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BOOSTING SMES SURVIVAL: DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES IN BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

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INTRODUCTION

During the current era of globalization, several industrialized economies, such as Germany, Japan, and the United States (US), have achieved success due to the presence of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within their borders (Nathali et al., 2023). According to Moffat (2021), many people mistakenly believe huge businesses control the US economy. Meanwhile, per Brown (2018), virtually all enterprises in the US employ fewer than 500 individuals, categorizing them as small-scale business organizations. Specifically, the US has delineated an SME as a business entity that employs no more than 500 individuals. Since consumers place a high value on small businesses' responsiveness to community needs and desires, as well as their ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, small businesses have historically played a vital role in the American economy (Moffat, 2021). In a comparable manner, young, successful entrepreneurs emerge from Malaysia's thriving SME sector, which is crucial to the country's economy (Mustiraya et al., 2021). Furthermore, it helps other communities get jobs, which is great for young people (Mustiraya et al., 2021).

Without a doubt, in today's times, it is essential for all businesses and companies to exhibit unwavering endurance in every given situation. Specific categories of establishments, particularly smaller and medium-sized ones, exhibit a lack of survival and yielding to external influences. Notably, the elevated failure rate of SMEs is extensively recorded. On a global scale, SMEs encounter considerable challenges that impede their sustainability, especially in unstable markets and during external crises. As reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 20% of small enterprises experience failure within their initial year, 50% by the fifth year, and merely around 33% endure beyond a decade (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). Correspondingly, data from the United Kingdom indicates that nearly 60% of minor enterprises discontinue their operations within a span of three years (Statista, n.d.).

In contrast, SMEs have grown due to minimal entry barriers and entrepreneurial endeavors (SCORE, 2022). For instance, in the US, over 4.4 million new enterprises were established in the year 2022 (SCORE, 2022). Despite the ease of starting this type of business, entrepreneurs face hurdles and obstacles in continuing operations in the long run. Walker (2019) emphasized that SMEs have restricted internal resources. Therefore, it is imperative to devise a solution, such as employing the Dynamic Capabilities (DCs) approach.

DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES APPROACH

According to Kump et al. (2019), several management professionals have paid close attention to the notion of DCs since its introduction over twenty years ago by Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), Helfat (1997), and Teece et al. (1997). DCs, as defined by Teece et al. (1997), refer to a firm's capacity to effectively incorporate, establish, and readjust external and internal knowledge and skills to adapt to unpredictable and swiftly evolving circumstances. When considering capabilities, most organizations often prioritize the tasks necessary to perform their daily operations. They also consider efficiency and the specific capabilities required to produce their present products or services (Teece, 2012; Teece & Pisano, 1994). Though not necessarily DCs, these abilities are nonetheless significant (Teece, 2012; Teece & Pisano, 1994).

It is crucial for businesses to have DCs to survive since these capabilities allow businesses to predict and react to changes in the market (Teece, 2021). Notably, businesses with great DCs can detect shifts in market conditions, recognize new possibilities, and swiftly adapt their plans (Gupta et al., 2024). Therefore, to ensure efficiency and resilience in unpredictable times, DCs also assist firms in reallocating resources to areas that offer the greatest return. Moreover, businesses could foster innovation (Bartlett & Morse, 2021). In addition, the ability of businesses to innovate their products, services, or processes is essential for long-term competitiveness and survival in uncertain marketplaces (Gupta et al., 2024). This can be accomplished by harnessing the DCs that they possess. Likewise, DCs allow companies to modify their supply chains or workforce distribution to resist disturbances like pandemics or economic downturns (Löfsten, 2016). Similarly, businesses that can learn and adapt constantly are better able to endure crises by preserving stability and seizing fresh opportunities for expansion (Bartlett & Morse, 2021). In conclusion, the presence of DCs enables businesses to maintain agility, competitiveness, and viability in the face of challenges, ultimately ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Doing the right thing is crucial to DCs. Teece (2021) asserted that setting an organization's core ideals is the first step to doing the right thing. Every business should have a set of values that guide how it works, deals with stakeholders, and makes decisions (Teece, 2021). Therefore, it includes meeting consumers' demands in a timely manner and utilizing innovation to gain a competitive advantage (Teece, 2021). Hence, in the current dynamic and demanding settings characterized by profound uncertainty, organizations necessitate robust DCs as they offer a structured framework to facilitate decision-making. Accordingly, Teece (2007) defined deep uncertainty as the result of technical progress, globalization, the erosion of global governance, and economic conditions.

Moreover, dynamic settings, marked by swift fluctuations and considerable uncertainty, profoundly influence the business sector by necessitating firms to adjust promptly and make sensible choices (Gupta et al., 2024). In these circumstances, DCs are absolutely necessary since they offer firms a formal framework for identifying opportunities and threats, seizing those opportunities and risks, and reforming internal processes to maintain their competitive edge. By utilizing resources like big data and analytics, allowing predictive capabilities, and encouraging data-driven innovation, DCs improve decision-making in uncertain markets (Gupta et al., 2024). Furthermore, by leveraging these technologies, businesses may maintain their competitive edge and create corporate value by reacting proactively to changes in the market.

Essentially, DCs are more idealistic models wherein companies or businesses plan for and achieve the future. Every accomplishment results from brave, brassy, and logical choices and actions. In general, strong DCs are an essential tool for decision-making and long-term performance in dynamic environments, supporting organizational objectives and the demands of unpredictable markets.

CONCLUSION

In summary, DCs are a way for all kinds of establishments, particularly SMEs, to overcome challenges (Teece, 2021). Moreover, DCs are a way to combine internal and external assets and resources in a way that makes sense. They provide a framework for entrepreneurial management to help businesses thrive in difficult times.

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THE RISE OF GREEN JOBS IN A CHANGING WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, green jobs have emerged as a focal point for addressing critical environmental challenges while simultaneously advancing economic development. Defined as roles that contribute to the preservation or restoration of environmental quality, green jobs span diverse industries, including renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and waste management (Boone et al., 2023). This growing emphasis reflects the global shift toward sustainable development and a low-carbon economy, aligning economic progress with ecological stewardship (Schneider et al., 2022). Governments, organizations, and communities are increasingly aware of the pivotal role these jobs play in mitigating climate change, improving resource efficiency, and promoting social equity (Abbas et al., 2023). This article discusses the dynamics of green job creation and offers valuable insights into their transformative potential for labor markets and sustainable development (Lobova et al., 2022).

GREEN JOBS POTENTIAL IN MALAYSIA

The rise of green jobs is closely tied to evolving environmental policies and growing demands for sustainable practices. Renewable energy sectors like solar and wind power exemplify rapid job growth driven by technological advancements and policy incentives. In Malaysia, the development of the solar photovoltaic (PV) industry has positioned the country as a leading exporter of solar panels, generating significant local employment in manufacturing, installation, and maintenance (Tang et al., 2022).

Sustainable agriculture also offers green job opportunities, particularly through organic farming and precision agriculture. Government initiatives such as the National Agrofood Policy (NAP) and the Malaysian Good Agricultural Practices (MyGAP) certification program promote eco-friendly practices, creating roles for agronomists, soil scientists, and sustainable farming consultants (Abbas et al., 2023). The National Agrofood Policy 2021-2030 (NAP 2.0) is Malaysia's plan to improve the country's agriculture and food industries in a sustainable and modern way. It focuses on ensuring enough safe and affordable food, making farming more productive and profitable, and protecting the environment.

The waste management and recycling industry further highlights Malaysia's green job potential. Policies promoting a circular economy, as outlined in the National Waste Management Policy, have increased the demand for expertise in recycling technologies, waste-to-energy systems, and sustainable packaging solutions (Muhammad et al., 2023). Companies

specializing in e-waste management also exemplify the growing niche of green employment within the waste sector (Abd-Mutalib et al., 2023). Despite these advancements, transitioning to a green economy presents significant challenges. The displacement of workers from carbon-intensive industries necessitates strategic workforce reskilling and equitable labor policies to prevent economic insecurity and social inequalities (Schneider et al., 2022). Additionally, the uneven distribution of green jobs, with urban areas like the Klang Valley offering more opportunities than rural regions, underscores the need for targeted interventions to ensure inclusivity (Lau et al., 2022).

The integration of education and training systems is essential for aligning workforce skills with the competencies required in emerging green sectors. Programs focused on sustainable technologies, eco-innovation, and resource management can foster a resilient workforce capable of driving a green economy. Collaborative efforts among governments, private enterprises, and educational institutions, as reflected in initiatives like the Green Technology Master Plan (GTMP) and various public-private partnerships, are vital to ensuring a just and inclusive transition (Yusoff et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The development of green jobs in Malaysia reflects the nation's dedication to harmonizing economic growth with environmental sustainability. Key sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and waste management demonstrate notable advancements in generating employment while tackling pressing environmental issues. Nonetheless, the transition to a green economy presents significant challenges, including workforce displacement from traditional industries, regional disparities in job availability, and skills mismatches in emerging green sectors. Overcoming these hurdles necessitates a comprehensive strategy focused on workforce reskilling, equitable labor policies, and targeted investments in education and training programs. Collaborative efforts among government, industry, and educational institutions, exemplified by initiatives like the Green Technology Master Plan, are critical to further ensure the success of a just and inclusive transformation. By fostering innovation, ensuring equitable access to green opportunities, and strengthening sustainable practices, Malaysia stands firm at the forefront of the global movement toward a sustainable economy, advancing both economic development and environmental stewardship.

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TRUST AND REMOTE WORK: SCHOLARLY VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Organisational trust has been called into question by the COVID-19 pandemic's extraordinary move to remote labour. The key elements impacting employee satisfaction, performance, and overall stability in organisations have been identified as trust in management, interpersonal trust among coworkers, and individual propensities to trust. Therefore, this study summarises the results of three recent research to shed light on the significance of trust in working remotely settings.

CONFIDENCE IN COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT

The transition to remote work has largely been made possible by management's trust. According to Bueechl et al. (2023), maintaining confidence and employee satisfaction during the shift to remote work requires management to make decisions in a transparent manner and with clear communication. In addition, Bueechl et al. (2023) asserted that incorporating staff members in decision-making procedures and providing regular updates have been discovered to be successful tactics for building trust.

EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS WITH WORKING FROM HOME

The availability of essential resources and assistance for upholding a work-life balance substantially impacts worker satisfaction in remote work environments. Accordingly, when workers feel supported and trusted by their companies, they are less likely to experience digital weariness, feel alone, and struggle to sustain productivity (Bueechl et al., 2023).

THE DIFFICULTIES OF WORKING FROM HOME

Isolation and digital exhaustion are frequent problems in remote work settings. Notably, developing trust via consistent support and communication helps to resolve these problems, which raises worker satisfaction and output (Bueechl et al., 2023). Thus, it is advised to use training and trust-building exercises to properly oversee these issues.

TRUST VS. PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

According to a study by Smith and Jones (2022), pro-social behaviour is not as strong a predictor of stability and success in remote work contexts as trust is. Surveys on perceived dependability and peer and management support were used to gauge trust levels (Smith & Jones, 2022). Correspondingly, it is advised that remote teams foster open communication and provide regular feedback in order to establish and preserve trust.

PERSONAL AND SUPERVISORY TRUST ATTITUDES

The success of remote work arrangements is greatly influenced by the trusting tendencies of both managers and employees. According to Johnson et al. (2023), those more inclined to trust others are more likely to be authorised to work from home and report higher levels of performance and job satisfaction. In this situation, managers' trust in their staff is critical; trusting managers are more likely to approve requests for remote work, which improves worker engagement and performance (Johnson et al., 2023).

ENGAGEMENT

Encouraging open communication and creating inclusive policies that meet the sector's operational and cultural requirements are also necessary mechanisms for leveraging remote work to improve organisational culture and, consequently, resilience, efficiency, and employee satisfaction in the face of changing work dynamics (Ogbu et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

A key component of successful remote work agreements is trust. In particular, remote work rules prioritising trust-building and maintenance through transparent, unambiguous, and supportive communication lead to improved organisational performance, satisfaction, and stability. Nevertheless, fostering a productive and positive remote work environment requires funding trust-building exercises and management and staff training.

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SELLING SERVICES: WHAT's NOT THERE

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INTRODUCTION

Selling services—intangibles that cannot be touched or physically owned—presents distinct problems and opportunities in today's rapidly changing business environment. Unlike actual things, services depend on performance, expertise, and trust, making them more complex to evaluate before purchasing. This concept of "selling what's not there" necessitates the use of unique techniques, such as stressing the benefits, setting clear expectations, and developing strong customer relationships. Thus, understanding the subtleties of service marketing is critical for effectively communicating value and building loyalty in a service-oriented market.

INSIGHTS ON SELLING SERVICES

Selling services presents distinct difficulties from selling products, where buyers can inspect, feel, and try prior to purchasing. Since services involve the sale of intangible offerings, strategic decisions are essential. When there is no tangible product to display, the emphasis switches to establishing credibility, proving value, and ensuring prospective customers make the right decision. Accordingly, this article delves into key insights on selling services that are invisible but necessary for a deal to be completed. To succeed in selling services, it is critical to employ strategic techniques that improve credibility, demonstrate value, and successfully address consumer demands.

Firstly, social media usage has become an essential tool for businesses in selling services, particularly by offering platforms for direct and efficient communication between sellers and potential customers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became even more crucial. It allowed businesses to maintain real-time consumer interaction, facilitating immediate purchase decisions (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This immediacy is particularly significant for younger consumers, such as millennials, who are more likely to purchase a service on the same day they engage with a brand on social media (Kay et al., 2020). In addition, Trequattrini et al. (2022) highlighted the pivotal role of digital technologies in enhancing the management and marketing of intangibles. This suggests that Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital analytics can reduce uncertainty and improve value perception. This is also supported by Etuk et al. (2022), who stated that online marketing strategies significantly impact adoption by efficiently utilising digital platforms to connect with potential customers, helping services expand their reach.

