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## Exploring the role of social media for SMEs: as a new marketing strategy tool for the firm performance perspective

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### Abstract

Social-media is not only a communication tool for amusement, but it is also an important part of marketing strategies in business life. This paper aims at analyzing the role of social media for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs); as a new marketing strategy tool for the firm performance perspective. This manuscript is focused on a case study including the comparison and analysis of totally four American and Turkish companies' Facebook and Twitter accounts in terms of the number of likes and followers, richness of content, interaction with customers and the use of language. Within this research, the qualitative method is used in order to see how these companies engage with their customers online and use social media as a strategic tool of social network marketing (SNM). Briefly findings of this study suggests that: the common problems of the Turkish SMEs are related with using formal language during the customers communication process and creating unattractive content lacking richness to attract their customers' attention in their social media activities. Another noteworthy point is that from the American SMEs perspective, they are less effective in using Twitter when compared to their Facebook accounts.

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### 1. Introduction

The internet gives us a wide range of opportunities such as; having a connection with people all around the World, creating, sharing and disseminating contents, gaining and searching information on unlimited number of subjects and staying up to date. More or less, there are some indisputable outcomes and changes due to the emergence of internet but especially the widespread use of social media. One of these crucial changes happens in business models, as well. By the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of internet and social media has become a part of business strategies. In addition to this, the companies started using unique qualities of web and have shifted their market strategy to e-commerce. Web has become one of the most profitable tools of promoting the products and services to attract the target audience. Some of them got into the market as an e-retailer, some others became content provider, transaction broker, market creator or service provider. However, one of the most important reasons that made them penetrate into the market is low barriers to entry. That's why many small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) put their products on

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the web or use multiple business models including the internet.

Henceforth, the firms began adding online infrastructure to their business model as well. In addition to this, they changed the revenue models because of the remarkable return on the internet and modified and renewed the key elements of traditional marketing. By the time of these ground breaking developments; social media has also become a turning point due to its realistic opportunities from the standpoint of business such as; cost effectiveness, time saving and engagement with customers. The more companies, especially SMEs started taking the advantage of social media; the more it has become a popular marketing tool under the title of Social Network Marketing (SNM). However, there are some crucial and controversial points concerning the effectiveness of SNM. Particularly, debates take place over the measurement of success in terms of quality and quantity.

The main objective of this paper is to explore the role of social media for SMEs as a new marketing strategy tool for the firm performance perspective. Furthermore, the paper is trying to highlight the utilities and qualitative returns in the light of SMEs. To achieve this target, this study aims to answer some research questions such as;

- Whether there is a remarkable differentiation between Turkish and American SMEs social media activities in terms of the number of likes and followers, richness of content, interaction with customers and the use of language or not?
- How are social media customer communication endeavor levels distinguished between more dynamic industry and conventional industry?
- Which country SMEs prefer to use more intensively which social-media medium in order to reach their target customer effectively?

Since our sample set consists of four companies; it is impossible and unrealistic to make a generalization or induction. The ultimate goal of this research is to reveal the specific differences between the selected firms in terms of the social media performances.

## 2. Literature Background

Even though long time has not passed since the social media has been started to be used to keep interaction with customers, it has become an important role in the business life. In this regard, some important seminal articles in the literature have been studied about using the social media as a strategic tool particularly for SMEs in this short time period. In the literature review section, we would like to define which factors of the SMEs marketing activities through social media are affecting their performance. In this content firstly, social media user customer types are categorized based on the literature definitions and then how social media users affect the SMEs marketing efforts on social media medium are specified. At the second phase, the defined performance criteria in the literature for measuring the effectiveness of social media through marketing activities for SMEs are identified.

### 2.1. Importance of using social media as a marketing strategy

Web 2.0 social media is a potentially powerful medium for finding key consumer influencers, engaging them, and generating brand advocates. However, in order to build viral campaigns and foster online word of mouth marketing (WOM), trust must be established and subsequently reinforced in order to overcome any reluctance on the part of the would be consumer (Miller and Lammas, 2010:7). After the emergence of new technologies, customers have been looking at social media instead of Google or other search engines in order to get information about the companies (Newman, 2013). Social Media is an advantage to build trust between the customers and the company in a way that has never been seen with the traditional media (Deelmann and Loos, 2002).

