

The effect of social media use on inter-organisational relationships in Kuwaiti SMEs

Maraim A A H Altarkait

Submitted in accordance with the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
Leeds Business School

February 2019

Declaration of originality

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Parts of the thesis appeared in the following proceedings:

Altarkait, M., Shaw, N. and Karanasios, S. (2017). The impact of social media use on supply relationships: the case of Kuwaiti SME. *In proceedings of 24th European Operations Management Association conference EurOMA2017*. July 1st-5th, 2017. Edinburgh.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Maraim Altarkait to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2018 The University of Leeds and Maraim Altarkait

Acknowledgments

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

First of all, all thanks and gratitude are to Allah, the lord of the worlds, for the guidance and blessings that are countless, and more than I could have ever imagined.

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisors Dr. Nicky Shaw and Dr. Stan Karanasios for their support, guidance and insightful feedback.

I would like to thank my husband, Saleh, and my daughters, Jood and Noor, for their support, encouragement and patience.

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation for my big family, my beloved mother Fatima, my brothers and sisters, for their endless encouragement and love.

I would like to thank also my friend, Muneera Alhajri, for her endless support. And my motivational WhatsApp group named “we will not stop till we reach” for their support and encouragement over this difficult journey; their everyday messages pushed me to work harder every time.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the soul of my father, who passed away during my studies. I wish I could celebrate this achievement with you.

And to my mother, for her endless love.

To my husband, thank you for always being there for me.

To my sweethearts, Jood and Noor.

Abstract

The world is becoming more connected through social media. Social media is a growing area of interest for many scholars because of the value of co-creation that it enables. Most social media applications are of low cost and need little technical expertise, making them an attractive tool for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), due to the latter's limited resources. Despite the growth in research and use of social media, it is unclear how it is used in and impacts upon supply chain relationships.

This research brings social media, SMEs and inter-organizational relationship (IORs) research together in the context of Kuwait. Specifically, it explores how the use of social media by Kuwaiti SMEs affects inter-organisational relationships. It achieves this by exploring the uses of social media, and investigating the impact of such use on new and existing relationships and on other technologies used.

Four inductive case studies from different sectors were conducted. Each case study represents a supply chain of SMEs that contains more than one buyer-supplier relationship. Social exchange theory, effectuation theory and media richness theory were used to build a theoretical framework that was used as a lens for the data collection and analysis.

The findings of this research reveal a range of social media uses in Kuwaiti supply relationships. The richness and openness of the media impacts the initial supplier selection process prior to opening new relationships. Social media use also brings different positive social and transactional impacts to supply relationships. The impact of social media on the other traditional technologies used by Kuwaiti SMEs is evident. Based on the findings several propositions are generated for future research.

This research is among the few empirical studies which explores the use and impact of social media in supply relationships, specifically in the context of SMEs in developing countries.

Table of contents

<i>Declaration of originality</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	3
<i>Dedication</i>	4
<i>Abstract</i>	5
<i>List of tables</i>	9
<i>List of figures</i>	9
<i>Chapter One: Introduction</i>	10
1.1 Introduction	10
1.2 Research motivation and gaps	10
1.3 Research location	12
1.5 Thesis outline	14
<i>Chapter Two: Literature review</i>	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Social media	16
2.2.1 Social media definition and categorisation.....	16
2.2.2 Social media and SMEs.....	18
2.2.3 Social media and supply chains.....	24
2.2.4 Social media impact	27
2.2.5 Negative impact of social media on relationships	30
2.3 Inter-organisational relationships	31
2.3.1 Supplier selection.....	33
2.3.2 Social influence on IOR formation	38
2.3.3 Social exchange theory	39
2.3.4 Trust	41
2.3.5 Information technologies and IORs	47
2.3.6 Less advanced technologies.....	52
2.4 Theoretical framework	56
2.5 Conclusion	58
<i>Chapter Three: Research context</i>	60
3.1 Introduction	60
3.2 Kuwait	60
3.2.1 Social media in Kuwait	61
3.2.2 Kuwaiti culture	62
3.2.4 Duwaniyah	64
3.3 SMEs	65
3.3.1 SME characteristics	66
<i>Chapter Four: Methodology</i>	68
4.1 Introduction	68
4.2 Research design	69
4.2.1 Philosophy underpinning the research	69

4.2.2 Qualitative research.....	71
4.2.3 Case study approach.....	71
4.3 Sampling, context and access.....	73
4.4 Data collection.....	78
4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	78
4.4.1.1 Interview challenges.....	80
4.4.2 Archival data.....	81
4.5 Data analysis.....	83
4.6 Quality of research data and analysis.....	86
4.7 Ethics.....	88
4.8 Conclusion.....	88
<i>Chapter Five: Design and construction case study.....</i>	<i>90</i>
5.1 Introduction.....	90
5.2 Case overview and context.....	90
5.3 Case analysis.....	93
5.3.1 Social media uses.....	93
5.3.2 New relationships.....	98
5.3.3 Social media impact.....	100
5.4 Social media vs traditional technologies.....	109
5.4 Conclusion.....	113
<i>Chapter Six: Wedding planner case study.....</i>	<i>115</i>
6.1 Introduction.....	115
6.2 Case overview and context.....	115
6.3 Case analysis.....	117
6.3.1 Social media uses.....	117
6.3.2 New relationships.....	123
6.3.3 Social media impact.....	127
6.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies.....	134
6.4 Conclusion.....	136
<i>Chapter Seven: Real estate case study.....</i>	<i>138</i>
7.1 Introduction.....	138
7.2 Case overview and context.....	138
7.3 Case analysis.....	140
7.3.1 Social media uses.....	140
7.3.2 New relationships.....	143
7.3.3 Social media impact.....	147
7.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies.....	150
7.4 Conclusion.....	153
<i>Chapter Eight: Wood factory case study.....</i>	<i>155</i>
8.1 Introduction.....	155
8.2 Case overview.....	155

8.3 Case analysis	157
8.3.1 Social media uses	157
8.3.2 New relationships	163
8.3.3 Social media impact	167
8.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies	173
8.4 Conclusion	176
Chapter Nine: Cross-case analysis	178
9.1 Introduction	178
9.2 Observations	180
9.3 Cross-case analysis	182
9.3.1 In what ways are SMEs utilizing social media with suppliers/business buyers?	182
9.3.2 How do SMEs use social media as a means of building new relationships?	188
9.3.3 How does social media, as a medium for interaction/exchange, affect buyer/supplier relationships?	191
9.3.4 How does the use of social media affect the other technologies used?	200
9.4 Conclusion	203
Chapter Ten: Discussion and conclusion	205
10.1 Introduction	205
10.2 Discussion of the findings	205
10.2.1 Social media uses	205
10.2.2 New relationships	211
10.2.3 Social media's impact	214
10.2.4 Social media and other technologies	224
10.3 Propositions	227
10.3.1 New relationships	228
10.3.2 Social media impact	229
10.3.3 Social media and other technologies	230
10.4 Theoretical contribution	231
10.5 Limitations and future research	233
10.6 Implications for policy and practice	235
10.7 Conclusion	236
Bibliography	238
Appendix 1: Interview Guide	256
Appendix 2: Samples of social media content captures	258
Appendix 3: Screen shots of ATLAS.ti software (coding and quotations)	260
Appendix 4: Codes and categories list	261
Appendix 5: Sample of categories and codes mind map	263
Appendix 6: Sample of themes and quotes table	264
Appendix 7: Sample of theme mind map	266

List of tables

Table 2.1: Conceptual model of Web 2.0 application	22
Table 2.2: Media richness	49
Table 4.1: Participant information	73
Table 5.1: D&C suppliers overview	87
Table 6.1: WP suppliers overview	113
Table 7.1: SMEs overview	135
Table 8.1: WF buyers and suppliers overview	153
Table 9.1: Development of themes and sub-themes	174

List of figures

Figure 2.1: Effectuation processes	38
Figure 4.1: Progressive focusing	65
Figure 4.2: Example of case study supply chain	70
Figure 5.1: D&C supply chain	86
Figure 6.1: WP supply chain	110
Figure 7.1: RE-O supply chain	134
Figure 8.1: WF supply chain	151
Figure 9.1: Social impact themes	186

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the motivation and rationale for conducting the research by outlining the limited understanding in current research as well as the gaps (section 1.2). The chapter then outlines the research aims and contribution (section 1.3). A brief overview of the research location is given in section 1.4. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented in section 1.5.

1.2 Research motivation and gaps

The motivation for the research began when the researcher observed the high and fast spread of social media use in Kuwait and other Arab countries, and how social media (as a tool) has helped to make huge changes in Arab countries, such as during the Arab spring, where in some countries it helped to change governments and in others there were a lot of disruptions. At the same time businesses started to adopt social media as well become available in different channels. The way businesses talk to their customers in Kuwait now is different from before social media; they have become more engaged and more social. This attracted the researcher attention and led the researcher to explore the impact of social media on business. Adding to this the spread of SMEs in Kuwait and how they have become a topic of discussion in recent years, led the researcher to explore social media with this size of enterprise. As found in the literature, most social media applications are of low cost and need little technical expertise, meaning that they are easily accessible (Barnes et al., 2012; Fosso Wamba and Carter, 2014). This makes social media an attractive tool for SMEs due to the limited resources they have in comparison to large businesses (Barnes et al., 2012). However, research in this context is still evolving.

The researcher found that most research on social media in the Arab world was related to the Arab spring, while in regard to businesses in general it was more towards marketing and interaction with customers, and the other side of the supply chain, towards suppliers, had received very little attention. Therefore, the researcher decided to explore it from this side. Starting from the supplier side of the supply chain, there

was very little previous research exploring the uses and the impact of the use of social media.

To the researcher's knowledge only three conceptual papers were available on the use and impact of social media in supply chains (O'Leary, 2011; Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013; Tingling et al., 2011). Two empirical papers were found within operations management journals about the operational efficiency of social media. Although the conceptual papers available expected the impact to be positive and promising, one of the empirical papers also found it positively improving operational efficiency and innovations in firms (Lam et al., 2016). The second empirical paper did not find an impact from Web 2.0 on either supply chain integration or operational performance (Camara et al., 2015). Although the topics of both papers are not exactly the same as the research covered in this thesis, these findings, in addition to the limited research, leave a researcher with an unclear understanding of the impact of social media on supply chains or operations management research in general, and introduces a list of questions that need to be answered.

As found in the literature the use of social media for social and organisational uses has the potential to influence relationships within and between businesses (Kim et al., 2011), as well as socially. In order to explore the supplier side, it was sensible to begin with the first point of interaction where social media as a tool of communication can be used, and this is of course the relationships with suppliers (upper tiers) or buyers. The literature confirms the importance of relationships in any supply chain (Harland, 1996). The survival and performance of organisations are highly dependent on their inter-connections and relationships with other firms (Oliver, 1990). This led to the key aim and the broad research question, which was to explore the impact of social media use in supply relationships in regard to Kuwaiti SMEs.

Starting from this aim the researcher went on to explore previous research into inter-organisational relationships from a supply chain perspective in general. Here further areas of interest were discovered, such as how suppliers are selected. Thus, both areas of inter-organisational relationship (IOR), new and existing, became important to explore in order to have a complete picture of the uses and impact of social media. Putting these together, a descriptive question regarding the uses of social media was

needed as a base for the above areas of research. After the preliminary interviews with SMEs and the open discussions, it became apparent that a question of the impact of social media on the other technologies used was also important to explore, because doing so would lead to a complete picture of the uses and impact of social media.

This, in brief, is the gradual exploration process within the literature that informed the research questions. Advanced readings in previous research and theory informed the wording of the final research questions.

1.3 Research location

This research was carried out in Kuwait. Kuwait is a small, oil-rich country; oil production and related industries are what mainly drives the Kuwaiti economy (Hernandez et al., 2013). This reliance on oil is a major problem facing Kuwait and other Gulf countries, and as a result these countries have set new diversification plans to redirect the economy away from oil by pushing for the development of SMEs. Most Kuwaiti companies are SMEs (Kuwait Statistical Bureau, 2011). However, their contribution to the economy is limited to just 3% of GDP (World Bank, 2016). Monetary help is not enough: more strategies and plans are needed in order to help SMEs succeed (Altamimi, 2013).

Kuwait has a developed information and communication technology infrastructure, according to the Global Information Technology Report (2016), and is ranked first globally among 139 countries in mobile network coverage and second in broadband Internet subscription (Baller et al., 2016). Significantly for this study, social media use in Kuwait is considered to be high: it is ranked 42nd globally among 139 in the use of social media. Despite this, there is a gap in the literature concerning how businesses are using social media and in particular its impact on business-to-business interactions across supply chains. In addition, there is limited academic research on Arab SMEs (Elbeltagi et al., 2013), and the business environment more broadly (Khakhar and Rammal, 2013; Ralston et al., 2012). Most research covers social media use for political conflicts such as the Arab Spring. Therefore, by focusing on Kuwait this research aims to generate new knowledge of SMEs and social media amongst Gulf countries and the Arab world. Thus, this study will bring social media, SMEs and inter-organisational

relationship (IORs) research together in the context of Kuwait. The following section covers the focus and the aim of the research as well as the research questions.

1.4 Research aims, approach and contributions

This research aims to explore the impact of social media use in supply relationships in regards to Kuwaiti SMEs. The key research question is “how does the use of social media by Kuwaiti SMEs affect inter-organisational relationships?” To address this key research question, the following specific research questions will be addressed:

1. In what ways are SMEs utilizing social media with suppliers/buyers?
2. How do SMEs use social media as a means to build new relationships?
3. How does social media, as a medium for interaction/exchange, affect buyer/supplier relationships?
4. How does the use of social media affect the other technologies used?

Multiple case studies were conducted to answer these research questions. Each case study represents a supply chain of SMEs that contains more than one buyer-supplier relationship or, in other words, dyadic relationships. Therefore, the study departs from traditional case study research and uses the supply chain as the unit of analysis, allowing the researcher to examine dyadic social media interaction in the context of the supply chain it falls within. Social exchange theory, effectuation theory and media richness theory were used to build a theoretical framework that was used as a lens for the data collection and analysis.

This thesis goes beyond current literature and extends social media research to include IORs in SMEs supply chains. It also contributes IOR literature and more specifically IO-IT literature by including social media as a new technology that can serve as a supply chain technology for SMEs. It contributes to SME research by exploring social media’s uses and impact as well as IORs within SMEs. It generates propositions that can be examined in future research. It also helps to fill a gap of research into Gulf countries and Arab countries in general, and specifically into Kuwait, which receives less attention in the literature, despite the abilities Kuwait has in terms of technology infrastructure and SME support. It is hoped that this research will help to draw new

strategies and plans for future Kuwaiti SMEs as well as for foreign firms wishing to work in Kuwait, and provide a direction for future supply chain research within social media literature.

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis contains ten chapters including this chapter. Chapter 2 covers the review of the existing literature in areas of social media, IORs and IO-IT, and outlines the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the context of the research, Kuwait and SMEs, including a complete overview of Kuwait and its culture. The general characteristic of SMEs will also be mentioned. Chapter 4 covers the methodology of the thesis by explaining the research design, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, data quality issues and research ethics. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 provide the analysis of the case studies within their contexts. Chapter 9 is a cross-case analysis that synthesizes the findings from the four cases by discussing each research question's themes within the larger research context and theoretical framework. Chapter 10 discusses the findings of the cases within the larger body of literature and presents the specific contribution of the research, as well as the propositions that emerged from the research findings. This is followed by the contribution to theory, research limitations and future research, implications for practice and policy, and finally a conclusion.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the literature strategy, and then reviews the literature on social media, inter-organisational relationships (IORs), and inter-organisational information technologies (IO-IT). It then outlines the theoretical framework of the research. It then gives a summary of the literature review by highlighting the significant gaps in previous research.

A search of the existing literature, later informed by the analysis of the data, suggested the areas of literature to be considered in this review. In particular a broad survey of literature on social media and Web 2.0 was provided to build knowledge of the field. Then more focused search was undertaken such as studies of SMEs. A gap in the literature about the use of social media in supply chains was found, resulting in a more focused search. This includes social media in supply chains, to determine the knowledge gaps the thesis aimed to cover. The positive and negative impacts of social media were covered based on the findings of the literature review. IORs are comprehensively covered within the academic literature, and reviews from top journals were used to build a general introductory knowledge about the field. Then a set of more focused areas was discussed based on the findings of the reviews and findings of the thesis, such as trust, social influence on IOR formation and less advanced technologies. Theories such as effectuation, from the entrepreneur (or SMEs) literature, appeared within the literature on social media and SMEs, along with social exchange theory within IORs and specifically dyadic relationships, and media richness theory within ICT use in relationships. These theories were privileged over others because they fit with the aims and the context of the thesis topic. As well as with findings of the research. They were organised in the literature review based on their uses within the findings, although overall, they were used as a set of theories together; some fit in certain areas more than others, therefore were mentioned within those certain areas. The Kuwaiti literature is very poor, and it was necessary to adopt the strategy of adding Arab and Middle Eastern research in order to obtain a broad perspective on Kuwait. However, in research into IOR and supply chains, although a little research has been done, the studies are diverse in topics, making it difficult to synthesise. In other areas such as social media

and SMEs, a large gap in Kuwaiti and Arabic research was revealed. A number of different databases were used, such as Web of Science, EBSCO and ABI.

2.2 Social media

The potential gains of social media for firms are significant and should not be ignored (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media offers firms a real-time communication tools that is low in cost and higher in efficiency than other traditional tools, which in turn makes it particularly appropriate for SMEs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, the extensive amount of social interaction already occurring through social media is growing (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). The use of these tools has the potential to influence internal and external business relationships (Kim et al., 2011). Thus, it is important to investigate these new tools and explore their impact on relationships. Although research on social media is relatively new, it is broad, covering different disciplines and areas, including business.

This research will investigate social media in the context of SMEs because of its many advantages, such as relatively low price and ease of use in comparison to other technologies, making it an attractive tool for SMEs, due to the limited resources they have in comparison to large businesses. First, a definition of social media and its categorisations is needed.

2.2.1 Social media definition and categorisation

In the academic literature, there is no generally accepted definition of social media (Barnes et al., 2012; Kadam and Ayarekar, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Usually social media, Web 2.0 and user generated content (UGC) are used interchangeably. The concept of Web 2.0 began with a conference brainstorming session between O'Reilly and MediaLive International (O'Reilly, 2005). The idea of Web 2.0 "relates to the concept of participation and interaction with web users connecting and sharing data, collaborating and contributing their own thoughts, ideas, experiences and knowledge" (Barlow et al., 2011, p. 2). Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC". More detailed definitions can be found in the literature for social media, such as applying "mobile and web-based technologies to

create highly interactive platforms where people and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify UGC” (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 241). Others define it as media based on technology that facilitates social interaction and the development of virtual relationships (O’Leary, 2011). In addition to all these definitions there are different terms to refer to social media other than Web 2.0 and UGC, for example interactive ICTs, new ICTs (Robinson and Robertson, 2010), innovative ICTs, online social networks and contemporary media (Fuchs, 2014). This indicates that these tools are used for different purposes and by different groups. Also, this indicates that “social media is a complex term with multi-layered meanings”, as described by Fuchs (2014, p. 35). For instance, a platform like Facebook is distinct from other media and technologies because it contains many media and ICTs, such as webpages, digital images, digital videos, discussion groups, connection lists and search engines in the same platform (Fuchs, 2014). This research will use the term social media and will look to social media as a new interactive tool in ICT that offers more social interaction and rich interactive medium between users, which in turn facilitates relationship building and enhancement because of the rich social flavour it has compared to other technologies.

Social media (SM) applications are broad and still evolving (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Khoo, 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media provides “broad, dynamic and versatile” applications, services and technologies (Schlagwein and Hu, 2017, p. 195). It serves different organisational and individual uses and goals. In other words, it cannot be “conceptualize[d] as a single technology” (Schlagwein and Hu, 2017, p. 195). It is important when classifying social media to take into account the evolving tools (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Many attempts have been made to categorise social media for business use (for example, Barnes et al., 2012; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Some are based on technological features and richness (such as Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), while others are based on categorising the applications/software based on their purpose (such as Kim et al., 2011).

Schlagwein and Hu (2017, p. 196) categorise social media based on its “actual use”. This is based on the diverse business goals of social media use rather than the technological features of social media or application uses. Schlagwein and Hu argue that this categorisation better serves information system researchers, according to their research, which explores why and how organisations use social media through the lens of absorptive

capacity. They categorise uses of social media in organisations into five categories. The first is for *broadcasting* information internally and externally. The second category of social media use is *dialogue*, such as internal and external communication. External dialogue involves communicating with customers and consumers and looking for feedback about specific things by starting a discussion in social media, such as on Twitter or LinkedIn. *Collaboration* is the third category, where social media is used to facilitate, internally and externally, the co-creation of a particular product, service or solution, facilitating actions and work. In the fourth category, social media is used for *knowledge sharing*, and the fifth category is *sociability*, where the use of social media is for producing social relations, loyalty and friendship. For example, external sociability is about building trust with external customers, allowing them to feel comfortable when dealing with the organisation. This in turn helps relationship building; sociability is usually linked to long-term aims rather than short-term commercial goals.

Owing to the evolving nature of the technology and functionality of social media applications that mean it can be used for different purposes, it is difficult to specify one kind of application to rely on in this research. Instead, this research will leave it open to SMEs to specify the social media they use for their supplier relationships. The following section will discuss social media uses and the impacts business might experience when adopting social media.

To avoid confusion, when reviewing the literature, the terms (social media, Web 2.0, UGC, online social networks) will be stated as used in the studies reviewed.

2.2.2 Social media and SMEs

There is a lack of research about social media use in SME contexts (Ahmad et al., 2018). The use of information and communication technologies in small businesses is a relatively neglected area of research within both ICT and small business research communities (Barnes et al., 2012), including in regards to social media. Although research about business use of social media is increasing in general, in the context of SMEs this growth is slow. The available literature about social media and SMEs is diverse in different topics, methods and areas of focus, such as adoption (e.g. Fosso Wamba and Carter, 2014; Sarosa, 2012), privacy policy (Shahizan et al., 2012), collaboration among small businesses

(Barnes et al., 2012), trust building in customer-supplier relationships (Calefato et al., 2013). The impact on Entrepreneurship (Kadam and Ayarekar, 2014), and so on. Most of the research is exploratory in nature and conceptual rather than empirical.

Some studies examine the use of social media in SMEs in a business-to-business (B2B) context. For example, Michaelidou et al. (2011), although focusing on B2B SME brand marketing activities, give insights about SMEs' use of social networking sites, capturing the benefits of and barriers to using social networking sites (SNS). Based on a questionnaire given to 102 UK SMEs, they found that the first three reasons for using SNS are the benefit of attracting new customers, to cultivate relationships and to increase awareness of brands. Among the barriers to using SNS, the most mentioned points were that the SNS are not of importance to other businesses in the same sector, there was uncertainty about their effectiveness and staff lacked the skills to deal with SNS.

Barnes et al. (2012) investigated the benefits of using Web 2.0 ICT in order to explore how small businesses use Web 2.0 ICT to work collaboratively with other small businesses in the UK. They organised their exploratory research based on Hinchliffe's (2010) discussion of the potential value of Web 2.0, such as cost reduction, transformation, growth and innovation. Its benefits were categorised as follows:

1. *Improved internal operational efficiency*: which can help minimise operating costs and increase productivity.
2. *Enhanced capabilities*: by offering the ability to share knowledge through connecting with professionals inside and outside organisations.
3. *More effective external communications*: by offering better communication with customers, suppliers and collaborators, allowing businesses to understand their needs, which in turns helps organisations to grow.
4. *Customisation service offerings*: by facilitating fast service offers designed based on customers' needs, which in turn supports innovation.

Furthermore, they added *lifestyle benefit* as the benefit of balancing work and life for SME managers.

Barnes et al. (2012) found that most small businesses reported improved efficiency and enhanced external communication as the benefits they gained from Web 2.0. Enhanced capability and customised offerings, which can be regarded as strategic benefits, were less

often reported. Lifestyle benefits were also less frequently reported. The study was limited to 12 micro businesses from the service sector in the UK, which limits its generalisability.

Although there is a lack of research in the Gulf region of the Middle East and in Arab countries more generally regarding business use of social media and SMEs specifically, the adoption rates in these countries are very high, as reported by an Arab social media report (2017). A recent study by Ahmad et al. (2018) explored the reasons for adoption of social media by SMEs and its impact on their performance in the Arab context. Their study of the adoption of social media by SMEs in Dubai found that SMEs in the UAE are using social media for marketing and advertising because of its richness and interactive features, which come at very low cost. They also use it for “information sharing”, sharing news about their SMEs with the public, and social media provides an important source of information for potential customers through electronic word of mouth, through reviews and recommendations from other customers. Moreover, social media allows SMEs to build relationships with customers because of direct social interaction with them, where they can listen to and respond to their needs quickly, which helps to make them loyal customers. Social media helps SMEs reach new customers and new markets as well, because information about SMEs can easily be delivered to a wide range of customers. Ahmad et al. (2018) found that using social media impacted SMEs’ performance in different ways, particularly in that it allows them to increase their online presence, where customers can like, comment on and share information with others about SMEs, which was found to help SMEs reach new customers. In turn, this makes customers aware of the SME, which increases the SME’s reputation, as the authors found, and reputation also helps to increase customer loyalty. It should be noted that Ahmad et al.’s research sample is limited, focusing on seven SMEs, with one informant from each SME, a number which can be expected in exploratory research. This is one of the studies that is similar to the context of the present thesis, based in a Gulf country, and although it is not about B2B or supplier relationships, its findings are important because of the context.

Pérez-González et al. (2017) examined the impact of social media use on SMEs’ innovation. They found that using social media for attaining information about competitors is a main factor in industrial SMEs’ innovation. Sharing internal knowledge through social media is another factor related to innovation. Other researchers have looked at social media use through a theoretical lens and conceptual models, such as Fischer and Reuber (2011)

and Kim et al. (2011). Kim et al. (2011) adopted a typology approach to build a conceptual model of Web 2.0 applications, in order to analyse SME usage of Web 2.0 in the USA, and to help provide a robust understanding of the nature and effect of Web 2.0 for SMEs. They identified three web support types when developing the model: social networking, information sharing and collaboration. Also, they noted three user spaces of interaction: business-to-employee-to-employee, business-to-employee-to-consumer and business-to-employee-to-business (Kim et al., 2011). Web 2.0's support for social networking helps to broaden the network between businesses and customers on the Internet, where they can build and maintain connections (Kim et al., 2011). For information sharing, Web 2.0 "facilitates creating, storing, refining, and sharing information between users on the Internet and can be viewed as structured or unstructured exchange of information in order to support social and active learning among participants" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 162). It also "supports and enhances collaborative work on the Internet this refers to complex interdependence and interactive work toward a shared goal or goals and assisting in facilitating goal-oriented teams in the process of problem solving and group decision making" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 163).

The other dimension is user interaction spaces; business-to-employee-to-employee space is an internal space for business employees to connect, network, share information and collaborate, which helps to increase productivity. Business-to-employee-to-consumer space is for businesses, their employees and their customers, and facilitates actively interacting and connecting with customers, and the potential value can be found in the model (Table 2.1). The last space is business-to-employee-to-business, and here the business, their employees and their partners such as suppliers can communicate and collaborate, which promises to strengthen and generate value for the relationships (Table 2.1) (Kim et al., 2011). Kim et al. collected data from 100 SMEs' websites and derived data from reviews of their websites and Google searches. They found that the Web 2.0 support type most used by US SMEs is social networking, followed by information sharing and collaboration. However, the study did not examine the user spaces. They suggest that an in-depth analysis of user spaces will give insights into the SMEs' practices within these three spaces.

Table 2.1 Conceptual model of Web 2.0 application

	Networking	Information sharing	Collaboration	Value creation
Business-to-employee-to-employee space	human resources management, employee relationship management	Company news, knowledge dissemination	New product development, prediction market, collaborative knowledge creation, project development	empowerment, employee participation, employee loyalty, knowledge management, improved information quality
Business-to-employee-to-consumer space	Customer relationship management, public relations	Company news, product review, complaints, market research, promotion, public relations	product innovation, collaborative filtering	Consumer loyalty, open innovation, increased consumer satisfaction, targeted marketing, leveraging custom-tailored experiences, capturing consumer data
Business-to-employee-to-business space	Partner relationship management	Company news, product review, complaints, new product announcements	Product innovation, collaborative product development, application development, supply chain management	Partner relationship building, enhanced business intelligence, innovation, increased productivity, enhanced knowledge management
Enabling technologies	Private corporate networking sites, public social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn)	Blogs, Twitter, social networking, photo sharing, video sharing	Wikis, blogs, Twitter, social networking, application sharing, open source software, collective intelligence, crowdsourcing	

Adapted from Kim et al. (2011)

Looking at previous research more broadly, other studies report the use of social media in a B2B context but not specifically in regard to SMEs. B2B adoption of social media is very slow in comparison to business-to-consumer (B2C), as mentioned in Brink (2017). The impact of B2B communication through social media is not clear yet because there is a lack of research in this area, but its importance has been realised and accepted among scholars (Wang et al., 2016). In a study in Belgium by Veldeman et al. (2015), it was found that

social media is perceived by B2B companies from the industrial and IT sectors as a communication tool that has the advantage of broader reach. Moreover, networking was found to be an important advantage of social media, and industrial companies believe that the low cost of social media is an important advantage. In addition, most of the companies in the sample agreed to the benefits of quick information sharing. Wang et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between social media capabilities, B2B communication and business performance. Using the lens of media synchronicity theory and in an East Asia context, it was found that social media applications' capabilities are supporting B2B communication and hence business performance. Communication performance is high through social media applications, which allow instant transition of messages between parties. Moreover, it allows for "pre-transmission presence", where parties can know who is online or available (Wang et al., 2016). Wang et al. (2016) found that social media is helping B2B project collaborations because of speed and "parallelism" capabilities. Where suppliers and customers can manage a project easily, the findings are that, through the lens of media synchronicity theory, the capabilities of social media help to add to the performance of communication and then business performance, especially in the area of collaboration (Wang et al., 2016). Moreover, as mentioned in Brink (2017), social media contains attractive possibilities for better B2B collaboration as well as innovation with buyers and partners.

In conclusion, it can be seen that some studies are conceptual, talking about potential impact, while some are based on a small sample or a small number of cases, giving evidence of the use of social media in businesses and the positive impact they have observed. However, it is clear that the supply chain area has received less attention in the context of SMEs. The impact of social media on supply chains is under-researched in general. Most studies look at use with customers (downstream of the supply chain) and neglect use with suppliers (upstream of the supply chain). In addition, most studies have been conducted in Western countries. Therefore, this study will contribute to filling the gap in research in general about the use of social media with suppliers and specifically within SMEs, because they are the majority contributor to most economies in the world, as well as in the context of Kuwait. The following section will review the available literature in the area of social media and supply chains.

2.2.3 Social media and supply chains

There is limited academic literature on the use of social media in supply chains (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013; O’Leary, 2011). To the researcher’s knowledge only three conceptual papers focus on this topic, and they are not specifically about SME usage, whilst two empirical papers have been identified in relation to the operational efficiency of social media. This section will summarise the most important use of the technologies of social media in supply chains.

Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska’s (2013) paper aims to provide the researcher of supply chain management with a reference for the main social media concepts. O’Leary’s (2011) conceptual work investigates the capabilities of social media for current and potential uses of social media in supply chains, covering different aspects and giving examples of current use, and suggestions for potential use. Tingling et al. (2011) examine the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on supply chain management; the discussion of this paper is organised using the supply chain operation reference model (SCOR), which is a cross-industry framework that categorises supply chain activities into five management processes: plan, source, make, deliver and return.

These three conceptual papers (O’Leary, 2011; Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013; Tingling et al. 2011) are broad, covering different areas of the supply chain. By summarising and synthesizing the three papers, the potential use of social media in supply chains can be seen to be as a communication tool, an information sharing tool, a relationship building tool, a supplier selection tool and a community building tool.

Social media as a communication tool

Social media has the potential to speed communication up over a broad network of suppliers, in real time and through many types of communication, namely video, audio and text (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Supply chain communication has been found historically to be unidirectional, whereas social media enables multidirectional communication, and also involves a wider base of participants (O’Leary, 2011). Twitter, for example, has been used by some businesses as a communication tool with their suppliers to communicate transaction information to multiple communication channels. This satisfies the need to coordinate multiple parties in the supply chain that are interested

in the information (O'Leary, 2011). For example, as O'Leary (2011) explains, for logistics, Twitter messages were used to indicate road closure and accidents, so other parties in the supply chain received information in an accessible way and in real time, and could change their route. Speeding up communication among the supply chain partners might also help with effective decision making (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013).

Social media as an information-sharing tool

O'Leary (2011) points out that social media can be linked to radio frequency identification systems (RFID) which share systems information to the supply chain, based on a project by the University of Waterloo, where Twitter messages about RFID-marked cows were generated after the cows were robotically milked (O'Dell, 2010, cited in O'Leary, 2011). Based on this example, O'Leary (2011) suggests that social media increases transparency and speeds up information flow, as instead of keeping information aggregated in the transaction processing systems, a Twitter message can be sent summarising what has been done over the system. In addition, using social media besides RFID systems provides a human side to information, which might create more awareness than system-generated messages (O'Leary, 2011).

Social media as a relationship tool

In order to gain strong competitive advantages in today's markets, transparency and closer relationships with key suppliers are required (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Web 2.0 changes have occurred through mobile devices, social networking and UGC, significantly adjusting the time and geography of supply chain relationships (Tingling et al., 2011). As noted in O'Leary (2011), Dell started to use social media as a way to distribute news and offers; it has evolved into a critical relationship building tool. The multi-directional flow of information will impact relationships, and looking to social media as a relationship tool raises a question about the kinds of relationships associated with supply chains (O'Leary, 2011). This research will contribute an answer to this question. In addition to its use as a relationship tool, social media helps to build trust between users through their communication (O'Leary, 2011). Social media's potential use in supplier relationships can be to build a community of suppliers where they can share business information and opportunities (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013), as the following section discusses.

Social media as a community-building tool

Social media's potential use with suppliers' relationships can be to build a community of suppliers where they can share business information and opportunities (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). For example, discussion groups organised for supply chains were found in Twitter under the hashtag #SCMchat (O'Leary, 2011). Social media can be used to engage suppliers, which might help to stimulate supply chain innovation and creativity (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Also, similar to the use of social media with customers where businesses seek feedback, it can be used by suppliers to seek feedback (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Social media can help supplier communities to share information in real time, which might help organisations to be at the leading edge (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). Communities of suppliers can be used to share knowledge as well, and therefore it can also be used as a knowledge sharing tool.

Social media as a supplier selection tool

As stated in O'Leary (2011), social media can be used to select partners. It offers the ability to monitor suppliers through their social media content, and to gather information about their reputation in the supply chain. Moreover, comparing different information available about suppliers with internal data or other public data available in social media helps to select the best supplier, and can also reveal the advantages and disadvantages of the different suppliers. For example, supply chain disruptions may affect the reputation of a supplier.

Two empirical research studies about the operational efficiency of social media were found in the literature, but they have contrasting findings. In a quantitative study in Spain done by Camara et al. (2015) that analysed the effect of Web 2.0 and cloud computing on operational performance via supply chain integration in 394 companies from the manufacturing sector, they did not find an impact from Web 2.0 on either supply chain integration or operational performance. They believe the reason for this is that supply chain features differ from the nature of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a more socially intensive technology that might have high impact on social areas of management that are more dependent on images, for example marketing, human resource management and internal communication. Furthermore, they state that this is not the right technology for sharing information and knowledge among the members of a supply chain.

In contrast, in an empirical study by Lam et al. (2016, p. 28), conducted from a strategic operation management perspective, they explored the “impact that informal, relationship-oriented online systems like social media” have on operational efficiency and innovation, based on longitudinal data from secondary sources. It is historically known that operations management usually focuses on transactional impacts of information technology, like improving scheduling and coordination and saving time (Lam et al., 2016, p. 39), but more recent research on operations management has emphasize the importance of building trust and relationships, in order to reduce risk and save costs, by adopting e-business technology (Johnson et al., 2007). Lam et al.’s study departs from the idea that IT is not only for transactional use. Social media in Lam et al.’s (2016) study was found to ease information flow and knowledge sharing across intra- and inter-organisational boundaries. Social media’s richness mainly helps in this respect, and this in turn improves firms’ operational efficiency and innovation in the modern business environment, which is mostly knowledge-based. Moreover, Lam et al. found that, studying organisations in a longitudinal study, they improved their performance if they employed social media strategically.

The difference between the two empirical papers is that one did not find an impact or relationship and the other found a positive impact of social media on operational efficiency. In addition, the studies were of different sectors and research settings, and used different methods. These findings and the limited research in this area argue the need for more research to understand the impact of applying these social technologies in supply chains.

The opportunities and benefits of social media use are suggested as potentially affecting supply chains based on examples in the market and other conceptual papers, periodicals and market research. However, limited empirical academic research has been found which tests these benefits. This research aims to fill a gap in the research, in order to help SMEs to improve their relationships through innovative technologies and to compete in highly competitive markets.

2.2.4 Social media impact

The previous sections showed the positive impact of social media if used within SMEs, B2B and supply chains in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and time-saving. This section

reviews other impacts, such as social impact. The social impact of social media was examined based on a broader search within management and business literature such as customer relationship management, because of the paucity of research from IORs literature.

Sashi (2012) developed a model of the customer engagement cycle. He identified connections, interactions, satisfaction, retention, loyalty, advocacy and engagement as stages in the cycle, and links this to social media as an interactive technology. The engagement cycle means that each concept impacts on the other, and they are not discrete concepts standing alone. *Connection* between customers and organisations can be offline, using traditional methods, or online through social media. Social media, as mentioned by Sashi, allows for connection with a wider number of firms or individuals in a very easy way. *Interaction* is the second term in the cycle, and this is when the customer and seller connect so they can interact. Before the Internet, interaction was limited by location and traditional means, such as word of mouth, letters and telephone. With the introduction of Web 2.0 this limitation has diminished, and real-time interaction has become easy worldwide. Through social media there is more frequent, faster and richer interaction among much larger groups of connected individuals and organisations or communities. *Satisfaction* occurs only if there is interaction; satisfaction in turn leads to engagement. This interaction must be continued because satisfaction “is not an end in itself”; as mentioned in Sashi (2012, p. 262), “satisfaction is a necessary condition for customer engagement, but it is not sufficient for customer engagement”. *Retention* is an outcome of total satisfaction over a period of time or an outcome of strong positive emotions. It might be an outcome of a long relationship without an emotional bond or emotional bonds without a long relationship. *Commitment* can be either affective commitment or calculative commitment. It is calculative when there is no other choice, and it leads to loyalty over time. It is affective when it is based on emotions, trust and reciprocity in the relationship. *Advocacy* is when customers talk positively about a product or service or company to others on social networks. This is usually done by satisfied or loyal customers. Finally, *engagement* means customers who are satisfied or loyal. In other words, customer engagement requires both types of commitment, affective and calculative. When customers are in a relational exchange with the seller and have a strong emotional bond, customer engagement occurs.

From the above model of engagement, social media appears to have an impact on the different stages of the cycle until the engagement occurs. This is without doubt the social nature of the technology, that allows the social stages to develop through it. While Sashi's (2012) research is conceptual, there is another novel empirical study (although at an individual level) that compares engagement through social media applications between customers and firms (online) with visits (offline), and this study found that more engagement in social media leads to more relationship intensity, which is represented in customer visit frequency (Rishika et al., 2013). This also has an impact on firms' profitability. It was found that social media allows SMEs to build relationships with customers because of the ability to have direct social interaction with them, where they can listen and respond to their needs quickly, which helps to make them loyal customers (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Other social impacts occur from likes and tweets. As mentioned in Kim and Kim (2018), some studies have found the impact of social presence (Facebook likes and tweets) can influence trust in sellers. This shows that likes and tweets have a social impact that in turn can increase trust or promote sales. However, this is in a B2C context. Social media, as found by Ahmad et al. (2018, p. 12), impacted SMEs' performance in different ways. For example, it "increase[d] online presence", where customers can like, comment and share information with others about SMEs, which was found to help SMEs reach new customers. This also helped increase SMEs' reputation. Reputation helped to increase customer loyalty. Furthermore, the authors found that instant and continuous communication with customers through social media channels helps to build trust and customer loyalty, and if customers lose satisfaction, social media enables them to make their voices heard quickly, which helps SMEs to take action to make them satisfied and regain confidence, trust and loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2018).

El-Haddadeh et al. (2012) investigated consumer adoption of social media as a communication channel with multinational firms in China. They found that the ease of use of social media can aid better engagement and communication between consumers and organisations. The adoption of social media as a corporate communication tool was found to highly impact trust in organisations and loyalty in products. Word of mouth is important in China for loyalty and customer retention, as found in their study. Therefore, positive electronic word of mouth through social media can help to build trust. Social influence has

a high impact on Chinese customers' preferences, so word of mouth has a social influence on the preferences of customers, because China is a collectivist culture. Collectivism is also a characteristic of Arab cultures.

To conclude, most studies report a social impact from individual or customer perspectives, and it can be argued that "as small business owners their relationship with customers [are] often personal" and "small business owners are unique communities because their personal and professional identities are so intertwined", as mentioned in Humphreys and Wilken (2015, p. 306). This limited available research gives an idea of the impact that might be within SMEs' IORs, as this research will explore.

