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## Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Qatar: The Role of Social Media and Media Literacy in Marketing Communication

Aisha Ali A.T. Al-khulaifi <sup>a</sup>, Smith Boonchutima <sup>a, \*</sup>, Ibtesam Mazahir <sup>a, b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>b</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah University, Pakistan

### Abstract

This research examines how female entrepreneurs in Qatar utilize social media as a tool within their marketing communication strategies, emphasizing their underlying motivations, the advantages they derive, and the obstacles they encounter. Media literacy is introduced as a critical factor influencing the effective use of social media for marketing communication. Drawing on insights from interviews with ten women managing businesses of varying sizes, the research applies theoretical perspectives such as Social Exchange Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Resource-Based View to examine their engagement with social media. The findings highlight that media literacy empowers entrepreneurs to critically evaluate content, strategically connect with their audience, and navigate ethical and professional challenges. Despite these advantages, entrepreneurs face hurdles such as audience expansion, maintaining professionalism, and reputation management. This study contributes to the understanding of social media marketing, media literacy, and women's entrepreneurship in Qatar, offering valuable implications for policymakers and business practitioners. Future research can explore the broader impacts of media literacy training programs on entrepreneurial success in other contexts.

**Keywords:** social media marketing, women entrepreneurs, Qatar, challenges, benefits, reasons, media literacy.

### 1. Introduction

Social media has emerged as a fundamental aspect of contemporary life, with its widespread adoption prompting its incorporation into numerous business strategies, particularly marketing communication. Defined as the utilization of social media platforms to advertise products, services, or brands (Shawky et al., 2019), social media marketing communication now constitutes a vital component of a company's broader marketing framework and has firmly established itself within the modern business environment. In particular, a study by (Shockley et al., 2018) found that women entrepreneurs in Qatar have traditionally faced several barriers to entering the business world, including limited access to resources and a lack of opportunities. However, social media has played a significant role in empowering women entrepreneurs in Qatar, providing them with a platform to connect, communicate, and compete in the business world. Media literacy enables these entrepreneurs to maximize the benefits of social media by enhancing their understanding of content creation, ethical practices, and audience engagement.

Recent years have seen a rise in the number of women entrepreneurs in Qatar (Alagos, 2016; Nazer, 2020). However, there is limited research that could explain their use of social media for

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [smith.b@chula.ac.th](mailto:smith.b@chula.ac.th) (S. Boonchutima)

marketing communication in a specific context (Li et al., 2023). This study aims to explore the extent to which theoretical frameworks can explain the use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar, given the important role that social media plays in marketing. By examining the theoretical frameworks that impact the use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into this topic.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the key motivations, benefits, and challenges women entrepreneurs face in Qatar when utilizing social media for marketing communication, and how does media literacy influence these experiences?
2. How do theoretical frameworks explain the relationship between social media use, marketing communication, and media literacy?
3. What strategies can be recommended to enhance media literacy among women entrepreneurs, thereby improving their social media marketing effectiveness?

The theoretical frameworks that will guide this study include the social exchange theory (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005), the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan, Hunt, 1994), media literacy and other relevant theories. The social exchange theory suggests that individuals interact with others to maximize rewards and minimize costs. This theory is relevant to the study as it suggests that women entrepreneurs are likely to use social media to maximize rewards and minimize costs, such as increasing brand awareness and reducing advertising expenses. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, on the other hand, suggests that trust and commitment are critical factors in building and maintaining relationships with customers. This theory is relevant to the study as it suggests that women entrepreneurs may use social media to build and enhance their relationships with customers, leading to increased commitment and trust. Finally, other relevant theories, such as the uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero, 2000) and the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984), will also be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the application of social media in the marketing efforts of Qatari women entrepreneurs.

The study's findings will provide insight into the reasons, benefits, and challenges of using social media in marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar and will contribute to the existing literature on social media marketing and women entrepreneurship. In addition, the study will highlight the relevance and applicability of theoretical frameworks to explain social media use in marketing communication and in a culture different from where the theories originate.

