



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Digital Business

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/digbus

Exploring social media affordance in relationship marketing practices in SMEs

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 April 2021

Received in revised form 5 September 2021

Accepted 17 September 2021

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Relationship marketing

Social media

SMEs

Technology affordance

ABSTRACT

Studies on social media use and effectiveness in large firms abound in the literature. However, social media usage for relationship marketing in small and medium enterprises is under-researched. This research examined how social media affordances influence SMEs' relationships with their customers. The Technology Affordance theory was utilized as the theoretical framework. Furthermore, a case study was used as the research design. The study's participants were SME owners/managers operating in Ghana. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze data. The study identified three affordances of social media in the context of relationship marketing in SMEs: brand visibility, sharing, and relationship. These social media affordances result in customer acquisition. The findings and their implications have been discussed in the paper.

1. Introduction

There has been considerable interest in the impact of social media on businesses among researchers, policymakers, and management of corporate organizations in recent years (Suryani et al., 2021). Social media are internet-based programs that allow users to create and share user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Hanafizadeh et al. (2021) identified Social networking sites (example, WhatsApp, Line, Telegram, and WeChat), Content communities (example, YouTube, TikTok, Vimeo), Blogs (Twitter, Blogspot), and Online forums & discussion (TripAdvisor, Yelp, and FourSquare) as the types of social media. Different marketing objectives are achieved by using social media, including creating brand affinity, increasing sales prospects, improving customer service, and driving favorable customer attitudes (Misirlis & Vlachopoulou, 2018; Wood and Khan, 2016).

Furthermore, social media assists firms in improving contact with their customers, increasing the level of trust and relationship building and facilitating the identification of possible business partners (Misirlis & Vlachopoulou, 2018; Meske and Stieglitz, 2013; Kelleher and Sweetser, 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011).

Although large organizations dominate the use of social media, research has proven that they are crucial tools for small and medium-sized businesses (Meske and Stieglitz, 2013; Rahmawati et al., 2020). Currently, more than 90 million small companies are active on Facebook (Facebook,

2021). In Ghana, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) use popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to market their operations and communicate with their clients (Odoom et al., 2017).

The intense competition in today's business environment has influenced companies to strengthen their relationships with their customers. The benefits of effective relationship marketing include reduced marketing costs and increased loyalty, profitability, security, and stability (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002; Peppers & Rogers, 2011). Salam and Hoque (2019) recommend relationship marketing (RM) for SMEs because it can help them attract and retain customers. Relationship marketing emphasizes the contact between a company and its clients (Beetles and Harris, 2010; Steinhoff et al., 2019). Businesses are currently operating in an environment where consumers are well-versed in social media and have easy access to technology. In a way, this market trend is influencing the way relationship marketing is done in businesses. When used as a company strategy, relationship marketing establishes and maintains long-term, mutually beneficial connections with clients. This relationship is established through open communication with clients, respecting them as different individuals, and following through on promises (Van Tonder, 2016).

Some studies have shown that social media is an ideal tool for achieving RM goals (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). They are valuable resources and appropriate tools for achieving relationship marketing goals (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015; Trainor et al., 2014). Their use

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goes beyond simple social communication (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015) and comprise a variety of marketing communication such as public relations (Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2011), promotions (Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011), relationship marketing (Williams & Chinn, 2010), and news updates (Reed & Hansen, 2013). Social media (SM) have changed communication and interaction between organizations and individuals (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015). However, the SMB Group's (2012) report shows that most small companies do not have a proper strategy for utilizing social media for business or marketing purposes, unlike larger corporations. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can benefit from social media and relationship marketing trends by developing and maintaining relationships with their customers. They also provide an opportunity for researchers to conduct a study (Qalati et al., 2021).

