

# Factors in Developing Online and Social Media for Marketing Local Silk & Cotton Products

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## Abstract

This study explores a number of factors critical to the development of an online site and the use of social media as part of promoting local silk and cotton merchandise made by small entrepreneurs located in northern Thailand. SWOT and TOWS analyses were conducted to determine the areas directly related to the successful development of online marketing and sales. Data were collected through interviews, group discussions, informal conversations, and a training seminar. The findings indicate that developing the staff's knowledge of marketing, public relations, and online sales, and use social media was critical, which requires organizing, training and educating the personnel and possibly designing or creating new silk products. It was also found that another important step was to significantly reduce the products that are not so popular and improve the distribution of those that sell well. The study further recommends that the willingness and collaboration of group members be encouraged as progress largely depends on their cooperation.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneur network, marketing, online, social media, strategy, SWOT/TOWS analysis

## 1. Introduction

For small entrepreneurs from the northern region of Thailand, who are solely promoting local products made out of silk and cotton such as cottoning and handbags, increasing sales is pivotal to their business' long term survival and growth (Hajli et al., 2017). In raising the interest of targeted customers to make purchases, the key factor is how their items are marketed on social media before they are displayed in markets (Ozawaa, Sekiguchib, and Tsuda, 2017). They do know that online marketing has become a significant factor in the consumption pattern of the new generations of consumers (Shannon Cummins et al., 2014). The key factor for these small entrepreneurs seems to be getting full cooperation from all those who share the same interest in adapting to the changes in the market and developing the reputation of the products from this Northern province (Mehmet and Clark, 2016). An initiative aiming to establish an online and social media entrepreneurial network that would help to promote these handmade items is in the planning. However, while people have been using the internet as a useful shopping tool to serve their own needs (Yi Jin Lim et al., 2016) all the while, entrepreneurs have been facing obstacles in getting their business online (Lena Olaison, 2014). Silk products from Lamphun and cotton products from Chiang Mai are similar handmade crafts from Northern Thailand. The similarities include the methods of production, and GI product conditions and the characteristics of the products and entrepreneurs.

Given all these common points, the proposed solution is to develop the products' marketing together. The idea is to get a diversified online distribution channel so that the products be highly exposed in the market and recognized thanks this public relations initiative. There are also high hopes that those involved in the project will acquire the knowledge and understanding of the market through the applications within social media to keep the initiative thriving for the long term and be in control of the decision making process with regard to marketing.

### ***- Statement of the Problem***

The selling of local silk- and cotton-made products has always relied on finding a location or a space at tourist sites, local markets, or outdoor events to showcase the goods in the hope that customers would be interested in buying some as souvenirs or for personal use. In this digital age, when information has to be in real time the question asked is: "how does one get local hand-made products, which have been around for years, to capture the interest of people who spend much of their time on online sites and social media?" Online sites used for marketing products communicate a message that hints on the added value to one's lifestyle by linking all the positive points to the big picture for the targeted customers (Lacoste, 2016). With a social media site used for public relations, customers could gain access to the merchandise while business owners could make use of the database for information that would enable them to develop better ways of promoting their goods (Hempelmann and Engelen, 2015).

With the integration of public comments, items most recently bought, accessories rarely purchased, backgrounds of individuals taking an interest in the commodities, and best practices in customer service on the part of other entrepreneurs, the social media site could become a knowledge and learning tool for developing many approaches in promoting the silk and cotton merchandise. However, an ongoing contribution to the social media site requires a number of factors to be taken into consideration. For one, there must be strong support from the users and they must have confidence in the participation (Gordon, 2013). While the idea of getting the local products marketed and promoted through an online site and social media may be an exciting endeavor, a number of issues need to be raised for consideration before things get fully launched. First, the operation internal and external sources will need to be assessed for an analysis of where the advantages reside and what certain factors need in terms of improvement.

