



ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
BUSINESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMES
(AIJBES)
www.aijbbs.com



GUANXI (RELATIONSHIP) AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF CHINESE MUSLIM WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON WECHAT BUSINESS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 20.10.2023

Revised date: 15.11.2023

Accepted date: 18.12.2023

Published date: 26.12.2023

To cite this document:

Zheng, X., Noordin, W. N. W., & Yahya, A. H. (2023). Guanxi (Relationship) And Entrepreneurship: The Development Strategy Of Chinese Muslim Women Entrepreneurship On Wechat Business. *Advanced International Journal of Business, Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, 5 (18), 218-230.

DOI: 10.35631/AIJBS.518020.

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Abstract:

The concept of guanxi has a strategic role in the development of WeChat business. The purpose of this study is to explore how can Muslim female entrepreneurs use the guanxi to build WeChat business development strategies. The authors use a qualitative research design and the data for our survey was obtained from 8 female entrepreneurs in Yiwu city with in-depth interviews methods. The authors explain how entrepreneurs in WeChat business establish a WeChat business development strategy through in -depth interviews with entrepreneurial women. This study found that the strategic development of WeChat business highlights the establishment of relationship, relationship maintenance. The aim of development strategy of WeChat business is improving the loyalty of customers to meet the long -term desire of customers' purchase. In addition, the survey found that the emotional connection between buyers and sellers on WeChat business has become an important part of the sales process in social media. It can be concluded that Muslim female entrepreneurs found that it is easier to establish trust and contact with Muslim groups through faith identification. Muslim women entrepreneurs maintain close emotional connections with consumers and stakeholders through mutual support and encouragement. Furthermore, emotional connections promote the development of their business in WeChat.

Keywords:

Guanxi (Relationship), Muslim Women Entrepreneurship, WeChat Business, Relationship Building.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely considered to be the main driving force for economic growth, and the rise of social media allows many people to pursue their own career through many opportunities and enter entrepreneurship at low cost. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram enabled many people to pass through his efforts to contribute your own thoughts, sharing and value information, and affect the opinions, views, etc. of the followers (Datta, Adkins, & Fitzsimmons, 2020).

Social media entrepreneurship is one of the current commercial development channels, and it is developing rapidly. In China, the rapid development of e-commerce platforms (Zhou, Gao, & Chimhowu, 2019), such as jingdong, taobao, tianmao etc., uses new technologies and online marketing to attract a large number of entrepreneurs to participate. Nowadays, the combination of social platform and business has formed a new situation of WeChat business marketing. The operation of doing business with a mobile phone has been recognized by many entrepreneurs (Townsend, Wallace, Smart, & Norman, 2016; Kapinga, Suero Montero, & Mbise, 2019). Social media platforms can provide interlocutors with a platform and a bond to build relationships (Wan Noordin, 2013). WeChat in China is a digital network of "relationships", which also promotes relational network marketing and also provide customers with good services. WeChat's social network service (SNS) provides good conditions for building service relationships (Liu, 2018), for customized services, it is important to establish business relationships and friendships at the same time (Tang, 2014). Relationship theory a unique part of Chinese culture. In case of China, the culture of "Guanxi", which means the interpersonal relationships played an important role in the development and expansion of network business (Luo, 1997). Nowadays, the biggest "Guanxi" network in China is on WeChat.

WeChat has a very powerful function, which can be said to cover all aspects of life, especially in recent years, covering almost all people (Gao, & Zhang, 2013), even small merchants need to collect payments through WeChat. WeChat is a social media software, but it is not only used for communication. Marketers have discovered through their attention and exploration of WeChat Moments that this is a new way to promote products and attract customers. Chinese people's guanxi (relationship) network is very powerful. Under the influence of the guanxi (relationship). people are more willing to share and accept products recommended by acquaintances (Chen, 2017), and moments of acquaintances are just the nodes connected by acquaintance networks, not only can you monitor your products but you can also recommend them (Chen, Chen, Guo, & Luo, 2018) to promote sales by receiving updates and photos of friends. Today's WeChat business groups and forms have also developed in various ways, such as large-scale enterprises, and their own WeChat business products, etc. At the same time, WeChat businesses have also had a positive impact on social and economic development (Rong, 2016).

