

The Adoption of Social Media by PR Practitioners in the United Arab Emirates

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This study aims to identify the effect of constituent factors on the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology in order to determine the factors most related to intentions, and to show the extent of their impact on the behaviour of the actual use of social media networks by the United Arab Emirates public relations practitioners in both private and public sectors. The findings indicate that the factors affecting the adoption of public relations practitioners of social networking include anticipating performance, availability of facilities, intention of usage, expected effort and social impact which are positively correlated with and significant to behavioural intention amongst PR professionals. Furthermore, PR practitioners are greatly aware of the importance of using social media in their work. A positive relationship exists between performance expectancy and behavioural intentions to adopt social media.

Key words: *Social Media, PR Practitioners, UTAUT, PR in UAE.*

Introduction

The Internet is a worldwide network connecting millions of computers that allow any user to search and access information from anywhere 24/7. The number of active Internet users in the United Arab Emirates is 9.73 million compared to the total population 9 million. In 2020, 8.3 million have a 99% penetration. (retrieved February 12, 2020). High internet usage is attributed to mobile subscriptions having 18.38 million indicated with an overall 187%. 93% of people access the Internet for personal and professional reasons every day: retrieved February 12, 2020.) Social media networking site (SNSs) users in the UAE are also represented with a large percentage of 92% under which 9.73 million people are actively social through mobile technology (retrieved February 12, 2020.) Therefore, large scale increase in the adoption of social media by both private and public sectors in the UAE is attributed to the ease of access to super-fast Internet at a very low price.

What is the relationships between PR and social networking sites (SNSs)?

“Public relations is a strategic process of communication used by individuals, businesses and organisations to create a positive relationship with the public.” (retrieved February 10, 2020.) Public relations, defined by Grunig and Hunt (as cited in Kameron & Morris, 2011), is an organisation’s attempt to manage communication between itself and the public. Communication by a single person or organisation to thousands of individuals has been heightened by the advent of internet-based social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The main goal of PR is to build and maintain a strong relationship and a positive image with the internal and external public by using a communication plan that encompasses both traditional or offline and online or new social media.

Social networking sites (SNSs) such as (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn...etc.) are the fastest growing Internet or web applications. They have become an integral part of the lives of people, organisations and governments. They are defined as “Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

PR and social media networking sites are interlinked because SNSs allow people and organisations to create new relationships and reconnect with other organisations or companies and friends. Increased communication, even online, strengthens relationships and also help to improve the services or profit of organisations (Thomson,2006). Therefore, all PR private and public Emirati organisations adopted and integrated SNSs in their PR work for several purposes such as to engage with the internal and external public, form and maintain new and old relationships, exchange ideas and experience, SMS messages, video, text, pictures, reconnect with other organisations or companies, government, clients, friends, co-workers in order to promote their business and profession.

Problem

Social networking sites (SNSs) have provided multiple platforms for PR practitioners to communicate with their public directly without depending on traditional media. They have opportunities to interact, share ideas, experiences, dialogue, comments, suggestions and real time updates on activities, products and services of their organisations and receive immediate feedback from the internal and external public. Some have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by (SNSs) to improve their professional practices and build a reputation for their organisations. On the other hand, some seem not to consider (SNSs) as a

serious platform that can be used for the advancement of PR programmers and activities. At best, they use (SNSs) for their personal interactions, leaving their organisations' public at the mercy of rumour and fake news mongers in the social virtual space. This study aims to identify the effect of the constituents of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology in order to determine factors most related to intentions, and to show the extent of their impact on the behaviour of the actual use of (SNSs) by United Arab Emirati public relations practitioners. Consequently, the research problem is to determine those factors which have the greatest influence on PR practitioners adopting (SNSs).

Literature Review: Related Studies

- 1- Al-Badiali et. al., 2018). The findings of this study show that the tendency and general awareness of social media by Omani public relation professionals is high.
- 2- BinShaikh et.al., 2016). The findings of this study indicate that organisations or companies that simply use Facebook to broadcast offers or post to advertise don't have a similar demand to those that engage customers and ask them for their opinion.
- 3- Inya, Agha, 2017). The study maintains that the use of social media by public relations practitioners has changed traditional methods of information dissemination in Universities in South-East Nigeria.
- 4- Quainoo, Antwi, 2015). The findings of this study indicate that all selected companies frequently use Facebook as a PR tool, however, there is more one-way communication resulting in less interaction to increase and foster a close relationship between the organisation and the public. There is more interaction from the organisation towards customers and the public with few responses from customers.
- 5- Williams, M., Rana, N. & Dwivedi, (2015) performed a systematic review of articles that used (UTAUT) theory and weight analysis of variables and found that performance expectancy and behavioural intention qualified for the best predictor category.
- 6- Silinskyte, J. (2014). The findings of this study indicate that factors significantly influencing behavioural intention towards using Bitcoin include performance and effort expectancy while actual usage is affected by both facilitating conditions and behavioural intention.
- 7- Alikilik, Ozlem, 2012). The findings reveal that in recent practice, Turkish PR professionals greatly appreciate the importance of social media. However, not all social media tools are equally adopted: e-mail is most frequently used while virtual world applications are the least adopted social media networking sites.
- 8- Lindley Curtis et. al., 2010). The study findings indicate that women consider social media to be beneficial, whereas men exhibit more confidence in actively using social media. Organisations with specified public relations departments are more likely to adopt social media. Positive correlations between UTAUT factors and credibility indicate greater likelihood to adopt social media.