In essence, this research seeks to investigate the motivations behind, advantages gained from, and obstacles encountered in the use of social media as a marketing communication tool by Qatari women entrepreneurs. The study's findings will contribute to the existing literature on social media marketing and women entrepreneurship, and highlight the relevance and applicability of theoretical frameworks to explain social media use in a culture different from where the theories originate.

## 2. Materials and methods

This study utilized a qualitative research approach employing in-depth interviews as the primary means of data collection. Media literacy was incorporated as a core theme, with questions exploring participants' understanding of digital content creation, evaluation, and ethical practices.

A total of ten female entrepreneurs in the country were selected for the sample using purposive sampling based on their expertise and current use of social media. Data collection was conducted via in-depth interviews held from September to October 2022. The interview questions, derived from the literature review, were tailored to address the research objectives.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, aimed at identifying recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data (Li et al., 2023). Transcripts underwent multiple readings to discern emerging patterns and themes, which were then used to structure and interpret the data.

To ensure study validity, the interview questions underwent review by experts in entrepreneurship and marketing communication. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants to gauge question effectiveness. Reliability was ensured through cross-checking and verification of collected data by an independent researcher.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect participant rights. All participants were briefed on the study's purpose and provided informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were

guaranteed, with participant identities withheld. Approval for the study was granted by the Strategic Communication Management Program Board at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

### 3. Discussion

Promoting products, services, or brands through social media, often referred to as social media marketing, is a key component of contemporary marketing approaches. This method offers several benefits, including increased brand visibility, enhanced customer interaction, and cost-efficiency. Furthermore, it allows for immediate communication with customers, helping to build stronger connections (Cawsey, Rowley, 2016; Sashi, 2012; Shawky et al., 2019; Shawky et al., 2019).

One key benefit of social media marketing is its capability to engage a wide-ranging audience. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which have millions of active users, present businesses with numerous opportunities to reach potential customers. Additionally, social media allows for precise targeting based on factors like demographics, location, interests, and behavior (Ramanathan et al., 2017; Semeradova, Weinlich, 2019).

Another significant benefit is its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing methods (Qalati et al., 2020). Unlike traditional advertising mediums such as print, radio, and television, which can be expensive, social media provides a more cost-effective option. This is especially beneficial for small businesses (Kikawa et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by limited access to resources and opportunities, the entrepreneurial activities of women in Qatar have been experiencing significant growth (Alagos, 2016). The country has witnessed a notable increase in women entrepreneurs, with Qatar ranking high in women entrepreneurship rates in the Middle East and North Africa (AbuKumail, Qanadilo, 2021).

The Qatari government has been proactive in supporting women entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Al-Dhameen program by the Qatar Development Bank (QDB), aimed at providing financial assistance to SMEs, including those owned by women. Additionally, entrepreneurship development programs like the Bedaya Center for Entrepreneurship and Career Development offer training and support to aspiring entrepreneurs (Qatar Development Bank, 2023).

While women in Qatar have the freedom to establish and manage businesses, the percentage of women business owners remains relatively low, although efforts are being made to increase their representation in leadership roles and address cultural barriers (El-Kassem et al., 2022; Khatri, 2014; Sergon, 2022). Despite educational achievements, women's participation in Qatar's labor force remains below expectations, often concentrated in entry-level administrative roles, particularly in the public sector (Hajhamad, 2021).

Qatari women aspiring to venture into entrepreneurship encounter numerous barriers to entry, including limited access to financial support, challenges in navigating legal requirements, cultural norms restricting women's participation, and the predominance of males in the business landscape (Camacho, 2019; Faisal, 2013). Additionally, the absence of female mentors, role models, and a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem can impede women's entrepreneurial endeavors. Despite these obstacles, women in Qatar are breaking into traditionally male-dominated industries and managerial roles, aligning with the goals outlined in Qatar National Vision 2030 (Hukoomi E-Government, 2022).