2.2.5 Negative impact of social media on relationships

Social media is seen as a communication tool that might help deliver messages to a broader base of suppliers and partners and thus help in effective decision making (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). However, more communication and more linkage do not always enhance the decision-making process, and may even be damaging (Tingling et al., 2011). Moreover, more communication channels might affect the quality of the information (O'Leary, 2011). Also, supply relationships may suffer; for example, broadening the demand for information to a larger number of partners may result in a greater evolution of supply chains, where relationships are quickly redrawn instead of becoming deep cooperative ones (Tingling et al., 2011). In addition, the next generation of technologies might enable power redistribution and channel conflicts within the supply chain, and intermediation opportunities (Tingling et al., 2011). For instance, suppliers may seize the opportunity to move downstream in the supply chain. On the other hand, producers may choose to be closer to the primary source of production in the supply chain. This creates an environment where organisations compete and cooperate at the same time (Tingling et al., 2011), which may affect organisations internally. Moreover, organisations involved in social media activity for their supply chain might find it being used by their employees for personal use, which affects the productivity of their work (O'Leary, 2011). In addition, it might be used to attack management efforts (O'Leary, 2011). To ensure privacy and information protection, the use of social media in supply chain settings requires development, for instance creating limitations as to who can access the information (O'Leary, 2011).

To sum up, there is a gap in the research on the negative impact of social media in general and in supply relationships specifically, and this research aims to fill part of this gap. This research focuses on investigating the use of social media specifically in the supply relationships of SMEs. The choice of supply relationships specifically to investigate the use of this kind of technology is due to the nature of this technology, which provides rich interaction and direct human communication, therefore it is sensible to look first at where human interactions are concentrated along the supply chain in order to test these technologies. Also, this study considers the importance of the relationships in supply chains, which are the base of any chain or network. The importance and benefits of inter-organisational relationships are discussed in the next section, in order to build on the discussion of the use of these technologies in supply relationships.

2.3 Inter-organisational relationships

Managers are under pressure to improve the performance of their operations and minimize costs because of today's competitive and global business environment (Harland et al., 2004). Organisations cannot perform in isolation, for to survive and grow they must have relationships with other firms (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011), and the motives and purposes for entering into relationships are different across firms (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011). The literature on inter-organisational relationships and networks is broad and comes from different fields and disciplines (Cropper et al., 2008; Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Harland et al., 2004; Oliver, 1990), including strategic management, channel management, industrial marketing and purchasing, organisational behaviour, and supply chain management (Harland et al., 2004). This research will look at IORs from a supply chain perspective and the meaning of IORs "is concerned about relationships between and among organizations" (Cropper et al., 2008, p. 4).

IOR formation literature is split into different theoretical paradigms, which leads to our understanding of IOR formation being varied in nature, including a mixture of motives, intentions and objectives (Barringer and Harrison, 2000). Owing to the massive amount of literature on IORs, many reviews have been carried out to aggregate this literature in a narrow way (such as Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Oliver, 1990). A meta-analysis by Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos (2011) which reviews the reviews from leading journals provides a more comprehensive view of the literature on IOR formation. This review was

based on the lens of organisational economics and organisation theory. Their meta-analysis in brief states that the organisational economics perspective assumes that when it is difficult and complex for a firm to handle an activity by itself or through markets, it forms IORs with partners to efficiently conduct the activities (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011). In other words, IORs are the best governance form when *specific investments, complementary assets* or *incentive alignment* are needed and can be obtained through relationships rather than markets or internally (Mahoney, 2005). The most commonly used theories found in the literature under this perspective are transaction cost economics and resource-based views (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011). On the other hand, from an organisation theory perspective firms form IORs to conduct tasks and enhance and boost inter-organisational and interpersonal relationships, in order to *improve their reputation and legitimacy, gain access to knowledge expertise and social capital, and benefit from powerful allies* (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011). The theories from this perspective stress the social structure embeddedness of individuals and firms (Uzzi, 1996). Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos indicate that resource dependence, stakeholder theory, institutional theory and social networks are the most used theories for this perspective. Also, they mention that there are different types of ties and networks, which can range from strong to weak ties, and goal-oriented or accidental forms of networks. Social structure and relationships are the most important from an organisation theory perspective. Thus, IORs can be explained from both economic and sociological perspectives (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011).

In the context of SMEs, small firms use IORs to protect themselves from *environmental uncertainty* and to *improve their performance*, as well as for innovation, because of their limited capabilities and resources (Gupta and Barua, 2018). Also, as mentioned in Mikhailitchenko and Lundstrom (2006), IORs are used by small firms to decrease transaction costs of manufacturing, for distribution of goods and services, for acquisitions, and to observe environmental change, although there is a shortage of information about relationships within small businesses (Adams et al., 2012). Some demonstrate the importance of the social mechanisms which small firms rely on for relationships. For example, Fuller and Lewis (2002, p. 330) explore and examine in depth the everyday practices of relationships in small firms, finding strong evidence demonstrated by owner-managers of small firms of “social control mechanisms” governing relationships. Furthermore, they mention previous studies which concluded that small businesses should

be viewed as social and financial units, and it should be understood that they are based on personal relationships.

This research is concerned with the use of innovative social technology among SMEs' IORs, and will look into the impact of using these technologies for establishing new relationships (selecting suppliers) and with existing dyadic relationships (buyer-supplier relationships). The next section reviews supplier selection practices in general within SMEs and specifically through the use of technologies or social media.

2.3.1 Supplier selection

“The selection of a best supplier is a pre-requisite for the success of the whole supply chain” (Gupta and Barua, 2018, p. 216). However, with the increased outsourcing and globalisation of markets, organisations are finding that they have to deal with new providers and supply markets where they do not have foundations or direct experience of (Boer et al., 2001; Gulati and Kettler, 2005). The developments in Internet technologies and customer preferences require faster supplier selection (Boer et al., 2001). A firm's suppliers directly impact the “price, quality, delivery reliability, and availability of its products”, and this in turn has an effect on customer satisfaction (Pearson and Ellram, 1995, p. 55), and changing customer preferences need to be satisfied (Boer et al., 2001). Models and criteria are discussed in the literature in regards to the decision-making process of supplier selection (Boer et al., 2001; Zadeh and Cheng, 2016). Among the most popular criteria are quality, delivery, price/cost and manufacturing capability (Zadeh and Cheng, 2016). Others found that significant factors for manufacturing industries procurement are “product quality, delivery compliance, price, production capability, technological capability, financial position and e-transaction capability” (Kar and Pani, 2014, p. 92). In addition to the criteria and models there are factors that affect the selection of suppliers. As mentioned in Sonmez's (2006) review, there are many factors that affect supplier selection and selection criteria. Among these factors are the type of products needed from the supplier (Pearson and Ellram, 1995), and the type of manufacturing strategy the buyers use, e.g. make-to-order (MTO), make-from-stock (MFS) or make-to-stock (MTS). Moreover, large organisations use different formal procedures and criteria when selecting suppliers, which are different to the procedures and criteria employed by small- and medium-sized organisations (Sonmez, 2006).

Although the literature on SME supplier selection practices is limited (Murthy and Paul, 2017; Pressey et al., 2009), supplier selection is significant for small firms for many reasons. One reason is resource scarcity, hence the need for better interaction between buyers and suppliers. Another reason is that small firms need to gain a competitive advantage by managing costs, as mentioned by Park and Krishnan (2001). As mentioned in Chiu and Okudan (2010), SMEs rely heavily on suppliers in comparison to large businesses and, therefore, supply chain management is more important for SMEs. Some studies indicate some of the practices for this type of organisation. Their supplier selection decisions are based on limited information gathered from their friends or peers or their own experience, because they lack resources (Murthy and Paul, 2017). Pressey et al. (2009) found that many SMEs are not applying a formal supplier evaluation process and also that the UK SMEs differ in the priorities they assign regarding supplier capabilities. In addition, they revealed that SME purchasing practices vary widely and should not be viewed as a homogenous group. It is important to understand SMEs' purchasing practices because of resource scarcity and the need to rely on suppliers to guarantee long-term success. In addition, as mentioned in Pressey et al. (2009), their lack of resources makes supplier monitoring an important task for SMEs in choosing the best supplier, but research in this area is limited (Pressey et al., 2009). Ellegaard (2006) indicates that small firms make decisions based on little information and less formal procedures. Moreover, as mentioned in Viljamaa (2011), small firms' decision making involves both the rationality of economic organisation and the socially embedded characteristics of the firm, as well as personal and emotional elements. Therefore, the search for suppliers is not necessarily comprehensive and is likely to utilise existing networks.

Another finding is that there is a lack of "managerial capability" in SMEs to select suppliers (Ramlan et al., 2016). It is known that in comparison to large firms, small firms apply less formal practices to select suppliers (Pearson and Ellram, 1995). Additionally, it seems clear that small firms do not use structured and formal methods to manage their relationships with suppliers. Park and Krishnan's (2001) research investigated small firm manager practices in regards to supplier selection by testing 78 firms in the USA, examining this in three models, namely rational/normative, external control and strategic choice. The rational/normative model was found to be the most important model for predicting supplier selection practices of small firms, where managers use rational judgment and decision

making within specific boundaries. They found to some extent that supplier selection practices among small business are impacted by the industry and the work it competes in. Moreover, the personal characteristics of managers, such as age, education and experience, can influence the supply chain management practices (including supplier selection) of small firms. Notably, in today's business environment, cost is not the only factor leading to the selection of a supplier, but rather quality, service and other factors are also influential and, therefore, decision making regarding new suppliers must consider tangible and intangible factors, in order to maintain competitiveness (Lin et al., 2011). Finally, qualitative (personal) criteria are also evident as factors influencing selection (Sonmez, 2006).

Supplier selection in firms is based on either decision-making practices or specific models. SMEs, as mentioned above, usually choose through informal methods and the choice is based on manager or owner decision, which means it is mostly, or to a large extent, the decision of an individual and not a department or team, who is usually the SME manager or owner. In addition to this there is a lack of research into the impact of new technologies such as the Internet and cloud computing on supply chains, particularly in regards to selecting suppliers, even though it is stated in the literature that these technologies facilitate better collaboration between parties, such as customers, manufacturers and suppliers (Zadeh and Cheng, 2016). To the researcher's knowledge, there is no research examining the impact of social media on selecting new suppliers and forming IORs, although social media is a rich, interconnected place for such things. There is, however, a study by Fisher and Rueber (2011) that examines the use of social media as a medium to promote effectual processes based on effectuation theory in the B2B relationship context. Effectuation theory will be used as a lens for supplier selection through social media in this research, because of the logic of the theory that fits with SME characteristics and the method of SMEs of taking decisions regarding new suppliers, which is not structured or carefully planned. The following section reviews effectuation theory in more detail.

2.3.1.1 Effectuation theory

Fischer and Reuber (2011) explore how effectuation processes are impacted when entrepreneurs adopt Twitter as a social interaction medium in a B2B context. As they explain, social interactions play a major role in the effectuation process. The concept of

effectuation was first introduced by Saravathy (2001), who compared the causation and effectuation process that entrepreneurs might go through. While the causation process has a specific goal and finds the means to achieve it, the effectuation process takes the available means and selects the available effects that entrepreneurs can create with these means. Saravathy argues that when entrepreneurs have general aims (not specific ones) of doing business and the future is not clear, but can be controlled to some extent, entrepreneurs are more likely to use the effectuation process rather than causation. Wiltbank et al. (2009, p. 129) define effectuation as “molding and enhancing initiatives, formulating new goals and creating new opportunities rather than positioning oneself within environments largely outside one’s control or taking opportunities as exogenously given”. Some studies allocate the effectuation process as a rationale for uncertain decision making (Read et al., 2009). Based on Saravathy’s theory of effectuation and Read et al.’s (2009) conceptual framework, shown in Figure 2.1, Fischer and Reuber (2011) study how social interaction via Twitter impacts the effectuation process for entrepreneurs. Three concepts were introduced as follows: intrasubjective cognition, interactive behaviour and intersubjective outcomes.

- *Intrasubjective cognition* refers to “the means the entrepreneur believes she or he has available and the effects that might be achieved with these means” (Fischer and Reuber, 2011, p. 4). It is intrasubjective because cognition occurs within the person directly, in a way that others may not know about (Fischer and Reuber, 2011).
- *Interactive behaviour* is when social interaction with other actors or parties occurs, for example with suppliers. Here, entrepreneurs share information about their cognition and get feedback from others and commitment to achieve shared goals.
- The results of this cognition and social interaction are *intersubjective outcomes*, which can be in the form of creating new firms, products, markets or other effects, or of accessing new tangible resources (e.g. funding) or intangible resources (e.g. reputation) (Read et al., 2009; Saravathy and Dew, 2005).

Fischer and Reuber (2011) suggest that reaching an intersubjective outcome might prompt re-evaluation of the means available, which leads to an iteration in the effectuation process (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). Figure 2.1, adapted from Read et al. (2009, p. 4), illustrates the effectual processes model used by Fischer and Reuber (2011) to explore the impact of

social Twitter interaction on the process. They found that the process might change in order; for example, it might start with social interaction on Twitter. Although social interaction is an important construct within effectuation theory, it has received less attention from researchers (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). The popularity of social media is based on many factors, but one of the important ones is that it allows users to engage in unlimited social interaction, in a way that was not easy before social media spread so widely. Fischer and Reuber's (2011) research examines how social interaction opportunities through social media affect entrepreneurs' thoughts and actions. To their knowledge, no research had previously examined this.

Thus, it is hoped this research will contribute to the literature exploring the use of social media in supplier selection by SMEs, the benefits it offers (as stated in the literature), and how social media can be used to select partners (O'Leary, 2011). Furthermore, because research on using ICT tools at the stage of supplier selection is rare, it has been found that the communication channel used can affect the trust in the supplier selection and at the price determination stage. Huang et al. (2008) compared use of different tools in the first stages of a relationship, specifically on price determination and how the tools affected trust in suppliers. They found that when using face-to-face and email as communication channels, trust can grow significantly. Therefore, it was recommended that supply managers should care about developing trust in the negotiation, and at the supplier selection stage they have to carefully choose the communication channel to be used (Huang et al., 2008). However, studies of communication channels in the early stages of relationships in the context of SMEs are rare. This research will contribute to the literature by investigating the impact of a multidimensional, rich, interactive tool, social media, on SME supplier selection.

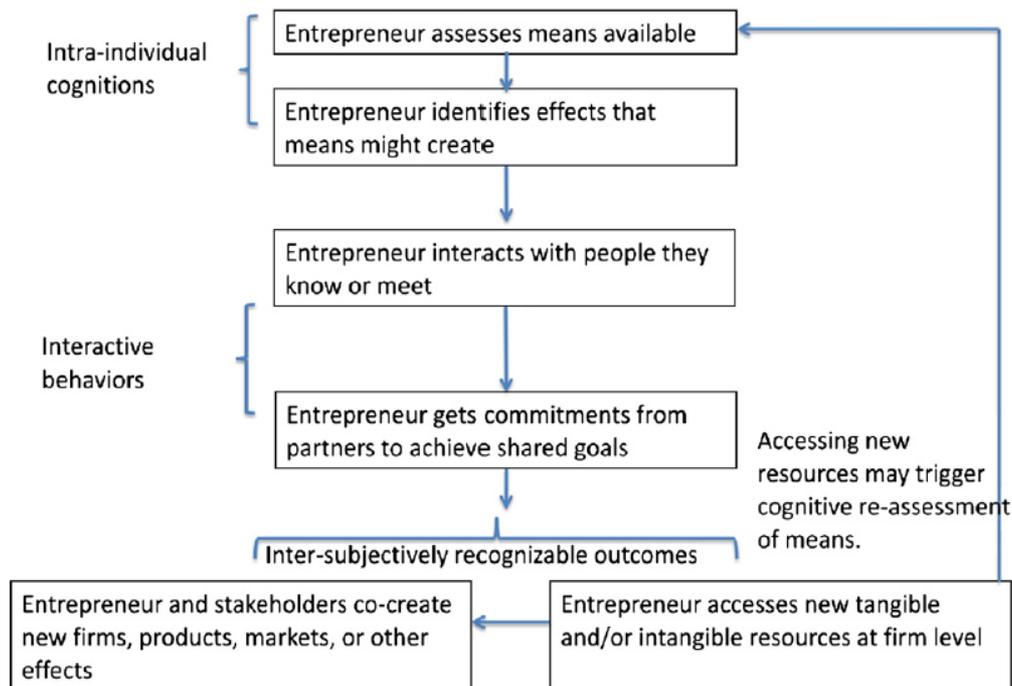


Figure 2.1: Effectuation processes. Adapted from Read et al. (2009).

2.3.2 Social influence on IOR formation

Many key sources in operations management and supply chains indicate the impact of social relations on the formation of IORs. One of the best-known arguments regarding the impact of social relations on economic actions is Granovetter's (1985) theory of embeddedness, which states that in order to understand economic behaviour, we need to consider the role of the social relationship structure in which the economic actions are embedded. Granovetter builds his argument by criticising the views held by those who explain economic behaviour in terms of either over- or under-socialisation. The under-socialised group believe that economic actions are determined by our own interests, while the over-socialised group think that social forces such as class or gender determine economic behaviour. Granovetter (1985) examines the concept of trust and malfeasance in economic relations to explain his point, and argues that trust and malfeasance are based on the structure of our social relations, contrasting the under-socialised group who think that they will never be able to build trust, and the over-socialised group who will never act to take advantage of others' trust, because they think their behaviour is influenced by social forces like gender or class. Granovetter argues that trust is based on our past experiences with people and whether or not we have (or will have) future relations with them. Thus, the major influence of economic behaviour is the structure of social relations with the people with whom they interact. Gulati (1998) builds on Granovetter's (1985) sociological claim

that the social context in which firms are embedded influences their economic actions, and studies the formation of some types of IORs (joint ventures) from a social network theory perspective. He observes that many alliance opportunities were presented to firms through their existing alliance partners (Gulati, 1998). Firms can be connected with other businesses through a wide array of social and economic relationships; these include supplier relationships, relationships between employees, alliances and trade association memberships (Gulati, 1995). Any kind of relationship can create a form of social network and can be an important source of social and technological information about organisational activities (Gulati, 1995; Gulati, 1998). For instance, Gulati's (1995) study found that the social networks in which firms are embedded affect their behaviour regarding economic actions, from the information provided through this social context, and firms make decisions whether to ally with other firms in strategic alliances or not. In addition, Gulati observed that new opportunities for alliances were presented to firms through their current alliance partners (Gulati, 1998).

In terms of existing relationships where interactions and exchanges are already in process, other papers consider exchanges and interactions in supply chains by using social exchange theory (SET) to study supply relationships and performance from different aspects. The next section will discuss the use of this theory in more detail.

2.3.3 Social exchange theory

SET evolved from different authors from different disciplines, such as George Homan, John Thibaut, Harold Kelley and Peter Blau (Emerson, 1976). Although their perspectives differ in the details, they all unite in the core idea of the theory, "social exchange as a frame of reference" (Emerson, 1976, p. 336). The scope of this frame of reference is defined as follows: "social exchange as here conceived as limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others" (Blau, 1964, cited in Emerson, 1976, p. 336). SET is based on the assumption that people or groups interact for reward or when they perceive a reward from interaction with others (Emerson, 1976). The main motivation to interact with others is the benefits gained from this interaction. As cited in Griffith et al. (2006, p. 87), who employed SET in a supply chain context, the main propositions of SET are:

1. Success proposition: which states that "the more a specific action is rewarded the more the person engaged in exchange is likely to repeat it" (Blau, 1964, cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p. 86).

2. Reward proposition: “the more valuable the outcome of the exchange to the person the more the person is likely to perform the action again” (Blau, 1964, cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p. 87).
3. Aggression proposition: “the exchange will be avoided by the person if the reward is not as expected, or an unexpected penalty is received from the exchange” (Homans, 1961, cited in Griffith et al., 2006 p. 87).
4. Rationality proposition: the individuals involved in exchanges will choose the alternative with higher value rewards. (Griffith et al., 2006)

However, social exchange benefits cannot be quantified and measured in terms of exact rewards gained. Many studies in the supply chain literature employ SET as a foundation for their studies and define it according to the focus of the study. Wu et al. (2014), for example, take into account the social factors that might have an impact on information sharing and the collaborative behaviour of partners, and measure the effect on supply chain performance. Based on the assumption and propositions of SET defined in supply chain research, Wu et al. define the antecedents of information sharing and collaboration as four key constructs: trust, commitment, reciprocity and power. They found that supply chain performance was achieved by collaborative effort which is driven by these SET-based constructs. They also recommend paying attention to the social drivers that identify the beliefs of partners in order to build relationships.

Griffith et al. (2006) use SET as a theoretical foundation to explore whether *procedural and distributive justice policies* set by suppliers impact on the attitude and behaviour of their partners in a supply chain relationship, and what the impact of these reactions on partner performance is. In brief, they found that policies of procedural and distributive justice improve the “long-term orientation” and “relational behaviour” of partner firms, and this is in line with the propositions of SET (p. 95). Lambe et al.’s (2001, p. 2) paper describes the foundation premises of using SET in B2B exchange relationships. They argue that although SET has been much used in B2B relational exchange literature within marketing, most researchers explain it implicitly in their research, stating that there is no “law like [the] generalization” of SET to use for the B2B context. Lambe et al. draw out, from research on B2B relational exchange marketing that used SET, the foundational premises of SET to be used in this context:

1. *Exchange interaction results in economic and/or social outcomes.*

2. *These outcomes are compared over time to other exchange alternatives to determine dependence on the exchange relationship.*
3. *Positive outcomes over time increase firms' trust in their partner and their commitment to the exchange relationship.*
4. *Positive exchange interactions over time produce relational exchange norms that govern the exchange relationship.* (Lambe et al., 2001, p. 6)

Lambe et al. (2001, p. 25) reviewed the literature on B2B relational exchange in regards to marketing and found that most of the models used, such as “process models on relationship development”, rely on SET to explain the development of relationships, but they are not articulated explicitly. In addition, they found that SET was used to examine variables that measure successful relationships, such as trust, commitment, dependence, cooperation, relational norms and satisfaction; these variables were used as an empirical operationalisation of the fundamental premises of SET. Lambe et al. also criticised the limitations of SET in this context (B2B). Among the most important criticisms of this research is that it fails “to explain the development of relational B2B exchange governance in *short term relational exchange* or in exchange relationships that must produce results quickly” because it needs interaction over time in order to develop trust, commitment or norms (Lambe et al., 2001, p. 27).

This theory can be regarded as comprehensive, underpinning most social interactions. The lack of use of SET might constrain the understanding of supplier relationships, as argued by Griffith et al. (2006). This research will investigate a mediated relation through social media in a collective country that cares about relationships and trust. Therefore, this theory can be used as a lens to support the findings of this research. The next section reviews trust because it is one of the most important social antecedents in relationships and for the use of IT in relationships. Furthermore, it was found as one of the main SET constructs used in the literature.

2.3.4 Trust

Trust has been widely investigated in the literature from the perspective of different topics and disciplines. Therefore, a review of studies of trust literature needed to build a background to the topic.

Trust has been widely investigated in the literature from the perspective of different topics and disciplines. Therefore, a review of studies of trust is needed in order to build a background to the topic.

As mentioned in Nyaga et al. (2010, p.104), “past studies [have] found a strong association between trust and relationship success”. Trust is a complex concept that include different types and levels (Ireland and Web, 2007). In a review of trust in IORs, Bachmann and Zaheer (2008) found a debate in the literature about its importance. Some economists underestimate the importance of trust in IORs, such as Williamson and his theory of transaction cost economics, while others from sociological backgrounds stress the importance of trust, such as Granovetter’s concept of social embeddedness, mentioned earlier. Trust in all types of relationships can be defined as the “expectation that the counterpart will behave in a reliable, predictable and fair manner, particularly when the potential for opportunism is present” (Bachmann and Zaheer, 2008, p. 535). In another review of trust outcomes in IORs (Delbufalo, 2012), several studies were seen to emphasise the importance of trust because of its positive outcome for relationships, such as facilitating information sharing with trusted parties in an open way, as well as cooperation between parties towards shared goals. Other studies in the review confirm that trust is necessary for supply chain relationships to become collaborative. Loyalty increases based on the level of inter-organisational trust. In addition, satisfaction, expectation of continuity and future purchase intentions were found in the review to be impacted by trust. Delbufalo’s (2012) review covered papers on the topic from 1990 to 2010. The review revealed that social exchange theory (SET) was among the most widely used theoretical approaches. It concluded by stressing the importance of trust for supply chain relationships from different dimensions, and this provides an answer to the debate over trust in IORs. This review, however, covered only Western countries; other countries with different cultures were not among the studies reviewed, which might be because there is limited research on other countries in this respect. As mentioned in Zhong et al.’s (2017) meta-analysis of interorganisational trust, interorganisational trust has been studied in several different disciplines, including economics, sociology and organisation studies, and each has its own theories. For example, in economics theory trust is viewed as a calculation of benefits and costs, while from a sociological perspective it is reciprocal and relational. From the perspective of organisational theories it is linked to power and viewed as a means of gaining resources. And from an institutional perspective it is viewed through the lens of the legal

system or cultural norms. Zhong et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis synthesises the different results of 152 studies of interorganisational trust, based on different theories, into a concerted model. These theories are transaction cost economies, social embeddedness theory and resource dependence theory. Although there are conceptual differences between the three theories, they complement each other in shaping interorganisational trust. They use quantitative methods and test hypotheses. Zhong et al. found an intertemporal link between the three theories that explains interorganisational trust. They also found that across theories the intermediary factor in interorganisational trust relationships is relationship duration.

In a study of collaborative relationships, Nyaga et al. (2010) examined antecedents of performance and satisfaction using commitment and trust as mediating variables in a quantitative survey, using theories of transaction cost economies (TCE) and SET. They found that collaborative activities such as joint relationship efforts, information sharing, and specific or dedicated investments lead to trust and commitment in relationships, and this in turn leads to satisfaction and performance. In a quantitative study of Taiwan manufacturing firms' supply chains, Chen et al. (2014) investigated the impact of trust on knowledge sharing from a relational perspective. Their findings show that if shared goals are developed between organisations, and they create social relational embeddedness and set influence strategies, trust emerges among them. Trust in turn positively influences interorganisational collaboration and knowledge sharing. This study extends organisational trust literature by considering relational factors rather than technological, economic or political factors.

Revilla and Knoppen (2015) studied how knowledge integration is facilitated through strategic supply chain management and trust from the buyer's perspective. They found that trust has a direct positive impact on joint scene making and joint decision making, and they represent dimensions of knowledge integration, as well as performance indicators, which are innovation and operational efficiency. The authors stress that trust must therefore be viewed as an organising principle. Also, as mentioned by Fawcett et al. (2012), for collaborative alliances to emerge and be sustained there should be a trust base. A study by Singh and Teng (2016) viewed trust and information technology in the same line as relationship resources that can help collaborative relationships. They built a model incorporating five factors: information technology integration, inter-organisational trust,

relational governance, transaction costs and supply chain performance. Among the findings they arrived at were that trust has a positive effect on performance, as well as reducing transactional costs and fostering relational governance.

Information technology can also enhance performance and directly improve relational governance. A recent study by Brinkhoff et al. (2015) proposes a model of relationship-level factors such as trust and dependence, and project-level factors such as top management and employee commitment and communication, investigating their role in project success. They investigated dyadic supply chain projects. They found that trust is necessary for the success of projects; however, its role is mediated by communication, employee commitment and top management support. This research, although stressing the importance of trust and communication, did not specify the means of communication (such as information technology). A study in China found that institutional factors such as interpersonal relationships affect trust, which in turn affected information sharing and collaborative planning. In other words, “building trust with a supplier as a governance tool leads to active information sharing and collaborative planning” (Cai et al., 2010, p. 266). This shows that the context in which firms operate has an impact on trust as well. China, in terms of its context, is close to Arab countries (Arab countries are discussed further in chapter 3). Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggested that in order for commitment and trust to develop and be sustained, firms in a relationship should provide resources or benefits that are better than those of other suppliers. Sharing knowledge and important information, and evaluation of performance, also helps to develop trust and commitment.

In terms of trust in the IORs of SMEs, there is limited research about buyer-supplier relationships in regards to SMEs. Small business relationships are highly dependent on social cues such as trust, rather than economic performance only (Murthy and Paul, 2017). Even in transactional relationships, Murthy and Paul (2017) found that social constructs, such as trust, control the economic exchange in small business relationships in India. Other studies have found that trust in SMEs facilitates ICT use and interaction with suppliers in both developing and developed economies (Mirkovski et al., 2016). In the context of SMEs, social factors play an important role, as the literature reveals. However, studies specifically about trust in SME IORs are very limited.

In a study about knowledge sharing in dyadic relationships, Cai et al. (2013) investigated buyers' perspectives about trust and the power of the suppliers. They found that knowledge sharing, represented in technical exchange and technology transfer, is significantly supported by trust and power; however, the effect of trust is stronger than power. This was investigated through structural equation modelling and by drawing on resource dependence theory and commitment-trust theory. Kim et al. (2010) investigated interorganisational cooperation in the Korean telecommunication industry, from the perspective of both buyers and suppliers. They synthesise various theories, such as resource dependence theory, transaction cost economics and social capital theory, in order to develop a model of inter-organisational cooperation. The results show that interorganisational trust and switching costs are the most important determinants for buyers, while trust does not appear important from the supplier's perspective. This can be explained due to power imbalances, where in this study buyers are more powerful than suppliers. This leads to the impact of power in inter-organisational relationships. The next section discusses power as an important factor in IORs.

As can be seen from the above studies, trust is an important facilitator of better relationships and better performance. It is mostly a middle point or the base point from which a relationship begins and is sustained. Power also appears in supply chain literature as an important part of buyer-supplier relationships; it appears with trust in many studies and is considered alone as an important concept in others, as the following paragraphs will show.

2.3.4.1 Power

Power is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, like trust. It is found to be important in understanding supply relationship management practices, as mentioned in Touboulic et al. (2014); it is considered in many past studies to be a key concept in buyer-supplier relationships. It is a main factor considered within resource dependence theory and transaction economics theory, and many other organisational theories (Ireland and Web, 2007). For example, from the perspective of resource dependence theory, when firms hold valuable and scarce resources, they have power over firms looking for these resources. From the perspective of transaction cost economics, this theory gives insight into the way firms within transactions gain power, while firms impact other firms in the transaction for economic gain. According to Ireland and Web (2007), power emerges in any IOR; there

must be one partner with greater power than the other. Cox et al. (2000) proposed a framework of dyadic buyer-supplier power structure types. These types include buyer dominance, where the power is with the buyer over the supplier; supplier dominance, which is the opposite; buyer-supplier interdependence, where there is high mutual dependence; and buyer-supplier independence, where there is low mutual dependence (Cox, 2001). They arrange it around matrix that can be used to examine different topics of power. It is important to understand buyer-supplier power exchange relationships (Cox, 2001).

Ireland and Webb (2007) investigated trust and power by building a framework based on social capital theory, resource dependence theory and transaction cost theory. They found that to obtain a strategic supply chain, trust and power must be balanced. The dynamics of power and trust are complex, however. Balance can be achieved to some extent by using different strategies, such as “establishing an authority, forming a common supply chain identity, interlocking organizations through the use of boundary spanners and maintaining organizational justice” (Ireland and Webb, 2007, p. 494). Touboulic et al. (2014) found that there is a power imbalance in all relationships between customers and suppliers when they investigated the impact of power on sustainable supply chain management practice implementation. They adopted resource dependence theory to analyse triadic relationships (buyer-supplier-supplier). They also found indications of the impact of power on relationship sustainability management; sustainability can be driven by powerful firms in a supply chain. They conclude that power imbalances are not always negative in sustainable supply chain management building. In a study by Chicksand and Rehme (2018), power imbalance was found to impact value appropriation. The authors recommend that parties should be clear about the benefits and sacrifices of business exchange and how these can be shared among parties.

Cox et al. (2001) built an analytical framework of power dynamics in buyer-supplier relationships from related studies and gaps in the literature, and tested the framework in a qualitative case study in the aerospace supply chain. They investigated how firms can manage direct and indirect relationships in the supply chains they fall in and to what end. Their findings indicate the importance of power as a concept to consider when answering such questions. The success of managing direct and indirect relationships in a supply network not only relies on “cultural alignments and managerial commitments”, but is “primarily a function of the complex pattern of exchange power that underpins supply

network relationships” (Cox et al., 2001, p. 223). The importance of considering power was evident in other research, such as a study by Cox et al. (2007), who investigated lean strategies in different supply chains through analysing power regimes. They found that only one of the supply chains they looked at adopted a lean approach, and the reason for this was power regime differences. Cox and Chicksand (2005) found that lean management can be applied internally in firms but that within external boundaries it might be difficult. In other words, lean interorganisational supply relationships can be applied by parties based on the power structure their relationship falls in, such as buyer dominance or interdependence. These structures “support long-term collaborative and lean approaches” (Cox and Chicksand, 2005, p.660).

The above studies indicate the importance of power as a concept that must be considered when answering many of the questions related to IORs. Power should be analysed in IORs and supply chains, because understanding the nature of a relationship can help in understanding other matters and in taking the right decisions.

Trust within information technology will be covered in the following section, which reviews inter-organisational information technology and traditional technologies, or more specifically supply chain technology, and their impact on relationships in supply chains, aiming to provide an understanding of the role and impact of IT and how social media can replace it.

2.3.5 Information technologies and IORs

The most important element of the use of information technologies in supply relationships is communication, which was found to be at the heart of any analysis of organisational relationships (Burgess et al., 2006). According to the benefits found in opening a communication channel with partners of a supply chain, as mentioned in Gligor and Autry’s (2012) paper, communication can help enhance and maintain a relationship between partners, help to develop knowledge, reduce uncertainty and conflict, and increase trust and cooperation. Moreover, it was mentioned that effective communication can reduce transaction costs, by increasing behavioural transparency, reducing uncertainty, advancing learning between organisations, increasing performance and satisfaction of relationship members, and giving more opportunities for better joint actions (Gligor and Autry, 2012).

Chong et al. (2009) found that when firms' communication is good, this improves the information flow between them, which in turn promotes more collaborative supply chain management. There are different types of technologies used for the purpose of communication with suppliers in the supply chain literature, which are discussed below.

The IT and the systems used between the actors in a supply chain are extensively covered in the literature, and among these technologies the most popular are the electronic radio interchange (EDI), radio frequency identification (RFID) and point of sale (POS) sharing systems. The main purpose for using these technologies is to communicate important information between the different partners in the supply chain, for example, changes in supplies that require replenishment (Pramatari, 2007). This communication of information helps in improving transparency and providing more accurate information, leading to more integration and collaboration along the supply chain, aiding faster replenishment, cutting costs, and saving time (Bourland, Powell and Pyke, 1996; Bunduchi et al., 2011; Leonard and Davis, 2006). Other types of supply chain technologies are part of traditional IT, facilitating information sharing and communication across firm boundaries (Liu et al., 2016). Their role in the supply chain is for execution of transactions, collaboration and coordination, and for supporting decisions, as Auramo et al.'s (2005) typology identifies.

Liu et al.'s (2016) study aimed to investigate the drivers and impacts of supply chain technology (SCT) use on performance, by understanding the motivation for the adoption (such as efficiency or legitimacy) and how this explains SCT use. They found that the economic motivation (efficiency) to adopt SCT is significantly associated with use of SCT. Firms who use SCT for high levels of information sharing showed a positive relationship between their SCT utilisation and delivery performance, and when they share accurate and timely information SCT can enact faster decisions and deliver better performance. With low levels of information sharing between partners, the relationship is hardly positive between SCT use and delivery performance.

Sanders (2008) evaluated specific patterns of IT use (exploitation and exploration) and explored how these relate to specific types of coordination with buyer and supplier performance. It was found that specific types of IT use affect specific types of coordination, such as operational and strategic, with no crossover between them. In addition, Paulraj et al. (2008) found strong evidence about the importance of long-term relationship

orientation, network governance and information technology in boosting *collaborative communication* among buyer-supplier relationships. Inter-organisational communication was found in this study to support buyer-supplier performance.

Aral et al. (2018) investigated IT use in supplier relationships and found that investments in IT that minimise search and coordination costs are related to use of more suppliers. However, when IT is specific for specific vendors, this is correlated with fewer suppliers. They also found that trust and repeated relationships are of significant importance in supply chain performance. Aral et al. (2018) mention that there is a lack of research about service sector supplier relationships, as most studies are in the manufacturing sector.

The use of IT seems to differ based on the context of the relationship, and customised projects are different from products using frequent supplies (Makkonen and Mervi, 2014). In a study in China on 208 firms, researchers tested the capability of IT in moderating supply chain collaboration and organisational responsiveness, by investigating three types of IT capability in different sectors. They found that IT capability moderates supply chain capability and organisational performance relationships. However, the effect of the three types of IT capability differs, as well as there being a difference across sectors, as sectors differ in terms of the extent of their IT use. Thus, the moderating effect of IT capability differs across sectors.

Zhang et al. (2016) examined electronic linkage, such as modern ICT, Internet (inter-organisational) and intranet (intra-organisational), and the difference between them in regards to supply chain performance, by focussing on supplier performance as an important element. They found that interorganisational ICT (the Internet) has a positive relationship on supply chain performance mediated by supply chain integration practices such as information sharing and cooperative relationships. Moreover, they found that information sharing between parties will be better if the relationship between them is cooperative.

In a case study about the use of mobile technologies in the steel industry between a mill and a supplier, Salo (2012) studied the changes occurring in the processes between them after adopting the technology. The process from order to delivery when they started to work in 2000 was manual and orders were placed by fax or phone. Order confirmations or notifications were handled manually and verbally, and pricing and billing were done using

paper. Scheduling for transportation was by fax or phone, but this was not without errors, information gaps and wasted time. They then adopted an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system in order to maintain the relationships, as well as using emails, using ERP especially for order handling. They then added pricing, but ERP adoption was not easy. The mill did, however, have enough experience and resources in IT, and the supplier also had some experience in IT. Recently, they added mobile systems, which they used to “speed inventory control, test-report transmissions and other non-routine communications” (Salo, 2012, p. 560). They used Wi-Fi and personal digital assistant (PDA) devices. This adoption digitised reporting and made it easier for both parties to process, whereas before mobile technologies reports were sent by post and filed. This took a long time and disturbed coordination between parties. PDAs are connected to ERP systems, which enables the system to update and send an email notification. Thus, the capacity of the supplier is now received by the mobile system instead of manually as it used to be received, already outdated. The mill can now have access to the supplier’ system where they can find real-time information about the production. There is a positive outcome of adopting mobile technologies as they can manage larger inter-organisational relationship coordination, leading to more effective and efficient relationships. They also create technology-based bonds between parties, which makes the relationship between them stronger and closes the information gap between parties. Trust and warm relationships between parties are what serve to make the adoption of mobile systems easier.

The above-mentioned studies mostly cover larger firms that are able to use expensive systems to facilitate their supply relationships. There is a lack of research about the factors impacting the use of ICT by SMEs from an inter-organisational perspective (Mirkovski et al., 2016). Mirkovski et al.’s (2016) case studies in developing (Macedonia) and developed (the USA) countries aimed to understand and compare the impact of inter-organisational relationships on ICT-mediated interactions of SMEs. By using transactional cost economics (TCE) and SET as a lens, they found that both Macedonian and US buyers preferred to use ICT for the benefits of saving costs and improving efficiency capabilities. They also found that ICT helps to build social bonds between parties where it becomes a substitute for contracts in developing countries. In this instance, social bonds were built between wineries and their suppliers to help increase trust in suppliers. It was found in this study that contracts are not often used by developing countries and they rely more on social bonds to govern relationships. The solid legal system in the developed country (the USA)

led buyers in this study to rely on the legal aspect rather than building social bonds. However, social bonds still emerged in the US case, and were used to increase trust in the supplier. For example, for fresh produce suppliers (grapes) they prefer social bonds, while for other raw materials such as glass bottles or yeast, they use contracts. Thus, for environmental uncertainty it depends on the context in the developed country case. Trust facilitates information sharing and collaboration and ICT use in the developing country context, while it indirectly influenced ICT use through information sharing in the American wineries. In other words, there is trust prior to ICT use, information sharing and collaboration in both developing and developed countries, and relational bonds have an appositive impact on trusting suppliers in both countries (Mirkovski et al., 2016).

Scuotto et al. (2017) investigated SME innovation performance and whether ICT oriented to intra- and inter-organisational processes has an impact on this performance. There is a lack of research about ICT's impact on SMEs' innovative performance. Scuotto et al. found a positive relationship between the innovation performance of SMEs and ICT use. ICT improved in-house R&D and open innovation models, that in turn positively affect SME innovation performance. This is when they use ICT to facilitate the flow of "informative, communicative, and work process data, as well as knowledge between the SMEs and internal and external actors, such as employees, customers and competitors among others" (Scuotto et al., 2017, p. 252). Scuotto et al. investigated a sample of 682 Italian SMEs in the service sector to investigate four proxies (buyer-supplier relationships, knowledge sharing activities, ICT specialised human resources, adoption of electronic market), on SMEs' use of ICTs (p. 1382). Among their findings is that the use of ICTs in SMEs' supply chain management positively supports buyer-supplier relationships. In addition, knowledge sharing activities are positively associated with ICT use in SMEs. They also mentioned the lack of research in the SME context, although the use of ICTs within SMEs' supply chain management is very important, because it helps SMEs to generate value from their partnerships and gain a competitive advantage in a competitive knowledge-based economy.

