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Determinants of Social Media Usage in Business by Women: Age and Development of the Country

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Received: 20 August 2020; Accepted: 13 September 2020; Published: 15 September 2020



Abstract: This paper aims to identify the most important social media purposes of usage by responding women's attitudes according to age and the economic stage of development of their respective country. Research was done through an online survey in 2017–2018 followed by an analyses of the results from eight countries: four countries that represent an emerging economy and four developed economies. Participants responded to questions concerning social technologies and their purposes of usage as well as resulting job opportunities. The conducted analysis of regarding Facebook as a platform resulted in the highest number of responses in the survey. In this paper, detailed results are presented including a comparative analysis between two groups of economies. Findings reveal that in both groups, the usage of Facebook in business is related mostly to a positive experience. The result showed that among women in emerging economies, social media were used more broadly, and from an age perspective, the results show that marketing is a key benefit emphasized among older respondents. The communication benefit of Facebook usage in business was noticed as a key factor by respondents in groups from both developed and emerging economies.

Keywords: social media in business; women; age preferences; emerging and developed economies

1. Introduction

Social media usage is mostly analyzed in groups of younger populations or students. According to Silver, Huang and Taylor [1], in most emerging economies, social media are also more likely to be used by younger adults. Thus, age is strongly correlated with the usage of social media [2] and reveals an important perspective of analysis and the gap of research among older people. Age perspective is mostly analyses from the user side [3,4], not from business benefits. Additionally, the basis for that question was stated from the assumption that social media among emerging economies developed differently than in developed countries [5]. In advanced economies, the Internet is a part of daily life and impacts social interactions, politics, culture, etc. However, social media across emerging markets are characterized by a more innovative approach and more instruments that are frequently used [6]. Phone users with higher levels of education are more likely to interact regularly through social media than those with lower levels of education [5]. The division of emerging and developed economies was implemented to assess economic opportunities for women to increase their entrepreneurial activities by social media engagement.

This paper aims to identify the extent of social media benefits according to the responding women's age and the economic stage of development of the investigated countries. Three research questions were addressed in the study:

- RQ1: Is there a difference in social media usage in business by women of different ages?
- RQ2: Is there a difference in social media usage in business by women from emerging versus developed economies?
- RQ3: What are the main areas of Facebook usage for business success as assessed by the responding women?

The study contributes to the on-going cross-country discussion concerning motives of social media usage in the business from gender and age perspective. The achieved results contribute to social media use in work understanding by exploring key benefits. The study explores the phenomenon of social media's extensive usage from theory and price perspective. The main benefit that was noticed by older women responders was marketing activity developed through social media. Among respondents from developed and developing economies, there was a different approach to assessing the following benefits of Facebook usage in the business: communication, customer service, and marketing. It underlines the meaning of the traditional channel of customer contact across different economies.

In the first part of the study, the definitions of social media and benefits are described. The second part addresses the methods and sample characteristics. Next, the research results are provided paired with a discussion of other research results. Finally, the conclusions, limitations of the study, and future directions are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Social Media

The popularity of social media continues to grow around the world, and its phenomenon is increasing. The concept of social media has become popular among researchers because it has a real impact on social and business reality. There are many propositions on how to define social media. In terms of the general definition, social media is described as online applications, platforms, and media that allow individuals and communities to gather and communicate and which aim to facilitate interactions and the sharing of content in real-time [7–9]. Other definitions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of social media.

Authors	Definitions
Safko and Brake (2009) [10]	It consists of activities and behaviors of users who meet online to share information (words, pictures, videos, and audios).
Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) [11]	It consists of Internet-based applications (Web 2.0), allowing the creation and the exchange of the content generated by users.
Hsu et al. (2013) [12]	It is used as a platform for everyday communication where users share ideas and discuss issues.
Khan et al. (2014) [13]	It refers to online tools and websites that enable communication and interaction by giving them opportunities to share information.
Steenkamp and Hyde–Clarke (2014) [14]	It is a platform that provides opportunity for information sharing and to create and distribute the content.
Paliszkievicz and Koohang (2016) [15]	It consists of Internet-based applications, which enables creating networks and making interaction among members of this network.
Kumar et al. (2016) [16]	It is a platform for businesses and individuals to transact and relate to each other in a mutually valuable manner.

Social media takes on many different forms, including social network sites, blogs, micro-blogs, media sharing platforms, wiki, virtual worlds, location-based services, social bookmarking services, group buying communities, review sites, and writing communities [15]. The main aim of social media is forming relationships and continuing relationships among people by the interaction amongst them.

