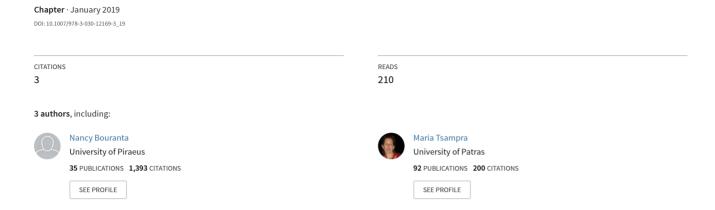# Digital Practices of Greek Small Entrepreneurship: Social Media and Self-Employment

DIGITAL PRACTICES OF GREEK SMALL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the adoption of Information and Communication Technology and emerging digital marketing practices by micro-enterprises in Greece; and specifically, the perception of the self-employed and solo self-employed entrepreneurs for the social media as means/tools enhancing business resilience and performance in the current period of economic downturn. A sample of 418usable questionnaires enabled exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses in order to validate the proposed constructs. The fit and predictive accuracy of the proposed model was estimated using AMOS software. Results on how Greek micro-entrepreneurs use digital marketing tools and specifically, on whether they integrate social media into business practices illuminate important aspects of entrepreneurial motivation and perceptions and provide valuable information for both practitioners and policy makers. Interestingly, there is also a significant relation between social media usage, or lack thereof, and the industry/economic sector in which the self-employed engage.

KEYWORDS: Sales performance, Self-employment, Social Media, Greece

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES

M31 Marketing
M10 General
M15 IT Management

1.INTRODUCTION

Self-employment has attracted particular attention in literature and research since the 1980s, due to its rising rates in all European economies. Since the outburst of the last crisis, self-employment has been further promoted by European Union (EU) economic policy as a way out of unemployment and in fact, it has much contributed to overall employment growth in certain countries amidst the crisis. In the economies of Southern Europe (notably Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy), self-employment with or without employees has traditionally been the backbone of the business sector - both in terms of employment and gross domestic product (GDP). Even in deep recession since 2009, in conditions of collapsed entrepreneurship and skyrocketing unemployment, self-employment in Greece appears to be resilient and even increased its rate to 31.9% (far above second-placed Italy: 23.4% and Portugal: 21.1%) recording the highest score in the EU (Eurostat, 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics).
Self-employed workers are often more focused on workmanship and much less on entrepreneurship. In other words, extended self-employment does not necessarily signify entrepreneurial initiatives of high aspirations and dynamic. Therefore, a thorough examination of the qualitative aspects of self-employed entrepreneurship is required for safe conclusions with regard to its contribution to job creation, economic resilience and recovery. On this ground, the study of strategy and practices adopted by self-employed to enhance their business sales performance and competitiveness is essential. Recently emerging and broadly expanding digital tools for communication, networking, marketing,

product/service customization and development have formed new challenges and generated new opportunities for small and micro enterprises (SmEs), such as the self-employed. The use of social media (SM) in particular, as the most user-friendly and popular Information and Communication Technology (ICT) means, have largely served SmE's resilience in the post-crisis period of limited resources. It is considered challenge for businesses to measure the effectiveness of social media marketing (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Jagongo and Kinyua (2013) proposed that further examination of the relationship between social media and business sales is needed. On this background, the aim of this study is to empirically explore the use of digital business tools by micro-enterprises in Greece, with particular focus on social media and their impact on sales performance. In addition, it is examined if self-employer attitudes towards SM usage are significantly defined by the economic sector of his /her business.

The following part of the paper briefly refers to the concepts of Social Media and Self-employment and presents the proposed theoretical model. Methodological analysis and results are described in the two subsequent parts, and then the final parts of the paper present the conclusions and practical implications of the present study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Data for the use of social media and other digital technologies mainly concern the customer's side, i.e. the internet user. The Laboratory of Electronic Commerce and Entrepreneurship - ELTRUN, Athens University of Economics, recently publicized the results of the 6th Annual Survey for Social Networking (2016). For the first time, data affirm an emerging trend of interaction between users and business – as recorded by Like in sites of commercial content and sites of specific companies and products. More illuminating information draws on the State of Digital Leadership 2014 survey (conducted by Valuecom in collaboration with ELTRUN). Greek SMEs are distinguished in three groups with regard to "how much digital is their marketing strategy and practice": 66% of SMEs are 'traditional' firms of established presence in digital media; 18% are identified as 'amateurs' and just 16% of SMEs fit in the group of "pioneers" with a leading digital presence. As for the objectives to be served by digital media, 50% of Greek SMEs seek primarily the commitment of customers to the product and the brand; for 44% of SMEs the main aim is to provide customer care; while, for 33% the priority is communication with customers, fans of the brand and opinion leaders (SEPE, 2015).

