

THE ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY PR PRACTITIONERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at identifying the effect of the constituent factors of 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 its impact on the behavior of the actual use of social media networks by the United Arab Emirates public relations practitioners in both the private and public sectors. The findings of this study indicated that the factors affecting the adoption of public relations practitioners of social networking are: anticipating the performance, availability of the facilities

intention of usage, expected effort and social impact are positively correlated and significant with behavioral intention among PR professionals. furthermore, the PR practitioners are highly aware of the importance of using social media in their work. A positive relationship exists between performance expectancy and behavioral 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 the internet active users in United Arab Emirates is 9.73 million compared to the total population 9.83 millions with 99% penetration in 2020. (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-united-arab-emirates>, retrieved February 12, 2020). The high internet usage is attributed to the mobile subscriptions having 18.38 million indicated with 187% overall. 93% of the people get access to internet for personal and professional reasons every day. (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-united-arab-emirates>, retrieved February 12, 2020.) . Social media networking sites (SNSs) users in UAE are also shown with big percentage of 92% under which 9.73 million people are actively social through mobile (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-united-arab-emirates>, retrieved February 12, 2020.) So the large scale rise in the adoption of social media by both the private and public sectors in the UAE is attributed to the easy availability of 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 organizations to create a positive relationship with the public." (<https://linchpinseo.com/beginners-guide-to-public-relations/> retrieved February 10 , 2020.)

Public relations, defined by Grunig and Hunt (as cited in (Kamerer & Morris,2011), is an organization's attempt to manage the communication between itself and its publics. Communication by a single person or organization to thousands of other 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 publics 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, you tube, Instagram, linked in...etc.) are the fastest growing internet or web application. They become an integral part of the lives of the people and organizations 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 organizations to create new relationships and reconnect with other organizations or companies, and friends. Increased communication, even online, strengthens relationships and also help to improve the services or profit of organizations (Thomson,2006). So all PR private and public Emirati organizations adopted and integrated SNSs in PR their work for several purposes such as: to engage with internal and external publics, formation and maintaining relationships new and old relationships, exchange ideas, experience, SMS messages, video, text, pictures, reconnect with other organizations or companies, government, clients, friends, coworkers in order to promote their business and profession.

PROBLEM

Social networking sites (SNSs) have provided multiple platforms for PR practitioners to communicate with their publics 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 organizations and receive immediate feedback from their internal and external publics. Some of them have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the (SNSs) to improve their professional practices and build a reputation for their organizations. On the other hand, some of them who seem not to consider (SNSs) as serious platforms that can be used for the advancement of PR programmers and activities. At best, they use (SNSs) for their personal interactions, leaving their organizations' publics at the mercy of rumor and fake news mongers in the social virtual space. This study aimed at identifying 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 its impact on the behavior of the actual use of (SNSs) by United Arab Emirati public relations practitioners. So the research problem is to determine the most influencing factors in adopting PR practitioners by (SNSs).

LITERATURE REVIEW: RELATED STUDIES

- 1- Al-Badiali et. al. ,2018). The findings of this study showed that the tendency and general awareness of social media by Omani public relation professionals is high.
- 2- BinShaikh et.al ,2016). The findings of his study indicated that organizations or companies that simply use Facebook to broadcast offers or post to advertise don't have the similar demand as those that engage customers and asking them for their opinion.
- 3- Inya, Agha, 2017). The study discovered that the use of social media by the public relations practitioners has changed the traditional methods of information dissemination in the universities in South-East Nigeria.
- 4- Quainoo, Antwi ,2015). The findings of this study indicated that all the selected companies use Facebook often as a PR tool; however, there is more one-way communication resulting in less interaction to increase

the relationship and foster close relationship between the organization and its public. The interaction is more from the organization to the customers and the public with few responses from the customers.

5- Williams, M., Rana, N. & Dwivedi,2015). performed a systematic review of articles that have used the (UTAUT) theory and the weight analysis of variables and found that performance expectancy and behavioral intention qualified for the best predictor category.

6- Silinskyte, J. (2014). The findings of this study indicated that the factors significantly influencing the behavioral intention to use Bitcoin include performance expectancy and effort expectancy and actual usage is affected by both facilitating conditions and behavioral intention.

7- Alilikil, Ozlem ,2012). The findings revealed that Turkish PR professionals highly appreciate the importance of social media in recent PR practice. However, not all social media tools are equally adopted; e-mail is the most, and virtual world applications are the least adopted social media networking sites.

8- Lindley Curtis et.al.,2010). The Findings of this study indicated that women consider social media to be beneficial, whereas men exhibit more confidence in actively utilizing social media. Organizations with specified public relations departments were more likely to adopt social media. Positive correlations between UTAUT factors and credibility indicated a greater likelihood to adopt social media.