Next, the focus is on enhancing customer experience. According to Wetzels et al. (2023), customer experience drives profitability by centring on understanding customer needs, delivering consistent and high-quality service, and leveraging feedback for improvement. Thus, these practices foster satisfaction, loyalty, and retention, creating a cycle where happier customers lead to repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately boosting financial outcomes. In addition, customer-centric techniques have been demonstrated to greatly increase brand loyalty and retention. Hence, providing high-quality customer experience has taken centre stage in service marketing strategies (Homburg et al., 2017). According to another research, customer experience management favours perceived service value, particularly in industries where the line between services and products is becoming hazier, such as financial services and e-commerce (Grewal et al., 2017). Correspondingly, businesses can increase client loyalty and gain a long-term edge in service markets by emphasising emotional involvement and customised experiences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, selling services requires a distinct approach that emphasises building trust, demonstrating value, and leveraging digital platforms to connect with customers. The convergence of social media, influencers, and modern technology such as AI has altered service marketing, allowing organisations to increase consumer engagement and create brand loyalty. Therefore, companies may bridge the value communication gap and connect meaningfully with their audiences by concentrating on individualised experiences and exploiting intangible traits such as emotional appeal and perceived quality. Nevertheless, a customer-centric strategy, supported by innovative tools and methodologies, is critical for success in the competitive landscape of service marketing.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, digital citizenship education is crucial in preparing individuals to engage in a digital world who have a role both as creators and consumers of digital content. According to Vajen et al. (2023), there are several definitions of citizenship that highlight various viewpoints, aspects, developments, advancements, and discipline distinctions. It is a status and a practice that is linked to both the digital and analogue fields (Isin & Ruppert, 2020). Digital citizenship conceptualizations can be defined as it connecting digital media to civic education and citizenship (Chong & Pao, 2022; Kenner, 2020). The idea of "digital citizenship" refers to using digital technologies and the internet in a way that is safe, moral, and responsible (Isdendi et al., 2023). This knowledge is frequently integrated into school curricula, industry training programs and community projects to make sure people of all ages have the knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities and challenges of the digital era. Digital citizenship might be attained through a variety of educational methods (Vajen et al., 2023). In recent years, a few digital citizenship education curricula have been created at different educational levels (Chong & Pao, 2022). This education would assist and guide all education stakeholders, particularly policymakers, educators, parents and learners. According to Lcom Team (2024), there are some reasons digital citizenship education is important towards students such as safety, integrity, future-readiness and participation.

IMPORTANCE

For the first reason, safety is important in digital citizenship education because it can help them prevent from participating in harmful situations. Since more students have access to digital devices, taking precautions to keep them safe is essential (Althibyani & Al-Zahrani, 2023). When the students know how to engage properly and safely online, this would lead to less chance of encountering dangerous situations or participating in a risky activity. Digital security covers both technological methods, such as firewalls and antivirus software, and information protection procedures to practice a safe and secure use of digital information (Ribble & Miller, 2013). Based on the study by Martin et al. (2021), discovered that the parents' primary concerns regarding their children's internet safety were that their children would be exposed to sexual content and engage in conversation with strangers.

Besides that, the second reason digital citizenship education is important to students is integrity. This can shape the ethical behavior of students in their educational progress. Students who have developed a sense of digital ethics are better able to understand the importance of honesty and integrity in their academic work. Through initiatives for education and awareness, they may encourage appropriate online behavior by highlighting the virtues of integrity,

empathy, and respect (Isdendi et al., 2023). Respecting people, learning how to utilize technology in a civil and efficient manner, and adhering to digital etiquette are all characteristics of good digital citizenship behaviour (Ribble, 2012). Respecting intellectual property rights and copyright is a crucial component of cyber ethics (Prasetiyo et al., 2022).

Future readiness is also important in digital citizenship education towards students. Significant advancements in technology have sparked changes in education and teachers in the twenty-first century need to be more adaptable, inquisitive, and forward-thinking (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020). It is about equipping them with the knowledge and abilities they need to thrive in this new environment and fostering in them the confidence to put those talents into practice (Zamora & Zamora, 2022; Yusuf, 2022). From this, students must be capable of being prepared for their future academic and professional endeavours, since both higher education and the workplace depend more on digital technology. With better learning and preparation in education, it can help students to be ready for their careers. Digital citizenship helps individuals be accountable for lifelong learning and prepares them for their future (Abdellatif et al., 2024).

Finally, another reason for digital citizenship education is to encourage active participation. According to Shi et al. (2023), the widespread use of technology and the Internet affects citizens' civic engagement which needs to be explored in this information age. Becoming an effective and responsible community member is essential for becoming a good digital citizen in a society where many social issues are debated and resolved online which also reflects life as a student. By using technologies, lecturers and students engaged in online sessions for e-learning, finished homework, and communicated with each other (Prasetiyo et al., 2023). This digital access also involves complete electronic engagement in society, guaranteeing equitable access to technology for all people especially students to enhance their capabilities (Tan, 2011).

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, digital citizenship education is not merely an optional addition to a student's curriculum but an essential component for their holistic development in today's interconnected world. This development of digital citizenship education has become one of the important knowledge and skills that students should have to practice digital citizenship in an increasingly digital society to ensure it will align with their educational background. Implementing a responsible mentality into students' technological interactions is just as important as providing them with rules on how to behave as decent digital citizens. It enables them to utilize digital tools and platforms in a secure situation, encouraging them to feel empowered and to comprehend the cultural and societal effects of digital technology. This was supported by the results of findings from Abdellatif et al. (2024), which highlight how crucial it is to incorporate digital citizenship instruction into academic courses from an educational standpoint. According to Djamzuri and Mulyana (2022), it is crucial that the creation of digital citizens, governmental organizations, academic institutions, and industry players collaborate together to improve digital literacy programs, given that they recognize the influence that these abilities have on social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

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THE PRICE OF OVER-CONTROL: HOW STRICT LEADERSHIP ERODES EMPLOYEE MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY

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INTRODUCTION

Excessive authoritarian leadership, or overly strict leadership, is marked by high levels of control and harsh penalties, which can adversely impact employee welfare and organizational effectiveness. Leaders who micromanage or enforce strict regulations typically establish work settings where employees feel restricted, diminishing their capacity to take initiative or make choices. This results in decreased motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and inadequate performance. Studies suggest that authoritarian leadership approaches, marked by control and stringent oversight, often correlate with adverse organizational effects like diminished creativity, decreased productivity, and elevated turnover rates (Pizzolitto et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2018). Grasping these impacts is crucial for organizations aiming to cultivate an engaged and high-performing team.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERLY STRICT LEADERSHIP

Excessively rigid leadership frequently manifests through actions like micromanagement, intense supervision, and harsh tactics. Micromanagement happens when leaders scrutinize every aspect of their employees' work, indicating a deficiency in trust and diminishing employees' feelings of autonomy and ownership regarding their responsibilities (Mackey et al., 2015). This neglect frequently leads to employees experiencing feelings of being unappreciated and disheartened. Moreover, authoritarian leaders might depend on disciplinary actions, like punishing small mistakes, which creates a fear-based atmosphere. This kind of strategy prevents learning and hinders development because employees are more apt to react defensively rather than to enhance their skills. A further trait of excessively rigid leadership is the unwillingness to delegate duties, as leaders believe they are the sole individuals able to accomplish tasks accurately. This not only raises the leader's burden but also denies employees the chance to showcase their skills and add significant value to the organization (De Hoogh & Hartog, 2008).

CONSEQUENCES AND IMPACT OF OVERLY STRICT LEADERSHIP

The consequences of excessively strict leadership are extensive, impacting both employees and organizations. A significant result is employee discontent. Overbearing control

and harsh penalties foster a workplace atmosphere where employees sense a lack of trust and feel they are always being watched, resulting in diminished morale and reduced job satisfaction (Men et al., 2022). Rigid leadership similarly suppresses creativity and innovation. Workers in these settings frequently turn risk-averse, choosing to stick to familiar protocols instead of suggesting innovative concepts due to concerns about criticism or failure (Pizzolitto et al., 2023).

Additionally, overly strict leadership increases employee turnover. When employees perceive their work environment as rigid and oppressive, they often seek out organizations that offer greater trust and empowerment. High turnover disrupts organizational stability, increases recruitment costs, and affects overall team performance (Harms et al., 2017). Productivity also suffers under strict leadership. When leaders insist on micromanaging and controlling every detail, employees face delays in decision-making and reduced efficiency, as they must seek constant approval for their actions. This lack of autonomy leads to dependency and slows down workflows, reducing overall productivity (Mackey et al., 2015).

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Organizations can address the adverse effects of overly strict leadership by implementing strategies that promote trust and autonomy. One key approach is to foster employee autonomy by empowering employees to make decisions. According to Deci and Ryan's (2013) self-determination theory, autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to better performance and higher satisfaction levels. Leaders should also adopt a participative leadership style that involves employees in decision-making processes. This approach encourages a sense of ownership and aligns team objectives, improving both employee satisfaction and organizational outcomes (Pizzolitto et al., 2023).

Another critical strategy is to encourage open communication between leaders and employees. Regular feedback sessions provide opportunities for employees to voice concerns and clarify expectations, fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect. By establishing avenues for open communication, organizations can clarify misunderstandings and foster stronger connections between leaders and their teams (Harms et al., 2017). These strategies not only reduce the negative impacts of excessively rigid leadership but also foster a nurturing work environment that promotes creativity, involvement, and productivity.

CONCLUSION

Excessively authoritarian leadership, characterized by micromanagement and harsh penalties, leads to significant adverse effects on employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. These leadership approaches foster settings marked by low morale, diminished motivation, and high turnover, ultimately obstructing creativity, productivity, and overall organizational success. By building trust, advocating for participative leadership, and facilitating open communication, organizations can create a positive and empowering workplace culture. This transition to a more encouraging leadership approach boosts employee satisfaction, fosters innovation, and aids in the long-term growth of the organization.

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IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY ON MARKETERS AND CONSUMERS

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become a vital aspect of modern business strategy, playing a pivotal role in shaping both corporate practices and consumer behavior. Defined as the ability to meet present needs without compromising future generations, it encompasses economic, environmental, and social dimensions (ERM Sustainability Institute, 2024). As challenges like climate change and resource depletion grow more pressing, businesses are embedding sustainable principles into their operations to remain competitive and socially responsible (Jakubowska et al., 2024). At the same time, consumers are increasingly favoring brands that demonstrate genuine accountability and a commitment to sustainable practices in their choices (ERM Sustainability Institute, 2024).

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Sustainability is reshaping how consumers engage with brands as awareness of global environmental challenges grows, alongside demands for ethical and eco-conscious business practices. Increasingly, sustainability is seen as a core aspect of brand loyalty, with consumers favoring companies that embrace initiatives like ethical sourcing, recycled materials, and carbon footprint reduction. Gen Z and Millennials are leading this shift, prioritizing products that emphasize recyclability, transparency, and minimal environmental impact, creating opportunities for businesses to differentiate themselves by embedding sustainability into their values and operations (Jakubowska et al., 2024).

Often referred to as the "sustainability generation," Gen Z influences not only their peers but also older generations to embrace eco-conscious behaviors. Their active presence on social media platforms serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness about environmental issues, with older generations frequently encountering these messages, which can reshape their perspectives and habits. Viral campaigns and posts by Gen Z, such as climate strikes and zero-waste challenges, often inspire older family members to adopt sustainable practices. Additionally, Gen Z often shares households or workplaces with older generations, where they model eco-friendly habits like recycling, reducing plastic use, and adopting plant-based diets. This direct exposure encourages older individuals to incorporate similar sustainable behaviors into their own lives. Beyond individual actions, Gen Z's influence extends to promoting ethical consumerism by prioritizing companies with sustainable practices, signifying a cultural shift that values long-term environmental well-being over immediate gains (Wood, 2022).

Businesses are adapting to this shift in consumer behavior. Jakubowska et al. (2024) emphasize that trust, transparency, and consumer education are crucial for fostering sustainable consumption. This generation Z and millennial push for accountability is not only reshaping the relationship between consumers and businesses but also signaling a transformative shift in market strategies. As businesses embrace these values, they are setting the stage for long-lasting changes that will influence the future of consumption patterns and business operations.

IMPACT ON MARKETERS

Sustainability is transforming marketing strategies as businesses increasingly incorporate eco-conscious practices into every aspect of their operations, from product design to supply chains and branding. Many companies are adopting life-cycle approaches, prioritizing recyclable materials, ethical sourcing, and transparent production processes to meet evolving consumer expectations. This shift not only advances environmental goals but also serves as a competitive advantage (Caroll, 2021). Brands like Patagonia and Tesla illustrate how robust green initiatives can drive market share and foster customer loyalty. However, these efforts are not without challenges. High implementation costs, the need for transparency, and the risk of greenwashing—where unsubstantiated sustainability claims erode trust—remain significant hurdles for marketers (Cavicchi, 2012).

To overcome these challenges, businesses are leveraging tools like life-cycle assessments and fostering genuine stakeholder engagement to build credibility. Sustainable branding succeeds when it authenticates core values and actively involves consumers in eco-friendly initiatives. By taking these steps, companies can differentiate themselves in competitive markets and secure long-term customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, sustainability has become a transformative force, fundamentally reshaping consumer behavior and marketing strategies by aligning ethical values with business innovation. Gen Z and Millennials are leading this shift, demanding accountability and prioritizing brands that share their eco-conscious ideals. Businesses have responded by integrating sustainability into product design, supply chains, and branding, unlocking opportunities for differentiation and growth. However, challenges such as high costs, transparency, and avoiding greenwashing emphasize the importance of trust and stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, sustainability is redefining consumer-business relationships for a more responsible future.

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OPTIMISING HALAL SUPPLY CHAIN WITH BLOCKCHAIN-DRIVEN RISK MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Halal industry, a significant driver of global economic growth, is confronted with unique risks that threaten halal integrity throughout the supply chain. Effective risk management is critical yet underdeveloped within this sector. This paper explores the utilisation of blockchain technology to enhance the management of halal-related risks, ensuring compliance and integrity from production to consumption. Blockchain's inherent capabilities, such as traceability, transparency, and immutability, address critical issues like contamination, non-compliance, and fraud. The research explored the key risk factors in the halal supply chain, examined how blockchain can mitigate these risks, and developed a Blockchain-Driven Supply Chain Risk Management Model for the halal industry. Focusing on Malaysia's halal sectors, including food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, modest fashion, and tourism, this study evaluated how blockchain can improve supply chain performance metrics like cost-effectiveness, timeliness, reliability, and sustainability. By integrating blockchain, businesses can ensure real-time data transparency, prevent unauthorised modifications, and enhance the overall integrity of halal products. The findings are expected to contribute to better risk management practices, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage for halal firms in the global market.

Keywords: Halal Integrity, Supply Chain Management, Risk Management, Blockchain Technology, Halal Industry

INTRODUCTION

The Halal industry represents a significant sector of global trade, characterised by stringent adherence to Islamic principles throughout its supply chains (Tieman 2017). However, ensuring the integrity of Halal products has considerable challenges, such as contamination, non-compliance with standards, and fraudulent activities. These issues not only jeopardise consumer trust but also hinder the industry's potential for sustainable growth and global competitiveness (Khan, Haleem & Khan, 2022). Effective risk management practices tailored to the unique complexities of Halal supply chains are thus imperative.