### ***- Research, Aims and Questions***

The aim of this study is to explore a number of factors involved in the development of an online site that aims to promote local silk- and cotton-made merchandise on behalf of small entrepreneurs located in the northern region of Thailand. To this end, the following questions are formulated:

1. What needs to be considered in developing a more diversified online distribution channel?
2. What needs to be considered in developing a social media, a web site and a database for public relations purposes and for the promotion of merchandise?
3. What needs to be considered in developing marketing skills via social media and applying the know-how to oneself?

## 2. Literature Review

### *- Diversified Online Distribution Channels*

Consumers are spending more time online with their mobile devices searching through social media and website for contents that are relevant to their interests and benefits (Purcareaa, Gheorghea, and Gheorghe, 2015). There are therefore more opportunities for reaching out to them. Even if sales have not been generated at an expected high volume the products, services, or ideas that have a unique brand appeal need to be constantly exposed in the daily events and lives of people in order to be more likely remembered (Csikósová, Antošová and Čulková, 2014). Relying on one traditional form, such as advertising, to grab the attention of potential buyers is limited in hope, while doing nothing at all to change the way for improvements can threaten the financial health of the business as well. A distribution channel is composed of a network which needs to be configured precisely for the purpose of getting the finished product from the manufacturer into the hands of the end user.

With an online distribution channel the organizations and key agents that make up the network need to be viewed in a holistic manner so that it keeps the producer aware of how communication is being carried out among members and the decisive actions taken to complete a mission (Lia, Laia, Lin A, 2017). The most important thing is to be assured that the stakeholders within the online network are functioning together in a cohesive effort to provide a high level of satisfaction with the services to customers (Key and Czaplewski, 2017). The more people are working in unison, the greater the strength there is as a resource for achievement. Diversifying an online distribution channel happens when customers have more positive things to say about a product and services and go to the extent of highlighting the values which other individuals share in the same mind set (Notta and Vlachvei, 2015). Despite other worldly events that are occurring each day and are beyond people's control, an online distribution channel that is built on a strong reputation for complete customer satisfaction will truly gain their trust.

### *- Social Media, Web Site, and Database for Public Relations and the Promotion of Merchandise*

With the popularity of social media, which are used globally, there are some new marketing opportunities to be put into practice and new challenges to face in order to stay competitive (Wu, Fanb and Zhao, 2018). Idealistic contents conjured in the minds of people have to be carefully planned out in alignment with other acting agents who are experts in their own field and can fortify the message (Melancon and Dalakas, 2018). Reaching the target group in hopes that they will embrace the message requires a firm partnership with bloggers, social media influencers, celebrities or key important public/social figures to communicate it in the most effective manner (Tsiakis, 2012). This is where a small business owner can leverage the strengths of others as an opportunity in building public relations and promoting the merchandise.

However, the fact of the matter is that whatever the customers are thinking and are about to do can sometimes go beyond the control of what the business owners would like for it to be. This becomes a real threat when the negative comments become viral and have the potential to damage the image of the business. The tools for public relations and for promoting the merchandise serve as an opportunity for small business owners to develop a sound relationship with their customers, employees, communities, and other stakeholders (Akdoğan and Altuntaş, 2015). New communication channels open up possibilities through

getting engaged with customers more directly. The platform that allows customers to voice express their viewpoints toward other buyers and with the business serves as a valuable device for entrepreneurs to understand how the product or service is making an impact on their lives as well as providing the opportunity in gauging for more information that can help them improve their business (Thakur, 2018). The only way of making social media, website, and database work effectively and efficiently for one's business is to be assured that everyone working within the business has a thoroughly solid understanding of the market and the customers; otherwise the results will become frustrating.

### ***- Knowledge of Marketing via Social Media for Applying Know-How***

Social media marketing itself is composed of a complex arrays of networks. While individual units seek to satisfy their own demands and needs and thus define their own principle of tactics and applications, this cannot be exclusively managed by the trading partner (Geng, Li, Qu, and Chen, 2017). Although this could be a threat in the collaboration network, the importance is to get an assured sign of trust in doing the business together online. Small business owners must set a specialized team to watch over how the patterns of interaction and reaction is demonstrated in an ebb and flow fashion in order to get the proper decisive actions implemented for sustaining the digital communication channels in being productive with the end users (Troxler and Wolf, 2017). There is no guarantee that the social media tools will solve the problems and challenges that can arise in the business transactions. Still, those who play an important role in aiming for customer satisfaction and excellence in service may need to take on a firmer proactive approach in getting the structural system of individuals to work together in a cross-functional fashion (Haryani and Motwani, 2015).

