marketing has been adopted by agro-based entrepreneurs, also known as agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia to perform marketing activities for their businesses. In terms of agro-food based business, the food processor is the highest group of agropreneurs that adopted social media marketing for their business. However, most of the respondents have a low-income level which is less than RM 1500 and they have just started their business for less than two years. As for the adoption level of social media marketing among agropreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia, most of the respondents were at a medium high

level, which indicates that the adoption level is quite high. The highest social media platform adopted among agropreneurs is Facebook. Based on the results of chi-square analysis, there is an association between respondent's business profile, namely the types of agro-based business operated and the adoption of social media marketing among agro-based entrepreneurs. The results of factor analysis indicated four latent factors that can be associated with the adoption of social media marketing among agro-based entrepreneurs in Peninsular Malaysia. The factors are perceived usefulness, social influence, perceived ease of use and facilitating conditions. Hence, existing entrepreneurs that have adopted social media marketing should cooperate and create an association of online agropreneurs to encourage other fellow entrepreneurs to start embracing social media marketing. Apart from that, agriculture agencies should also organise more training on entrepreneurial skills to foster more efficient use of social media marketing.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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