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Entrepreneurs on the Utilization of Online Market  
through Social Media Platform*

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## Abstract

This research seeks to study the perception of Micro and Small-sized businesses in the online market with social media as their platform of exposure. It also aims to provide suggestions for the enhancement of online market through social media. Due to the sole and vigorous focus on oil and gas development, Brunei is now facing several drawbacks for in its efforts to grow other sectors. The existence of a small market and the constant high rate of unemployment are proving to be a stumbling block to the efforts that instigate Brunei's diversification plans. In this case, the Halal food industry, entrepreneurship and technology, and more specifically, the telecommunication industry are confronted with different sets of problems but correlated with each sector through the external support for online market growth. In spite of the problems, in 2017, Brunei holds the first position of high penetration of Internet in the Southeast Asian region.

Hence, to identify these problems, this research was conducted qualitatively with semi-structured interviews. These interviews were designed with the notion to better understand the mindset and actions made by the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs (MSEs). About twenty food entrepreneurs and one semi-government agency, Darussalam Enterprise, were interviewed. The findings of this research confirmed that, social media is indeed widely accepted by both consumers and entrepreneurs. However, the ability to fully utilize such advanced and valuable tool is hindered by the lack of skills and infrastructures in Brunei. Undoubtedly, the culture of Dutch Disease still lingers in the mindset of the Government and its people, hence, having a highly educated pool of community is not enough for Brunei's economic growth. Instead, resilient, thought-out and steadfast actions are highly needed alongside the the vast knowledge that the Bruneians already possess.

**Keywords:** Brunei Halal Industry, Development, Entrepreneurship, Online Market, Social Media

## **1. Introduction**

The repetition of dutch disease is embedded under the curse of oil and gas development in Brunei (Basir, 2017). It has resulted in a slow growth of other sectors which have constructed a negative cultural mentality to the Bruneians as they indulge in immense benefits through government's dependency. As the rate of unemployment continue to increase, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah has strictly encouraged his citizens to pursue entrepreneurship to solidify the private sectors and to remove the domination of public jobs among the locals (Othman, 2017). However, the slow growth of the development for other sectors indicate the strategies pursued by the entrepreneurs are not as substantial enough to create a fast, lasting impact. Even so, the positive capacity of micro, small and medium enterprises is awarding hopes to any country's economic, innovative and technological advancement (Al-Mahrouq, 2010).

Thus, the research is highlighting the market contexts between offline but largely on online market to put forward the suggestion of online market enhancement for the entrepreneurs. Furthermore, since the cultural mentality in Brunei is highly associated with the dependency towards the government, hence, it is intriguing to assess the perceived decisions and challenges of the entrepreneurs on the usage of social media as their platform of online marketing and selling. Not to mention, the correlated dilemma through the context of external support from the government from telecommunication sector and Halal food industry is hindering the online entrepreneurs to move forward with social media.

## **2. Problem Statement**

About 65% of small and medium enterprises of restaurant and catering sectors in Brunei have pursued the convenience of Information Technology (Chen & Hamdan, 2014). However, the specific research on online market through social media by

micro and small entrepreneurs particularly with the idea of destructive cultural mentality in Brunei is scarcely being explored. The availability of previous literatures are mostly focusing on the motivational factors on the usage of social media and the trend of social messaging application as well as the behaviours of young customers towards social media as an online shop. Furthermore, despite the introduction of 3G services in 2005 in Brunei (Oxford Business Group), the observation from entrepreneurs' social media profiles show that online market through social media started in 2010 for Facebook and 2012 for Instagram. Nonetheless, the selection of social media applications; Facebook (92%) and Instagram (87%) for this research are in accordance with the most utilized applications in Brunei (AITI, 2016). Thus, the theory of Technological Acceptance Model will assist the understanding of the perceived attitudes of online entrepreneurs towards the ease of use and usefulness of social media as they are embedded with the impacts from dutch disease in Brunei.

### **2.1. Research Objectives:**

- i. To study the perceived decisions and challenges of Micro and Small Food entrepreneurs in using Social Media as an online market in Brunei.
- ii. To provide suggestions to the development of an online market through Social Media in Brunei to be utilized by Micro and Small Entrepreneurs.

### **2.2. Research Questions:**

- i. How do Micro and Small Food Entrepreneurs in Brunei perceive the usage of Social Media in their business?
- ii. What are the suggestions to enhance the development of Brunei's online market through Social Media for Micro and Small Enterprises?

