

Enhancing Social Media Analytics Capability Among Small Businesses

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Abstract

Given the unprecedented power of social media, more firms are integrating social media into their business strategies. A clear understanding of big data from social media and their linkages to business decisions is critical for today's business viability, sustainability, and growth. However, small businesses' lack of financial and human resources has prevented them from adopting social media data analytics, leading to a large knowledge gap. With the increasing sophistication of large corporations' data analytics capability, this gap is expected to widen, suggesting an acute need for training and research to address the critical social media analytics needs of small businesses. Therefore, an overarching goal of this project is to promote success of small businesses in Alabama by helping them optimize their social media intelligence capacity. To achieve this goal, a collaboration is sought with external constituencies (e.g., chambers of commerce) to identify strategic problems/opportunities for social media data analytics by small businesses (Phase 1: needs assessment), develop training and implementation intervention program modules to tackle key social media data analytics problems/opportunities identified (Phase 2: development of intervention modules), and evaluate the effectiveness of such modules (Phase 3: implementation and evaluation) with selected small businesses in Alabama. We envision creating significant economic impact in these communities by assisting small businesses. This project will involve undergraduate and graduate students working with faculty and small businesses in developing intervention programs and implementing them with small businesses as a part of service-learning projects in the social media analytics curriculum. A mixed-methods approach combining a survey, interviews, and focus groups with small businesses will be employed to collect data. Success of this project will be evaluated through various quantitative and qualitative metrics.

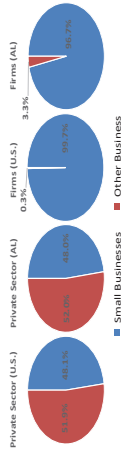
Enhancing Social Media Analytics Capability among Small Businesses

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Project Need

Small businesses (SBs)

- There are more private businesses with less than 500 employees.
- SBs employ 10 million people nationally, and created over 5,700 new jobs in Alabama.
- Women and veterans are related to SBs more than are any other groups.



Social Media for SBs

- Given the unprecedented power of social media, more firms are integrating social media into their business strategies. A clear understanding of big data from social media and their linkages to business decisions is critical for today's business viability, sustainability, and growth.
- However, many small businesses are not using social media. They are predominantly active and help them gain business value (Stockdale et al., 2012) with reduced marketing expenses (Delio, 2015; Stetzer, 2016).
- Nevertheless, a majority of SBs are struggling with the challenge of using social media effectively (Parr, 2015).

Challenges with Social Media Analytics for SBs:

- Social media analytics refer to gathering, monitoring, and analyzing data from social media of a firm's own and others to inform its business decisions.
- SBs' lack of financial and human resources has prevented them from adopting social media data analytics, leading to a large knowledge gap.
- With large corporations' data analytics capability increasing, this gap is widening, and addressing the critical social media analytics needs of SBs.



Project Goals

- The goal of this project is to build the social media data analytics capability among SBs in the Auburn, Opelika, and Greater Valley areas, and enhancing the social media analytics curriculum in Consumer and Design Sciences (CDS) at Auburn University, by meeting the following three objectives:
 1. Identify any key problems/opportunities for social media analytics among SBs.
 2. Develop intervention programs with social media analytics for SBs.
 3. Implement and evaluate intervention programs.



Significance

- The proposed project is a first step to build an outreach, research, and education infrastructure to support a long-term program for promoting the use of social media data analytics among economically distressed and thriving communities in Alabama and beyond.
- The team aims to expand this project further to include SBs in other communities in Alabama, in neighboring states, and eventually across the United States.

Partner Constituencies

- To meet these project goal and objectives, we partnered with Auburn, Opelika, and Greater Valley Chambers of Commerce, and Auburn University CDS team access to local SBs for collecting need assessment data and implementing the intervention programs.

Project Method

Phase 1 – Needs Assessment

- A mixed method combining a survey and interviews with 10 local SB owners to discover their current use and needs of social media data analytics.
- Interviews will be conducted among volunteered survey participants to gain insights into their business cases that illustrate key needs and challenges identified through the survey.

Phase 2 - Development of Intervention Modules

- Based on findings from Phase 1, we will develop a set of intervention modules to address 3-5 key social media data analytics needs and challenges.
 1. Intervention goals
 2. targeted social media
 3. analytical tools and procedures to be used
 4. a protocol to train SB employees, and
 5. metrics for assessing intervention outcomes.

Phase 3 – Implementation of the Intervention Program

- A group of graduate and undergraduate students from the CDS Department will be trained to implement the intervention program. Each student implementer will be supervised by the faculty investigators to execute the intervention program with an assigned SB over a 2-4 months.

Phase 4 – Evaluation and Dissemination of the Program

- Upon completion of the intervention program, its success in enhancing SB positive impacts on their business processes and performance will be evaluated through:
 - o SB participants' feedback interviews which will capture perceived changes in their business processes, performance data (e.g. sales, revenue, customer acquisition, and customer feedback data), and information on business process changes.
 - o Quantitative and qualitative outcome measures specific to each intervention including business performance data (e.g. sales, revenue, customer acquisition, and customer feedback data), and information on business process changes.
- Insights generated from this project will be disseminated to:
 - o SB members of the three Chambers of Commerce, through Chamber of Commerce presentations and publications
 - o academic audience through presentations and publications
 - o general audience through a project website



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