A study examining social media usage by women entrepreneurs in Egypt served as inspiration for this research. It revealed that social media can serve as a powerful tool for female entrepreneurs, aiding in business development, customer communication, and brand awareness (Beninger et al., 2016). However, challenges such as financial constraints and limited technology access hinder effective social media utilization. Despite these challenges, leveraging social media can significantly impact business success, underscoring the importance of addressing barriers to its effective usage by women entrepreneurs.

Various theoretical perspectives have been applied to analyze social media use in marketing communication. Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals engage in interactions to maximize rewards and minimize costs, implying that women entrepreneurs may utilize social media to enhance brand visibility and reduce marketing expenses (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that women entrepreneurs may use social media to meet their needs, including business promotion and customer engagement (Ruggiero, 2000).

Network Theory emphasizes the role of social media in expanding networks and fostering customer relationships, which can benefit women entrepreneurs in broadening their reach and

enhancing customer connections (van Osch, Bulgurcu, 2020). The Technology Acceptance Model suggests that women entrepreneurs' attitudes toward social media influence their adoption and usage for marketing communication (Fosso Wamba, 2018). Similarly, the Information Adoption Model proposes that female entrepreneurs might experience a series of stages, including becoming aware of, showing interest in, evaluating, testing, and ultimately adopting social media for their marketing strategies (Rahaman et al., 2022).

The Resource-Based Model posits that women entrepreneurs can utilize their expertise, capabilities, and networks via social media to achieve a competitive advantage within the business environment (Wernerfelt, 1984). Effectively leveraging resources and capabilities on social media enhances the likelihood of success in the competitive business environment (Fan et al., 2021; Pervaje, 2011). These theoretical frameworks offer insights into the dynamics of social media marketing communication for women entrepreneurs, highlighting its potential impact on business outcomes and the strategies needed to overcome associated challenges.

#### 4. Results

This research focused on examining the motivations, advantages, and obstacles associated with utilizing social media for marketing communication by Qatari women entrepreneurs. Data was collected from 10 women entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews conducted from September to October 2022.

**Table 1.** Motivations, Benefits, and Challenges of utilizing Social Media in Marketing for Qatari Women Entrepreneurs

Category	Subcategory	Quotations
Reasons	Usage Convenience	"The ease of communicating means that access to commercial desire can be done with a click of a button."
	Cost-Effectiveness	"It is the most cost-effective advertising method. I keep learning new features"
	Opportunities	
Personal Benefits	Brand Awareness	"The biggest advantage of social media is marketplace awareness."
	Consumer Engagement	"It allows communication with customers even outside of business hours."
	Ease of Access	"Ability to use Social media efficiently has elevated many local products to prominence in the Middle East region."
Professional Benefits	Brand Reputation	"Entrepreneurs are urged to work hard and professionally to build a strong brand reputation on the platform."
	Marketing Management	"Using Social media appropriately offers valuable visibility for new and established businesses in the market."
	Expansion	"Before launching a business, it's essential to define branding and style for effective communication."
	Sales	"Engaging with the audience is vital, as they inspire ideas and fuel sales."
Challenges	Growing the audience	"It's hard to gain followers and reach a larger audience on social media, especially for new businesses."
	Maintaining Professionalism	"It can be difficult to maintain professionalism on social media, especially when dealing with negative comments or complaints."
	Reputation Management	"Reputation management is crucial on social media because one mistake can lead to a boycott of the business."



The participants identified three main reasons for using social media for marketing communication: usage convenience, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities. They stated that social media provides an easy and convenient way to communicate with potential customers, as it can be accessed with just a click of a button. Social media platforms also serve as digital marketplaces, enabling businesses to promote their content effortlessly and encourage interaction and sharing, which can provide marketers with extensive information about consumers as seen in [Table 1](#).