Leonardi et al. (2013) [17] proposed the definition of enterprise social media by underlining four aspects of web-based platforms. The first applies to communication among employees or sharing information in the company [18]. The second refers to easier direct or indirect identification of communication partners at work. The third relates to the possibility of posting, editing, and sorting text and files. The last web-platform attitude involves viewing the messages, connections, text, and files posted by anyone else in the organization. Keitzmann et al. (2011) [19] presented six constructs of social media: identity, conversations, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. It enables us to characterize the extent to which users: reveal themselves, communicate with each other, exchange, distribute, and receive content, know if others are available, related to each other, understand the social standing of others, and form communities.

One of the most popular social network sites is Facebook [20]. It is a self-organizing network. Users can make decisions with whom they would like to interact. Facebook allows preparing public or private profiles with personal information, e.g., hometown, current city, education, employment, interests. It enables us to choose the list of other users with whom they share information, photos, videos, announcements, links, and opinions. Facebook has opened up new possibilities for self-presentation [21], and a user's friends are more than an audience; they are actively involved in constructing the user's identity. They can comment on content provided by the users [22]. Facebook's mission statement is "... to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" [23].

2.2. Social Media Usage and Benefits

Social media sites have different features that realize different aims for the individual user and business [24]. Researchers have identified different benefits for social media use. However, the primary reason is communication and building relationships with others. Social media enables individuals to maintain relationships with family or friends [25], present photos and videos [26,27], learn from others and share information [26,28,29].

In business, the main areas for using social media apart from communication with clients are to increase profits, support customer services, or gain new customers. Researchers underline its role in marketing as the new hybrid construct of the promotion mix [30]. Social media also are related to women's empowerment and influence on their attendance in the economy; it helps in creating new employment opportunities, and in the recruitment process [31,32]. Social media can help to create awareness of the brand, products, or services and can help in building a good image of the company [33]. Social media in organizations can be used to: enhance communication inside the organization and enable stakeholders to be more innovative. Major challenges for social media are to be transparent, reliable, and to be able to communicate issues on time; thereby reducing rumors, and enhancing people to speak good about the company. Although there are many benefits of social media usage, it also possesses some risks related to security, privacy, accessibility, data management, social inclusion and anxiety, depression, and exposure to developmentally inappropriate content [15,34,35].

Rapid changes in emerging economies are being supported by Information and communications technology (ICT) that is easily accessible through social technologies via mobile phones. Phone users with higher levels of education are more likely to interact more regularly through social media than those with lower levels of education [5]. ICT access escalates higher efficiency, productivity, faster information sharing among employees, and supports creation and transfer of knowledge that enhances collaboration and communication due to faster transfer of information [36,37]. According to research, social media usage by women entrepreneurs in emerging economies increases a woman's self-efficacy and social capital [38].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Instrument and Materials

The questionnaire for the study was developed to survey women's empowerment [39]. The survey instrument consists of sections related to demographics, technology, and social technologies. Five different social technology platforms were studied, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+. Facebook received the highest number of responses regarding usage. Questions related to social technologies included the assessment of access to technology, the purpose of the usage of technology, technological benefits for women's empowerment, and past experience in using social media in business. The survey included the following usage of social technology platforms in business: communication, customer service, gaining new customers, marketing, recruiting employees, increasing profits, building relationships, and creating awareness.

Analyzed data included responses from 980 women in the workplace regarding the use of technology, specifically social technologies, and the benefits. Data were collected electronically among women in eight countries: Georgia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, and the US. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the respondents were assured confidentiality and anonymity. The survey was done in companies that cooperate with universities in a given country.

A sample of the study includes women's responses as follows: 137 from Georgia, 106 from Poland, 129 from Romania, 152 from Slovenia, 102 from Spain, 123 from Taiwan, 131 from Turkey and 100 from the United States.

3.2. Methods

A qualitative approach was used for this study using a survey instrument that was developed with close-ended questions. Descriptive statistical analyses were used to give the reader comparative analyses and applicable results. Quantitative research in the study embraces an empirical assessment of the most important benefits recognized in the featured age and economic development stage of classification.

The collected data were divided according to the stage of economic development: thus, two groups were distinguished: developed (USA, Spain, Slovenia and Taiwan) and emerging economies (Poland, Romania, Georgia and Turkey). The developed economies group covers 477 collected answers and 503 in the case of emerging economies. The age division includes four classes: 25 years and under, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, and over 45 years. This classification was used in a multidimensional analyses of survey answers.

For RQ1 and RQ2, the investigation conducted a comparative analysis that includes the non-parametric correlation analysis and the Mann–Whitney U test for women's age and their respective countries economic development differences for Facebook usage assessment. RQ3 was explored through the hierarchy method of agglomeration based on the Euclidean distance for a multidimensional attitude of social media usage.