As observed, the efforts of companies to adapt to new digital market conditions vary in objectives as much as in results. Derham et al. (2011) proposed that even small enterprises can use social media for their daily transactions, as the cost is affordable compared withthat of traditional media and requires a lower level of IT skills. The advent of social media has created new opportunities, for micro-businesses in particular, to overcome "smallness,"i.e., size-related liabilities by establishing direct and personal access to customers, sharing and collaborating, even interactively developing products/services, and raising brand awareness. Because of the low barriers against the use of SM, they present for small business a free and efficient alternative to promote goods and services directly to worldwide customers (Kadam and Ayarekar, 2014; Sharma and Kalra, 2011). It should also be noted, however, that data and related observations refer to large organizations and do not take micro-enterprises into account (Odoom, 2017). To fill in the gap, this research seeks to trace and conceptualize the mode of social media integration in the marketing practice of Greek micro-businesses, through questionnairesfor self-employed and solo entrepreneurs.

RQ1. To what extent do Greek self-employed and solo entrepreneurs use social media?

There is evidence supporting the usage of major social media platforms, which varies by factors such as gender, age, educational attainment, etc. Specifically, some studies showed that the reasons and frequencies of social media usage vary according to gender (Barker, 2009; Mazman and Usluel, 2011), supporting that females are more attracted to usingSM than males (Misra et al., 2015). Thedemographic factor plays a significant role in the adoption of social networking sites, as the younger generation uses them more frequently (Chan-Olmested et al., 2013). In addition, the level of a manager's educationseems to play a significant role in whether or not to adopt a social media platform (Vlachvei and Notta, 2014). Educated managers are more likely to use SM to promote their business or communicate with their customers (Damanpour and Schneider, 2009; Vlachvei and Notta, 2014). According to Sim and Pop (2014), the exposure on social media to a foreign languagevocabulary can be beneficial to involve it, and the participants were further encouraged to useit as a tool for that cause. Mahmud (2014), who conducted a similar study, separated three group based on proficiency level and

showed that social media as a medium can build confidence and promote language learning. Also, as for the two groups, this encourages them to participate in online conversations. Business owners rarely possess all the skills and knowledge needed to expand their enterprise (Garrigos et al., 2012). It was found that information technology (IT) based capabilities are particularly crucial in facilitating small- and medium-sized enterprise internationalization (Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Many self-employers are not technologically savvy and know little about social media. Thus, a major barrier for small businesses is the knowledge necessary to start and maintain a web and social media presence.

RQ2: Have the demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational level, language, and IT level of knowledge) of self-employed and solo entrepreneursinfluenced the level of social media adoption?

The use of social networking sites can be profitable for companies and their brands in terms of exposure, brand awareness, and actual sales; it also can prove to be detrimental if not managed correctly (Mihalcea and Savulescu, 2013). In this line, Jagongo and Kinyua (2013) indicated that companies face social networks as valuable communication tools, which, if used properly, can help them to improve their web presence in order to effectively promote their brand. In addition, Kumar et al. (2013) showed that the social media community can strengthen customer-business relationships and lead to revenues. Empirical data also supported that the use of social networking has a positive and significant effect toward sales (Groza et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2015; Kwok and Yu, 2013; Aladwani, 2015). Idota et al. (2016) also reached the same conclusion, indicating that social media have a direct effecton Japanese companies' sales. The current research examines the relationship between SM usage and sales performance among self-employed and solo entrepreneurs.

RQ3: Has the use of social media by self-employed and solo entrepreneurs a positive effect on business sales?

