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CROSSING BORDERS BY SOCIAL MEDIA: AN APPLICATION ON THE TURKISH EXPORTERS

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ABSTRACT

In today's world of lost boundaries, businesses face a dynamic and interconnected international environment and this world has brought both opportunities and challenges. Today's customers are now spending most of their time on the social media. Along with the revolutions in technology, communication and transportation businesses in global economy, in order to obtain a competitive advantage, unlike traditional marketing methods, businesses have begun searching for alternative channels. Importantly, in face of continuously growing competition and changing consumer preferences, social media which came up with the development of Web 2.0, becomes one of the marketing communication components for businesses and it provides appealing opportunities to businesses which aim to reach target markets quickly and effectively.

Interest to the role of the social media in marketing activities has increased. Academic inquiry on the subject has also accelerated with many contributions attempting to define the social media's role in marketing. Although many studies on this subject take place in literature, few studies have investigated the potential role of the internet in exporting or social media's role in exporting. The aim of this study is to determine the uses of social media by the exporting firms which are important for the economic purposes. In line with the aim, the study has been carried out through colleting primary data from the exporting firms in the city of Kayseri in Turkey.

Keywords: *Social media; Social media marketing; Exporting firms; Turkey*

INTRODUCTION

From 2010 to 2014, the Turkish exports earnings increased fast. But since 2015, export figures have started to fall. In the year of 2016, it was calculated as 142 138 billion US Dollars. It has been noticed that the share of export earning of Kayseri in Turkey's total export earnings is around 1% (Under secretariat of Foreign Trade and the Turkish Statistics Institute).

Today, a new consumer profile has been emerged by the use of increasing technology, the rise of computers, internet access, and the fact that smartphones are part of everyday life. These new consumers are constantly communicating and using social media very well. Consumers are no longer just consumers and have begun to participate in their ideas and production process very effectively. Businesses that actively use social media can design and develop products with their customers, and as a result they are ahead of the competition.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The leading social networks are usually available in multiple languages and enable firms to connect with their potential customers or other firms across geographical, political or economic borders. As many researches have shown, daily time spent on social media continues to increase every year in all consumer groups. Research conducted by GlobalWebIndex shows that globally around 1 in every 3 minutes spent online is devoted to social networking and messaging, with digital consumers engaging for a daily average of over 2 hours (rising to 2 hrs 40 mins among 16-24s). Statistic of Statista, given in the Table 1 below, shows the number of social network users

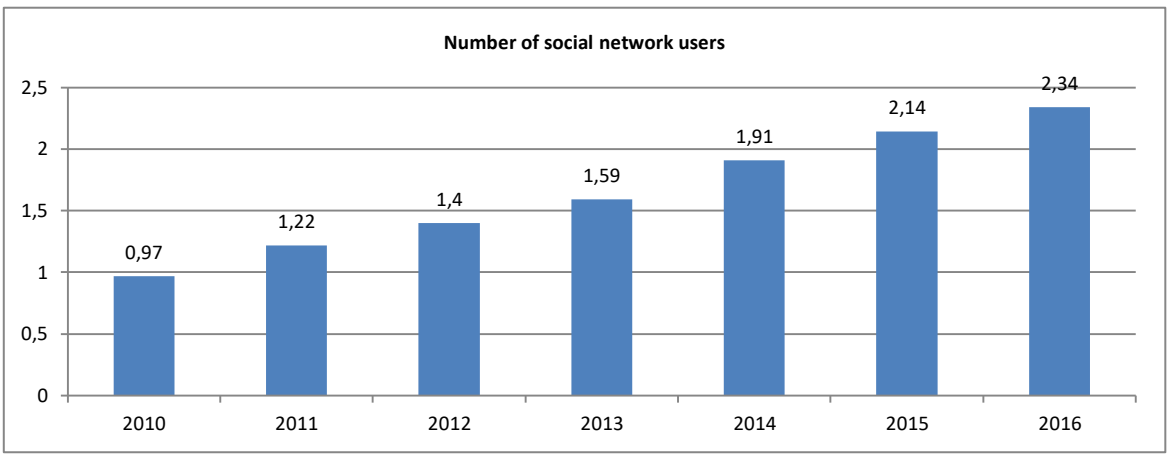
worldwide from 2010 to 2016 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/).

Table1: Number of Social Network Users Worldwide from 2010 to 2016 (in Billions)

Year	Number of social network users
2010	0,97
2011	1,22
2012	1,4
2013	1,59
2014	1,91
2015	2,14
2016	2,34

At the beginning of 2016, 2,34 billion internet users accessed social networks and these figures are still expected to grow as mobile device usage and mobile social networks increasingly gain attraction. According to Statista, in 2020, it is estimated that there will be around 2.95 billion social network users around the globe.

