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How has Facebook Help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca Survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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Abstract

Following the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO), single mothers are among the most severely affected. This group is not only losing their source of income due to the MCO, but most of them do not have sufficient savings to support their families. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca towards the usage of Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The objective of this study is to explore how Facebook helped B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The research adopted a qualitative in-depth interview for the data collection process. For data analysis, the researcher analysed the findings using a thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The results show that B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca had a very positive perception towards Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic due to several factors. Besides, the results also indicates that Facebook help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic in several ways, such as improving the (1) visibility of the products, (2) promoting the products, (3) cost cutting, and (4) customer engagement. The results also reveal that there are five reasons why Facebook is considered as the best social media platform in aiding small businesses generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: Facebook, B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs, Malacca, Survive, COVID-19.

Introduction

The titles of mom, mummy, or mother are synonymous with women who have given birth. This group is the pillar of strength for every family. In terms of the attention, love, sacrifice given to one's family, no comparison can be made. In an effort to dedicate initiatives as a wife in the family, sometimes, this group also join hands with the head of the family to continue fighting for their survival, especially among the B40 category. Even more heart-wrenching, when the woman in the family has to shoulder two responsibilities at once as a mother and father during certain circumstances, such as being divorced or having experienced the death

of their spouse. In Melaka, a total of 67.4% of the population in the urban area consists of the B40 group, while 6.6% of rural residents have B40 status (Economic Affairs Ministry, 2018).

Single mother refers to a woman with the title of mother who raises and educates her child alone without the presence of her husband due to being divorced, the death of a spouse, and so on (DBP, 2016). According to Thye (2021), society plays a significant role in supporting single mothers. Single mothers are the most vulnerable group under the women empowerment sector and because of that, higher priority should be given to them, and this should be highlighted in our society. Besides, the biggest challenges that single mothers face are balancing their responsibilities of committing to their 9-to-5 job, while taking care of their children at home. That is why entrepreneurship and jobs that provide flexibility are much more suitable for them to generate income (Yao, 2020).

Living in the era of COVID-19 Pandemic, single mothers must be wise in marketing their products and cannot anymore rely on the face-to-face sales and marketing approach. Online business has numerous advantages, for example, it can assist a seller to promote their products and/ or services quickly and effectively. According to Zain (2021), online businesses have become popular because they offer many advantages that traditional businesses cannot provide. This business method is simple to launch and requires little startup capital. Additionally, there is fewer risks, and traders do not need to hire many employees to run their businesses.

As reported by Mulia (2020), at least 60% of respondents in Malaysia have been actively buying goods online since the implementation of MCO compared against the periods before MCO was implemented. While, according to the Southeast Asia (SEA) 2021 e-Commerce Barometer Report issued by Group (2022), the number of online shoppers in Southeast Asia is expected to continue to increase to approximately 380 million people by 2026. The Southeast Asia-based tech logistics company has teamed up with DPD Group to release a report for the first time that conduct research on online shoppers and shipping options in SEA. The survey was conducted in July 2021 at six countries, namely, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, with the data of more than 9,000 respondents showed that, since the pandemic began two years ago, approximately 70 million online shoppers were recorded in SEA. Therefore, single mothers should take this opportunity to market their products online.

Literature Review

Online shopping is a trend in today's society since the use of the Internet has increased in the last decade. Goods and services are sold online using various channels, such as social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram; websites; and applications, such as Shopee and Lazada, which are advertised in individual or group blogs. Its main purpose is to attract users to browse and buy goods and/ or services offered by merchants. Furthermore, purchasing over the Internet has been made even easier with electronic payments through online banking or credit cards. The use of online sales platforms is becoming more popular among consumers to buy essential goods during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. As such, merchants need to be prepared to focus more on several aspects, such as exploring new products, providing more economical price offers, user-friendly websites, faster delivery services, cashless payments, and consumer satisfaction before and after purchase (Omar et al., 2021).

Business owners in Malaysia should take advantage of the growing popularity of online shopping by operating their operations online. There are numerous benefits of running an online business. First, it only requires a small amount of capital. Second, the overall cost of establishing such a business is lower than establishing a conventional one, in particular, a physical retail store. Such an approach also comes at a much lower risk compared to physical business. Lastly, an online store can be operated 24 hours a day, and has the potential to reach customers all over the world (Muslim, 2021).