4. Quantitative and Qualitative Assessments on Respondents

The average age of the women respondents was 36, while the median value was 35 years of age (Figure 1—left panel). In a group of developed economies countries, the average age was 39 years (median 38 years) and among emerging countries, the average was 34 years (median 33 years). In both groups of respondents, the standard deviation was 9 years and the predominate age ranges were 26–35 years and 36–45 years (Figure 1—right panel).

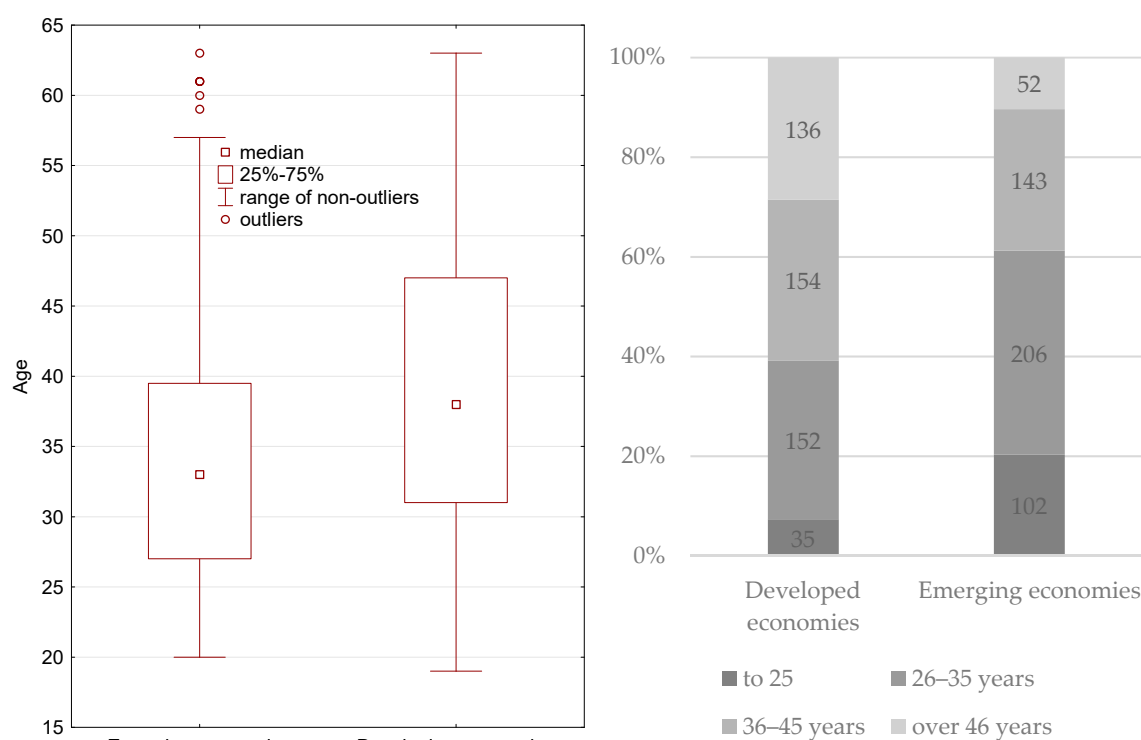


Figure 1. Age of respondents.

Figure 2 presents the share of women that work for a company or an organization versus running their own business. It is interesting to note that 20.3% of women in the developed economies group run their own business, while in the emerging economies group, it was 25.6%.

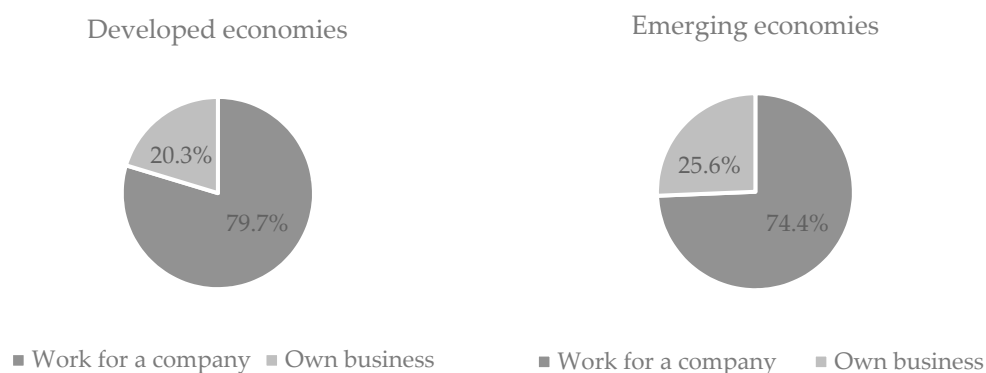


Figure 2. Working for company/organization or leading own business.