Most of the aforementioned studies focus on a specific industry; thus, the current empirical research corroborates the relationship between social media and sales performance across various economic context. Odoom (2017) proposed that further research should examine the possible disparities that exist between product-based SMEs and service-based SMEs. Dutot and Bergeron (2016) also recommended the comparison among different industries (e.g., technology, retail, communications) concerning the use of social media. Cross-sectional research may be valuable to explore how social media influences sales performance for specific types of companies and within particular industries. This prospective could allow managers to better understand what types of organizations are more likely to benefit from social media usage. However, little research has been done on the moderating effect of the business sector in the relationship between social media usage and business sales. Based on the above gap in the literature, the following research question can be formed:

RQ4: Does the industry that the company operateshave a moderating effect on the slope of the use of social networks sales of the enterprise?

3. Methodology

3.1. Establishing the constructs

Respondents were asked to identify the types of media used based on a given list (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The items concerning the reasons for using social media tools were based on previously developed measurements (Jagongo and Kinyua, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015). The 12 items were translated into the Greek language and took the form of a 7-point psychometric Likert scale (anchored on 1= "strongly disagree" through 7= "strongly agree"). The respondents were also asked about their perception of the impact of social media usage on firm performance. The measures based on managers' estimates were fixed versus the objective measures, which are based on independently observable facts. Ettlie et al. (1990, p. 68) proposed that it was necessary to rely on perceptual performance measures because of the virtual nonexistence of accurate, standard, and objective performance data, and the practical difficulties associated with attempting to gather it. Other researchers have also supported perceptual measures as being useful and even necessary in the case of comparisons across units with different technologies and operation lines (Ketokivi and Schroeder, 2004; Albacete-Sáez et al. 2011). Thus, sales performance is measured using the respondent's perception and based on 3 items instrument. A sample item is: "The use of social media increase sales".

Finally, a series of questions were related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education level, knowledge of a foreign language, computer literacy, marital status), as well as to their business (economic sector, size and type of the firm, etc.)

3.2. Sampling process

Data were collected through field survey using a structured questionnaire administered exclusively to self-employed respondents. People out of employment (unemployed, looking for work), or in dependent employment (working for an employer) at the time of the survey, as well as atypical self-employed (students and pensioners) were excluded. Self-employed workers in Greece represent about 30.3%: 7.4% employing one or more employees and 22.9% not employing any employees. Family workers are also a significant component of employment representing the 3.9% of the employees (http//www.statistics.gr). Thus, the number of the target population was estimated to be 30.3% of the Greek population. The sample was formed by participants who fit the profile of the study and were therefore recruited with the snowball technique (Dragan and Isaic-Maniu 2013), as is usual in qualitative social research.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents and
Descriptive information for their firms (N=418)

Type of Classification	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	280	67%
	Female	138	33%
Age	18-24 years	35	8.4%
	25-34 years	79	18.9%
	35-44years	122	29.2%
	45-54years	132	31.6%
	55-64years	50	12%
Education	Received a post- graduate qualification	44	10.5%
	Completed tertiary education	165	39.5%
	Completed secondary education	118	28.2%
	Completed post secondary technical-vocational education	58	13.9%
	Completed primary education	30	7.2%
Knowledge of a foreign language	Excellent command	103	24.7%
	Good command	176	42.4%
	Basic skills	137	33%
Knowledge of Information Technology (IT)	Excellent command	89	21.2%
	Good command	174	41,6%
	Basic skills	31	7.3%
Marital status	Single	136	32.6%
	Married	281	67.4%
Sector	Tourism and Catering	91	22.2%
	Trade	89	21.8%
	Non-service activities	118	28.7%
	Professionalservices	112	27.3%
Size in number of employees	none	198	47.4%
	1-2employees	105	25.1%
	3-5 employees	69	16.5%
	5 and more employees	46	11%
Type of business	Home based	198	47.4%
	Non home-based	105	25.1%

The questionnaires were filled out within three weeks, taking January 10, 2016 as a starting date for the data collection. The purpose of the study was explained to the sample participants, who were assured of total confidentiality and anonymity. A sample of 455 questionnaires was collected, 37 of which were not included in the following results as ineligible. Hence, the total usable sample for analysis consisted

of 418 questionnaires. The demographic profile of the participants in this survey and the descriptive information of their firms are portrayed in Table 1. The sample consisted of 67% male and 33% female self-employers. The age groups were: 18-24 years (8.4%), 25-34 years (18.9%), 35-44 years (29.2%), 45-54 years (31.6%) and over 55 years of age (12%). A total of 67.4% were married while 32.6% were single.