Certain standards have to be agreed upon in advance so that there is no second guessing on what the other side of the partnership might do as this could lead to undesirable consequences. It is through the customer journey and those who give a heap of praises for the services that insight on where the business can build on its brand name can be acquired (Dong and Li, 2018). Creativity and innovation should always be welcomed for the purpose of complying with the changes in customers' preference and determining the competence and capacity for strengthening the business' ability in staying competitive in its market. What are deemed as weaknesses in the working system can also be presented as an awareness to be brought into for discussion and for seeking better ways to get individuals to integrate and assist in reconfiguring out ways of developing the social media tools for expanding the market (Smith, Smitha and Shaw, 2017).

### **3. Methodology**

Before the online and social media system can be set up, the internal and external factors for design that would allow for the members involved in the network to build up the confidence and mastery of the operation must be considered. This study focuses on small entrepreneurs who are in the retailing business and sell silk crafted and cotton made items for ladies and men. The products range from personal accessories such as handbags, wallets, knapsacks, shirts, jackets, and pants to household items such as tablecloth, rugs, and window drapes. These entrepreneurs are located in the northern region of Thailand. Four conduct business in the Khammao Tha Sing town district of Lamphun and seven sell these products in the district of Mae Chaem, Chiangmai. Lamphun silk and Chiangmai cotton products are famous handicrafts throughout the country for their beautiful patterns (they are also durable and comfortable to wear).

Both lines of products have the same origins and characteristics (GI products). The entrepreneurs are people living in the northern region of Thailand who share the same local values with each other. The products and entrepreneurs are therefore the samples in this research. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the groups for this research. The selection was based on the following criteria:

1. Being authorized as the official operator and having met the GI criteria mark.
2. Identified as a local entrepreneur engaged in trading silk with a minimum of five-year experience.

The selected groups were composed of four entrepreneurs based in the Lamphun province engaged in the trade of promoting silk items and seven entrepreneurs from the Chiang Mai province in the business of selling hand-woven cotton fabrics. Each of these entrepreneurs only had two staff members working alongside with them.

The collection of data was done as follows:

1. *Interviews and Group Discussions* – The work began by setting up a separate interview to meet all of the entrepreneurs and their staff at their local stores. After obtaining permission from the owners to have a group discussion with their staff members, the same questions were asked about the various considerations for developing a more diversified online distribution channel and widening their knowledge of marketing.
2. *Conversation* – In order to get into deeper details, staff members form small conversation groups to express their viewpoints about the inquiry that had been raised in the large group discussion.
3. *Training Seminar* – A workshop was organized for the entrepreneurs and staff members to develop the skills required to handle an online distribution channel, social media, website, and database for public relations and to promote merchandise. Participants were guided by experts in their own field to demonstrate the hands on practice of marketing via social media. A questionnaire was distributed to get the feedback of how well the workshop met their level of satisfaction.

#### - *SWOT Analysis*

A SWOT analysis was conducted as a useful tool for assessing the group's self-potential in carrying out an operation and identifying the critical threats and opportunities in a competitive environment. It is also useful to examine how the competition is likely to evolve and what implications this may have in terms threats and opportunities that the group will have to deal with. The internal analysis helps members understand which of the resources and capabilities are likely to be sources of competitive advantage and which are less likely to be sources of such advantages (Gürel and Tat, 2017).

#### - *TOWS Matrix*

A TOWS analysis was also conducted. As a tool used to generate, compare and select strategies for the best decision in moving forward, the TOWS concept is a trade-off between internal and external factors (strengths and weaknesses are internal factors and opportunities and threats external ones). The strength/opportunity (SO) strategy is a proactive strategy, which uses internal strengths to exploit external opportunities. The weakness/opportunity (WO) strategy eliminates weaknesses from within and exploits opportunities from outside.