### **3. Literature Review**

Social media (SM) originated from the establishment of Web 2.0 as it transited from the 1979's newsgroups system to the User-Generated Content (UGC) (Haeinlein & Kaplan, 2012). The socialization through UGC is more convenient with the integrated communication of SM as compared to traditional media (TM) due to the latter's one-way conversation method (Alassiri et.al, 2014). SM is considered to be more influential than TM but the former is not superior to the latter technique as the both medias act as the comparative advantage for the establishment of international online business (Ogidi & Utulu, 2016). The integration of SM and TM has enabled businesses to be more accessible. Nonetheless, as UGC is increasingly relevant and vital in this advanced digital era, business-owners may proceed to utilizing the digital media instead of the traditional. Even so, Wan (2000) argues that the success of utilizing digital media for the enhancement of a business depends on how the profile of a user is being constructed to create a far better competitive advantage as a marketing strategy.

The standard definition of micro, small and medium enterprises is comprised of six main entities such as employees, assets, industry, investment, turnover and capital (Kushnir et. al, 2010). However, different countries may have different official definitions for each of these enterprises. For instance, the Government of Brunei selected the number of employees to determine the difference. Micro enterprise will be comprised of one to four employees whereas the small from five to nineteen and medium enterprise, twenty to fifty employees (Government of Brunei, 2016).

According to the report made by Authority for Info-communication in Technology Industry (2016), about 75% of the population has gained access to the internet in Brunei. However, in reality and more specifically, the percentages of business activities and marketing strategy are respectively only 25% and 17%. It is important to keep in mind that as the survey was not made for specific group of people,

hence, it can be deduced that a lot more business owners did not take part in the survey. In addition to that, the indication of the acceptance of an online market in Brunei is that 43% has been using mobile phone and 39% for the computer for the purpose of online shopping.

#### **4. Methodology**

The author applies the qualitative concept of phenomenology as it paves the way of comprehending the participants with the disclosure of their living experiences towards the usage of social media and the perception towards the correlated issues of Halal industry and telecommunication companies for the online market growth. Phenomenology acts as an interpretative and observative tool for investigation as it relates with the empirical research which provides an efficient assessment through the first-person perspectives.

In this research, the focal point of primary data depends on the semi-structured questionnaires from twenty micro and small entrepreneurs due to the fact that the combined percentages of both enterprises in 2016 was at a high of 78.8% as compared to 17.7% for the medium one (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016a). Twenty participants is a sufficient pool for the research as the author has to consider the time constraint of two-weeks of fieldwork as well as the business hours of the entrepreneurs. Additionally, one semi-government agency, Darussalam Enterprises is included in the interview as it acts as the facilitator of entrepreneurship in Brunei. Three different newspapers in Brunei such as Borneo Bulletin, New Brunei Daily and Pelita Brunei are utilized as the primary data to elaborate the situations in Brunei regarding the Halal industry, telecommunications sector and entrepreneurship whereas the secondary sources will be based on books from Thammasat University's library, theses from Universiti Brunei Darussalam, journal articles and reports from several institutions, as well as statistic from Brunei's government agency or



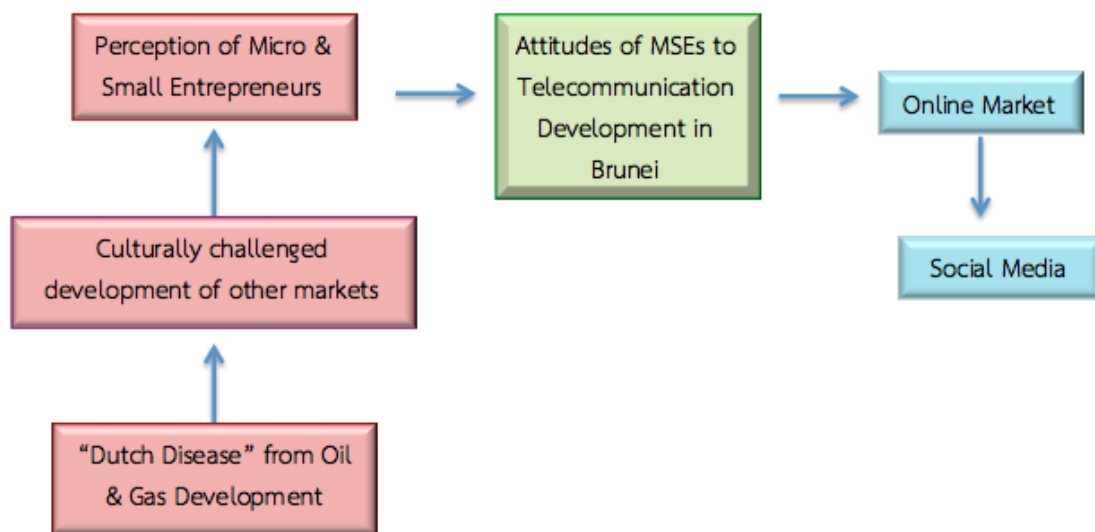
department such as Authority for Info-Communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam and Department of Statistic.