The emergence of various applications and the use of social media as a business medium shows that traders have used opportunities and spaces that open up the acceptance of Malaysian society towards E-Business. Web and mobile and social media applications are platforms commonly used by sellers and consumers for online business transactions. There are various online platforms that can be used, such as Lazada, Shopee, Facebook, WhatsApp, or applications created by the government or certain organizations that can be used as a bridge to market and sell business goods. All these applications are ready to accommodate and connect the needs of merchants and users in business and purchasing matters (Mokhtar et al., 2017). The use of social media in corporate environments spreads like wildfire and achieving such a result is crucial. Entrepreneurs of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) can use social media to increase sales to improve marketing efforts especially. The use of modern technology has made it possible for business owners to plan for their future more effectively and conduct more organised market research. The variety of technology available today enables SME entrepreneurs to expand beyond their niche industries and establish their brands on a larger, global scale (Suhaimi & Shiratuddin, 2017).

In recent years, we have seen the use of social media as a tool for businesses to disseminate information about new and existing products, enabling customers to make purchases online, and support worldwide trade (Alghfeli et al., 2019, 2021; Khalifa et al., 2021). Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram are increasingly used to promote businesses and has the potential to assist business owners to improve or reach greater levels of business performance through the use of customer relationship management tools (Sajilan, 2019; Peerayuth & Pakamon, 2017). Besides, social media is, therefore, seen as a reasonably cheap way for businesses to use marketing to increase and strengthen the value of their brand (Abdulla et al., 2019; Binnawas et al., 2019). Furthermore, businesses can develop specialised content for consumers by using the capabilities provided by social media platforms to gather essential insights about users' information including demographic, interests, and usage. Businesses can share, tag, message, remark, and inform utilising social media sites like Facebook to market their goods and services (He et al., 2015; Ainin et al., 2015).

According to Turan and Kara (2018), online social networking sites have assimilated into customers' daily lives all around the world. Due to its capacity to ease a variety of communication-related obstacles, online social media has emerged as a crucial marketing communication tool for business owners and their clients. Through online social networking, business owners may now readily and affordably access clients, suppliers, partners, and other essential resources that were previously out of their grasp. Facebook has been one of the most well-liked websites among the several online social networks. Anyone in the globe may join Facebook for free, quickly contact with others, and follow or take part in real-time conversations with other people about issues that interest them. According to a recent

statistic, Facebook had 2.934 billion monthly active users in July 2022, placing it 1st in our ranking of the world's most 'active' social media platforms (Kepios, 2022; Turan & Kara, 2018). Facebook not only helps entrepreneurs perform marketing but also improves the effectiveness of virtual client interactions. Facebook has had a significant impact on advertising, serving as a quick and efficient means of promoting the new products in the market. The selection of Facebook as a more effective marketing medium by every organization is an excellent sign because the movement of information on the site is efficient and effective. Besides, Facebook is also known as the Facebook Commerce (F-Commerce), in which this is becoming a "trend" in the online business world (Muttaqin, 2011; Triyaningsih, 2011; Muningsih, 2014).

Social media is a crucial marketing tool for promoting Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) companies. Facebook is the primary social media network that SMEs like to utilise for advertising. Such reason is because Facebook offers additional tools for SMEs to interact with their clients, including direct message, comments, likes, and shares. SMEs businesses use social media to minimise the cost of advertising, reach out to potential customers online, enhance customer engagement, and raise brand recognition of the business (Borway et al., 2021). Moreover, social media assists SMEs in gaining a competitive edge and expanding their businesses by cultivating close bonds with customers (Ahmad et al., 2018; Cheng & Shiu, 2018). Due to convenience and cost considerations, SMEs are also more inclined to use Facebook than a corporate website (Dzisi & Ofosu, 2014). Previous research has found that, Facebook is a useful tool for disseminating information and influencing society. This is due to Facebook's numerous benefits and privileges, including its ability to reach a wide audience, the fact that using it is free and appealing, in addition to having an interface that is quick and simple to use, and the ability to provide information in an interesting manner (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Methodology