In conclusion, supply chain technologies and systems can clearly have a positive impact on the performance of inter-organisational relationships. The studies above show that there is a lack of research into SMEs' use of IT for their supply relationships, as well as the social impacts, such as trust, of inter-organisational information technology or information systems (IOIT/IS), which are less frequently reported in the literature. As mentioned in

Salo (2012), too many types of information technologies that are based on the Internet are employed by managers, and researchers see the need to explore IT use within relationships. Moreover, some studies recommend looking to social antecedents such as trust and its relationship to inter-organisational information systems and the impact on performance, because mostly the impact of IT is researched from IT-related antecedents (Kim et al., 2011). Moreover, there is evidence that the use of advanced IT systems removes the human element in buyer-supplier interactions, while trust is built on human interaction, as mentioned in Chae et al. (2005). Numerous studies of buyer-supplier relationships found that communication is an important element in building trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Besides their lack of human interaction and direct communication, advanced IT systems were found to be successful in organisations if there is a formative context (such as trust, dependence, long-term orientation and information sharing) that moderates the use and success of advanced IT; in other words, there is a good relationship prior to the use of advanced information technology (Chae et al., 2005; Vijayasarathy, 2010). This means that these technologies are not mainly used to build and enhance the relationship, but they are more to enhance the flow of operations and information between firms. Moreover, many supply chain technologies are more costly and complex to use (Olorunniwo and Li, 2010). Therefore, they are less likely to be used by SMEs, which are the focus of this study, because of the high cost and expertise needed. Also, they pay less attention to the social aspects of the relationship and ignore to some extent the human interaction, which is the first point in any relationship. An important concern of supply chain management is the behaviour of the parties of the relationships undertaken together in order to enhance relationship coordination (Carlo et al., 2006). Therefore, less advanced or traditional ICTs are reviewed in the next section to assess their impact on the relationships between parties in a supply chain.

2.3.6 Less advanced technologies

Based on Daft and Lengel's (1983, 1984) theory of media richness, more than one study has been conducted to see the influence of media richness on buyer-supplier relationships in different contexts. Media richness theory has proposed that the success of an organisation is based on its capability to reduce uncertainty and equivocality through processing information of relevant richness (Daft and Lengel, 1983). Uncertainty means the absence of information, where the uncertainty decreases if the available information increases.

Equivocality means ambiguity, where there is more than one interpretation that is inconsistent with the others, which leads to confusion and less understanding (Daft and Lengel, 1984). Daft and Lengel introduce the concept of “information richness”. Richness is defined as “the potential information carrying capacity of data” (Daft and Lengel, 1983, p. 7). They also argue that the richness of information is determined by the media used to deliver this information. They propose that communication media differ in their richness. The media includes face-to-face, phone calls, letters, written documents and numerical documents, where face-to-face is the richest medium and numerical documents are the least. In addition, each medium differs in its capacity to deliver *immediate feedback*, as well as in the communication channel utilised, the personality of the message and the language used (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Media richness

Information richness	Medium	Feedback	Channel	Source	Language
High	face-to-face	immediate	audio-visual	personal	body, natural
	telephone	fast	audio	personal	natural
	written, personal	slow	limited visual	personal	natural
Low	written, formal	very slow	limited visual	impersonal	natural
	numeric, formal	very slow	limited visual	impersonal	numeric

Adapted from Daft and Lengel (1983).

Face-to-face is regarded as the richest medium, as it can provide immediate response and feedback, which helps with understanding. Also, this medium of communication allows observation of multiple cues, such as body language, facial expression and tone of voice. What makes it so rich is that it delivers personal information using natural language. Telephone communication, on the other hand, despite having fast feedback, is less rich than face-to-face, since it lacks visual cues (body language, facial expressions); it only includes audio and language content. Written communication is even less rich, because the feedback is not immediate and what is written is the visual part of it with no audio cues available. The least rich medium are numerical documents, which usually contain quantitative data to deliver specific information about the organisation; these documents lack immediate feedback, personalisation or any cues to observe (Daft and Lengel, 1983).

In addition, Daft and Lengel provide a framework of how managers use available media to deal with different situations. The richest media is needed for unpredictable, complex phenomena, while low media richness is used for predictable, routine, simple tasks (Daft

and Lengel, 1983, 1984). Thus, media richness theory was proposed to describe and predict the ability of different media to deliver information that reduces ambiguity; the more the ambiguity in the task, the more the richest media is needed. As described by Vickery et al. (2004), media richness helps to effectively close the gap of expectation, cultural differences and assumptions between buyers and suppliers or any alliances, as managers usually rely on rich information to enable the transfer of complex information, and they also rely on rich communication to prevent conflict and resolve differences, and to increase the chance of effective associations between organisations (Vickery et al., 2004).

Vickery et al.'s (2004) research focused on two media of Daft and Lengel's (1983) framework, namely face-to-face and telephone, and they extended it to add electronic (email and EDI). Face-to-face is the richest information medium, as described above, telephone offers audio only, and electronic (email and EDI), where there is limited visual content, is classified as of medium to high richness. They investigated the impact of media richness on B2B service environments and found a direct effect of media richness on the performance of the relationship (Vickery et al., 2004).

Ambrose et al. (2008) used the same framework to explore whether the choice of communication media is affected by different stages in the relationship's development, and found that face-to-face is the preferred communication medium in new relationships, because of the richness of this channel and its ability to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty, and when the relationship develops it was found that less rich media such as telephone and email are used, depending on the buyers' and suppliers' needs. However, it was found that in more long-term relationships buyers and suppliers go back to using face-to-face communication, and this is supposed to be due to the social benefits of the relationship.

Carr and Kaynak (2007) investigated the relationship between communication methods, information sharing within and between firms, and support aimed at supplier development. By collecting data from 231 firms from different sectors they found that using traditional communication methods with key suppliers is positively related to the extent to which information is shared between buyer and key supplier, while the relationship between their use of advanced communication methods such as EDI, ERP and computer-to-computer links, and information sharing between buyers and suppliers, is not significant, which may be because the sample had low levels of usage of advanced communication methods. Also, it was found that traditional communication methods are indirectly related to product

quality improvement and financial performance through information sharing between firms.

There is limited research on SME practices regarding the use of information technology in their relationships, but it has been recommended that in order to increase SME competitiveness in local and international markets they must adopt management technologies (Bordonaba-Juste and Cambra-Fierro, 2009). Some studies look to SMEs' suppliers and buyers, and the impact of using information technologies on the relationship between them. Bordonaba-Juste and Cambra-Fierro (2009) found that in order to build a strong relationship with SME suppliers, it is necessary to blend use of information technologies and customised communication strategies in order to develop a cooperative relationship. Another study found cooperation determinants in the e-marketplace context, after looking at 400 SME buyers, allowing better understanding of the extent to which the ICT may affect and contribute to cooperative buyer-seller relationships (Lancastre and Lages, 2006).

To conclude, where advanced systems are aimed at building more collaborative relationships by communication and information sharing, in order to boost the performance of the supply chain, traditional media was found to help more in building trust between parties to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty and offer more human interaction than advanced technologies. Social media has been found to offer applications that might help to facilitate rich communication and interaction that can overcome the need for face-to-face meetings and physical nearness (Barnes et al., 2012; Fosso and Carter, 2014). It was expected that the potential of using it in SMEs would offer more collaboration between parties and networking as well as rich and fast information sharing (Kim et al., 2011), which can be a substitute for SMEs for the complex and high-cost advanced systems to some extent. However, the use of these media has not been investigated beforehand to see their impact on supply relationships, so SMEs' use and practices in adopting social media to build and enhance relationships were investigated in this research, in order to fill this gap in academic research.

2.4 Theoretical framework

Social media research in the context of SMEs is an evolving discipline and, as such, the use of theory and frameworks are limited, since most studies are exploratory in nature. On the other hand, the IORs and information technology literature is well developed, and thus rich in theories and frameworks.

This research will fall across several disciplines, such as IORs, information technology and small businesses. Therefore, it is logical to use a cross-disciplinary blend of theories in order to provide a complete picture of the phenomena being explored. As mentioned in Kembro et al. (2014, p. 609), “theoretical perspectives are important, as they can improve the description, explanation and predictions of complex phenomena”, such as the use of social technologies for relationships in the context of SMEs. Therefore, this research will blend several theories from related literature in order to provide a theoretical lens to cover different aspects of the research.

In a structured and systematic review of social media research by Ngai et al. (2015), various theories, constructs and conceptual frameworks were found to be used in different contexts of social media research, other than within the context of SMEs. Ngai et al. argue that this is expected because the use of social media involves different *socio-psychological factors*. Social exchange theory (SET) will be used as a lens for this research (section 2.2.4). This research will explore social technology in relationships. The use of this technology for relationships and the relationships themselves cannot be completely separated, as they are a complex social and IT mixture. Therefore, using social theory besides IT theories will help explain and understand the phenomenon much more clearly. In addition, some scholars agree on the need for caution when using a single theory to explain connected, complex supply chain relationships (Kembro et al., 2014). SET is classified under “relational governance theories” in a structured literature review of the theories used for information sharing in supply chains by Kembro et al. (2014, p. 612): “these theories are grouped together because they all focus on exchange mechanisms that are manifested in socially derived arrangements”. In the same review, it was found that SET with other social theories was among the most used as a lens for information sharing in supply chains, and in terms of the unit of analysis it was among the highest used for dyadic relationships. Also

it was among the most commonly used theoretical approach for research on IORs and trust (Delbufalo, 2012)

Among the known theories in IOR literature is social network theory. Social network theory was found to be used for extended relationships (Kembro et al., 2014), while this research will explore dyadic relationships within the same supply chain in the context of SMEs, where the supply chains might be shorter. This is a narrower view of the relationship than the network view. This justifies the use of SET for this research, because it is mostly used to explore dyadic relationships, as found by Kembro et al. (2014). Also, SET is extensively used for relationships research (in the supply chain context) (e.g. Bunduchi, 2008; Ehret and Haase, 2012; Kern and Willcocks, 2000; Lai, 2009; Vandaele et al., 2007; Weaver and Dickson, 1998; Wei et al., 2012; Young-Ybarra and Wiersema, 1999). This research will extend the use to include mediated relationships through social technologies (social media).

In order to complement SET, effectuation theory will be used as another foundation for this research (section 2.3.1.1). The process of selecting a new relationship involves a decision-making process, and some studies allocate the effectuation process as a rationale for investigating uncertainty in decision making (Read et al., 2009). Previous research has clarified that the logic of effectuation falls within larger decision making, and within the category of uncertainty (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). Although this theory was found to have emerged first in entrepreneurship studies (Sarasvathy, 2001, 2008), in a meta-analysis by Read et al. (2009) it was found that effectuation theory was gaining interest in studies related to management, economics and psychology. It has also lately been extended to address questions related to finance and innovation, although it was developed first around start-up activities (Read et al., 2009). Also, it was used by Berends et al. (2014) in the context of small firms to explore product innovation processes, and by Fischer and Reuber (2011), in the social media context, to explore how effectuation processes are impacted when entrepreneurs adopt Twitter as a social interaction medium in a B2B context. The logic of effectuation is appropriate for small firms' strengths and limitations with regards to their limited resources and flexibility, as suggested by Berends et al. (2014). One of the main constructs of the theory is *social interaction*. As mentioned in Fischer and Reuber (2011), limited research attention has been paid to the role of social interaction in effectuation. Most studies pay attention to the entire network or a specific type of relationship, but not to the social interaction between parties (Fischer and Reuber, 2011).

Moreover, they stress that social media use is increasing and offers a variety of means for social interaction.

Effectuation theory and social exchange theory meet at the social interaction point. According to SET, an interaction is defined as a “social exchange process” (Bruhn et al., 2014). As mentioned in Kingshott (2006), based on SET, when parties socially exchange trust, commitment and dependence evolve as a result of the socialisation process. This informs us that SET needs a history of exchanges in order to find a social outcome of the relationship (e.g. trust, commitment and dependence), and effectuation is used for decision making under uncertainty, and does not require a long time to produce outcomes. Therefore, SET and effectuation theory will be used together to explore social media as a medium for social interaction for current relationships and for the new relationships where there is no history of interaction, and social media serves as a medium for selection and interaction for the relationship.

Social media will be explored as a medium for relationships, to complement the group of theories (SET and effectuation theory), acting as a theory that pays attention to the functionality of the media. Since social media is considered a rich media (multimedia), media richness theory (MRT) is considered relevant and effective to explain social media richness. Based on Daft and Lengel’s (1983, 1984) theory of media richness, more than one study has been conducted to examine the influence or choice of media richness on buyer-supplier relationships in different contexts. All three theories (SET, effectuation and MRT) were found in the systematic review by Ngai et al. (2015) of social media research. These three theories will be used together to explore and reveal the complex dyadic relationships in SME contexts in the developing, unique culture of Kuwait.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review covers social media in general, social media and SMEs and social media and supply chain literature. It found diverse yet limited research about social media use in SMEs, although the literature revealed the positive impact and the benefits of social media for such organisations. Social media and SMEs literature is diverse in different topics; supply relationships received the least attention, however. The available conceptual papers expect a positive impact of social media in supply chains. Empirical papers looked

to the impact on operational efficiency: one found a positive impact and the other did not find an impact. Moreover, no studies looked at SMEs in this regard and most were conducted in Western countries.

IORs literature, although rich in research and covering many aspects from different theoretical lenses and disciplines, has paid less attention to SMEs within both the areas of supplier selection and the use of IT in relationships. Arab countries and Kuwaiti literature in this area is particularly scarce. Social media and IORs in the context of SMEs have to the researcher's knowledge never been covered in the literature. This research fills these gaps in knowledge, and extends social media research to include supply relationships in the SME context, as well as extending IOR research to include new technology in the IO-IT used by SMEs. It will also cover this big gap in research into Kuwait and Arab countries in general in all areas of social media, IORs and SMEs.

SET, effectuation theory and MRT were used as the theoretical lenses for this research. These interdisciplinary theories will be used together to allow a full exploration of this complex topic.

The next chapter covers the research context, Kuwait and SMEs.

Chapter Three: Research context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the research context, Kuwait and SMEs. It first covers the research location, including the use of social media in Kuwait and the culture of Kuwait. Then it outlines the characteristics of SMEs that might have an impact on the use of information technology.

3.2 Kuwait

Kuwait is a small developing country in the Gulf region of the Arab Middle East. It is on the north-west side of the Arabian Gulf. Kuwait, although small geographically (17,818 sq. km), is important globally, because it is one of the most productive oil-producing countries, containing 6% of global reserves of oil (World Factbook, 2018). Arab Middle Eastern countries are an important economic region, because of their natural resources, their geographical location and the political impact the region has (Khakhar and Rammal, 2013). The importance of the region makes it attractive for foreign direct investment (Zahra, 2011).

The Kuwaiti economy is relatively open (World Factbook, 2018) and numbers of Kuwaiti SMEs are high, but their contribution to the economy is very low, accounting for about 3% of the GDP (World Bank, 2016). Oil production and related industries drive the Kuwaiti economy forward (Hernandez et al., 2013) and petroleum accounts for half of Kuwait's GDP, with 92% of export revenue and 90% of government income (World Factbook, 2018). This reliance on oil is a major problem facing the economies of most Gulf countries, including Kuwait (Elasrag, 2011). Therefore, oil producing countries (GCC) have set new diversification plans to help their economies by financing the private sector and SMEs through generous special funds set up for this purpose (GICWED, 2013). The Kuwaiti government is working to help the economy be driven by SMEs (Hernandez et al., 2013). The government introduced the Kuwait National Fund for SMEs in 2013 and invested KD 2 billion (£4.4 billion) to support SMEs; this is a big step by the Kuwait government towards diversifying the economy (Hernandez et al., 2013). Another strategy by Kuwait government is to open the door for direct foreign investment, and to oblige foreign investors to do business with local SME suppliers, and this is one of the licensing approval and

incentives criteria based on the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion law (KDIPA, 2016). SMEs in Gulf countries are receiving generous financing from their governments in order to steer these economies away from reliance on oil, but still there is more support needed from the government to sustain Gulf countries' SMEs, including in Kuwait (GICWED, 2013). In order to see a positive effect on the economy of Kuwait, Altamimi (2013) claims that monetary support is not enough, and the Kuwaiti government needs more policies and a wider strategic vision to help these companies succeed.

3.2.1 Social media in Kuwait

Internet penetration in Kuwait is very high according to World Factbook, which states that 78% of the population use the Internet (World Factbook, 2016). While Kuwait's population of 4,052,584 in 2013 (Country Economy, 2016) is relatively small, it is ranked 42nd globally among 139 in the use of social media, according to a global information technology report (Baller et al., 2016). Nearly half of the population of Kuwait uses social media (Kemp, 2014). In 2014 Facebook was used by 26.75% of the population of Kuwait and active Twitter users of Kuwait generated 10% of Arabic tweets, even though Kuwait is relatively small compared to other Arab countries; the total number of LinkedIn users in 2014 was nearly double the number of users in 2013 (Arab social media report, 2014). The adoption rate of social media has been high in most Arab countries in recent years (Arab social media report, 2014). It is clear that the adoption rate of social media in the Arab region is steadily increasing and the value it has for Arab users is significant (Richard, 2012). Moreover, the Kuwaiti government issued a new law in 2014 regarding electronic transactions, including via social media, that validates official and customary electronic documents or records, copies on paper, electronic signatures and electronic writing (Council of Ministers, 2014).

Owing to the high penetration rate among individuals in Arab countries, it is believed that social media significantly affects the social and cultural aspects of the area (Richard, 2012). However, this is individual use, whereas the business use of social media in Kuwait remains largely unknown. One study of Twitter use in Kuwait reported that one of the major facilitators to business was the use of Twitter, the wide reach of social media in Kuwait and the wide Internet coverage (Aladwani, 2015). According to a global information technology report (Bilbao-Osorio et al., 2014), Kuwaiti business-to-business and business-

to-customer Internet use is ranked 61 and 69 respectively amongst 148 countries, while in 2012 the extent of business Internet use in Kuwait was ranked 91 in 142 (Dutta and Bilbao-Osorio, 2012). However, there is a gap in research on how businesses are using social media for business in Kuwait, and thus more research is needed to explore this area.

3.2.2 Kuwaiti culture

To understand the whole picture, it is essential to recognise and understand the communities and cultures in which firms operate (Elamin, 2012; Gupta and Singh, 2013). The culture of the Arab Middle East is unique in many respects (Welsh and Raven, 2006), and is considered to be one of the most complex cultural and social systems in the world (Rose and Straub, 1998). Arabic culture is strongly collectivist (Hofstede, 1980) and values extended relationships (Aladwani, 2013). This indicates also that people in the Arab world focus on building relationships and trust (Khakhar and Rammal, 2013), and interpersonal relationships are critical for Arabs, as they value trust and respect in their communications with others, as well as harmony, be it in families or other networks (Elamin, 2012). What mostly governs business relationships in Arab countries and other collective cultures is trust, in comparison to Western cultures that are governed more through contracts (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993; Gupta and Singh, 2013). Business models in the Arab world are socially oriented, where relationships and individuals are more important than the business itself (Rice, 1999). On the other hand, in the Western world things are more achievement-oriented, as business is more central than people or personnel themselves (Uzzi, 1997).

According to Hall (1966), culture can be identified as being high- or low-context. Where individuals from low-context cultures are more task-focused and communicate message explicitly, those from high-context cultures tend to pay more attention to building relationships and usually communicate messages implicitly (Khakhar and Rammal, 2013). Arab countries are classified as high-context (Hall, 1966). For example, in a recent study about the negotiation process between Arab and non-Arab managers, it was shown that Arab managers focused on building relationships before any deal was made with non-Arab managers, including personal (not business-related) relationships, and they use referent power (Khakhar and Rammal, 2013). The referent power is due to the relationships and trust between individuals.

Moreover, according to Hofstede (1980), Arabic culture is high in uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede's index of cultural dimensions measures the extent to which a society can accept uncertainty and ambiguity. For example, people from high uncertainty avoidance cultures fear adopting technologies that are highly complex and unclear. Instead, they prefer easy technologies that are not complex to use (Belkhamza and Wafa, 2009). For instance, in a cultural-comparative study between Kuwaiti and British users of e-government portals, there was a difference between the two groups about the perceived performance of the quality of the e-government websites tested. The British group valued the fonts and the speed of page loading, while the Kuwaitis rated highly the content clarity and search facilities' performance (Aladwani, 2013).

In general, Arab societies are reluctant to trust outsiders, as they have more confidence in their families, especially in regards to key business decisions (Ali, 1995). For strong control purposes, family members are preferred over non-family in business, regardless of their efficiency (Sudani and Thornberry, 2013). In contrast, managers from low uncertainty avoidance societies, like the UK, are usually delegators, risk-takers, more accepting and less emotional (Hofstede, 1991). In a study by AlHussan, AlHusan and Alhesan (2017), they explored the roles of senior managers (in non-Arab companies) in business-to-business (B2B) relationship management with Arab Middle Eastern (Jordanian) buyer companies. They found that being involved at a social, personal level with buyers is important in Arab cultures, because it helps to build trust, and trust is important for relationships with Arab business, because they rely on trust more than the organisation. Moreover, they stressed the importance of social meetings and gatherings for Arab relationships, as many business offers and opportunities are discussed and opened in these gatherings. In addition, the lack of formality in Arab organisations makes them rely more on informalities and trust for their relationships. "Business is personal" in the Arab world, as the authors found (ALHussan, AlHusan and Alhesan, 2017, p. 832). In the West, business is conducted through organisations, while in Arab countries it is conducted through trust and social networks. The findings show that Arab key buyers obligate suppliers' top managers for high involvement with them even for operational levels of work, in comparison to Western societies where this is a strategic choice.

Another study in Saudi Arabia explored the relationship of organisational justice and trust in immediate supervisors by using social exchange theory as a lens through which to

analyse the Arab and Islamic context (Tlaiss and Elamin, 2015). Their findings show that when judging fairness Saudi managers rely more on “interpersonal concerns” than the “structure of procedure” or “actual outcomes” (Tlaiss and Elamin, 2015, p. 1054). This is also present in other collective communities like China, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia, as limited studies reveal.

Building a personal relationship can also be achieved by getting involved with people on their special occasions, like weddings and birthdays, or by giving gifts or lunch invitations. In a study exploring Arab cultural influence on trust in B2B Emirati banking relationships, the dyadic relationships between Emirati and non-Emirati bankers and their business clients were examined. Joujeir and Brennan (2017) found that in an Arab/Muslim context, religion, culture and shared values have an impact and serve as a significant mediating variable on the antecedents of trust. These findings can apply to other Gulf countries, and Arab/Muslim countries generally, as the authors indicate. Their results show that Emirati to Emirati relationships are symmetrical, while Emirati to non-Emirati relationships are asymmetrical. Some of the non-Emirati bankers who had worked there for a long time and understood the culture of the UAE indicated also the importance of “family name” in gaining trust. However, other non-Emirati bankers with less experience of the UAE showed less understanding of local culture, stating they are more “cognitive, calculative and business-oriented” (Joujeir and Brennan, 2017, p. 25).

This is, in brief, some of the Arab cultural aspects that might shape business and technology use in the Middle East, including in Kuwait. The next paragraph will discuss “*Duwaniyah*”, a specific Kuwaiti social phenomenon.

3.2.4 *Duwaniyah*

Kuwait is characterised by a social phenomenon known as “*Duwaniyah*”. *Duwaniyahs* can be described as social, political and cultural gatherings, which are periodical (usually once a week). The latest news and topics are usually discussed in the *Duwaniyah*. Key moments of Kuwait’s history and important decisions (e.g. social, political and economic) were made in certain *Duwaniyahs*. The history of *Duwaniyahs* goes back to the beginning of Kuwait’s establishment, when merchants, Sheikhs (royal family rulers) and judges conducted their work through *Duwaniyahs*.

Duwaniyahs can be categorised into two main types. The first, and probably the most common type, is where family and/or close friends gather. The second type is more related to business and political affairs. The second type is an opportunity to discuss deals and contracts between business people. Furthermore, *Duwaniyahs* in general can be a place for other purposes such as solving social conflicts and conducting social events such as weddings or condolence gatherings.

As Abdullah Al-Otaibi has written in the *Al-Jareedah* newspaper in Kuwait (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2007), diplomats in Kuwait are familiar with the importance of *Duwaniyahs* in Kuwaiti culture. Therefore, diplomats make sure to socialise through *Duwaniyah* gatherings, either in return for Kuwaiti visits or during special occasions such as Ramadan. Furthermore, Al-Otaibi mentions that diplomats know the timing of *Duwaniyahs*, at least the main *Duwaniyahs* in Kuwait (*Duwaniyahs* are known for their social and political influence), and therefore they visit these *Duwaniyahs* on a regular basis. *Duwaniyahs* are considered an opportunity for diplomats to get to know Kuwaiti people away from the official channels. This in turn can be beneficial to the development of relationships between other countries and Kuwait. Also, it can benefit diplomats in their jobs, especially when they are required to give an impression about certain issues regarding Kuwaiti culture.

The second important context to this research is SMEs, which are discussed in the next section.

3.3 SMEs

The definition of SMEs differs from country to country and from region to region. For example, in the UK, as a developed country, SMEs are divided into three sizes: micro, where there are up to nine employees, small, which have 10 to 49, and medium, which have 50 to 250. In Kuwait, a developing country, there is no clear definition of SMEs, but there are strategies and laws for diversifying the economy away from oil and helping SMEs to grow and contribute to GDP. The latest law, no. 98 for the year 2013, regarding the national fund and SME development, sets a clear definition for SMEs (*Kuwait Today*, 2013) as follows:

- Small businesses: have 1-4 employees and capital of less than KD 250,000 (approximately £ 500,000);
- Medium businesses: have 5-50 employees with capital of less than KD 500,000 (approximately £ 1,000,000).

This is the definition used in this research. However, it should be clear that the definition of Kuwaiti SMEs is narrow and specific to Kuwait. The definition differs from the widely known definition applied to European and North American businesses. Kuwaiti SMEs are considered micro to small businesses based on the European definition, for example, therefore it should be noted that comparisons across SMEs literature from different contexts should not be direct.

The following section outlines some SME characteristics that might affect their use of information technology.

3.3.1 SME characteristics

There are many characteristics reported in the literature about SMEs that might either be positive for the use of technology or more of a challenge. The following points summarise the most important points for the purpose of this research:

1. **The owner-manager:** SME managers are usually in direct contact with operations (Gelinas and Bigras, 2004). There are different types of SME manager (Morrissey and Pittaway, 2004), regarding their knowledge, expertise, innovation and other factors that will affect many decisions (Ali and Magalhaes, 2008; Harland et al., 2007). In the context of Arab countries, the managers have a major impact on many decisions, including IT adoption, as found by Elbaltagi's (2013) study in the UAE. They concluded that their results indicate that a manager's opinion has more impact in Arab countries and their role in SMEs specifically is very important; the decision is centred on the manager rather than participated in by other employees. They add that this is possibly due to Arabic culture, where there is a high power distance, as described by Hofstede (1980).
2. **Limited resources and funds:** many studies in different parts of the world highlight the fact that SMEs lack resources and suffer from financial barriers

(Burhanuddin et al., 2009; Harland et al., 2007; Morissey and Pittaway, 2006; Naguyen, Newby and Macaulary, 2015). This in turn is a major inhibitor of the use of and investment in IT (Harland et al., 2007; Kauremaa et al., 2009; Naguyen, Newby and Macaulary, 2015).

3. **Limited skills:** this includes management skills, limited IT and IS skills (Burhanuddin et al., 2009; Harland et al., 2007; Karanasios and Burgess, 2006; Kauremaa et al., 2009; Naguyen, Newby and Macaulary, 2015). Also, there is often a lack of expert consultation and limited research due to limitations of staff and employees (Burhanuddin et al., 2009) and a lack of training (Harland et al., 2007).
4. **Flexibility:** SMEs are less bureaucratic and hierarchical (Oviatt, McDougall, 1994). They mostly use simple decision-making processes (Gelinias and Bigras, 2004). Their flexibility in comparison to large firms is favourable to the adoption of integrated systems (Gelinias and Bigras, 2004), because they need less response time to apply change (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994).
5. **Short-term strategies:** SMEs often focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency, and this is good because it enables them to take fast actions and solve problems; however, it is also a disadvantage because the focus is short-term, instead of having a long strategic approach (Gelinias and Bigras, 2004). This also indicates their lack of strategies for business and for IT investment (Naguyen, Newby and Macaulary, 2015).
6. **Underutilised IT:** SMEs are found to use less IT and this is a major disadvantage (Gelinias and Bigras, 2004). Some research has found that some SMEs' key drivers to adopt IT is if larger or more powerful businesses push them to use it (Harland et al., 2007). Additionally, it was found that the barrier to adopt IT is often due to technical issues, for example, SME concerns about viruses and hacking, security issues, incompatibility, and time and cost needed to update technology (Harland et al., 2007). Others found low internal information system readiness to be a constraint to wider adoption of inter-organisational IS with other firms in the supplier network (Kauremaa et al., 2009).

These in brief are some of the characteristics that might be found in most SME studies, and the related information regarding Kuwait as for the location of this research. The following chapter present the methodology of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The overall research aim is to investigate in depth the impact of social media use in supply relationships in Kuwaiti SMEs. In other words, the key research question is “how does the use of social media in Kuwaiti SMEs affect inter-organisational relationships?” Chapter 2 provided a literature review and based on this developed a theoretical framework to be used as a lens to answer the research question. This chapter describes the research design, sampling, context and access issues, as well as data collection and preparation, data analysis, quality of research, and data and ethical issues raised by the research. It follows the “progressive focusing” notion suggested by Stake (1995) and adapted by Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) to propose a model (figure 4.1) that aids the complex iterative process and the trustworthiness issues of qualitative research. The chapter is organised in the same manner as Sinkovics and Alfoldi’s model, as the following diagram illustrates.

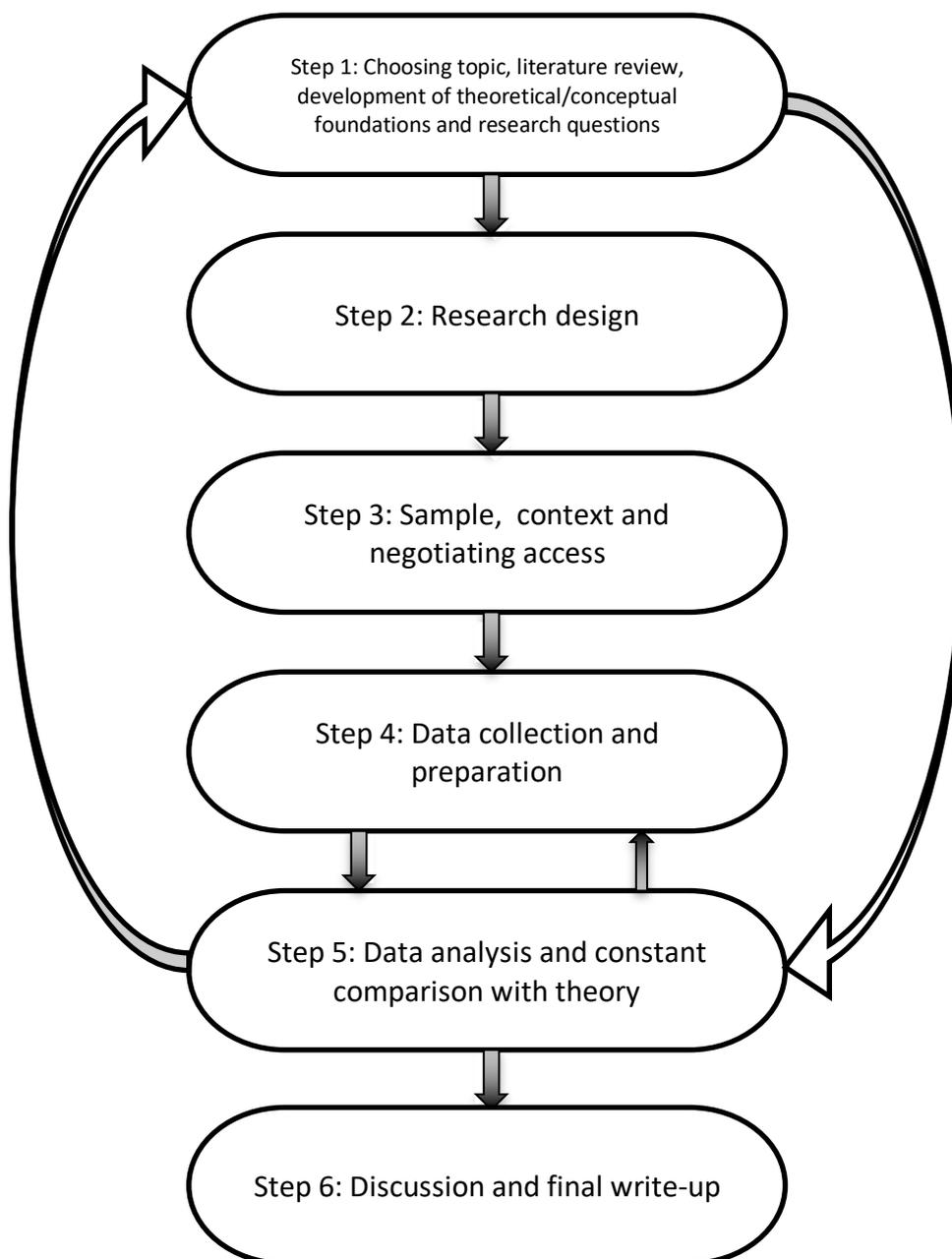


Figure 4.1: Progressive focusing. Adapted from Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012).

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 Philosophy underpinning the research

Research methodologies are diverse and should be based on philosophical commitments that have implications for research design and methods (Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012). Therefore, it is important first to know the philosophy underpinning the research, which will guide the design and methodology choice. It has been argued that the

researcher's view of the nature of reality (ontology) and what constitutes acceptable knowledge (epistemology) affect their choice of philosophical stance (Benton and Craib, 2011). If the researcher believes that the nature of reality is created from "the perception and sequent actions of social actors" (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132), then they adopt the subjectivist view of ontology, where reality can be found in the details of a situation and socially constructed by actors (Saunders et al., 2012) and where human interpretation is the starting point for knowledge about the social world (Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012). This view of the nature of reality and what constitutes acceptable knowledge means that the researcher is adopting an interpretive philosophy (Saunders et al., 2012). This is in line with this study, which explores the research topic from several actors' perspectives (buyers and suppliers), i.e. regarding their relationship through social media within the context of SMEs, which all have different characteristics. This is in the context of a developing country, Kuwait, which has its own unique culture that differs from that of other nations. An interpretive philosophical stance argues that it is difficult to capture social reality in a formal proposition, quantify it and control it by experiment (Lee, 1991), as the opposite philosophy in social science suggests (positivism). Human behaviour is unpredictable because humans are unique in their possession of free will, and the level of awareness they have of and the meaning they apply to social life (Benton and Craib, 2011). It has been argued that taking a positivist approach and making law-like generalizations about the world reduces the complexity of the world and loses the potential for rich insights about the world (Saunders et al., 2012). For these reasons this research will adopt an interpretive philosophical stance.

Interpretivism is considered a loose term that covers a variety of philosophical approaches which take human interpretation as the starting point for knowledge about the social world (Duberley, Johnson and Cassell, 2012). It is unlike positivism, which believes that reality is out there, external to the researcher, and that there is a single reality. The ontology of interpretivism holds the view that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and reproduced by communication, interaction and practice, therefore knowledge about reality is always known through the researcher (Tracy, 2013). Social constructionism is a reflection of interpretivism. The core of social constructionism is that reality is specified by people rather than by objective and external factors, therefore social scientists should not collect facts and measure how many times specific patterns occur, but rather they should be concerned about the different meanings that people place upon their experiences.

Concentration should be on people, individually and collectively, their thinking and feeling, and the focus should be on the ways they communicate together, whether verbally or non-verbally (Easterby-Smith, 2008). The German term *verstehen* is usually used to describe social constructionism, which is translated as understanding what is going in an actor's head. This involves an understanding of logical and symbolic systems, including the culture where the actors live, since the shared culture of actors is important to an interpretive understanding (Benton and Craib, 2011). This research adopts the philosophy of social constructionism.

4.2.2 Qualitative research

Based on the philosophy (social constructionism) underpinning this research, the choice of research method is qualitative, because this methodological choice is usually associated with this philosophy (Saunders et al., 2012). A qualitative approach allows the exploration of the effect of social media on relationships. Relationships are based mainly on social aspects, so it is more sensible to explore them in depth from the perspective of the actors themselves, rather than quantify them and lose the rich insights behind them. As Yin states, qualitative research gives the researcher the “ability to study events within their real world context – including the relevant culture of the people, organization or group being studied” (2011, p. 78). Many qualitative studies start with an inductive approach, where the data drives the theory. In line with most qualitative research while this research follows an inductive approach of qualitative studies there are similarities with the abductive approach. The reason is that this research analysis and findings started inductively but later were generated through an iterative process between theoretical framework, related literature and participants' explanations; this recursive cycle indicates that it is not a purely inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.2.3 Case study approach

A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Case studies often generate answers to questions commencing with “why”, “how” and “what” (Yin, 2003). Case study research is an applicable strategy for management research because, as Cepeda and Martin (2005) outline,

it helps to study the state-of-the-art of management in a natural setting. The theory generated from management case studies is based on practice. Also, case studies help to reveal the complexity and the nature of organisations' processes through answering 'how' and 'why'. Finally, they state that it is a suitable strategy for studying areas in which there is limited previous research. Several leading scholars have used the case study method to study SMEs (e.g. Iacovou, Benbasat and Dexter, 1995; Hotho and Champion, 2011; Chetty and Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Perren and Ram, 2004). Most studies found by the researcher that explore the use of social media in SMEs adopt a qualitative case study design (e.g. Razmerita and Kirchner, 2011; Barnes et al., 2012; Sarosa, 2012; Daniela et al., 2013; Roy and Dionne, 2014). Case studies can be used for several aims, for example to provide descriptions, to test theory or to generate theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). This research aims to carry out the last use, i.e. generate theory from case studies.

Case studies can include one case or multiple cases and also can involve many levels of analysis (Yin, 2003). This research will include multiple case studies because, as stated by (Yin, 2003), conducting more than one case study provides a robust base for theory building.

Building theory from case studies is a research strategy that involves using one or more cases to create theoretical constructs, propositions or mid-range theory from case-based empirical evidence. (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 25)

Furthermore, multiple case studies provide a chance for a wider exploration of a phenomenon and for theoretical elaboration (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

It was found that there are no theories covering this research study's interdisciplinary questions. Therefore, a set of theories from interdisciplinary and related literature, on IT, SMEs and inter-organisational relationships, were used as a lens to guide data collection and analysis. These theories include social exchange theory (SET), effectuation theory and media richness theory (MRT). The final output of inductive case studies can be concepts, a conceptual framework, propositions or possibly mid-range theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). This research aimed to generate propositions that can be tested further in future research. A single case study can explain a phenomenon in depth, however, multiple case studies are commonly better for stronger theory-building base (Yin, 2003). Multiple case studies give

more analytical power; for example, four cases have four times the analytical power of one case (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). As mentioned before, “the theory building process occurs via recursive cycling among case data, emerging theory and later the extant literature” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 25), as adopted in this research (Figure 4.1). The following sections explain in detail the steps and process taken to achieve this. It should be noted, that although some of the approaches and tools used here are towards the qualitative positivists approach (such as Eisenhardt and Graebner suggestions), it is not the case with the approach taken here.

4.3 Sampling, context and access

After adopting the strategy of multiple cases to generate a theory or propositions in this research, it is important to clarify the method via which the cases were chosen, as well as the context of the cases and how they were accessed.

First of all, the cases were chosen from Kuwaiti SMEs (see chapter 3 for discussion of Kuwait and SMEs), because the use of social media is very high in Kuwait and SMEs are the majority firms in terms of numbers. The government is pushing SMEs to grow and become a main source of income along with oil. The social nature of Kuwaiti culture means caring about relationships. Given all this, there is little research that covers these issues in Kuwait. Moreover, there is a gap in research in this interdisciplinary subject in general, in the literature on topics such as SMEs, social media and supply relationships.

The cases were selected from multiple sectors, including service and manufacturing. The reason for this is that the nature of work in each sector is different, which could influence the impact and use of rich media (Ambrose et al., 2008). This is especially the case in B2B relationships, as Vickery et al. (2004) have argued. Therefore, similar to Ambrose et al.’s (2008) study, we assume the sector to have an impact on the use of social media with suppliers. This is also to increase the validity of the research.

The research aimed for six case studies, but there was the potential for this number to increase within the available time, until the cases provide theoretical saturation, where a new case does not add significant insights. However, the maximum number of cases was limited to ten, as Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that more than ten will generate a lot of data

that is difficult to control, while less than four is insufficient to generate theory. This research aimed for six cases at first because there are cases within each case. For example, the focal firm is the buyer SME and their first-tier suppliers (constituting a dyadic relationship), then the other cases within the case are the first-tier supplier and second-tier supplier (second dyadic relationship) in the same supply chain (figure 4.2), which fulfil the condition of being a Kuwaiti SME that uses social media with business buyers or suppliers. It was not clear how many cases and sub-cases would be found within each supply chain. Therefore, the number was open, as mentioned earlier, from four to ten cases. However, cases found and reached were five supply chains, and access was available to sub-cases within them for four of the five cases only. Therefore case studies were conducted on four supply chains. Each case study is a supply chain of different SMEs (figure 4.2). There is an average of four dyadic relationships in each case study.