Figure 1: Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2016 (in billions)



In Turkey, social media usage has also gone through a similar trend. According to We Are Social, there are 48 million active social media accounts in Turkey and active social media user penetration rate is 60 % at the beginning of 2017. The average social media user spends 2 hours and 56 minutes per day globally using social networks and microblogs and in Turkey they use 2 hours and 37 minutes, with Argentinian and Filipino users registering the most, at more than 4 hours per day. Facebook is the most popular social network worldwide with 1.871 billion active users in January 2016, and Messenger is the second (http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2016/digital-social-mobile-in-apac-in-2016/).

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) has indicated that social media introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals. Communication facilities brought by social media that people use so intensely offer new opportunities and advantages for businesses. Successful businesses use social media effectively. Nowadays, while the power of advertising to influence the consumer gradually decreases, the power of

consumers to influence other consumers through social media increases. Social media's power in marketing is increasing day by day because it is low cost and more reliable for consumers. According to research conducted by Google Wildfire, 27 percent of companies surveyed are shifting budgets from traditional to social media. Tapscott and Williams (2006) emphasize a new type of market is being shaped: copyright, communication strategy and message control by hierarchical management structures is increasingly under attack. Social media has functioned as a new marketing communication channel. As Mangold and Faulds (2009) stated that the media have experienced a huge transformation over the past decade. This evolving and changing new media environment brings many new applications in terms of marketing activities.

According to Pérez-Latre, Portilla and Blanco (2011) social networks might also be a tool for audience and market segmentation and the analysis of specific or "niche" audiences. And also they have been considered in market research as a new tool for collecting information. In the study of Belch and Belch (2002), internet was included in the promotion mix. Social media allows us to better understand consumers and identify their needs clearly as interrelationships with consumer quickly and easily. As Macmillan (2011, s.7) specified that the most important feature of social media is the ability to measure customer returns. The main reasons for using social media in business are to effectively and inexpensively get out the message about company and enhance communication with customers.The target audience is identifiable, measurable and accessible at any time. Over the years, there has been an impressive increase in the number of people contacting brands directly through their social platform. Social media marketing is increasingly being used in business to attract attention and gain website traffic. Today's digital marketing spending shows that social media is an area of marketing which will receive huge investment in the future. In 2016, spending on social media marketing in the U.S. totalled approximately 11.72 billion U.S. dollars. By 2019, this figure is expected to rise to 17.34 billion U.S. dollars (https://www.statista.com/statistics/276890/social-media-marketing-expenditure-in-the-united-states/). Hanna et al. (2011) propose that any company engaging in social media marketing, either large or small, should first conceptualize and develop its own version of the social media ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been performed to investigate the impact of the internet on international marketing: (Quelch and Klein 1996, Bennett; 1997, Hamill and Gregory; 1997, Poon and Jevons; 1997, Samiee; 1998, Berthon, Pitt, Katsikeas and Berthon; 1999, Yip; 2000, Zugelder, Flaherty and Johnson; 2000, Hamill and Prashantham; 2001, Overby and Min; 2001, Prasad, Ramamurthy and Naidu; 2001, Prashantham;2003, Nguyen and Barrett; 2006, Lu and Julian; 2007, Mathews and Healy; 2008). But these studies have not addressed social media.

Berthonvd. (2012), Constantinides, Romero and Boria (2008); Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre; 2011, Mangold and Faulds (2009) Kirtiş and Karahan (2011) examined theoretically the issue. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) presented a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Constantinides, Romero and Boria (2008) explain social medias importance as a strategic marketing tool and proposes a number of alternative strategies for retailers. Mangold and Faulds (2009) argues that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another. Kirtiş and Karahan (2011) investigated whether firms spend less money via social media to realize their marketing strategies comparing with traditional media as well as the importance of social media for the marketing area. They indicated that after the global recession firms have looked for the most effective marketing strategy with minimum cost. Social media has become the optimum choice which serves to this strategy. Because it can reach millions of people with the highest speed and it can spread out very quickly, then firms prefer to use social media even in substitution for traditional media tools. Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga (2010) used case studies to describe how companies are using social media to interact with their customers.

Luo, Zhang, Duan (2013) inspect relationships between social media and firm equity value. They find that social media is a leading indicator of firm equity value and has a stronger predictive value than conventional online consumer behavioural metrics. Curtis et al.(2010) investigate that adoption of social

media for public relations by non-profit organizations. The studies evaluate that social media in terms of exporting companies are very limited. It is believed that the social media will impact exporting performance and international competition.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Goal

The aim of this study is to examine the empirical link between the social media and export marketing performance in exporter firms which are important for the economic purposes. In this respect, more specifically, this study investigates the social media usage by the exporting firms operating in the city of Kayseri in Turkey, and also their perceptions related to this issue.