Figure 3 gives more specific information regarding the organizations in which the respondents work. As noted, 43.2% of the respondents work for corporations in the case of a developed economy, and in the emerging economies group, it was only 17.3%. In a group of emerging economies, women declare to work for “other” types of organizations, mostly public units.

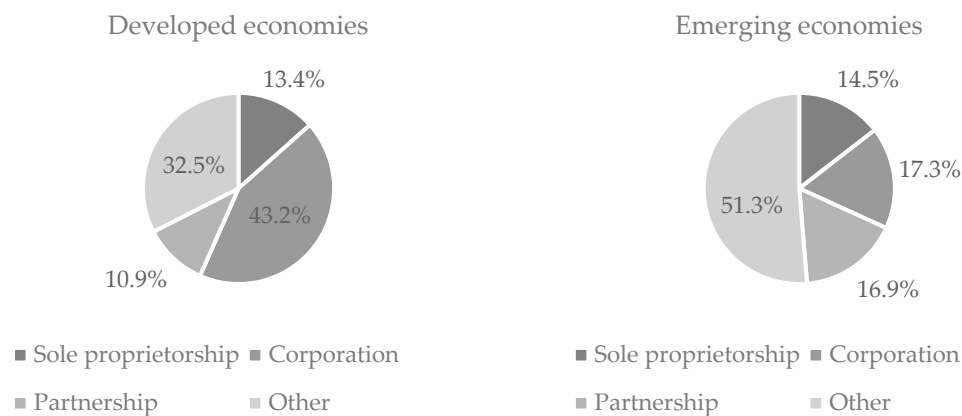


Figure 3. Type of the organization.

Figure 4 presents results regarding access to technology, specifically desktops, laptops, iPad/tablets, smartphones, wifi, and other options. Women declared access to each technology and could indicate more than one. The difference in developed and the emerging economies groups of countries was apparent in the usage of laptops where developing economies' access to this technology was higher. Only in case of access to desktops, the developed economies group indicated this technology as more accessible compared to the group of emerging economies.

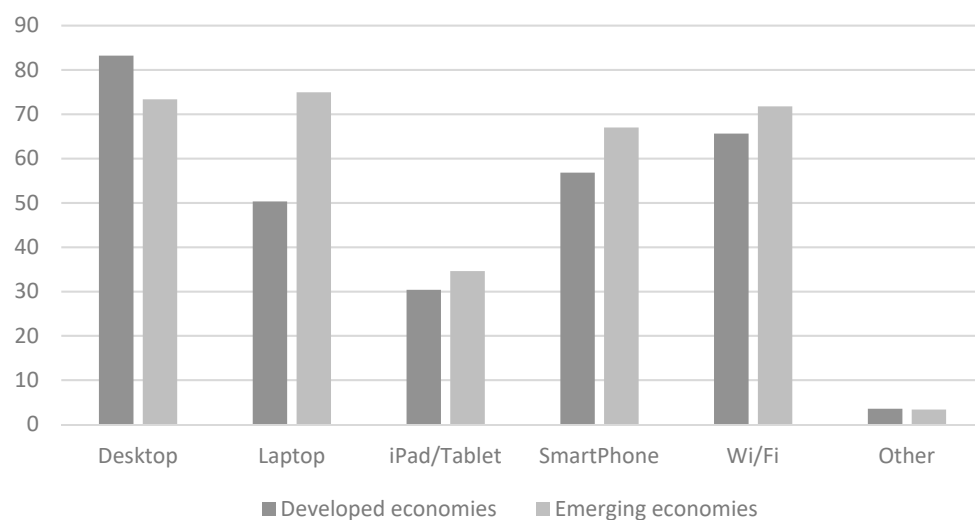


Figure 4. Access to technology.

In the developed economies group, over 95% of respondents indicated more than 5-years experience in using social media, while in the emerging economies group, the percentage was 85% (Figure 5). These differences of experience may impact the social media assessment among two groups of women.