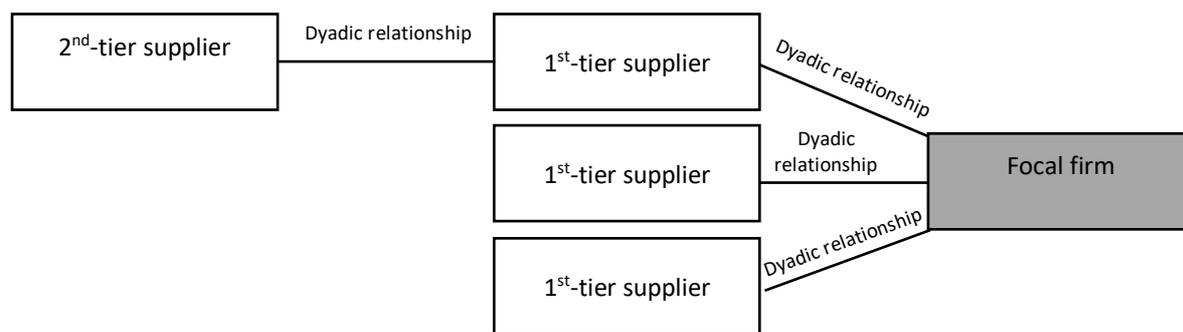


Figure 4.2: Example of case study supply chain

The purpose of case study selection here is not to represent a population, such as in statistical sampling (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013), and not to represent typical Kuwaiti SMEs, because this is impractical (Barnes et al., 2012), as small businesses are not homogenous in nature (Martin and Matlay, 2001). But as Barnes et al. point out in their qualitative study, the purpose of sampling is to “hold a lens to our emerging theory rather than population sampling” (Barnes et al., 2012, p. 693). And as Eisenhardt states, the goal of sampling for inductive case studies is to “replicate or extend the emergent theory” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 537). Therefore, the cases were selected to fill the condition of being Kuwaiti SMEs (based on the Kuwaiti definition of SMEs) that use social media specifically with their suppliers or buyers (business customers).

The first technique used was theoretical sampling, where the cases were selected because of their anticipated theoretical relevance to the research (Eisenhardt, 1989). The second technique used was snowball sampling; this was used within the five main cases to reach the other participants (relationships) in the same supply chain, representing dyadic buyer-supplier relationships, as in figure 4.2. The researcher asked respondents to recommend three of their suppliers that they use social media with. Suppliers or buyers from outside Kuwait were avoided to keep the cases in the same context (Kuwait).

Although the SME population can be found in the Ministry of Commerce and other government databases, the specific population is unknown (of SMEs using social media). Therefore, multiple strategies were used to find participants. Some cases were found on social media platforms, such as the wedding planner, design and construction companies, the gift shop, and others. The researcher observed that they are active on social media platforms and they mention their suppliers on their Instagram pages, which means that they are likely to use it with their suppliers. The real estate company was introduced to the researcher through their connections, who knew that the researcher was conducting research about social media use and its impact. For the manufacturing sector, the search for a case study that was mainly in the manufacturing sector and using social media was not easy. Therefore, a list of manufacturing sector companies that was available online through the Kuwaiti public industry authority was examined. Small and medium companies were extracted and contacted by email to introduce the research and ask for participation. Two companies responded, and when contacted further it appeared that one of them was not using social media with their buyers and suppliers. The other one was the wood factory, which was found to use social media.

After finding the cases (focal firms) and asking them to participate in the research, the researcher asked to pre-interview them to introduce the idea of the research and make sure that they are using social media with buyers or suppliers. All focal firms were pre-interviewed, some over the phone and some face-to-face. When they demonstrated a real use of social media with buyers or suppliers they were chosen to be part of the sample. Most cases were cooperative with the researcher, a PhD student, and offered to help because the study was sponsored by a known educational institution in Kuwait, which made them more comfortable with providing information and participating. In addition, the researcher introduced the research in a friendly way and let them know that all information

would be secure and used only for educational purposes, because the researcher as a Kuwaiti knows what makes people comfortable enough to trust someone. There were five cases: three from the service sector, a wedding planner, a real estate company and a gift shop, and one in the manufacturing sector, a wood factory. The last is in two sectors, which are design and construction. General sectors were used, such as service and manufacturing, because it was found that Kuwaiti sectors are divided into too many sections within service and manufacturing, and SMEs themselves are often not sure which Kuwaiti sector they belong to.

Priority was given to upstream suppliers because there is limited research about upstream supply chain use of social media. However, when there was not much active use, buyers (downstream) were selected. At the end the relationship should compromise a dyadic relationship (buyer and supplier). All cases recommended upstream suppliers, except the pure manufacturing sector, wood factory, which recommended buyers, because they don't use it with suppliers, as most of their suppliers are outside Kuwait. It was expected that two to three tiers of suppliers would be reached within cases because SMEs' supply chains are more likely to be short in Kuwait, where most are from outside Kuwait. And this was indeed the case: the researcher reached two tiers of suppliers in most cases. Most second- or third-tier suppliers were not using social media or were outside Kuwait, therefore they were less than first-tier suppliers in all cases, as the case analyses will show. Table (4.1) shows all the SMEs that participated in this research, except the gift shop, who were not cooperative in connecting the researcher with their suppliers, and were postponing or not answering calls and emails, and as the research was constrained in terms of time, they were therefore excluded from the sample. Most cases connected the researcher with their suppliers to complete the interviews in the same supply chains, and reach more tiers of supplier, to explore upper-tier uses and impact of social media. SMEs either called their relationships or asked the researcher to refer to them when calling a supplier. Most suppliers agreed to participate; some gave promises but it seemed they were busy or were not interested in participating, so they stopped answering the researcher. In such cases the researcher returned to the buyer or supplier to ask for other participants they could recommend. Mixing more than one technique and using personal contacts to find participants is common in theory building research (e.g. Fischer and Reuber, 2011; Barnes et al., 2012). The next section explains data collection techniques.

Table 4.1: Participant information

SME	Sector	Size	SME age	Length of social use	Social media applications used	Interviewees
Wedding planner	Service	Small	6 years	6 years	Blog, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Catering	Manufacturing	Medium	21 years	6 years	Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp	Operations and sales manager
Flowers	Service	Small	3 years	3years	Instagram and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Chocolate factory	Manufacturing	Medium	7 years	5 years	Instagram and WhatsApp	Sales manager
Designer	Manufacturing and service	Medium	19 years	5 years	Instagram and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Design and construction	Manufacturing and service	Medium	12 years	5 years	Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp	Owner-manager and assistant
Fittings	Service	Medium	12 years	4 years	Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp	Owner-manager and two sales employees
Interiors	Service	Medium	27 years	4 years	Instagram and WhatsApp	Owner-manager and assistant
Marble factory	Manufacturing	Medium	22 years	3 years	Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp	Executive manager
Tradesman	Manufacturing	Medium	31 years	7 years	WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Wood factory	Manufacturing	Medium	19 years	7 years	Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp	Owner-manager and assistant
Interior designer (A)	Service	Small	6 years	6 years	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Interior designer (R)	Service	Small	12 years	7 years	Blog, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Interior designer (O)	Service	Small	9 years	7 years	Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Carpet	Service	Medium	43 years	6 years	Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Wallpaper & flooring	Service	Medium	36 years	6 years	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp	Executive manager
Real estate (O)	Service	Small	17 years	5 years	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	Owner-manager
Real estate (F)	Service	Small	12 years	5 years	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	Owner-manager

Real estate (A)	Service	Small	15 years	5 years	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp,	Owner-manager
Real estate (M)	Service	Small	30 years	4 years	WhatsApp	Owner-manager

4.4 Data collection

Theory building from case research usually requires more than one data collection method to fill the cases; the most widely used are interviews, observations and archival data. The main data source in this study was semi-structured interviews with multiple actors in each case (buyers and suppliers). Archival data was planned to be collected, such as social media interactions and communications, but access was not available. Also the researcher followed all the case studies on the different social media platforms (such as Instagram and Snapchat) from the time of data collection to the time of data analysis.

Preliminary exploratory discussions were undertaken with two SMEs, as mentioned before. Since there is no research available in the Kuwaiti context about this topic and there is a lack of research in general about SMEs, social media and supplier relationships, this study is considered exploratory. Therefore, before deciding to collect the data and proceeding with the research, preliminary exploratory discussions (unstructured interviews) were carried out with two participants in order to check the depth and scope of social media use with suppliers. These unstructured interviews also helped to shape the “interview guide” as well as the literature. They gave a good sense of the feasibility of the research. Data was collected in two steps: two cases between December and January 2015-16 and the other two cases between April and May 2016. This gap between data collections allows more alteration to the interview guide in order to capture more clearer depth data.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews clarify subjectively lived experiences and respondent viewpoints and perspectives, and assist in gaining information about issues that cannot be observed (Tracy, 2013). Semi-structured interviews can be used to collect data in studies that contain exploratory elements, and are a part of a case study or grounded theory, and in studies that will be analysed qualitatively (Saunders et al., 2012). They are often used for topics that need in-depth understanding, where they can be the best or the only data collection method (Saunders et al., 2012).

Several semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted for each case study, to explore in what ways SMEs are utilizing social media with suppliers, how SMEs use social media as a means to find new suppliers (new relationships), how social media use affects current buyer-supplier relationships and the impact of social media use on other technologies. Different actors (buyer and suppliers) involved in dyadic relationships within the same supply chain were interviewed in order to achieve validity when analysing the interviews. In addition, study of different dyadic relationships at different points in the supply chain, upstream and downstream, allow for comparison of use and impact in different points in the supply chain (for example, close to end customer, far from end customer).

In each SME, whether a buyer or supplier company, any person engaged in the use of social media with buyers or suppliers was interviewed (refer to table 4.1). In most cases the owner-manager is responsible for social media use and interactions with suppliers. In some cases, there were assistants who use it, as well as the manager; the researcher made sure to interview them as well in order to have a full view of the use and impact of social media in business relationships. This was also to limit potential bias in the interviews, by “using numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomenon from diverse perspective” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). This in turn increases the validity of the findings.

Most participants were introduced to the topic of the research in the pre-interview meeting in a friendly and comfortable way. At the beginning of the second interview, the researcher reminded the participants of how the interview will go and explained in brief how the data will be kept and treated. The researcher then showed the interviewee a map of the supply chain (such as in figure 4.1) to explain what the answers should be about and to help them visualize their relationships, to see where the supplier is and where the buyer is, and to recall how they use social media with this specific relationship, apart from the customer. This visualization helps to make the respondent clear about the focus of the research, because based on the prior unstructured interviews respondents were not sure about differences between buyers and end consumers, for example, and some were not sure what was considered a supplier. Therefore using the figure and explaining upstream and downstream relationships made them clearer about what the researcher means.

The questions then started in an open-ended way, based on the interview guide (refer to appendix 1). The interviews shifted based on the responses of the interviewee, to allow the interviewee to provide richer information, by asking them more about new issues they raised or asking them to provide examples of what they are saying. This in turn allows a deeper picture of the use and impact of social media within SMEs. However, the researcher kept the interview in the same structure and in the same boundaries according to the main research questions. Each interview was slightly different based on the shift of responses, which were mostly around the context of the SMEs and the nature of their work. Most interviews were face-to-face (some were conducted through Skype video call) in the SMEs' sites, in order to give good first impressions that would help to build trust between the interviewee and interviewer, which would in turn lead to in-depth data from the interviewee (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

Interviews were conducted in Arabic to allow a comfortable discussion of ideas, since both the researcher and most interviewees' main language is Arabic. Interviews were tape-recorded after obtaining permission, and then transcribed verbatim. The ATLAS.ti software was used to manage the coding and analysis process, because it supports the Arabic language. Data was coded in Arabic to keep the essence of the interviews from getting lost in translation. Translation was made of the quotations required by the researcher; back translation was then made by a certified translator to verify the translation by the researcher. 28 interviews were conducted in the four case studies. This is counted as 18 dyadic relationships, as most relationships were between the focal firm and their first-tier suppliers. However, the analysis was general, and not about specific dyadic relationships, which means that the collection of responses either referred to suppliers or buyers, because some buyers are suppliers to others, and so on. The researcher thus took the totality of use and impact in buyer-supplier relationships (extracted from all the interviews).

4.4.1.1 Interview challenges

There were some challenges faced by the researcher while interviewing the participants, which might have a slight impact on the results of the research. In other words, if these could be avoided, the data obtained will be richer.

Most SMEs' first purpose of social media use is to connect with end customers and for

sales and marketing. Therefore, they sometimes shifted to talking about end customers in their responses. The researcher tried to remind them each time to focus on business buyers or suppliers, but because the topic is rich and social media tools add a lot to their business in terms of end customers, they are keen to explain details. However, based on Kuwaiti etiquette the researcher was required to listen until she found a space to shift the conversation, which wasted interview time. Therefore, in subsequent interviews the researcher made sure to raise this point at the beginning and after each set of questions, in order to keep the interview on track.

While most participants were managers some participants were lower levels staff such as assistants, and they felt too constrained to say everything about specific relationships (e.g. mentioning a specific buyer by name) and so responded in general, because they were afraid to say something (for the researcher as a Kuwaiti about another Kuwaiti). This way of responding shifted the analysis to generalities rather than being about specific relationships.

Some participants showed in one way or another that they did not want to add more to the point they were talking about. This was mostly in their body language or facial expression, which the researcher understood as a fellow Kuwaiti. This made the researcher respect them and move on to the next question. The researcher also observed that Kuwaiti men talked less and more briefly compared to non-Kuwaiti men (other Arab nationalities). This might be due to their nature or because of the social culture that they are not too open in talking freely to women. Although this is not widely the case in Kuwait nowadays, compared to other Gulf countries, it is possible based on the background of the interviewee. An example of this is two of the real estate respondents; the researcher had to ask for female colleagues, although it is not common in Kuwait for a real estate business to be owned and managed by a woman. The female interviewee added more depth to the responses of the other real estate participants; she talked in detail. However, this cannot be generalized, because the gift shop owner was a woman and she talked only briefly, but it seemed to the researcher that the reason was that she was just very busy.

4.4.2 Archival data

The researcher planned to collect data on social media interaction from social media platforms and analyse it along with the interviews for the purpose of triangulation.

Triangulating data from different sources of evidence generates much more convincing and accurate findings from case studies (Yin, 2003). However, it was found that social media content between buyers and suppliers was all private and in direct channels such as WhatsApp or Instagram direct message. It was not easy to access except through the SMEs' devices (such as mobile phones). Furthermore, most SMEs were not open to sharing all the chats, because there were some personal chats in many cases, due to the length of relations, while some indicated that there was some private information about their customers or monetary information that they did not want to share. Therefore, accessing this information for the purposes of analysis was not possible. However, most respondents showed examples of what they were talking about in the interview to the researcher at the time of the interview. For example, when talking about sharing operational information they showed the pictures they exchanged with their partner at the time of operation to the researcher from their devices. Some provided screen captures of parts of chats with partners. These screen captures offered a reflection to the researcher of what was said by the interviewee (refer to appendix 2).

With regard to broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, the researcher asked interviewees to provide details of their business accounts and the researcher followed all the accounts, after getting participants' permission. Checking their accounts and following them for a while gave the researcher an impression of their broadcast activities, such as tags, mentions, visits to suppliers and complimenting suppliers in broadcast channels. However, the impact of these practices was not clear to the researcher except through the respondents' views in the interviews, though it did provide evidence about use, the same way as they explained in the interviews. Therefore, the type of social media interaction and conversations between buyers and suppliers was captured through the interviews with participants, because access was not granted to private chats, and through following and checking their broadcast channels during the time between data collection and analysis. Triangulation was made through collecting responses from different actors (buyers and suppliers), through different sectors (manufacturing and service), and through interviewing SMEs of different size and age (SMEs established before social media and those established alongside or after social media), as will be explained in the analysis.

4.5 Data analysis

Findings of qualitative research usually emerge gradually, by iterative processes and through interaction between data and theory (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). “The theory building process occurs via recursive cycling among the case data, emerging theory, and later, extant literature” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 25). The cyclical process of developing the qualitative study and the iterative interaction between data collection, data analysis and theory was developed in a model by Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) as mentioned and shown above in figure (4.1), which they call “progressive focusing”. They argue that using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) helps in making non-linear qualitative research processes more organised and systematic, which adds more rigour, transparency and credibility to the research. Therefore, this research was analysed with the help of CAQDAS, specifically, ATLAS.ti, because it supports the Arabic language. Step 5, where the theory started to emerge, and the arrows with steps 4 and 1, indicate the constant comparison between the data collection, analysis and theory or literature. A constant comparative approach was used, in which the new codes were compared to the previous ones, in order to maintain integrity for the emergent constructs (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

All cases were transcribed verbatim from the voice recordings to ensure credibility of the data. Then they were typed up in MS Word and imported into ATLAS.ti along with the theoretical framework and research questions. This is to collect all that is needed for analysis in the same place, in order to make coding and managing the process of analysis easier. The analysis began with the design and construction (D&C) case study because it was the case that was ready to analyse first in terms of transcriptions. It was one of fastest cases in terms of chasing up suppliers and obtaining access.

The following paragraphs explain in detail the process of coding, mapping, themes generating and analysis writing. An iterative process between codes, quotations from ATLAS.ti (appendix 3), the theoretical framework, the literature and construction of mind maps were used to generate themes and sub-themes that answer the research questions. The choice of themes was based on the richness of the participants’ explanations and their relation to theory and literature, but not the number of repetitions of codes in ATLAS.ti. The software (ATLAS.ti), hand-written notes and maps were used in this process, which

means there was not complete dependence on ATLAS.ti to generate the themes. This type of analysis as mentioned by (Bryman and Burgess, 1994) needs logical and intuitive thinking because it is not a mechanical process.

The researcher started to read each interview separately and carefully, starting with the interviews with the focal firm manager, to get a general idea about and understanding of the context of the case and the setting.

The researcher then started to write notes about any thoughts or impressions from the data. For example, the type of relationship appears important more than its length, because most participants did not remember the length of relationships in number of years, because most relationships were transactional, but they remembered the “feeling” towards the other party in terms of being “trusted”, or as some called it, “old trusted relationships”. Although they used the term old, most were not sure about the number of years. After that the researcher started to code descriptively, based on the key topics. For example, some data refers to the Kuwaiti context, such as when they said “we are in Kuwait” or “Kuwaitis”; this was coded as the Kuwaiti context. Other topic coding was, for example, the uses of social media for communication, information sharing or community building, and so on. “The main purpose of topic coding is to allow the researcher to make sense of the rich, complex data collected during fieldwork and create an organised record of all the themes in the data that are considered (potentially) illuminating” (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012, p. 123). At the same time, the researcher went back to the research questions and coded descriptively based on topics that could answer the research questions.

After open (descriptive) and topic coding, the researcher started to examine the data closely to code analytically; at this time the theoretical framework was used to help coding the data. Concepts from the theoretical framework (such as intra-subjective cognition, interactive behaviour..etc.) were not clearly visible in the data, but were embedded, so the researcher needed to examine the data very closely. At the same time the researcher took notes of thoughts, definitions, interpretations and cultural knowledge about Kuwait. Each time the researcher read the transcripts and code, more insights and thoughts appeared, and the researcher added them to the notes. As many emerging analytical codes appeared beyond the theoretical framework, the researcher went back to the related literature to see where the research fits, find definitions and see what concepts beyond the theoretical

framework might work for the analysis, given the new codes.

After repeated investigation of the transcripts of the first case study interviews, which was done one by one, the researcher found that no more codes were appearing. At this point all the codes were organised in a list. The list at first was too long (167 codes) but the researcher grouped them into categories to reduce redundancies and deleted any repetitions (i.e. where different labels had been used for the same idea) and the final version of the list of codes numbered 79 (appendix 4). This was done after reading the quotations and their labels and making sure nothing was repeated or could be placed under another code.

Next, the researcher created a mind map of the code groups to gain a clearer view and develop themes (a sample in appendix 5). At this point themes started to appear clearly. An iterative process between the quotes and the codes in the mind map was done to help generate the themes. Once the themes started to appear clearly, the researcher began to write down the themes in a separate table, then the researcher copied the quotations from ATLAS.ti and then pasted them in the table opposite the themes (based on the codes attached to them). The researcher then read them carefully to make sure each theme reflected the codes and the quotations (see sample in appendix 6). At this point sub-themes emerged, and some commonalities were observed between themes, which indicated some overlap, which was subsequently investigated by the researcher. This was done by reviewing the quotations and the codes again, and then re-labelling or merging some themes until the final list of themes was more robust. For example, some overlap was found between “supplier selection” as a use of social media and the supplier selection process, as a means of picking the appropriate supplier. It was found after investigations that instead of labelling the theme “supplier selection tool” for social media uses, “social networking” is better because it is broader and reflects the use for supplier selection and other social communication and interactions that leads to new relationships and maintaining of existing ones. It is also important to mention that the literature was re-visited together with the theoretical framework, to make sure that the theme labels fitted with the findings of previous research. At the end of this iterative process a more focused mind map of themes was generated (see sample in appendix 7). Here the researcher constructed an idea about the different themes and sub-themes that covered each research question. The researcher started to write the analysis by structuring the case into an overview of the case study context, which included the focal firm overview and the first- and second-tier suppliers.

Then the analysis of the cases was conducted by connecting each theme under each research question; for example, the social media uses section is connected to the first research question, then new relationships is connected to the second research question, and so on. The analysis was written based on the data coded in ATLASTI, notes taken while analysing and while collecting the data, and the mind maps. The list of codes and themes was then used to guide the next cases, and special care was taken to carefully examine the transcripts for more emerging codes and themes or context-related matters. The cases were mostly similar in terms of use and impact because they mostly share a similar context, which is creative, innovative sectors where customization is a high priority. This helped reach to some extent a saturation point, where themes are repeated in most cases, and only some emergent themes were appearing (which might be related to the context of the case or the way they explain issues). Table 9.1 shows the results of the iterative process of coding, , categorising, mapping and reading until the themes and sub-themes were arrived at; these themes were privileged to give the final version of the analytical findings.

The case study chapters (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8) were written firstly by paying close attention to the personal language and viewpoints of participants as well as the individual case contexts. This is a way to increase the validity of the research report, as indicated by Johnson (1997, p. 284), by using many “low inference descriptors” such as direct quotations, which help the reader to experience the interviewee’s language and meaning. Secondly, the cross-case analysis (chapter 9) then draws upon the theoretical framework and the larger context of the research, Kuwait and SMEs. Finally, a discussion (chapter 10) draws upon the literature and the theoretical lens to help understand the findings and demonstrate the contribution to literature as well as allowing the proposition to emerge. This is to allow the clear emergence of theory without overwhelming it and/or overlapping it with rich stories from the cases, as recommended by Eisenhardt and Graebner, (2007). Therefore, gradual analysis presentation and reporting of the data was done, for clearer understanding and reading and for better theory building

4.6 Quality of research data and analysis

Different strategies were undertaken to ensure consistent quality of the data and analysis. Many scholars have addressed the issues of quality in qualitative research to increase

validity and credibility.

Using more than one source of evidence maximizes the strength of data (Creswell, 2013). In this thesis the data were collected from different sources. The first data were collected from both buyers and suppliers, because inter-organisational relationships consist of these two actors, therefore obtaining the opinions of both sides of the relationship provides the full picture, which in turn increases the credibility of the data. Data were obtained from different managerial levels where applicable. In some cases, the owner-manager and other employees use social media with their suppliers, therefore this research asked about any other employees who use social media and they were interviewed where possible. Viewing the subject of the study from different perspectives through different and knowledgeable participants limits bias in interview data (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Second, data were gathered from different tiers of the supply chain, the focal firm, the first tier of suppliers and the second tier of suppliers. Although in most cases only two tiers of suppliers were reached, because the rest mostly are outside of Kuwait or do not use social media, this gives a wider view and exploration of social media uses and impact in upper tiers of the supply chain.

Finally, four case studies were conducted in this research and there are sub-cases within each case. Multiple cases, as suggested by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 27), “create more robust theory because the propositions are more deeply grounded in varied empirical evidence”. Moreover, they indicate that multiple cases compared to one case study leads to generalizable and testable theory. This research also used theory triangulation which increases qualitative research validity (Johnson, 1997), by interpreting and explaining the data through more than one theoretical lens.

In terms of generalization, as suggested by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), using multiple cases yields to generalizable theory, although generalization is not the main aim of qualitative research, because samples are not randomly chosen to represent a population (Johnson, 1997). Some degree of generalization can, though, be made to similar groups. Johnson (1997) indicates that some kinds of information should be mentioned in research in order to help to decide if the research findings or theory can be generalized for others: information such as the numbers and kinds of people interviewed, sampling methods, data

collection and analysis methods, contextual information, as well as the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. All this information was mentioned in this chapter, while general context information was discussed in chapter 3, and case context information is available in each case chapter separately. These research findings can be generalized to other Gulf countries' SMEs because they share similar contexts to Kuwait and their governments are also pushing SMEs to grow, as mentioned before. Also, other developing Arab countries can benefit from these research results as they share relatively the same context. However, generalization for Western countries must be taken with care because of the impact of the Kuwaiti (Arabic) context that appeared in this research when the data were analysed.

Taking extra care when collecting data and retrieving it for analysis, such as by recording and transcribing the recordings, is a way to improve reliability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). All interviews were tape recorded after gaining the respondent's consent. Then the data were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were examined against the recordings to ensure the quality of the transcription. All these procedures, although taking time and effort, were completed before starting the analysis to ensure high quality data.

4.7 Ethics

University of Leeds ethical requirements were considered in this research. All participants were provided with information sheets to have an idea about the research topic and their role in the research. Consent forms were provided with the information sheet to make participants feel comfortable in terms of the information they provided such as that the data is anonymised and will be protected and confidential. The right to withdraw from the study was explained as well. Permission was gained before the interviews to record the interview for research purposes. University of Leeds ethical requirements were followed and ethical approval was granted before data collection.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the methodological approach this thesis adopted. It first presented the philosophical stance of this research, and the research design and method, i.e. a qualitative and case study approach. Then it explained the sampling strategies and the

access issues. Data collection techniques and the interview challenges faced were then presented. The data analysis process was discussed, as well as quality of data collection and analysis, and credibility and validity. Finally, ethical issues were presented. The following four chapters present the analysis of the four case studies. This is followed by a cross-case analysis in chapter 9.

Chapter Five: Design and construction case study

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of the first case study, which focuses on the supply chain of a design and construction company (hereafter referred to as D&C). It presents a detailed overview of the focal firm and the context of the case. Then Table 5.1 summarizes the relationship of each supplier to the focal firm. Following the case description, the next section analyses the data in detail; this is followed by a summary of the key findings of this case in its context.

5.2 Case overview and context

D&C is a medium-sized company established in 2006, in the service and manufacturing sector. The company provides two main types of service, design and execution. Within the design services, they offer architectural and interior designs on paper (drawings); this is the service part. Within execution they offer construction services and interior execution, which is the manufacturing part. Customers can ask for end-to-end services, starting from designs on paper to execution, construction and interior design. Or they can ask only for designs on paper, or only execution services. The company's work is highly focused on customised designs. Each project is unique and is customised according to the needs of the customer. The majority of their customers are business customers (buyers), such as restaurants, banks, shops and offices. In their supply chain they deal with three types of suppliers: (i) core suppliers of materials such as cement, glass and bricks; (ii) tradesmen such as painters, carpenters and other trades; (iii) suppliers of finished materials, labelled Fittings, Interiors and Marble (figure 5.1). The latter are the only suppliers who they use social media with. Figure 5.1 illustrates that there are two tiers of suppliers: finished material suppliers, the first-tier suppliers for D&C, and second-tier suppliers, suppliers of the fittings. This mean D&C have three dyadic relationships, and the fittings supplier and the tradesman are a further dyadic relationship.

Finished materials suppliers are the largest type of supplier for D&C and they fill in the innovative and creative part. D&C selects them based on the design, customer needs and feasibility. For example, the design of each restaurant is unique and based on the owner's (buyer's) choices and budget. Their relationship with most finished material suppliers is

transactional, but at the same time ongoing, as there is repeated work between them. “The more variables in the end product [Design], the more suppliers we deal with” (D&C manager). The innovative and creative nature of the materials needed and the range of suppliers ,mean the business heavily uses social media to interact with these types of suppliers. Social media use with the other groups of suppliers is negligible, because the suppliers themselves do not use it.

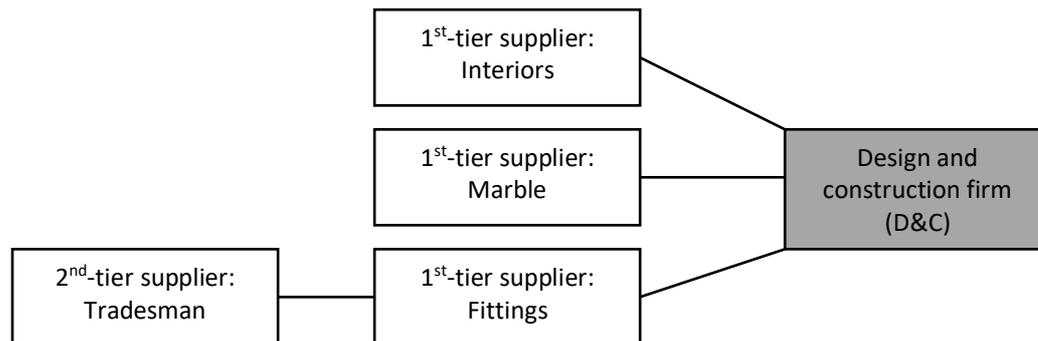


Figure 5.1: D&C supply chain

The company relies heavily on the Internet and ICT in their business. They use telephone (including mobile phones), email, a Google server (for their internal network), websites and social media for communication and information sharing with suppliers and buyers. The main social media channels they use are broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, and direct channels such as WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used to communicate and share pictures and designs with suppliers/buyers on a one-to-one basis. Broadcast channels such as Instagram are used to share information and as a reference for their projects, and also to search for suppliers of finished materials. They recently started using Snapchat to show their projects and images from works-in-progress to the public. The aim is exposure, but it also helps with buyer relations and opens doors for new relationships. Social media communication with suppliers and buyers is the responsibility of the owner-manager (D&C manager) and their assistant, and they are the ones who were interviewed for this study.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of D&C and its suppliers, which are other SMEs in this case, and their activities and relationships. There are five SMEs within this case/supply chain. This leads to four dyadic relationships in two tiers.

Table 5.1: D&C suppliers overview

	Focal firm: Design and construction (D&C)	Interiors	Marble	Fittings	Tradesman
Relationship with D&C		Supplier of unique interior pieces such as chandeliers and mirrors	Supplier of marble and granite	Supplier of special types of materials (called “editors”), lighting, some furniture and European wallpaper	Second-tier supplier to Fittings, but in the same supply chain; carpentry and upholstery, manufacturing plant with a workshop for the manufacture of curtains
Founded	2006	1990	1995	2006 (but were in the market in other businesses before)	1987
Size	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Sector	Service and manufacturing	Service (retail)	Manufacturing/service	Service	Manufacturing
Products	They provide end-to-end services starting from designs on paper then execution, construction and interior design	Unique from different styles; pieces from outside Kuwait	Distributor of marble and granite from Spain, Italy and China, plus marble factory for cutting, and installation services in Kuwait	Lighting, some furniture and European wallpaper for the Kuwaiti market and customized furniture based on orders.	Carpentry and upholstery manufacturer
Nature of products	Highly customisable	Ready-made	Customised and ready-made	Retail and some customised products	Highly customisable
Location of suppliers	Core materials and tradesmen mostly from Kuwait. Finished materials are both from Kuwait and outside Kuwait	Different countries all outside Kuwait	Spain, Italy and China for marble. Cement, sand and core materials from inside Kuwait	All suppliers for products and materials are from Europe. Manufacturing parts for customised products are from Kuwait (from the Tradesman)	Tools purchased outside Kuwait; wood and garments are from suppliers both inside and outside Kuwait
Traditional ICT (email, phone, etc.) for supplier interaction	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email
Social media channels for supplier interaction	WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat	WhatsApp and Instagram	WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook	WhatsApp and Instagram	WhatsApp
Who manages social media	Owner and Assistant	Owner and Assistant	Manager	Owner and Assistant	Owner

5.3 Case analysis

The following sections present an analysis of the design and construction firm's supply chain by addressing each of the research questions in turn and the themes that emerge within them.

5.3.1 Social media uses

The main social media tools used were WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat, and their use in this case can be categorized into four main business activities: (i) coordination of operations, (ii) information sharing, (iii) orders and (iv) social networking. The following section discusses these in more detail.

Coordinating operations

Social media is used to communicate real-time operational information and to coordinate buyer-supplier relationships. It is used by SMEs with existing suppliers/buyers to coordinate daily, weekly, monthly and occasional operations, such as during the design process, by communicating important information about operations instantly. SMEs use social media to provide real-time information about production through pictures, text and sometimes voice in WhatsApp. As D&C's manager explained:

I have an assistant who contacts buyers, he uses WhatsApp to coordinate meetings with them and answer their queries... There is a direct line of communication [through WhatsApp] with me in the design process if there is something they want to say... and sometimes I contact them to obtain real-time opinions, desires and confirmation during the production/sourcing process... however, I have tried to limit the communication with them because it affects my time and that's why I have an assistant to deal with the buyers' communications... my assistant communicate with me through WhatsApp to take confirmations and approvals about buyers' work and queries. (D&C manager)

The Tradesman uses WhatsApp to share pictures of their work from inside the factory, e.g. carpentry execution. As the Tradesman said:

We heavily rely on social media for communication... WhatsApp, we cannot dispense with it ever... in Kuwait communication is through WhatsApp... we send pictures... for example, to show where we have reached in the work, through WhatsApp.

Both the above examples are from the manufacturing side of the work, where customization takes place. They share real-time images during the process of production to update the other parties on the progress of the work. This helps the other party to see the work and send feedback before the product is finalised. Use of social media in operations and during the production process helps speed up production and the decision-making process.

Social media is also used to coordinate buyer and supplier relationships, such as setting up meetings, coordinating delivery of orders and sample delivery. Some SMEs use WhatsApp to coordinate order deliveries; some buyers enquire through WhatsApp about the availability of an item and ask for it to be prepared for them to pick up, or ask for delivery at a specific time and place. This co-ordination is done through WhatsApp because it is instant, task-oriented and retains a record of conversations, unlike telephone calls or visits.

Information sharing

Direct and broadcast social media channels are used in this case to share information, such as news, updates or prices. A direct channel, WhatsApp, is usually used to answer queries regarding prices or procurement. Broadcast channels, Instagram and Snapchat, are used to share news and latest updates about products and projects.

The use of social media as a channel to answer queries is common with both existing and new or prospective relations, as answering enquires does not entail any commitment from one party to another. For example, some buyers ask suppliers about the prices of production of specific pieces or ask about the amount of material needed to build, say, a customised sofa. Some ask about the availability of specific types of

materials or items. Another example is that social media is used instead of visiting many suppliers' sites (shops) to look for specific products and then deciding which one is the best to buy, as the D&C manager indicated::

After enquiring through WhatsApp and receiving pictures [from suppliers] while in my office... I go the next day to visit the specific one [supplier] I need... Instead of visiting more than one place... because of [information sharing] through WhatsApp I know the specific supplier to visit.

One fittings supplier (first-tier supplier) said:

Engineers [including D&C] ask initially through WhatsApp whether we have what they need or not, but to buy they usually come by themselves because colours are different than pictures, especially when it is about materials, colours are very similar, the one colour may have many shades... so the engineer takes an initial decision through WhatsApp till they come and see by themselves. (Fittings assistant)

This use, for procurement, was found more often between the focal firm and their first-tier suppliers. On the upstream level of suppliers (between first- and second-tier suppliers) SMEs do not use social media for procurement. This may be because of the different type of products they are looking for, since the focal firm is usually looking for creative, innovative items in order to fill customised design projects, while other SMEs may be looking for core materials or highly standardised products in large quantities.

The other type of information sharing is through broadcast channels. These channels are used to share news and latest updates about products or projects. Information shared in broadcast channels is later used as a reference, a catalogue or shop-front, and as a website. They use these applications for broadcasting their work and to keep it available as a reference for future buyers' enquiries or future suppliers.

Instagram – we use it as a reference, if they want to see our work we refer them to see our Instagram, so they see our previous projects. (D&C assistant)

I use Instagram for showing products like catalogues. (Interiors manager)

All SMEs in this case use Instagram in the same manner and it seems that it is the only “web presence” tool for some of them, such as Fittings. While others may have a website, websites are not as active as Instagram inside Kuwait. This is the reason for the high use of Instagram among SMEs.

Orders

Some SMEs were found in this case to use social media channels to place orders. This is bounded by trust and long relations. If they trust the suppliers and they have a long relationship with them they might place some orders through WhatsApp to speed up the work.

With long relations I finalise many matters through WhatsApp... for example, I ask do you have this product? ... they reply with a photo... if I like it, I finish the transaction and the purchase through WhatsApp. (D&C manager)

If she is interested in some items she sends me a message, ‘would you mind sending me photos of chandeliers and the price and that is in specific dimensions and heights’; what I have to do is search for these items and then send her the full details and it is up to her then to choose. (Interiors assistant)

These are some examples of the focal firm and suppliers’ use of WhatsApp, where for some products visits are not required as pictures are enough. This is combined with the trust of the supplier in terms of the quality of their products. However, this is clearly more for ready-made products than services that require negotiation and discussion.

Social networking

In this case study it was found that SMEs used social media channels as a social network to find and select suppliers (actively) or to become reachable for new buyers (passively).

It was found that the focal firm (D&C) uses broadcast channels actively as a social network to search for and take initial decisions about new suppliers. New suppliers searched through broadcast channels for creative finished products, in other words for the customised parts of the projects they do. The D&C manager said:

I use Instagram to search for new suppliers... before social media you had to go by yourself to discover new suppliers... I shopped a lot... I wasted whole days out of the office to find new suppliers in the market... I was dedicating three days of the week to searching and discovering... Still for some suppliers who do not have an Instagram account, I need to go by myself... however, visiting these is becoming more rare for me, because Instagram is easier for me... nowadays, I don't go by myself to find them unless I can't find what I need completely.

The availability of information in broadcasting channels, supported by pictures, about suppliers' products and projects is helpful to D&C in selecting new suppliers. Its richness stems from the ability to substitute visits. These channels, such as Instagram, are helpful to search for suppliers and review suppliers' products through the pictures available, in order to decide on their suitability.

On the other hand, upstream suppliers (first tier and above) are not using social media actively as a social network to search for new suppliers. However, they indicated that new buyers are finding them through social media, and are initiating new relationships with them. In other words, upstream suppliers benefit from social networking, in being reachable by new buyers. As the Interiors supplier said: "Through Instagram I gain new customers; before, our buyers were limited to some engineers but now with Instagram we know more new buyers" (Interiors manager). However, validating this from the perspective of the other parties (buyers) was not possible in this study. Although SMEs in this case benefited from social media, in gaining new buyers, they have their reasons for not using social media to select new suppliers (upstream). These are all united in the point of experience. Because of past experience, they think that they do not need social media to find new suppliers. One of the SMEs said "from my experience known companies should have a website... not only Facebook... If they are only on Facebook and they don't have a website this is a disaster" (Fittings manager). They mean, by

Facebook, social media in general. Another said “because I have previous experience, I know how to find what I need without social media” (Tradesman). This seems to be the obvious reason for not using social media actively. One observation about these SMEs is that their main suppliers are from outside Kuwait. This may be another reason that might lead to their lack of trust in selecting suppliers only through social media. Focal firm experience is limited in comparison to first- and second-tier suppliers as it is the youngest in terms of the age of the business (refer to table 5.1), and this might explain their use of social media for searching and selecting suppliers compared to the others SMEs in the case. The following section explains how the D&C company selects new suppliers.

5.3.2 New relationships

It was found in this case that D&C only use social media broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, along with offline networks, as a means to find and select new suppliers. They use direct channels such as WhatsApp mostly for social interactions with new relations, and they use physical visits to ensure quality and to build trust. The following paragraphs explain the D&C company’s method of selecting new suppliers.

Supplier selection

D&C uses social media to select upstream, creative, innovative finished material suppliers. They learn about new suppliers usually through their offline networks and social media channels, or they search for them as they indicated:

I use Instagram to search for new suppliers... sometimes I hear from my employees about a unique products supplier... or sometimes I found, via others’ Instagram or Snapchat, a special product... I first ask about their Instagram.
(D&C manager)

This indicates that this process is not always carefully planned, but is introduced or found via available means and by chance, and they then take the chance to explore further. This represents the logic of effectuation. They use available means such as Instagram to learn more about new suppliers. As mentioned above, D&C use social media for finished material suppliers that sell creative, innovative products. Based on

the rich information available in social media channels, they select suppliers if they perceive they will obtain a benefit by exchanging with them, e.g. the most innovative products. As they said: “of course I decide to visit them personally... if I find what attracts me in their Instagram” (D&C manager). This means that pictures in Instagram can give the impression of attraction. The richness of social media promotes cognition about suppliers’ suitability.

However, it is not always satisfactory to make selections based only on the information available on Instagram, such as pictures, because of the trust issue. Cultures that are high in uncertainty avoidance like Kuwait find it difficult to trust easily, as the D&C manager said: “the new [suppliers] that I haven’t dealt with before... I might just enquire through WhatsApp... but I can’t finalise everything through WhatsApp... I should see for myself”. Therefore they usually make some kind of social interaction to build some type of trust before starting a relationship.

Social interaction

Social interaction takes place after exploration and building a first impression of the new supplier from their social media pictures. After enquiring through WhatsApp they decide about the next step, which is a face-to-face visit, in order to introduce themselves and explore the products more closely. They usually visit the supplier and browse their products, with the aim of getting to know them personally. As they indicated, “if it is a new relationship it must start with a personal visit... I should see for myself” (D&C manager). This also accords with the Kuwaiti culture of caring about building relationships and trust, in order to feel comfortable about opening a new relationship. A close examination of the products might also satisfy the uncertainty aspect of the Kuwaiti culture.

After the visits, if the focal firm likes what they see, they usually, as she said, “exchange business cards and WhatsApp numbers for future communication” (D&C manager). D&C always needs a wide range of finished material suppliers to fulfil different customers’ needs, and social media helps them broaden the selection of suppliers to choose from. Rich information in broadcast channels, although supported with offline communication, seems to have a major impact on speeding up the process of searching for, reaching and selecting new suppliers. Opening a line through WhatsApp for a new

relationship promotes easier communication, thus more interaction and information sharing. And this in turn helps to make new business opportunities and exchanges. However, what is missing through social media as a medium is trust building in new suppliers, therefore, offline means such as visits are used to fill this need.