Many Chinese businessmen seize the new media approach to run their own businesses (Xue & Yu, 2017) this also includes Muslim women. Many Muslim women entrepreneurs actively participate in the constantly changing business channels especially in the WeChat business that has been very popular in recent years. The trend of using WeChat for business activities among women entrepreneurs is fast developing in China. Hunt, Fielden and Woolnough (2019) posited that media technology has influenced women entrepreneurs through enhanced empowerment and quality, improve self-concept and self-efficacy. Women should be concerned in the world, because their social resources are scarce and they don't have a tailored system to teach them.

However, the research on Muslim women's entrepreneurship is rarely concerned (Abbasi, 2012). At the same time, the development of Chinese Muslim women's WeChat business is also lacking in academic. In the author's argue that new media entrepreneurs combined with the media and entrepreneurship are continuously developing. The academic community should pay attention to how different groups can apply different strategies in the new situation to seek different development. This study has the following research significance:

1. This research explores media entrepreneurship, highlighting the development trend of modern business among Muslim women in China.
2. This study focuses on entrepreneurship in Chinese ethnic groups, and study the development strategy of WeChat business, and provide a reference for the practicality of entrepreneurship.
3. This study focuses on the specific impact of *guanxi* (relationship) on new media entrepreneurship and focuses on the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships.

This study responded to the following two research issues:

1. What is the WeChat business development strategy?
2. How to maintain the *guanxi* (relationship) with stakeholders?

Methodology

Due to the rapid development of Yiwu and various development in business activities , the authors chose to focus on entrepreneurs on WeChat business in Yiwu. Yiwu is one of the six strongest cities in mainland China and the largest small commodity distribution centre in the world (Belguidoum & Pliez, 2015). Yiwu has Muslim entrepreneurs from the country and many Muslim bosses from the Arab countries. This study adopts qualitative research method. In-depth interviews were used in this research. The author interviewed 9 Muslim women (with age range between 29-46) who had been engaged in WeChat business for a more than five years.

Findings

WeChat Business Strategy

Relying On The Support Of Friends In The Circle Of Friends

Establishing a circle of friends is the first step in WeChat business development. Most WeChat connections are relatives and friends. Product sales are inseparable from the support and promotion of relatives and friends.

I2: The product information released by the circle of friends, the customers who need it will pay attention, and then come to me to place an order. I usually don't take the initiative to disturb others.

I5: In addition to publishing product information in Moments, I also have investment information, that is, recruiting agents. Doing business is the most profitable, because there are many people who are eager to make money, and there will be people around you who will consult you. Friends also come to try the weight loss products, and the effect is very good. That is, because this product is good and can make money, I also hired a lot of agents.

I9: Because I have been in business for many years, there are still some connections

between friends. After I sold the plaster, I posted the product in the circle of friends, I didn't expect everyone to flock to buy the product. Less than a week. Plaster is sold out. I3: My WeChat friends are basically my friends or my classmates, relatives and friends. At the beginning, I posted products in the circle of friends, and acquaintances supported me to buy some of my products. Later, the more people I reach out to, the greater the demand.

Establish a Connection

The Muslim entrepreneurs normally make their first connection via the link of faith and then cultivate that connection through interaction and relationship building strategies.

Connection Through Faith

The connection of faith is the most direct connection. Trust among Muslims comes natural because of similar background.

I1: My customers are basically Muslims, because the connection of faith will directly increase trust. I don't even need to explain much with my customers. And custom can trust me.

I7: Faith increases intimacy and trust in everyone. Then casually chat about topics that the other person is interested in, and slowly they will trust you.

Establish Connection and Communication with WeChat Customers

Newly added WeChat friends are potential customers. You need to communicate with them, make notes, and establish contact with them on WeChat.

I3: Actually, many of our WeChat businesses need to establish contact with strangers. For example, when I sell eye masks, after she receives the goods, I contact her and instruct her on how to use them. Then after she used it for a while, I asked her how it worked? See if there is any desire to buy. If it's easy to use, you can tell him about the event at a discount. If it is inconvenient to use, you can talk to him about other products.

I7: After adding a person on WeChat, you can communicate with him. Customers don't have a strong sense of trust in you. You can send a small red envelope during the chat, such as 11.68 yuan, nice to meet you and so on. This is how I first communicated with the three general agents. Your goal is actually to get her to notice your product, get her to know you first and then focus on your product.