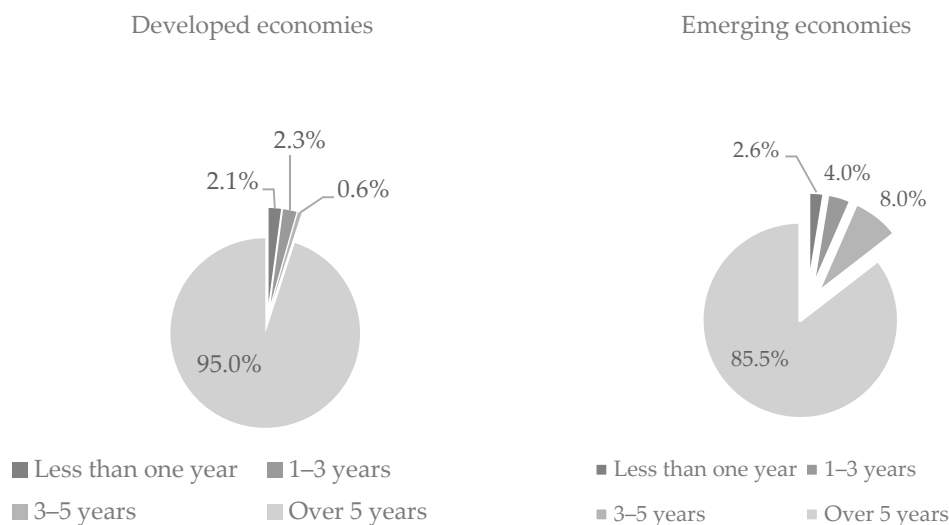


Figure 5. Experience in the use of social technologies.

5. Results

The indication of social media usage was further investigated according to the benefits of its usage (Figure 6). In the emerging economies group, benefits were reported by 96.4% of women, and across developed economies by 94.1% of women underlining the high level of benefits awareness in women's assessment and the importance of a conducted study.

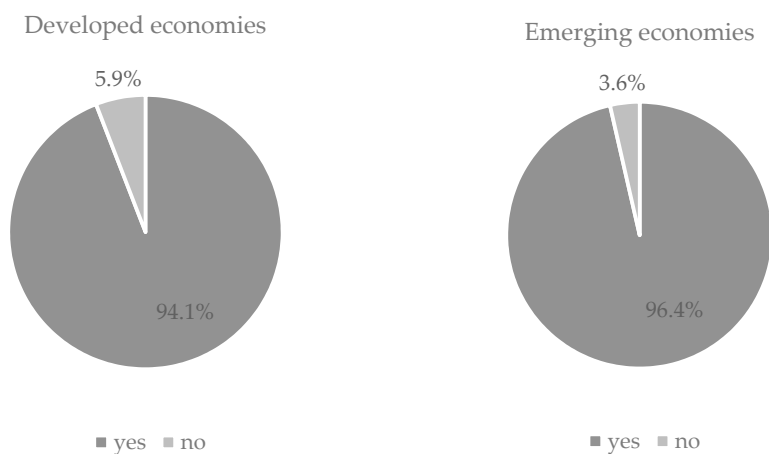


Figure 6. Awareness of benefits that social technology can provide.

Figure 7 presents the awareness of technology benefits usage in different areas of business. In every field, the slightly higher awareness of technology benefits was reached in the group of emerging economies. The highest level of technology benefits recognition was noticed in the area of information and communication: 91.9% and 91.5% for the emerging economies group and 88.9% and 86.0% for the developed economies group. The awareness of technology benefits in social media usage was declared by 79.9% of responders in the emerging economies group and 75.1% in the developed economies group.

In Figure 8 the purposes of Facebook usage in business were presented by including the group of economies division. In the emerging economies group, Facebook was used for communication by almost half of the women. In the developing economies group, only 37.1% of respondents indicated usage of Facebook for communication.

Figure 9 presents an assessment of the social technologies' experience by responders. Women from a group of emerging economies make up a significantly higher share of those indicating a mostly

positive experience in using social technologies (89.1%). In the group of respondents from developed countries, the positive experience was noted by 71.3% of women.

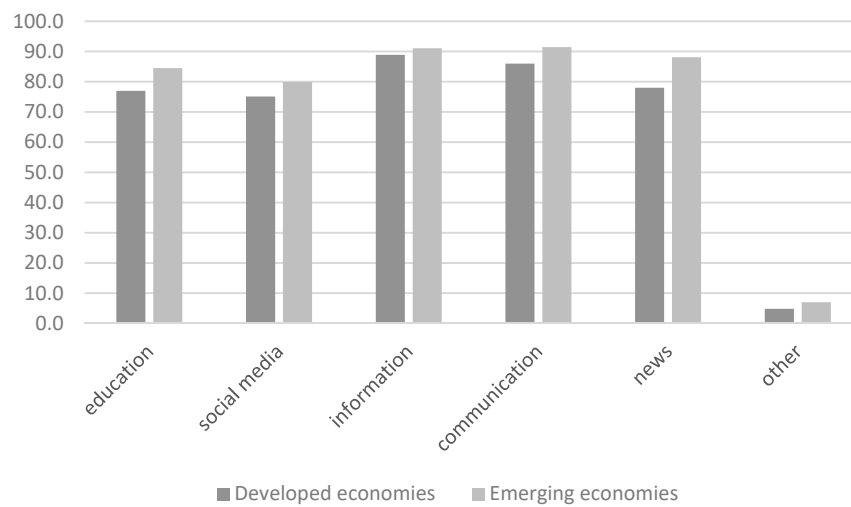


Figure 7. Awareness of technology benefits in different fields.