5.3.3 Social media impact

The impact of use of social media was not only social, as expected; there were transactional impacts as well, such as time saving, and also negative impacts.

Trust was expected to be an outcome of social media use in buyer-supplier relations. This case shows that trust usually needs to be established *before* social media use can be effective. Effective use of social media means dependence on social media tools as a medium for relationships. Trust in a partner exists because of the credibility and integrity of the partner, and the duration of the relationship. Most participants explained that if there is trust and the relationship is ongoing, they use social media differently, compared to new relations: “With long-term relations I finalize many matters through WhatsApp” (D&C manager).

The reason is likely to be the Kuwaiti culture of high “uncertainty avoidance”, which means being less comfortable taking risks. Therefore trust building is important in dealing with others. Trust in a partner must exist in order to trust using social media effectively with them. However, trust can be strengthened more with the use of social media through the social use and impact, as the analysis will show.

5.3.3.1 Social impact

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

It was found that some SMEs use social media channels socially for customer/supplier care, thus nurturing and maintaining relationships. They do so by using direct channels, i.e. WhatsApp, to send personal, customized messages, and broadcast channels, i.e. Instagram and Snapchat, to upload content that is purposefully directed to specific buyers or suppliers.

SMEs who use direct channels use them in different ways and for different purposes. But even then, in the end their intention is to care for the other party and make them feel special. For example, an Interiors assistant mentioned that she sent buyers, through WhatsApp, the latest products and interior pieces, based on their preferences, which means customized messages. As she said, “I send engineers the new items we have, especially the one[s] I know that will like the item” (Interiors assistant). Based on the length of the relationship, the supplier knows the buyer’s tastes and preferences; for example, the buyer may like the industrial style of furniture, and once they receive new items in this style they update the buyer directly via WhatsApp. This type of communication is to show the other party that they understand their preferences and that they care about updating them. Direct communication with buyers is also a way to open up new business and exchange opportunities. More exchanges and projects strengthen the connections and maintain the relationship.

Another example mentioned by one of the SMEs in this case is the sharing of copyrighted information. The Tradesman indicated that

Old buyers whom I trust, I use it differently... I send them unique and special things [designs]... because I know that they will not use them in a way that will harm me... But [with] new buyers... I am cautious... I don’t send it through WhatsApp... we have to sit face-to-face. (Tradesman)

They share such material through direct channels and the buyer knows that this information, e.g. a design, is copyrighted, and the supplier will not share it with other buyers. This is a special treatment that in turn impacts the relationship positively.

As one supplier said, “sometimes through Instagram I received private [direct] messages from some engineers [interior designers] who deal with us, showing me how they have used the items they bought from us [in their end designs]” (Interiors manager). Although the transaction usually ends with the purchase of the item, this communication engages the supplier beyond the transaction. Showing them how they have used it is pleasing for the supplier. This is a way to deepen the connection between the two parties. Going beyond the transaction keeps the relationship going for longer. This type of message is not popular via email.

Broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat were also found to be used for maintaining relationships. Instagram, as mentioned before, is the most popular channel in Kuwait for businesses at the time of the research, while Snapchat was newly spreading in the country. Snapchat was found to be used in a creative and innovative ways by D&C to nurture and maintain relationships with buyers and suppliers. Snapchat is simple and practical in comparison to professional Instagram photos, as the focal firm's manager thinks, as they can post pictures or videos live from the place they are in at that moment. This is the idea of the application: to broadcast the story of the day. The fact that D&C can upload many posts without filling the timeline helps them to show other parties what they are really doing (which can be called "behind the scenes"), as will be discussed next. This has helped to show the originality and depth of D&C's work to the public, which has had an impact on their relationships, as will be discussed later. It is also better for them than Instagram because it needs less time to prepare posts. As the D&C manager indicated:

I found that current buyers are following me on Snapchat... this helped me to maintain my relationship with them... For example, when I work on one of their projects, I shoot part of the work, because I know they are seeing this... so they feel that I'm interacting with them and they are with me in work... also to make them feel special because I featured them... usually they send me encouragement messages on private channels... their messages show their happiness and satisfaction with the broadcasting

Snapchat allows the D&C manager to send purposeful snaps through a broadcast channel for the business's buyers. This in turn helps buyers/suppliers experience the interactions remotely. In addition, buyers can gain an idea about the work and how it is progressing. The engineer does not do this in a systematic way, such as providing a daily live update for every project, since filming everything takes up time. The story on Snapchat allows for snaps of the engineer's day in progress, and provides an overview of different projects in different stages. This is one of the ways Snapchat is acceptable and becoming popular in Kuwait. Another benefit of shooting part of a work in progress, as the D&C manager indicated, is as follows:

I do this on purpose [broadcasting], I show that part that I know they are waiting for right now... this is also to let them [buyers] know that we are working hard on their projects

These are indirect ways to impact the buyer's feelings, and allow them to experience the interaction and become aware of certain details and behind-the-scenes activity of the engineer's work. As the engineer indicated, this was not possible before Snapchat. Having an idea about the details of their work, as an engineer, was only possible through the people who work close to them in the office.

Giving snaps of the everyday work from the engineer's office and from projects sites has another impact also. As the D&C manager said:

After I finished the work with the client [buyer] Snapchat reminds them of me... because they are following me... so they see my work in other projects. My work improves and designs usually improve. This helps them to return to me in their future projects instead of going to others... when they are following me, I always put myself in their mind.

One of the other ways the focal firm uses broadcast channels upstream with their suppliers is that they feature their business and show it in their channel, by shooting the D&C manager's visits to them and talking about their products, complementing their commitment to their promises and to the quality of their work. The manager's word of mouth is appreciated, because she becomes known by delivering a professional image about her work and the mass of projects she works on. Thus suppliers appreciate that she is doing them a favour in talking about them on her channel to the public. As the D&C manager indicated, "I found that suppliers feel happy and they appreciate this a lot". They are mostly other SMEs, and this is a way of promoting them. This in turn impacts D&C-supplier relations positively, and is one of the ways of nurturing and maintaining the relationship for longer.

This type of communication (or broadcasting), that delivers rich live information about the work and operations, is not available in other e-channels. Therefore, although Snapchat is not used by all participants, its impact cannot be ignored. It is important to

mention here that the impact of Snapchat is realized by D&C's manager only in regards to their buyers and some suppliers. The researcher did not have the opportunity to validate this perception, as most buyers were not interviewed. However, the researcher, as a Kuwaiti, realized this use of Snapchat and that the popularity of Snapchat is spreading, although its impact is not clear to the researcher; this view gives an idea about the impact, but one that might be supported by other cases in the thesis.

Reputation

Social media channels help SMEs show their professionalism and deliver a good image of their work, as mentioned, through broadcasting the large projects they work on, the volume of the project, their hard work, etc. This in turn might have an impact on their relationships with their suppliers and buyers, as they will feel proud to belong to this relationship. This also in turn may allow them to maintain and enhance their relationships with partners. For example, the Marble manager mentioned that they have supplied a large Kuwaiti project that is known all over the Gulf and the Middle East. Posting this in their public channels, such as Instagram, as they usually do for all their projects, gives a boost to their reputation and professional image. This in turn impacts their relations with buyers and suppliers, as the other parties will try to maintain it and support it and show that they belong to this SME relationship. Another example is how Snapchat helps D&C deliver the image of the "professionalism" of their engineer's work, as the manager said:

Snapchat helps me to show the originality and depth of my work compared to other engineers in Snapchat... I regularly receive messages like: you have a concept, your designs are original, you are an original designer not like others, your work is professional and you are different from other designers... this is what I want to deliver... this image of my work... it wasn't easy to deliver it before Snapchat.

These details could previously only be seen and realised by people who work close to the engineer. Through Snapchat broadcasting it has become possible to display such things more widely, and this is one of its main benefits for the focal firm. This image can help in relationships with suppliers (upstream) and buyers (downstream). As the

manager indicated, when she talks about her suppliers (SMEs) in her Snapchat they appreciate this and feel happy because a known (reputed) engineer is talking about them. Also they feel proud to have a relationship with a known (professional) person or SME (in this case), and often try to show this to others. In this case this means that they feel special in having a relationship with the focal firm. This type of broadcasting is a way to support relationships through kindness and appreciation.

The impact of broadcasting is the reputation the SME gains, and this in turn positively impacts their relations with existing suppliers or buyers.

Satisfaction

Speed, convenience and continuous communication through different channels of social media bring satisfaction to the relationships, as some participants indicated. For example, answering queries, updating news, sending pictures of products, sending sizes or dimensions, or sending quotes instantly through WhatsApp compared to spreadsheets and email, is related to better services and more communication between parties. As one participant said, “it [social media] makes you closer to the buyers, and the service that you provide is better than before” (Interiors assistant). Another added: “Suppliers now share all the latest products they have directly... WhatsApp makes them closer to me... Relationships become more friendly, because communication is direct, one to one and informal” (Marble manager).

This is usually through direct channels. Broadcast channels also bring satisfaction, as mentioned previously, because talking about suppliers and complimenting their work on Snapchat makes them feel happy and appreciative of this favour; this in turn must impact their satisfaction and relationship with buyers. This impact is related to others such as reputation and trust. All social impacts seem to be related to each other; this might become clearer in the cross-case analysis, when all cases are analysed together

5.3.3.2 Transactional impact

Social media features, such as instant, direct communication, openness, and accessibility, are saving a massive amount of time managing transactional relations, which in turn reduces costs for SMEs. Although the time saved and reductions in cost

were not recorded in this research due to its exploratory nature and the qualitative approach adopted, many interviewees mentioned it anecdotally.

Time saving

Most SMEs in this case study concluded the impact of social media on their relationships by saying that it saves time. Saving time has many dimensions. The first is through the use of direct channels of communication and information sharing. Information sharing, such as answering enquiries or procurement, allows rich information (pictures, text, video and voice) to be exchanged in an instant, direct way between parties. This facilitates faster decisions and thus boosts transactions. For example, one of the suppliers that uses direct channels to share pictures said: “I send to my supplier... asking about pictures of a specific sofa, he instantly replies... Sometimes at the time when there is a customer in the showroom... I send [to the supplier] enquiring about prices or about specific sizes and he replies instantly” (Fittings assistant). This instant communication allows the transactions between the three parties (customer, business customer and their supplier) to be performed simultaneously.

Sharing information in direct channels aids procurement; for example, the D&C manager’s way of browsing many suppliers’ products at the same time, instead of taking the effort to visit each of them. As she explained:

It makes many matters easier... Today I am supposed to go to a wallpaper suppliers, and this will impact the rest of my day in terms of the time and effort needed... But I can completely finish the matter through WhatsApp... I shop and finish while I’m in my office... WhatsApp reduces half of the effort... now all I need to do is choose from the pictures they send me to ask for samples to be sent to my office. (D&C manager)

Using direct channels to communicate operational information allows parties to share information accurately, because it is typed and supported by pictures. Accurate information saves parties time because it reduces errors. This was found to help in managing suppliers who were using verbal communication or paper. As indicated by one of the participants, “information becomes more accurate, as before [WhatsApp] he could say it verbally or write it in a paper but now it is typed in the messages, he cannot

retract it. It is written in the message. For example, if he asked for a specific number of meters” (Fittings manager). In this quote the first-tier supplier (Fittings) is talking about a second-tier supplier (Tradesman) and how information is exchanged between them before and after social media adoption. With social media, messages between them can be recorded digitally. The recorded message can serve as a contract between them. For this type of supplier (tradesmen), social media is effective because often they do not even use email. The Tradesman also confirmed that it adds a lot to their business; as he said: “WhatsApp for me is a path for work [business], for me it is a way to save a massive amount of time”. This indicates the impact social media has their old ways of business, and the amount of time they are saving after adopting it.

The second dimension is sharing information through broadcast channels. Buyers and suppliers usually update their pages with their latest projects or products. This makes this information accessible for other parties at any time. Information such as updates or news is important for relations that are not contractual. As indicated by the Marble manager: “I use [Instagram] for end and business customers, I update it more than Facebook because I have more engagement from followers... I share all my projects and products... instead of taking the effort to visit the showroom they can find everything on Instagram”. The availability and accessibility of such information helps all parties to be informed about each other’s news in a shorter amount of time, which allows them to make faster decisions.

Social media features positively impact business relationships between parties. Social media can be a substitute, to some extent, for expensive supply chain technologies that need resources and training, as well as a substitute for simple ways of communication such as verbal or paper communication.

5.3.3.3 Negative impact

Beside the positive impact, however, there is also a negative side to using social media for building business relationships. For instance, the openness of social media channels such as Instagram and Snapchat can have a negative social impact. Some parties feel intimidated from some posts in Snapchat, as the D&C manager said:

Some buyers question me... but of course not directly... they are following me all the time on Snapchat... and sometimes when I'm on a business trip outside Kuwait and I make a live broadcast... we receive more calls and messages at such times from buyers asking about their work.

When customers see the D&C manager, through live Snapchat streams, work outside Kuwait, they think that their work in Kuwait is being neglected or will be delayed. D&C thus come under pressure; the manager indicated that they need to be aware of when and what to post through their Snapchat live channel. This means they are under pressure to deliver satisfying messages on a continuous basis; that is, always posting content that has a positive impact on the other party's impressions. Maintaining this and giving it enough attention will be very time-consuming for SMEs. Details that might affect multiple buyers differently cannot be easily anticipated, for instance.

Another negative impact of social media use is that the copyright status of some of the published designs or creations is affected. SMEs share images and videos to deliver rich content, and some parties or other SMEs misuse that, for example by copying or sharing designs, innovations or images as their own. Therefore, some SMEs indicated that they share copyrighted pictures or designs only with trusted partners that they have known for a long time. The Tradesman commented, for example: "I don't send my designs through WhatsApp for new buyers, because I suffered from this before; I only share it with buyers I trust, because I can trust that they will not copy it and execute it with others".

Lastly, although direct and frequent communication are advantages of social media, they are disadvantages at the same time. Frequent communication wastes SMEs' time in checking and responding to it. Direct communication through WhatsApp was found to bother workers outside working hours. As one said "The disadvantage is that they contact me at any time even outside working hours like in my holiday time. And I don't have a choice but to answer" (D&C assistant). Increased communication and connection through social media channels distracts managers, workers and SMEs from their work. Some work, such as designing, needs innovation and creative thinking, and more distraction in work time affects focus. As the D&C manager said, "I'm too busy... I cannot deal with too much communication... My work also needs creative thinking....

so I need to focus sometimes”. Some direct communication and broadcasting thus negatively affects SMEs’ time and work.

5.4.4 Social media vs traditional technologies

It was found that none of the SMEs in this case study use any advanced supply chain technologies such as electronic data interchange (EDI), radio frequency identification (RFID) or other information systems. They only use traditional information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as telephone and email. Some do have a website. They use computers for email and Excel spreadsheets, as well as other office processing systems, and they use mobile phones, mostly for both types of social media channel, direct and broadcast. This is expected for SMEs in a developing country such as Kuwait. Therefore, the impact of social media in this case will be compared to telephone and email. These are the most frequently used and mentioned means for communication between buyers and suppliers, before the appearance of social media.

5.4.4.1 Social media richness vs telephone calls

The impact social media has had on the telephone has been vast. Although social media is not a substitute for telephone, it complements it. Telephone communication is less rich than face-to-face; although it has fast feedback, it lacks visual cues, as it only includes audio and language content (Daft and Lengel, 1983). The ability of social media to share photos, videos, voice messages and text, makes it more preferable than telephone. However, use of the telephone cannot be substituted completely. Telephone use is complemented in this case by social media’s richness.

Using social media besides the telephone helps to reduce the uncertainty and ambiguity of information shared. Sharing information through voice cannot be compared with sharing information that is supported by pictures, text, and sometimes voice or video. For example, social media is used alongside the telephone to complement the phone call with photos and sharing of text information, such as sizes and quantities: “before (social media) we were depending on the telephone... WhatsApp complements the telephone by sending photos, sizes, etc. ... WhatsApp has made a big difference to our work” (Fittings assistant). This overcomes the limitation of telephone communication, i.e. that it is only voice communication, with rich communication. At the same time, it

helps to overcome trust issues in buyer-supplier communication in the Kuwaiti context, thanks to visualization of shared information. Furthermore, the information is recorded digitally, which increases trust in the accuracy of the information compared to sharing it verbally over the phone. Information that is recorded digitally can be retrieved, compared to information received verbally through the telephone. Moreover, the richness of social media allows regular, rich contact in a convenient manner, compared to telephone contact, through different types of communication channel, such as direct and broadcast. Regular contact can help to nurture relationships, as mentioned before, and it is not practical to do this through phone calls.

Task-oriented messages vs telephone calls

Some SMEs think that social media reduces telephone use and is to some extent preferable to the telephone in Kuwait for operational communication, since by using WhatsApp (for example) the message can be focused on the task. It is considered better than telephoning, as Kuwaiti telephone etiquette usually involves some time spent at the beginning of the call greeting and asking about the other party's health and other matters that are not related directly to the business matter in hand. As the Tradesman indicated: "it saves my time... I don't need to talk a lot through the phone and ask about other matters... I just send what I need and receive what I need... matters become more formal, more business to business, without side conversations". However, it should be said that this is dependent on the length of the relationship. Sometimes it is a business relationship, but if it is long-term it may have become informal. Therefore, depending on the type and length of the relationship, conversations that are not business-related can take, for some long-term relationships, around 25 to 50% of the total call time. The reason may be the collectivist Kuwaiti culture, where relationships and social matters are important, and greeting and asking about personal matters is a way to show one cares about the social as well as the business relationship. They find it difficult to separate business from social conversations. It should be clarified that this usually applies within Kuwaiti to Kuwaiti communication, or Kuwaiti to Arab communication, as other workers that do not speak fluent Arabic might not be treated the same. Because of this, some participants have mentioned that WhatsApp is preferred, as conversations can be kept direct and to the point, and this saves their time. Also, some people are not always in the mood to talk and greet, and they are also SMEs, which are usually always busy.

Overcoming language barriers

For communication between Kuwaitis and non-Arabs, social media has been found to be of help in overcoming language barriers. This point was raised by a non-Arabic speaker (an assistant to a Kuwaiti manager), who mentioned that the telephone and WhatsApp complement each other in overcoming language barriers. The information they share with pictures through WhatsApp is usually in English, which is not easy for some Arab buyers. Therefore, they call to speak instead of typing what they want: “some clients prefer to call and some prefer to chat in WhatsApp, because some clients are not good at typing English so they call and speak... it is easier for them” (Interiors assistant). English is widely spoken in Kuwait and it is normal for it to be mixed with Arabic in spoken conversation. So some non-Arab workers understand simple Arabic, plus have good spoken English. When it comes to written text, mixing English and Arabic is not as easy as when speaking it, and workers who understand simple spoken Arabic cannot necessarily read it or write it. Therefore, both WhatsApp and the telephone are used for these types of buyers. They are usually used to answer queries about specific things, but not to finalise deals.

5.4.4.2 Social media speed vs email

Email is one of the main channels for communication between buyer and supplier, used within Kuwait by buyers/suppliers for large deals and short-term contracts that need to be documented. It is rarely used for daily operational communication between buyers and suppliers. The telephone and in-person visits are used more often for suppliers within Kuwait, while email is the main channel for communication with suppliers outside Kuwait, even with high social media use. Thus the purpose of email is not to complement or substitute social media, because it is used for specific matters within Kuwait.

Social media was found to have an impact on the speed of communication in comparison to email. SMEs indicated that social media, specifically direct channels, is faster and more convenient than email, and can speed up work and communication. Participant responses differ, but all agree that the speed of WhatsApp compares favourably to email, though it does not substitute it entirely. For example, most communication between parties is through WhatsApp, to speed up exchanges and

responses, but at the end, in order to document the deal, they use email, as mentioned above. This is with deals that contain rights, for example, or when they sign a short-term contract for a specific project such as installing a design. For these sorts of projects, they use email to document the conversations and negotiations carried out via WhatsApp, in order to provide a written record. This preserves each parties' rights, as some manufacturing SMEs indicated. As the Marble manager said, "all discussion before arriving at the final agreements [can be] through WhatsApp... but formal agreement is through email, because we deal with large amounts, so to protect his rights and to protect my rights, there should be evidence". Formal documentation is important for some type of work, such as manufacturing, and they think that WhatsApp is not the best way of documenting their deals. This becomes a norm between parties in this case, that WhatsApp is an informal channel to speed up the work in most cases and email is the formal channel to document it. Moreover, sharing files through email takes time to prepare and type, and then they need downloading, but through WhatsApp files can be captured and sent immediately. This saves parties time and speeds up the process of exchange. As one of the participants said, "without WhatsApp the work was very slow, I had to make photo quotations, I take pictures, take sizes, type in Excel spreadsheets, then send it by email. If the client is busy they will check their email later, but WhatsApp is instant" (Interiors assistant). It can be said that WhatsApp is an informal channel to speed up work in most cases, and email is the formal channel to document large deals and contracts.

Most of the impact on telephones and email is from the direct channel (WhatsApp), because it is similar to them. Other channels, which are considered more to be broadcasting channels, have an impact too, not on these technologies, but on the means used before the rise of social media, such as newspaper, catalogues or brochures, that were used for exposure or to share information about the SMEs. Some SMEs who used print catalogues or brochures for their products or projects no longer do this, because Instagram has substituted them. Some who used to use newspapers for exposure and marketing in order to reach new relationships are no longer advertising in newspapers because of Instagram. Instagram opens the door for new relationships, and this is not easy through other communication channels such as telephone and email.

To conclude, social media in this case has not substituted any technology completely,

but it saves a massive amount of time by speeding up work and exchanges between parties. The instant and rich (pictures, text and voice) features of social media have impacted the old ways of exchange and communication.

5.4 Conclusion

The basis of this case is customization and the use of innovative and creative suppliers, and the transactional but repeated type of relationships between parties show the uses and impact of social media. The Kuwaiti context as well, specifically the culture of collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, has an impact on the manner of social media use as a medium for exchange between buyer and suppliers.

In this case social media is used to communicate real-time operational information and to coordinate buyer-supplier relationships. It is used for information sharing between parties and for placing some orders. Social networking is also one of the social media uses in this case. Information richness, such as pictures, videos, text and voice, is one of the general outcomes of social media use in buyer-supplier relationships. It has a major impact on facilitating relationships.

Social media is used as a social network alongside offline means to select new suppliers. Both channels of social media, direct (WhatsApp) and broadcast (Instagram and Snapchat), are used to communicate and share rich information, thus facilitating the supplier selection and interaction process.

It was found that trust is not an outcome of social media use, but is established prior to effective social media use in existing relations. However, there is a sense of the impact of the richness of social media in expediting the building of trust for new relationships and strengthening trust for existing relationships.

Social media's social impact is to nurture and maintain relationships between parties. Broadcast channels help to show the professionalism of some SMEs, thus building a good reputation; this has an impact on their relationships, as parties feel proud to be in a relationship with them. Communicating real-time information at the time of operation has an impact on buyers' satisfaction with the service provided.

The other impacts are transactional, such as saving time. Social media features, such as instant, direct communication, openness, and ease of access are saving a massive amount of time in managing transactional relations, which in turn reduces costs for SMEs. There is also some negative impact, however.

Social media has had a large impact in regards to older technologies. The impact social media has had on telephone use has been vast. The telephone is complemented by social media features such as its richness. Social media was also found to have an impact in increasing the speed of communication in comparison to email.

Chapter Six: Wedding planner case study

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the second case study, which focuses on the supply chain of a wedding planner company (hereafter referred to as WP). It presents a detailed overview of the focal firm, WP, and the context of the case. Table 6.1 summarizes the relationship of each supplier to the focal firm. Following the case description, the chapter analyses the data in detail within the case context; this is followed by a summary of the key findings.

6.2 Case overview and context

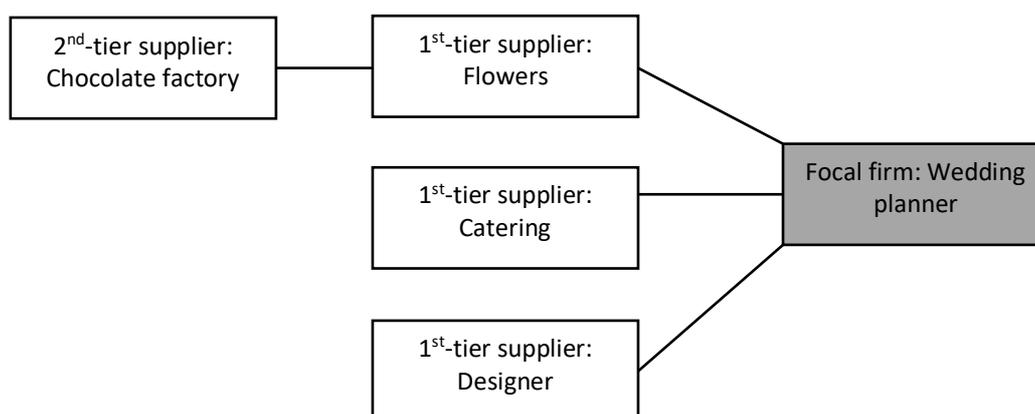


Figure 6.1: WP supply chain

WP is a small-sized company. It was established in 2012 and falls under the service sector. WP provides a complete service surrounding wedding and events planning. Rather than in-house production, there is a wide range of external suppliers which the company deals with to execute each wedding/event. Customers can ask for end-to-end wedding planning. WP's work is highly customised, because each wedding is unique and caters to the taste of the customer and their budget. The majority of customers are end customers, and they also serve business customers (buyers) for events at places such as banks or schools. In their supply chain they deal with a wide range of suppliers to fulfil each unique event. Consequently, they have long-established relationships with

suppliers, such as DJs, photographers, lighting experts, florists and caterers. These experts are known for their high quality in the Kuwaiti market, and most customers order from them. Although the relationship may be long, it is not fixed or exclusive to them. The company also consults other types of supplier, chosen based on the latest trends and designs, such as for catering, wedding designers and flowers. They are always looking for the latest trends, as each wedding or event is customised based on customer budget and the type of event (small or large weddings, or school events, etc.). In addition, the choice of supplier is sometimes not fully the wedding planner's decision, as some customers ask for specific items, such as a specific DJ. However, most of the time suppliers are suggested by the wedding planner. Sometimes the budget specifies the choice of suppliers, as high-budget suppliers are different from lower-budget suppliers. But all are looking for quality, besides price. As well as all these types of suppliers, there are one-time (arm's-length) suppliers, and these usually sell creative, innovative products that are not needed in all weddings, but are used to add a special touch to a wedding or event. Therefore, WP's supply chain is mostly not fixed and they are always looking for new suppliers.

Relationships in this case are mostly transactional, filling customised or unique customer needs. However, it was found that although transactional they are dealt with like a collaborative relationship. Moreover, in this case it is evident that parties care more about building informal, friendly relations that go beyond business-to-business relations. And this is clearly because of the impact of Kuwaiti culture. This also may be due to the nature of their work, which is highly customised, and in which they have to keep contacting each other to arrive at an end product that fulfils the end customer's needs.

The company relies heavily on the Internet and ICT in their business. They use telephone, email, Google, websites and social media for communication with their suppliers inside and outside Kuwait, as well as internally with employees to share information and pictures. The main forms of social media they currently use are Instagram and WhatsApp, and they consider themselves to be early adopters. They are also present on other social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Pinterest. They follow Kuwaiti trends in social media use. The owner-manager manages the channels, updating Instagram and other channels, and using WhatsApp

with suppliers and buyers. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the other SMEs' details and their relationships with the focal firm.

6.3 Case analysis

The following section presents the analysis of the wedding planner's supply chain by addressing each of the research questions in turn and the themes emerging within them.

6.3.1 Social media uses

In this case, the main social media tools used were WhatsApp and Instagram; their use can be categorized into five main business activities: (1) coordinating operations; (2) information sharing; (3) collaboration; (4) orders; and (5) social networking. The following sections discuss these in more detail.

Coordinating operations

Social media is used here to communicate real-time updates of operations between buyers and suppliers and to coordinate work between parties. The nature of WP's work is highly customised to the needs of the end client. Therefore, checking the details of the work from suppliers and providing feedback is very important. The ability to share pictures, videos, voice and text allows for real-time communication and faster feedback. SMEs were usually found in this case to use direct channels such as WhatsApp for this purpose. WP mentioned many examples of sharing real-time updates on operations, such as receiving flower arrangement pictures to confirm or comment on. She usually sends comments using voice messages to avoid misunderstanding. The catering firm also sends photos of sweets and cakes in preparation, before finalizing an order. WP's manager said:

I use WhatsApp for everything... at the time of preparation they share photos to get my opinion and ask if it is appropriate... they share samples of wedding invitation cards... sometimes we hire illustrators for the cards... they send pictures to get instant feedback to complete their work.

Table 6.1: WP suppliers overview

	Focal firm: wedding planner	Flowers	Chocolate factory	Catering	Designer
Relationship with wedding planner		First-tier supplier of flowers and flower arrangements for weddings	Second-tier supplier for the flower shop	First-tier supplier of catering for weddings and events	First-tier supplier for wood work such as stages, carpets, chairs and other wedding supplies
Founded	2012	2013	2009	1997	1996
Size	Small	Small	Medium	Medium	Medium
Sector	Service	Service	Manufacturing	Manufacturing	Manufacturing and service
Products	End-to-end wedding and event planning services	Flowers and chocolate gifts for special occasions	A range of chocolates of different sizes, tastes and shapes	A wide range of bakery products and special occasion cakes such as wedding cakes; oven-baked products and specially created baby-size savouries, sweets and sandwiches	They rent ready-made products such as chairs and carpets in large quantities, and manufacture special designs such as stages, entrances and booths for special events and weddings
Nature of products	Highly customised based on customers' needs and budget	Usually customised based on customer order	Customised based on order	Retail and customised	Standard and customised
Location of suppliers	Most suppliers are from Kuwait, but there are some special orders from suppliers outside Kuwait such as Turkey, China or Europe	Main suppliers of flowers are from Europe. Suppliers of soil and some other spare suppliers of flowers from Kuwait. Chocolate suppliers in Kuwait	Core material and other suppliers are from outside and inside Kuwait	Large suppliers from inside and outside Kuwait, e.g. chocolate suppliers are from Europe. Vegetable suppliers are from Kuwait	90% of suppliers are from Kuwait and some special order suppliers are from outside Kuwait
Traditional ICT (email, phone, etc.) for supplier interactions	Telephone, email and websites	Telephone, email and websites	Email and sometimes fax	Email	Email and telephone
Social media channels for supplier interactions	Facebook, blog, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp	WhatsApp and Instagram	WhatsApp and soon Instagram	WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook	WhatsApp and Instagram
Who manages SM	Owner-manager	Owner-manager	Sales manager	Social media management company	Owner-manager

This indicates the multidirectional, real-time communication between parties during the process of production. Even the catering supplier said that “WhatsApp makes my life easy, before I send the cake [for example] I send a picture to the client to get their comments”. Checking in at the time of production and receiving instant feedback is highly important to the nature of WP’s business. This is especially the case because their work contains many details from multiple suppliers that the planner must be aware of. Furthermore, most orders are highly customised, not standard, so fast confirmation is critical to their work.

Social media is also used to coordinate buyer and supplier relationships, through activities such as setting up meetings, payments and wedding day deliveries. “WhatsApp is a main tool for communication and for coordination for meetings, picture sharing and designs” (Florist). For example, before the wedding day, they coordinate timings for each supplier to deliver and install their work. They usually use a direct channel, WhatsApp, as this speeds up the process. As WP’s manager said, “I inform the team [suppliers] about the timing of the installation of specific things on the wedding day” and “I share the timetable of each participant [suppliers] of the team on the wedding day”. This ensures that they all know their duties and timings, as some duties are dependent on each other. In order to coordinate the work effectively, this information is shared to all participating suppliers, such as the designer, florist, DJ, lighting and catering. This social media use fits with WP’s business as it is mainly based on coordinating with different parties to deliver an end product (a wedding or event).

Information sharing

It was found in this case that broadcast channels, such as Instagram, are used for information sharing as well as a direct channel, WhatsApp. The information shared in these channels is the latest news, projects or products the buyer or suppliers have. These channels are used like a catalogue or website for some SMEs. Within this sharing of information through broadcast channels, it was found that the SMEs in this case use features of Instagram such as “tagging”. For example, WP uses Instagram to show the latest events and weddings they have worked on, and they tag the suppliers who worked on the event with them, such as the catering firm and the designer, as the manager said: “[I use] Instagram to document most of the weddings and events and tag all the suppliers who worked with me in the event [or wedding]”. Tagging suppliers provides

full information about the source of each product. It shows, to some extent, WP's supply relationships to the public, as well as other relationships. It is usually done by the wedding planner as a favour in return for a supplier's good prices and service, as she indicated. Suppliers also indicated that they tag WP in the pictures they share in their broadcast channels. This tagging has a mutual benefit. It also has a good social impact on their relationships, as will be discussed later. Moreover, broadcasting their latest products or projects via their Instagram keeps other parties updated, as the catering manager indicated: "We have one supplier that always brings new items from France. I follow them and see their new items through Instagram instead of going to the shop each time to see what is the latest. If I need an item I call them to reserve it for me." Sharing information through broadcast channels is a way to update other parties on the latest news, and in this case is a way to compliment other parties by tagging them.

Collaboration

In this case it was found that WP use a direct channel, WhatsApp's groups feature, to create teams of collaborators to discuss and successfully arrange a wedding or event as a shared project. WP use WhatsApp groups to connect staff, some important suppliers and the wedding family in order to discuss the matter of the wedding all together at the same time. As the manager said: "Sometimes I create a WhatsApp group for the team, wedding family and some important suppliers such as the DJ and photographer to ease the discussions and agreements." A WhatsApp group allows collaborators to 'meet' at anytime and anywhere, as indicated by WP. Each participant can post a message, picture or video at any time, and it can be checked and responded to by the others at their convenience. This flexibility of meeting time and discussion time is a particular advantage of using this feature. For example, WP showed how a WhatsApp group was created to connect a designer, DJ and a catering firm. The designer shows the group the theme he will be using by sharing photos, and discusses the idea he has for the cake to match the theme. This makes the catering firm aware of what is needed from them in terms of cake design. The catering firm then shares the size, weight and height of the cake so the designer can prepare a suitable table. They also share pictures of the initial designs and solicit the opinion of the rest of the group. The designer and the DJ and lighting designer discuss the placement of lights, speakers or wires to match the dimensions of the design. WP coordinates all the discussions and gives comments. The

discussion is supported by pictures and videos for more clarity. They also use voice messages and videos as indicated by WP's manager: "we use voice messages [in WhatsApp] a lot... this is to avoid misunderstanding compared to written messages". This is when further explanation is needed in order to understand what they mean carefully. The discussion is recorded digitally in the group as a reference for all partners. As one of the SMEs indicated: "it is so important [the WhatsApp group] because it is difficult to meet each time for small changes... this is the best way [to meet] ... the discussion is clear for all parties" (Designer). At the end WP collects from the recorded WhatsApp chat all that was agreed on and the tasks needed from each party and prints it in a table with the timings for the day of the wedding. It is then shared in the group with all the collaborators. This unique use of WhatsApp has an impact on buyer-supplier relations, which will be discussed further later.

Orders

It was found that a direct channel, WhatsApp, is used in this case for placing small orders, with trusted, long-term relations, and its use depends on the situation.

The first situation involves repeated orders or when there is not a range to choose from, such as with photographers; they just place the order through WhatsApp. This also applies to the DJ. They place the order and share the lists of songs with them, all through WhatsApp. If they need to listen to some specific songs, they share them through voice messages in WhatsApp. However, this is confirmed only by WP; access was not possible for any of the photographers or DJs.

The second situation is when there is a range to choose from or there are special orders. Or sometimes the end customer asks WP to meet the supplier. Here visits and meetings are required. After these visits and meetings, communication and the final order takes place through direct channels, i.e. WhatsApp, as the WP manager said: "For the catering I send one WhatsApp message including the kind of sweets they [the end customer] have chosen, how many kilos of each kind, a picture of the plates, what plates for which sweet... also some other details about the cake heights and colour". When they start working on the order, payment is usually transferred online to the supplier's account and a receipt is received after they meet. The catering manager said: "the

wedding planner places the order... They specify quantities and transfer the payment online... and we are done... if she needs anything special she visits us”.

The third situation depends on the type of buyer; for example, for hotels, orders must be processed formally. Therefore, they use WhatsApp as an informal, faster channel to place the order, but later it is sent through the formal channels, such as email. As the catering manager said, “all [orders] go through WhatsApp but some need formalities; I know the differences between my business customers [buyers]”. Another example is from the manufacturing sector, the chocolate factory; they only accept small orders from buyers they trust through WhatsApp. The reason is the necessary formality of orders because of the large quantities involved and documentation issues. It is evident that the Kuwaiti culture of “uncertainty avoidance” is high here; they use these channels only with trusted parties and for small orders, not large deals. Although there is a high dependence on the media for most orders from WP to their suppliers (upstream), it is bounded by different scenarios, and there is caution involved.

Social networking

Although social media in this case was not found to be used specifically by all SMEs as a tool to select new suppliers, it seems that it is understood for many of them to be a place where they can search for and reach new suppliers and buyers, in other words, new relationships and connections. It is also in this case understood to be a place where they can connect with existing suppliers, follow each other’s news and recommend each other through tags, as another method (as well as offline means) of strengthening and maintaining relationships.

For new relationships, social media, specifically Instagram, is used alongside Google by WP and the designer as a search tool to find and learn about new suppliers, and by the catering firm to find new buyers, such as wedding planners. As WP’s manager said:

Instagram is still the place where you find suppliers and information about them; for example, if one of my clients asks for a specific DJ and they are unknown but their price is suitable [for the client], where can I find out about them? It is either a Google search or Instagram.

Although they use Google, it is mostly just used to reach a company's Instagram page; Instagram is the preferred tool to learn more about new suppliers. The reason is the rich information, such as pictures and comments, that is available on Instagram, which can give initial ideas and impressions about the new supplier. They sometimes use Instagram to search through hashtags, for example, the 'photographer' hashtag, to find new suppliers.

With existing relationships, it was found that some dyadic relations in this case use social media channels as a means (social networks) to extend their business relations to personal relations. It was found that upstream suppliers, such as the chocolate factory (second tier), do not use social media with their upstream suppliers (third tier) or downstream large buyers for business communication. They use social media with these buyers and suppliers for social communication, on occasions such as Eid and New Year, in order to keep the relationship friendly and to maintain contact. As they indicated, "we use it with them for friendly chatting, not business; for orders [for example] we use formal channels" (Chocolate factory). It is also used by others, to see the latest news about their old clients (buyers) as one participant said:

I always check the Instagram page of my old clients from the wedding planners, and also call them for coffee just to keep the friendly relationship... if the relationship is not good and friendly nothing will work here in Kuwait, I believe a lot in personal relations in this country, the country is small and relationships is really matter. (Catering)

This shows that they care to stay up to date about their buyers' achievements, which are broadcast via social media channels. They use such information to make contact with them and compliment their work and achievements. The reason behind it as he indicated is to keep the relationship, because this is important in Kuwait. This reflects the collective nature of Kuwaiti culture.

6.3.2 New relationships

In this case social media is used as a network to search for, learn about then select new suppliers or buyers. In this case WP and the designer use social media and other offline

means when needed to find and select new suppliers, while the catering firm was found to use them to select new buyers; the florist also intends to use it to select prospective buyers. SMEs who do not use social media to select new suppliers (upstream) do not do so for a variety of reasons, such as already knowing where to find new suppliers, or they are looking for large suppliers who are not usually available on social media. Another reason is that their suppliers are fixed, such as the florist, and they do not need different, creative or innovative suppliers, unlike WP and the designer who are usually fulfilling specific customer needs. The following sections explain the role of social media in new relationships.

Supplier selection

Social media channels are a place where SMEs can learn about new suppliers and their suitability; where they can select a supplier and open a relationship with them. It was found that some SMEs use it actively, which means they go and search for new suppliers/buyers and examine their suitability. Others use it for information sharing, to show their products and projects, and then buyers and suppliers find them and initiate the relationship. Some use it both ways, including WP.

It was found that WP and the designer use social media actively, to select new suppliers to fill specific needs for specific customers. They both use hashtags or Google to find the Instagram pages of new suppliers. As WP's manager said, "I make sure to visit their Instagram page because there is [usually] more detail... pictures and videos... from which I can learn more about them". This indicates the popularity of Instagram in Kuwait, where it is used as a website, and has more details and pictures. The availability of such rich information helps give an idea about the prospective relationship, as the designer said: "[Instagram] allows a first impression... to decide whether to contact them or not". WP's manager added: "Instagram can give you a general idea about new suppliers".

The catering firm uses it downstream to select new buyers, and the florist is deciding whether to do so in the future. The catering firm are evaluating the suitability of prospective new buyers, as the catering manager explained: "I see new wedding planners, for example, and see what levels of wedding they are doing... If I like their work... I follow them and like their pictures so they see my name... after that I leave it

to chance”. Sometimes he goes further and invites them to a meeting, to see their work, if he knows they have an upcoming wedding. So the firm uses both social media and offline means, but here this is downstream, towards buyers. This reflects effectuation logic, as will be explained later: he uses the available means to attract their attention.

Information sharing is practiced by almost all of the SMEs. They share their latest products and projects in their broadcast channels, such as Instagram. And this makes them available for any company looking for new buyers and suppliers. As indicated by some of them, many suppliers indeed introduce themselves through Instagram.