Forming An Agency Team

The agency team is an advantage of WeChat business development. The development of WeChat business agents is the main sales channel for WeChat business, because the development of agents has affected the benefits of senior agents. The development and management of the team is an important factor affecting sales, which includes the setting of the agency hierarchy; the customer transfer to the agency; the strength of the team leader.

Agency Level

The agency level of WeChat is a business to business model. The higher the investment, the higher the agency level, the lower the purchase price, and the higher the profit. Each company has different agent title for different agents. The main agent levels are roughly divided into (from top to bottom), Company partner-president region representative -agent sales director-VIP member.

15: WeChat business has always been graded, because some people have the ability to invest. The more you invest, the lower the price you get. Profits are high. The higher the agent level, you can be the general agent, the general agent can recruit small agent. Continue recruit agent is important way to fast develop WeChat business. So it is easy to make money if you have a team. Now promoted to president. Our level is President-Regional Manager-Sales Director-VIP.

17: The agent hierarchical relationship of WeChat business is very simple, that is, the amount of investment is the amount of the level. If you invest the highest agent, then your purchase price is the lowest, you can also recruit your team yourself, that is, recruit your agent, their sales will be shipped from you, and the sales will be credited to your team. In this case, you sell the item yourself and manage the team at the same time, and then collect a commission for the entire sale. This can really make money. Now promoted to president. Our level is President-Regional Manager-Sales Director-VIP.

From A Customer To An Agent

WeChat business with good products can attract many friends who want to start a business. After using the product, most of them feel that the product is very good, and the agent can get a lower price and sell the product to make money. Many agents see this as an opportunity to start a business and having tested the products

16: I am very fat after giving birth. Then a friend in Xinjiang do "Babitu" product, So recommend me to use it. I took a course of treatment. I lost nearly ten pounds. Then my colitis got better. Then I became an agent.

15: Like many agents I initially wanted to lose weight. After losing weight, others have to buy products from them, so they become agents. Losing weight can't deceive people, everyone is a living advertisement.

Maintain Guanxi (Relationship) On WeChat Business

Product Value and Demand

A good relationship is built on a good product. Having a good product and demand is the first step in building a relationship.

14: The main thing we sell is the product. The quality of the product determines whether the customers will continue to buy, and can we continue to make money. Therefore, the relationship is based on the quality of the product.

16: I choose this product because I feel good after using it myself, and I am willing to share it with more people. And I think the most important thing is to choose products on WeChat business, because quality determines your success in starting a business.

Gifts Giving Can Promote Customer and Agency Relationships (Guanxi)

Giving gifts can bring agents and clients closer together. Effectively maintaining the relationship between agents and customers is very important for the long-term development of entrepreneurship.

17: In terms of customer maintenance, in addition to ensuring product quality, I will send some

gifts on occasionally. This is why brings us closer together. I still need to keep in touch with the agent, eg. Asking the agent, "How is your client? I think it's also a supervising role, and sometimes buying small gifts for the agent. I don't just say it verbally. There must also be some practical actions, such as giving out red envelopes during the festival, or sending small gifts, which are all interactions with the agent.

11: For some wholesale agents. We sometimes offer agents a free hijab based on what they're selling today. These are the prizes or gifts for agents, which can stimulate their motivation to continue to sell, and at the same time, it will further shorten our distance and enhance our guanxi (relationship).

Emotional Relationship (Guanxi) With Customers And Agents

Maintain a Relationship As a Friend

Emotional maintenance with customers is also an important part of WeChat's business development. WeChat customers also gradually become friends and share products.

11: Emotional communication is more important between us and our customers. On WeChat, we need to patiently help them deal with problems, such as female marriage and family problems, parenting problems, and so on. I see them as your good friends and communicate more online. In this way, trust and affection are built.

13: I have always regarded customers as friends for WeChat business. Because I, we actually sell products to share good products with more friends, and will also consider customer considerations to recommend suitable products for him. In this case, everyone will believe the other party.