4. Results

4.1. Exploring the Use of Social Media

The research findings indicated that 74.3% of respondents are aware of existing social media tools and use them in businesses, while 25.7% of them do not use social media tools at all. This question was important because it allowed the formation of two distinct groups (users and non-users of social media) and the differentiation of results between them. The users were also asked to identify the types of social media used (Table 2): Facebook was by far the most commonly used (by 88.6%), followed by Twitter (21.3%), Blogs and Instagram (20%), YouTube (14%) and LinkedIn (7.6%). Interesting conclusions can be drawn for business by this question, as each type of social media serves different marketing strategies: Facebook is considered as consumer focused (and too social for B2B use), Twitter is interactive and serves business networking and innovation awareness, LinkedIn is more appropriate for staff recruitment, etc. The results also indicate that 35.8% of firms use only one type of social media, 19% use a combination of two and only 6.7% use more than two types of social media.

Table 2: Types of social media used

Types	%
Facebook	88.6%
Twitter	21.3%
Social bookmarking	6.7%
YouTube	14%
Blogs	20%
Wikis	1.3%
Podcasting	1%
Slideshare	1.9%
LinkedIn	7.6%
Instagram	20.3%
Others	6.3%

Significant differences were found between male and female self-employers in social media usage (Chi squared 4.273; df. 1; sig. 0.039). According to results, female self-employed professionals use social media more (77%) compared to their male counterparts (66.8%). Age is also an important factor of differentiation: the higher rates of social media users are found among those younger than 54 years old (Chi squared 25.336; df. 4; sig. 0.000), ranging between 80.1% and 78.8% in the various subgroups. The usage of social media is limited to 50% of those older than 55 years of age. Chi-square analysis also indicated significant differences in the level of education between those who use SM and who do not (Chi squared 63.982; df. 4; sig. 0.000). Most of SM users of our sample have post-graduate qualifications (85.4%), many have completed tertiary (79.5%) or post-secondary technical/vocational education (71.2%), while many have secondary education (67.8%). Those who have merely primary education are less likely (14.3%) to use social media. Apart from education, the knowledge of a foreign language as well as IT literacy significantly related to SMJ usage. The majority (51%) of those who do not use SM are not familiar with foreign languages (basic knowledge) and (53.1%) have limited knowledge of Information Technology. On the other hand, SM users who have a good (44%) or excellent (29.2%) command of a foreign language are comparatively more than non-users of the same level of language knowledge (good: 37.5%, excellent: 11.5%). The same applies for SM users and non-users with regard to their level of IT literacy (Table 3).

Table 3: Use of SM and knowledge of a foreign language and IT

	knowledge of a foreign language*			Total	knowledge of IT**			Total
	Basic skills	Good command	Excellent command		Basic skills	Good command	Excellent command	
Users of SM	82 26.7%	136 44%	90 29.2%	308 100%	99 31.8%	132 42.6%	79 25.6%	310 100%
Non-users	55 51%	41 37.5%	12 11.5%	108 100%	57 53.1%	42 38.5%	9 8.3%	108 100%
Total	137 33%	176 42.4%	103 24.7%	416 100%	31 7.3%	174 41.6%	89 21.2%	418 100%

*Note: Chi squared 22.656; df. 2; sig. 0.000 (0 cell _ 0% _ have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 23.6).

**Note: Chi squared 19.080; df. 2; sig. 0.000 (0 cell _ 0.0% _ have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.3).