Some research studies in the literature have been seeking the answer to the question of “how consumers’ interaction” with social media has become crucial to marketers? One stream of research suggests the existence of a “loyalty ladder” in social networking communities that splits users into categories such as;

- “Lurkers” those who are reticent to contribute to sites,
- “Tourists” those who post comments but demonstrate no commitment to a network,
- “Minglers” those who post with no regularity or frequency and
- “Evangelists/insiders” those who are enthusiastic, expert and regular in their contributions.

Some other researchers split users into slightly different sets, for example;

- “Social clickers” users who communicate with friends and create content on message boards and review sites,
- “Online insiders” avid online shoppers who vocalize product preferences and
- “Content kings” young men addicted to online entertainment.

These groupings demonstrate the complexity and lack of uniform measurements for marketers targeting users of social media (Miller and Lammis, 2010:3). In order to use social media as a marketing tool first of all, it is crucial to do the market discovery. The first step is to define the target customers. There are some questions that might be helpful, such as, “what are their demographic characteristics?”, “do they have a specific location?”, “what are their desires?”, and “what do they currently buy?”

The second step is to know where they go online. It is sacrosanct to know which social media channels they prefer, what blogs they regularly read; what articles interest them and what videos they watch. The last step is to define the competition. The company must know the major players in the market; who is buying AdWords ads and who has the top rankings in order to create the content in a similar way. Besides, there are some other important channels concerning the way to find the target customers like discussion forums and press releases. They can generate traffic to companies’ content through finding communities and key words they include. Awareness, trust and reputation are the important benefits of using social media for companies to reinforce their market position (Gligorijevic and Leong, 2011).

*Social Network Marketing (SNM)*: Due to technological infrastructure dramatically changes in the last decade that requires the social media and marketing works closely in business life. Marketing teams use various ways of social media. That increases the searchability of the brand or the company and creates two way communication with customers. The term, Social Network Marketing (SNM), arise out of this connection. Currently, most prevalent SNM practices involve creating and operating a company’s fan page, managing promotions, maintaining public relations, and conducting market research. Other activities include providing customer support, encouraging customer reviews and discussions, and recruiting (Bettiol et al., 2012; Chua et al., 2009; Gligorijevic and Leong, 2011; Newman, 2013; Pentina et al., 2012). It is known that, key to business success with SNM is the ability to engage followers.

In addition to this, smaller companies are more suited to utilize SNM due to their greater flexibility and higher need to contain marketing communications costs (Pentina et al., 2012:67). According to the SMEs organizational objectives and capabilities some of them only use internet forum-blogs in order to gather industry specific information and promoting their events. Some others are highly active on micro-blogging tools (such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+) for online advertising and creating an effective online communication network (Gligorijevic and Leong, 2011:496). SNM is more effective in building brand awareness and enhancing brand reputation than generating leads and increasing sales. But even in this function, SNM is only one part of integrated marketing communications and it is difficult to ascertain its contribution compared to paid advertising and other types of promotion (Pentina et al., 2012:68).

*Word of Mouth (WOM) and e-WOM Marketing*: With the proliferation of social media websites, the importance of word of mouth marketing and peer recommendation is becoming more pertinent for companies that are immersing themselves in online conversation with consumer communities. Social media provides platforms for consumers to share experiences in their social networks, and to evaluate businesses through websites featuring reviews and recommendations of products and services. These practices of posting information on frequently-visited websites can build or destroy the reputation of a business organization. Appropriate communication channels and context of messages are crucial elements in developing trust, as they help to clarify expectations in prospective relationships between companies and their customers (Gligorijevic and Leong, 2011:495). Because the main target is to create online brand reputation; another term, e-word of mouth marketing gives an opportunity for SMEs. The more people talk and write online about the brand in a positive way, the more effective marketing strategies work.

Currently there are various online applications (online feedback mechanisms, viral marketing, social networking, blogging) that are a form of e-WOM, however, considering the speed, scale and ubiquity of the internet, many researchers agree that the effects of e-WOM are more impactful, and even different, from those of offline-WOM, favoring rapid product adoption or leading to increased sales and brand advocacy through solving product and customer problems faster and cost-effectively (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010:299).