This paper aims to improve supply chain performance in Malaysia's Halal industry by identifying key risks, optimising performance, and developing a Blockchain-Driven Supply Chain Risk Management Model. The goal is to encompass a range of Halal sectors, including food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, modest fashion, and tourism, assessing existing methods to improve both integrity and efficiency.

HALAL SUPPLY-CHAIN BLOCKCHAIN MODEL

Consortium Blockchain is a key instrument in halal risk assessment procedures, contributing to the integrity and compliance of the halal supply chain. Figure 1 shows how this

technique works in this particular situation. The first step in the process is the identification of Validator Nodes, which are regulatory organisations that only approve transactions after confirming the quality guarantee has been provided by manufacturers and shipping companies (Geetanjali, Iman & Bhoopesh 2019).
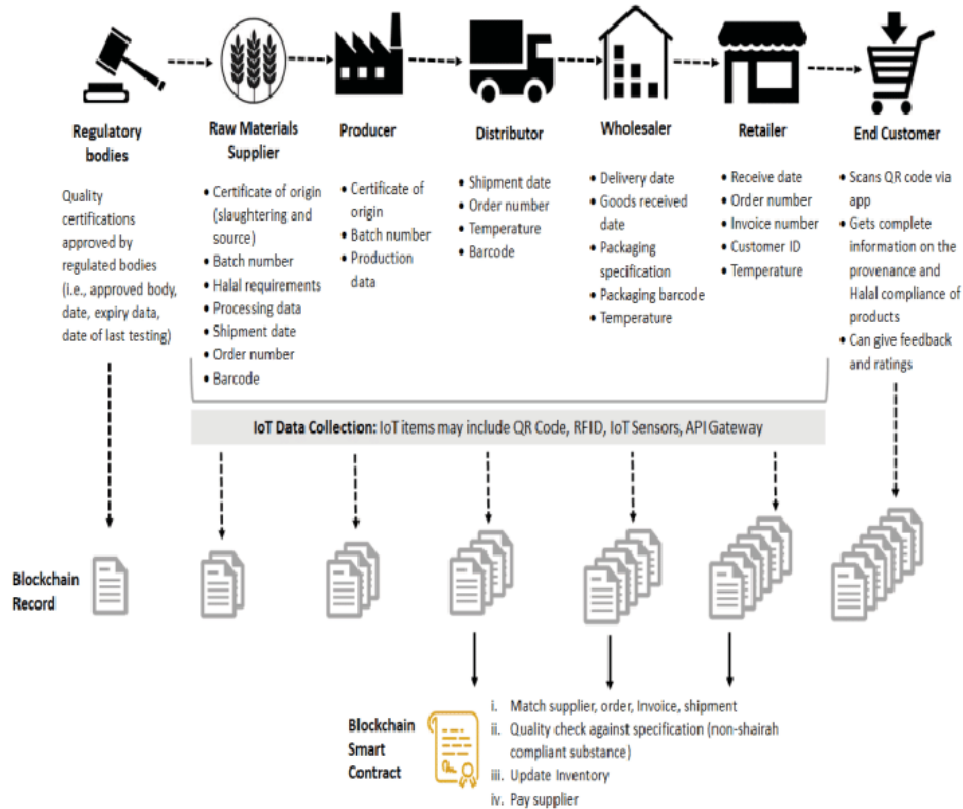
Figure 1: Blockchain Technology in Halal Supply Chain
Source: Geetanjali, Iman and Bhoopesh (2019)

Automation is facilitated by Internet of Things (IoT) devices like QR codes, RFID tags, sensors, and API Gateways. These devices autonomously gather and upload data onto the Blockchain, ensuring real-time transparency and accuracy in product provenance and adherence to Shariah standards. A fundamental aspect of this Blockchain implementation is the deployment of Smart Contracts, computer-programmed agreements that execute actions automatically upon fulfillment of predefined conditions. For instance, Smart Contracts enable seamless matching of supplier orders, invoices, shipments, and automatic payments among distributors, wholesalers, and retailers. They also enforce contractual terms and conditions, thereby minimising disputes and bolstering operational efficiency (Prayudanti & Sucipto (2021).

Consumers benefit by accessing comprehensive product information through mobile apps, where QR codes provide detailed insights into product origins and Shariah compliance. Moreover, consumer feedback and ratings are recorded on the Blockchain, promoting transparency and continual enhancement across the supply chain. Overall, the adoption of Consortium Blockchain in the Halal food sector promises enhanced traceability, efficiency, and trust among stakeholders. It reinforces compliance with halal standards, mitigates risks such as contamination and fraud, and improves overall service quality through robust risk assessment and management practices.

HALAL SUPPLY CHAIN RISK MANAGEMENT

Effective management of risks within the Halal supply chain is crucial for ensuring compliance with Islamic principles and meeting consumer expectations. The Halal supply chain encompasses various stages, from sourcing raw materials to the final distribution of products, each fraught with potential risks that could compromise Halal integrity (Ivanov, Dolgui & Sokolov 2019). Risks may include issues such as contamination, non-compliance with standards, and fraudulent practices, all of which can undermine consumer trust and damage brand reputation. Thus, a comprehensive risk management procedure designed especially for the halal sector is necessary to solve these issues. Usually, this approach starts with the identification and classification of risks using thorough literature research, industry expert advice, and potential field observations. These risks can be divided into four categories: contamination (including cross-contamination with non-Halal substances), process (relating to manufacturing and handling procedures), material (concerning the source and nature of raw materials), and integrity (focusing on adherence to Halal standards throughout the supply chain).
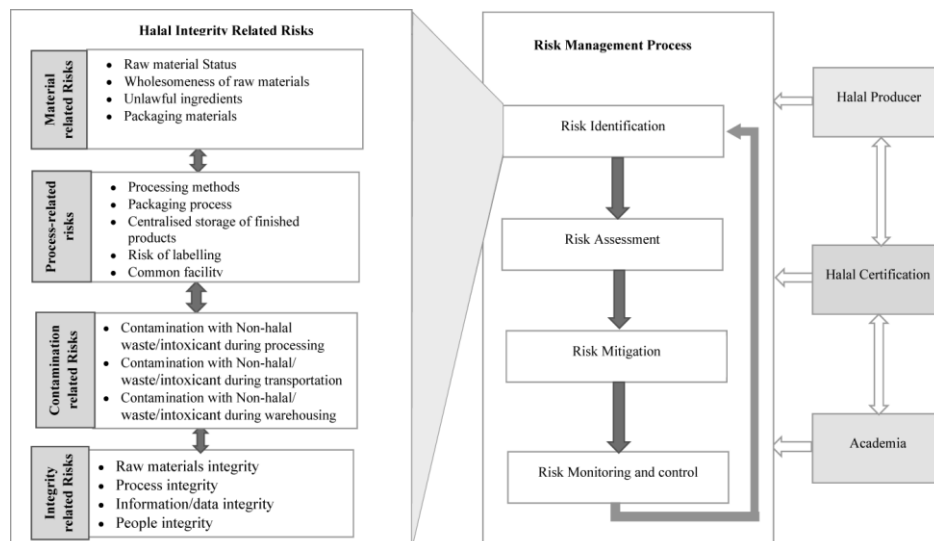
Figure 2: Halal Supply Chain Risk Management Framework
Source: Khan, Haleem, and Khan (2022).

Figure 2 introduces a structured research framework aimed at identifying and assessing significant risks through a combination of literature review and expert input. By employing innovative methods such as Intuitionistic Fuzzy Numbers (IFN) and D-number techniques, the severity of identified risks is quantified to prioritise them into "high priority" and "low priority" categories. Key risks identified include concerns over raw material status and processing methods, emphasising their pivotal role in maintaining Halal compliance (Khan et al., 2022).

However, there are a few limitations, such as potential gaps in risk identification due to constraints in accessing relevant literature. Furthermore, while the framework effectively evaluates risk severity, it currently lacks provisions for developing specific risk mitigation strategies, which presents an avenue for future research. Methodologically, the study leverages expert opinions, highlighting the need for rigorous validation and analysis to mitigate biases inherent in subjective assessments.

CONCLUSION

This paper holds significant implications for both academic research and industry practice. By exploring how blockchain technology can address specific challenges in the Halal supply chain, the research contributes to advancing knowledge in supply chain management and blockchain applications within regulated industries. Moreover, these findings can guide policymakers, regulators, and industry practitioners in adopting innovative technologies to strengthen compliance, transparency, and consumer trust in Halal products. Ultimately, the study aims to foster sustainable growth and competitive advantage for Halal firms operating in the global marketplace, ensuring their alignment with Islamic principles and regulatory standards.

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FOMO AND LIVE STREAMING: A DYNAMIC DUO FOR MODERN MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Marketing through live streaming has rapidly grown into a revolution in the world of social commerce, influencing consumer interactions and purchase decisions across multiple platforms. The "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) is a crucial factor in its success, as it drives people to take immediate action to avoid missing potential opportunities. This paper investigates how social commerce platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook leverage FOMO by engaging in real-time interaction, offering limited-time deals, and presenting social proof to create an urgent and persuasive atmosphere that encourages spontaneous purchasing. Insights from various live-streaming highlight different approaches, such as countdown sales, early-bird discounts, unexpected price reductions, and gamified promotions like spin-and-win games. These strategies utilize the concepts of limited availability and time sensitivity to evoke a sense of urgency among the audience. Furthermore, social proof, shown through live viewer numbers and real-time purchase notifications, reinforces the urge for consumers to join in. While these tactics work well, there are ethical issues regarding the possibility of taking advantage of consumer weaknesses, especially in younger demographics. This paper concludes by highlighting the importance of implementing FOMO-based marketing strategies cautiously while ensuring consumer confidence is maintained. Future research should explore how FOMO-based marketing influences consumer behaviour over time and assess the impact of regulations designed to protect consumer welfare.

Keywords: Live Streaming; Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); Social Commerce; Live Shopping; Impulse Buying; Real-Time Interaction; Limited-Time Offers

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of live streaming in social commerce has revolutionized interaction with consumers across various social commerce platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This dynamic and engaging style creates a sense of immediacy and exclusivity, often leveraging the psychological concept of "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out). In today's digital landscape, fuelled by FOMO, live-streaming marketing captures attention and drives impulsive purchasing behaviours (Przybylski et al., 2013). This paper explores the role of FOMO in social commerce platforms and its impact on consumer decision-making, focusing on strategies used across various platforms.

FOMO, characterized by a desire to participate in others' enjoyable experiences, is

especially pronounced in online settings. Research indicated that the fear of missing out (FOMO) greatly influences consumer behaviour, especially among younger generations who are regularly exposed to social media content (Przybylski et al., 2013). Live streaming marketing used FOMO by offering limited-time deals, engaging in real-time conversation, and providing social validation. FOMO plays a huge role in influencing consumer activities on social commerce platforms, particularly regarding continual buying processes. It acts as a middleman between informational motivation and the habitual use of these sites, resulting in compulsive consumption (Li et al., 2021).

OBSERVATIONAL AND ANALYSIS

Real-Time Interaction

Real-time interaction between sellers and consumers is a key characteristic of live-streaming marketing. Hosts often interact with their audience by responding to inquiries, showcasing items, and highlighting viewer comments. This two-way communication fosters a sense of inclusion and trust, motivating viewers to make purchasing decisions (Wang et al., 2021). During live streaming marketing, researchers have observed that hosts frequently use phrases such as "exclusive for the next 10 minutes" or "limited stock left" to create a sense of urgency, successfully triggering FOMO (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

Limited-Time Offers

Live streaming on social commerce platforms is successful due to the strategic use of flash sales and exclusive deals. Viewers are often offered exclusive discounts or package deals that can only be accessed during the live streams. Some examples of these strategies are:

1. **Countdown Sales:** Sellers show a countdown timer to encourage viewers to buy before time expires. For example, a live stream could showcase a "10-minute flash sale" for a discounted product, highlighting the need to act quickly (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

2. **Exclusive Early-Bird Discounts:** Offering special prices to the initial customers, such as "limited to the first 100 orders," not only promotes quick decision-making but also encourages swift action (Li et al., 2021).

3. **Gift With Purchase:** Hosts can offer gifts to viewers who purchase within a specified time period (Zhao et al., 2023). For example, "Purchase in the next five minutes to get a bonus product!" This increases the sense of urgency and enhances the perceived value of the offer (Cheng, 2020).

4. **Surprise discounts**: Declaring sudden price cuts during the live stream, like "This item is now 50% off for the next three minutes!" surprises viewers and encourages them to take advantage of the offer quickly (Zhao et al., 2023).

5. **Spin-and-Win Promotions:** Some live streams incorporate gamification by offering "spin the wheel" games. Viewers who make purchases within a specific time frame can receive extra discounts or prizes (Zhao et al., 2023).

These tactics take advantage of live streaming's temporary nature, making viewers feel compelled to act immediately or risk missing out on exclusive advantages.

Social Proof and Peer Influence

Social proof is a crucial aspect of FOMO and is frequently used in live-streaming marketing. Social commerce platforms display the number of viewers, comments, and purchases in real-time. Research shows that high levels of engagement, such as large numbers of viewers or quick product sell-outs, increase the product's perceived value and encourage others to participate in the trend (Hayran & Anik, 2021). This phenomenon underscores the idea that failing to act risks missing out on a widely embraced and rewarding opportunity (Bläse et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

Incorporating FOMO into social commerce live streaming aligns with consumer behaviour theories, especially the scarcity principle and the desire for social connection (Cialdini, 2001). Social commerce live streaming platforms take advantage of psychological triggers to encourage impulsive behaviour by establishing a socially charged, time-sensitive environment (Sun et al., 2019). Additionally, social commerce's algorithm increases the FOMO by showcasing live sessions with high interaction to a larger group of people, reinforcing the pattern of immediacy and desire (Franchina et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider the ethical consequences of using FOMO in marketing. Critics argue that such tactics can exploit consumer vulnerabilities, especially among younger audiences with limited financial knowledge (Hayran and Anik, 2021). Finding a balance between successful marketing techniques and protecting consumer interests is a challenge that marketers and regulators must address.

CONCLUSION

Live streaming marketing, as demonstrated by social commerce platforms, has become a powerful tool for involving customers and driving sales. Marketers use real-time interaction, limited-time offers, and social proof to create high-pressure environments that encourage impulsive behaviour by exploiting FOMO. Even though these strategies work well, their ethical implications require a cautious approach to maintain consumer trust. Future studies could explore the lasting impacts of FOMO-based marketing on consumer behaviour and mental well-being, as well as the effectiveness of regulations in reducing possible negative consequences.