Although there have been several studies on organizations' use of social media and relationship marketing in SMEs, there are some shortcomings in the literature. First, despite the relevance of relationship marketing, studies investigating SMEs' utilization of relationship marketing are limited (Suryani et al., 2021; Salam and Hoque, 2019; Guha et al., 2018). Second, the majority of the studies investigating firms' use of social media have focused on the pre-adoption process (Ahmad et al., 2019; Gavino et al., 2018; Odoom et al., 2017), the impact of adoption on firm performance (Bocconcelli et al., 2017; Hanafizadeh et al., 2021; Hitchen et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015; Odoom and Mensah, 2019) and its influences consumer brand perception and behavior (Gligor and Bozkurt, 2021; Hinson et al., 2019; Nafees et al., 2021). There is little empirical literature on the usage of social media affordances in SMEs, particularly in emerging markets such as Ghana (Odoom et al., 2017). Furthermore, Sheth (2011) believes that the contextual differences and sociopolitical climate in developed and developing countries are fundamentally distinct.

To address these gaps and expand the relationship between marketing and social media literature, this study draws on empirical data from an emerging market, specifically from Ghana, to examine social media affordances in SMEs' relationship marketing. The research question of this study is: what are the affordances of social media in SMEs' relationship marketing practices?

The Affordance Theory is used in our research to fill in the gaps in the existing literature (Gibson, 1977). Our study contributes to the expanding body of literature on the use of social media by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). First and foremost, our research adds to the current literature by employing the Technology Affordance Theory in conjunction with a case study research approach to better understand social media affordances in SMEs. Although small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a critical role in the creation of decent jobs and the reduction of poverty in low-middle-income nations (Chatterjee and Kar, 2020), Odoom et al. (2017) found that SMEs in emerging markets have limited resources and capacities. Consequently, understanding social media affordances in this context adds to the body of knowledge already available.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 comprises the theoretical background and literature review, while Section 3 discusses the research methodology. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 concludes the paper, discussing the theoretical, practical implications of the study's outcomes, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

This section reviews the literature on relationship marketing to understand the role of social media in relationship marketing practice in SMEs. It also presents the theory (affordance theory) underpinning the study.

2.1. Relationship marketing

Firstly, relationship marketing was defined as an approach followed by organizations to form sustained relationships with their customers (Berry, 1983). The most general and easy-to-understand definition of relationship marketing is that it is a way of building, developing, and maintaining high-value, cost-effective relationships with customers, suppliers, employees,

and partners for the enduring benefit of both sides (Kotler, 2019). Relationship Marketing (RM) builds a collaborative relationship through communication and interaction between organizations and stakeholders (Gronroos, 2011). The central purpose of RM is to build long-term mutual satisfaction between businesses and their customers (Gronroos, 2004). Sustained long-term mutual satisfaction enables businesses to communicate, interact, and engage consistently with customers (Gronroos, 2004; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Successful implementation of relationship marketing necessitates a strategic approach that involves developing customer-centric processes, selecting and implementing technology solutions, empowering employees, gathering customer information, and developing knowledge generation capabilities to differentiate customers and learning from best practices (Chaston, 2014). Marketers employ relationship marketing strategies to build long-term relationships mutually satisfying with their key partners, including customers (Kang and Kim, 2017). The digital age is changing relationships between consumers and organizations. Hence, relationship marketing is viewed as a technology affordance of digital technology. As a result, the following section applies technology affordance theory to understand this phenomenon.

2.2. Technology affordance theory

Affordance theory was initially proposed by Gibson (1977), who analyzed relationships between animals and their living environments. Gibson (1986) stated that an animal or a human perceives an object's utilities for actions, termed "affordances." According to Volkoff and Strong (2013, pp. 822–823), the term affordances can mean several things: (1) "what is offered, provided, or furnished to someone or something by an object"; (2) "a property of the relationship between an object and an actor which is defined as an opportunity for action"; (3) "the potential for behaviors associated with achieving an immediate concrete outcome." Affordance can also mean "the action potential that a given technology can take" (Majchrzak et al., 2013, p.39); "a relational construct linking the capabilities afforded by technology artifacts to the actors' purposes" (Faraj and Azad, 2012, p. 26). The central theme in all these definitions is that affordance involves an object facilitating an action (Leidner et al., 2018). Affordance is the asset obtained from the relationship between an actor and an object (Volkoff and Strong, 2013), and it represents an opportunity to perform (Stoffregen, 2003). Norman (1999) emphasizes the role of perception and users shaping affordance and the possibilities for designing objects. Gibson (1986) views affordance as subject to users' perceptions (Fox and McEwan, 2017; Leonardi, 2014; Rice et al., 2017).