The selection of the location is in Brunei-Muara district as it is the Central Business District of Brunei. Hence, the food market in this district is quite superior as compared to the other three districts in Brunei; Tutong, Belait and Temburong. In addition, despite being the smallest district, the amount of residents in Brunei-Muara is 292,705 people which is higher than the other three locations (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016b). Hence, the online users in Brunei-Muara is also equivalently high (AITI, 2016).

#### **4.1 Conceptual Framework**

As mentioned in the introduction, the framework below derives from the curse of the dutch disease of Brunei's non-renewable resources which have immensely challenged the development of other sectors in the country. The selected market in this research is related to the Halal food industry that is being expanded by micro and small entrepreneurs that utilize social media as an exposure podium as it is the most cost effective. As 3G services were introduced in Brunei in 2005, the internet penetration of Brunei is the highest among other Southeast Asian region with 95% (We Are Social, 2018). Hence, to better understand the perceived decisions of online market through social media, the author will include the perception of the entrepreneurs towards the telecommunication industry as it is the one that delivers and offers internet services. The author believes that the vigorous focus on the oil and gas sectors has invasively affect the services of telecommunication which may lead to the inability of entrepreneurs to completely utilize social media. Meanwhile, the Halal industry may cause adverse growth to the online food entrepreneurs due to the transparency issue in viewing the clear justification of Halal certificate from social media. This may cause the reduction of the consumer confidence as the Brunei Halal procedure is considered to be one of the most stringent (Zaili, 2016).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



#### 5. Circumstances of Halal Industry, Social Media and Telecommunication Sector in Brunei:

The author divides the Halal industry in Brunei into three parts. Starting with the competitiveness of Brunei Halal with other Halal brands from several countries in which despite the stringent procedure, Brunei is quite slow in catching up to other Halal competitors in every Halal category. The second part is the procedure of Brunei Halal as it vitalizes the long process of getting the Halal certificates and permits. The inclusion of such contents is merely to prove that the delay of getting certificate may cause a limitation to the entrepreneurs to ensure a licensed claim that the food they sell online is Halal. Third, encompasses the issues of Brunei Halal in the context of weighing out its strengths and weaknesses. Alongside those two issues is the criticism surrounding the brand.

The collection of strengths involve the privileges of foreign direct investment as foreigners are permitted to 100% own companies in Brunei, the establishment of Darussalam Enterprise to mediate the issues that arise between the entrepreneurs and the government, extended route for national carrier which can ease the export

of Brunei Halal brand to long-distant countries such as Japan and Korea. On the contrary, the tedious process of importing Halal foods to suit customers' preferences can prove be a difficult guessing game, provided that the prices of the local products are more expensive than the foreign brand (Oh et. Al, 2018). This is further fueled by the non-existent cooperation between citizens and the government. Such issue may occur due to the productivity level of both parties. Since gaining independence in 1984, the government neglected to encourage the citizens to pursue and diversify its private sectors. Due to such behaviour, citizens are used to the selection of high salary from the public sectors for wealth security (Razak, 2012). As a result, it led to 6.9% of unemployment rate which has forced Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah to highlight the significance of dividing the citizens' productivity into public and private spheres to mediate the unemployment issue. This career issue has left Brunei Wafirah Holdings to largely enhance the Halal brand with the assistance of Ghanim International Corporation. The author also includes the criticism related to Syariah law which made it compulsory for entrepreneurs to hire a supervisor who could comprehend the procedure of the law. However, this procedure is argued to create a problem for entrepreneurs as hiring a supervisor costs money.