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MICROFINANCE PROGRAM: A POVERTY ERADICATION INITIATIVE

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Microfinance actually, refers to the offering of credit and savings in helping small-scale and medium scale enterprises. With the introduction of microfinance, those lacking the capital to apply credit, mainly the poor, will be able to run their business. Consequently, this will help them to improve their quality of life in the society. In other words, microfinance is in existence as to strategize against poverty by many development agencies. Historically, microfinance started in Bangladesh in 1976. Being an economics professor with University of Chittagong, Muhammad Yunus experimented on the provision of credit to the rural poor. His experiment later developed into the world's famous microfinance institution, the Grameen bank. Many microfinance institutions replicated its ground-breaking methods in combating poverty (Montgomery & Weiss, 2005).

The effectiveness of microfinance programs was aggressively debated and studied by academicians and researches worldwide. Many studies done by researchers such as Montgomery and Weiss (2005) and Khan (2022) confirmed that the majority of the microfinance program participants are poor. Obaidullah (2008) mentioned that there is an increasing number of poverty in urban and rural parts of most Muslim countries whereas Saatçioğlu, Sandıkc and Jafari (2016) indicated that 40% of Muslims worldwide are living in poverty. However, Kondo (2008) in his study on the impact of the Rural Microenterprise Finance Project (RMFP) in Philipines pointed out that some of the participants in the RMFP who are deemed qualified are not poor. Hence, there are issues on whether the microfinance institutions have done enough in identifying the poor and successfully lift them up from poverty.

Many issues raised on the effectiveness of microfinance program in reaching out to the poor. Some said that the rate of success in reducing poverty in the society is not as much as expected when microfinance was first introduced. There are many factors that contribute to this scenario. The factors range from lack of promotion to failure in implementing the program with good governance by the agencies involved. One other area of failure is due to the Muslims perspectives on the conventional products which deemed not compatible with the financial principles set forth in the Islamic law. Another concern is the issue of Islamic-compliance products and services has contributed to rejection of conventional Microfinance program among the poor Muslim worldwide. Consequently this gives birth to Islamic Microfinance. Roughly two-third of the microfinance market in the Muslim countries persisted on Islamic financing (Rahman, Al Smady & Kazemian (2015). More than a decade ago, Rokhman (2013) pointed that its existence concentrated in a few countries with the top three countries pointing to Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Most recent, there are studies on Islamic mirofinance in countries such Turkiye, and Somalia (Odzemir, Savasa and Ulev, 2023; Hilif, Kulmie, & Osman, 2024).All these studies dwelled on how microfinance programs can be applied to eradicate poverty and improve quality living of the society.

In a nutshell, a provision of appropriate microfinance products and services to the poor is needed to assist in taking down the poverty level. In order to achieve this objective, microfinance institutions should understand the need of the poor in terms of their financial needs. Since many participants are Muslims and one of the requirements is to seek for Islamic based products and services, implementers of microfinance should offer more of shariah compliant products in their microfinance schemes. By doing so, it is believed that this Islamic Microfinance programs will be able to reach the majority hardcore poor Muslims.

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BEATING INFLATION SMARTLY: THE POWER OF UNIT TRUST INVESTMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Inflation, the gradual increase in prices over time, poses a significant challenge to the purchasing power of money. When inflation rises, the same amount of money buys fewer goods and services, eroding wealth and limiting financial security. To counter this, individuals need investments capable of outpacing inflation, preserving and growing their real wealth. Among the many options available, unit trusts have gained prominence as a practical and effective vehicle for managing inflationary risks. By pooling resources from multiple investors and investing in a diversified portfolio, unit trusts offer a balanced approach to achieving inflation-beating returns while managing risk.

Unit trusts are particularly attractive for many investors due to their accessibility and professional management. Unlike other investment vehicles that require substantial capital or financial expertise, unit trusts cater to a broad spectrum of investors, including those with limited resources or knowledge. This democratization of investment opportunities has made unit trusts a cornerstone for wealth preservation in inflationary environments. Moreover, their diversified structure provides a buffer against market volatility, ensuring a more stable return on investment. Understanding how unit trusts work is essential to appreciating their role in combating inflation and fostering financial security.

HOW UNIT TRUSTS WORK

Unit trusts operate on a pooled investment model, where funds from multiple investors are combined into a single portfolio managed by professional fund managers. These managers allocate the pooled funds across various financial instruments, such as equities, bonds, real estate, and cash equivalents. The primary objective is to achieve a return that outpaces inflation, thus preserving and growing the real value of the investment over time. This approach provides investors access to a broader range of assets than they might be able to afford individually.

One of the standout advantages of unit trusts is their diversification. By investing in a wide array of asset classes and sectors, unit trusts reduce the risk associated with the underperformance of any single investment. This aligns with the principles of modern portfolio theory, which emphasizes diversification as a key strategy for minimizing risk while maximizing returns (Markowitz, 1952). For instance, a unit trust might include both equities, which offer high growth potential, and bonds, which provide stability and regular income. This blend ensures that the portfolio remains resilient despite economic fluctuations.

Another critical feature of unit trusts is their professional management. Fund managers bring expertise and market insights that most individual investors lack, enabling them to make informed decisions about asset allocation. For example, during periods of high inflation, managers might increase exposure to inflation-linked bonds or commodities like gold, which tend to perform well under such conditions. This active management optimizes returns and ensures the portfolio is aligned with prevailing economic trends.

In addition to their structural and management advantages, unit trusts are highly liquid, allowing investors to redeem their units whenever needed. This flexibility is especially valuable in volatile markets, where quick access to funds can be crucial. Furthermore, unit trusts typically have low barriers to entry, making them accessible to a wide range of investors. Whether someone is a novice investor with limited funds or a seasoned investor seeking diversification, unit trusts offer a scalable and efficient solution.

By pooling resources, diversifying investments, and leveraging professional expertise, unit trusts provide a robust framework for combating inflation. Their ability to deliver stable, inflation-beating returns while minimizing risk makes them a compelling choice for individuals looking to safeguard their wealth over the long term.

HOW UNIT TRUSTS PROTECT AGAINST INFLATION

How Unit Trusts Protect Against Inflation

Inflation poses a significant threat to the purchasing power of money, making it essential for investors to seek strategies that preserve wealth and generate returns that outpace rising prices. Unit trusts are particularly effective in this regard, offering a combination of growth, income, and professional management within a diversified portfolio. By pooling resources across multiple asset classes, unit trusts provide a structured and dynamic way to hedge against inflationary pressures.

Capital Growth through Equities

One of the primary ways unit trusts protect against inflation is by allocating a significant portion of their investments to equities. Stocks have historically demonstrated the ability to generate returns that exceed inflation rates over the long term. During inflationary periods, companies typically adjust their revenues and profits to account for increased costs, which is reflected in rising stock prices. By investing in a diversified portfolio of equities through unit trusts, investors gain exposure to this growth potential while reducing the risk of individual stock underperformance. This growth-driven approach makes equities a key component of inflation-resistant portfolios.

Income Generation through Bonds

Another critical element of unit trusts is their allocation to bonds, particularly inflation-linked bonds. These instruments are designed to adjust their interest rates and principal values in line with inflation, ensuring investors receive real, inflation-protected returns. Fixed-income securities included in unit trusts also provide a steady income stream, helping investors maintain purchasing power. For instance, inflation-indexed bonds adjust payouts to align with rising prices, offering stability amidst economic uncertainty during inflationary periods.

Diversification for Risk Management

Unit trusts inherently offer diversification, which is one of the most effective ways to manage investment risk. By pooling funds across various asset classes, industries, and geographic regions, unit trusts spread the potential for losses and gains across a broader spectrum. This reduces the impact of poor performance in any single sector or market on the overall portfolio. For example, while equities might drive long-term growth, bonds and commodities like gold provide stability and act as a hedge against inflation. This balanced approach ensures investors can weather inflationary periods with minimal financial strain.

Reinvestment and Compounding Effects

Unit trusts also capitalize on the power of reinvestment and compounding to combat inflation. Dividends or interest earned from the underlying investments can be reinvested, allowing returns to generate additional returns over time. The compounding effect becomes especially critical during inflationary periods, as it helps offset the decline in purchasing power. Over the long term, the reinvestment of earnings can significantly enhance the growth potential of an investor's portfolio, making unit trusts a reliable inflation-fighting tool.

Active Portfolio Management

The active management provided by professional fund managers is another key factor in a unit trust's ability to counter inflation. These managers actively monitor economic conditions and inflationary trends, adjusting the asset mix as necessary to optimize returns. For instance, during periods of rising inflation, fund managers may increase exposure to assets that tend to perform well in inflationary environments, such as energy stocks, real estate, or inflation-linked securities. This proactive approach ensures the portfolio remains dynamic and resilient to economic shifts.

Exposure to Real Assets

Finally, some unit trusts include investments in real assets, such as real estate or infrastructure, which are natural hedges against inflation. Real assets tend to appreciate during inflationary periods because their intrinsic value rises with increasing prices. For example, rental income from real estate properties often increases alongside inflation, ensuring that investors continue to receive inflation-adjusted returns. This makes real asset exposure essential to a well-rounded, inflation-resistant portfolio.

CONCLUSION

Unit trusts offer a strategic and accessible investment vehicle for individuals looking to combat the adverse effects of inflation. As inflation erodes the purchasing power of money, it becomes essential to adopt financial strategies that preserve wealth and ensure its real growth. Unit trusts address this need through their diversified portfolio structure, professional management, and adaptability to changing economic conditions.

By pooling funds from multiple investors, unit trusts allow access to various financial instruments, such as equities, bonds, and real assets, collectively providing a balanced approach to wealth preservation. Their diversification minimizes risk, while their exposure to growth-oriented and inflation-linked assets ensures returns that often outpace inflation. Additionally, the expertise of fund managers enables strategic asset allocation, which aligns investments with inflationary trends, further optimizing returns during periods of rising prices.

Ultimately, combining diversification, professional management, and affordability makes unit trusts a practical choice for novice and experienced investors. They empower individuals to protect their wealth from inflation's erosive effects, offering stability, growth, and financial security. In an era where inflationary pressures are increasingly prevalent, unit trusts stand out as a reliable tool to safeguard and enhance purchasing power over the long term.

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BUILDING CUSTOMER TRUST THROUGH ONLINE BUSINESS REVIEWS

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INTRODUCTION

The e-commerce environment has undergone significant changes, offering convenience and availability of various products and services. Nevertheless, this era of digital transformation has presented distinctive obstacles, particularly regarding credibility and trust. Trust is formed when one party in a transaction believes in the reliability and honesty of the other (Sondern & Hertel, 2024). Unlike brick-and-mortar stores, where customers have face-to-face interactions with salespeople and can touch products, online shoppers rely solely on digital representations and information provided by the retailer as they navigate a virtual environment. Belardinelli and Gili (2022) state that credibility and trust play a vital role as "relational goods," with significant positive effects on the well-being of individuals and society. Creating satisfying customer experiences and promoting long-term success in e-commerce customer service relies on establishing credibility and trust as the foundation in this context. It is nurtured through enjoyable interactions, transparent communication, and a steadfast dedication to fulfilling commitments. Creating a feeling of safety and reliability, a trustworthy service is an essential component of the customer experience.

Without face-to-face contact, the endorsement of happy customers is crucial for establishing trust. Customer reviews, testimonials, and influencer endorsements serve as a type of digital word-of-mouth marketing that provides reassurance to potential customers regarding the quality and trustworthiness of products and services. Displaying authentic reviews on product pages, presenting case studies, and including customer testimonials on the website offer social evidence of the brand's trustworthiness. Actively responding to customer feedback, whether it is positive or negative, shows a dedication to constant improvement and builds trust and credibility. Over the last twenty years, relationship marketing has gained more significance, making trust a key factor across various industries. Hence, the lack of emphasis on the role of trust in managing challenging emergency situations is highlighted, despite its acknowledged importance in purchasing processes (Latino et al., 2023). Therefore, this article delves deeper into establishing trust with customers through online business reviews.

CUSTOMER TRUST AND ONLINE BUSINESS REVIEWS

Trust is the base for successful relationships between brands and consumers. Consumers rely on information to navigate the complex world of commerce, looking for advice to help them make choices that align with their desires and preferences. In this scenario, reviews act as a beacon, constructing a narrative from actual experiences. Authentic assessments act as guards, truth guardians, and visibility foundations in the realm of genuineness. They are not just testimonials but represent the vast array of consumer interactions with a company. Serving as a contemporary version of oral recommendations, these evaluations provide important information on the dependability, excellence, and general contentment of a product or service (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). Positive feedback from customers online is crucial in establishing trust and confidence in a brand's products. They confirm the brand's trustworthiness and serve as convincing recommendations for potential customers, which significantly influence sales and customer acquisition rates (Tran et al., 2022).

Satisfied customers' positive feedback boosts the brand's reputation, attracting consumers making choices in the market. This encouragement helps potential buyers feel confident and motivated to make well-informed buying choices. Based on research by Habib et al. (2021), when satisfied customers share their positive experiences about a brand, it significantly enhances how its reputation is viewed by individuals evaluating various choices. When contented customers express their positive experiences through electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), it acts as a spotlight drawing others to trust and believe in that brand. This affirmative buzz not only validates the brand's trustworthiness but also steers other prospective clients toward wise decisions. It is like a chain reaction: increased satisfied customers, increased confidence, and increased attraction towards that brand over its competitors in the market.

Credibility in this partnership is further reinforced with an additional layer of strength. Trustworthiness of a service or product brand is established through demonstrated expertise, reliability, and a proven history of success. Clients have confidence in the professionalism and expertise of a business when they possess credibility. Credibility functions as a symbol of quality assurance, establishing trust with customers and setting up a service apart from rivals, whether it be a bank, a healthcare facility, or an online platform. Research shows that the credibility of messages and media is important for building trust in digital influencers, thereby influencing impulsive buying on social networking sites (Shamim et al., 2022). There are several advantages to having trust and credibility in the service industry. To begin with, these traits significantly reduce the level of perceived risk. Customers often hesitate to engage with new services due to worries about the quality of service. The resulting contentment will foster consumer confidence in the business. Trust is established when one party in the exchange process has faith in the trustworthiness and honesty of the other party (Aras et al., 2023). Positive feedback, honest communication, and a proven history help reduce risks and encourage consumers to make initial purchases.