An affordance (first-order affordance) resulting from a user-technology partnership may lead to multiple affordances (second-order affordance) and deliver multiple outcomes (affordance outcomes) (Treem and Leonardi, 2013; Volkoff and Strong, 2013). Treem and Leonardi (2013) have examined how social media use can improve organizations' productivity, such as socialization, knowledge sharing, and power exercise. Also, Majchrzak et al. (2013) show how four different affordances associated with using social media to support knowledge sharing induce a shift from a centralized process that is intermittent and repository-based to a set of continuous online communal knowledge conversations that are decentralized, continuous, and emergent. Consequently, we apply the technology affordance theory in this study to understand how social media features provide SMEs' affordances and how they produce results. Applying the affordance theory to the study allows us to investigate the benefit of social media use in building relationships with customers.

3. Methodology

The current research adopted a case study approach (Creswell and Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2014), case study research encompasses studying a case (or cases) within a contemporary context or natural setting. The case may be an entity, such as an individual, small group, team, or organization. According to Creswell and Cheryl (2017), the case study method is appropriate for addressing research questions that focus on answering the why

and how of a phenomenon. The research question of this study focuses on answering how social media affordances influence SMEs' relationships with their customers. Therefore, it falls within the 'how' type of question, which validates our case study design decision. Also, the case study design could understand how social media affordances influence SMEs' relationship marketing. Yin (2014) posits that the case study design is appropriate when a researcher wants to have an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Yin (2014) recommends the case study for research that investigates contemporary issues. SMEs' social media use is a contemporary development; thus, our decision aligns with Yin's recommendation.

3.1. Case selection and background of companies

Specific SMEs were chosen to participate in this study. They were selected because they use social media to create and manage relationships with their customers. Below are brief profiles of the SMEs involved.

Company A is a Ghanaian-based digital service consulting company offering digital consulting and advisory, social media marketing, content development, digital creative ideas, and digital paid media services. It has been in business for ten (10) years and uses WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They have six (6) employees.

Company B is a fashion, food, and ushering company. It offers services such as events planning, such as parties and weddings. The company has been in business for two (2) years; it uses WhatsApp and Instagram. It has twenty-four (24) employees.

Company C is a private basic school that comprises kindergarten and primary school. The school has been in operation for four (4) years. It solely uses WhatsApp because of the demography of parents who send their wards to the school. It has ten (10) employees.

Company D is a printing and branding company in Ghana. It offers graphic and creative design, corporate branding, and signage services. The company has been in existence for about five (5) years, uses Facebook solely, and has six (6) employees.

Company E provides cleaning and corporate errand services. The company offers cleaning services, runs errands for organizations and busy individuals. It also sells ladies' handbags. It has been in operation for five (5) years and uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. It has twelve (12) employees.

Company F runs a grocery business in Ghana. The company offers retail and wholesale grocery products. It has been in existence for three (3) years and uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. It has an eight (8) staff.

Company G sells Waakye (a Ghanaian dish made with beans and rice). It sells packed freshly cooked and hot rice meals. It is a family business that has operated for four (4) years and uses WhatsApp. It has three (3) employees.

Company H provides IT consultancy. It represents a foreign company that sells Microsoft suites to companies and enterprises. It has been in business for six (6) years and uses Facebook and WhatsApp. It has ten (10) employees.

Company I produces pepper/chili sauce. The company prepares and packages chili sauce for events and retail shops. The company has been in business for two (2) years and uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. It has twelve (12) employees.

Company J sells fresh eggs and poultry. It has been in operations for two (2) years and uses WhatsApp. It has twelve (12) employees.

Table 1 presents a summary of the SMEs' profile.

3.2. Participants selection and data collection

The study involved ten (10) SMEs managers/owners/co-owners. According to Creswell (2008), small sample sizes between 5 and 25 are ideal for case study research. Therefore, our decision to use ten participants is justified. Table 2 presents the profile of participants. Creswell (2008) and Tongco (2007) recommend purposive sampling for qualitative studies. Purposive sampling enables researchers to rely on their personal judgment to select members of the population to participate in a study (Patton, 2002).