9- Monica and Sweetser, 2008). The findings provide an overview of the adoption of social media by PR actioners as a whole in the PR industry.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to identify the major variables affecting the general acceptance of the use of technology in social networks and their impact on the behaviour of the actual use of public relations practitioners for social networks. It employs the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to identify and test its variables

Theoretical Framework

The study applies the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) in order to identify the effect of its constituent factors and use of technology to determine the factors most related to intentions, and to show the extent of their impact on the behaviour of the actual use of social media by United Arab Emirati public relations practitioners. The (UTAUT) theory suggests that four core constructs (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions) are direct determinants of usage intention and behaviour. Gender, age, experience and voluntariness of use are posited to moderate the impact of the four key constructs on usage intention and behaviour (Venkatesh et. al., 2003).

Hypotheses

- 1- There is a significant relationship between expected performance and effort, social impact, available facilities, and behavioural intention;
- 2- There is a strong correlation between expected effort, social impact, available facilities and behavioural intention;
- 3- There is a strong correlation between social impact, available facilities, and behavioural intention;
- 4- There is a strong correlation between available facilities and behavioural intention.

Methodology

This study is based on the descriptive-analytical approach. Its population consists of all public relations practitioners including employees, Heads of Departments and managers working in both private and public sectors in the UAE. To produce meaningful and useful results, a convenience sample is used and covers (N.219) practitioners working in public relations.

The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first deals with the characteristics of sample members related to gender, age, educational qualification and the duration of social media usage, while the second consists of a group of paragraphs or phrases to measure the field of communication networks in PR. These paragraphs are placed on a 3-point Likert scale (agree=3, neutral=2 and disagree=1). The validity of the questionnaire is verified and the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) is used for stability and reached (90.2). Multiple regression analysis is used to estimate and test the relationships between different variables.

Results

First: Factors Affecting Adoption by Practitioners of Public Relations for Social Networks

Mean and standard deviations for public relations variables of practitioners' adoption of social networks were calculated for each variable as shown in Table 1 below.

Performance expectancy (PE) variable came in the first place, as the most agreed upon variable, with an average (2.70), implying that it has the strongest influence on the decision whether to use social networks. Available facilitating conditions (FC) variable came second with an average (2.67) while behavioural intention (BI) variable ranked third with an average (2.63).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

NO.	Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree of adoption
1	Performance Expectancy (PE)	2.70	0.290	High
2	Facilitating Conditions (FC)	2.67	0.366	High
3	Behavioural Intention (BI)	2.63	0.534	High
4	Effort Expectancy (EE)	2.57	0.332	High
5	Social Influence (SI)	2.50	0.479	High
	All	2.62	0.273	High

Note: 3 for agree, 2 for neutral and 1 for disagree.

Second: The Relationship between Performance Expectancy (PE) and other Independent Variables is shown in Table 2 below:

The regression results show that the value of "F" statistic reached (34.877), which is significant at the level of 0.05. This confirms the high explanatory strength of the linear regression model from a statistical point of view and indicates a strong relationship between performance expectancy (dependent variable), effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions and behavioural intention. The results also show a moderate correlation coefficient value (0.63) between the four variables and PE. The coefficient of determination (R^2) accounted for 0.395.

The results also indicate that effort expectancy has a significant impact on PE as the value of *t*-statistic was statistically significant at the level of 0.05, while it was not significant with the other three variables as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Results of PE

Variables	Performance Expectancy (PE)						
	F	Sig.	R	R ²	(B)	t	Sig.
Constant	34.877	0.000	0.63	0.395	1.089	7.698	0.000
Effort Expectancy (EE)					0.453	7.518	0.000
Social influence (SI)					0.056	0.867	0.387
Facilitating Conditions (FC)					0.147	0.147	0.22
Behavioural Intention (BI)					0.141	0.626	0.22

Third: The Relationship between Effort Expectancy (EE) and the other three Independent Variables: Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions and Behavioural Intention

Table 3 shows that the value of "F" amounted to (20.419), which is significant at the level of 0.05. This confirms the high explanatory power of the linear regression model from a statistical point of view and indicates a strong relationship between expected effort and the other three independent variables: social influence, facilitating conditions and behavioural intention.