The idea is to mitigate weaknesses in order to exploit opportunities. The strength/threat (ST) strategy uses inner strengths to avoid external obstacles and overcome any potential threats. The weakness/threat (WT) strategy reduces internal weaknesses and avoids external obstacles in order to avoid any possible threat.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The results of the SWOT analysis are shown in Figure 1.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The silk products from Lamphun and cotton products from Chiang Mai are well-known and accepted.</li> <li>2. Entrepreneurs have the knowledge and know-how fabric which has been passed on from generation to generation.</li> <li>3. No other local producer can produce and claim that the finished items are genuine silk flower cotton from the Lamphun and Chiang Mai areas.</li> <li>4. Entrepreneurs are creative and have the ability to design new weaving patterns.</li> <li>5. Entrepreneurs have a network of villagers to produce their items on a continuous basis.</li> <li>6. Entrepreneurs are willing to do whatever is needed to meet the needs for market development, public relations, and online sales.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most entrepreneurs still do not fully understand changing consumer behaviors in digital marketing.</li> <li>2. Entrepreneurs do not have the expertise in online media technology.</li> <li>3. Most entrepreneurs lack efficiency developing new products to meet new demand.</li> <li>4. Similar production process so they compete with each other.</li> <li>5. No mutual cooperation among the silk flower groups.</li> <li>6. Handicrafts require a lot of time and skills so items are produced in small quantities. Large demand cannot be met quickly.</li> <li>7. Inconsistencies in the quality and pricing. It all depends on the reputation of each entrepreneur.</li> <li>8. Entrepreneurs are located in remote areas.</li> <li>9. No online sales management system.</li> <li>10. No customer database or accurate information to generate interest in buying silk products.</li> </ol>
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local handicraft market is likely to grow.</li> <li>2. The government provides funding, training and sets up promotional events.</li> <li>3. Foreign costume designers interested in the cotton fabrics.</li> <li>4. Online marketing platforms that allow online trading such as Lazada, Alibaba, Etsy, and Pingkoi.</li> <li>5. Most people now have access to social media on their own which makes it easy and comfortable for small businesses to reach customers.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unstable economic conditions which may create uncertainties in the market and limit its expansion.</li> <li>2. Constant changes in consumer behavior.</li> <li>3. Other fashion trends that are more modern and are reasonably priced.</li> <li>4. The requirements of some online distribution platforms need to be complied to, such as payment method for destination, thus creating entry barriers to online trading.</li> <li>5. Other products and brand names from overseas that have a stronger appeal to interested buyers.</li> </ol>

Figure 1: SWOT Analysis

Figure 2 shows the TOWS Matrix. A development approach, based the SWOT and TOWS analyses, has been elaborated. As stated above, the idea is to use internal strengths to exploit external opportunities by starting using online marketing and sales.