Moreover, consumer feedback enhances the level of connection and communication between the service provider and the customer, promoting transparency and genuineness in the partnership. Businesses can demonstrate their appreciation for their customers' opinions and trust by being open to feedback and transparent about their practices (Rane et al., 2023). By seeking out and acting upon customer feedback, service providers show their dedication to understanding client needs, addressing issues, and constantly working to enhance the quality of their services. This open communication fosters trust and encourages a feeling of partnership

and mutual respect between the service provider and its customers, establishing the groundwork for enduring relationships based on trust, loyalty, and mutual contentment.

In addition, trust and credibility serve as boosters for growth and innovation. A business that provides services and has won its customers' trust is more likely to obtain constructive comments. The willingness to listen to input, along with a credible reputation, promotes an environment of continual improvement and adaptation to changing demands from customers. A business that values feedback and is dedicated to adjusting according to customer insights fosters a setting conducive to supporting both growth and innovation. Businesses can develop more solid connections, remain important in dynamic markets, and gain a competitive advantage by cultivating trust (Urefe et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

In short, building trust and credibility gives a competitive advantage to businesses in today's digital era, with abundant information and endless options. Having online reviews and testimonials, along with a clear commitment to honest business practices, can help in building a solid online business reputation. Companies that participate in reviews by replying to feedback and expressing gratitude for customer input enhance this trust even more. This commitment shows a company's involvement in constant improvement and satisfying customers, ultimately boosting its reputation and cultivating a loyal customer following.

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFTERMATH OF TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS: THE BARRIERS TO RECOVERY AMONG EMPLOYEES

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INTRODUCTION

Toxic, negative, and destructive work environments have been classified as workplaces with "bad" management and dysfunctional relations and have gained interest from organizational behavioral researchers over the last ten years. These environments are characterized by bullying, gaslighting, and favoritism, as well as a lack of accountability, which altogether create a hostile environment and are detrimental to both individual employee health and the organization as a whole (Ariza-Montes et al., 2020). Although a good portion of existing studies concentrates on the recognition and intervention of the structural elements of violence and toxicity within the organization, it seems there is still plenty of room to explore on psychological scars inflicts on employees and the specific barriers that hinder their recovery (Verkuil et al., 2015).

It is evident that negative professional consequences arise from toxic workplaces, such as stunted career progress, derailment, and bad work relations (Ariza-Montes et al., 2020). However, the more hidden threat to employees' mental health, abuse, and manipulation of the hierarchy often gets lesser notice, though it is no less, if not more, obnoxious. Employees who routinely encounter dramatic emotional states, who are subjected to devious practices and strained by unending threatened expectations, have been known to suffer from clinical depression, anxious states, burnout, and eventually post-traumatic stress disorder (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Namie & Namie, 2018). Notably, this cluster of psychological disorders is alarming as it is often insidious in onset and indolent in nature, resulting in a gradual erosion of one's motivation, creativity, and, ultimately, well-being. The most accurate depiction is a stealthy assassin in the life of the sufferer, a quiet detractor of their very existence.

The relationship between career stagnation and degradation in mental health is a vicious cycle, wherein employees are constantly locked in a state of low self-esteem and a weakness to seek better workplaces or avenues for self-development and career expansion (Houshmand et al., 2012). With this phenomenon, it is essential to stress the importance of further studies investigating the impact of toxic workplaces in the long run and devising ways to put together structural organization and individual self-care. These strategies are necessary to manage the past's effects and avert such horrors in the future. However, even with the awareness that this is the case, what remains a worrying issue is the fact that the obstacles to recovery have gained

little attention in the literature on organizational behavior. In particular, those employees who have been subjected to working in a toxic workplace are often unable to take any constructive steps as they know the impact and want to change the situation. Such barriers are complex factors that unison stamp out all post-stressor recovery attempts.

THE BARRIERS TO RECOVERY

Recovering from a toxic workplace environment poses significant challenges for employees, often due to several interrelated barriers. One major obstacle is the emotional trauma experienced by those exposed to such environments, including lingering stress, anxiety, and self-doubt arising from negative experiences. Toxic workplaces erode a person's sense of security, which can have a profoundly detrimental effect on overall well-being, particularly mental health, as highlighted by Rasool et al. (2021). In addition, this damage to mental health is often long-lasting and difficult to address, creating additional hurdles for recovery. Persistent criticism or devaluation in such environments can deeply undermine an individual's self-esteem, compounding the psychological impact. Therefore, overcoming these effects requires considerable time, effort, and often professional intervention to rebuild confidence and mental resilience.

Secondly, unresolved feelings, such as lingering anger or the absence of closure from past toxic experiences, can significantly hinder individuals from moving forward in their personal and professional lives. In the workplace, these unresolved emotions often manifest through negative behaviors like poor performance, lack of motivation, ineffective communication, and disengagement with the organization. Employee engagement, which serves as a vital emotional and physical connection between employees and the organization (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019), becomes difficult to establish under such circumstances. When these unresolved feelings persist, they disrupt the development of a supportive work culture and impede efforts to rehabilitate a toxic environment. Thus, addressing these issues is critical for fostering a collaborative and productive workplace that encourages growth and emotional well-being.

Third, insufficient support from workplace management systems, friends, mentors, or therapists can significantly hinder an individual's recovery process. Toxic workplace environments are pervasive and can affect organizations universally. However, personal reasons often deter employees from formally reporting such behaviors, as highlighted by Taylor and Rew (2010). This reluctance to address issues due to fears of retaliation and doubting organization action, coupled with victims' silence, complicates the identification and documentation of toxic incidents (Berquist et al., 2018). Consequently, addressing and resolving these toxic environments becomes increasingly challenging, perpetuating the problem and delaying meaningful interventions.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, while the desire for recovery and change may be present among affected employees, these barriers create a formidable obstacle, making it challenging to escape the harmful cycle of toxic workplace environments. Hence, addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort from organizations, policymakers, and mental health advocates to create supportive structures that empower employees to take proactive steps toward recovery and reintegration into healthier work settings.

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THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS: HOW THEY ARE RESHAPING SOCIETY AND YOUTH CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media influencers has dramatically reshaped society and youth culture, transforming both how individuals interact with brands and the way they perceive self-identity and success. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have given rise to a new form of celebrity, where individuals build massive followings through their relatability, authenticity, and niche expertise. Influencers wield significant power in shaping trends, from fashion and beauty to lifestyle and politics, impacting their audiences' choices and behaviours. This paper explores the role of influencers in shaping youth culture, examining both positive and negative consequences.

Keywords: social media influencers, society, youth culture, positive effect, negative effect

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the internet and social media has given effect to the way decision-making is made by consumers in purchasing goods and services. Businesses are also aware of the importance of social media as marketing and promotional tools and the changing trend to purchase where marketing activities are now delivered at our fingertips. The social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Tik Tok and others are platforms used by businesses as their promotional tools. Such sites enable users to create and share information in their social networking groups.

To engage with consumers via online platforms, there exists a need to connect with social media influencers and as time goes by, these social media influencers have become powerful players in shaping opinions, driving trends, and influencing consumer behavior especially among younger generations. These digital personalities, with their content and massive followings, hold sway over everything from fashion choices to political views. For marketers, understanding who influencers are, what they do, and how they impact audiences is essential to tapping into this modern phenomenon. In this article, we will look into the world of social media influencers and how they shape society and the youth culture.

WHO ARE SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS?

Social media influencers are individuals who have built a loyal following online. They are known for sharing content that resonates with their audience. Their influence comes from trust, relatability, and expertise in specific niches. An influencer is an individual who uses his or her social media platforms to impact opinions, behaviours, or purchasing decisions. They are often seen as relatable, compared to traditional celebrities. What sets them apart is their ability to connect directly with followers through engaging and authentic content. They post regularly, interact with their audience, and often specialize in topics such as beauty, fitness, gaming, or lifestyle. Their success depends on two key factors: their follower count and their engagement rate (likes, comments, and shares).

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON YOUTH AND SOCIETY

Social media has become a crucial part in modern marketing, with over 91% of US companies using it to "inform, shape, engage, and influence consumer behavior" (Mulcahy et al., 2023). It has grown into a tool used by millions of people every day and as younger generations are now born in this digital world; they are used to having access to social media whenever they want to. Thus, due to the increase usage of social media, social media influencers have become significant figures in contemporary society, particularly in the lives of younger generations. Their power to shape perceptions, drive consumer behaviour, and influence social trends is profound, affecting everything from self-esteem and identity formation to purchasing decisions and social activism. This impact is felt across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and increasingly on other social networks, where influencers shape the digital landscape and broader culture.

SHAPING IDENTITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

One of the most profound impacts of social media influencers on youth is the shaping of identity and self-esteem. Influencers often project aspirational lifestyles, promoting beauty, fashion, fitness, and lifestyle trends that young people often strive to emulate. While this could be a source of inspiration, it also contributes to the rise of unattainable standards that can negatively affect self-image. Research suggests that frequent exposure to influencers' content especially in beauty and fashion can lead to increase body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, particularly among adolescent girls (Fardouly et al., 2015). Youth, especially Generation Z, are highly impressionable and are heavily influenced by the online personas they follow. The prevalence of filtered images, heavily curated content, and "perfect" portrayals of life can lead to unhealthy comparisons, where young people feel inadequate unless they match these ideals. A study by Tiggemann and Slater (2014) highlights how social media use correlates with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, particularly in the context of following beauty influencers. However, not all effects are negative. Many influencers also promote body positivity, mental health awareness, and self-love, which can help counterbalance some of the harmful impacts. Influencers like Lizzo and Jameela Jamil have used their platforms to advocate for diversity and self-acceptance, presenting more inclusive standards of beauty that resonate with youth (Fardouly et al., 2015; Diedrichs et al., 2015).

INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Social media influencers play a central role in shaping the purchasing decisions of youth. As digital natives, young people are more likely to trust influencers than traditional forms of advertising. Influencers' product recommendations, reviews, and endorsements significantly impact youth's consumer behaviour. Studies have shown that 49% of Gen Z consumers are more likely to make a purchase after seeing a product recommended by an influencer (McKinsey & Company, 2021). This shift toward influencer-driven consumerism is evident across various industries, including fashion, beauty, tech, and gaming. Influencers often act as brand ambassadors, creating a sense of authenticity and relatability that traditional advertisements cannot replicate. In turn, this drives brand loyalty among younger audiences. However, there are concerns about the commercial exploitation of influencer platforms, with accusations of promoting materialism and superficial values, leading to a desire to keep up with trends at the cost of financial stability or personal well-being (Freberg et al., 2011).

INFLUENCERS AND SOCIAL NORMS

Beyond consumerism, influencers also have the power to shape social norms. They often set the tone for trends in fashion, language, and behaviour. Platforms like TikTok are particularly influential in creating viral trends, whether related to dance challenges, fashion styles, or even political movements. The viral nature of TikTok has allowed influencers to engage youth in conversations about race, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (Abidin, 2016). Influencers could also reinforce or challenge societal expectations around beauty, success, and gender roles.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

While influencers have been celebrated for promoting positive social change, their impact on youth and society is not entirely without controversy. The constant need to post, the pressure to maintain a "perfect" online presence, and the desire for validation through likes and comments can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness among young people. A study by the Royal Society for Public Health (2017) found that Instagram was the most detrimental platform for mental health, particularly among teenagers, due to its focus on appearance and comparison.

Additionally, influencers' portrayal of an idealized lifestyle can contribute to the phenomenon of FOMO (fear of missing out), which may lead to social isolation or dissatisfaction with one's own life. Influencers often create a curated version of reality that overlooks the challenges and imperfections of their lives, creating an unrealistic portrayal of success (Chua & Chang, 2016). However, influencers are also playing a crucial role in destigmatizing mental health struggles, advocating for open discussions about mental well-being, and helping to combat the negative impact of social comparison.

CONCLUSION

The impact of social media influencers on youth and society is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, influencers can inspire positive change, promote social causes, and shape purchasing behaviour. On the other hand, they also contribute to the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards, social comparison, and consumerism. For youth, the key is to develop critical thinking skills and media literacy to navigate the influencer-driven landscape

while recognizing both the positive and negative aspects of influencer culture. As social media continues to evolve, the role of influencers will undoubtedly expand, and it will be important to monitor their influence on youth mental health and societal norms. Moving forward, influencers who promote authenticity, diversity, and mental well-being will likely have a lasting positive impact on society.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Toxic leadership is a big problem in workplaces, harming both employees and organizations. It causes poor performance, high employee turnover, and low morale. The article examines toxic behaviors that create harmful work settings, such as excessive control, micromanagement, and emotional abuse. Research shows these behaviors increase stress, distrust, and disengagement among employees. To solve this, the article suggests spotting toxic leadership early and encouraging better habits like empathy, emotional intelligence, and creating a supportive work culture. Positive leadership practices can reduce harm, improve employee well-being, and boost productivity.

KEYWORDS: Toxic Leadership, Emotional Abuse, Employee Well-Being, Organizational Culture

INTRODUCTION

A developing issue in many organizations is toxic leadership, which is defined by actions that have a detrimental effect on workers' productivity and well-being. Toxic leaders foster unfavorable work conditions that result in low morale, high turnover, and poor performance. Tepper (2000) asserts that emotional abuse and micromanagement are examples of abusive leadership styles that lead to increased stress and decreased job satisfaction. According to Lipman-Blumen (2006), toxic CEOs create an atmosphere of mistrust and anxiety that might impede the growth of a company. Furthermore, Grazier (2016) points out that high turnover is a result of toxic leadership, as workers are looking for healthier workplaces.

RECOGNIZING TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Since toxic leadership behaviors can take many various forms, it is important to be addressed early on. Toxic leadership behaviors, such as making decisions without consulting their employees, are often indicative of authoritarianism and hinder initiatives and creativity. According to Tepper (2000), employees who experience authoritarian leadership become disengaged because they feel helpless and unmotivated. Micromanagement, in which supervisors have undue influence over every facet of their workers' jobs, is another prevalent trait. According to Goleman (2012), micromanagement undermines emotional intelligence and trust, which makes it more difficult for leaders to relate to their people.

Another indication of toxic leadership is emotional abuse. Workers under toxic leaders often experience humiliation or a lack of value, which affects their self-esteem and creates a fearful work environment. This behavior not only undermines confidence but also causes stress and negative work dynamics (Lipman-Blumen, 2006). Additionally, toxic bosses may use fear to influence staff members or generate false information to manipulate others for their own benefit. Tepper (2000) emphasizes that these executives' lack of empathy causes alienation and anger, which eventually lowers staff morale and compromises the health of the organization.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Toxic leadership has serious repercussions for the organization and individual workers. Employees who work under toxic leadership may personally suffer from high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout. Reduced productivity, disengagement, and absenteeism may result from this. Eventually, employees may become demoralized and uninspired, which impairs their performance.