Table 1
Profile of participants involved in the study.

Type of business	Years of business	Social media channels used
Digital service agency	Ten years	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
Fashion/foods/Ushering Agency	Two years	WhatsApp and Instagram
Basic Private School	Four years	WhatsApp
Branding/Printing	Five years	Facebook
Cleaning/corporate errands	Five years	Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram
Grocery business	Three years	Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram
Waakye fast food	Four years	WhatsApp
IT consultancy	Six years	Facebook and WhatsApp
Freshly bottled Pepper/Chili.	Two years	Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram
Poultry	Two years	WhatsApp

Table 2
Profile of interviewees.

Pseudonym	Role	Gender
Participant A	OWNER	Male
Participant B	OWNER	Male
Participant C	CO-OWNER	Male
Participant D	OWNER	Male
Participant E	OWNER	Female
Participant F	OWNER	Female
Participant G	CO-OWNER	Male
Participant H	OWNER	Male
Participant I	OWNER	Male
Participant J	CO-OWNER	Male

This sampling method helped us to select people within the SMEs who have knowledge about social media use.

To conceal the identities of the companies and participants, pseudonyms such as Participant A, B, C, etc., have been used to represent them. Similarly, companies were assigned pseudonyms, Company A, B, C, etc. The pseudonyms of the participants correspond with that of their respective companies. For instance, participant A works with Company A. Table 2 shows participants' demographic profiles. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data. An in-depth interview was deemed appropriate to explore SMEs' use of social media for relationship marketing. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review. The interviews began with warm-up questions and explanations about relationship marketing and social media. They were conducted from 14th to 21st November 2020; each interview lasted an average of thirty minutes. Open-ended questions and followed by pre-established probes were utilized. Participants' consent was sought before the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then the notes were thematically analyzed. The interview guide has been attached as appendix 1.

3.3. Analysis of data

Data analysis was done using the thematic analysis approach (Creswell, 2008; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, cited in Nowell et al., 2017). Following Nowell et al.'s (2017) approach, we first familiarized ourselves with the data by listening to and transcribing the interviews. Tables were then used to organize all transcripts for easy coding. The second stage involved creating codes linked to the research question by identifying keywords and sentences. At this stage, we created a coding manual and defined the codes.

The third stage involved grouping codes into themes. After this, we merged similar codes. The themes were then labeled and reviewed to ensure that they represented the contents of the excerpts. In selecting and

naming the themes and sub-themes, we relied on the words used by the interviewees. Themes were analyzed to measure how they relate and fit into the overall argument of the study.

To ensure reliability, we followed Nowell et al.'s (2017) recommendation and approach. Interviewees were provided with an interview guide before the interview. Also, they were provided with the interview transcripts for verification. Member checking and peer debriefing were utilized where participants and other researchers verified consistency between the results and the excerpts used to support them. Excerpts from the transcripts have been used to support the themes.

4. Research findings

Our study found three affordances of social media that can help comprehend how social media influence relationship marketing practices in SMEs: brand visibility, sharing, and relationship. These social media affordances result in customer acquisition. Fig. 1 summarizes the findings of the study.

4.1. Social media affordances

4.1.1. Brand visibility

Social media can make SME brands visible to others (example, customers). They are essential platforms for advertising and promoting products and services. Social media allows companies to design their advertising materials using rich, dynamic, and interactive media at minimal cost (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Participant B claimed that: "social media has helped because sometimes you have to advertise your products online and don't know who is watching and then you get contacted to offer your products and services, so it is beneficial." All content on a company's page communicates, therefore, managers of social media platforms need to ensure that their brands communicate in clearly to all online users. Participant F indicated that "we use Facebook, WhatsApp Status, and Instagram for advertising his products and getting clients." Social media offers a convenient and more accessible way for promoting one's products, reaching a large group of people. Participant J also noted that ".....we use WhatsApp to contact clients, and push product adverts to their respective contacts." The ripple effect of promoting one's products and services via social media tends to reach far more people than anticipated, giving the company an edge over those who have not incorporated technology into their product or service offering. Furthermore, Participant C noted

that social media has specifically helped their company's marketing initiatives: "social media connects us to suppliers."