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Strengths</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The silk and cotton products are highly well-known and accepted.</li> <li>2. Entrepreneurs have the technical knowledge which has been passed on from generation to another.</li> <li>3. No other local producers can claim that the finished items are genuine silk flower cotton from the Lamphun and Chiang Mai Provinces.</li> <li>4. Entrepreneurs are creative and have the ability to design new weaving patterns.</li> <li>5. Entrepreneurs have a reliable network of villagers for their production.</li> <li>6. Entrepreneurs are ready to meet the needs for market development, public relations, and online sales.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most entrepreneurs still don't understand the marketing process, public relations, and changing consumer behavior.</li> <li>2. Entrepreneurs do not have the expertise to use online media technology and access internet.</li> <li>3. Most entrepreneurs still lack efficiency developing new products that meet market demand.</li> <li>4. Products are similar and compete with each other.</li> <li>5. No mutual cooperation among producers of silk items.</li> <li>6. Since making handicrafts requires a lot of time and skills and items are produced in small quantities, larger demand may not be easily met.</li> <li>7. Uncertainties in the quality and pricing of products (depend on the reputation of each entrepreneur).</li> <li>8. Entrepreneurs are located in remote areas.</li> <li>9. No online sales management system.</li> <li>10. No customer database showing interest in buying silk products.</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Opportunities</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local handicraft market likely to grow.</li> <li>2. Government provides funding, training, and promotional events.</li> <li>3. Costume designers from abroad interested in bringing fabrics for design in the cottoning collection.</li> <li>4. There is an online marketing platform that allows online trading such as Lazada, Alibaba, Etsy, and Pingkoi.</li> <li>5. Most people now have access to social media on their own, which makes it easy and comfortable for small businesses to reach customers.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>SO Strategies</u></b></p> <p>“Proactive Strategies” use internal strengths to exploit external opportunities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (S1, S6, O1, O2, O3, O4, O5) Improve marketing and online sales. Develop the public relations, online sales and social media knowledge of staff.</li> <li>2. (S1, S4, O1, O2, O3) Introducing silk and cotton to costume designers, both at home and abroad, and make these fabrics to part of the product.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>WO Strategies</u></b></p> <p>“Strategic Solutions” eliminate weaknesses from within and exploit opportunities from the outside.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. (W1, W2, W9, W10, O2, O4, O5) Organize training and teach entrepreneurs and staff marketing skills for public relations and online sales, and utilize social media to generate interest.</li> <li>6. (W2, W9, W10) Make a website and a database of entrepreneurs and customers.</li> <li>7. (W4, W5, W7, O1, O2) Create an entrepreneurial network and encourage strong cooperation. - Provide a strong network for knowledge and understanding of the buyers and the products.</li> </ol>

<u>Threats</u>	<u>ST Strategies</u>	<u>WT Strategies</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unstable economic conditions may create uncertainties in market expansion of products.</li> <li>2. Constant changes in consumer behavior.</li> <li>3. More modern fashion trends available at more reasonable prices.</li> <li>4. Some of the requirements of online distribution platforms can be a barrier to taking part in online trading (failure to comply with the policy means refusal to distribute the goods).</li> <li>5. Indirect competitors have overseas products and brands with stronger appeal to buyers.</li> </ol>	<p>“Strategic Defenses” use inner strengths to avoid external obstacles.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (S1, S2, S3, S4, T2, T3, T5) Design or create new products made of Lamphun silk flowers and cottons for display at the markets.</li> <li>2. (S3, S6, T4) Apply training to develop skills and educate entrepreneurs on providing a good point-of-sale analysis and an online sales platform to draw interest in the merchandise.</li> </ol>	<p>“Strategic Directions” reduce internal weaknesses and avoid external obstacles.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (W1, W4, T1, T3, T5) Reduce the amount of resources on products that have no value to the customers’ preference and distribute the goods where they sell better and are more attractive in that market.</li> </ol>

**Figure 2: TOWS Matrix**

This requires a proactive strategy of ensuring that the staff is knowledgeable in marketing, public relations and online sales, and can utilize social media to introduce and promote the Lamphun silk and Mae Chaem cotton to designers residing locally and abroad. As one local staff members stated: " Lamphun Thai silk is very unique, no one in this world could copy the pattern and its quality [...] Mae Chaem’s cotton fabric is also the GI product, which could be found as the original product here in our area."

As to the strategic solution, the approach is on eliminating weaknesses from within and exploiting opportunities from the outside. This is done by organizing, training and educating the operators or personnel of the operators to have the marketing knowledge and skills of public relations, online sales, and social media. . One entrepreneur, however, feels that online financial transactions are dangerous for his business. A website should be set up along with a database of entrepreneurs and customers. Moreover, an entrepreneurial network should be created and strong cooperation among members encouraged. Lastly, incentives for strong networking should be provided.

With regard to the strategic defense, the method mentions using inner strengths to avoid external obstacles. The plan calls for designing or creating new products made out of silk. There also should be a workshop to train and educate entrepreneurs in providing a good point-of-sales analysis and an online sales platform.