9- Monica and Sweetser,2008). The findings of this study provided 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 at identifying the major variables affecting the general acceptance of the use of technology in social networks and their impact on the behavior 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 applied 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 its impact on the behavior 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 behavior. Gender, age, experience and voluntariness of use are posited to moderate the impact of the four key constructs on usage intention and behavior (Venkatesh et. al., 2003)

HYPOTHESES:

- 1- There is a significant relationship between expected performance, expected effort, social impact, available facilities, and behavioral intention;

- 2- There is a strong correlation between the expected effort, the social impact, the available facilities and the behavioral intention;
- 3- There is a strong correlation between the social impact, available facilities, and the behavioral intention;
- 4- There is a strong correlation between the available facilities and the behavioral intention.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the descriptive-analytical approach. Its population consists of all public relations practitioners including: employees, heads of the departments, and managers working in both in the private and public sectors in the UAE. To produce meaningful and useful results, a convenience sample was used and covered (N.219) practitioners working in public relations. The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first deals with the characteristics of the sample's 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's scale (agree=3, neutral=2 and disagree=1). The validity of the questionnaire was verified and the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) was used for stability and reached (90.2). Multiple regression analysis was used to estimate and test the relationships between the different variables.

RESULTS

First: factors affecting the adopted by practitioners of public relations for social networks.

Means and standard deviations for the variables of public relations 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 this variable has the strongest influence on the decision to the usage of social networks. The available facilitating conditions (PC) variable came second with an average (2.67) while, the behavioral intention (BI) variable ranked third with an average (2.63)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables of Study

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.

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	Behavioral 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

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), the effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions and behavioral 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 there is a significant impact the effort expectancy 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.

. Multiple Regression Results of PE2Table

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

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

three independent variables: social influence, facilitating conditions, and behavioral intention. This evidence is enforced by the correlation coefficient value of (0.471) and significant value of t-statistic for each other three independent variables.

. Multiple Regression Results of (EE)3Table

Variables	Effort Expectancy (EE)						
	F	Sig.	R	R ²	(B)	t	Sig.
Constant					1.413	7.698	0.000
Social Influence (SI)	20.419	0.000	0.471	0.222	0.158	3.215	0.002
Facilitating Conditions (FC)					0.187	2.909	0.004
Behavioral Intention (BI)					0.100	2.348	0.020

Fourth: The Relationship between Social Impact, Facilitating Conditions and Behavioral 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					0.591	2.793	0.006
Facilitating Conditions (FC)	42.524	0.000	0.532	0.283	0.480	5.816	0.000
Behavioral Intention (BI)					0.237	4.196	0.000

Fifth: The Relationship between Available Facilitating Conditions (FC) and Behavioral 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 Behavioral 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.

. Regression Results of (FC)5Table

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

DISCUSSION

The study aimed at identifying 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 its impact on the behavior of the actual use of social media by United Arab Emirati public relations practitioners.

Performance Expectancy: Venkatesh et al. (2003) has defined it as it is "a degree to which one believes that the job performance will improve by using innovative technology" The findings related to this factor showed that the PR professionals have a positive attitude toward 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 "with respect to ease that is how an individual feel either he/she use technology in easy way and how much strength of ease is there in usage of technology." Venkatesh,(2003). The findings related to this factor indicated the PR professionals believe their organization has computer sets, internet services, data bases, so it is easy to use social media networks as well as the top management paid a great effort in order to facilitate the flow of information among the employees.

Behavioral Intention (BI): Zarpou et al. ,2012). is another variable behavioral that can be defined as "a subjective approach of consumers towards the adoptability of mobile commerce." The findings related to this variable showed that the PR professionals adopted social media in their work to communicate with their customer, publicize the activities and news of their organization.

Social Influence(SI). Individuals often respond to social normative influences to maintain a favorable image within their group or team 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 argued 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 indicated that the PR professionals accept and fulfill the orders of their senior

management to give a favorable image about themselves to the management and colleagues which might enhance their social status in the organization.

Perceived Benefit(PB) is one of the strongest determinants of the intentional behavior and actual behavior. That is the users use the system that contains beneficial jobs Lindley et. al (2010). The findings indicated that the most influential factor in behavioral intent is: performance expectancy, social influence and easiness of the use of facilities. The findings of this study are in agreement with Williams, Michael et. al. (2015) and McCarthy, Halawi,2008) studies that emphasized performance expectancy variable as a decisive, strong and influential in the intentional use of social media by individuals.

Conclusion

Social media networking sites have brought about fundamental, broad-based changes in communication between individuals, groups, organizations, and societies. The findings of the study indicated that factors affecting the adoption of public relations practitioners of social media are: anticipating the performance, availability of the facilities, intention of usage, expected effort and social impact. All of them are positively correlated and significant with behavioral intention among PR professionals. furthermore, the PR practitioner highly aware of the importance of social media usage in their work. Also a positive relationship exists between performance expectancy and behavioral intentions in adopting social media.

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