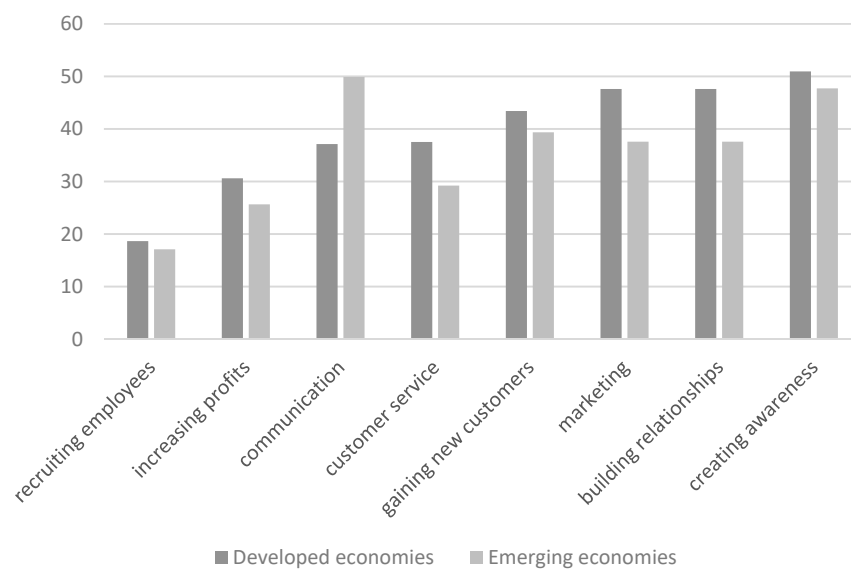


Figure 8. The purpose of Facebook usage in business.

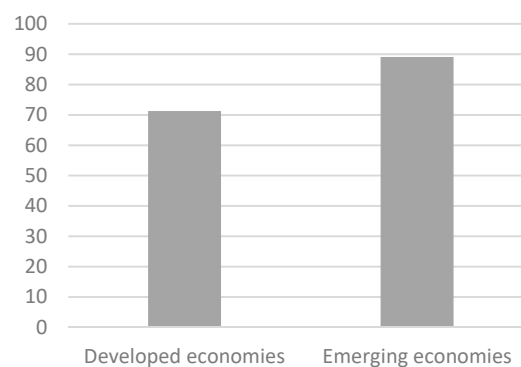


Figure 9. Positive experience with social technologies.

Table 2 shows the U Mann–Whitney test results indicating the observed difference in the mean ranks of the two groups of countries. Only significant differences were presented in Table 1 (higher ranks were recorded for a group of emerging economies). According to the U Mann–Whitney test, we stated the following null hypotheses: there are no statistically significant differences between the usage of Facebook in developed and emerging economies and the experience of its usage in women’s attitudes.

Table 2. U Mann–Whitney test results.

	Rank Sum	Rank Sum	U	Z	p
	Group 1	Group 2			
Facebook usage for communication	69,599.5	85,246.5	29,413.5	−4.86640	0.000001
Facebook usage for customer service	77,539.5	70,156.5	32,755.5	2.24236	0.024939
Facebook usage for marketing	82,660.5	71,629.5	33,126.5	2.84610	0.004426
Positive experience with social technologies	225,273.5	251,502.5	98,517.5	−4.64453	0.000003

The group of emerging and developed economies countries were significantly different in communication, marketing, and customer service assessment regarding Facebook purposes of usage. These results underline the different directions of engagement for business reasons between the two groups.

Table 3 presents the correlation relationship between the age of respondents and purposes of Facebook usage in business. In this analysis, age was included as a continuous variable. For the developed economies group of responses, older responders noticed a more robust attitude in using Facebook for creating awareness and marketing. Across emerging economies, older respondents used Facebook more broadly for gaining new customers, increasing revenues and profits, marketing, and recruiting purposes. The level of correlation was relatively low, but the highest level was noticed in the case of marketing (0.2852).

Table 3. Correlation relations between Facebook purposes of usage and age of respondents.

	Developed Economies	Emerging Economies
	<i>p</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value
Communication	0.005725	−0.022145
Customer Service	0.021911	0.096360
Creating awareness	0.120034	0.098214
Gaining new customers	0.098907	0.217456
Increasing revenues/profits	−0.021770	0.271928
Marketing	0.132155	0.285172
Building relationships	0.055129	0.085076
Recruiting	0.039712	0.165521
Other	−0.034496	0.031138

* *p*-value < 0.05.