Also, Participant B stated that: "I use WhatsApp and Instagram to promote my business in a reliable and fast manner." Social media enables customers to quickly share advertising brochures, messages, and promotions with their friends and family. Social media advertising helps businesses leverage user dynamics, such as peer pressure, recommendations, and likes (Narayan et al., 2011).

4.1.2. Sharing

Social media facilitate two-way information sharing between SMEs and their customers; SMEs share information with customers, and customers provide feedback to the SMEs. They allow for precise and targeted communication. For example, Participant G indicated that "We use WhatsApp to communicate the menu of the day to our contacts and also for easy contact [sic] of suppliers."

Likewise, Participant C noted that "These platforms allow stakeholder access and information dissemination." Furthermore, Participant E contended that they "send messages or engage our customers via WhatsApp." Participant H stated that "On Instagram, our followers are updated from time to time on menus and exciting recipes that can be prepared using pepper. This is an easy and convenient way to target all our contacts at once."

Communication takes different forms, such as individual messages or broadcast messages. Social media help to spread information quickly to customers. Human behavior is innately social, and typically, people are influenced by social content – a crucial concept effectively used in social media.

On the other hand, social media enable SME customers to provide feedback to SMEs. Companies set up social media accounts to interact with customers and obtain valuable feedback from them. Social media is not only monitored for negative comments but also for opportunities to improve customer relations. Empowered customers choose how they interact with companies and have high expectations for their experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

As explained by Participant A: "Social media allows for communication and also offers clients the possibility of communicating with the organization."

Companies are aware that customers are now more empowered; therefore, they closely monitor their social media accounts for negative comments and opportunities to improve customer experience and relations. Participant E succinctly captured this:

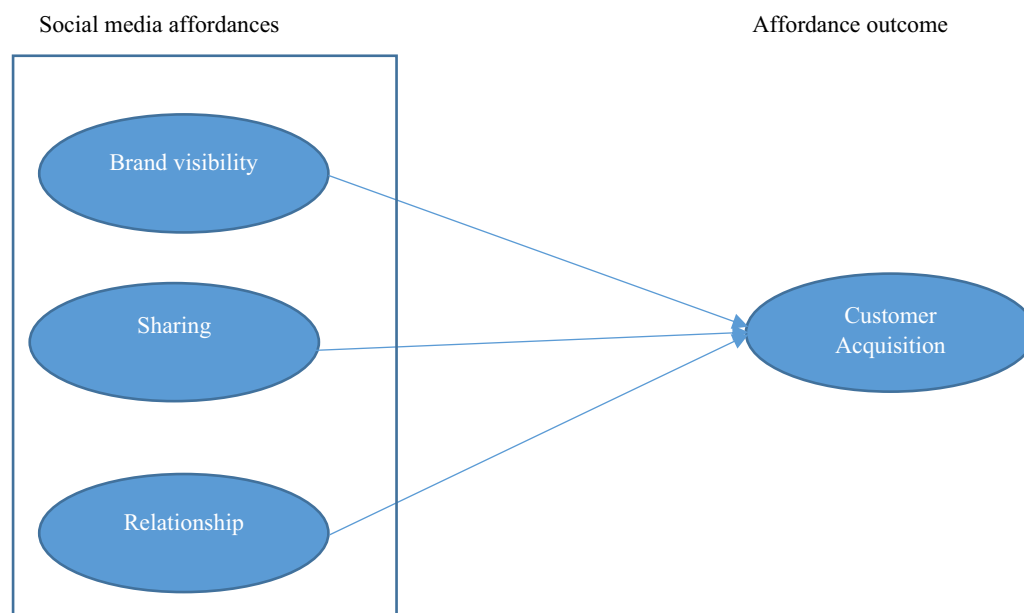


Fig. 1. Summary of findings.

"I do get them. It is usually direct feedback from customers and not that open. For instance, someone called me for a cleaning job, and my staff went there and did not do a good job cleaning. When people text you on social media, you cannot rectify the cleaning well [sic] on social media, so you will try and explain to them that you are sorry for the inconvenience caused, and when you get there the next time, you make sure you deliver well".