4.2. Relating business motivation with the use of social media

Respondents were also asked about the benefits of SM use that they identify for their business. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation was employed to the Reasons for using social media tools. As displayed in Table 4, the factor analysis of the scale proved a good fit that revealed four factors that explain 66.2% of total variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic was 0.872. The Bartlett test of sphericity also provided satisfactory results. In order to further examine the factors structure of the scale, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized. The four-factor structure shows an adequate model [χ^2 = 141.860, p=0,00, TLI =0.940, CFI = 0.958 και RMSEA =0.71]. The test for reliabilityinstrument provided alpha (equal to 0.75) that exceeded the recommended level of 0.60 and rather strong item-to-total correlations. In addition, the Cronbach α values for the factors ranged from 0.77 to 0.91, suggesting that the constructs had high internal consistency. The measurement of the concept was based on previously developed instruments, so that content validity was assured. The analysis also verified that the factor loading of the concepts exceed the 0.5 threshold on its parent factor with low cross-loading, which supports that the measurement instrument reached convergent validity. Examining the discriminant validity of the instrument, it was found that the square root of AVE was greater than the coefficient, which demonstrated discriminant validity between the construct. The extracted factors are explained using the measured variable loadings and can be labeled/typecast as serving: International perspective, Customer communication and Business promotion.

Table 4: Factoring the reasons for using social media

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.872	Factor londings		
Items	International perspective	Customer communication	Business promotion
Expand business abroad	0.894		
Find suppliers internationally	0.863		
Immediate response to international customers	0.829		
Find international customers	0.808		
Bettermarketresearch		0.783	
Reduced communication costs		0.720	
Betterfeedbackfromcustomers		0.715	
Gain more business contacts		0.653	
Showcase businessoffers			0.755
Establish relationship with customers			0.748
Immediate response to customerorders			0.672
Showcase business products and services			0.666
Eigenvalue	42.7	14.1	9.3
Cumulative Variance %	26.6%	19.8%	19.8%
Cronbach a	0.91	0.78	0.77

As far as business performance concept, the factor analysis revealed a one-dimensional factor that explains 72% of total variance. Cronbach's alpha was .81. The results of both tests KMO and Bartlett were considered satisfactory.

4.3. Social media and sales performance

Structural equation modeling was used to validate the cause-and-effect relation between social media usage and firms' sales. To estimate the parameters of the model, given that the data examination revealed no semantic normality violation, the maximum likelihood method and covariance matrix were used. The model indicates that χ^2 is 224.449 with 77 df (p=0.000), supporting the assertion that the χ^2 relative value to degree of freedom (χ^2/df) does not exceed the proposed cut-off point of 3. The other indicators showed that the estimates for a set of recommended indices (IFI=.95, GFI=0.94, CFI=.95, TLI=.94) were above or equal to the accepted threshold of 0.90. The RMSEA was equal to 0.07, which is considered adequate for the sample characteristics. The results indicated that all the social media reasons have a direct and positive effect on firms' sales at the p value < 0.001 level (Table 5). Path estimates are identified as statistically significant, in the predicted direction and with standardised residuals within the acceptable limits. Thus, the data analysis shows that the use of SM has a positive effect on sales as the p-value is less than 5%.

Table 5: Structural equation path coefficients

Relationships	Coefficient	CR (t value)	p value
Direct effect			
International perspective – sales performance	0.101	2.756	0.006
Customer communication– sales performance	0.714	6.227	0.000
Business promotion– sales performance	0.416	4.331	0.000

Note: t-values greater than 1.96 are significant (p<0.05)

In order to test the moderating effects, a multiple group SEM analysis was selected, by using the unstandardised beta coefficients of the different groups. First the two models were tested unconstrained allowing all the parameters to vary freely across the sub-groups. Next equality constraints were imposed on all the regression weights across the two sub-groups. The moderator was the business sector. Each group have almost equal and adequate sample size (Tourism and Catering=91, Trade=89, Non-service activities=118, Professional Services=112). Both models (unconstrained and constrained) provided a good fit to the data (Table 6). The χ^2 difference was significant, providing evidence that the relationship between perceived food safety and sales performance are different among business sectors.

Table 6: Moderation tests

Model	χ^2	Df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	Sig.
Moderating variable: gender								
Unconstrained	1027.215	56	0.96	0.97	0.035			
Constrained	1122.694	57	0.96	0.97	0.033	9.407	11	<0.05

Next examined the path coefficients between four sector groups by using t-value over 1.96. The results, presented in Table 7, indicate that each sector perceives in a different way the social media dimensions' importance.