Discussion

Guanxi (Relationship) and Promoting Products and Services on WeChat As Part Of The Women Entrepreneurs' Business Strategy

Social media plays an important role in People's Daily lives as they are a collectivist culture that highly values family and social groups have a high value (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016). Social media entrepreneurs have started using social media apps, because it has potential benefits for both sellers and buyers (Baghdadi, 2013; Kahar, Yamimi, Bunari, & Habil, 2012; Lee, DeWester, & Park, 2008). Entrepreneurs also use social media applications to build social capital by presenting themselves and connecting with others (Ferro, 2015). Social interaction for social media users to seek integration of resources for social interests (Dolan & Bergeron, 2016; Tang, 2014; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). People use social media to keep in touch with friends and relatives, expand their social media network, gain social support and belonging (a kind of self-identity), show self-image, and get in touch with the society (Leung, 2009; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Gu, Cheng, Zhang, Li, Ni, & Wang, 2022). Therefore, corporations the strategic management brand mobile SNSs provides socialization and identification to the engaged users (Chen, 2017).

The important role of social media in relationship building and development cannot be overlooked. However, this study found that Chinese guanxi have played an irreplaceable role under the new business model combining media and business. From this chapter, we discuss the development strategy of WeChat businesses in combination with Chinese guanxi. WeChat entrepreneurs use the features of WeChat (ads, videos, messages, payments) to connect with others and gradually develop a strategy for WeChat business. The findings showed that Entrepreneurs use WeChat to build their network relationships with the specific strategies: Rely

on the support of friends - Expand the client list - Build connections - Forming agent team (Figure 1).

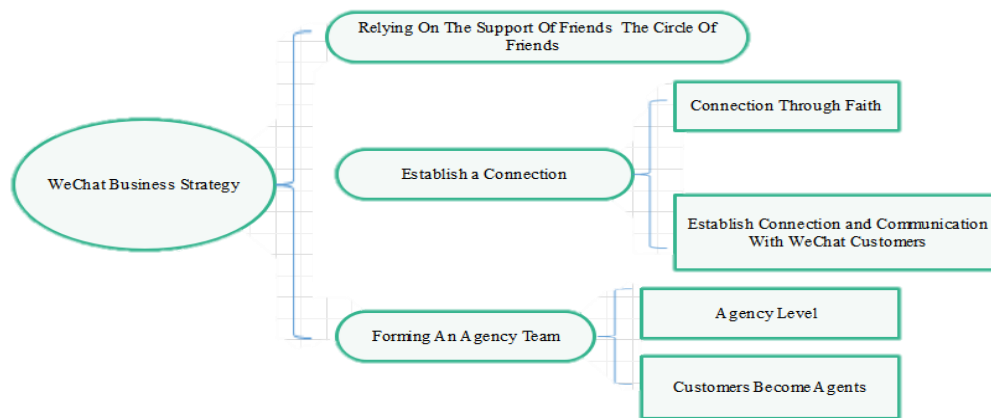


Figure 1: WeChat Business Strategy

First, family and friends are among the earliest sale and most common sources of recognition entrepreneurs and trust. It's like the first stage of being recognized and starting a business. The seller's friends and family will try to recommend entrepreneurs to other relatives and friends (AlArfaj & Solaiman, 2019). WeChat business is to rely on Moments to sell products to WeChat friends. In other words, only WeChat friends can see the entrepreneur's products and content. The first people who can buy from entrepreneurs must be relatives and friends. This is only the first step of WeChat entrepreneurship.

Second is building connection. The religious identity of Muslim entrepreneurs is economic to build relationships with Muslims. Muslims can draw closer the *guanxi* (relationship) between customers and entrepreneurs through the word "*Salam*", which can make it easier for both parties to trust and understand each other. The identity of Muslims is very obvious in China. Muslims will be willing to believe in Muslim entrepreneurs in terms of faith, and give Muslim entrepreneurs more repurchase and support. At the same time, entrepreneurs start to establish contact with strangers. When contacting strangers, they pay more attention to their WeChat Moments, follow and like, comment and share. It is possible to interact on social platforms, increase the connection with strangers, and shorten the sense of distance. The finding is consistent with Huang, Lynn, Dong, & Men (2023) researched that the engagement of cognition is reflected in the public's various information content in the public's comment. female entrepreneurs increase with public engagement through media. Then women entrepreneurs set up contact with strangers. the specific manifestations in social media are that "like", "sharing" and "comment " are response to the publisher information, and researchers can observe and identify the public's preferences through interaction (Saxton & Waters, 2014).