As for social media, it is categorized into three main points of accessibility such as the ease of use, the reasons of utilizing from general perspectives and the adaptation by both customers and entrepreneurs from previous literatures. For the first two sections, statistics from the years 2010, 2013 and 2016 are applied and they concentrate on the factor of ease of access which further comprises of internet penetration, prices of internet, mobile or internet subscriptions.

The circumstances of telecommunication sector in Brunei include the initial efforts of technology through the knowledge of science and technology as it aims to produce productive, innovative, creative and competent society in Brunei (Sulaiman & 1996). Through the Global Innovation Index, Brunei was positioned at the rank of 53rd in 2012 but dropped to 88th place in 2013. The author also mentions the efforts from

Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) in which the students are still not yet available to be the experts in software programmers and developers. This resulted in Telekom Brunei to take charge in providing the training to its staff while waiting for the graduates from UTB. Another two sections of this sector mentions the efforts of telecommunication and the issues of the sector. The efforts include the establishment of National Information Technology Council in 2000 and the enforcement of AITI Order in 2001 with the creation of Authority for Info-Communication Technology Industry (AITI). Meanwhile, the issues of telecommunication sector include the three companies in Brunei; Telekom Brunei Berhad, which was replaced by TelBru, DataStream Technology (DST) and Bmobile, which was replaced by Progresif Cellular.

## **6. Analysis of Findings**

Easy is the term that is constantly being used in utilizing the social media, but according to the theory of Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) (see Figure II) that is used in this research, the perceived ease of use for the utilization of Facebook and Instagram as an online market is not as easy as it seems. The idea of easy comes from the idea of perceived playfulness in which the entrepreneurs spontaneously or comprehend the functions of social media without a lesson. However, the absence of awareness on the existence of social media analytical tool has led to the incapacity for entrepreneurs to comprehend different effectiveness results of offline and online word-of-mouth marketing. The reasons for such unawareness include age and family in which it is part of the subjective norms in the perceived usefulness. The concept of self-established business and family business means the management of social media is depending on the young and old entrepreneurs. The older members in a family business may influence the selection of the social media through the idea of the social media followers which consist of older customers or friends. Additionally, the Same goes to the self-established business owners that are aged 35 years old and above as they prefer the convenience of Facebook over

Instagram. On the other hand, fifteen entrepreneurs that are aged between 23 to 31 years old conceptualize Instagram as more useful and easy than Facebook. The role player for such choice is the function of image from Instagram which is part of the perceived usefulness of TAM. One of the entrepreneurs believe that to view the future development of a country, one has to look at its young generation. Hence, the young entrepreneurs should align themselves with the existence of advanced knowledge of digital system. This includes the vast intensive comprehension of social media. In accordance to the objective of usability in perceived ease-of-use context, the main goals of utilizing social media are merely to increase the exposure of the business and to increase sale for the business. However, the latter goal may have a slight delay of success with the expected profitability due to the less attraction from image demonstration skills as the entrepreneurs are lacking of social media techniques.