Finally, the concept of a strategic direction is about reducing internal weaknesses and avoiding external obstacles. The focus is thus on having a significant trimming of the product line. Products that are not so popular should be discarded and the distribution of products that are best sellers further developed. As one entrepreneur mentioned, one way to do that is to “buy more online equipment and learn how to use them as our products should be sold worldwide through the internet.”



***- Need for a Diversified Online Distribution Channel***

The development of online marketing and sales should revolve around a certain time frame, such as configuring out whether the times in the morning, afternoon, evening, or night time on a particular day in the week and of that month are generating enough commercial traffic that ultimately leads to individuals making an order. It is important to keep track of periods when more items are ordered and also of periods when sales are low if for nothing else for the purpose of allocating resources that will push the sales up in slow periods and test new promotional ideas during peak periods. When local hand-made items are not selling at the expected level, information needs to be treated as value learning points for being more knowledgeable in terms of marketing, public relations, and for utilizing online sites and social media for promoting goods. Developing an understanding of why some products are not being ordered enough can also be part of an experimental design for an online system that makes customers wanting to buy those products (Lacka and Chong, 2016).

Whether customers are tourists, local buyers, or leisurely shoppers a diversified online distribution channel will need to be in a content that grabs all of their senses so that it helps fashion designers focus on developing products that meet their needs. Thus developing a diversified online distribution channel will require an array of individuals to communicate their ideas and other areas of interests that sustain the momentum of an order towards customer satisfaction and setting up conditions for repeat buyers (Keinänen and Kivivalainen, 2015). The technical terms used in the exchanges between key agents, staff and entrepreneurs would have to be communicated in a way that helps each other understand the complexity of the market and a take proactive stance. Building good reputation in the business stems from a strong discipline on knowing what one is competent and capable of producing as well as not exaggerating and puffing up competencies, which could ruin the credibility of the entire group (Guesalaga, 2016).

Although working facilities may not be adjacent to each other, the individuals who are part of the system will need to keep abreast and stay in close contact with others to make sure that the flow of information reaches everyone (Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2016). It is also critical to keep things simplified for customers so they do not become mentally exhausted in trying to make an order or browsing through the items. Most importantly though keeping things simplified is a must for workers so they do not become overburden with information or feel anxious due to a lack of clarity. Seminars for acquiring training would need to be arranged for groups to impart facts within the online system that may hinder its performance or to adjust concepts that enable customers to have a pleasant shopping experience (Li and Chen, 2016). The vast array of knowledge, skills, and abilities applied from each individual will determine the longevity of a diversified online distribution channel system. Getting the information to circulate and build a rapport of trust with customers should be a daily concern.

***- Factors for Public Relations and for Promoting the Merchandise***

If members are to make the most of the new marketing opportunities through social media and web sites they will need to keep on exploring on the trends and values that influence people to buy or not buy particular merchandise. In Thailand, the government has always been keen on preserving the cultural identity and heritage of the nation (Constantinides, 2014). One way to do that would be for the government to request local citizens, especially at educational institutions nationwide, to wear the local attires that have been part of the local folklore for centuries. Texts and photos can be used as part of a cultural campaign for public relations in reaching out to non-Thais that want to learn more about the local traditional style

of clothing. Another occasion for goods to be worn and displayed lavishly is during the holiday festivities, weddings, graduation ceremonies, and important banquets. Not only are these events important for feeding information into the web sites and social media but they can also serve as a database for entrepreneurs to learn more about their targeted customers and construct a psychographic profile of them. Getting a better understanding of who their customers are and why they bought their products should provide a strong purpose for coming up with more innovative ideas for redesigning merchandise that enhances the value to the buyer (Papasolomou, et al., 2014). Once the comprehension of customers becomes robust, the idea of sharing knowledge and learning about best practices in marketing should be encouraged as a form of entrepreneurial networking and fostering cooperation among peers.