## *2.2. Measuring success of social media performance*

Social media measurement has become popular among the companies and researchers. Day by day, it is possible to encounter with more reasonable solutions and tools to measure companies' Social Network Marketing (SNM) success. The more measurement systems are improved, the more number of metrics increase and become trustworthy. It is required for SMEs to measure success against original goals. However the important point is that companies should look beyond the retweets and likes. In other words, they should also remember to measure beyond the numbers. Because these results are going to be helpful in terms of managing crisis; increasing brand sentiment besides reactive and proactive social support. Metrics such as the number of viewers, visitors, friends, or followers do not automatically translate to higher conversions, order value, or sales. It is true that given their viral characteristics, Social Network Marketing (SNM) may be more effective in building brand awareness and enhancing brand reputation than generating leads and increasing sales. It is difficult to ascertain its contribution compared to paid advertising and other types of promotion. Another issue is the length of time required for each new SNM tactic to work and the resulting problem of measurement timing. Finally, quantifying engagement (the main goal of SNM) that does not necessarily parallel numbers of friends, subscribers, tweets, and retweets is still an unresolved issue (Pentina et al., 2012:68).

While many social marketers fixate on volume metrics (website traffic, hit rates, click-throughs, time spent on-line, postings etc.), however, such metrics often need to be customized for individual campaigns and need be considered in the pre-launch phase, ideally incorporated in message testing. The often unanswerable prediction is whether online viral marketing campaigns will be effective in the short and long terms. Viral marketing is notoriously difficult to execute successfully and measure adequately. The quest for reliable metrics means that some marketers will shy away from implementing online viral tactics that draw only short-term attention (such as viral videos) to tactics that actually allow for prospect identification and capture of behavioral data. Much of what happens in social marketing is little more than experimental, or simply about "insights" rather than metrics (Miller and Lammas, 2010:7). There are 2 kinds of metrics that worth examining; "engagement metrics" (followers, fans, comments) and "sentiment metrics" (positive and negative comments of the customers).

In general, it is agreed that mishandling social media and Twitter can have significant negative impacts, as e-WOM could produce irreparable or costly damage and that research is needed in order to clearly understand how and what should be done, if anything, with models like Twitter as marketing tools. There is also another important issue – contrary to general belief, Twitter is not free, if properly undertaken as a marketing tool. That requires time to develop relationships, as well as commitment, people, finance and management buy-in, conditions easy for large companies to achieve, but very difficult for SMEs to comply with as a marketing tool, and not many are convinced of its strategic viability (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010:300). The effects of social media users, in other words potential influencers are indisputable in the context of SNM. The demographic qualifications of these influencers vary and they are not always celebrities or opinion leaders. The important thing is, following the influencers through related topics and analyzing the strategic ways to benefit. There is a strong correlation in a user's influence rank across different topics, leading to two interesting conclusions. First, most influential users hold significant influence over a variety of topics. This means that local opinion leaders and highly popular figures could indeed be used to spread information outside their area of expertise. In fact, new advertisement campaigns have recently been launched that insert advertisement links into a popular person's tweet. Second, the power-law trend in the difference among influence of individuals indicates that it is substantially more effective to target the top influentials than to employ a massive number of non-popular users in order to kick start a viral campaign (Cha et al., 2010).

The revenue which is generated by using social media should be revealed. In addition to this, investments made in social media should be taken into account and the rate of return should be calculated. There are numerous open questions and controversies related to actual business potential of social-media. In addition to "Return on Investment (ROI)" measurement issues and lack of strategic understanding and planning, there are even critics questioning especially Twitter's actual future; accusing the difficulty to understand Twitter and to measure results. Furthermore, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seem to have a more acute dilemma, since the lack of necessary resources, people and time have prevented most of them to experiment with Twitter (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010:297-298).

### 3. Research Approach

In this research, a case-study intends to analyze the SMEs social media efforts in the aspects of reach (the firm's access and connection to customers), richness (depth and detail of two way information between the company and the customer) and affiliation (facilitating useful interactions with customers). In other words, this study is focused on analyzing how SMEs view the World through the customer's eyes and constantly seek ways to create more value via social media for the customer satisfaction and produce fewer complaints (Hitt et al., 2013:104-105). Therefore, qualitative content analysis (Özdemir, 2010) is the main method for this particular work, because the ultimate target is to see the companies' strategical use of social media, including which contents they choose, how often they update their accounts, what style of language they use and how effective their communication is.