Sample and Data Collection

The population of the current study consists of exporting firms registered with Kayseri Chamber of Industry. The registered number of exporting firms with Kayseri Chamber of Industry is about 1000. However, due to the current economic and socio-politic circumstances of Turkey, a large number of these firms have presently halted their operations. Moreover, many other firms are operating indirectly; that is, they are making production for other firms, most of which are larger nation-wide operating firms. On top of this, the inherited difficulties of conducting survey with firms have also contributed to the low level of participation. The sample consisted of 78 Turkish exporter firms. In line with the aims, a questionnaire was developed including various types of question. In order to prepare an appropriate questionnaire, first the literature was reviewed by investigating relative scales used in similar studies and an interview was conducted with the representatives of 10 exporting firms in Kayseri. Subsequently, a pilot study was done with 10 exporting firms representing the targeted population. Data were gathered via a self-administered mail survey. Data obtained from those 78 questionnaires were analysed through a statistical packet program and the differences between export firm employees' expectations and perceptions concerning social media usage were tested through t-test analyses.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of the Exporting Firms

Characteristics of the exporting firms and respondents are given in Table 2. As it can be noticed from Table 2, there are 78 exporting firms participated in the survey. Approximately 22% of the responding firms are in the textile, 20% of the responding firms are in the furnishing, 14% of the responding firms are in the machinery and 8% of the responding firms are in the Electronics/Communication sectors, most of them are small and medium sized and export earnings of 40% of the participating firms are 72% of their total revenues.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Exporting Firms Responding to the Survey

Operating Sector	n	%	Operating Year	n	%
Textile	17	21,8	**1-5**	10	12,8
Food	4	5,1	**6-10**	9	11,5
Furnishing	16	20,5	**11-15**	18	23,1
Electronics/Communication Technologies	6	7,7	**16-20**	12	15,4
Chemical	1	1,3	**21-25**	1	15,4
Machinery	11	14,1	**26 and above**	17	21,8
Other	23	29,5	**Total**	**78**	**100**
Total	**78**	**100**			
Export Earnings as Part of Revenues	**n**	**%**	**Exporting Period**	**n**	**%**
1-20	34	45,3	**1-5**	28	36,8
21-40	20	26,7	**6-10**	20	26,3
41-60	9	12,0	**11-20**	8	10,5
61-80	5	6,7	**21 and above**	20	26,3
81-100	7	9,3	**Total**	**76**	**100**
Total	**75**	**100**			
Number of Employee	**n**	**%**	**Number of Exporting Country**	**n**	**%**
Small (1-50)	45	57,7	**1-5**	39	52
Medium (51-150)	15	19,2	**6-25**	21	28
Large (151 and above)	18	23,1	**26 and above**	15	20
Total	**78**	**100**	**Total**	**75**	**100**
Position of the Respondents	**n**	**%**	**Education level of the Respondents**	**n**	**%**
Firm Owner-President of Managerial Board	8	10,3	**Primary and Secondary Education**	5	6,5
General Manager – Firm Manager	5	6,4	**High School / College Education**	15	19,5
Foreign Trade Manager	13	16,7	**Associate and Bachelor's University Degrees**	44	57,1
Foreign Trade Staff	30	38,5	**Master's and Doctorate Degrees**	13	16,9
Other Department Manager	4	5,1	**Total**	**77**	**100**
Other Staff	18	23,1			
Total	**78**	**100**			

Social media usage level of the exporting firms according to social media types are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Social Media Usage Level of the Exporting Firms According to Social Media Types

Social Media	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Facebook	67	3,0448	1,09313
Twitter	53	2,2830	1,14987
YouTube	55	**3,1455**	1,28262
Blogs	49	1,9388	1,14397
LinkedIn	45	1,8222	,93636
Instagram	45	2,6222	1,36995
WhatsApp	66	**4,2273**	,81892
Google+	49	**3,2653**	1,59132
Imo	45	1,4889	,66134
Viber	49	2,1633	1,17875
Skype	48	2,9792	1,32873
WeChat	39	1,7692	1,36616

As it can be noticed from Table 03, most of the exporting firms participated in the survey use Facebook, WhatsApp, Google+ and YouTube. WhatsApp is the most used social media platform. IMO is the least used social media platform.

Differences of Employee's Expectation and Perception in Terms of Social Media Using

Independent-samples t-test compared the means of employee's expectation and employee's perception (Table 4) with the value of t and the significance level for exporting firms. The means, values of t and significance levels are listed in the Table 4. Independent-samples t-test reveals that there are statistically significant differences between the employee's expectation and perception based on social media using. From the results obtained, the p-value is less than the significant level,05 and four alternative hypothesis are accepted (rejected the null hypothesis) if the p-value is less than ,05. These variables are "Gathering information on the job", "Providing information about the companies", "Doing advertising" and "Product presentation". Evaluations of employees on social media usage differ in terms of employee's expectation and perception. The hypothesis H1 is accepted.