As a result of the application of hierarchical methods, dendrograms were obtained illustrating the hierarchical structure of a set of Facebook purposes of usage to the decreasing similarity between them. Forming clusters in the agglomeration method was made by using the Euclidean distance. It measures the distance between objects in a multidimensional geometric space. In the case of developed economies, the age does not significantly impact on the purposes agglomeration of Facebook usage (Figure 10). It indicates that the objectives of Facebook usage were more similar than the age of respondents in its assessment. Similar answers to Facebook’s purposes of usage were recorded for three elements: communication, marketing, and building relationships. The more substantial impact of age was noticed in a group of respondents from emerging economies countries in which women’s age did not impact only on building relationships with clients (Figure 11). It may indicate other/different

paths of developing contacts with customers without using Facebook on a larger scale. In the emerging economies group of respondents, two pairs of Facebook usages in business were indicated as similar based on women's answers: communication, recruiting employees and customer service, marketing.

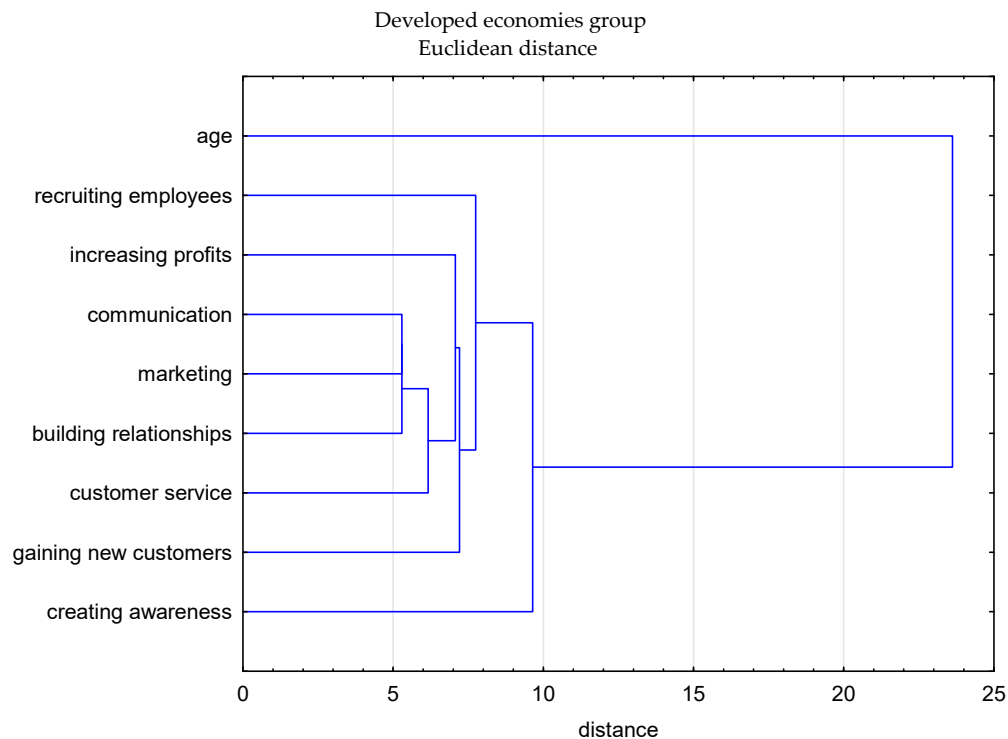


Figure 10. Hierarchical agglomeration for the developed economies group according to Facebook purposes of usage.