A qualitative-exploratory approach is chosen, in order to uncover how companies utilize social media, to gain practical insights into how they perceive social media as a useful marketing tool and perhaps new ideas that could be recommended to other similar companies (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010:301). Qualitative methods and in particular case studies allow to conduct an in-depth and longitudinal observation of phenomena and processes that are not yet clear in literature in order to single-out variables and relationships among them and to orient further analysis and exploration (Bettiol et al., 2012:11). Successful social marketing often depends more on qualitative metrics for desirable signs of the tone, quality and customer benefit of the interaction. These may include: unique visitors, interaction rates, relevant actions taken, conversation size, conversation density, content freshness and relevance, audience profiles, unique user reach, and so on. Such metrics not only measure whether people are engaged, but how they are engaging.

### 4. Case Study and Findings

In this paper, we analyzed the "Facebook and Twitter" networks particularly due to their widespread use and popularity among the customers. Almost every SMEs have Facebook and Twitter accounts but the important thing is the firms performance of using social media as a new marketing strategy tool. In order to have a competitive advantage, companies should create value for the customers. Social media may have a supportive role during this process. The target of this analysis is to contribute to the studies conducted so far, regarding the social media and SMEs; and to bring a new perspective to these studies in terms of performance assessment.

As a part of the case study, we chose the companies from USA and Turkey in order to make a comparison with their social media activities. We made a list of small and medium sized companies with similarities in both Fashion industry and Organic Bread industry. Then we randomly chose four of them and matched in order to contrast and analyse. Selected industries and firms were chosen because of their theoretical relevance and their novel social network marketing concepts strives, according to appropriateness of their sizes and the business-to-consumer (B2C) industry structure. In the sampling selection process; at first an appropriate company was randomly decided then its pair was found. For instance; the first two companies are both medium sized, in terms of the number of the employees they have and besides, both of them perform in fashion industry with retail chain stores. The second group of firms is both small sized and their line of business is organic-healthy foods; especially their core competency is "making organic-healthy breads". All the selected companies are well-known brands by their target customers, also both industry represented companies have similar firm profiles and they have same experience of period in the social media activities. This is why these four companies were chosen particularly. The observations and the analysis were done between January and February 2014. We gathered information on the chosen firm's social media accounts and focused on specific details such as; the number of likes and the followers, frequency of the updates, richness and relativeness of the content, interaction of the engagement and the use of language.

#### 4.1. Fashion-retail industry analysis

The fashion company from USA has interesting content for the target customers in the Facebook business page in terms of many aspects. First of all, they post different kinds of surveys, contests and questions in order to attract the attention of their customers. This is actually a good example of engaging with the customers. Secondly, they post some surveys regarding the outfits and colors. They sometimes share the pictures of their designer and the crew as content. The firm posts not only pictures, but also videos about the backstage and the designs with a high resolution.

Besides, they give some information and tips about fashion which strengthens the message of the content. They never forget to celebrate special days. Another important point is that, the company shares customer views on their Facebook business page. This is also crucial for customer retention. This American fashion company is quite active about creating content on social media. For instance, they take part in volunteer projects and post some pictures in order to let their customer know. Furthermore, they also pursue the agenda of the industry and make interviews with other SMEs performing in the same industry, regardless of the competitor rivalry. This attempt can be considered as a remarkable strategy. Since the company updates Facebook business page every day and post more than one content which are genuinely rich, related and striking; interaction of the engagement with customers is really effective. At the same time, they reply almost every question and comment of the customers. The answers are not cliché vice versa they reply almost always in a different way. Whether it is a complaint or commendation; the company replies by repeating the name of the customer. When we consider the way they use language; the company is totally different from the other compared firm in terms of wording. First of all, their language is not formal; besides they reply the questions as if both the designer and the owner of the company would not do. Their wording is like storytelling and quite sincere. Also, they prefer using vivid descriptions and this directly affects the general frame of the content in a positive way.

The Company's Twitter content resembles with the "Facebook business page" including same surveys, small questions, discount announcements and tips. Tweets are always vivid and sincere. This is one of the best ways to attract the followers especially in fashion industry. As for using "hashtags"; they often use the company name but also the colors, styles and designs as hashtag. This is also crucial to engage the attention of the potential followers and promote the Twitter account. The Company retweets customer views and replies almost every tweet of the followers. They don't use a prototype; besides thank and appreciate every each comment of the customers and fans. The firm's wording is quite casual and in a friendly style. In addition to this, they use "smiley" in order to cherish the conversation. There is no punctuation or spelling mistakes.