Third is building a WeChat team. Whether the speed of WeChat business development can make money, the most important thing is for entrepreneurs to develop their own agency team. Joining the entrepreneur's team through continuous agency can distribute the entrepreneur's products. Agents can continue to recruit new agents to sell group is created. Thus, all sales of the agency team are related to the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs can maximize their profits, while agents at all levels can earn the difference.

WeChat business agency levels are divided into (from high level to low): Company partner-president region representative -agent sales director-VIP member. And every agent level can recruit new agent except VIP member. Different agent levels can recruit an unlimited number of new agents to distribute their own products to obtain the cost difference. In the hierarchical distribution of WeChat business, entrepreneurs will strive to obtain the qualifications of senior agents, because the higher the agent, the lower the product cost price, so that entrepreneurs can obtain huge profits from it. Entrepreneurs in this study pay agency fees (ranging from several thousand to tens of thousands) at one time to obtain the right to purchase goods at low prices. Entrepreneurs focus on recruiting new agents in the process of operation to distribute the entrepreneur's products, to achieve profit growth. It can be seen from the agent level guanxi (relationship) and profit distribution of WeChat business development that the WeChat team sales established by entrepreneurs is the core of WeChat business development, and how to continuously add new agents and maintain contact with agents is more attention for entrepreneurs.

This study found that the development of WeChat business agency teams is mainly from consumers to agents. Entrepreneurs basically use the product themselves, the quality and development of the product attract consumers, and the consumer turns into an agent and joins the agent team. The research found that entrepreneurs will choose products to start a business because of two reasons. First, the product is really effective and can be recommended to people in need around them. The second is that if you are an agent, the agents can get a lower agency price by using the products themselves, and at the same time, they can also earn the difference in cost. For entrepreneurs, the agent can use it himself, share the product to those who need it, and sell the product.

In order to promote the better development of business, it is necessary to establish good relations with stakeholders when operating WeChat business (Verčič & Zerfass, 2016). WeChat agents are the relevant stakeholders of entrepreneurs, and paying attention to stakeholders is to solve the entrepreneurial development problems of WeChat businesses. Freeman (2001) published his seminal work on stakeholder theory as a strategic management approach, claiming that management policy must address shareholders and their constituents. There is a direct relationship between an organization's social responsibility and financial performance. Dissatisfied stakeholders can affect an organization's financial performance and negatively affect the organization's standing (Freeman, 2001). Freeman (2001) created stakeholder theory using model concepts that show how a firm should maximize its shareholder value. A company must address stakeholder and individual interests, as stakeholders can collectively influence, or become influenced by the purpose of the organization. Customers, employees, suppliers is critical to the organization, and leaders in the organization should avoid making any trade-offs between stakeholders (Freeman & Dmytrivev, 2017).

Due to the interests of entrepreneurs are closely related to the interests of agents, entrepreneurs are responsible for the sales of agents. Entrepreneurs, as team leaders in WeChat business, provide guidance and help to stakeholders. This study found that successful entrepreneurs are very concerned about team development. Entrepreneurs spend their time and energy on dealing with team issues and encouraging team development, inspiring more agents to do a good job in sales. Good leaders will make team members actively participate in sales and be motivated to start a business. Entrepreneurs strive to be good team leaders and lead the team to complete sales tasks, to achieve the win-win goal of entrepreneurs and agents.