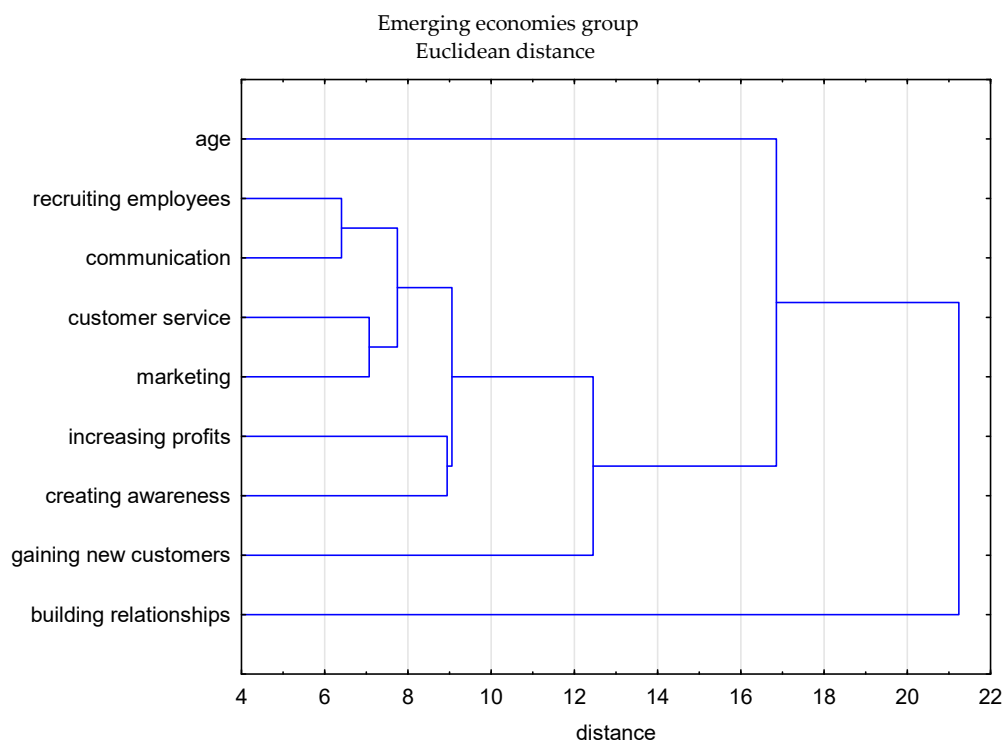


Figure 11. Hierarchical agglomeration for the emerging economies group according to Facebook purposes of usage.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Social media has changed the ways of communication around the world [15,40]. It has helped people find, analyze, and exchange information [41] and become part of everyday life supporting many organizations as they conduct business in different parts of the world [42].

Social media has provided many channels for the development of entrepreneurship, also among women. Understanding the benefits of social media in business differs according to age [43]. The age of respondents is often used as a control variable in social media usage recognition.

According to RQ1, marketing was used as a significant benefit, which becomes more important among older respondents. However, the remaining identified benefits noted different stages of recognition between the results of developed and emerging economies according to age perspective among respondents. Facebook usage in business among emerging economies linked the age of women with increasing revenues/profits of organizations benefits assessment. The results indicated that the recognition of social media benefits is different according to age.

Communication, marketing, and sales often top social media Facebook benefits, which are recognized by businesses in every industry [44–47], especially in the case of information sharing [48]. The stage of a country's economic development also underlined differences in social media usage; however, the survey results did not indicate significantly different attitude of every benefit of social media. The awareness of social media benefits results were significant in the survey, which shows the importance of social media's role in business. According to variance analyses conducted for RQ2, benefits like communication, customer service and marketing were assessed differently among women respondents from developed and emerging economies. The agglomeration analyses revealed that among women from developed economies, three benefits were assessed similarly; communication, marketing, and building relationships—which shows three key characteristics in which Facebook is used. In the emerging economies group of women, similar answers were noted for recruiting employees and communication. Other social media platforms were not indicated as most often used, even those dedicated to recruiting employees [49]. According to RQ3, the communication role via social media is a key benefit that underlines its attractiveness that is still developed in various forms [50] by attaching users to new products or companies' services [51]. Social media is extending traditional communication channels, not replacing them, so understanding the motivations, needs related to age shows crucial benefits.

Additionally, Facebook usage for business success was noted by the respondents as positive.

Based on the research results, several gaps in the literature have been identified that need to be addressed:

- The effectiveness of different social media for business communication;
- The privacy issue related to knowledge sharing in social media;
- The impact of communication in social media on entrepreneurship and innovativeness;
- Education of users in the maintenance of their privacy on the Internet;
- Identifying the most suitable mechanisms to enhance trust-building for organizations using social media.

The current research poses some limitations that could create a new direction of research. First, the study focuses on one type of social media: Facebook. As a result, our research is only within the realm of one platform, and managers and scholars should be cautious in universally generalizing with other social media available on the Internet. Secondly, the analysis of social media attitude among developed and emerging economies cover only the eight countries and do not include macroeconomic factors that impact ICT stages of development. Thirdly, the generalization of the results may be limited due to the different age structures of the two groups of respondents.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.H.N. and J.P.; methodology, M.M.-S.; validation and data collection, M.M.-S.; writing—original draft preparation, J.P. and M.M.-S.; writing—review and editing, J.H.N. and J.P. and M.M.-S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank all the responders who participated in this study. We would also like to thank the people who helped coordinate the research and support the collection of data, in Georgia—Salome Svanadze, Romania—Caesar Scarlat, Slovenia—Tanja Grublješič, Taiwan—Tzong-Ru (Jiun-Shen) Lee and Turkey—Fatih Çetin.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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