Social media helps companies obtain feedback from their clients, helping them turn disgruntled customers into loyal customers.

4.1.3. Relationship

Social media enables SMEs to create and sustain relationships. Through relationship affordance, SMEs can engage their customers, instill trust in them, and build cooperative relationships.

Social media offers easier and cheaper ways to engage customers regularly. Participant C opined that social media enables quick access to one's target audience by "maintaining a relationship with stakeholders like parents, teachers, suppliers, and other clients. It also enabled us to be in constant touch as well as easy access to targets." Participant B further posited that "social media is used in retaining and keeping in constant touch with stakeholders." Furthermore, Participant F maintains that "I use social media to engage with my customers." Customer engagement does not only allow for customer attraction but also allows for customer retention. SMEs are expected to have a social media presence to establish their presence among customers (Braojos-Gomes et al., 2015). Participant A acknowledged the importance of social media in relation to customer engagement: "...Customers have the opportunity to have a two-way communication in a very respectful and courteous manner." Social Media provides many opportunities for businesses to reach out to their customers.

Furthermore, facilitate trust-building. Positive customer experience can encourage customers to become active brand advocates, increase brand loyalty, referrals, and ultimately build trust. SM can strengthen SMEs' brand image and awareness if they are genuine, honest, and transparent with customers online (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Trust is vital in social media; it reduces uncertainty among customers and helps people. Trust refers to situations where one party (**trustor**) is willing to rely on the actions of another party (**trustee**), and the situation is typically directed to the future (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust influences whom we share information with and whose information we can accept without verification. Participants described how they build trust in their customers on social media. Participant D, for example, noted that for his customers to feel comfortable doing business with him on Facebook, he has uploaded all relevant documents on his company's Facebook page, "I place my company documents to show legitimacy."

Similarly, Participant A suggested that "...So for you to gain the trust of social media users, your site must be detailed, and this already sets you apart from others". By being transparent, it builds customers' trust and confidence. These views are consistent with Agnihotri et al.'s (2016) assertion; they argue that firms must be transparent with their customers online to enhance their online image.

Finally, social media facilitate cooperative relationship-building between SMEs and their customers. Cooperation refers to a mutual process where two or more individuals or organizations work together. People are social beings; therefore, they use social media to fulfill the need to connect with others. Through relationship affordance, SME owners build personal and business relationships with their customers. For example, participant C noted that "Beyond the relationship with our clients, it has also allowed us to build personal relationships. Because of social media interactions, we have had to build a strong relationship with them. "

According to Participant B, "They have been so supportive, they recommend me and my business to people and all that. Social media has been so helpful because it helps me to reach out to customers and let them know I am around". Consumers usually trust recommendations from other consumers who have experienced a brand. Cooperative relationships can translate into loyal customers and create a win-win situation for both businesses and their clients.

4.2. Social media affordance outcome

Our study shows that social media's inherent and physical features result in a favorable outcome for SMEs. This study found that brand visibility, sharing, and relationship affordances lead to customer acquisition.

4.2.1. Customer acquisition

Social media (SM) was found to be an essential platform for marketing activities. It is cost-effective and can reach a larger group within a short time. SM represents a low-cost tool used to combine technology and social interaction using words (Braojos-Gomes et al., 2015). For example, Participant A stated that they use social media "...primarily for customer acquisition and marketing purposes. It is also an easier and cost-effective way of getting to more people." It offers a vast audience; it is a cost-effective and fast medium for marketing activities targeting one's niche. Participant F indicated that "These mediums have helped me get many customers online and followers who also recommend my site and products to others."

Furthermore, Participant G noted that "Social media has helped me attract customers through referrals from others and practically retain customers daily." Then again, Participant D claimed that "...Due to our client niche being corporate organizations, Facebook is the ideal platform to attract them." Social media offers a good and easy referral system for customer acquisition. Based on the companies' comments, we can conclude that SM offers these companies new ways to market and acquire customers. Social media is an ideal platform for employing viral marketing techniques, i.e., building brand awareness and advertising companies.