At the organizational level, toxic leadership undermines company culture. When toxic behaviors go unchallenged, they create an environment where negativity, gossip, and conflict flourish. This can lead to high turnover as employees leave for healthier environments. Tepper (2000) explains that high turnover disrupts team cohesion and incurs high costs in recruitment and training. Additionally, toxic leadership can damage a company's reputation, making it harder to attract top talent. In a competitive job market, news of poor leadership practices can deter potential employees from applying.

CONCLUSION

Toxic leadership can have far-reaching consequences for both employees and organizations. However, recognizing the signs of toxic leadership early and addressing these behaviors can help mitigate their effects. According to Lipman-Blumen (2006), the key to defeating toxic leadership is cultivating a positive leadership culture with sympathetic and encouraging leaders. Organizations may foster an atmosphere where workers feel appreciated and empowered by emphasizing good leadership practices and keeping leaders accountable, which will ultimately increase engagement, productivity, and success.

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA: ECONOMIC IMPACT AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism emerges as a pivotal force in global economic advancement. This sector not only significantly contributes to the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also plays a crucial role in achieving various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, tourism is intricately linked to SDG 8, 12, and 14, which focus on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP), and the sustainable utilization of marine resources, respectively (Spencer & McBean, 2020). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) highlights the substantial impact of tourism, noting that it accounts for approximately 10% of global GDP. Furthermore, prior to the pandemic, this sector was instrumental in creating one out of every ten jobs globally, underscoring its significant role in the global economy (Fang, 2020; UNWTO, 2023). The multifaceted nature of tourism encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects. Economically, tourism acts as a catalyst for investment, propels infrastructure development, and is a major contributor to foreign exchange earnings (Kline et al., 2018). Socially, it enhances cultural exchange and fosters a deeper understanding among diverse populations. Environmentally, tourism is increasingly recognized for its potential to promote conservation efforts and sustainable practices, aligning with global environmental sustainability goals (Sharpley, 2020). In the context of Malaysia, these global trends and impacts are particularly evident.

TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

Tourism plays a crucial role in Malaysia's economy. In 2023, the sector contributed RM157 billion to the national GDP, accounting for 8.6% of total economic output (Berita Harian, 2024). This figure is expected to grow to RM198.7 billion in 2024, comprising 10.5% of the economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024). Employment in tourism also saw significant growth, with approximately 3.4 million people employed in 2023, representing 21.4% of Malaysia's total employment (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Projections for 2024 suggest job numbers will surpass 2.4 million, reflecting a 5.2% increase from the previous year and a 5.3% rise compared to the 2019 peak (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2024).

The National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 provides strategic direction for the sector, emphasizing enhanced governance, specialized tourism investment zones, smart tourism initiatives, improved demand sophistication, sustainable practices, and workforce development. These measures aim to position Malaysia among the top ten global tourism destinations, aligning with government objectives to leverage the sector for national development. The MADANI framework highlights tourism as a high-value, strategic area critical for enhancing the service ecosystem and advancing value chains (Ministry of Economy Malaysia, 2023).

Despite its potential, the industry faces challenges, including dependence on international visitors, which leaves it susceptible to global economic and geopolitical risks. Overdevelopment in tourist areas raises environmental concerns, endangering key attractions

(UNWTO, 2023). To mitigate these issues, Malaysia is emphasizing sustainable tourism by balancing economic progress with environmental conservation. Programs like the Green Hotels Association and eco-tourism initiatives encourage responsible travel, while diversifying into medical, educational, and agro-tourism reduces reliance on seasonal demand (Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Tourism in Malaysia is a dynamic and essential part of the economy, offering a rich array of experiences to international and domestic travelers. Although the industry faces challenges such as economic dependency and environmental sustainability, ongoing efforts in diversification and responsible tourism practices are paving the way for a more resilient future. As Malaysia continues to evolve its tourism strategies, it remains a prime example of how a nation can leverage its cultural and natural assets to captivate a global audience, fostering economic development while preserving its heritage and environment for future generations. Looking ahead, Malaysia's commitment to sustainable tourism and strategic policy implementation will be key in overcoming challenges and securing a prosperous and environmentally balanced future for its tourism sector.

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THE EMERGENCE OF AI IN RETAIL: HOW IT'S CHANGING HOLIDAY SALES

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ABSTRACT

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools into Malaysia's retail sector is revolutionizing the holiday shopping experience. As Malaysian consumers increasingly embrace AI-driven platforms, they benefit from personalized shopping experiences, real-time price monitoring, and tailored product recommendations. This transformation is particularly evident during key retail events such as 11.11, 12.12, Cyber Monday, and year-end sales. By enabling price comparisons, delivering customized gift suggestions, and offering seamless online shopping experiences, AI is reshaping how Malaysians approach festive shopping. With capabilities to track prices across various e-commerce platforms, assist in discovering culturally significant gifts, and help shoppers in making informed decisions, AI tools offer a more efficient, personalized, and enjoyable shopping experience. The future of holiday shopping in Malaysia is increasingly defined by AI's capacity to enhance consumer convenience while ensuring the festive purchasing journey remains aligned with individual preferences and budgets.

Keywords: AI, retail, Malaysia, festive, consumer

INTRODUCTION

As Malaysia's festive season approaches at the end of every year, retail is changing slightly. As consumers, we need purchase experiences become more personalized and efficient. Malaysian shops should quickly adopt AI technologies without delay. Imagine having a personal assistant who knows your preferences better than your closest friends. Malaysia's e-commerce is already showing this. Online retail assistants powered by AI are changing customer experiences. For instance, in gift shopping, these digital assistants use your browsing history and past purchases to propose products.

While browsing wide product catalogs on platforms such as TikTok shops, Lazada, and Shopee, you may notice their accurate recommendations. This is the result of powerful AI algorithms. These platforms are leading the way of using AI to improve customer experiences, especially during holiday shopping (Duckett, 2024).

The AI revolution goes beyond product recommendations. Are you tired of enduring endless queues for customer support during bustling shopping periods? Enter AI chatbots: your round-the-clock digital shopping assistants. These advanced virtual assistants are designed to address product queries and provide real-time updates on your orders, revolutionizing the customer service experience. These chatbots not only improve customer satisfaction, but also free up customer care agents to handle more complex issues (Chitra, 2023). The outcome? You get a better, simpler shopping experience, even during the holidays. Therefore, this article explores AI's emerging role in Malaysian retail, particularly during the holiday sales season.

RETAIL DECISION-MAKING USING AI

AI's background impact is just as revolutionary as its client applications. Have you ever wondered how retailers predict your needs, especially during festive seasons? The answer lies in AI-powered analytics. Consider a store manager planning for holiday sales. In the past, they used intuition or basic sales records. Today, they have a lot of AI-analyzed data to predict customer behavior accurately. Jain et al. (2023) explain how this data-driven approach helps merchants adjust their product assortments and pricing to meet consumer demand during peak seasons like the holidays.

AI's predictions go beyond stocking hot items. They are also changing supply chain management. Imagine a popular toy is unavailable before the festive season. This may have caused client dissatisfaction and lower sales. AI-driven analytics help retailers predict supply chain issues. According to Bansal and Bansal (2023), this proactive technique allows enterprises to handle issues before they affect sales, ensuring the availability of critical products during the holiday sales.

In the US, Meier (2024) explains that Savvy Black Friday shoppers are increasingly turning to AI tools like ChatGPT to find the best deals and streamline their holiday shopping experience. This trend reflects a shift from traditional in-store bargain hunting to a more tech-savvy approach, with 44% of likely Black Friday shoppers planning to use AI to navigate dynamic pricing and rapidly changing deals.

MARKETING PERSONALIZATION: AI-DRIVEN STRATEGIES

Let's look at how AI is changing marketing strategies as the holidays approach. Promotional campaigns are no longer uniform. AI allows previously impossible customization. Imagine receiving a personalized promotional email. Malaysian companies are using AI to segment their customers and adapt their marketing. Li et al. (2020) describe how retailers use consumer data to create personalized email marketing, social media ads, and in-app notifications.

Think about this: You are a Malaysian fashionista who is considering winter clothing for your holiday trip. You receive an unexpected winter clothing sale notification from your favorite retailer. Coincidence? Not exactly. This is AI assessing your preferences and purchase habits to offer relevant specials at ideal times. This customization goes beyond convenience. According to Pillai et al. (2020), making customers feel valued and understood builds loyalty. This personal touch is crucial in sales retail competition.

ADDRESSING DIFFICULTIES: HUMANIZING AI INTEGRATION

AI in retail has many benefits, but its drawbacks must be acknowledged. Data privacy and workforce adaptation are major problems as we use AI. Consider the massive personal data needed for AI to function effectively. How can we protect these data? These challenges require Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA). Chitra (2023) explains how this regulation regulates the collection and use of personal data, protecting consumer privacy in the AI era. Equipping the workforce for an AI-driven future may be the biggest issue. Imagine being a retail employee with years of customer service experience, only to watch AI increasingly controls customer relationships. Bansal and Bansal (2023) emphasize worker upskilling to analyze AI-generated insights and improve customer interactions.

CONCLUSION

As another holiday shopping season approaches, AI is revolutionizing Malaysian retail. Shopping has become more engaging and efficient with AI-driven shopping assistants and targeted marketing. Nonetheless, as we move toward an AI-driven future, we must carefully assess its challenges. We can ensure responsible and fair AI benefits by addressing data privacy and investing in secure application development.

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DIGITAL NOMADS: BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY OR HINDERING PERFORMANCE?

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital nomadism has surged in popularity, driven by rapid advancements in technology and the evolving norms of modern workplaces. Companies transitioned to remote work setups as a result of the global pandemic, further accelerating this trend and proving that productivity is not necessarily tied to a physical office. Digital nomads harness the power of technology to work remotely while exploring different locations, transforming any space with an internet connection into their office. This lifestyle offers unparalleled freedom, allowing individuals to design their work environment and schedule, achieving a balance between professional responsibilities and personal fulfillment that traditional office settings often cannot provide (Verma, 2023).

This shift in the working environment has fueled a growing demand for flexibility, allowing individuals to travel and work from their preferred locations. For employers, offering this level of flexibility has become a powerful strategy to attract, retain, and engage top talent (Payne, 2023).

However, while the idea of working from their homes, neighborhood cafes, or even different countries sounds appealing, the impact of digital nomadism on employees' performance is a subject of ongoing debate. This article explores both the advantages and drawbacks of this lifestyle, examining how it influences productivity, creativity, and overall work outcomes among employees.

PROS OF BEING A DIGITAL NOMAD ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Increased Flexibility

Among the greatest benefits of being a digital nomad is that they report higher satisfaction levels with their work than most other workers because they can work in environments that suit them best, boosting creativity and productivity. Satisfaction among digital nomads comes down to the fact that they are overall satisfied with their earnings and happy with the flexibility, comfort, and freedom they have with their work and lifestyle, leading to higher levels of output. Organizations that embrace greater flexibility can harness the talent of employees who are happier, more productive, more loyal, and have access to wider networks of

global talent and potential partners for the business (Verma, 2023).

According to Zaki (2023), allowing the right for employees to decide when, where, and how they work can lead to greater productivity and job satisfaction. When employees have self-determination and the freedom to approach their tasks in their own way within an autonomy-supportive environment, they are more likely to find their work engaging, develop a positive attitude toward their roles, and actively collaborate with their surroundings and colleagues, fostering a more dynamic and fulfilling workplace.

Broader Perspectives

Immersing themselves in diverse cultures and environments, digital nomads naturally cultivate innovative thinking. By mingling with fellow nomads, local entrepreneurs, and professionals at networking events or co-working spaces, they gain access to unique perspectives and connections that might otherwise remain out of reach. These dynamic interactions often spark opportunities for collaboration, inspire fresh ideas, and foster knowledge exchange.

When organizations empower employees to expand their professional networks in this way, the benefits flow both ways. Employees sharpen their problem-solving abilities, boost creativity, and return with fresh, innovative ideas, often uncovering potential business partnerships and attracting top talent. This exchange fuels the organization's growth by enhancing global business strategies. At the same time, businesses gain access to the world's best talent, leveraging diverse skills and perspectives that transcend geographical boundaries to address evolving business needs (Haddouch, 2024).

Better Work-Life Balance

For many, the freedom to choose their schedule and location significantly enhances their mental well-being. Digital nomads have the flexibility to design their workdays around personal needs and preferences—whether that means starting early, taking extended breaks, or working in inspiring locations. This autonomy often leads to increased productivity, better work-life balance, and higher job satisfaction, which in turn can improve employee retention.

Additionally, by leveraging automation tools, digital nomads can streamline tasks, reduce costs, and achieve more with fewer resources. As automation becomes an integral part of their workflows, digital nomads not only save time but also contribute to driving further innovations in automation (Verma, 2023).

CONS OF BEING A DIGITAL NOMAD ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Unpredictable Working Environment

An unpredictable working environment, while offering variety and adventure, can also pose significant challenges to a digital nomad's job performance. Martin (2023) mentions in his article that situations such as frequent changes in time zones, unreliable internet connections, a lack of privacy, the absence of a dedicated workspace, and noisy environments can all impact and disrupt focus, productivity, and communication. As a result, digital nomads may find themselves scrambling for a workspace at the last minute or working strange hours to accommodate time zones, which makes it difficult for them to establish a routine, leading to

burnout and stress.

Besides that, adapting to different cultural norms or managing logistical issues—such as finding quiet places for video calls—can consume valuable time and energy. These uncertainties may lead to inconsistent work output or missed deadlines if not effectively managed.

Burnout Risk

Although the digital nomad lifestyle is often portrayed as liberating, the blurred boundaries between work and leisure can lead to burnout. Constantly switching environments, adapting to new time zones, and managing the pressures of remote work can create mental and physical fatigue, stress, and overwork problems while traveling (Wang et al. 2021). Without the structure of a traditional office, digital nomads may feel the need to be 'always on,' answering emails late at night or working extended hours to accommodate clients in different regions.

Furthermore, the lack of a stable routine can disrupt sleep patterns, eating habits, and self-care practices, further exacerbating stress. Social isolation, another common challenge, can intensify feelings of loneliness and diminish emotional resilience. Over time, this combination of factors can result in reduced productivity, diminished creativity, and even health problems.

Perceived Disconnect

One of the greatest challenges digital nomads face is the lack of a consistent community and the repeated effort to rebuild connections in each new location. This transient lifestyle can lead to feelings of detachment from their teams and a weakened sense of belonging to the company culture. Automation, while enhancing efficiency, can further reduce opportunities for meaningful interactions with clients or colleagues, making it harder to cultivate strong relationships (Verma, 2023).