Participants highlighted several personal and professional advantages of utilizing social media for marketing communication. On a personal level, they emphasized benefits such as heightened brand awareness, enhanced consumer engagement, and easy accessibility. Professionally, social media was seen as instrumental in building brand reputation, managing marketing activities, facilitating business expansion, and driving sales and revenue growth.

However, participants also identified key challenges in leveraging social media effectively. Expanding their audience was noted as a significant hurdle, requiring consistent time and effort to grow a substantial following. Maintaining professionalism on social media emerged as another challenge, particularly in addressing customer concerns promptly, as neglect in this area can result in adverse outcomes for the business. Reputation management was deemed crucial, as a poorly handled reputation can lead to boycotts and a loss of consumer trust on the platform.

The findings reveal social media provides women entrepreneurs in Qatar with a unique opportunity to succeed in a patriarchal society. Participants observed that social media is an inclusive platform, transcending gender boundaries while offering a sense of security and safety to thrive in the business world. Additionally, they emphasized that social media usage can lead to empowerment in both marketing and status for women entrepreneurs in the Arabic region.

Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the reasons behind the usage of social media networking platforms by Qatari women entrepreneurs, the benefits and challenges they experience, and the opportunities that social media provides for empowerment. These insights can be useful for both policymakers and practitioners looking to support women entrepreneurs in Qatar and the broader Arabic region.

The findings of this study reveal that women entrepreneurs in Qatar recognize multiple advantages of using social media for marketing, such as convenience, affordability, and growth potential. They also noted that social media helps boost brand visibility, foster consumer interaction, and provides easy accessibility. However, the participants also identified several challenges in using social media for marketing, such as growing the audience, maintaining professionalism, and managing reputation.

To better understand and address these challenges, the participants shared specific strategies they employed to overcome the difficulties they faced when using social media for marketing communication. These strategies can be valuable for other entrepreneurs facing similar challenges.

1. Expanding the audience: To address the challenge of expanding their audience on social media, participants stressed the need for creating engaging and high-quality content, collaborating with influencers and complementary brands, and utilizing paid advertising to reach a wider audience. Additionally, they mentioned the value of using hashtags and geotags strategically to increase visibility and attract new followers.

2. Maintaining professionalism: Participants highlighted the importance of establishing clear guidelines and policies for their social media presence, including response times, tone of voice, and the types of comments and messages they would address. They also mentioned the importance of training their team members on how to handle customer inquiries, complaints, and negative feedback professionally and respectfully.

3. Reputation management: To effectively manage their reputation on social media, participants stressed the need for continuous monitoring of their online presence, promptly addressing any negative comments or feedback, and taking responsibility for any mistakes made. They also highlighted the importance of being transparent and authentic in their communication with their audience. By openly addressing issues, admitting mistakes, and taking corrective actions, they were able to maintain trust and credibility with their customers. Additionally, participants emphasized the value of sharing positive customer reviews and testimonials to showcase their brand's reputation and successes.

The participants also emphasized the importance of understanding their target audience and using appropriate marketing tools to reach them. They noted that Instagram and Snapchat were the most popular platforms among their target audience and that the content they shared on these

platforms needed to be catchy and to the point. Additionally, they stressed the importance of listening to their audience and using their feedback to improve their marketing strategies.

By implementing these specific strategies to overcome the challenges of using social media for marketing communication, women entrepreneurs in Qatar were able to leverage the platform effectively to grow their businesses. These insights can be useful for other entrepreneurs facing similar challenges and looking to optimize their social media presence for marketing success.

When it comes to the challenges they faced, the participants highlighted the difficulties of growing their audience and maintaining professionalism on social media. They also emphasized the importance of reputation management, as one mistake on social media can lead to a boycott of the business.