After finding new suppliers through broadcast channels, which are like a website or a social network, SMEs go further and usually introduce some kind of social interaction in order to build some sort of trust with the prospect supplier or buyer.

Social interaction

After searching for and learning about new suppliers from their Instagram pages, the next step is social interaction, through visiting or contacting them to enquire and to learn more. As WP’s manager said: “After that... I sit [meet] with them... I get to know them”. She added: “although [I search Instagram] because of photos... I don’t believe them all... I go by myself to check... sometimes pictures are not real... from my experience I have learned that people can cheat you with pictures”. This reflects the importance of avoiding risk by learning more about new suppliers. A closer examination of a new supplier’s products can lead to the development of trust in the integrity and credibility of the supplier.

The designer suggested that there must be social contact in order for trust to be established: “with new relations... I need to meet them face-to-face... I think WhatsApp is the second step for communication... first communication should be face-to-face... just to build some trust”. It is evident that offline social interaction is mostly used to fulfil the “uncertainty avoidance” element of Kuwaiti culture, and to allow the relationship to progress. However, it was found that this social interaction can be overcome if the supplier or product is recommended by offline social circles such as connections. As WP’s manager said:

And sometimes if they are new suppliers, they must be recommended or verified by our connections or family... for example, I have a sweet order now [for one of the weddings], a group of friends highly recommended it... I did not go to check this new supplier by myself [as I usually do], because I trust the taste and opinion of the people who recommended it.

If such social circles recommend a product, social interaction or the need to build trust is overcome by following what the trusted relations recommend. In other words, trust is built through the trusted recommendations. This reflects the collectivist culture of Kuwaiti society.

WP and the designer showed a sense of the ability of social media to expedite the trust-building process in regards to new partners to some extent. The richness of information through social media also aids SMEs' decision making and allows them to have an idea about suppliers prior to a visit. The relationships in this case are more transactional than strategic, which might also be a reason for a faster trust-building process in a new relationship.

The outcome of social interaction through social media channels or these recommendations is the opening of new relationships. After opening the new relations, parties usually exchange WhatsApp numbers. Then future communication is usually done through WhatsApp. There is a benefit of opening a line of communication through WhatsApp, because it is a way to promote more business opportunities between new parties, as they will exchange information about new products or businesses. And this promotes more business for new transactional relations, such as in this case. The supplier selection process in this case should be fast to some extent, in order to fill specific creative or innovative customer needs. The findings of this case show that social media is aiding this, however not all SMEs use it to select suppliers.

The richness of the information that can be exchanged, through text, pictures, video and voice facilitates existing and new buyer-supplier relationships in this case. The impact of social media use is both social and transactional. The following section explains this in detail.

6.3.3 Social media impact

Social media's impact was social and transactional impact, like the previous case study, D&C, and also had negative impacts.

Trust should be considered first here, as it was expected to be an outcome of social media use. Trust is a complex concept. In this case it is a mixture of the credibility and integrity of the supplier, the belief in their ability to deliver quality work, plus the personal trust that is based on the social, informal relations between parties. The former in this case existed before social media use. As WP's manager said: "it is trust in their work first, then WhatsApp use". This has been strengthened by social media use and increased dealings among parties, as the researcher found. The following sections explain in detail the social impact of social media use as a medium for relationships.

6.3.3.1 Social impact

It should be noted here that social impact themes are related to each other. Each social theme impacts the other in one way or another, and trust plays a major role in the emergence of social themes.

Reputation

It was found that some SMEs use broadcast channels and tag other SMEs, and this was found to be a way of gaining reputation through a relationship.

The wedding planner tags her suppliers in the wedding pictures she posts on Instagram. Smaller or unknown suppliers, such as the florist or designers, benefit from tags by getting more followers as a result of the tagging. Other suppliers also benefit in getting new buyers going to deal with them direct because of a tag. Some also gain enhanced reputation because they have worked with WP. As the WP manager said:

Some designers if I told them I want the service for free... I'm sure they would not mind... because they told me by themselves we were something [in the market] and with working with me they become another thing... Their reputation has changed... they become more known... we tag them in our Instagram.

This shows that designers gain reputation through WP's tags in broadcast channels, as the designer also made clear:

[tags on Instagram] give me good reputation because I have dealt with WP... it is also evidence that I worked with her... also we benefit from each other... if she tags me her buyers who want just a designer find me, and when I tag her buyers from my side, if they need a wedding planner, they reach her directly.

The impact of tagging is evident here possibly because of the Kuwaiti culture of collectivism, where word of mouth is particularly appreciated. Tagging is a form of electronic word of mouth. It is as if WP is recommending the suppliers to others or to the public. Gaining reputation through the other party leads to benefits, thus parties usually care about maintaining the relationship for longer, as the following paragraph will explain.

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

It was found in this case that SMEs use social media features such as tagging on Instagram and the openness of the channel as a way to maintain relationships with buyers and suppliers.

A close investigation of the intentions and practices of tagging shows that it has a social impact that, in the end, supports a relationship and helps maintain it. Tagging in this case is understood as a favour from one party to another, because there is no obligation to tag. This is especially the case when the one who tags is known and has a reputation or a large number of followers, as mentioned before. As the florist said, "tags increase my followers... Because many people check my page and see... I got many phone calls once she [WP] tagged me... orders increased".

WP's manager touched on the impact of tags on relationships by mentioning that suppliers, after she has tagged them, especially the ones who benefited (those who are new or unknown), are always looking to keep her satisfied and to work with her. The designer, for instance, is one of the suppliers who benefitted from WP's tags; he said: "when the person who tagged you has a reputation and is known in the industry... this is an advantage for me... it gives me the courage to provide a good service and to prove

to her [WP] that we are trustworthy”. SMEs seek to maintain relations with others if they benefit from tags, by providing good prices and better services, and by trying to please the other party.

There are also benefits for well-known and larger SMEs from tags, as well for smaller businesses. For example, the catering firm is a known SME in the market, and said “tags will keep me in people’s minds... [for me] there is a difference when the wedding planner mentions that the cake is from me... my name is then repeated [by other people]... it is better than saying the cake is from X or Y [another catering firm]”. Suppliers, such as catering, also tag WP in their Instagram posts. As they put it, “we benefit from each other”. In terms of individual businesses, usually it is the one who has fewer followers who benefits more. In terms of buyer-supplier relationships, those who benefit others through tags get better services and prices, and this is a way by which relationships are maintained.

Tags also have an impact on relationships on the personal level. Tags in this case leave a good impression between parties; suppliers who have been tagged mentioned things like “I feel that the wedding planner appreciated my work when she tagged me” (Florist). The designer thinks that “tags increase my trust in the wedding planner”. Posting pictures on WP’s Instagram gives the impression that it is their work alone; tagging suppliers is like appreciating others’ efforts. Although it is a business and the supplier’s work is paid, doing so leaves a positive impression on the other parties’ feelings. Its impact is social. Maintenance of relationships in this case is twofold: one towards the business itself and one towards the social relations. Tagging each other becomes as a norm that is a favour between parties. This indirect way of nurturing and maintaining relationships was not possible before social media broadcast channels such as Instagram.

Loyalty

Loyalty was found to be an outcome of social media use in relationships. As mentioned above, trust is prior to social media use. Trust in the quality of the products or services and the credibility of the supplier is what makes WP use social media effectively with some of her suppliers, as well as some suppliers with their buyers or suppliers. Using social media as a channel for business exchange and interactions strengthened trust in

suppliers as well as social relationships as WP indicated. Trust and social relations are very important in Kuwait, as the catering manager said: in Kuwait business is built on “relations, trust and money”. In this case (WP), trust and good relations through social media bring loyalty to the relationship, as in the relationship between WP and the catering for,. Where one of the catering sales managers who deals directly with WP through WhatsApp opens his own catering company, WP’s manager was happy to deal with the new, unknown company because of the sales manager she trusted and had worked with previously. She did not care about the old SME’s name, that is known in the market, as much as the trust, good relations and loyalty she had built with the sales manager. She knows that this person will not disappoint her and will deliver the quality she is looking for. Therefore, she becomes loyal, although at the personal level. However, it is clear here that this social theme is related to the others, as one has an impact on another. Social themes cannot be isolated from the social context the SMEs works in. In other words, the use of social media blended with the relationships and trust, which bring different social impacts that are related to each other.

Buyer satisfaction

Communication via social media during the production/operation period has the effect of saving time but also has social impacts, such as buyer satisfaction. This means that the supplier delivers what is expected by the buyer. This is due to effective communication through rich media, where the work can be communicated through pictures and videos. Comments and feedback can be obtained instantly. This is a way that SMEs use social media as a supply chain technology. This was found in this case more with manufacturing suppliers, such as the designer and the catering firm, where these suppliers will create something customised, based on an idea or theme. Errors or faults are more likely in comparison to other, ready-made services, such as DJs or photography. For example, when the wedding planner asks the designer for specific designs (e.g. stages) in specific sizes, the designer usually shows the work in progress before finalising it. As the designer said: “pictures and videos are very important, so are video calls... we show [WP] that we have done this this way... and this is the width, etc. ... it is clearer and faster”.

The designer also sometimes makes a sample of the work and sends it to the WhatsApp group he has with WP, to gain faster feedback and suggestions from WP or the wedding

family for improvements. Sharing such information ensures the buyer stays up to date with the progress of the work. It is also a way of reviewing the work and making changes as the work progresses, which also saves the cost of making the wrong order and remaking it. WP's manager also explained and showed how they share pictures of sweet stands and cakes with the catering firm, and how they should look on the wedding day. She gives her comments in voice messages, and they make the changes and then resend pictures to allow her to confirm the changes. The catering firm, although they have been in the market a long time, touched on the impact of sharing photos: "WhatsApp makes my life easy... it decreases buyers' complaints".

Information richness, therefore, through pictures and videos, reduces buyers' complaints and increases their satisfaction with the end product. This also saves the cost of correcting wrong orders. This effective and instant communication has a positive impact on relations between parties.

6.3.3.2 Transactional impact

Time saving

Most social media use saves parties time. For example, communicating real-time operational information, coordinating work between parties, collaborating on specific events and placing orders more quickly. All SMEs in the case study mentioned this impact.

For example, sharing real-time pictures of an operation saves both parties time. As the wedding planner said:

Time... Time... Time... for details, for example, instead of visiting them [a supplier] more than once, I finalize the matter through WhatsApp... On the wedding day the florist arranges the vases and sends me the picture to get my approval... Imagine if I had to make the effort to go to their shop.

Using social media for collaboration on shared events and goals saves meeting time, as WhatsApp groups allow flexible 'meeting' anytime and anywhere. The richness of the information that can be exchanged through social media allows for virtualizing the

meeting. For example, a WhatsApp group participant explains what is not clear through writing on paper and recording it on video, then sharing it with the group. This overcomes physical nearness, as WP pointed out: “it is like you are sitting together in the same room”. She added:

without meeting each one in their house... I can send what I want anytime... also once I remember anything I send it to the group... once they find the time they can check it and see... if I were in a meeting with them it would be normal to forget [to say] many things.

In some sectors, to overcome bureaucracy, such as in the hotel sector, social media is used as an informal tool to speed up work, or orders, as in this case. For example, the catering sales manager said the process of placing an official order from a 5-star hotel takes a long time, nearly four days, because it involves paperwork plus emails. Therefore he accepts orders through WhatsApp from trusted parties (purchasing managers in certain hotels); as he put it, “I started the order before the official paperwork arrived... I don’t mind... I want to process my work, and when the purchase order arrives the cake will be ready in the fridge” (Catering manager). Some orders arrive only a few days before an event, therefore using informal, fast channels is very effective in this case. Some participants also mentioned that social media saves costs for them, such as the cost of international calls and SMS.

6.3.3.3 Negative impact

Although the richness of social media in enabling picture sharing is a major positive impact of social media use in this case, it was found that it has a negative impact too. The negative impact of social media use mostly affects the SMEs, not their relationships. The negative impacts involve infringement of the copyright of products, increased competition between SMEs and decreased shelf-life of some products.

One of the most frequently reported negative impacts is copyright infringement. It was found that the copyright of suppliers who create innovative and creative products and designs can be negatively affected by use of social media. When broadcasting pictures of projects and designs on social media channels, these pictures can be copied by others

and executed under their name. As the designer found, some parties do not have credibility, and share designs with other parties. The material that is available on broadcast channels such as Instagram is easily copied, therefore the designer tends to post designs after they have been used.

Social media also has a negative impact on the shelf-life of designs. In terms of the sweet designs created by the catering company, for example, before social media, designs could still appear new for around three years. Gradually, with the spread of social media, it has become necessary to make new items every year. With the high spread of social media in Kuwait it is now the case that after any big weddings, sweets are seen as old and already used, because of the high speed at which pictures can be released. As the catering firm said, “the sweets that we just released cease to be new after the first wedding [at which they were used]... all the world saw them and knows them... this is a big danger... this is one of the negative sides of social media”. This is a specific feature of the Kuwaiti context, that uniqueness is a demand, especially on special occasions such as parties and weddings. As the catering firm said, in reference to one example: “I told them this is a new item that we just released last week... they replied, no everybody saw it, it is old now”. This is affecting their business and making the shelf-life of their products shorter. This leads to SMEs being no longer able to cope with the fast developments and changes in the markets.

Competition between businesses has also increased as a result of social media, because it is easy to copy each other and Instagram makes it easy for the customer to compare more choices more quickly, which allows them to make faster decisions; this is the main reason for the increased competition.

Social media was found to be of a benefit but at the same time its negative impact on innovative and creative industries cannot be ignored. As one participant said, “it is a sword with two edges... I cannot dispense with it... but it is affecting my products at the same time” (Catering manager). This shows the positive and negative impact of social media use, but it seems the positive side is more effective, which makes it an important tool.

6.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies

Most SMEs in this case study do not use any advanced technologies, such as information systems. They use computers, telephones including mobiles, emails and the Internet. The impact of social media on the use of the telephone and email is vast.

6.3.4.1 Social media richness vs the telephone

It was found that SMEs in this case, similar to the D&C case, use social media to complement the telephone by sharing photos, voice and videos, as well as to keep a digital copy of some conversations or orders. This helps SMEs to overcome physical distance and to exchange information accurately and clearly. When information is supported by pictures it has a richness that is better than information given by voice alone, as with the telephone, and written information as well, which is better than verbal information. As the florist said: “to complement phone calls for flower arrangements... we send photos through WhatsApp”. WP’s manager thinks that social media makes information exchange clearer by allowing for the sharing of rich information: “What makes things clearer is the photos they send... for example, pictures of the flower types... pictures of flower arrangements... [or] the [supplier] sends videos explaining what he is doing so I understand better”. This indicates the richness of using social media channels such as WhatsApp to deliver clear and rich information that is not possible through telephone calls. Such information cannot be delivered by phone calls alone, and without social media would require a visit. Visits take time and effort. These problems have been overcome through the use of social media channels between parties.

Moreover, the potential for digital record of chats is another benefit that WhatsApp has over the telephone. As the designer explained, WhatsApp is of help for orders placed over the phone: “WhatsApp is used for order confirmation... it is written and typed and this saves the information for me... it confirms the deal between us... WhatsApp provides a confirmation of what has been said over the phone”. A further example of documentation was found in this case. Sometimes conversations are documented as a reference for the work and a reminder of agreements between parties. They return to the chat, or WhatsApp group, to remember what they have said to the other party, for example, meeting times, sample pictures, etc. The florist said:

it is of benefit because it reminds me... it is written and saved like a note that I can reread... sometimes I go back to the previous WhatsApp chat with the chocolate factory to check orders I have made before and reorder the same if necessary.

Digital records are not possible through the telephone. Thus, the telephone is still in use, however, but is complemented by social media for more effective and rich communication between parties.

Overcoming language barriers

WP indicated that social media's richness helps to overcome language barriers with some of their suppliers' workers, such as tradesmen, as many are non-Kuwaitis or non-Arabs. Here, instead of visits or telephone calls, they use social media. Although they mostly don't type Arabic, pictures and videos help in this situation. As WP's manager said: "carpentry for example, when he explains things for me... [carpenters] are mostly non-Arabs... I ask him to draw it and take a video of the drawing and explain what he will do... I cannot dispense with WhatsApp". This is also part of the richness of social media, that it can overcome problems in traditional ways of communication. It is also a way of delivering accurate information between parties who speak different languages. "WhatsApp is better at delivering information... Information is delivered correctly, faster, more accurately and clearer between me and the supplier because of pictures, videos and text" (Designer).

6.3.4.2 Social media speed vs email

It was found in this case that social media is used to speed up communication, in comparison to email. Email is the preferred communication channel with large businesses such as banks and hotels. SMEs, however, use WhatsApp as a main tool for communication, along with the telephone, and for official documentation they use written contracts or receipts. WhatsApp is faster and easier to access. In reference to a hotel they work with, the catering firm explained that: "Email is official in case anything goes wrong ... but in practice I don't wait for it to start the work... WhatsApp is enough to start the work and orders" (Catering manager). Because he trusts the employee in charge, he takes orders through WhatsApp in order to speed up the work,

and later receives emails for their records. The second-tier supplier, the chocolate factory, use email more than other SMEs, and it is important for most of their upstream communication with their suppliers, as the manager explained: “email is still the most important [tool] because it documents everything... Small matters can be dealt with through WhatsApp, but some needs email”. Their use of WhatsApp is limited to trusted parties and matters where speed is required, but most of their communication is via email, and this is a clear difference between second-tier suppliers and first-tier supplier in this case. Although both use WhatsApp to speed things up, but second-tier supplier use is limited in comparison to first-tier suppliers.

6.4 Conclusion

This case is based on customization, innovation and creativity, similarly to the D&C case. Relationships, although transactional, are based on trust and social relationships. Kuwaiti culture also plays a major role in this case context; the context shapes the use and impact of social media

Social media was found to be used to coordinate operations between parties, to share information such as the latest news, to place small orders, and for collaboration on shared projects. Also parties use it for social networking, to extend business relationships to personal relations, and to search for, find and select new suppliers. These uses arise because of the richness of social media, which facilitates the exchanges of pictures, videos, text and voice.

It was found that WP and the designer use social media alongside offline means to select new suppliers, while the catering firm use it to find new buyers. The information about new suppliers available on Instagram helps in determining their suitability, as well as the offline and online social interaction with them. Recommendations from offline social circles plays a major role building trust in new suppliers in this case.

The impact of social media is both social and transactional. Although it was found that trust is not an outcome of social media use, it is required prior to use. Broadcast channel tagging can impact the reputation of some SMEs positively and this is regarded a favour among the relationships. This makes parties care to nurture and maintain relationship

for longer. Trust and good social relationships through social media also lead to loyalty. The rich communication potential has an impact on buyer satisfaction by helping SMEs to deliver the expected results.

There is also transactional impact, such as saving a massive amount of time. Social media use also has negative impacts, which include infringement of copyright, increased competition between SMEs and decreased shelf-life of designs.

The impact of using social media is vast, in terms of the ways in which it complements telephone calls and email. The richness of social media complements voice calls with pictures and videos. And it is used to speed up communication in comparison to email, although email is still the official tool for some suppliers.

Chapter Seven: Real estate case study

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of the third case study, which focuses on the supply chain of a real estate company (hereafter referred to as O-RE). It presents a detailed overview of the firm. Table 7.1 summarizes the relationship of each peer to O-RE. The subsequent section analyses the data in detail; this is followed by a summary of the key findings.

7.2 Case overview and context

O-RE is a small company established in 2001, in the service sector. The company's services include selling, buying and renting estates such as houses, buildings or land. They do this by collecting information from customers who want to sell or rent their properties and providing it to the ones who want to buy. They receive commission from the buyer when the estate is sold. Information is mostly supplied to O-RE by other real estate companies when they need it. For example, O-RE is looking for a specific property that is not on their list; they ask other real estate companies to supply information about the specific property if they have it. They exchange such information and if the property is sold they share the commission. Therefore their relationships are collaborative, and trust is very important in their dealings with other real estate companies. The reason for this is that if they share the full information the other party might sell the property under their own name and leave the information supplier without their commission. Trust and honesty is therefore very important, as indicated by participants.

The supply chain in this case study is flat, in the same tier (peers) (see figure 7.1). O-RE serves end consumers and business customers. Their suppliers are the customers (end and business) they deal with; they provide them with information about the estates they want to sell, and other real estate companies supply them with information. Relationships are more collaborative in this case, although without contracts, but the relationships are dependent on each other to provide information about properties and to know the latest news in the sector. What holds relationships is trust and social relations as well as the repeated collaborations between parties.

O-RE rely heavily on communication technologies, i.e. the telephone, mobile, fax, the Internet and email in their dealings, to share and exchange information. However, they still use old methods, such as newspapers. These different kinds of channel are used to promote the properties they have by sharing limited information about them, in order to make people aware of their availability. At the same time, sharing such information serves to update other real estate companies they deal with about what they have, meaning they can be contacted for full details when needed. With the introduction of social media, O-RE and their peers have begun to heavily rely on these tools to share rich information and widen their relationships, as the analysis will show. The owner-manager of O-RE manages these channels and he is the one who was interviewed. Table 7.1 provides an overview of O-RE's peers.

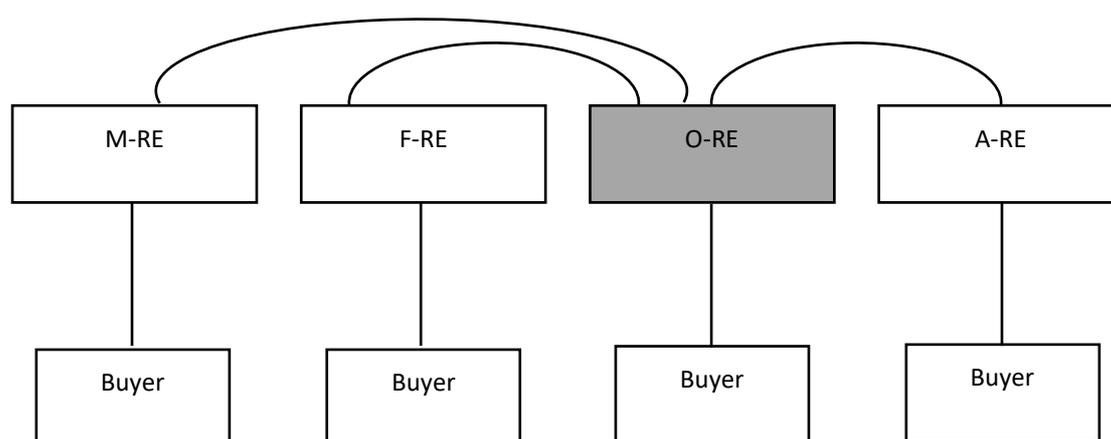


Figure 7.1: O-RE supply chain

Table 7.1: SMEs overview

	O-RE	F-RE	A-RE	M-RE
Relationship with O-RE		Supplies and exchanges information on estates with O-RE	Supplies and exchanges information on estates with O-RE	Supplies and exchanges information on estates with O-RE
Founded	2001	2003	2003	2000
Size	Small	Small	Small	Small
Sector	Service	Service	Service	Manufacturing and service
Products	They sell, buy and rent properties	They sell, buy and rent properties	They sell, buy and rent properties	They sell, buy and rent properties, and they build and design properties
Nature of products	Information and connecting buyer and seller of properties together	Information and connecting buyer and seller of properties together	Information and connecting buyer and seller of properties together	Information and connecting buyer and seller of properties together
Location of suppliers	Kuwait (other real estate companies)			
Traditional ICT (email, phone, etc.) for supplier interaction	Phone, email, fax and newspaper			
Social media (SM) channels for supplier interaction	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp	WhatsApp only
Who manages social media	Owner-manager	Owner-manager	Owner-manager	Owner-manager

7.3 Case analysis

The following section presents an analysis of the real estate company, O-RE, and their peers, by addressing each of the research questions in turn.

7.3.1 Social media uses

This case study's participants use social media mainly for information sharing, e.g. real estate company offers and news, and secondly for social networking, to build real estate communities. They have found it a quick new channel that adds to their old ways of communication and information sharing. All participants are Kuwaitis. Their main business activity is, in fact, information sharing, because estate prices are usually such high prices, and they do not sell many items per day, therefore their everyday business differs from those businesses based on selling low-cost, high-volume items.

7.3.1.1 Information sharing

The main information found to be exchanged in this case is real estate offers and requests, such as offering a house for sale or requesting to buy a building. It was found that all participants use social media to share such information with each other. The main social media tool used in this instance is the direct channel, WhatsApp. Broadcast channels such as Instagram and Twitter are then used to share offers and real estate news, as participants indicated:

WhatsApp is used for sending and receiving real estate offers and requests; Twitter and Instagram, in addition to sending and receiving real estate offers and requests, are used to post news and reports about real estate. (F-RE manager)

WhatsApp is the most frequently used. Some customers ask for the picture and location of the house before going to see it in reality. Then they would evaluate it by its picture and location, seeing whether they want it or not. For example, some houses are old or reconditioned, but they want a new one. So it would be evident through the picture whether it is suitable for them or not. (O-RE manager)

Participants use social media for sharing information with buyers and other real estate companies or agents. They share information and pictures of properties, their sizes, etc. Participants indicated that in broadcast channels and with new real estate companies they share limited information such as the specifications of a property, while specific details such as the address are shared only with trusted real estate parties to protect their rights (this will be discussed later). This is the only use for information sharing in this case, sharing offers, requests and news, and this is due to the nature of the real estate business.

7.3.1.2 Social networking

Social networking in this case is similar to other cases, in which social media is used to find and connect with new and existing relationships. However, in this case it is more through a special type of networks, virtual communities.

Virtual communities

Real estate companies use social media to share information and to connect with each other in groups that are a type of virtual community. It was found here that real estate companies use a direct channel, WhatsApp, to build virtual communities of real estate businesses, by creating WhatsApp groups that connect a number of real estate companies and agents, where they share daily offers, such as houses for sale or rent, and requests for properties. Each participant can post the offers they have.

We use WhatsApp groups to exchange details. We exchange and present real estate offers as we do in newspapers, without the location and address. If any real estate office wants a property, they would contact us via private messages [in WhatsApp] to send them the address and details, provided that I trust them for sure. (O-RE manager)

Real estate companies found that WhatsApp groups are a new channel that allows them to reach more real estate companies. Although WhatsApp is a chat application, not primarily intended for business, it is used creatively to serve real estate goals.

Such communities serve as a form of “*Duwaniyah*”, a place where men (exclusively) gather socially and exchange information and discuss different issues, including regarding business. It is “an important aspect of Kuwaiti culture and traditions, forming an integral part of men’s social lives” (Fattahova, 2011, no pagination). WhatsApp groups can be considered a form of virtual *Duwaniyah*, where information and the latest news about real estate is exchanged. There are also some specialized groups within real estate, as explained by A-RE’s manager:

We usually connect to each other through WhatsApp groups. Now I’m in more than one group, one is for GCC companies, one for Kuwaiti real estate companies, one for investment offers, one for residential estates. And one which is general for all types of real estate news, that sometimes includes construction.

Virtual communities serve as a place where participants gather, and also a place where they can find each other, because group members do not necessarily know each other. In this case, a group is initiated by one of the real estate companies, and he adds his

connections, and these connections invite their connections, in other words snowballing connections. Thus they all gather and connect in one place. As A-RE's manager explained, "I don't know all the participants in these groups, I know about 50% only... I don't mean that I know them personally but there is an information exchange relationship because we work in the same sector". And this also happens in some offline *Duwaniyahs*, where strangers can come and attend gatherings for the purpose of business or to build new relationships. The (female) manager of M-RE compared the advantage of *Duwaniyahs* for men in comparison to women:

If you don't have connections [in Kuwait] your work cannot progress... Men in *Duwaniyahs* are building relationships... they can find them much more easily than us, the women in real estate ... because we don't have *Duwaniyahs* for women... most of the work [business and deals] is done through *Duwaniyahs*.

This might be a reason why this sector is dominated by men, as observed by the researcher; there are few women working in this sector, such as the manager of M-RE.

There are some general unwritten rules for some specialized groups, such as not sharing messages that are outside of the specialized subject. Any participant who does not follow the rules is removed by the group manager, as indicated by A-RE. It seems that these groups nowadays have become the first channel to gather real estate information: "WhatsApp is the first channel... through WhatsApp we send, every day, the morning message for all our connections [within the sphere of RE]" (A-RE manager). He means that they share the information they have every morning to the groups first thing in the morning, and this reflects the idea of the newspaper, which is still used in this sector (as will be discussed later).

7.3.2 New relationships

Broadcast channels were found to be a place where they build new relationships in this case. As well as virtual communities, WhatsApp groups were found to serve as social networks where participants gather, find and reach out to each other, and form new relationships.

Supplier selection

Opening new relationships in this case is similar to other cases, done either actively or passively through information sharing. Some real estate companies search for new relations through social media tools such as Instagram, or they find them in WhatsApp groups, virtual communities, and they then initiate the relationship, either online or offline. Others share information in broadcast channels such as Instagram and Twitter, or in real estate WhatsApp groups, or other businesses may come to them to initiate a relationship. F-RE's manager commented: "social media widens my relationships circle... they [other real estate companies or buyers] find me through social media, Instagram or Twitter, it is not necessarily that I'm the one who searches for them". With regards to searching, he added:

I search [Instagram] by name or by using keywords in our field, such as 'properties' or 'real estate', and the names of companies or individuals start appearing to me. If they are a company, I search via Google to learn the history of the company... and who the members of their board of directors are, so that I can gain access to the company through one of them. (F-RE manager)

The impact of personal connections (offline social networks) and their opinion is evident in this case. It is one of things that is taken into consideration by participants, especially for new relationships. In this case connections can be considered part of the search for new relationships via means other than social media. As in the above example, they can gain access to new companies and open a relationship more easily if they find a connection. Therefore, they check the names of the directors first. This is called "*Wasta*" in Kuwaiti terms, as will be explained later. This was evident in the WhatsApp groups too, the virtual communities of real estate companies. For example, if any of the group members are interested in the estates posted by O-RE, they usually message O-RE directly through WhatsApp direct message, to ask for more details about the estate.

I do not know some real estate agents on WhatsApp groups that I have joined. When someone I do not know asks me in private about a particular offer, I do not give them any details related to the property yet I immediately ask my real estate connections whom I trust whether they have worked with them before or not.

What do they think about them? If they speak highly of them, I could start doing business with them. (O-RE manager)

O-RE's manager indicated that before he begins to share the information or open a relationship with them and before he starts to work with them he asks his connections (other real estate companies with whom he has a long relationship and whom he trusts) if anybody has dealt with them. If the connection recommends and compliments the new relationship, O-RE shares the information and starts to work with them. He does not necessarily search about the history of the company or individual that wants to work with him by himself, if his connections recommend them. The manager of O-RE added:

sometimes from the family name you can learn about their honesty... I usually call them [after they contact me in WhatsApp] asking about [their] relatives I know from the same family... just like friendly chatting to see if they belong to the same family [that I know], how close they are to people I know... If I feel that he is 'clean'... I start to deal with him... so the most important question we need to know is 'who is the owner of the company?'

There are many Kuwaiti family names that are widely known in Kuwait, because Kuwait is a narrow society. In other words, Kuwait is a small country where people mostly know each other. Kuwaitis usually care about the reputation of their families, so they interact with people in a respectful way to keep their family's name clean, and this includes in business. For example, if the father worked in the same sector as his son and was known to be "clean", as Kuwaitis say about people who are honest and do not cheat, people will usually trust the son to be the same as his father, although there are exceptions. If he is known to be clean like his father, this will spread quickly between dealers (businessmen), and likewise if he breaks this trust it is not easy to rebuild it in societies such as Kuwait. This reputation building and breaking is spread among Kuwaitis mostly via *Duwaniyahs*

This also reflects the collectivist nature of Kuwaiti culture, that was evident in other cases. Kuwaitis care deeply about the opinion of their connections, as well as the reputation of their families in front of others, where one person represents the whole family. Therefore, while social media channels are used to find new relationships and

to learn more about them and make decisions, connections and offline networks play a major role as well. Subsequent social interaction with the new party is important to build some type of trust.

Social interaction

After finding who the person is, they will deal with them. They begin to interact and share information with them, and get to know them closely, through WhatsApp or in some cases the telephone. Sometimes this also happens through offline visits, in order to build trust, and this is particularly the case if they do not have a prior connection that knows the new connection, as the manager of F-RE explained:

I only use social media for searching, but starting new relationships requires a personal meeting, or at least a phone call, because the nature of our business in real estate is based on goods with large amounts of money, so there should be a meeting or an introduction to build some kind of trust before making deals.

If there is a recommendation from a prior connection, however, visits are in some cases not required. Social interaction through social media means is enough, as the manager of O-RE stated:

After [I ask about him] I deal with him [share information with him] without even meeting him face-to-face... it is all done through WhatsApp and the telephone... at the time of the official sale, when they want to register the deal officially we meet face-to-face... this has happened many times.

These examples of social interaction also reflect the importance of trust building in new relationships. It may happen in a variety of ways, but at the end it is having a sense of trust that makes parties comfortable in dealing with new real estate companies. After searching, recommendations and social interaction, if the relationship is opened, future communication takes place mostly through WhatsApp.

These examples also reflect the speed of opening relationships and dealings in this sector, though also the caution that exists. The reason for such speed might be the type of exchanges, which are mainly based on information, not physical products, until the

deal takes place, and a deal does not usually take place quickly in this type of business. Also it might be because of the transactional nature of the relationships, where parties contact each other only when needed. Widening the circle of relationships is beneficial for this type of business, where deals might become quicker than if relationships are limited to a small number of real estate companies, because reaching more buyers is possible with more relationships. Opening relationships in this sector is fast, but trust is an important element for both new and existing relationships.

7.3.3 Social media impact

The use of social media in this case is limited to information sharing and community building, so its impact is limited as well. However, in the same way as the other cases, there are both social and transactional impacts, and also there are negative impacts.

The issue of trust was raised in all cases, although it is not a direct outcome of social media use. However, trust is important for effective use of social media, as a relationship technology between buyer and supplier. In this sector (real estate) trust is very important, and is the predominant aspect of dealings between real estate parties, as O-RE's manager said: "Real estate business in Kuwait depends on mutual trust among the companies. If I do not trust F-RE, I would not deal with them in the first place. Building trust is a top priority, and this was the case even before using social media." It was found that real estate companies are participating in WhatsApp groups, and in these virtual communities they do not know all the members, as mentioned before. More investigation about the trust issue revealed that they participate in groups and share information, but only limited information about the estate or property, leaving the details such as the location or specific address for trusted parties. Therefore, it can be concluded that trust is prior to social media use with new and existing relationships.

7.3.3.1 Social impact

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

Broadcast channels such as Instagram and Twitter allow parties to be connected all the time and stay updated about the latest offers available from their peers. WhatsApp groups or virtual communities, used for everyday communication and exchange of information, are another way of staying connected and updated.

I [check the Twitter and Instagram accounts] of my real estate friends every day, as they put their offers there... if there is an offer they have not exchanged with me in WhatsApp, I would find it on their Instagram or Twitter account; when I find one of the properties that I'm looking for, I would capture the screen and send it to them through WhatsApp, then I ask them for the address of the property to offer it to my customers. (O-RE manager)

This type of connection through different channels was not as convenient before social media, when the tools they were using were the newspaper and the telephone. Being updated and connected with other parties all the time leads to more deals between parties, and this in turn nurtures the relationship and maintains it for longer. It was also found that real estate companies use social media tools to contact their buyers and other real estate parties on occasions like Eid, Ramadan and New Year, to keep in touch with them in a friendly, social manner. This is in turn another way to keep relations for longer.

7.3.3.2 Transactional impact

Time saving

It was found that social media tools are a popular new channel that makes communication and information sharing easier and faster, as well as rich. Saving time is an important aspect of social media use due to the nature of real estate work, which needs much effort and time. Sharing pictures saves parties visiting time (as in other cases), as participants said:

Before WhatsApp we had to go to the estate location to see it... Either it is close or far away... Now, by calling [for example] the security officer of the building [that is offered] for sale and asking for pictures [of the building]... he sends the pictures and we don't need to [make the effort] and go there... WhatsApp reduces the distance, hours... and effort... and also cost. (A-RE manager)

Pictures give an idea about the property for sale, for example, whether it is old or new, as mentioned by other participants. This in turn saves the time needed for visits. Moreover, sharing pictures makes decision making easier, as it gives a first impression

for the buyer or the real estate agents about the status of the house, for example. Some buyers, based on the WhatsApp picture, decide whether they want to go to see the property or not, as it might not be what they are looking for. As O-RE's manager stated, "new communication tools make many tasks easier for us... before [social media] we would give them the address to see the house and we would keep calling them to follow up with them". Now all these things are done through social media tools, and this saves a massive amount of time for real estate SMEs. Sending and exchanging information through WhatsApp also saves time needed for calling and giving details over the phone, particularly the need to greet people before explaining the specific point of the call, required by Kuwaiti telephone etiquette. As one participant said, "there is not extensive talking... there are shortcuts in talking and writing and time" (M-RE manager). This is also an advantage of social media use over the telephone, as will be explained later.

7.3.3.3 Negative impact

There are also negative impacts from the use of social media tools, but O-RE attempt to avoid these by making sure they know the history of the real estate companies they are working with. One of the most important points raised in this respect is that the introduction of virtual communities, although it has the benefit of keeping them updated and always connected with parties, mixes things together compared to the old ways, as O-RE's manager explained:

in the [offline] market... people [in the real estate business] are in groups... cheaters with cheaters... clean people work with clean people... but with [the introduction of] WhatsApp groups they all mix together... therefore, before I deal with any of them I ask about them.

The manager of M-RE stated that:

through [WhatsApp groups] you see all kinds [of real estate companies]... before these tools you were limited to companies you knew well... it really opens the door for new relationships but [at the same time] too many people can distract you.

Because Kuwaiti society is narrow, as mentioned before, people tend to know each other, and *Duwaniyabs* also help in this respect. This helps people know the groups to avoid and the groups to join. As M-RE's manager indicated, "people know each other in the market... when I say [for example] O-RE... they speak highly about him... while there are some groups that are known to be liars in the market". This shows that virtual communities open the door for many connections that might not be honest. Although WhatsApp groups are considered private, access to these groups is not difficult. Some real estate companies think that this is a disadvantage of these communities. Some companies from these communities might steal offers, as M-RE's manager indicated: "a disadvantage is too much stealing... sometimes you post ambiguous offers [without the details or address] and they ask other companies they know to get the details without asking you... this is because the offer has been broadcast [in the WhatsApp groups]". Although virtual communities are widening relationships and helping parties keep up to date with real estate news, they are not without their disadvantages and risks.

7.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies

It was found that in this case study real estate companies were using a variety of old technologies and offline means to connect with their buyers or peers, such as newspapers and pagers. For example, participants used to mention a code number for a property in a newspaper advertisement, and the buyer or peer, when calling the pager, entered the code provided, which meant they wanted to know more about the property. Then the real estate agent would call by telephone and gives the details verbally. If the buyer or the real estate peer liked the details, they would ask for a visit. Broadcasting in newspapers was costly, however. There are also "advertisement newspapers", which are specialized and cheaper than general newspapers. Mobile phones and SMS also became popular in Kuwait; real estate companies used to use these tools to broadcast their offers. Then the Internet arrived, as a new means; at first there were real estate forums where SMEs could create communities and share deals, offers and requests.

Social media spread quickly in Kuwait and the Arab world. Real estate companies then moved to using Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp. After the move to social media, forums and SMS were no longer used. WhatsApp groups became a substitute for the forums and WhatsApp messages replaced SMS and use of pagers stopped completely.

Instagram and Twitter became a cheaper (almost free) option instead of newspapers. However, they did not stop using newspapers, because there are generations (i.e. the older generation) who are still searching through newspapers and who do not use social media, as O-RE indicated. The manager of A-RE said:

we didn't stop the old ways of communication because generations are different... therefore, we share the same information in newspapers, Instagram and WhatsApp... so reaching different generations has become easier than before.

Without doubt, what has made real estate companies move from pager, fax, SMS and telephone to more rich means such as forums and then social media channels, which are easier and faster to use, is the type and speed of information that can be exchanged in less time, with less effort and at lower cost. As participants stated:

WhatsApp has advantages... it makes dealings [with parties] easier... instead of too many phone calls or faxes... it is easier, you send the same offer to all groups. (M-RE manager)

[compared to] the telephone... social media can be a substitute [because of]... voice messages... and picture sharing; for example, we send property pictures, ownership document pictures or the rent statement if it is a building... all the pictures and details... and sometime they [buyers] take [initial] decisions and make agreements based on these [pictures and details]. (A-RE manager)

Features of social media such as voice messages, picture and text sharing are making communication between real estate parties richer than the old ways of communication. As O-RE's manager put it:

Pictures are important, they give a first impression for the buyer about the status of the house... it makes it easier for us [real estate companies] and the buyer to take decisions... of course, at the end he [the buyer] has to see it [the property] for himself... but new communication tools make many matters easier.

This was confirmed by the manager of M-RE:

before WhatsApp we would send the location through fax; we would copy the location from the map, then we would send it, just the location not the property picture... now it is easier, we give the details of the property and the pictures of the property... all through WhatsApp.

The richness of the information being shared makes exchanges and decision making faster than before. Previously a lot of time was needed to find, check, communicate and decide; through social media all this can be done much more easily, e.g. by broadcasting a property on Instagram, Twitter or WhatsApp groups, and by sharing and communicating pictures and details through WhatsApp, then taking decisions over whether to make the effort to visit the property or not. This in turn facilitates relationships and boosts transactions. However, the telephone is still in use and cannot be entirely replaced by the richness of social media; rather it is complemented by it, and still used for some groups who prefer old ways; the same is true for the newspaper.