The frequent relocations and lack of stable social ties often result in loneliness, which can negatively impact both professional performance and personal well-being (Mäkiniemi et al., 2021; Lacárcel et al., 2023). For remote employees, mental health remains a persistent concern, and for digital nomads, isolation amplifies this issue as their work environment lacks the organic social interactions of a traditional office (Chevtaeva, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rise of digital nomadism presents a unique opportunity for employees to break free from traditional work environments and embrace a lifestyle that fosters flexibility and independence. While the benefits, such as increased productivity, broader perspectives, and improved work-life balance, can significantly boost performance, there are also undeniable challenges. Issues like an unpredictable working environment, perceived disconnect, and potential burnout can impact productivity and team dynamics if not managed properly.

Companies that embrace this trend can mitigate its drawbacks by implementing clear remote work guidelines, such as doing performance and motivation metrics, simplifying internal procedures, building transparency within the organization (Zaki, 2023), investing in remote work technologies, and fostering a culture of trust and accountability.

As the workforce continues to evolve, it is essential to strike a balance that allows employees to thrive in this new era of work without compromising their performance or well-being. The digital nomad lifestyle is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but with the right strategies in place, it can serve as a powerful tool to empower employees and drive organizational success.

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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN MALAYSIA: INSIGHTS, CHALLENGES, AND SOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly changing global digital environment, social media marketing has emerged as a fundamental component of contemporary corporate strategy. Nonetheless, its execution is fraught with difficulties. Globally, firms encounter challenges including managing intricate platform algorithms, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations, and sustaining genuine customer interaction in an oversaturated online landscape. Moreover, enterprises must adjust to varied cultural contexts, consumer habits, and technology innovations to maintain competitiveness. These global difficulties highlight the necessity of customized solutions that consider regional specificities, promoting sustainable growth via strategic digital communication. Malaysia's dynamic digital economy presents distinct opportunities and difficulties for social media marketing. Due to extensive internet penetration and active user participation, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have emerged as vital avenues for businesses aiming to improve brand visibility and customer interaction. Marketers face distinct challenges, such as evolving consumer preferences, regulatory constraints, and the necessity for culturally pertinent content. This study examines the insights and difficulties of social media marketing in Malaysia and provides practical solutions for organizations to efficiently navigate this changing landscape. For instance, a study conducted by Hootsuite in 2022 reported that social media penetration in Malaysia reached 86%, making platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok critical for business marketing strategies. Shopee's 11.11 Big Sale campaign is an example of a successful initiative, generating over 200 million items sold within 24 hours, highlighting the effectiveness of targeted social media marketing.

Figure 1 indicates that in 2024, Malaysia demonstrates a readiness to adopt digital connectivity, as evidenced by the overall social media numbers from the preceding year. The nation's total population has reached 34.49 million, and internet utilization is experiencing a steady annual rise. Connectivity has become indispensable in Malaysian society, evidenced by a 1.1% increase in online involvement, reaching 97.4% of the population. The quantity of social media user IDs has risen by 20%, totaling 28.68 million individuals actively engaging on social media platforms. The slight increase in cellular mobile connections, presently at 44.55 million, representing 129.2% of the national population, underscores the importance of mobile connectivity in the daily lives of Malaysians. Among internet users aged 16 to 64, 98.5% possess a mobile device, reflecting a 0.9% increase from the prior year, indicating nearly ubiquitous mobile phone ownership. Desktop computers and laptops remain prevalent, with

69.3% of users possessing one or more devices, an increase of 1% over the prior year. The continual gains underscore the importance of popular devices for accessing the internet and social media. A significant trend to note is the swift proliferation of smart devices. Ownership of smartwatches or wristbands rose by 5.1%, utilization of TV streaming devices increased by 15.4%, and adoption of smart home gadgets grew by 8.6%. The growing prevalence of interconnected smart devices in Malaysian households empowers individuals with enhanced convenience, indicating a rising familiarity with advanced technological systems.
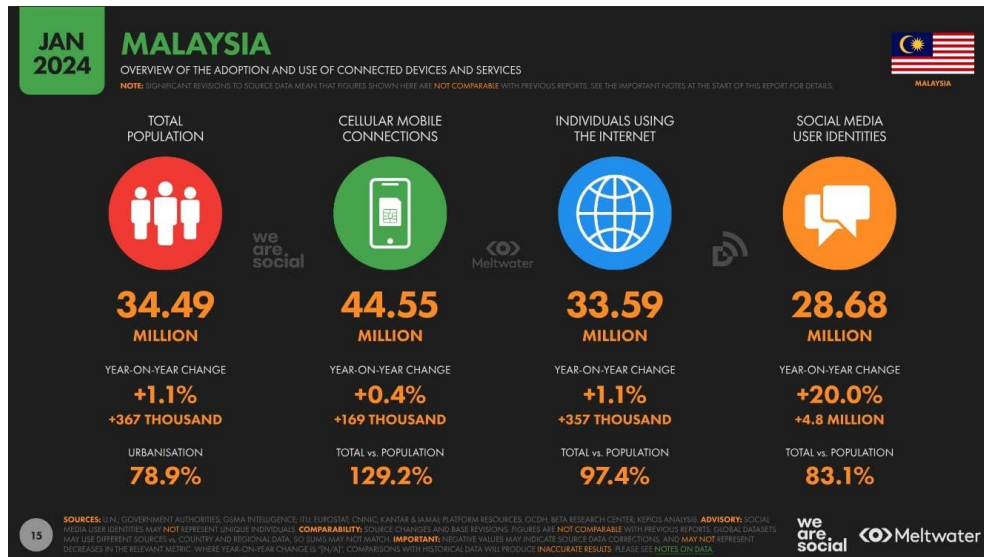

Figure 1: Overview of the Adoption and Use of Connected Devices and Servies
Sources: https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-malaysia

This article will examine the obstacles of social media marketing in Malaysia, identify successful solutions to address these challenges, and discuss how firms can adhere to relevant rules and regulations.

What are the distinctive challenges that businesses in Malaysia have with social media marketing?

Social media has undeniably become a crucial marketing instrument for businesses to engage with target audiences and promote brands, products, and services. Notwithstanding these advantages, social media marketing in Malaysia that organizations must address to achieve success (Alias et al., 2022); a particularly formidable obstacle is catering to its diverse, multicultural populace. A diverse amalgamation of races, diversity poses a problem for businesses aiming to produce social media content that resonates with their viewers.

Neglecting cultural awareness may result in backlash and tarnish a brand's reputation. A further problem in social media marketing in Malaysia is the constantly changing algorithms of social media platforms. Major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and LinkedIn frequently revise their algorithms, complicating the ability of businesses to stay abreast of current trends and cultural phenomena. Furthermore, enterprises in Malaysia must confront the challenges posed by false information and misinformation on social media platforms. The dissemination of misinformation can damage a business's reputation. Vigilance is essential to guarantee that one's content is correct, truthful, and informative.

The rising usage of ad-blockers and ad-blindness among social media users in Malaysia presents significant challenges. These programs obstruct and disregard advertisements, hindering organizations' ability to effectively engage their target customers. Surmounting this hurdle necessitates the dissemination of engaging, useful, and pertinent information to stimulate audience interest in your enterprise. Malaysian enterprises must consider cultural sensitivity, algorithm changes, content accuracy, and the creation of interesting content when pursuing marketing objectives.

What measures can Malaysian businesses implement to guarantee that their social media marketing practices adhere to applicable laws and regulations?

The law applies universally. Like any nation globally, Malaysian enterprises must adhere to the laws and regulations pertaining to social media marketing. These restrictions guarantee that firms function equitably and ethically, safeguarding customers from deceptive advertising while fostering healthy competition in local marketplaces. Malaysian enterprises must comprehend and comply with these standards to guarantee that their social media marketing initiatives are in accordance with them.

A notable regulation is the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA). The legislation governs the acquisition, utilization, and dissemination of personal data. This legislation mandates obtaining user consent prior to the collection of personal information. Businesses must exhibit transparency regarding their methods of collecting and utilizing personal data, thereby granting individual users appropriate access and accurate information.

The Consumer Protection Act of 1999 (CPA) is an additional regulation. The CPA forbids businesses from participating in deceptive or misleading advertising, imposing unethical contractual terms, and engaging in unconscionable behavior. Adhering to CPA necessitates that businesses maintain accuracy and honesty in their social media marketing endeavors regarding promoted products and services.

Malaysian enterprises are required to adhere to the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice (MCAP), which regulates the content and placement of advertisements in Malaysia. This act mandates that enterprises verify the authenticity and propriety of their advertisements. This legislation ultimately prohibits the advertisement of offensive or discriminating material. Businesses must create policies and procedures to ensure their social marketing initiatives adhere to these regulations.

Compliance with rules and regulations is crucial for businesses in Malaysia to thrive in social media marketing. By comprehending applicable rules and regulations, formulating policies and processes, and assuring compliance of their social media marketing initiatives with these regulations, firms can cultivate consumer trust, avert legal complications, and attain their marketing objectives.

How can enterprises overcome obstacles in the social media marketing domain?

Social media marketing is an essential component of contemporary business strategy. Navigating the complexities of a changing environment can be difficult. Due to algorithm modifications and heightened competition, businesses must identify strategies to surmount challenges in order to maintain relevance and success in their social media marketing initiatives.

Here are few strategies organizations can employ to navigate in the social media marketing domain:

a)   Identify and comprehend the obstacles.

Recognizing and comprehending these obstacles is essential. Businesses must undertake research and examine their social media initiatives to identify specific areas necessitating enhancement. This may encompass diminished engagement rates, unproductive content, or insufficient internet presence.

b)   Formulate a robust social media strategy

Upon identifying the pertinent difficulties, businesses can then create a robust social media marketing strategy, on target audience engagement, social media channels, and content development. A well-defined plan will guarantee that your marketing initiatives are concentrated and connected with company objectives.

c)   Generate captivating content

Social media users are overwhelmed with content. Enterprises must generate captivating and pertinent content to differentiate themselves. This may encompass visual content, like films and photographs, or textual content, such as blog entries or social media updates. The essential task is to produce content that resonates with the intended audience and fosters engagement.

While, to enhance social media marketing strategies tailored for businesses in Malaysia, step-by-step frameworks and strategies can be implemented. For example:

Audience Segmentation Tools

Understanding the target audience is critical. Here's how businesses can utilize segmentation tools:

Step 1: Define Audience Personas

Tools: Google Analytics, Facebook Audience Insights, or HubSpot.
Actions: Segment the audience based on demographics (age, gender, location).
Use psychographics (interests, values, and online behaviors).

Step 2: Leverage Platform-Specific Insights

For Instagram: Use Instagram Insights for follower activity trends.
For TikTok: Explore TikTok Analytics for content-specific audience behaviors.
For Facebook: Use detailed custom audience targeting.

Step 3: A/B Testing for Precision

Use tools like Optimizely to test different campaigns for various segments.
Adjust campaigns based on CTR, engagement, or conversion rates.

CONCLUSION

The most essential thing to keep in mind when it comes to overcoming obstacles in the social media marketing landscape is to keep a flexible mentality and to keep your attention on the audience that you are attempting to reach. companies have the potential to overcome obstacles and achieve success in social media marketing by developing a comprehensive plan, producing content that is engaging, utilizing influencers, and monitoring and adjusting their methods. These are all ways in which companies can achieve success in social media marketing.

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CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

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INTRODUCTION

Responsible marketing is becoming an increasingly important priority for many businesses today. Responsible marketing, often known as social marketing, has significant implications for any business's long-term viability. Notably, social marketing in 2024 is characterized by various developing themes aiming at boosting interaction, using technology, and fulfilling changing customer expectations. Meanwhile, responsible marketing is a unique marketing discipline that emphasizes the use of a systematic planning process to implement marketing principles and techniques. This is with a particular emphasis on priority audience segments in order to influence behavior, change and provide a positive impact on society and individuals. Accordingly, analogous to the objectives of commercial sector marketers, whose aim is to sell products and services, social marketers seek to effectively induce behavioral change (Lee & Kotler, 2020).

In general, the responsible marketing effort is aimed at modifying the behavior of the target audience, promoting societal benefit, and motivating action. In particular, it prioritizes the major impact on the well-being of the customer or consumer, the community, society, the general public, and the global environment.

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

A social marketing campaign's application demonstrates how the methods used have changed over time. In 2024, the programs are no longer exclusively available through conventional methods, necessitating face-to-face engagement with the target audience. Instead, due to the rapid advancement of technology, they can be implemented through more interactive platforms. The message can be conveyed worldwide and has a significant impact on many of the intended audiences. In addition, social media marketing has allowed firms to communicate with specific target groups in a timely and effective manner. As such, this is a vital development for enterprises (Ghafar, 2024).

Moreover, Appel et al. (2020) stated that considering the promising potential audience that spends many hours a day on social media across many platforms, it is not unexpected that marketers have embraced social media as a marketing tool. Correspondingly, an extensive corpus of research on social media marketing and related topics, such as online word of mouth (WOM) and online networks, has been developed, and social media has also been embraced

academically.

Utilizing social media platforms can substantially increase the visibility of the campaign and may be implemented at minimal expense. Recently, marketers have been able to leverage various free social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and others to convey messages and broadcast pertinent campaign material. At the same time, numerous organizations have recently utilized these platforms to enhance connection with prospective clients and to foster positive relations with the general public. Consequently, utilizing social media platforms can improve community involvement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects. For instance, the 'Love in A Box' campaign, in collaboration with the Sarawak Organization of Parents and Children with Special Needs (PIBAKAT), utilized social media platforms to garner further support for this charitable initiative (Henrietta, 2019).

Using live applications to communicate directly with the target audience is one of the many benefits of social media use. The comments and feedback options on the social networking site enable us to participate by providing immediate feedback. Artificial intelligence-powered tools are optimizing influencer marketing by assessing authenticity and reach, while automation enables customer service to address enquiries at scale with efficiency. Moreover, regularly posting on social media enhances the effectiveness of information dissemination for long-term campaigns compared to doing singular events or programs.

CONCLUSION

These trends illustrate the evolution of social marketing in response to the changing behavior of consumers and technological advancements. To cultivate consumer trust and loyalty, responsible marketing fosters a balance between profitability and accountability. Furthermore, the utilization of the most recent technology can effectively expand the benefits of social marketing campaigns that consider societal and environmental impacts, thereby contributing to the well-being of local and global communities.