To better understand the social media use of the participants, the findings from this study have been summarized and linked to relevant theoretical frameworks. The theories provide a lens through which to interpret the participants' reasons, benefits, and challenges in using social media for marketing communication. Below, we provide an in-depth explanation of each theoretical framework and its relevance to the study.

1. **Social Exchange Theory:** This theory posits that people engage with others to optimize benefits and reduce expenses. In the context of this study, it explains why women entrepreneurs utilize social media as an affordable marketing tool that provides convenience and growth opportunities, ultimately enhancing their returns.

2. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** This theory posits that individuals use media to fulfil their needs and desires. This study helps to explain why women entrepreneurs use social media to satisfy their needs, such as promoting their business, connecting with customers, and building relationships.

3. **Network Theory:** Focusing on the relationships and connections between nodes, this theory provides a framework for understanding the importance of social media networks in marketing communication. In this study, Network Theory helps explain how women entrepreneurs leverage their connections on social media platforms to grow their audience, establish collaborations, and increase brand awareness.

4. **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):** This model examines the factors that influence users' acceptance and use of technology, including perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of this study, TAM helps explain why women entrepreneurs in Qatar adopt social media for marketing communication, as they perceive it to be a useful and convenient tool for promoting their businesses and connecting with their target audience.

5. **Information Adoption Model (IAM):** This model focuses on the factors that influence an individual's intention to adopt information, including its perceived quality, relevance, and usefulness. In the context of this study, IAM sheds light on how women entrepreneurs assess the usefulness and relevance of social media for marketing communication, which ultimately influences their decision to adopt it as a marketing tool.

6. **Resource-Based View (RBV):** This theory posits that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its unique resources and capabilities. In the context of this study, RBV helps explain why women entrepreneurs use social media as a strategic resource for marketing communication, leveraging the platform to enhance their competitive advantage through cost-effective promotion and increased customer engagement.

The findings enhance our understanding of how women entrepreneurs in Qatar use social media for marketing, demonstrating how theoretical frameworks can explain their motivations, benefits, and challenges. This study adds to the literature on social media use among entrepreneurs and offers practical insights to help others navigate the challenges of utilizing social media for marketing purposes.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between social media use, marketing communication, and media literacy among women entrepreneurs in Qatar. The findings highlight key advantages such as convenience, cost-efficiency, and growth opportunities, including increased brand awareness, consumer engagement, improved brand reputation, and greater sales. However, challenges like audience growth, maintaining professionalism, and managing reputation were also noted. Theoretical frameworks, including Social Exchange Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory,

Network Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, and Resource-Based View, provided valuable insights into the social media practices of these entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, this study imparts valuable insights into the strategic use of social media for marketing communication among women entrepreneurs in Qatar. Emphasis is placed on the importance of strategic planning, brand fortification, audience responsiveness, and adept reputation management on social media platforms. The outcomes contribute substantively to the extant literature on social media marketing and women's entrepreneurship in the Qatari context.

Nevertheless, several limitations merit acknowledgement. The study exclusively focuses on the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Qatar, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions. Future research endeavours should encompass diverse global contexts to afford a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, the study predominantly centres on Generation Y and Z women entrepreneurs, possibly overlooking the distinct perspectives and challenges of different age cohorts. Future investigations may consider a broader age spectrum to capture nuanced variations in social media practices among women entrepreneurs. The study recommends incorporating media literacy into entrepreneurial training programs to equip women with essential skills for analyzing, creating, and managing digital content effectively. Policymakers should promote initiatives that combine entrepreneurship development with media literacy education, ensuring broader access to training resources. Future research should examine the impact of media literacy on consumer perceptions and brand management to further explore its influence on business success. Additionally, studies could investigate how varying levels of media literacy affect entrepreneurial outcomes across different cultural contexts.

By addressing these recommendations, women entrepreneurs in Qatar can leverage media literacy to optimize their social media strategies and achieve sustainable growth in a competitive digital landscape.

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