Table 1. General overview of the first group (fashion-retail industry) selected firms social-media activities analysis

| <i>Firms profile</i>  |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Headquarters:   | New York USA,   | Istanbul Turkey,  |
| Founded:  | 1984  | 1986  |
| <i>Facebook business page related activities</i>                                |   |   |
| The number of likes:  | 24.925*   | 154.781*  |
| The frequency of update:  | Everyday  | Almost everyday   |
| Richness and relativeness of the content to take attention of target customers: | Quite rich customer oriented content                  | More product related content rather than customer focus   |
| Interaction of the engagement with customers:                                   | Effective (as responding all questions and comments)  | Special relevance of interacting for more personal manner |
| The use of language:  | Quite sincere (friendly style)                        | Quite formal  |
| Punctuation or spelling mistakes:   | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistakes) | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistakes)     |
| <i>Twitter account related activities</i>                                       |   |   |
| The number of the followers:  | 4.462*  | 13.159*   |
| The frequency of update:  | Everyday (approximately 3 tweets in a day)            | Everyday (approximately 3 tweets in a day)                |
| Richness and relativeness of the content:                                       | Same as the Facebook page content                     | More actively up to date content than the Facebook page   |
| Interaction of the engagement with customers:                                   | Effective (as replying almost every tweet)            | Intensive (as retweeting the customer's tweets)           |
| The use of language:  | Vivid and sincere (as casual manner)                  | Standard (as formal manner)                               |
| Punctuation or spelling mistakes:   | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistake)  | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistake)      |

\*Note: these numbers were observed in January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014.



On the other hand, Turkish Fashion Company often shares the photos of their latest fashion collection on the Facebook business page. Besides, they post discount announcements, small surveys and small questions. The company has one video backstage; however there are some complaints from the customers regarding the low resolution of this video. One of the most important and remarkable point is that; they engage with the followers and form two way communication through the use of Facebook business page. There are some comments under almost every picture and the content they post. Customer complaints, comments and questions are replied. Meanwhile, the company asks for the contact information of that particular follower in order to keep in touch. In addition to this, whenever a customer asks a question about a size or color of an outfit; they always reply and try to find a solution or if a customer complains about the quality of an outfit; they immediately report the problem. Nevertheless, this Company uses the formal wording in the social-media communication and the answers are given with same words. Besides the all valuable efforts on social media to communicate with target customers, their language still needs more human touch.

On the Twitter account Turkish Fashion Company uses the same content like Facebook page, such as small questions, discount announcements. However, they share more surveys than they do on their Facebook business page. They post many surveys; it is a way to show that the company gives importance to their followers' ideas. They use the "company name, fashion and accessories, Friday night-out" as hashtag. In addition to this, the company has a sponsorship agreement with a TV serial in Turkey. They also use its hashtag in order to attract the potential followers. The Company replies almost every tweet and question. Besides, they retweet the follower's tweets regarding their company. Their wording is quite formal and standard on Twitter as well, but there is no punctuation or spelling mistakes.

When we compare these two fashion-retail industry companies' social-media profiles, they have similar strategies in terms of the richness and relativeness of the content. Both of them share pictures, surveys, small questions and tips regarding the fashion collection of the company and the fashion industry in general. However, the American company has an extensive content if we consider the interviews they are doing and the volunteer projects they are taking part. In addition to this, the two companies have a different style in terms of the use of language. The Turkish company is quite formal, distant and repetitive but the American company is quite unique and sincere. This may create different perceptions about company's corporate culture and corporate image. The American company uses Twitter more effectively and share more content when compared to Turkish company. However, both of them do not create different contents on Twitter. They prefer using the same posts with Facebook pages.

All in all, both companies create engagement and two way of communication which is an important tool of SNM and the process of forming differentiation.