Maintain Guanxi (Relationships) on WeChat Business

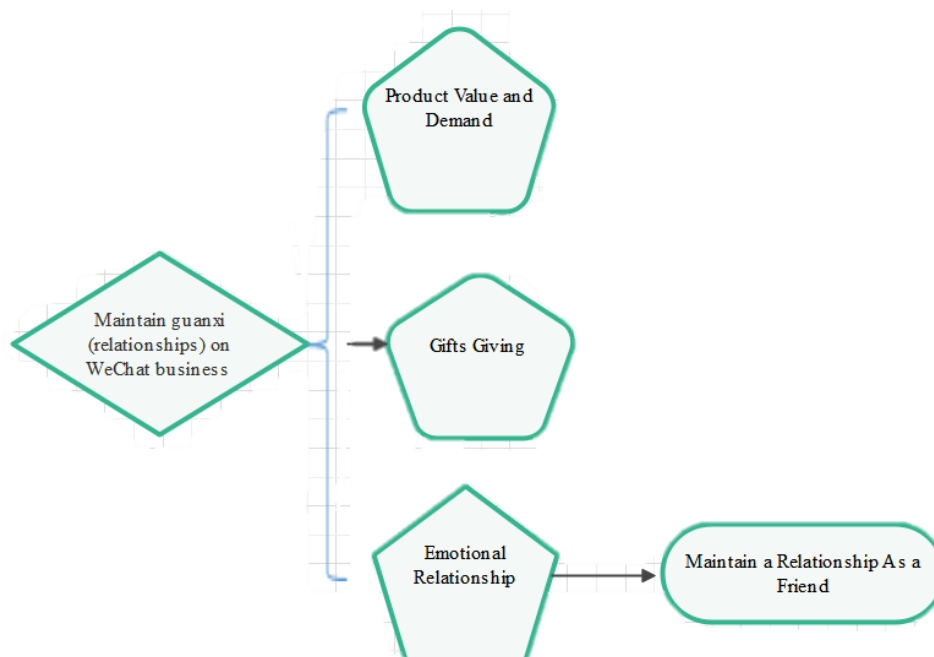


Figure 2: Maintain Guanxi (Relationships) On Wechat Business

“Guanxi” has three basic dimensions: 1) reciprocity, 2) affect, and 3) trustworthiness (Berger et al., 2015; Horak et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2012). The researcher uses three basic dimensions to explain study findings that female entrepreneurs use three ways to establish relationships with customers, product value and demand, gift-giving and emotional connection (Figure 2) Female entrepreneurs claimed that maintaining long-term relationships with customers can bring economic benefits.

First is trustworthiness. The traits of a trustworthy person include reliability, competence, sincerity, trustworthiness, and honesty (Chen & Chen, 2004). Integrity is defined as "a person's credit rating in business transactions", which developed over time from doing business together (Wang, p. 83, 2007). The authors found that entrepreneurs believe that product value and demand were important factors of trustworthiness for maintaining relationships. The value and need of the product are the first step in building a relationship, which is consistent with Fombrun (1996) viewed that the product is a prerequisite for relationship building. Entrepreneurs want to improve their products, meet consumer expectations, and build their reputation (Syuhada and Windy Gambetta. 2013).

Second. Gift-giving- reciprocity. The finding is consistent with Wong (2001) proposed that the establishment, maintenance, and strengthening of relationships are achieved through the reciprocal cycle of upgrading, which includes gifts and help (Hwang, 1987; Kipnis, 1997; Lin, 2011; Yen, Barnes, and Wang, 2011). This study found that the consensus with Yen et al. (2011), Horak (2015) and Horak & Taube (2016) proposed that the guanxi (relationship) between entrepreneurs and consumers through gifts, increasing their communication and trust, can improve customer loyalty.

Third, emotional relationship - affect. The influence dimension is defined as a harmonious emotion. What an individual views each other and share a common understanding and bond (Cai et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2017). This study found that the emotional connection between Muslim female entrepreneurs and customers is closer, not only in the establishment of buy-sale business relationship, but the mutual promotion and mutual achievement between entrepreneurs and customers (agents). entrepreneurs treat customers as friends to communicate and understand emotionally, entrepreneurs can be honest with each other, and think more about customers. Entrepreneurs and customers have established a friend relationship, which is a closer relationship.

Muslim women maintain a good network of relationships with consumers by ensuring product quality, giving gifts, and connecting emotionally. Through the maintenance of relationships, consumer loyalty can be improved, and emotional stickiness with consumers can be enhanced.

Conclusion

This article explores the strategic steps of WeChat business development and the important role of guanxi (relationship) in WeChat business development. Muslim female entrepreneurs build connections through guanxi (relationship) and actively maintain connections with customers to enhance customer loyalty. Muslim groups through faith identification. Entrepreneurs maintain close emotional connections with consumers and stakeholders. On the one hand, they give mutual support and encouragement. On the other hand, emotional connections will promote the development of WeChat business. In addition, for Muslim female entrepreneurs, the prerequisite for building trust is the quality of the product. The core of relationship maintenance is to increase the loyalty of customers and increase customer purchase rates.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge UiTM for allowing us to participate in this study, and for their guidance from the editors and reviewers.

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