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SUSTAINABLE FINANCE: SUSTAINABILITY-LINKED LOAN

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Sustainable finance is financial decision-making and investments incorporating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors of companies and financial institutions to support sustainable economic growth, mitigate climate risks, and foster social equity (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024). To promote sustainable finance within the financial industry, especially in lending activities, new products have been developed to suit borrowers' needs. Among the financial instruments designed to address environmental and social challenges are sustainability-linked loans (SLLs). Sustainability-linked loans provide businesses with the necessary financial support to achieve sustainability goals while fostering positive ecological outcomes.

SLLs are financial products where the terms and conditions of the loan are linked to the borrower's achievement of predetermined ESG targets, known as sustainability performance targets. These targets include key performance indicators (financial), external ratings, or equivalent metrics used to measure improvements in the borrower's sustainability profile. Examples of the sustainability performance target categories include energy efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, water consumption, biodiversity etc. The sustainability-linked loans can take the form of any loan instrument, including guarantee facilities or letters of credit (Loan Market Association, Asia Pacific Loan Market Association, & Loan Syndications & Trading Association, 2019). The sustainability-linked loan principles (SLLP) were developed to easily adopt SLLs in the financial industry. These principles provide guidelines on the fundamental characteristics of SLLs. SLLP has established a framework for SLL characteristics based on four components: target setting, reporting, evaluation, and relationship to the borrower's broader CSR strategy. (Loan Market Association, Asia Pacific Loan Market Association, & Loan Syndications & Trading Association, 2019). The most distinctive feature of SLLs is that the use of loan proceeds is not restricted to specific projects but supports the borrower's overall business operations. This flexibility makes them particularly attractive to companies committed to integrating ESG factors into their business strategy, regardless of the industry sector.

Malaysia is actively leveraging sustainability-linked loans to drive environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives across various sectors of the economy, ranging from corporate enterprises to government-linked entities. This approach emphasises the adaptability of SLLs in achieving varied ESG goals. The Malaysian corporate and public sectors have made notable strides with SLLs. For example, AEON Credit Service (M) Berhad utilised RM600 million in SLLs to advance ESG education, promote financial inclusion, and achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 (AEON Credit Service, 2023). Similarly, CapitaLand Malaysia Trust (CLMT) has committed RM752 million to decarbonise its operations, including securing green certifications and enhancing renewable energy adoption (The Star, 2024). Furthermore, Sabah Credit

Corporation and Sarawak Energy Berhad have adopted SLLs for initiatives aligned with global climate agreements. Sabah Credit's RM100 million SLLs focus on environmental and social sustainability performance targets (The Star, 2022), while Sarawak Energy leverages its loan to reduce grid emissions and enhance sustainability education programmes (CIMB, 2020). These initiatives highlight Malaysia's commitment to integrating ESG considerations into financial strategies, fostering a collaborative approach between financial institutions and borrowers to meet sustainability objectives. The emphasis on measurable outcomes, flexibility, and alignment with international frameworks positions SLLs as a pivotal tool in advancing Malaysia's transition to a sustainable and inclusive economy.

However, a problem called "greenwashing" is synonymous with ESG financing and would put SLLs' efforts toward sustainable finance at risk. Greenwashing refers to the deceptive practice where companies present themselves as more environmentally friendly than they are (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This issue involves exaggerating, misrepresenting, or selectively sharing information to create a false impression of sustainability. Among the well-known greenwashing cases that fall under this category is the infamous Volkswagen's "dieselgate" case, where the company was fined $30 billion for rigging two diesel engines to appear as if they emitted fewer pollutants than they actually did. Similarly, Toyota was fined $180 million for a Clean Air Act violation for failing to report a defect that interfered with proper tailpipe emissions control. The issue of greenwashing can also occur when companies set weak or easily achievable sustainability targets, allowing them to claim "sustainable" status and benefit from related incentives without making meaningful changes. Nonetheless, the specific effect of greenwashing on the SLLs is not definite as it involves bank internal processing and reporting. However, greenwashing can mislead investors by creating a false impression of a company's commitment to ESG goals, potentially undermining trust in sustainability initiatives (Walker & Wan, 2012). This will erode confidence in ESG initiatives and can mislead stakeholders, investors, and customers towards genuine sustainability efforts.

Despite the risks, SLLs are crucial in fostering a sustainable and inclusive financial landscape. Their unique ability to balance flexibility with accountability makes them invaluable in advancing corporate and national ESG agendas. However, the efficacy of these instruments relies on stringent governance to ensure genuine progress, further solidifying their role in addressing global environmental and social challenges.

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THE IMPACT OF CLASSROOM DESIGN ON LEARNING: STRATEGIES FOR BETTER STUDENT OUTCOMES

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom design has a significant impact on how well students learn. Every element, including furniture placement and lighting, affects students' focus, involvement, and understanding. The design refers to the tangible, external factors that surround individuals in specific settings. This includes the design and material of a space, as well as elements like lighting, temperature, furniture, and acoustics. In contexts like classrooms or workplaces, design can significantly influence behaviours, interactions, and overall well-being. A well-designed layout refers to the quality of the physical environment in the classroom, which includes the thoughtful arrangement of furniture (seating arrangement) and resources to promote communication, collaboration, and critical thinking among students. According to Marlow et al. (2015), the physical quality of a learning space is a crucial component for ensuring an effective educational experience. If the learning environment is lacking, it can negatively impact both student performance and behaviour. Likewise, a decline in classroom quality can also have detrimental effects on students' health, leading to issues such as discomfort, sensitive skin, and headaches. This article explores various design components that improve the learning experiences, as the effect of the classroom on students' outcomes has been extensively studied.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

A student's educational experience revolves around the classroom, and elements like temperature, colour, and lighting have a substantial impact on the learning environment. The research by Barrett et al. identified seven key design factors: light, temperature, air quality, ownership, flexibility, complexity, and colour, which collectively account for 16% of the variation in students' academic progress. According to the research, light has the most significant impact on academic achievement among all design elements; however, window size alone has minimal effect on learning. Additionally, the quantity and quality of electrical lighting are positively correlated with students' learning progress. In addition to lighting, other factors that affect student learning experiences include temperature, CO_2 levels, and architectural design. Students perform better in rooms with temperature control, while unwanted heat from the sun has a negative impact on performance, especially in spaces without external shading. Academic achievement is also correlated with CO_2 levels; rooms with larger windows or higher volumes of mechanical ventilation improve students' performance. Fisher (2001) stated that thoughtfully designed furniture enhances student comfort and well-being, leading to better focus and improved academic achievement.

SEATING ARRANGEMENT

Classroom seating arrangements significantly influence student interaction, collaboration, and learning outcomes, making physical layout a critical factor in optimising the learning experience (Fernandes et al., 2015). According to Babadjanova (2020), traditional row seating is effective for individual tasks as it reduces distractions and enhances student focus, particularly for those who are prone to disruptions. This arrangement reduces off-task behaviours such as inappropriate talking and movement (Simmons et al., 2015). Recent research by Byiringiro (2023) found a positive and significant correlation between classroom seating arrangements and students' academic performance in Mathematics in public day secondary schools in Musanze District. The study suggests that teachers should consider regularly rotating students, as this could improve grades and increase interaction with teachers, ultimately enhancing students' intrinsic motivation. Benedict and Hoag (2004) support this by exploring the connection between students' seating preferences and their academic success. Their finding indicates that students who choose to sit toward the front of the classroom are more likely to earn A grades, while those who favour the back tend to receive more Ds and Fs. Additionally, merely preferring sitting in the back increased the likelihood of receiving a D or F by 23 percentage points, regardless of actual seating choice.

ACOUSTIC

Good acoustic conditions help minimise background noise and enhance speech clarity, allowing students to hear and understand instructions in a stress-free environment. The use of sound-absorbing materials and cheerful classroom designs further improves students' comprehension (Shield & Dockrell, 2008). High levels of background noise (air conditioning, cars, etc.) can increase cognitive load, resulting in stress and decreased concentration. Effective sound control, such as putting up sound-absorbing material on both walls and windows and regularly examining the air conditioning, can significantly reduce these distractions, enabling students to focus better (Klatte et al., 2013). An extensive review by the Acoustical Society of America indicates that improved acoustic conditions are associated with better academic performance. Students in well-designed classrooms tend to achieve higher test scores compared to those in acoustically poor environments (Benjamin et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

Classroom design involves more than just making a space comfortable for students. It plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning progress and academic achievement. A well-designed classroom can increase students' motivation and engagement. Effective strategies for classroom design, such as the physical setting, the arrangement of seats, and acoustics, support a sense of belonging and autonomy, nurture positive relationships between teachers and students, and create opportunities for collaboration and decision-making among students.

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THE SYNERGY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: UNLOCKING LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

Leadership effectiveness is increasingly influenced by emotional intelligence (EI), which enables leaders to navigate interpersonal dynamics and drive organizational success. This study investigates the role of EI in enhancing transformational leadership, addressing the problem of traditional leadership assessments overly relying on cognitive and technical competencies. The study aims to explore how EI competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability impact leadership behaviors and organizational outcomes. Findings indicate that EI mediates transformational leadership effectiveness, fostering strong leader-member relationships and improving employee performance. The study's implications highlight the need for EI-focused training and its integration into leadership development programs, which enhances workplace effectiveness.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Transformational Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Relationships

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, interpersonal skills have become an important factor that defines leadership effectiveness (Goleman, 1998). Earlier roles of leaders predominantly focused on managing and coordinating all organizational activities. Warm leadership theories are normally founded on cognitive intelligence and technical competencies. However, the increasingly stressed importance of emotional intelligence (EI) as one of the pillars of effective leadership has influenced the ways and means of the organizational assessment of leaders (Preeti, 2024). Emotional intelligence is a construct that comprises the ability to experience, understand, appraise, and regulate emotions (Mayer et al., 2002). These dimensions translate into a leader's management of emotions in a workplace context.

Kim and Maubourgne (1992) described leadership as the ability to mobilize enough support from the people that are required for organizational objectives. Management of human resources is one of the four managerial functions distinguished, which addresses the direction of people and organizations towards the accomplishment of organizational objectives. Pandey and Rathore (2015) define leadership as the process of getting the members of a group, organization, or company to move in specific directions during a risky or uncertain situation.

Emotional intelligence acts as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and unit-level performance. Leaders with high EI can develop strong leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships, which in turn drive follower performance and job performance (Waglay et al., 2020). This paper identifies the key emotional intelligence competencies that influence transformational leadership effectiveness and examines the role of these competencies on organizational performance.

Table 1.1 Components of Emotional Intelligence

Component	Description
Self-Awareness	Recognizing one's own emotions and their impact on thoughts and behavior.
Self-Regulation	Managing one's emotions and impulses, fostering self-control.
Social Awareness	Understanding the emotions and needs of others, including empathy.
Relationship Management	Building and maintaining healthy relationships through effective communication and conflict resolution.

Source: (Preeti, 2024)

Table 1.1 highlights four key components of emotional intelligence: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. These elements collectively enhance personal and interpersonal effectiveness by fostering emotional understanding, self-control, empathy, and effective communication.

STYLES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is categorized into three styles: transformational, transactional, and charismatic. Transformational leadership comprises four components. The four need categories are intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Transactional leadership revolves around the business's performance within a systematic reward and punishment framework. Heroism in leadership characteristics puts emphasis on the qualities of the leader and the influence they possess, as expressed by charismatic leadership.

ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

EI is thus central to transformational leadership behavior. EI increases one's capacity of displaying transformational leadership, with the resulting improvement in organizational performance (Mir & Abbasi, 2012). These competencies allow the person to reflect when they are angry and to be able to solve interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. With emotions, it is possible for leaders to cushion the effects of a negative event, control attention, and bring about changes that would promote positivity and moods.

Bass (1990) pointed out that transformational leaders must develop many forms of intelligence, such as social and emotional intelligence, to motivate employees and nurture relationships. Avolio and Bass (1997) conducted a study using the sampling tool, Management Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), to ascertain that transformational leadership had a better positive impact and popularity than transactional leadership. These leaders exhibited traits like internal locus of control, self-confidence, and self-acceptance. Additionally, the research highlights a strong link between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, with weaker associations with social and cognitive intelligence.

Table 1.2 Emotional Intelligence Competencies used in Transformational Leadership

Emotional Intelligence Competencies Used by Transformational Leaders (Identified through review of literature)		Advantages of EI Competencies to Transformational Leaders
Competency	Competency Components	
Empathy	Self-management	
	Understanding emotional cues	
	Understanding emotions of self and others	
Building Bonds	Relationship Building	
	Understanding	Increased Leadership Effectiveness and Performance
	Complex Relationship	
	Social Skills	
	Positive Relationships	
Adaptability	Being Flexible	
	Emotional Learning	
Developing Others	Inspire	
	Influence	
	Intellectual Stimulation	
	Motivation	

Source: (Pandey and Rathore, 2015)

Table 1.2 outlines key emotional intelligence (EI) competencies integral to transformational leadership, detailing their components and the advantages they confer in enhancing leadership effectiveness and performance. Mills (2009) used a survey to undertake an exploratory analysis of the link between EI and leadership success. The results of the research showed that leadership competencies, which focus on emotional intelligence, for instance, developing others and adaptability—do foster leadership. Employees' evaluation of such leaders was higher, and these leaders received more managerial support. Building bonds is another competency because transformational leaders can establish a good rapport with their followers; thus, this ability to exercise idealized influence effectively will lead to better acceptance.

The competency of adaptability entitles the follower to be receptive to change and encourages other followers to do the same by changing their thinking just enough to meet the demands of a situation and to be flexible enough to meet the intentions set for the group. These competencies are crucial for the transformational leaders, as EI leaders consider followers' development by enhancing their learning and performance, as well as closing the gap between each follower's self-interest and organizational objectives.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides valuable theoretical and practical insights into the relationship between EI and the impact of transformational leadership. This paper was able to establish emotive intelligence, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management as components for demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors that enhance organizational performance (Mayer et al., 2002). In detail, there is a positive LMX and increased performance among the employees, and the leaders promote their job satisfaction (Waglay et al., 2020). Similarly, skills like empathy help leaders manage relations and conflict in the workplace as well as engage followers for the achievement of organizational objectives (Mills,

2009).

Moreover, further research into the moderating relationship that EI has within other leadership types, such as transactional and charismatic, could offer the foundation for an enhanced understanding of all the various ways in which it influences leadership. Therefore, the present study finds that emotional intelligence is a fundamental aspect of transformational leadership, promoting positive organizational results through improved interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. If scholars and practitioners continue to expand the study of EI and its impact on leadership and avoid the flaws identified here, they can refine perceptions of the abilities that EI influences across progressive organizational environments.

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