Social media speed vs email

As in the other cases, social media complements email, due to the speed of social media compared to email responses. In this case it is almost a substitute for real estate parties, though it complements it for larger buyers or larger real estate companies. As F-RE's manager said: "we usually use email and WhatsApp for communication, but I noticed lately that many companies are dispensing with email and just using WhatsApp for communication as a faster and easier tool". He is referring to communication with real estate peers, who have moved to WhatsApp over email. Some also mentioned the use of fax, which is a slower option than email, but was previously in use for some of them. As another participant mentioned, "fax and email have been substituted by WhatsApp to send all the documents, pictures and forms... we can print them if needed" (A-RE manager). "Nobody uses fax machines anymore", according to the manager of F-RE. This indicates that WhatsApp is becoming an important, convenient tool to facilitate real estate work, as they have started to move away from more official methods such as email or fax. A-RE mentioned that WhatsApp messages are now taken into consideration in the Kuwaiti courts, used as evidence if needed. However, it was found that some large companies and governmental sectors do not accept WhatsApp

messages, and also some real estate companies do not exchange information through WhatsApp because it is not their official tool. As O-RE' manager said, "in brief, WhatsApp has become a substitute for SMS and email except with large companies and governmental sectors, in order to protect my rights... we also use email if companies ask to use it for communication with them". This also may be due to the limited number of exchanges with these large companies and governmental sectors as buyers, which makes it better to use formal methods of communication. With real estate peers there are many exchanges and a higher degree of trust, and thus WhatsApp is better and faster.

Social media has added to the old technologies and methods of communication between real estate parties and their buyers, by adding richness of picture sharing and speed of communication, and it has become easier and faster to share information and take decisions. As indicated by A-RE's manager, "decision making has become easier and faster... and even when I'm travelling the work doesn't stop... because WhatsApp is working and we can completely connect with our clients". This reflects the impact of social media tools and their effectiveness in this sector.

7.4 Conclusion

All participants in this case are pure Kuwaitis, and most relationships are Kuwaiti to Kuwaiti, compared to the other cases where the manager (or owner) is Kuwaiti but the employees are not necessarily Kuwaitis (from other cultures such as Egypt, India or the Philippines). Therefore, the culture of Kuwaitis themselves is very clear here. The nature of the business also plays a part in explaining the use and impact of social media in this case.

It was found that social media is used in this case mainly for information sharing, sharing real estate offers and requests, through both direct and broadcast channels, i.e. WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter. It is also used for social networking, by building virtual communities of real estate companies (suppliers), where they share news, offers and reach out to each other to open new relationships. It serves a similar role to the Kuwaiti *Duwaniyahs*.

Real estate companies were found to use social media channels, i.e. WhatsApp groups, Twitter and Instagram, as a means to find or reach out to new relationships. Similar to the other cases, this is done either actively or through information sharing. However, offline connections (offline social networks) still play an important role in learning more about what is found on social media and in building trust. Social interaction is the next step in deciding to open a relationship and start dealing; this is usually through visits and the telephone in order to build trust (if there are no connections to recommend them).

Trust is very important in this sector and it must be established prior to effective social media use between buyer and supplier. The impact of information sharing via direct and broadcast channels is that it allows parties to stay connected and updated all the time with other parties, and this in turn nurtures and maintains relationships. It was found that social media saves massive amounts of time, by saving visits or calling time through sharing pictures.

The negative impact of social media use is mostly from the virtual communities. These mix all kind of real estate companies together, where the honest and trusted are mixed with the dishonest, before groups of real estate companies get to know each other in the market. Real estate companies thus consider virtual communities a disadvantage, despite their benefits.

Social media has had a huge impact on old ways of communication between parties because of its richness, speed and easiness of sharing information. It complements the telephone by its richness, and surpasses email for speed. It has substituted the fax, pager, SMS and online forums that were used before social media in the real estate sector.

Chapter Eight: Wood factory case study

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of the fourth case study, which focuses on the supply chain of a wood factory (hereafter referred to as WF). It presents a detailed overview of the firm and the context of the case. Then table 8.1 summarizes the relationship of each supplier to the focal firm. Following the case description, the subsequent section analyses the data in detail; this is followed by a summary of the key findings of this case in its context.

8.2 Case overview

WF is a medium-sized company established in 1999, in the manufacturing sector. The company provides customized cupboards and woodwork solutions for houses and businesses, such as sliding doors, hinged doors, accessories solutions and storage solutions. They provide very high-quality work customized and manufactured to the customer's needs. Their customers include both end customers and business customers such as interior designers and large businesses. Their main suppliers of wood are from Germany. They manufacture wooden products in Kuwait in a medium-sized factory. They have Kuwaiti suppliers for some items such as glass, materials and some accessories related to the cupboards. These suppliers are dealt with based on customer needs, and not in large fixed quantities.

On the other side of the supply chain, they have business customers (buyers) who are mostly interior designers. Their relationships with them are mostly transactional, but the national culture of Kuwait, which is based around collectivism, leads to them also being collaborative. Parties are keen to build social relations beside business ones, and this reflects the Kuwaiti way of caring about relations, as mentioned in the literature.

The company relies heavily on the Internet and ICT in their business. They use telephone (including mobile phones), email, websites and social media. The main social media channels they use are broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, and direct channels such as WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used with buyers to coordinate

operations, answer enquiries, provide updates and receive feedback. Broadcast channels such as Instagram are used to share information and as a reference for their products. They recently started using Snapchat to show off their products for more marketing and exposure to buyers and end consumers. Email is their main communication channel. Kuwaiti suppliers are not dealt with on a regular basis, and they visit them to conduct transactions. The reason for this is mostly the language barrier, because employees of most raw material suppliers, such as glass, are non-Arabs.

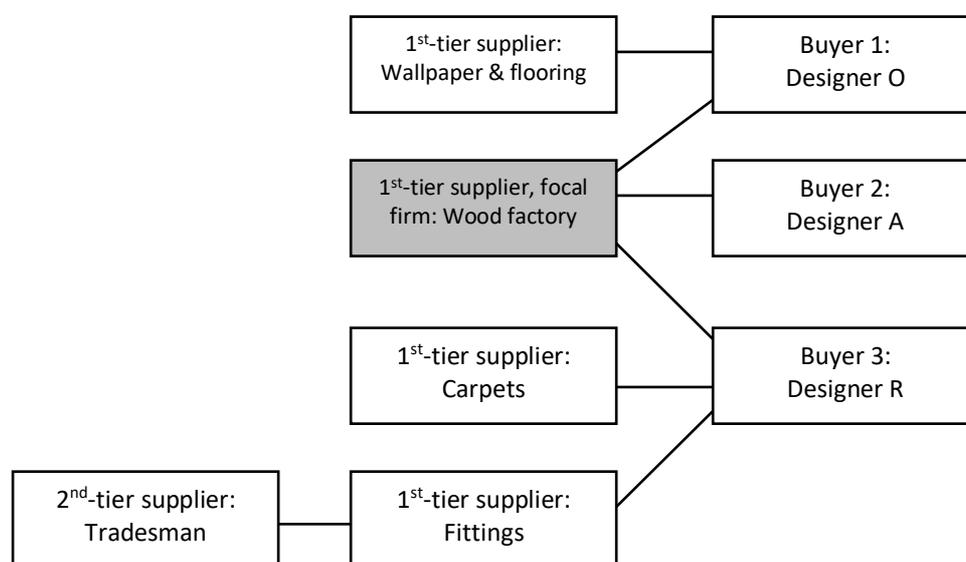


Figure 8.1: WF supply chain

WF use social media more with buyers (downstream). They referred the researcher to their buyers with whom they use social media; they were all interior designers, with whom they build and improve relationships through social media (figure 8.1). There are eight SMEs within this case/supply chain (table 8.1). This leads to seven dyadic relationships in three tiers. In this case the direction of the interviews is different; they first go downstream to WF's buyers, then upstream to suppliers of these buyers, as shown in figure (8.1). The focal firm, in this case, is in the middle (see figure 8.1). social media communication with buyers is the responsibility of the owner-manager (WF's manager) and their assistant, and they are the ones who were interviewed for this study. Table 8.1 provides an overview of WF, its buyers and the suppliers of WF's buyers, which are other SMEs in this case, and their activities and relationships.

8.3 Case analysis

The following section presents analysis of WF's supply chain by addressing each of the research questions in turn.

8.3.1 Social media uses

The main social media tools used in this case are WhatsApp as a direct channel, and Instagram and Snapchat as broadcast channels. Their use can be categorized into four business activities: (1) coordinating operations, (2) information sharing, (3) orders and (4) social networking. The following sections explain these uses in more detail.

Coordinating operations

Social media is used by WF and their buyers to communicate real-time operational information and to coordinate buyer-supplier relationships, in order to speed up operations and deliver the expected results more quickly. WF's use of social media is downstream with buyers to update them about the work and to receive their feedback, as they indicated: "Instead of calling them directly, I send a WhatsApp to update them [about their orders], to take their feedback about our work. It is easy to use and better as you don't need to disturb them with a call" (WF assistant). Designer R also confirmed this use by saying that, in regards to WF, "we start with email for price quotations; formal [transactions] are all through email... they then update us [by WhatsApp]... e.g. we finished this or that, etc." This indicates that WhatsApp is a channel used after formal transactions with WF, as it is important for WF to use formal channels, thus their use of social media is limited to specific things such as receiving feedback and updating the other parties. It was also found that this use appears in upper-tier relations, where second-tier suppliers are using it with first-tier suppliers for the same purpose, as the Tradesman indicated:

[Fittings] send me to their clients to take sizes, then we [Fittings and Tradesman] communicate regarding materials and designs through WhatsApp... before WhatsApp I used to go to them by myself and this consumed a lot of my time... WhatsApp saves me time.

Table 8.1: WF buyers and suppliers overview

	Focal firm: wood factory (WF)	Designer O	Wallpaper and flooring	Designer A	Designer R	Carpets	Fittings	Tradesman
Relationship with WF	-	Buyer of WF and an interior designer that also owns a company in the arts and designs service sector	Supplier of Designer O for wallpaper and flooring	Buyer of WF and a registered freelance interior designer	Buyer of WF and interior designer and furniture designer	Supplier of Designer R that provide luxury carpets	Supplier of Interiors R of special types of materials (called “editors”)	Second tier supplier to Fittings; carpentry and upholstery manufacturing plant with a workshop for the manufacture of curtains
Founded	2000	2009	1982	2012	2010	1975	2006	1987
Size	Medium	Medium	Medium	Small	Small	Small	Medium	Medium
Sector	Manufacturing	Service	Service	Service	Service	Service	Service	Manufacturing
Products	Customised wood cupboards and woodwork solutions	Interior design services, online services such as stores for Kuwaiti designers plus offline services such as seminars, workshops and field trips. Field trips include visiting factories such as WF	Sell and install wallpapers and parquet flooring. They also sell materials by the metre	Offers interior design services by designing with 3D software so customers can imagine their future house or place of business	Offers interior design services for houses and innovative furniture that is not available in the Kuwaiti market	Import luxury hand-made carpets from specialized designers and factories all over the world, and offers in-house carpet cleaning services	Lighting, some furniture and European wallpaper for the Kuwaiti market	Carpentry and upholstery manufacturer
Nature of products	Highly customisable and some ready-made items	Customised for designs and ready-made online store	Ready-made	Highly customisable	Highly customisable and innovative ready-made	Ready-made special pieces	Retail and some customised products	Highly customisable

Location of suppliers	Core materials from Germany, other raw material such as glass from Kuwait	Mostly from Kuwait for interior design services, some from outside Kuwait as well	All suppliers are from outside Kuwait such as Europe and Korea	Most suppliers are from Kuwait; for special products not available in Kuwait they are open to dealing with outside suppliers	Kuwait and outside suppliers	All outside Kuwait, such as India, Iran, Pakistan, Nepal and China	All suppliers for products and materials are from Europe. Manufactured parts for customised products are from Kuwait (from the Tradesman)	Tools purchased outside Kuwait; wood and garments are from suppliers both inside and outside Kuwait
Traditional ICT (email, phone, etc.) for supplier interaction	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email	Telephone and email
Social media channels for supplier interaction	WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat	WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat	WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook	WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram	WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook	WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook	WhatsApp and Instagram	WhatsApp only
Who manages social media	Owner and Assistant	Owner	Manager	Owner	Owner	Owner	Owner and Assistant	Owner

To complete the operation of designing and executing a sofa, for example, the rest of the communication takes place through WhatsApp. The Tradesman also uses WhatsApp to provide updates (pictures) throughout production. It is important to mention that trust is needed in such uses, as Designer R confirmed:

[I use] WhatsApp mostly within the operations... the [supplier's workers] show me a picture of the work, asking me... should we continue? I go to visit the project, but not necessarily every day... because I know him and I know the quality of his work... he just updates me on his work... to know what point he has reached.

This indicates the Designer's trust in the credibility and integrity of the supplier, and also the repeated exchanges between them; she knows him very well and trusts him enough not to have to go and see for herself every time. It seems that the main reason for this use is to save time and effort, and to make the process easier for both parties. This use of social media, sharing pictures between SMEs, helps them boost operations and work more effectively on projects and deliver the expected results.

Information sharing

Social media is used by SMEs in this case to share information in broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, and direct channels such as WhatsApp. This includes tagging, updates on the latest news, and answering queries from buyers or suppliers.

Broadcast channels are used to update buyers/suppliers about WF's latest news, such as the latest projects they are working on or the latest products they have, through posting on Instagram and sometimes through tagging in Instagram pictures. For example, WF use tags to inform their buyers about new collections they have, as the WF manager said: "Yesterday I mentioned all the interior designers I know in a picture in Instagram... of solid wood hand-crafted tables... [telling them] let me know if you are interested to see this special collection in a couple of months". Although tagging was found to be used by other SMEs to compliment other parties on their work, here it was found to be used by WF to update and inform other parties on their new items.

Moreover, it was found in this case that broadcast channels such as Snapchat are used by some SMEs to share the latest buyer/supplier news. Some SMEs do not use it at all,

however; the reason might be that the spread of Snapchat was limited and a recent occurrence at the time of data collection. It was found that it is used as another broadcast channel besides Instagram to reach a larger audience and to show more detail through the live videos.

Snapchat: I use it to reach those who do not follow [our] Instagram and prefer Snapchat... through Snapchat I shoot everything new... products under production in the factory... I shoot from inside the factory... but I have a corner in the factory for 'finishing', where the products reach the highest quality... these details I don't shoot and I don't mention them, because this is one of my secrets that distinguishes [our factory] from others. (WF manager)

A first-tier supplier, wallpaper and flooring, also use Snapchat in the same way, to show the latest products they have in store, and they think that it is better than Instagram for showing the details of these products because of its ability to shoot more than one video in the same story (Instagram have since introduced the same feature but it was not available at the time of data collection). It seems that the purpose of using Snapchat is the same as Instagram, i.e. to broadcast, but there are some differences that makes some SMEs adopt Snapchat as well. One of the reasons is the hype in Kuwait; the use of social media channels changes over time based on hype among Kuwaitis. Facebook use, for example, was very limited at the time of data collection and was not mentioned much by participants.

A direct channel, which in this case is WhatsApp, is used to share one-to-one information, such as enquiries regarding prices or availability. For example, Designer R said: "I ask [my suppliers] through WhatsApp... do you have this? I will come tomorrow to see." The Fittings supplier said: "[designers] ask me [through WhatsApp] about a specific type of wallpaper, for example, an Islamic pattern; I prepare it for them, then she/he come to see and choose" (Fittings assistant). WhatsApp is used to make enquiries in order to save the effort and time of visits; this also helps SMEs specify suppliers they need to visit instead of visiting more than one.

Orders

Some SMEs in this case use social media channels to place or receive some specific types of order, such as ready-made products that can be examined through photos. However, this does not apply to the customised or manufactured orders that require customization and visits. As Designer O said:

it depends on the type of the product... for example, a specific type of wallpaper that I will buy and my employees will install it... I can finish the order through WhatsApp... there are some products that need a visit, such as materials; e.g. I need blue velvet, a supplier can send me a WhatsApp picture, but pictures differ from eye [evaluation]... the shade changes according to the lighting... Here I have to visit them or they have to send me a sample.

This indicates that WhatsApp is available as a channel to speed up some orders, but it is limited to specific types of products and also with specific buyers that have been dealt with before. Also there must be trust between them, as the wallpaper and flooring supplier indicated that he does not finalise any orders through WhatsApp because they should be examined by the buyer to avoid incorrect orders. However, he said, “Old buyers... they know how to order... they know what they want... so they send direct messages via WhatsApp, pictures, sizes, for example, and how many rolls they need”. Not all SMEs in this case mention the use of social media for orders; this use was also evident in case 2 (the wedding planner) and case 1 (the design and construction company).

Social networking

As found in previous cases, social media is understood for many SMEs in this case to be a place where they can search for or reach new suppliers and buyers, in other words, new relationships and connections. However, this understanding applies more to the smaller SMEs and the younger SMEs who were established after or alongside the spread of social media in Kuwait. Designer A said: “from the beginning where can [clients] find me? Through Instagram, they look at my designs and contact me”.

The way Designer A said this explains that he believes that social media is the place where others can find him and learn more about his business. Designer A did not

mention other means such as his website which is more known to be the place to learn about new business. It seems that the spread of social media in Kuwait makes social media channels the dominant web presence for SMEs among other known means available for larger companies or the ones mentioned in the literature.

Many SMEs also consider social media a tool for exposure in regards to new buyers and suppliers, besides end consumers, which was their first priority when they initiated social media. In other words, they become reachable by other buyers and suppliers through social media channels. For example, Designer R does not use social media to search for new suppliers, however she considers it a medium for new relationships, as she said: “the most important [benefit] is exposure, I reach people I didn’t expect to reach”. The wallpaper and flooring firm thinks the same, as the manager said: “it complements the existing tools... if we were 40% known in Kuwait... now 75% know us... [It leads to] more exposure... and widens business relationships”. It is evident that social media is becoming a place for exposure that leads to new relationships, as well as a place where businesses can search for, learn about and reach new buyers or suppliers. Even SMEs who do not believe in social media as a tool for selecting new suppliers are finding it of benefit, as the carpet supplier said: “It is possible [to look for new suppliers]... it opens my eyes to potential clients that I would like to work with, potential designers I would like to collaborate with and potential artists”.

This indicates that even if they do not use it actively to search for suppliers, it is a place (a social network) that makes them aware of what is available in the market in their sectors or industries. It might be that this use of broadcast channels, particularly Instagram, is a unique use by Kuwaiti SMEs, because of the popularity of the application in Kuwait.

8.3.2 New relationships

As discussed above, social media is used as a social network where parties can find and reach out to each other. The next sections explain in detail how SMEs use social media to open new relationships or to select new suppliers.

Supplier selection

Social media was found here to be a means of becoming aware of new suppliers and buyers, as mentioned before, by searching for, accidentally finding or being introduced via tagging to new suppliers/buyers. Some SMEs use social media actively and some use it for information sharing, while some use it both ways, such as Designer A, who said: “Instagram gives me the chance to know many companies that support my work... They either find me and contact me to open relationships, or I initiate it”. In active usage, they initiate relationships or express their need for new suppliers. For example, Designer A and Designer O both use broadcast channels, Instagram and Snapchat, to express their need for suppliers; suppliers then come to them to introduce themselves.

I don't search social media much for new suppliers... because searching is not easy... you can find suppliers from outside Kuwait [while what you want is Kuwaiti suppliers]... If I need new suppliers I [broadcast] on my page on Instagram or Snapchat that I need this... my followers suggest suppliers or the suppliers themselves contact me. (Designer O)

Designer A made a similar point: “sometimes I post a picture on Instagram enquiring about specific type of, let's say, flooring... many companies contact me and introduce themselves, letting me know that they sell this type of flooring”. This reflects the use of social media as a social networking tool, where businesses can find each other, and recommend each other through tags and mentions. They use social media also to search for what they are looking for. For example, when they need a new, unique material that to fill a customer need, as Designer A said:

For example, I need 'natural stone sheets'... I don't know where to find them... I search through Instagram and I find two suppliers, a Kuwaiti and a Saudi; through examining their pictures I find that the Kuwaiti supplier sells wallpaper like natural stones... while the Saudi supplier sells the actual natural stone... I post a comment on their page saying that I need samples, they immediately contact me saying that they have browsed my Instagram and my projects and they are happy to work with a Kuwaiti designer.

Both parties browse each other's page and construct a first impression about each other; pictures serve as a rich medium to provide an idea about a supplier. Instagram, besides serving as a website for SMEs, also serves as a social network. Although suppliers from outside Kuwait are not examined here, this example shows the breadth of social media and how it can significantly broaden relations.

The other way of using social media is for information sharing; this is done by most SMEs, by sharing all they do and have on their Instagram page for the public, including buyers and suppliers, and this available information makes them reachable for new relationships, that is, for parties to come to them to open a relationship. "We use Instagram to show our products... some buyers find us and contact us through WhatsApp to order... But the credit goes to Instagram... it widens our business relationships" (Wallpaper and flooring manager).

Other SMEs indicated that they became known in the market from their Instagram account. Instagram helps other parties become aware of their existence, thus it is a way to broaden their relationships to new buyers and suppliers. For example, one interviewee said:

Many suppliers do not know our name in the market... they know us from Instagram and they like how we work... I receive continuous emails, even from India, Pakistan, China, Iran and the US... from the largest companies telling us that they like our direction, they like the way our showroom looks... they like that we are showing the artistic side of carpets. (Carpets manager)

Therefore, it can be said here that supplier selection in this case is either active or passive, but social media plays a crucial part in facilitating it.

Using social media as a website and social network is not enough, however, for societies like Kuwait, where people need some form of social interaction in order to trust the new party and to begin working with them. After finding new businesses through social media, what follows is social interaction, which takes a variety of forms.

Social interaction

After finding a new relationship through broadcast channels, the next step was found usually to be social interaction, with the aim of deciding the suitability of the relationship. Pictures on Instagram/Snapchat are not usually enough to decide, though this depends on the type of product. The “uncertainty avoidance” of Kuwaiti culture might also be a reason to connect with a new supplier or investigate their reliability beyond social media. SMEs usually start by asking for samples, as Designer A did in the example given above. Some go to visit or ask for a meeting with the supplier, such as Designer O, who said: “[after that early communication] I should meet with them or go to their place and see for myself... I checked their [Instagram] page... but I don’t judge them through it... I need to see for myself”. Some ask for more information about the new party, such as the size of their business, as the wallpaper and flooring supplier said: “they contact us to meet with us... we ask for more information about their business and the size [of their business] and their capabilities... if it is suitable we give them the chance to deal with us and we import [wallpaper] for them”. Each business uses different types of social interaction, including virtual interaction, which was found in this case through likes and comments in broadcast channels such as Instagram.

The impact of likes and comments in Instagram is high for some of them, as Designer A explained:

What made me initiate the relationship with [WF] and get to know them [personally] is the mutual likes on Instagram... Although I knew their factory before seeing them on Instagram... I can now like and comment on the work I like from their factory. (Designer A)

Likes and comments here as social interactions lead parties to open official relationships with suppliers and deal with them, as several participants indicated. Instagram interaction widens their relationships and leads them to new business.

The order of awareness of supplier or supplier selection and social interaction might not be the same. Sometimes the interaction occurs before opening the relationship. Prospective suppliers might not be needed at this time, but because of Instagram awareness and remote interaction, they can be called to mind for any future needs.

Usually after opening a relationship, WhatsApp becomes the tool for communication between parties.

8.3.3 Social media impact

It was found that the impact of social media in this case is social and transactional. Negative impacts also emerged within this case. Themes appear to be similar to previous cases.

Although it was expected to be an outcome of use of social media between buyer and supplier, trust was found to be necessary prior to use in this case, as in the other cases. “I limit my relationships... I don’t trust just anybody... trust comes first [before social media]” (WF manager). Building some sense of trust before using social media was evident in this case, and this is presumably because of the “uncertainty avoidance” of Kuwaiti culture, as mentioned before. This is especially the case in matters that require sharing information, coordinating operations or placing orders. However, answering queries, which does not entail any commitment, does not require trust prior to use. Most SMEs provide their WhatsApp numbers in their Instagram bios. So social media is used differently with trusted relations; where there is trust there is more effective use. This provides more evidence for the findings in other cases that trust building is important before effective use of social media and the limited use of social media with new relations before trust.

8.3.3.1 Social impact

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

As mentioned before, relationships in this case are transactional. This type of relationship needs nurturing and maintenance, because there is no contract to hold it together, and there is a range of suppliers in the market to fill the same needs, especially in creative and innovative sectors such as design and decor. It was found in this case that broadcasting, tagging and direct communication are all ways of nurturing and maintaining relationships, directly or indirectly.

When a buyer or supplier broadcasts their working day, e.g. in Snapchat, it allows other parties to be aware of the activities of the business (similar to the D&C case). It is also

gives an impression of the depth of the work, the variety of relationships and other details that any buyer/supplier can use to take action to nurture the relationship. For example, Designer O said:

Social media shows people that I'm still working... It reminds them of my existence... They know about my latest projects... who I deal with, for example, one of the carpet suppliers follows me... and saw that I'm dealing with other suppliers... she contacted me and gave me offers (increased my share) so that I would work with her and not others... social media keeps my suppliers updated about my work.

There is a mutual benefit here from broadcasting details of their work. The designer gets special offers and the carpet supplier is aware of the designer's (buyer's) work, which led them to take action to attract her again. This information was not easily available for the supplier before social media channels such as Snapchat and Instagram.

Another method of relationship maintenance mentioned by participants involves, when sharing information on broadcast channels, using tags to mention another party. This is understood between buyer and supplier as a favour in this case (and in other cases as well). The reason might be that it is a form of word of mouth, which is highly appreciated in collective societies like Kuwait, and in business in general. It was found to be a way of maintaining relationships for longer, by providing special treatment to partners. As Carpet supplier explained it:

When a high-profile designer recommends you on her Instagram and her followers become interested in our carpets... when somebody does you a favour that somehow benefits you, whether socially, mentally or financially, you want to make a gesture in return... if [the Designer] comes to us wanting a piece, we will not treat her like others... some clients get more discount depending on their relationship with us.

Thus, there is a benefit from tags, as Designer R also said: "their followers are not my followers... so it is exposure from both sides". This indicates mutual benefits for both parties.

Some businesses use direct channels such as WhatsApp to contact other parties on occasions such as Eid, or to ask about them after a transaction has ended, just to keep in touch with them. The WF assistant explained: “once the business has finished and they are happy, the WhatsApp [communication] stops... after six months I send them a message again, asking about them, if they want anything... because we want business”. This type of communication is an indirect way of nurturing and maintaining relationships, because, as mentioned, relationships are transactional, and reminding the other party about you might lead them to work with you again in future businesses, or to recommend you to others (word of mouth). Tagging in broadcast channels and doing favours for other businesses also leads to loyalty, as will be explained in the next section.

Loyalty

WF’s manager explained loyalty, saying, “Instagram [adds to our relationship] with interior designers... they follow us and comment on our pictures... I care about this very much... they show the pieces [we produce] to their customers and tag us... This makes us feel loyal to each other”. This friendly interaction through Instagram via likes, comments and tags has a positive impact on the social relationships between parties. It has an impact on feelings such as loyalty. Although the relationships are transactional and the interaction is virtual, it also has a social impact on parties. Some designers showed examples of tagging and mentioning in their relationships with suppliers and how this leads to loyalty between them. For example, Designer A was contacted by a carpet supplier that he deals with, when the carpet supplier found a picture posted by Designer A on Instagram showing an interior design that used a carpet from their factory, as Designer A shows the projects he has worked on his Instagram page and tags the suppliers that he deals with. In return, the carpet factory gave him a gift, a customized carpet with his logo. As Designer A said, “for me this is a strong gift that I will never forget, now for any carpet I need for my projects I go directly to them [the carpet factory]”. Sharing this information in social media broadcast channels clearly gave the factory manager a good feeling and impression towards Designer A. Although Designer A’s business is smaller in size and capabilities compared to the carpet factory, the latter still takes the time to like and comment on his pictures and designs. Thus they are active in returning the favour to the Designer; this in turn leads to loyalty to the factory, as the Designer’s comments indicate that he goes directly to them for any

project. The intention of the carpet factory was not known to the researcher (they did not agree to an interview) but the reaction of the designer explains his intention to really become loyal to the supplier.

Before the existence of social media tools, such information was not easy to access or broadcast. It was not possible to share rich information with pictures or to mention others in order to benefit them (i.e. using tags). This was done by literal word of mouth only, and word of mouth cannot be spread as far as broadcast channels such as Instagram. In Instagram anybody can pass by the page and browse the pictures and tags, so the exposure is much wider than in offline social networks.

Comments, likes and tags have an impact, leading businesses to feel close to each other, because of the repeated Instagram and Snapchat interaction from both sides. As WF's manager said: "Likes and comments on Instagram (from buyers) makes me feel that we are one community... I feel that as designers, Instagram brings us together." Several designers confirmed that mutual interaction through social media has an impact on their relation with WF:

For example, regarding the wood factory, I'm not dealing with them too much now... because I don't design houses... however, I do like to visit them from time to time... and see their latest work... and talk about them [in my social media channels] to my followers... this benefits me and my followers, keeping us updated... and even if there is no business now, I feel close to them.
(Designer O)

Also, as explained by the wallpaper and flooring supplier: "there was a relationship with these [interior designers] before, but with these tools [social media] it has become wider and stronger". It is evident in this case that social media has an impact on the social side of relationships in terms of exposure, loyalty, mutual benefits and more.

8.3.3.2 Transactional impact

Time saving

As mentioned in previous cases, the main reason for adopting new technologies is to facilitate relationships and save time by making exchanges and transactions easier and faster. It was found that all uses of social media lead to saving both parties time. Most SMEs mentioned saving time as an important impact of social media use for business relationships. It saves the effort and time needed for personal visits. Updates on operations save time lost in continuing in incorrect work, and save the need for correction at the end. “WhatsApp makes operations easier and faster” (Designer R). Also, for enquiries and orders, social media is a channel for rich information sharing, and is saving parties massive amounts of time. To give another example:

Sometimes they send a picture of the place and the size of the carpet needed... and they ask me, ‘what fits this place?’ ... I send pictures of carpets that might fit... and they choose... it is more efficient... instead of visiting the place, taking measurements, going back to choose from the shop and taking many pieces to the client to choose from... we save more time and costs... this applies to interior designers too. (Carpets manager)

The information available in broadcast channels saves the effort and time of visits and the time needed for decision making in choosing from a range or a collection; buyers can specify what they want before visiting the supplier: “If I want a specific piece, instead of going by myself to visit more than one place to find [what I need], I go to suppliers’ accounts on Instagram and browse their collections... then I contact them... so I save the effort of visits” (Designer A). This is a transactional impact that makes parties depend on social media channels for their relationships and allows them to exchange rich information in a fast and convenient way, thus saving time. Saving time leads to saving costs as well.

8.3.3.3 Negative impact

Sharing information on broadcast channels leads to openness. This openness of social media makes rivals aware of SMEs’ activities, and this enables them to take action that might impact SMEs. In addition, rivals come to know their relationships with their

buyers/suppliers, which usually appear through tags. Some participants encountered situations in which suppliers were intimidated by learning about the relationships of buyers with their rivals. This example is from Designer A:

I have a relationship with more than one company that provide the same type of products [rivals]... if they know from my [Instagram] pictures that I deal with the other company, they get jealous... for example, one of the large companies that I deal with are lacking some products I need, I go to their rivals [in the market] and I deal with them to fill my [clients'] needs; once they knew this [from my Instagram] they stopped giving me the coupons they used to give me to my clients.

This also applies to buyers that deal with the same suppliers and who do not get featured through the suppliers' tags. This promotes certain buyers over others, and this might have an impact on the other's feelings, as indicated in the following example:

Sometimes we finish a project with an interior designer and we take pictures of his work... we post them on Instagram... we compliment the designer and that we are happy to work with him... this is [an indirect way] to promote this designer... that he is good and this is his account [we tagged him]... other interior designers might get intimidated and jealous... they think that they are preferable for us... but we deal with many designers... so I can't control this.
(Carpets manager)

The impact of sharing such information and of tagging cannot be predicted before posting, and this is another problem that faces SMEs. This information sharing and the openness was not available before social media; now, buyer, suppliers and rivals can all be aware of most of each other's activity.

Another negative impact is when sharing information in broadcast channels to update the parties on their latest projects and products, it was found that this information, or more specifically pictures, are misused by others such as rivals, and thus copyrights are affected, as found as well in previous cases. Rivals can copy the design and work of SMEs and execute it or refer to it as their own work, as confirmed by several

participants: “other carpenters steal my pictures and copy my work... my copyright is affected... they attribute it to themselves” (WF manager). “Some small companies use my pictures as if they are their own designs... this is not large companies that care about their reputation” (Designer A).

Finally, one of the unique negative impacts of social media touched upon by the carpets supplier, as he deals with carpet factories and works as a distributor for more than one supplier, was that with the openness of social media, supply chains become shorter, and some tiers of supplier can be bypassed, as he explained:

today it has become easier for factories to reach end consumers because of social media... many have started to use these tools to sell directly... because they can reach larger markets through it now... e.g. instead of dealing with one distributor [in the Middle East]... they sell to more than one.

The suggestion that relationships can be reinvented is mentioned as a potential negative side of social media in the literature on supply chains and social media (such as in Tingling et al., 2011).

8.3.4 Social media vs traditional technologies

It was found that SMEs are not using advanced technologies with their relationships in this case. They use telephone, email and personal visits. Some SMEs established at the time of the spread of social media, such as the designers, use social media alongside telephone and email. The richness and convenience of social media is what makes the difference for Kuwaiti SMEs, compared to telephone and email. However, telephone and email are still in use and cannot be abandoned, as WF’s manager said: “it is a kind of package of communication... you cannot cancel your mobile, landline or website... so [they can] find you when they search... [you also can’t cancel] your Instagram because of the updated library of pictures”. This shows that social media channels are complementing other channels of communication between buyers and suppliers. The following section explains the differences touched on by participants.

8.3.4.1 Social media richness vs telephone calls

Telephone is not a rich medium for communication, as it only involves voice, while social media can be used to share pictures, videos, text and voice, and this is what SMEs found to be an impact of using social media instead of the telephone for transactions and exchanges. The Fittings assistant said: “WhatsApp had led to a huge change in our work... we share photos... we send photos of the latest products we have... it opens new business opportunities”. Another participant added to the benefits of WhatsApp over telephone: “the telephone is used regularly... but the telephone plus WhatsApp equals pictures... what they ask for over the telephone I can send a picture of in WhatsApp” (Wallpaper and flooring manager). This reflects the richness of social media compared to the telephone. Pictures complement the voice to deliver the full details. Moreover, social media was found to surpass the telephone in terms of staying connected all the time with a buyer or supplier, where this is not possible or convenient through the phone. As Designer R explained: “because phone calls are not available all the time... you might be in a meeting... they call and you can’t answer... so WhatsApp can be used to finalize matters” (Designer R). Also other channels such as Instagram and Snapchat allow a continuous connection with parties in compare to telephone. The richness of social media complements the voice-only telephone, and besides this a social feeling can be expressed through social media channels, such as through likes, comments and tags, which is not available through phones.

Overcoming language barriers

Social media richness was also found to be useful in overcoming language barriers between Kuwaitis and non-Arab workers (as found in other cases). This point was raised by just one participant, the WF assistant, who said: “[WhatsApp is] fast, all documented... and can be used to overcome language barriers; sometimes they don’t understand my accent, so it is clear when I type it out for them. This is a big advantage for me.” All other participants in this case were Kuwaitis and Arabs, so language was not an issue.

8.3.4.2 Social media speed vs email

First, it is evident that it is more common to use social media tools such as WhatsApp between Kuwaiti SMEs, especially when the transaction is small or does not require formal documentation. The trend now is to use WhatsApp, and this is not only between buyers and suppliers, but all over Kuwait.

Our societies prefer WhatsApp over email or websites... Now when I'm making my online store they asked to me provide a WhatsApp number for orders... because there might be some people that only use WhatsApp [they don't know how to use websites]; this is the trend here [in Kuwait]. (Designer R)

Another designer thinks that Kuwaiti SMEs prefer social media, though he personally uses email: "I use email... but not all Kuwaiti [SMEs] use email... they don't provide their emails with their address [usually in Instagram bio], that's why I use Instagram with them... it is faster for me" (Designer A). The clear reason for the popularity of social media is its speed and convenience compared to email, as many participants agreed.

WhatsApp is instant and you can reply instantly... [with email] a reply might take three days... while chat in WhatsApp can take just half an hour. (Designer R)

WhatsApp is very important for me... it is a quick, efficient way to get in touch with people... I think everybody should use it... Email is so cold and you may be misunderstood... WhatsApp has emojis as well... which help the other party understand what you mean... and you can send a voice note as well. (Carpets manager)

Thus, besides its speed, WhatsApp is more "social", as chat can be informal, and there are more opportunities to express exactly what one means. It is a practical tool that can be almost similar to face-to-face meetings. However, although convenient, WhatsApp and social media in general have a limitation that mean they cannot be used exclusively

instead of emails. The main reason for this is that some companies do not accept sole use of WhatsApp. Email is still the official tool, e.g. for large companies, large dealers and suppliers outside Kuwait, and serves as documentation. “Email I think is very important... WhatsApp is a quicker tool, but again WhatsApp is not an official tool ... I’m not sure how WhatsApp works legally today in Kuwait” (Carpets manager). Although the carpets supplier uses WhatsApp to speed up work, they still believe that email is the official tool. The wallpaper and flooring firm also expressed that, with suppliers, “email is safer... as a form of documentation”.

Another reason for not depending totally on WhatsApp is that large files and high-resolution pictures cannot be delivered through WhatsApp. “WhatsApp hasn’t affected email use; I still use it with my suppliers... for example, they send me their catalogues by email... email is still important... because we send large files that cannot be sent through WhatsApp” (Designer O).

Although WhatsApp is speeding up business in comparison to email, email is still the official tool for documentation of formal communication with certain partners, perhaps because of trust issues of Kuwaiti culture; they use it to feel comfortable about its officiality.

8.4 Conclusion

This case study is similar to the D&C and WP cases, as customization is evident and the use of innovative and creative suppliers is predominant. Although the main goal of this case was to explore the use and impact of social media in the manufacturing sector (upstream), the direction of the case shifted (downstream) towards creative, innovative service sectors. The culture of Kuwait is also clear and has an impact here.

Social media was found in this case to be used for coordinating operations by sharing real-time operational information, and for information sharing, such as updates on the latest news. It is also used to place or receive some specific types of orders in certain relationships. Finally, it is used as a social network, where businesses can find and reach out to new relationships.

Social media is used alongside offline means to find, select and open new relationships. It is used actively, i.e. searching for and initiating new relationships, or as a method of information sharing, where information is shared via broadcast channels and new parties approach the business in question as a result.

For existing relationships, trust is necessary prior to effective use of social media between parties; when trust is present, businesses can depend on social media tools in conducting relationships. The richness of social media – its opportunities for broadcasting, tagging and direct communication with other parties – means it is an effective way to nurture and maintain relationships. This case shows that a further social impact of social media use is loyalty to certain business relationships, and this is a result of continuous online interaction between parties.

The transactional impact of social media use was found to be time saving, where most uses of social media channels lead to parties saving time. There is also a negative impact on SMEs from social media use, such as copyright infringement.

The richness of social media has had an impact on the use of the telephone and email. Social media adds to the telephone by complementing it with rich information that is helping to overcome language barriers for non-Arab workers. Social media is a faster tool compared to email; however, email is still the official tool.

Chapter Nine: Cross-case analysis

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a cross-case analysis of the four case studies, design and construction (D&C), wedding planner (WP), real estate (O-RE) and wood factory (WF). The analysis is within the big context of research Kuwait and SMEs and through the lens of the theoretical framework.

This research has explored the impact of social media use in supply relationships in regard to Kuwaiti SMEs. The key research question was “how does the use of social media by Kuwaiti SMEs affect inter-organisational relationships?” To address this key research question, the following specific research questions were addressed:

1. In what ways are SMEs utilizing social media with suppliers/business buyers?
2. How do SMEs use social media as a means to build new relationships?
3. How does social media, as a medium for interaction/exchange, affect buyer/supplier relationships?
4. How does the use of social media affect the other technologies used?

The following table shows the results of the iterative process of coding, categorising, mapping and transcripts reading until the themes and sub-themes were emerged; these themes were privileged to give the final version of the analytical findings.

Then some important concepts and observations related to the analysis are discussed in the next section. The subsequent section is cross-analysis of each theme, which aims to answer the research questions in turn. Finally, a summary of the important findings is presented.