#### *4.2. Bakery-retail industry analysis*

This organic bread bakery company from USA reflects Its mission and vision through the contents and posts they share on the Facebook business page (besides, they use solar system and also share contents about the sustainability as well). They post information about healthy nutrition, recipes for special days, pictures of the products, employees and the actual family farm where their organic wheat comes from. Besides, they often share the pictures of the supermarkets and stores they work with. The company gives importance to awards. Since their mission is to sell organic products and care about human health; they have many awards such as "Leadership in Sustainability" award of being one of the best working place in USA. In addition to this, they sometimes post some questions and surveys directly related with the industry. One of the noteworthy contents they share is contest. Contests are a part of company's communication strategy. They often organize contests among adults and children resulting in small presents (like free coupon or picnic baskets). This is an effective way to engage with the customers and followers through social media. It is obvious that, their target customers are not only adults; but also all other age levels. The company not only answers the comments and questions but also shares the customer thoughts and comments. Furthermore, they are holding discussions on ecology and organic foods which creates interaction. Another important point is that, the company celebrates every October as co-op month! They give importance to cooperation among the employees and prefer a glasnost policy. As a result, they create a positive impression. They always communicate with the winners of the contests through Facebook business page and form two way communications. The Company prefers an informal language. Their wording is quite sincere. They answer almost every question through different words. The crucial thing is that; the wording reflects their passion and excitement to work.

Table 2. General overview of the second group (“organic-healthy bread” bakery-retail industry) selected firms social-media activities analysis

| <i>Firms profile</i>   |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Headquarters:  | California USA,  | Istanbul Turkey,   |
| Founded:   | 1979   | 1988   |
| <i>Facebook business page related activities</i>                       |  |  |
| The number of likes:   | 3.911*   | 257*   |
| The frequency of update:   | Approximately 2 or 3 times in a month                                  | Approximately 3 or 4 times in a month                    |
| Richness and relativeness of the content:                              | Providing information to support their product differentiation         | Not informative enough                                   |
| Interaction of the engagement with customers:                          | Discussing about organic products to make conscious their customers    | Not sufficient communication effort with their customers |
| The use of language:   | Informal language (personalized communication)                         | N/A (there is not enough samples to define exactly)      |
| Punctuation or spelling mistakes:                                      | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistakes)                  | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistakes)    |
| <i>Twitter account related activities</i>                              |  |  |
| The number of the followers:   | 1.744*   | 54*  |
| The frequency of update:   | Once or twice in a month   | The most recent update was done in September 2013        |
| Richness and relativeness of the content:                              | Similar with Facebook page content, but not as active as Facebook page | Not intend to update contents                            |
| Interaction of the engagement with customers:                          | Rarely use hashtags and retweet their customers comments               | Not using any hashtags                                   |
| The use of language:   | Unique special messages for each customers                             | The use of language is quite dull and uninteresting      |
| Punctuation or spelling mistakes:                                      | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistake)                   | Well written (there is not any orthographic mistake)     |
| *Note: these numbers were observed in February 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2014. |  |  |

The Company’s Twitter content is similar with their Facebook business page. However, their Twitter account is not as effective and active as their Facebook Business page. This organic-bakery company creates interaction through replying follower’s tweets and questions. However they rarely retweet their follower comments. Besides, they rarely use hashtags; they generally use #nonGMO, #organic and #vegan as hashtags. The firm’s language and wording is sincere. They try to create uniqueness and try to make their followers feel special through the use of language. There are not any orthographic mistakes.

The healthy bread and pastry company from Turkey generally posts the pictures of their products (breads, cakes, desserts, coffees and breakfasts), the pictures and the addresses of the company chain stores. In addition to this, there are a few questions and surveys posted by the company. However, most of them do not attract the attention of the customers. Besides, the firm organizes an event called “secret customer”, but they do not post any explanations. However they reply the questions from the customers regarding this event. Since the company’s core competency is organic breads, they upload more information about it. They have one video about the bread making process. The Company shares the pictures of the products taken by the customers under the title of “things from you”. This is a good attempt for engaging with the customers. However, the company does not reply every question or complaint posted by the followers. This causes a serious lack of communication. For instance, one of the customers complains about the food and claims that she got poisoned because of chicken. Although she goes on writing and complaining; the company does not reply and prefers to be silent. This is a stunning example of a wrong strategy. Keeping silent or ignoring the problems cannot be strategic tools of SNM. On the contrary, they hasten the process of bad reputation through WOM and there should be more explanation about the pictures they share. The wording is quite important in terms of social media marketing. However since the company posts less information about their products or their mission and vision; they are not keeping in touch with the customers. It is not possible to make a sophisticated



analysis about the language they use. But as far as it is understood, they have formal and standard style. There is no punctuation or spelling mistakes.

On the Twitter medium the Company uses the same content of their Facebook business page. They do not use hashtags. They make announcements about the presents and discounts on special days. Besides, the same tweets are iterated for months. They do not renew the content. They reply the tweets in the same way. They answer the questions regarding the changes on prices and apologize. Besides, the company retweets the follower's posts and comments about the products. The main problem is that; their wording does not include any human touch, sincerity or uniqueness. The use of language is quite dull and uninteresting.