This evidence is enforced by the correlation coefficient value of (0.471) and the significant value of *t*-statistic for each three independent variable.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results of (EE)

Variables	Effort Expectancy (EE)						
	F	Sig.	R	R ²	(B)	t	Sig.
Constant	20.419	0.000	0.471	0.222	.1413	7.698	0.000
Social Influence (SI)					.0158	3.215	0.002
Facilitating Conditions (FC)					.0187	2.909	0.004
Behavioural Intention (BI)					0.100	2.348	0.020

Fourth: The Relationship between Social Impact, Facilitating Conditions and Behavioural Intention. The results also showed a significant impact of the two independent variables on social influence.

Table 4 shows that the value of "F" reached (42.524), which is significant at the level of (0.05). The values of *t*-statistic, which are all significant, provide evidence of the significant impact of both independent variables (i. e. FC and BI) on social impact as a dependent variable.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results of (SI)

Variables	Social influence (SI)						
	F	Sig.	R	R ²	(B)	t	Sig.
Constant	42.524	0.000	0.532	0.283	0.591	2.793	0.006
Facilitating Conditions (FC)					0.480	5.816	0.000
Behavioural Intention (BI)					0.237	4.196	0.000

Fifth: The Relationship between Available Facilitating Conditions (FC) and Behavioural Intention (BI)

As Table 5 shows, Fisher's F statistic is high and significant at the 0.05 level, as it is more than 42. The results of the estimated regression model are evidence of the strong impact of Behavioural Intention (BI) on Facilitating Conditions (FC) despite the low value of the coefficient of determination (R²), which is mainly due to the small number of explanatory variables.

Table 5: Regression Results of (FC)

Variables	Facilitating Conditions (FC)						
	F	Sig.	R	R ²	(B)	t	Sig.
(Constant)					1.938	16.960	0.000
Behavioural Intention (BI)	42.355	0.000	0.404	0.163	0.277	6.508	0.000

Discussion

The study aims to identify the effect of the constituent of the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology to determine the factors most related to intentions to show the extent of their impact on the behaviour of the actual use of social media by United Arab Emirati public relations practitioners.

Performance Expectancy: Venkatesh et. al. (2003) have defined this term as “the degree to which one believes that job performance will improve by using innovative technology.” The findings related to this factor showed that PR professionals have a positive attitude towards social media networks because they satisfy their personal and professional business by communicating with their customers.

Effort Expectancy (EE) is another major variable that is found in the UTAUT. It can be defined as “whether an individual feels that the use of technology is easy and how much strength of ease is there in the use of technology” Venkatesh, (2003). The findings related to this factor indicate that PR professionals believe that their organisation has computer sets, internet services, data bases, therefore it is easy to use social media networks while top management makes a great effort to facilitate the flow of information amongst employees.

Behavioural Intention (BI): Zarpou et. al. ,2012) is another behavioural variable that can be defined as “a subjective approach of consumers towards the adoptability of mobile commerce.” The findings related to this variable show that PR professionals adopted social media in their work to communicate with their customer, publicise activities and news of their organisation.

Social Influence (SI). Individuals often respond to social normative influences to maintain a favourable image within their group or team in order to be accepted by them. Moore and Benbasat (1991) define image (social approval) as “the degree to which use of an innovation is perceived to enhance one's image or status in one's social system.” Rogers also argues that “undoubtedly one of the most important motivations for almost any individual to adopt an



innovation is the desire to gain social status” (1983). The findings related to this factor indicate that PR professionals accept and fulfil senior management orders to create a favourable image about themselves to management and colleagues which may enhance their social status in the organisation.

Perceived Benefit (PB) is one of the strongest determinants of intentional and actual behaviour. Therefore, users use the system that contains beneficial jobs Lindley et. al. (2010). The findings indicate that the most influential factors in behavioural intent are performance expectancy, social influence and the facilities’ ease of use . The findings agree with Williams, Michael et. al. (2015) and McCarthy, Halawi, 2008) which emphasised performance expectancy variable s is a decisive factor in the intentional use of social media by individuals.

Conclusion

Social media networking sites have created fundamental, broad-based changes in communication between individuals, groups, organisations and societies. The findings indicate that factors affecting the adoption of public relations practitioners of social media include anticipating performance, availability of facilities, intention of usage, expected effort and social impact. All of them are positively and significantly correlated with behavioural intention amongst PR professionals. Furthermore, PR practitioners are greatly aware of the importance of using social media in their work. There is also a positive relationship between performance expectancy and behavioural intentions in adopting social media.



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