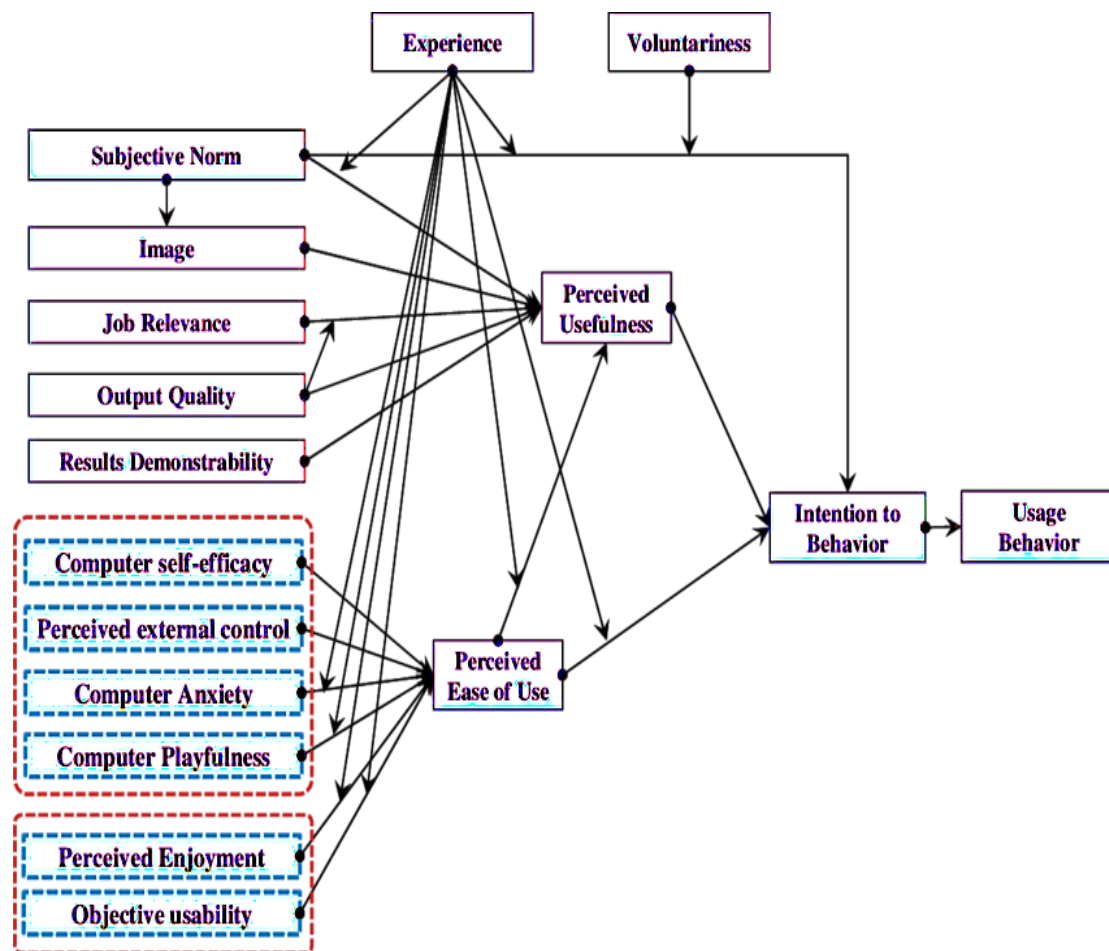
In addition, the perceived ease of use plays a major role for comprehending the entrepreneurs' thought process and the disadvantages that they have to face. For instance, the external support for entrepreneurs become a hindrance for them to upgrade their strategies due to the lack of skills in online marketing strategies such as the unawareness of the social media analytical tools. Since the people in Brunei have been relying on the government, hence some of the entrepreneurs may mistakenly disregard the power of self-help, instead they wait for the business assistances from the government. Despite the general consensus of spoon-fed entrepreneurs, some sought marketing courses in Malaysia as they deemed the assistance from Brunei as being inefficient in comparison to other countries.

Marketing classes in Brunei are still considered to be fundamental but are time-consuming for those who have acquired the knowledge of business management. Furthermore, the semi-government agency, Darussalam Enterprise, who acts as the facilitator for micro, small and medium enterprises in Brunei is confronting an issue of teaching management. The agency used to provide social media marketing classes in

the past but due to the insufficient facilitators who are knowledgeable in advanced business, the classes have to be stopped. The facilitators themselves come from a department under DARE, such as Livewire, where they conduct free classes. Moreover, DARE mentions that most of the entrepreneurs in Brunei do not acquire the basic knowledge on the foundation of business. Thus, due to such problem, some entrepreneurs will have to seek out assistance from abroad on marketing classes as it is more efficient and intensively given by experts. Additionally, it is mentioned that social media marketing is highly beneficial due to the perception of ease and cost-wise as the marketing through traditional platform such as newspaper is expensive. For instance, coloured advertising can cost up to B\$4000 per advert.

For the perceived enjoyment, one cannot simply enjoy the usage of the technology if there is a computer anxiety. In this case, the privacy of the social media acts as the hesitation factor for entrepreneurs to make their online business a success. Some young entrepreneurs highly value their business and personal privacy. The privacy is merely due to the perception of avoiding competition from other food entrepreneurs that sell the same kind of food. Most entrepreneurs treasure their food design and prefer to be the only entrepreneur that sells such food but it is quite inconceivable to avoid such problem as to enhance the business performance, one will highly require the strategy of competitive advantage to be proactive, innovative and creative. This again leads to the notion that of Brunei is not yet open to the competition of economic activities which it is a factor that is needed in entrepreneurship for the future upgrades of their brand products.