When these two bakery industry companies were compared owing to their social media medium endeavor, it was observed that these two companies have totally different social media marketing strategies. The American firm is quite active especially on Facebook and they share various kinds of contents. Besides, they have successful communication skills and they know how to engage with the customers. As for the language, their wording is friendly but not unconventional. Their main problem is the content of their Twitter account. It is obvious that, they give more importance to Facebook business page. However, when a social media account is neglected, it means that this platform may not be appropriate for the company's marketing strategy. At that time, the needs and the short term plans should be reviewed. Conversely, the Turkish firm has lots of problems regarding the online communication. First of all, they are not as active as the American company in social media medium. Although they try to create content, they do not know how to engage with the customers and attract their attention through the use of images and words. In addition to this, they rarely reply comments and questions when compared to the American firm. The company's wording is monotone and colorless which has a negative impact on SNM. Similar with the American company, the Turkish company does not use the Twitter account effectively even less than their Facebook business page.

All in all, the American Company is more efficient and successful than the Turkish company in terms of content, engagement with customers and the use of language.

## **5. Concluding Remark**

This paper aims to research the social media use and performance of SMEs as a new marketing tool. Specifically, we analyzed four companies which are chosen randomly under the title of small and medium sized enterprises according to their operation areas in USA and Turkey. The target was to focus on their social media accounts during a certain period of time regarding some aspects such as; the number of likes, the frequency of update, richness and relativeness of the content, interaction of engagement, the use of language and punctuation or spelling mistakes. These are important points because especially SMEs may sustain their position and create loyal customers through the effective use of stated factors in social network marketing (SNM). The study analyzed the Facebook and Twitter accounts of randomly selected "fashion retail chains" and "healthy bakery retail chains" SMEs from USA and Turkey; in order to make a comparison of each two companies which are performing in the same industry. The findings enable us to comment on different performances and point of views of the companies' social media use in terms of new marketing strategy.

The research intends to show how effective and active are these companies' social media accounts from the stand point of social marketing network. According to these findings, we can summarize that the American companies are more prone to apply the required strategies and the factors when compared to social media use of Turkish companies. Dynamic industries such as "fashion-retail chains" strive more than conventional industries such as "bakery-retail chains" on social media medium and this obviously affects their amount of customer followers. In both industries, American companies' Facebook business pages meet SNM needs and expectations whereas their Twitter accounts can be defined as below the line in default of the factors mentioned above. On the other hand, Turkish companies show the average success in terms of their Facebook business pages; however they are posterior due to their underdeveloped and neglected Twitter accounts. Finally, we found that the enterprises which are analogous according to their size and scope; may have different approaches to strategic use of social media and these discrepancies become obvious when a systematical comparison is made between them. The main suggestion of this paper for SMEs, planning to use social media mediums as a competitive marketing tool; is that they should spend time to create rich contents on their social media accounts to attract their target customers' attention. In addition, they should also be more sincere while

communicating with their target customers and should prefer to communicate in a more friendly style and to respond in a quick manner to all communication attempts of their customers.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

As all scholarly studies contain some limitations, this study has some limitations too. First of all, this study investigates the social media (Facebook and Twitter pages) efforts of business-to-consumer industry related SMEs. Research approach was decided as qualitative content analysis with observing selected sample firms Facebook business page and Twitter accounts. Although the semi-structured interview was prepared to conduct with sampling firms, unfortunately responsible employees from the selected companies showed no intention to answer our interview questions. Thus, our paper findings only depend on our external observations. Future researchers should conduct interviews with key informants to obtain more detailed and more specific information, related to their firms' social network marketing activities to reach their overall marketing targets. Additionally research other social media mediums should be observed (e.g. Google+, LinkedIn, internet forum blogs etc.) in the future as well. On the other hand, future studies might design comprehensive research methodology with wide range industry comparison and large sample size. This kind of research application might be useful to find out what types of social network marketing endeavors enhance the firms' performance. Furthermore, how companies should design their social media activities for different social media followers' clusters in order to increase effectiveness of reaching marketing targets can be explored. Finally, researching the impact of social network marketing efforts on the "financial (i.e. ROI) and market (i.e. sales revenue) performances" might be beneficial for SMEs to decide what level they should invest and spend their time and management efforts.

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