H1: Employee's expectation and perception differ in terms of social media usage.

Table 4: t-test Comparison of the Means of Employee's Expectation and Employee's Perception

Export Earnings as Part of Revenues	n	Expectation	n	Perception	t	Sig.
Doing market research	71	3,5352	69	3,4638	0,434	,665
Understanding customer trends	72	3,7917	69	3,5217	1,632	,105
Gathering information on the job	72	3,5694	69	3,2029	2,142	,034
Providing information about the companies	72	3,3472	69	3,6957	2,100	,038
Providing information about the product	71	3,7606	69	3,7391	0,136	,892
Doing research and development	71	3,2958	68	3,2353	0,313	,755
To talk about orders and payments	71	3,5493	68	3,5441	0,029	,977
Doing sales	71	3,8310	69	3,5797	1,590	,114
Doing advertising	71	4,1268	68	3,7059	2,688	,008
Access to company statistics	70	3,2000	68	2,9118	1,492	,138
Product presentation	70	3,9571	68	3,6176	2,079	,039
Provide video and audio technical support	71	3,8873	69	3,6812	1,168	,245
Developing foreign language skills	71	3,5775	69	3,3043	1,411	,161
Creating an archive and database	69	3,3768	68	3,0588	1,638	,104
Sharing the information of fair and abroad	71	3,9577	69	3,7391	1,468	,144
Uploading pictures and videos	71	4,0000	69	3,8551	0,909	,365
One-to-one communication	71	3,9437	69	3,7971	1,054	,294
Establishing special friendships	71	3,4507	69	3,1884	1,432	,155
Creating a commercial and social network	71	3,7465	69	3,5797	1,155	,250
Managing Customer Relationships (CRM)	71	3,4085	69	3,2899	0,682	,496

The independent-samples t-test indicated that there are significant differences in the means of employee's expectation and perception depending on social media usage. The results show that employee's expectation and perception differ in terms of social media usage for value of "gathering information on the job". The expectation (3,56) was higher than the average of perceptions (3,20). The export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for gathering information on the job, but they cannot use it sufficiently.

The results show that employee's expectation and perception differ in terms of social media usage for value of "Providing information about the companies". The perceptions (3,69) was higher than the average of expectation (3,34). The export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for accessing company information, so they can use it sufficiently.

The results show that employee's expectation and perception differ in terms of social media using for value of "Doing advertising". The expectation (4,12) was higher than the average of perceptions (3,70). The export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for doing sales, but they cannot use it sufficiently.

The results show that employee's expectation and perception differ in terms of social media using for value of "Product presentation". The expectation (3,95) was higher than the average of perceptions (3,61). The export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for product presentation, but they cannot use it sufficiently.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The increased worldwide usage of smart phones and mobile devices has opened up the possibilities of mobile social networks with increased features. If exporters have a clear social media strategy, social

media has a key role on success in sales, consumer relations and all marketing functions. As part of an export strategy, social media can help exporters to penetrate into market and to find demand of their products from customers abroad.

This research was conducted to identify the employee evaluations who work in exporting firms in Kayseri in Turkey. The usage of social media by the employees of the export department is very important. Independent-samples t-test reveals that there are statistically significant differences between the employee's expectation and perception based on social media usage. These variables are "Gathering information on the job", "Providing information about the companies", "Doing advertising" and "Product presentation". Evaluations of employees on social media usage differ in terms of employee's expectation and perception.

The results show that (1) the export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for gathering information on the job, but they cannot use it sufficiently, (2) the export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for accessing company information, so they can use it sufficiently, (3) the export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for doing advertising, but they cannot use it sufficiently, (4) the export department employees think that they can use social media effectively for product presentation, but they cannot use it sufficiently.

According to above mentioned results, it can be suggested that in order to help the employees use the social media more efficiently for gathering information on the job, doing advertising and product presentation, firms ought to conduct different activities such as training programs that may increase their operational skills in these deficient areas.

Another important conclusion from this study is that although the employees working in export departments strongly believe in the important role of social media, they cannot sufficiently use this potential in their job operations. This also shows that such employees do not see the social media as an effective professional tool. Hence, awareness of the effective social media usage should be promoted among these employees.

Results of the study are strongly based on the literature review. Comparison with the results of the research done in different samples will be useful. Other studies should be done on a larger scope to compare this study with what is happening across the nation. Results are valid within the specified research limits, and it is impossible to make generalization.

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