This study applied a qualitative method of in-depth interview to collect the data from 30 informants, who were B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca. The main rationale for employing in-depth interview in this study was to obtain necessary information from the informants on how Facebook help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In this study, 30 informants were interviewed, and according to sample size recommendations, 20 to 30 informants would be sufficient for an in-depth interview (Creswell, 1998). The informants in this study were selected based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the sample that involves participants who have specific characteristics of features (Coyne, 1997). The selection of the informants in this study was based on the following characteristics: (1) B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs, (2) staying and running a business in Malacca, (3) the business has been affected by the coronavirus, and (4) using Facebook for business purposes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The findings were analysed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns which refers to the 'themes' within data. It also minimally organises and describes data sets in rich details. To analyse data using thematic analysis, this study followed six processes in thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) i.e. (1) familiarising data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

Results and Discussion

The result is based on three main questions that were asked to the informants during the in-depth interview. The questions were as follows: (1) What are the perceptions of B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca towards the usage of Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic? (2) How has Facebook help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic? (3) Why is Facebook considered as the best social media platform in helping small businesses generate income during COVID 19 Pandemic?

What are the perceptions of B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca towards the usage of Facebook as a platform to generate income during COVID 19 Pandemic?

The results found that, B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca had a very positive perception towards Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They are thankful to Facebook for helping them survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Their positive perception towards Facebook is due to several factors. First, they receive more profits compared to physical businesses. This is because people are afraid to go out to purchase goods in stores for fear of being infected with this virus. People are also seen as more comfortable to buy essential goods online to avoid being infected with COVID-19 if they are exposed to an outdoor environment that is not relatively safe at that time. As such, when they start doing businesses online through Facebook, the profits were five times more than before. Furthermore, B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca also stated that, they do not make much profits through physical businesses that they run before the COVID-19 Pandemic. This is due to the fact that they have to spend for shop rental, employee wages, as well as utility bills, which cost significant amount of money.

Second, B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca had a very positive perception towards Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID 19 Pandemic because the site allows them to grow their businesses without limits. They stated that, before using Facebook as a platform for business purposes, their buyers were individuals who reside at Melaka only. However, after using Facebook in promoting their business, their buyers are made up of different walks of life - regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, national origin, and state of residence. They also mentioned that Facebook makes their product become popular and known by many people around Malaysia.

Third, the informants had a very positive perception towards Facebook as a platform to generate income during the COVID-19 pandemic because Facebook proved to them that, anyone can be successful in carrying out a business. Most of the informants explained that, with the proper strategy and plan, a product can draw customers' attention without needing to spend a lot of money or pay others to advertise it. The most crucial element is that they should be able to utilise every Facebook feature to its fullest. The informants added that they would keep using Facebook as a tool for growing their businesses because they had positive experiences using it for product sales and promotion. They also said they were ready and willing to accept assistance and guidance from authorities in managing their online businesses.

How has Facebook help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Based on the results, Facebook help B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic in several ways. First, improving the visibility of the products. Second, promoting the products. Followed by cost cutting, and lastly, customer engagement.

1) Visibility of the products

Majority of the informants claimed that Facebook has helped them by increasing the visibility of their product among Malaysian consumers. What they must do is simply enter the text they want to post to their 'Wall' or add a photo or video to their 'Wall' and of course for a business, the optimal privacy setting chosen is "Public". It is as simple as that, their Facebook friends and friends of friends will undoubtedly see their postings of the products. In order to spread the word about their products, they also stated that they would add additional users and ask them to become friends. Additionally, they will constantly and repeatedly post about their products on their 'Wall' to increase the visibility to others, and all of this comes at no additional expense to them.

2) Promoting the products

Majority of the informants claimed that Facebook has assisted them in terms of promoting their products to a wide range of consumers. By using Facebook, they can promote their products creatively and make it more interesting to attract potential buyers to make a purchase. For example, they can make a video about the product and post it on their feed. They can also post a picture about the product with interesting captions to influence the consumers to buy their products. All the Facebook features that they use to promote their product is easy to handle and free of charge.