Table 7: Structural equation path coefficients based on business sector

PATHS	Tourism and Catering			Trade			Non-service activities			Professional Services		
	b	t	p value	b	t	p value	b	t	p value	b	t	p value
International perspective – salesperformance	0.33	3.302	0.000	-0.083	-0.725	0.468	0.097	1.554	0.12	0.05	0.66	0.509
Customercommunication– salesperformance	0.774	3.096	0.002	0.396	1.203	0.229	0.992	3.914	0.000	0.529	2.335	0.02
Businesspromotion– salesperformance	0.116	0.476	0.634	0.623	3.624	0.000	0.346	2.804	0.005	0.493	2.049	0.04

Note: t-values greater than 1.96 are significant

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In the globally expanding context of social media, consumers are no longer passive receivers but active participants in marketing and buying processes. Companies need to adjust to the new revolutionized market rules in order to gain a competitive advantage. According to the Social Media Marketing Industry Report (2015), most companies acknowledge the importance of these platforms: 93% declare they employ social media in their marketing strategy, with Facebook being rated as the top network (92%), closely followed by Twitter (84%) and LinkedIn (71%) (https://www.socialmediaexaminer.com). Little is known, however, about whether small and micro-enterprises adopt social mediaand in what way they integrate them in doing business. Motivated by this lack of evidence, the paper investigates to what extent Greek self-employed and solo entrepreneurs use social media. Data analysis of this study supports that most of the small and micro-enterprises are aware of SM, and they use it for generating sales. The demographic characteristics of micro-enterprisers such as gender, age, educational level, language, and IT level of knowledge influence SM usage. The key deliverables that social media can provide are international perspective, customer communication, andbusiness promotion, which play an important role in enhancing business sales.

According to recent research by Dosi and Tzortzaki (2016), many companies are unable to evaluate the broad potential of SM in doing businessor to effectively manage the new ways of communication, access information and interaction. The Greek business sector is the focus of research exploring SM integration in marketing processes (Dosi and Tzortzaki, 2016). Findings indicate that Greek companies are aware of SM importance for marketing; those applying SM practices identify increased exposure and sales improvement as their main benefits. These results are in accordance with the findings of the current study. The data analysis shows that, according to the respondents' perception, the use of social networking has a positive effect on their business sales.The study supported that most self-employed and solo entrepreneurs had not fully understood and internalized the potential of SM international perspectives. Social media could enable small and micro-enterprises to acquire customers from all over the world (Cesaroni and Consoli, 2015). However, the small Greek businesses in the majority seemto not reap the full benefits of this opportunity.

Some previous studies proposed to investigate the moderating effect of SM across different business sectors (Jagongo and Kinyua, 2013; Odoom, 2017; Dutotand Bergeron, 2016). Thus, the present research indicates that the perceived relationship between social media and sales varied among four industries (tourism and catering, trade, non-service activities, professional services). Small Greek businesses may be unable to reap the full benefits of the international perspective that SM provides except in tourism and catering. The industry seems to use SM simply to attract customers and increase sales. However, social media could enable small and micro-enterprises to acquire customers from outside their zone of operation (Cesaroni and Consoli, 2015). On the other hand, business promotion appears to influence sales on the industries such as trade, non-service activities, and professional services. Small businesses such as restaurants, cafes, and apartments may believe that SM cannot help them to increase their business' sales through promotion activities, or they are unable to provide any kind of business offers because of low margins. Communication with customers seems to be important for all industries, except for trade, which believes it cannot help to improve sales. Through communication, self-employers could improve their business image; customers appreciate the more personalize approached andtypically leave comments about the products, thus providing valuable feedback (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016). However, for the trade industry, the only deliverable that SM can provide isbusiness promotion supporting its important role in enhancing business sales, thus negating the international perspective and communication with customers.

Finally, this study does have some limitations. Firstly, the context of the research should be tested in other countries to be able to make cross-cultural comparisons. The results of this research are influenced by the economic environment and the severe crisis in Greece. Caution should be taken regarding the impact of the economic crisis in each individual country and the diversity of cultures and social systems.

The present research examines the direct link between SM usage and business sales, assisting firms in predicting sales based on SM usage. Since SM usage explain only a part of the variance in sales, further research should investigate customer and contextual factors that may mediate the proposed relationship.

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