Figure II: Theory of Technological Acceptance Model 3



#### Definitions of each variable:

##### Perceived Usefulness

1. Subjective Norm: The degree of how one perceives other people to prioritize and consider the usage of the system.
2. Image: The perception on the use of innovative system as a booster for their social system.
3. Job Relevance: The belief that the target system applies to one's job.
4. Output Quality: The belief that the system will perform the person's job tasks.
5. Results Demonstrability: The belief that the results of using it are tangible, observable & communicable.

**Perceived Ease-of-Use:**

1. Computer self-efficacy: The (belief) ability to perform the specific task using the technology.
2. Perceived external control: Believing the existence of support systems - organizational & technical resource
3. Computer Anxiety: Individual's apprehension or fear (in this research regarding security and privacy).
4. Computer Playfulness: The tendency of an individual to react spontaneously.
5. Perceived Enjoyment: It is still entertaining to utilize the technology despite results from any kind of performances.
6. Objective Usability: The satisfaction of completing goals/tasks due to the effective usage of the system.

Apart from the problems of social media, the entrepreneurs are also facing issues from the procedure of Halal certificates in Brunei as well as the prices of the Internet. The former deals with consumer confidence of Halal certificate in which the entrepreneurs are facing the delay of obtaining the certificate as it exceeds the expected 45 days of procedure. Some of the entrepreneurs in this research have to wait for almost a year. In addition to that is the inspection of kitchen or places used by the online food entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs claim that the difficulty of such rules is the fact that government officials from Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and Ministry of Health (MoH) have different opinions on the approval of hygiene and Halal.

Whilst prices of the Internet is part of the external control as the telecommunication companies are offering high prices of Internet as compared to other countries in Southeast Asia such as Singapore. One of Singapore's telecommunication companies, Singtel offers a fibre broadband plan with 1Gbps from the price of S\$49.90. In comparison, the highest data that Telkom Brunei can offer is 300 Mbps, which costs B\$999.00. Looking at Indonesia's Biznet company, the price of 100Mbps costs only



Rp 450,000, roughly around B\$45.00. This leads to immense difficulty for online entrepreneurs in Brunei who have complained that using Instagram is rather expensive due to the loading of images and videos as compared to Facebook. Moreover, the entrepreneurs include that the Internet in Brunei can be frustrating as it is quite taxing to load.

## **7. Conclusion**

Social media is useful but it is not quite easy to utilize in accordance with the comprehension of online business management. Looking at the circumstances in Brunei, the eventual result of online entrepreneurship through social media is that the micro and small entrepreneurs are not able to fully optimize the effortless function of social media applications. The perceived challenges of Brunei's food micro and small entrepreneurs derive mainly from the perceived ease-of-use variables. The clear issues can be seen through the external control as the support from Darussalam Enterprise is still inefficient, inflexible and not resilient as a constant driver to ease the entrepreneurs' conditions. The lack of intensive social media knowledge from the online food entrepreneurs and the lack of availability of social media marketing classes from Darussalam Enterprise are simply ceasing the growth of entrepreneurs who rely mostly on social media for exposure as other marketing platform such as newspaper is considered to be expensive. The age of the entrepreneurs is also vital for the growth of proactive and creative as well as innovative mindsets in Brunei. Furthermore, it becomes more problematic if the entrepreneurs themselves do not apply the concept of self-help for their business. Brunei has already raised the right community which is educated but the culture of waiting for the government to do something may not be suitable for the development of entrepreneurship in the country.

Hence, there are several suggestions for the development of an online market through social media. First, the partial prices of Internet should be based on the

standard of living alongside the culture of money spending in Brunei. Second, exclusive offer for the micro and small entrepreneurs from the Internet companies should be considered. Third is the budget allocation for the enhancement of the online marketing classes alongside advanced business subjects. The classes should be divided into two – for the beginners and for the advanced level. Fourth is the enlightenment of research and development between the connections among the three sectors of Halal, telecommunication and entrepreneurship should be vigorously pushed to enhance the online market growth in Brunei. The sectors may be different but it is a hindrance to the entrepreneurs in Brunei for any sectors that Halal industry comprise of. Moreover, the micro and small enterprises require an online market through social media due to the possible expensive prices of offline market (as compared to home-based businesses) and traditional media for platform of business exposure.

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