5. Discussion and implications

This research explored social media affordances in SMEs in the context of relationship marketing. According to the technology affordance theory, affordances refer are the goal-oriented opportunities that technology enables the user to carry out (Vaast and Kaganer, 2013). Our study's results revealed that SMEs' social media usage results in various affordances: brand visibility, sharing, and relationship. The study's findings also show that these affordances result in customer acquisition.

The visibility affordance is the SMEs' social media use in relationship marketing, which supports the results of a previous study (Leidner et al., 2018; Lin and Kishore, 2021; Vaast and Kaganer, 2013). This assertion shows that social media makes SMEs visible and can help them promote their products/services and businesses to increase visibility to actual and potential customers. Therefore, social media is a great promotional tool for creating awareness about SMEs, their products, and services.

Also, sharing was one of the affordances of SMEs' social media use in relationship marketing. The findings support the notion that social media offers SMEs an opportunity to share information, obtain feedback and customer insights. Likewise, the results of the study are in line with Osatuyi's (2013) findings, which "suggest that social networking sites hold the greatest potential for sharing information" (p. 2629). This might be because social media offer easy ways to quickly post an update without creating adverts or other forms of communication.

Furthermore, we found relationships as another affordance of social media in SMEs' relationship marketing practices. Social media can enable SMEs to engage their customers, instill trust, and build a cooperative relationships. These findings align with Tuncer's (2021) study, which revealed that IT affordance (which includes visibility affordance) influences trust in social media platforms and confidence in sellers. This demonstrates that providing customers with affordance for the promotion/visibility of videos, images, and texts of products on social media helps build confidence and trust in SMEs (Tuncer, 2021). In the same vein, we can infer that using social media to share information videos, images, and texts about SMEs' products and services and engage customers can lead customers to trust SMEs. This result affirms the assumption that social media use can provoke immediate feedback from customers. This finding is affirmed by Cabiddu et al. (2014), who noted that multimedia content production and interactions in public or semi-public electronic platforms are two functionalities that

allow this affordance. For example, SMEs post, promote, and share videos and photos on Facebook and Instagram to give customers feedback through reactions (e.g., likes, shares, retweets, and comments). Finally, the study reveals that customer acquisition building is social media affordance outcomes. The findings suggest that the visibility, sharing, and relationship affordances of social media can help SMEs to acquire new customers. Customer feedback on social media platforms would help SMEs identify their needs and provide them, assisting them in getting new customers. Concerning trust, prior studies (Boateng and Narteh, 2016; Punyatoya, 2019) have indicated its significance in building online and offline relationships.

The study makes a few contributions to existing literature. From a theoretical standpoint, it has been shown that SMEs' social media use can result in the following affordances: promotion/visibility, information sharing, and customer engagement. This first-order affordance leads to second-order category affordances, building customer trust and feedback that leads to customer acquisition and building relationships. This study also shows that building customer trust and obtaining customer feedback is an essential mediator for building online relationships.

Practically, the findings mean that SMEs can develop and sustain relationships with their customers using social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Furthermore, SME managers can rely on social media to promote their products and services by creating content that engages the target audience. Also, they should upload the contact details of the business on social media to instill trust in the customers.

5.1. Limitations

The limitations of this study provide some interesting leads for future research. The small sample size of ten companies was a limitation. Future research could interview more SMEs across different business sectors. While providing a starting point, generalizing the results outside this study's scope may not be a true reflection of SMEs in Ghana. This research could be replicated using a quantitative approach so that the findings could be applied to a broader population. Furthermore, we did not investigate how each social media application facilitates affordances. Therefore, a future study could investigate how specific social media applications enable affordance.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. What do you use social media for? And why?

Probe: To what extent has social media helped you to attract and retain customers?

2. How has social media helped you build new contacts and maintain old ones (e.g., with suppliers, business partners, etc.?) give examples

Probe: How has social media helped you to instill trust in your customers?

3. How have you used social media to build and maintain your contacts (e.g., WhatsApp group, Facebook group, etc.)

4. How has social media helped you to build cooperative relationships with your customers?

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