3) Cost cutting

The biggest contribution of Facebook in helping B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca survive during the COVID-19 Pandemic is the reduction of operating costs of running businesses. There are no fees associated with creating a Facebook account, promoting a product, or making the products visible to customers. Besides that, by running their businesses online through Facebook, they do not have to pay for any employee salaries and store rent. Since they don't operate their business physically, they can also save money on utility costs.

4) Customer engagement

Majority of the informants claimed that Facebook has helped them in terms of engagement with the customers, because Facebook allows comments to be submitted on a seller's Facebook wall, whereby the seller is able to respond to all enquiries from customers about the products. The most important element is that a seller can know the customers' feedback towards their products as a seller needing to learn what customers think of their goods is crucial. After purchasing a product, buyers typically post a comment on the seller's wall. If a customer is pleased with a product, they will complement the seller and spread the word about it.

Why is Facebook considered as the best social media platform in helping small businesses generate income during COVID 19 Pandemic?

As mentioned by B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca, there are five reasons why Facebook considered as the best social media platform in helping small businesses generate income during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1) Facebook is free for everyone

B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca informed that, they do not pay any membership fee when opening a Facebook account for business purposes. Facebook accounts can be opened for free through online registration via laptop or mobile phone. With no charge to open an account, this helps them to reduce business costs.

2) Facebook is user-friendly

The informants stated that, Facebook is easy to handle. Even though they are not expert in handling social media, they encounter no issues while using Facebook for business purposes. This is because Facebook makes it simple to share photos, text messages, videos, status posts, and feelings on Facebook. Besides, based on their experienced, informants stated that, within 24 hours of learning how to handle Facebook from the family members and qualified individuals, they can already use Facebook very well in promoting their products. The informants also mentioned that there are some of Facebook features that are interesting and user-friendly, which are beneficial for business purposes. Some of the examples include (1) news feed, (2) photos, (3) the like button, (4) the messenger platform, (5) social plugins, (6) the wall, (7) timeline, and (8) events.

3) Facebook can reach a vast number of buyers

B40 Single Mother Entrepreneurs in Malacca believed that Facebook is the most popular social media platforms among users in Malaysia. They assumed majority of the Malaysian have at least one Facebook account. In addition, they also think that Facebook is the most widely used social media platform by Malaysians to buy online goods.

4) Facebook allows two-way communication between seller and buyer

As mentioned by informants, Facebook allows them to interact closely with their potential buyers. Sellers and buyers can communicate at anytime and anywhere without being tied to specific place and time. In addition, informants also informed that they can reply to buyers' enquiries quickly without any interruption as long as they have access to the internet.

5) Facebook makes business easy to handle

Informants claimed that they can efficiently run their businesses with just a device like a phone, that is connected to the internet. They only need to publish images, videos, or captions relevant to the products in question on their Facebook Wall to market their businesses whenever they want. Additionally, since Facebook's features are quite basic yet engaging, utilising it does not consume a lot of mobile data.

Conclusion

Based on the results, it can be said that single mother entrepreneurs may and should utilise Facebook to promote their products. Although single mother entrepreneurs may be less skilled in handling technology or social media, Facebook proves that it is very easy to handle.

All they have to do is learn how to manage social media from individuals around them or from qualified individuals. Within 24 hours, they will be able to handle Facebook very well because it is designed to facilitate its users from the various walks of life. Additionally, single mothers can successfully, creatively, and frequently promote their products on Facebook using its key features like Newsfeed, Messenger, Timeline, and the Wall without having to invest a lot of money. To be able to conduct businesses online using Facebook, all they need is just a mobile phone with internet connectivity. Single mother entrepreneurs are also advised to use Facebook advertisements to market their products. This is due to the fact that Facebook can reach a larger audience, generate new leads, convert more customers, and increase sales. Advertising on Facebook is significantly less expensive than more conventional media outlets. According to Eliisa (2021), with Facebook, on the other hand, you can get away with a \$10 dollar budget and reach 1,000 people on the same day that your campaign is launched. The best aspect of Facebook advertisements is the opportunity to target a certain audience. Therefore, even if you run a small business, Facebook ad campaigns allow you to rapidly reach your potential clients without having to break your bank.

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