However, networking can only be done if each member can see how advices and recommendations can help their business operations be more efficient in maintaining costs and expenses in marketing while also gaining some effective results with regards to sales (Perju-Mitran and Budacia, 2015). Cooperation can only be achieved if members believe they have the capacity to work within the process, which should not become a burden on one's schedule, should allow assistance to be easily provided and should not make people feel guilty if they're not able to fully accomplish the task (Papadas, Avlonitis and Carrigan, 2017). Naturally, not all the merchandise promoted will strike a big demand from buyers no matter how good the information may be about the products. It simply cannot be a magic wand that automatically generates sales. When times of setbacks and staggering sales occur, it is best for the network to offer insights on how to rise to the marketing challenges.

Strategies that incorporate digital media technology will require the knowledge, skills, abilities and talents of fellow colleagues to come up with something more creative to generate interest and attention towards making purchases. A research staff can be sent out to spot areas that feature people using the items as part of their daily lives and interview them to see what benefits they are actually receiving and make some possible recommendations for other things that could be produced. This is also a good opportunity to see where the level of quality stands and for learning more on where the values lie in the product. Finding out about why other people choose other items to buy instead through a person keen on the cotton and silk products can also serve as a valuable learning point for redesigning the goods or experimenting with a new market (Dua, Cui and Su, 2018). Such information can be brought back to the network for meaningful discussions on (re-)designing and market planning to reach those targeted customers. Even products that are designed by big brand names in the business of sports apparels and households can become vulnerable to sales slump but still keep on finding ways to get their products sold.

Social media has been effective in announcing sales promotion events for sportswear, fashion dress, and casual clothes but are still in the works of finding the best way to sort out an accurate information of the buying customers due to some individuals not being fully cooperative in giving out details due to language barrier, especially while they're in a middle of shopping (Yousaf and Xiucheng, 2018). Designing and creating a new product will have to come from facts gathered from key individuals who have intelligence that is derived from close contacts with their customers, co-workers, social influences, and with other important players that shape the industry. The sources provided help allocate the time and energy that goes into making products designed to attract the right customers through social media.

Most importantly workshops should be arranged for network members to acquire the basic know-how of building a strong rapport with people who have a strong acumen about the market for the purpose of learning how to ask the right questions and implement the appropriate methods for collecting important background details of the desired customers (Todeschini, 2017). Once there is a good pulse on the targeted customers the mechanism for laying out a friendly platform that guides the customer journey to sales and other promoted items becomes imminent for ensuring a smooth service operation. Products that are not so popular on the buyers' list would also need to be analyzed and reported for others in the network to be aware of. The main issue here is to avoid being redundant in a market where customers already know what items they deem enviable to pay money for. For products that are seen as having no value perhaps it is good to get the public involved (both local and international) to come up with an idea on how an unpopular product can be reconceived to offer value to customers. A popular product should be given away for free to those individuals partaking in the research study as a token of appreciation.

The most important thing is that members that are part of the network be supportive of the cause and keep looking for better opportunities to increase sales. There should be no shame or guilt if a new product idea does not sale as much as it had been expected to. The practice of promoting silk and cotton merchandise through an online web site and social media is an ongoing process that requires individuals to remain humble and patient. The results gained from the system can be a good testing indicator that proves whether the belief was the right decision made or to be reconsidered (Pappas, 2016). In addition, the results gained can also verify whether the experiment was successful or not successful due to other factors that may have been overlooked and not integrated into the process (Schmidt and Iyer, 2015).

#### ***- Factors for Acquiring Marketing Knowledge***

Comments, interaction with photos and chats, recommendations, review of products and services available in the social media contain valuable information for developing a strategic marketing database that involves entrepreneurs and customers. The thoughts and opinions that occur spontaneously and cannot be fully under managerial control provide an indication of the values to be emphasized. A well recorded and updated file of entrepreneurs and customers can serve as a pipeline for siphoning through facts to obtain details for laying out a marketing plan to promoting more merchandise (Diaz Ruiz and Kowalkowski, 2014).

The method of marketing and the end results from the activities of getting the products sold will not always be embraced by everyone (some may have their own opinion). Nevertheless, there has to be trust in the networking system that keeps the partners working together (Sanclemente-Tllez, 2017). The stronger the cooperation among people the higher the chance there is for individuals to learn together how to improve the ways of getting the social media to work in their favor and collaborate in resolving issues to keep the business moving forward (Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015). Although network members may be located away from each other they will need to develop a positive attitude that welcomes the idea of teaming for a social media marketing project that aims to promote local silk and cotton products. Given the informal working structure, they will have to find the time and space for coordinating their skills and abilities to keep the project moving forward. They must be able to share crucial knowledge quickly, learn to ask questions clearly and frequently, and make minor adjustments (Edmondson, 2012).

Fruitful analyses come from solid networking among group members who are in control of their own diagnosed information about the products and know how to satisfy the needs of customers. The strength in networking would come from allowing group members to arrange informal meetings on their own and share information based on figures, psychographics, emerging cases, or proven practices for stimulating a better sense of comprehension on how things are taking shape in the marketing aspects and dealing with the reality of what is working and what is not. Greater insights for networking can be invigorated by permitting group members to make collective decisions, conduct testing and experimentation on the ideas, and allowing them to follow up on the results for outlining an action plan which makes other take accountability and responsibility for carrying out the tasks. This creates a mental infrastructure that allows individuals the freedom to seek out and provide accurate information without having the burden to produce information on a timely basis (Cross and Katzenbach, 2012).

Designing or creating a new product would be derived from learning how current end users are truly benefitting from the products that meet their lifestyle needs. The values met would need to be put into a simple caption that displays the aesthetic quality of acquiring the goods. Perhaps it would also benefit customers to allow potential buyers to request that the product be customized to his/her preferential style thus opening up more background information on who their customers are. Gaining the knowledge and know-how of social media marketing requires entrepreneurs and their staff members to take a course on to deal with the changing lifestyle of customers and on how to foresee what type of products would be needed to ensure customer satisfaction. A workshop arranged for networking members would also give them a chance to discuss certain products that have not been quite popular with buyers. Moreover, learning about the practical ways of social media marketing and their customers' lifestyle behavior would also give them better insights for making products that add value instead of being just short-lived fads (Sankrusme, 2015).

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

When developing an online network for marketing local silk and cotton products, there are some factors to be considered before the concept can be fully systemized to take its course of action. Technological tools are there to be utilized in the best possible way to support the marketing strategy, but they requires the full capacities of group members in making a strong contribution and ensuring that results occur. While the working structure may not be highly formalized, it is thus very important to enroll the cooperation and collaboration of all so that no time, resources, and energy become wasted. Supporting an online distribution channel, arranging the technological resources for public relations and merchandise promotion, and understanding marketing through social media would require fellow networking members to uphold a culture that represents the shared value for being customer orientated and offering high quality in services (Yan and Pei, 2015).

It is imperative for the business to succeed that there be a cooperative spirit that keeps the principles and ideas intact and fosters a sense of accountability and responsibility for learning and searching for better techniques to assist in reaching the aims and objectives of the marketing plans (Xie et al., 2016). Development starts with a commitment to make the idea work and to keep on working whenever challenges arise. In the end, it all comes down to the willingness and cooperation of each individual member to become a team player, be an agent of change, provide leadership in goal sharing, and adapt for ways in making improvements for the system to work for all.

Although this work is limited in scope it contributes in laying out the plans for developing an online and social media for an entrepreneurial network. But entrepreneurs have exhibited a number of limitations that will need to be addressed. These include:

1. The availability of equipment for online media training.
2. The inability to prepare online information for the majority of the entrepreneurs to access online media.
3. Entrepreneurs' lack of knowledge and skills for conducting online marketing.
4. Entrepreneurs did not want to perform financial transactions in online media as they thought that there was a high risk involved.
5. The participation of entrepreneurs in a collaborative network was still weak.

In spite of these limitations, entrepreneurs should therefore develop a strong collaboration network with other local entrepreneurs and should invest and take advantages of the financial transactions with the online tools.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

1. Extend the research content into the inner mental drives of entrepreneur and staff, e.g. needs of achievement, self-motivation.
2. Marketing factors might be applied as variables in future studies.

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