Table 9.1: Development of Themes and sub-themes

Categories	List of codes	Themes	Sub-themes	Theoretical observation
Social media uses	Broadcasting Communication tool Community-building tool Operations Collaboration Decision making Direct-communication Latest news Latest updates Orders Procurement Relationship tool Social networking Supplier selection tool Enquiries	Coordinating operations		SET, effectuation and MRT inform the uses of social media. Themes were extracted based on the supporting literature such as the conceptual papers on supply chains
		Information sharing		
		Social networking	Virtual communities	
		Orders		
		Collaboration		
New relationships	Experience Awareness Interactive behaviour Initial communication New suppliers Personal relationships Personal visits Product type SM users Supplier selection tool Trust WhatsApp WhatsApp groups Duwaneya Exposure Supplier/buyer reach Connections	Supplier selection		Effectuation logic with SET rational such as trust helps to inform the way Kuwaiti SMEs choose their new suppliers. SET supports the Kuwaiti context while effectuation reflects the SME context. The richness of SM plays an important role.
		Social interaction		
Social media impact	Distraction Effective communication Likes/comments Limitation of the media Loyalty Long relationships Maintaining relationships Picture sharing impact Nurturing Rivals Satisfaction SM users Social communication Social impact Social interaction Tags	Social impact	Relationship nurturing and maintenance	SET propositions and MRT framed the impact of social media as explained by the participants. Most impact around the richness and openness of social media.
			Reputation	
			Buyer satisfaction	
			Loyalty	
		Transactional impact	Time saving	
		Negative impact	Time consuming	
	Increased competition			

	Trust Time wasting Copyright Snapchat WhatsApp Instagram Live broadcasting		Intellectual property	
Other technologies	Email Fast Focus Formal communication Instant Language Media richness Other technology Rich communication SM features Speed Telephone WhatsApp richness Trust	SM richness vs telephone	Task-oriented messages	MRT and the logic of SET are what informs the complementary role of social media over other simple technologies used by Kuwaiti SMEs.
		SM speed vs email	Overcoming language barriers	

9.2 Observations

Before proceeding to the analysis, some points need to be considered and discussed because they touch on many areas of the research, such as trust and relationship type.

Trust is one of the important concepts that touches all areas of the research, although it is not an outcome of social media use, but needed for effective use. Trust was expected to be an outcome or impact of social media with suppliers. In the supply chain context, trust is defined as “the extent to which supply chain partners perceive each other as credible and benevolent” (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 102). The cases show that trust in buyer-supplier relationships usually needs to be established *before* social media use can be effective.

Effective use of social media as a medium for relationships means dependence on social media for most transaction between buyers and suppliers, including sharing important information such as copyrighted designs. This is in line with what was found in the literature; trusting and honest business relationships encourage and enhance a safe environment for information sharing between partners (Kwon and Suh, 2005).

Moreover, in order to maintain inter-firm exchange for longer, a high level of trust is essential (Wu et al., 2014).

Trust in regards to SMEs must occur before effective social media use; however, personal trust and social relations can come after social media use, and are usually strengthened through more interaction and use of social media, especially for new relationships. If there is trust in the integrity and credibility of the supplier, with social media use personal trust and a social relationship can be built and strengthened, and this is subsequently what governs the relationship. This fits with what is mentioned in the literature, that what governs relationships in Arab countries and other collective cultures is mostly trust, in comparison to Western cultures that are governed more through contracts (Bjerke and Al-Meer, 1993; Gupta and Singh, 2013).

The mutual benefits that are gained from trust between parties reflect SET logic. There is a reward for trust building and maintaining relationships between parties, i.e. the reward of speeding up exchanges and using social media effectively, thus saving parties time, as well as the other social benefits, as will be explained later.

The other point that is important to consider is the type of buyer-supplier relationship in most cases. The type of supplier relationships that are using social media are those that are more towards the transactional end of the continuum (sometimes called “arm’s length” relationships). This means that there is no long contracts or other type of alliances holding them together. However, relationships were found to be more collaborative, which means governed by trust and social relations, what some participants refer to as “old relations that we trust”. This is surely because of repeated interactions, or due to the impact of national culture on the way they look at and talk about relations. As mentioned, Arabic culture is strongly collectivist (Hofstede, 1980) and values extended relationships (Aladwani, 2013). This draws attention to the importance of social relations in Kuwait, even in transactional relationships. This might indicate a difference in the meaning of “transactional” in collectivist societies, in comparison to Western societies where transactional means a short and arm’s-length relationship that ends when the transaction ends.

9.3 Cross-case analysis

The following sections cover each research question in turn followed by the themes that emerged under each one, giving the totality of the findings from the four cases.

9.3.1 In what ways are SMEs utilizing social media with suppliers/business buyers?

This research question aimed to explore the uses of social media. Therefore, the analysis is more descriptive than explanatory. An inductive approach was used to answer this question. It was compared and aligned with what were found in the literature to be uses or prospective uses of social media in supply chains or in SMEs.

The four cases show that social media is used for transactional purposes, such as coordinating operations, information sharing, placing orders and collaboration, as well as for social purposes that led to business, such as social networking, including in virtual communities. Using social media for these purposes shows that transactional uses lead to social uses as well, because of the richness, speed, and continuousness or convenience of communication between parties through social media.

Coordinating operations

In this research study, coordinating operations means “coordinating work in progress between buyers and suppliers, such as through obtaining feedback on work, updates on the progress of the work, coordinating meetings or coordinating order delivery between parties”. Social media was found to be used as a tool to coordinate and communicate operations between buyers and suppliers. The most frequently used channel for this purpose was direct channels such as WhatsApp. Most cases use social media to coordinate operations in the customized part of projects, such as D&C, WP and WF. Customization needs continuous feedback to deliver expected results. Using social media as a supply chain technology to facilitate effective communication through its speed and richness saves both parties time and allows them to process operations faster. Instead of visiting in person to see updates or setting meetings to coordinate work, or even calling to share progress, suppliers are updating buyers of the progress of work through sharing real-time pictures of operations and seeking buyers’ comments and feedback.

As in previous research, one of the potential values of social media recognised here is more effective communication with external partners such as suppliers. Better communication enables firms to understand buyers' needs efficiently and thus helps in the customization of service offerings (Hinchcliffe, 2010). Moreover, social media was expected, based on previous studies, to be used similar with suppliers as with customers, where businesses seek feedback (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). The present study supports this suggestion.

It was found in this research that SMEs of different sizes and ages are using social media to coordinate operations. This use was apparent in both supply chain tiers, first and second, as well as with buyers. Although it is more often used with manufacturing suppliers because of the customized nature of the products they provide, it is also used by service suppliers to coordinate meetings, order deliveries and share tasks. Therefore, the size, age and sector of the SME does not have an impact on their use of social media for coordinating operations. The only case that did not mention this use is the real estate case, because the nature of their work and sector is mainly based on information sharing, and there are not many operations between peers.

Social media is used by SMEs as a supply chain technology, to coordinate operations between parties.

Information sharing

The cases in this research have shown that information sharing through social media is “the use of social media to share information, such as news, latest products, projects, prices and the availability of products, through direct and broadcast channels”. In the literature the definition of information sharing within Web 2.0 systems was that it “facilitates creating, storing, refining, and sharing information between users on the Internet and can be viewed as structured or unstructured exchange of information in order to support social and active learning among participants” (Kim et al., 2011, p. 162). The cases' uses of social media for information sharing supports this, as the following paragraph will explain.

Information sharing through direct channels was found to involve sharing pictures about specific products buyers are interested in purchasing, or asking about prices,

specifications or availability. This information sharing is usually used by buyers to decide which supplier to visit, thus saving time required in visiting more than one supplier, as the cases show. And sometimes this information sharing goes further, to the point of deciding to purchase the item from trusted suppliers. However, this depends on the nature of the product, as indicated by some participants. This is discussed further in the “Orders” section below. Trust in direct channels is not required for sharing information about prices, availability or certain specifications, because there is no commitment to the supplier. However, it was found that trust is important for the buyer when the purpose of information sharing is to make a purchase. When buyers trust the supplier, buyers use WhatsApp to ask for and receive information about the product they want to purchase. Based on the product type, buyers take the initial or final decision to purchase. In the real estate business, information sharing about properties is limited to certain information, while full details are shared only with trusted parties.

Information sharing through broadcast channels is through posting on Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter the latest news, products, projects or offers. Parties can have direct access to such information. Broadcast channels are used as websites for SMEs, especially Instagram. For some SMEs it is the only web presence. The reason for this is the popularity of Instagram in Kuwait, which makes it more important than a website. People tend to check the Instagram page more than the website, as several participants indicated. Broadcast channels are used by WP and WF to tag buyers or suppliers. The purpose of this is sharing news of latest collaborations with them or as a way to update buyers about new products. Tags have an impact on relationships, as will be discussed later. Sharing news and the latest information via social media tools allows for transparency and gives the information a human touch that makes it more attractive compared to system-generated information (O’leary, 2011). Finally, it was found that sector, age or size of the SME does not have an impact on the use of social media for information sharing.

Social media channels, direct and broadcast, are used for sharing information, such as news, prices, availability, and latest products and projects, between parties. Trust is required for some cases.

Social networking

SMEs were found in the cases to be using social media as a social network where they can search for and select new suppliers or buyers, and where SMEs can be reachable by buyers and suppliers. In other words, it is a tool for new relationships and connections, and a tool to maintain and strengthen existing relationships. As found in the literature, Web 2.0 (or social media) support for social networking is helping to broaden the networks between businesses and customers on the Internet, where they can build and maintain connections (Kim et al., 2011). The current study supports this.

It was found from the cases that social media is understood by some (younger) SMEs, who were established after or alongside the spread of social media in Kuwait, to be the place where they can search for and select new suppliers. This applies to the search for creative, innovative products but not core or fixed items. Other suppliers who were mostly established before social media are not using it specifically to search for new suppliers. The reason, as they indicated, is that they have enough experience already to find new suppliers if needed, or their suppliers are mostly outside Kuwait and this impacts their trust in the use of social media alone to search for them. They also might need suppliers of large fixed items that are not usually available through social media channels. However, these SMEs who do not use it to search for new suppliers are benefiting from their availability on social media channels such as Instagram to show their latest products and projects, and thus they become reachable by new buyers or suppliers. Exposure, as indicated by some participants, is one of the most important benefits of social media use in terms of social networking.

All cases use broadcast channels such as Instagram (most cases) and Snapchat (certain SMEs only) for the purpose of searching or exposure, except the real estate case, where SMEs were found to be using the direct channel, WhatsApp, alongside broadcast channels to build some type of social networking. Virtual communities were found to exist in the real estate case, which can be considered a specialized type of social networking, where real estate companies gather in the same place to share news and real estate offers and orders. As mentioned in the literature, "A virtual community is an aggregation in cyberspace of individuals sharing common interests through repeated contacts via electronic means, such as chat rooms, on-line forums, bulletin boards, and e-mail" (Yung-Cheng et al., 2010, p.49). In this research, these virtual communities are

a place where real estate companies also reach each other to open new relationships.

The other use of social media as a social network is by using it with existing relationships, as a means where SMEs can always connect with their buyers or suppliers through broadcast channels, and on occasions such as Eid or New Year, for example, mostly through direct channels.

The use of social media for social networking fits with the Kuwaiti culture of collectivism, because social circles play an important role in Kuwaiti society, such as in *Duwaniyahs*, which can be defined as a weekly or monthly social gathering. This is an important part of the Kuwaiti culture. People gather to discuss many matter and news including business. For specialized business *Duwaniyahs*, there is the opportunity to discuss deals and contracts between business people. The availability of such a culture makes the use of virtual communities and engagement in such groups' easier for Kuwaiti because it reflects one aspect of their culture that they use with it, although in a virtual form. But it should be noted that *Duwaniyah* are still available and practiced in Kuwait, even with the introduction of such virtual technologies that can substitute them.

Finally, sector and size of SMEs do not have an impact on this use; however, age of SMEs does have an impact on the type of use of social networking, such as using it actively to search for and select new suppliers.

Social media channels, both broadcast and direct, are used for social networking to find and reach new relationships and to maintain existing relationships.

Orders

The use of social media for placing orders was common amongst three cases, D&C, WP and WF, but it does not appear clearly in the real estate case because they sell different type of products compared to the products exchanged in the other cases. The use of social media for orders was found to be for small orders, and usually involved ready-made products, because usually customized or manufactured products cannot be specified and organised only through social media. Also, large or expensive pieces were not found to be ordered through social media. The main reason for this is the high price

of these projects or products and the details that need to be clarified between parties. Therefore, it was found that placing orders through social media channels is dependent on the product type or the situation. Where there is a range to choose from or there is some kind of customization, offline meetings are usually needed before placing the order through social media. If the product can be examined well enough through WhatsApp pictures, an order can be finalized through WhatsApp. However, this use is highly bounded by trust because it entails commitments and payments. Cases that mentioned this use stress that trust should be established between them and the other party. Buyers need trust in the quality of the supplier's products or work and the suppliers should trust the buyer to make the payment and proceed with the order. The reason for this use (placing orders), as participants indicated, is to save parties time and avoid delays in formalities or bureaucracy (for some). Age, sector and size of SMEs seems not to have an impact on this use of social media.

Social media was found to be used to place orders that were primarily of lower value. Trust is very important for this use.

Collaboration

Social media was found in this research to be a tool for collecting more than one supplier and buyer in a virtual meeting to discuss a shared project. And this is the same as what is mentioned in the literature, Collaboration through Web 2.0 (social media), as described by Kim et al. (2011, p. 164), refers to “complex interdependent and interactive work toward a shared goal or goals and assisting in facilitating goal-oriented teams in the processes of problem solving and group decision making”.

This use of social media channels is unique to WP. The evident reason for this is the context of this case and the nature of the work involved. All suppliers in the WP case are working on the same project that must be delivered on a specific day, and most of the suppliers need to be available at the same time. Another unique use is that they are using a direct channel feature of WhatsApp, WhatsApp groups, for this purpose. The purpose of these groups is to ease discussions and agreements, because mostly their work (as suppliers) is dependent on each other. The richness of social media allows information to be shared accurately. Furthermore, the discussion is recorded digitally in the group where it can be a reference for the members. This type of virtual meeting

allows members to meet or share information at any time from anywhere, which allows the work to proceed and progress faster, as the participants indicated. Trust was stressed here too; suppliers must be trusted in terms of the quality of their work and commit to promises in order to join these groups.

Social media is used to create teams of collaborators with trusted suppliers to achieve shared goals, such as projects.

9.3.2 How do SMEs use social media as a means of building new relationships?

Social media is used as a social network where parties can find each other and open new relationships, as mentioned in the section on social media uses. This section explains how parties are using social media to open new relationships through the lens of effectuation theory, with an SET rationale. SMEs are more flexible and mostly use simple decision-making processes (Gelinias and Bigras, 2004). Ellegaard (2006) indicates that small firms make decisions based on little information and less formal procedures. Moreover, as mentioned by Viljamaa (2011), small firms' decision making encloses both rationality of economic organisation and the socially embedded characteristics of the firm, and may also include personal, emotional elements. Therefore, the search for suppliers is not necessarily comprehensive and is likely to utilize existing networks. The use of social media allows SMEs to go beyond their limited networks, as the following paragraphs will show.

Supplier selection

Based on the case analyses, what is meant by supplier selection in this research is the ways SMEs use social media channels as a network to find and select prospective new relationships. Social media is used by some SMEs as a means or as a starting point to check about new suppliers that are found by chance, found via searches (i.e. actively) or introduced by others. Social media is also used by other SMEs as a means of information sharing that makes them reachable by new buyers or suppliers (i.e. passively).

Active use of social media to find and learn about suppliers is usually done by new SMEs that were established alongside the spread of social media in the Arab world,

such as WP and D&C. By analysing the cases and the cases within the cases SMEs were found to use effectuation logic to select new suppliers. The process of selecting a new relationship involves a decision-making process, and as in the literature, effectuation logic is considered a rationale for uncertain decision making (Read et al., 2009). Furthermore, it was expected based on the literature that social media could serve as a social place where firms can find each other and interact for business purposes (O'Leary, 2011). As found in the case analyses, SMEs are not applying structured and formal processes to the selection of new suppliers, nor using careful plans; it was only explained as being used informally by all SMEs when selecting new relationships. Some SMEs also indicated finding out about new suppliers by chance and then going to explore them further through social media. SMEs were found to use available means such as social media channels and the information available on them, such as pictures and videos, to learn about new suppliers. These means allow SMEs to gain an impression about prospective suppliers and allow for the formation of perceptions of suppliers through the available pictures, videos and other information.

It is evident from the cases that the rich information, such as pictures, available on social media channels plays an important role in using social media as a means for selecting suppliers. Through the rich information in social media channels parties build *intrasubjective cognition*, which is defined in the literature as “the means the entrepreneur believes she or he has available and the effects that might be achieved with these means” (in this case the entrepreneur is the SME's manager) (Fischer and Reuber 2011, p. 4). It is intra-subjective because cognition happens within the person directly in a way that others may not know about (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). This cognition was evident when participants (mostly SME managers) explained the process of selecting new suppliers through social media. This cognition leads to further action by SME managers; they decide about the potential new supplier and this further action is represented by “social interaction”, which is in these cases for the purpose of building some type of trust. This reflects the Kuwaiti cultural dimension of “uncertainty avoidance”. Arabic culture is high in uncertainty avoidance. This index from Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimension measures the extent to which a society can accept uncertainty and ambiguity. Therefore, SMEs managers although using available means, such as social media channels, did not rely only on them to directly open a relationship,

using further investigation through other means where needed (as will be explained next).

Social media is used by SMEs as a means to select new suppliers (or forge new relationships) by applying effectuation logic in taking decisions. Intrasubjective cognition is conducted based on the rich information available in social media channels.

Social interaction

Based on the case analysis, social interaction can be explained as any type of social communication, whether through social media channels or others, that builds some type of trust and allows parties to go further and open a relationship. After the intrasubjective cognition within the SME manager, the next step, for most of the SMEs, is to use other means to build trust, through social interaction. Social interaction, based on the concepts of effectuation theory, refers to *interactive behaviour* with other actors or parties, for example suppliers. Here entrepreneurs (SME managers in this case) share information about their cognition and get feedback from others and commitment to achieve shared goals. In most cases, the main reason for social interaction after cognition is to build some sense of trust by learning more about the new supplier; to get to know them more closely and to build some social relationship, or to trust the quality of their products or services, depending on the nature of the prospective business between the parties.

This theme is affected by the Kuwaiti culture of collectivism. While some SMEs find new parties via social media means, they use offline means such as their connections (offline social networks) to formulate an opinion about the new prospective supplier. The impact of these connections is very high in some cases, such as RE and WP, which is usually dependent on them after finding a prospective relationship through social media, before going further to open the relationship. Arabs depend extensively on social and personal relations which is the result of their collectivist nature (Berger et al., 2015), where if any of the offline social circle recommends the new relationship, parties can trust dealing with them without further investigation.

The culture of Kuwait is again evident in this theme, where parties need to interact to overcome the uncertainty avoidance of Kuwaiti culture and to feel comfortable enough to develop the relationship. Social interaction, thus, refers to getting to know a party closely. The outcome of supplier selection cognition and social interaction is opening new relationships with suppliers and starting to deal with them, and all this is in line with effectuation theory.

Social interaction, through offline means and sometimes through social media channels, is important to build trust in a new relationship.

9.3.3 How does social media, as a medium for interaction/exchange, affect buyer/supplier relationships?

The impact of social media use on existing buyer-supplier relationships in this research was found to be both social and transactional. Social, or more specifically intangible, impact cannot be counted. Transactional impact, can be counted quantitatively, such as in terms of time, frequency or cost. However, it was not counted in this research. A negative impact also appears from these uses, which is discussed later in this section.

9.3.3.1 Social impact

This research found that social media facilitates a means of promoting more social and personal relationships between parties. Thus all social impact themes that emerged are connected and related to each other, and trust is the ground for them to emerge. Nurturing and maintaining relationships, and the other social (intangible) themes such as loyalty and reputation are all related to each other. None of the social themes can stand alone; it works like a circle comprising social activities, all circling around each other (figure 9.1). The evident reason for the overlapping between the social themes is the complexity of social activities, buyer-supplier relationships and social technologies, with the collective nature of Kuwait culture as well as the SMEs' nature and context. This all makes it even more complex, however, it is beyond the scope of this research to focus on the relationships and the overlapping between the different social impact themes, but it should be mentioned here to provide the complete picture.

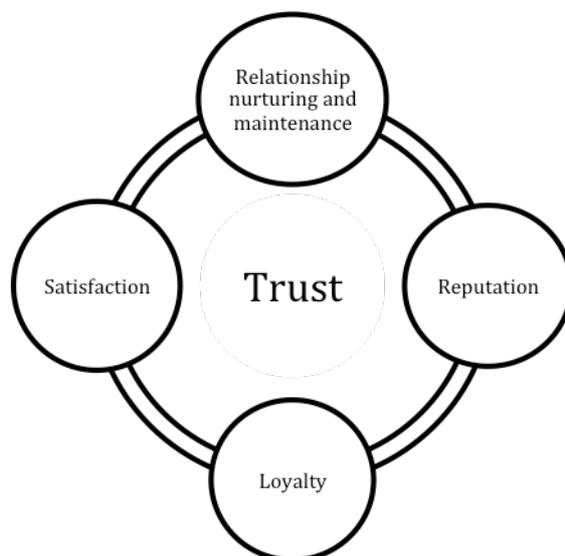


Figure 9.1: Social impact themes

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

It was found that SMEs are not using social media only for transactional purposes such as information sharing, orders or coordinating operations, but also for social purposes, such as social networking, which leads to relationship nurturing and maintenance. In most cases, the buyer-supplier relationships that use social media for communication and exchange are transactional relationships, that is, not connected by contracts. Reasons for this include the context of the research, Kuwait, particularly the collective nature of Kuwaiti culture that cares about social relationships, as well as the features of social media channels, which provide rich and continuous communication between parties compared to old ways of communication. All this has helped social media become a rich place for relationship nurturing and maintenance. Social media allows relationships between SMEs to be strengthened beyond what is possible by telephone or email. Therefore, SMEs use these channels directly or indirectly, and this has an impact on social relations. The cases show different methods and channels used for the same purpose. Direct channels such as WhatsApp are used to connect directly and update parties with customized messages based on their preferences, or to connect with them on occasions such as Eid and New Year; this use is not different to the other channels, but it is more convenient with social media. Other social media channels such

as Snapchat and Instagram (broadcast channels) are adding a new and indirect method of nurturing relationships.

Snapchat was found to be used creatively for this purpose. It is used to deliver rich and live information about work and operations (as explained in the cases); this type of broadcasting was not available in previous channels used by Kuwaiti SMEs. Other cases use Instagram tagging. Tagging is a form of electronic word of mouth; it is like recommending a supplier to the public, and this is very important in collective societies like Kuwait and is highly appreciated. The reason for this is the increased exposure for the tagged SME, which brings benefits for them. The cases show that parties feel obliged (though not formally) to return this favour, although it is mostly an intangible favour. For example, if an SME features a supplier's products in snaps or tags a supplier in an Instagram post, the favour is reciprocated such as through special service, special discounts special prices, or in tags on an Instagram page, for instance. Therefore, it can be said that there is a mutual benefit from doing others a favour.

This reflects the SET logic of interacting with other parties in a favourable manner, in return for reciprocal benefits. Here they are broadcasting for others for the benefit of exposure and the reward of getting better prices or services, or for maintaining the relationship. These different ways of nurturing and maintaining relationships through social media channels are a way to strengthen social relations between parties, besides transactional relations. Social relations are what govern the relations later. Trust in the integrity and credibility of the supplier is not enough. Personal trust and social relations are not less important; they cannot be built only through economic exchange. As found in the literature, creating a "comprehensive" contract to govern a relationship is not easy, therefore, "non-contractual methods" are important for "successful exchanges" (Goetz and Scott, 1981, cited in Lambe et al., 2011, p. 2). Also, as mentioned in Lambe et al. (2011, p. 3) many researchers have found that "personal relations and norms", what they called "relational controls", are usually the better means of relationship governance.

Reputation

Reputation in this research context is the professionalism, quality and breadth of the supplier work's that is delivered in daily remote interactions in social media broadcast

channels such as Snapchat and Instagram. Reputation is intangible; it appears in cases that involve innovative and creative sectors where variety and a large collection of products or services are important (D&C and WP), and also where competition between suppliers seems to be high and fierce. Therefore, reputation is important in maintaining relationships, as well as developing and maintaining trust. As found in the literature, “a positive reputation can be a source of competitive advantage” (Hansen, Samuelson and Silseth, 2008 cited in Wagner et al., 2011, p. 30); “buyers (suppliers) are more likely to expect that suppliers (buyers) with a positive reputation are also trustworthy (i.e. credible and benevolent)” (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 33).

Social media’s richness and the ability of some SMEs to livestream the working day through Snapchat, such as D&C do, are allowing reputation to be built through these channels. This is because live broadcasting can give a perception about the SME’s work and their relationships. On Instagram, reputation seems to be based on the number of followers (besides the quality of the work). If the number of followers is high, this indicates a well-reputed SME (as some participants indicated). Tagging and mentioning other SMEs is a particular favour here because of the high number of followers the SMEs have. This in turn supports relationships positively. Showing their relationships with a well-reputed SME adds to a business’s reputation and allows others (new relationships) to trust them faster. Social media is a channel to show this, however, the intangible “reputation” is realised by participants.

It seems that reputation through social media broadcasting can be built faster than in offline modes. As mentioned in the literature, “a good reputation is difficult to build and easy to lose” (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 34). Reputation is built over time or based on historical events. In the social media context, the ability to continuously (daily) broadcast through social media channels reflects real-life events of a supplier’s work, and seems to be a way to compress the time needed for reputation building. In the social media context, it seems that a reputation is easy to build and easy to lose.

Reputation is a social outcome of broadcasting interactions between parties, and because it is social (intangible) it cannot be discrete and separated from other social outcomes. Social phenomena are complex because they are connected to each other like a circle. Norms have a connection with reputation, because doing others a favour

becomes a norm, such as tagging and mentioning. Having a large number of followers implies you have a good reputation, and this becomes a norm. Reputation has an impact on trust as well; having a good reputation allows others to trust dealing with SMEs. Therefore, although reputation is not a direct SET concept, it is related in different ways to the logic and concepts (trust and norms) of the theory.

Loyalty

Although loyalty was not mentioned by all cases, it is important to consider it here, because it is related in one way or another to other social themes. For example, nurturing and maintaining relationships leads to loyalty in the long run, and some studies have found that loyalty is an outcome of trust (e.g. Rauyran and Miller, 2007).

The case analyses show loyalty to be a social feeling and a purchasing behaviour, but it is more of a feeling in this research. This is found in the literature to be called behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Rauyran and Miller (2007, p. 22) define these in the light of Chaudhri and Holbrooks' (2001) definitions as follows: behavioural loyalty is “the willingness of average business customers to repurchase the service and the products of the service provider and to maintain a relationship with service provider supplier”; while attitudinal loyalty is “the level of customers’ psychological attachments and attitudinal advocacy towards the service provider/supplier”.

In the cases analysed here, in the social media context, interaction between parties through tags, comments and likes in broadcast channels are found to impact feelings and social relations, and leads to both kinds of loyalty, as expressed by participants

SET concepts such as norms and trust also play an important role for this theme. The availability of norms, such as tagging generating a favour, creates an opportunity for loyalty. Trust is a major facilitator of loyalty. This means in the light of SET that this theme appears as a social outcome of social media use.

Satisfaction

It was found that “information sharing” and “coordinating operations”, where parties communicate at the time of operations and involve other parties with the progress and details of the work, are all ways to enhance customer satisfaction. The reason for this

is the rich communication (through pictures and videos) and the speed of communication between parties, which leads SMEs to deliver the expected results or service more effectively and more quickly. Buyers can deliver their comments and feedback instantly through social media tools, thus service is better. The impact of this is satisfaction. This was found more with SMEs whose services are mostly customized. However, with standard products, the speed of providing information about a products' availability, specification or other enquiries were also found to be a way to increase buyer satisfaction. Although not all cases indicated satisfaction explicitly, the way they explained the new medium of communicating and exchanging information (social media), and how it has impacted their old ways of operating and facilitated their exchanges, is a sign of satisfaction.

Satisfaction is connected to other social themes. For example, satisfaction contributes to loyalty, as previous studies have found (e.g. Rauyruen and Miller, 2007). When a customer is satisfied they become a loyal customer. As Kotler (1994) indicates, "the key to customer retention is customer satisfaction" (cited in Rauyruen and Miller, 2007, p. 23). This indicates the link with "buyer maintenance". Suppliers keep buyers satisfied in order to maintain their relationship with them. Thus both parties benefit, and this is without doubt according to the logic of SET.

Social impact is one of the impacts of social media use between buyers and supplier. All social themes that emerged are connected in a circle and trust is the basis of all of them. All social themes support buyer-supplier relationships positively.

9.3.3.2 Transactional impact

Time saving

Most technologies are used in business to save time, and thus costs. Social media was found to save a significant amount of time for Kuwaiti SMEs. In most cases, SMEs were not using any advanced technologies for their relationships. They were using the telephone, newspapers, email and personal visits. Social media richness is a way to save buyer-supplier time and speed transactions. It was found that most uses of social media in the cases led to time saving. Direct channels for information sharing are helping

buyers to make faster decisions. When the information is accurate, typed and supported by pictures, this serves as a documentation and delivers effective information to the other party. The information available in broadcast channels is accessible for parties at any time, for updates and news. It was found that the main advantage of social media in comparison to the other methods of interaction between buyers and suppliers for Kuwaiti SMEs is picture and video sharing. Social media channels are saving time needed for meetings, visiting, calling and checking up, by overcoming physical nearness. Because it saves time, some SMEs mostly depend on these tools for exchanging information, although they do not consider social media the official tool for their relationships. Dependence only occurs with trusted parties. The time-saving impact leads parties to depend on social media channels for their relationships and allows them to exchange rich information in a fast and convenient way, thus saving time. Saving time leads to saving costs as well.

Social media features positively impact business relationships between parties. Social media can be a substitute, to some extent, for expensive supply chain technologies that need resources and training, as well as a substitute for simple ways of communication such as verbal or paper communication.

The main transactional impact of social media use for interaction and exchanges between parties is saving parties time.

9.3.3.3 Negative impact

The negative impact of using social media as a medium for buyer-supplier relationships was less reported by SMEs and was not consistent across the cases. Each case study views the impact of social media use based on its context and the nature of the supply chain relationships and transactions. However, the following sub-themes are important to consider to understand the complete nature of impact.

Time consuming

Although there are many benefits of the openness of broadcast channels such as Snapchat and Instagram, such as live updates and news, there are also negative sides of this use. First, on the personal level, sharing the working day live or showing

relationships (with others) through tags might affect multiple buyers (or suppliers) differently. The impact on the personal level of sharing different information cannot be predicted. However, it can be controlled based on experience, by paying attention to the details. This needs attention and therefore is time consuming. Second, frequent communication enabled by social media, while it has advantages, was also felt by some participants to distract from core work tasks. Third, one of the technical aspects of social media that has a negative impact is the limited resolution of pictures, which can affect initial decision making. This can lead to time devoted to making visits or inquiries and interacting with possible suppliers to clarify the product features (which may not be clear from the picture). A limitation here is file size constraints implemented by platform such as WhatsApp. Because of often the firms need to use parallel systems (email and social media) thus increasing time and effort.

Increased competition

Another negative impact of openness of social media is that rivals who work in the same sector can become aware of all of an SME's activities, and can take action to enhance how they compete with them. This competition might occur in different ways. One of the most important is when relationships are redrawn and supply chains become shorter because suppliers are aware how to reach buyers directly due to the openness of social media. As expected from the literature, supply relationships may suffer; for example, broadening the demand for information to a larger number of partners may result in the evolution of supply chains, where relationships are quickly redrawn, replacing deep cooperative ones (Tingling et al., 2011). Furthermore, the next generation of technologies might enable power redistribution and channel conflicts within a supply chain (Tingling et al., 2011). For instance, suppliers may grab the opportunity to move downstream in a supply chain. On the other hand, producers may choose to be closer to the primary production source in a supply chain. This creates an environment where organisations compete and cooperate at the same time (Tingling et al., 2011). Another impact of openness is that comparing the products and prices of more than one supplier has become much easier than before. Meaning that firms can attempt to undercut one another. This also impact buyer-supplier relationships negatively where relationships are easily redrawn.

intellectual property

One of the most important negative impacts of the openness of social media is the impact on the intellectual property of innovative and creative products and designs, such as food designs, designers' and wedding planners' ideas, and engineers' designs. As mentioned in previous studies, content communities such as YouTube or photo sharing sites such as Flickr increase the risk of sharing copyright-protected material (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and Instagram and Snapchat have the same problem. Rivals or smaller businesses can copy ideas and designs disseminated via these channels. This openness and the potential for copying means competition is increased in markets where others can copy products- potentially at lower cost and with poorer quality but with the same design. In addition, sharing pictures in broadcast channels affects the shelf-life of some designs, in comparison to before the advent of social media. If a product is widely seen on social media channels, it ceases to be seen by buyers as creative or innovative. To overcome this negative aspect of social media, SMEs need to generate new designs and ideas more frequently to cope with changing market demands and competitors' actions, which in turn is costly and time-consuming.

In regard to the negative sides of social media, they were less reported in the cases in compare to the positive impact of social media. The reason might be that SMEs are having been successful in their attempts in using it to build and maintain relationships. Although the negative aspects are less reported they should not be understated as participants indicated that they are aware of and concerned with by these negative impacts, whilst at the same time they are heavily reliant on social media. This indicates that on balance the positive impact of social media is much more significant than the negative impact. It is also important to mention that these negative impacts were not consistent in all cases, except for the point about intellectual property Each participant viewed the negative aspects according to the nature of their business.

There is a negative impact of using social media for relationships, however the advantages overcome the disadvantages.

9.3.4 How does the use of social media affect the other technologies used?

Many supply chain technologies are costly and complex to use (Olorunniwo and Li, 2010), therefore they are less likely to be used by SMEs. It was found that none of the Kuwaiti SMEs in this research use any advanced supply chain technologies such as electronic data interchange (EDI), radio frequency identification (RFID), enterprise resource planning (ERP) or other information systems (IS) with their Kuwaiti suppliers. Some Kuwaiti SMEs use information systems with their suppliers outside Kuwait, which are not within the boundaries of this research. Within Kuwait, they only use traditional information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as telephone and email, and some SMEs have a website. They also use computers for email and Excel spreadsheets, as well as other office processing systems, and they use mobile phones, mostly for both kinds of social media channel, direct and broadcast. This means that there are no large technological differences between Kuwaiti SMEs in most cases. The reason might be the developing nature of the country, as well as the sample nature, SMEs, which are limited in their skills, including management skills, limited IT and IS skills (Burhanuddin et al., 2009; Harland et al., 2007; Karanasios and Burgess, 2006; Kauremaa et al., 2009; Nguyen, Newby and Macaulary, 2015). They were found also to use other means such as personal visits and newspapers, and before that their means included pager, fax and SMS, and Internet forums were popular. Social media was a revolution in regards to the old ways of communication because of its richness. It saves SMEs a significant amount of time and has replaced most old ways, except telephone, email and personal visits. This is expected for SMEs in a developing country such as Kuwait. Therefore, the impact of social media in this case will be compared to telephone and email; these are the most frequently used and mentioned means for communication between buyers and suppliers. This will be explored through the lens of media richness theory, as well as an SET rationale.

Media richness theory (MRT) proposes that the success of an organisation is based on its capability to reduce uncertainty and equivocality (ambiguity) through processing information of relevant richness (Daft and Lengel, 1983). Richness is here defined as “the potential information carrying capacity of data” (Daft and Lengel, 1983, p. 7). The use of social media is regarded in this research as having high richness, due to the ability to share pictures, text, video and voice messages instantly. Social media features, such

as instant messaging, and direct, broadcast and fast communication, allow for rich and convenient communication. This complements traditional methods of communication such as telephone and email.

Social media richness vs telephone

Based on MRT, as telephone is a voice-only medium, it is regarded as having less richness. Telephone communication is less rich than face-to-face; although it has fast feedback, it lacks visual cues, as it only includes audio and language content (Daft and Lengel, 1983). It was one of the main channels of communication for SMEs before the advent of social media. Social media impacted its use because of its richness, which allows for more effective communication, though it did not substitute it completely. It was found in regards to social media:

1. It complements phone calls with pictures and sharing of text information.
2. The information shared through social media is recorded digitally, which adds trust to the information compared to verbal information-sharing. Also information can be retrieved because it has been recorded, although social media is not the official documentation tool.
3. The richness of social media allows regular and rich contact in a convenient manner compared to the telephone.
4. The convenience and richness of social media make the exchange of information and decision making faster than before social media.
5. Social feelings can be expressed indirectly and frequently through social media channels such as via likes, comments and tags.
6. The richness of social media in comparison to the telephone is helping to overcome trust issues in buyer-supplier communication because of the visualization of shared information.
7. Messaging through social media is “task-oriented” in comparison to telephone talks, as it can include more side talks, especially if the relationship is informal and has existed for a long time. This is related to the Kuwaiti collectivist culture.
8. Social media is used to overcome language barriers with non-Arab workers by delivering accurate messages. Social media complements phone calls with

pictures and videos, and the telephone complements photos with spoken explanations.

9. Social media use compared to use of the telephone is saving parties time.

Social media is thus of benefit for both parties compared to telephone communication. Social media has become widely and effectively used, and SMEs are dependent on social media to facilitate buyer-supplier relationships. This reflects SET logic, as using social media is rewarding for both parties, hence why they continue using it and relying on it.

Social media complements telephone communication with its richness.

Social media vs email

Compared to email, social media is preferable for its speed and convenience. Although technically it is not necessarily faster than email, Kuwaiti SMEs view it in this way. Social media complements email, as both are used depending on the task. Email is always regarded as the official tool and social media (specifically WhatsApp) is not regarded as the official tool, although there was found to be high reliance on this tool among cases. When the deal is large or it is a short-term contract that entails rights, the initial communication and agreement can be carried out through WhatsApp to speed up the work, but to finalize the deal it should be documented through email. The reason for this documentation is to save parties' rights. Using more than one means of communication for different purposes such as social media channels and email is a norm between participating cases.

When there is high trust between parties or in small deals or exchanges that do not entail obligations (such as RE exchanges), SMEs rely only on WhatsApp with Kuwaiti suppliers or buyers, rather than email. Social media (WhatsApp) is regarded as more "social" by most cases and can lead to more informal communication; also there is a chance to express the exact message by using voice messages with pictures, and this can be done instantly. While nothing prevents email from being equally "social", and some studies, such as Vickery et al. (2004) and Ambrose et al. (2008), have classified email as a rich medium, it is a norm among cases that email is a more official tool, used for formal communication. On the technical side, WhatsApp is preferable because

emails need typing, preparation, uploading and downloading, while in WhatsApp message capturing and sending is faster. Email is preferable over WhatsApp because large files can be shared in comparison to WhatsApp, and high-resolution pictures and videos can be better shared through email. So when exchanges require high-resolution pictures, such as of designs and colours, SMEs usually return to email. Trust plays an important part in making email the official tool for documentation over social media, just as it plays a role in reliance on WhatsApp with certain parties.

Social media is preferable for its speed and convenient over email communication, but email is the official tool for formal communication and larger deals.

9.4 Conclusion

Social media is used by most cases in this research as a communications channel with certain types of suppliers, which sell special types of products. Such relationships are transactional. Although are relationships are transactional they are mostly repeated to fill different needs at different times.

Trust was found to be important and appears in regards to most research questions, although it is not an outcome of social media use. It is important to the opening of new relationships, but it must exist prior to effective use of social media with existing relationships. However, there is a sense that social media use is facilitating faster trust building because of its richness.

The use of social media among the four cases was found to be to some extent like other supply chain technologies or information systems. For transactional uses, it was found to be used for coordinating operations, sharing information, placing orders and collaboration to achieve a specific goal or project. For social uses, it is used as a network for new and existing relationships, and it allows more interaction and social relationships.

Social media channels and their richness allow SMEs to use these means to find prospective suppliers and to select them. It is also a medium for interaction to build some type of trust in order to open the relationship.

The use of social media with existing suppliers, after trust exists, as a medium for interaction and transactional exchanges brings a social impact that positively supports buyer-supplier relationships. In addition, it saves parties time and this is its transactional impact. There is a negative impact as well, but it seems that the advantages of social media overcome the disadvantages of its use.

In comparison to other technologies, social media complements voice-only telephone communication with rich information such as pictures and videos. Its speed and instant features make it preferable to email communication.

The following chapter discusses the research findings in the light of previous research to demonstrate this study's contribution. It presents the contribution to theory, policy and practice, as well as the limitations of the research and some suggestions for future research.

Chapter Ten: Discussion and conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the cross-case analysis in the light of the larger literature and outline the specific contribution to knowledge within each research question (section 10.2), and then outlines the study's propositions that emerged from the findings (section 10.3). It then outlines the theoretical contribution of the research (section 10.4), discusses the limitations of the research and suggests future research to cover these limitations (section 10.5). Then it outlines the implications for policy and practice (section 10.6). The chapter ends with a brief conclusion to the main findings.

10.2 Discussion of the findings

The following sub-sections discuss the findings of each research question in turn.

10.2.1 Social media uses

This research aimed to explore the impact of social media on IORs in Kuwaiti SMEs. By exploring the ways in which SMEs are using social media with their suppliers and/or buyers, it was found that the uses for social media in relationships are diverse, and can be both transactional and social.

The first important use found was “coordinating operations”, which is an important transactional use for relationships within supply chains. It was found that Kuwaiti SMEs are using social media as a rich (multimedia) technology, that delivers real-time information, and which thus allows more effective communication between parties. Effective communication throughout operations eases the customisation of products, predominantly in the manufacturing sector, and facilitates coordination of work, such as delivery, in the service sector. A key finding is that businesses use social media for sharing pictures and videos of their processes and operations, which minimizes the need for visits or meetings, thus saving parties time. Although in previous studies on SMEs and social media it has been found that improved efficiency and enhanced communication are among the benefits gained from Web 2.0 use in small businesses,

these findings were not replicated here within the context of supplier relationships or supply chains. In the literature on supply chains and social media, most uses and benefits of social media are conceptually expected to be positive. There is very limited empirical research on this point, however – just one study by Camara et al. (2015), which failed to find a relationship between Web 2.0 and supply chain integration and operational efficiency. Camara et al. argued that Web 2.0 is more of a social technology, with its ability to include images, and is thus better used in areas such as marketing or human resources. They added that the nature of the technology differs from supply chain features. However, this thesis found that one of the main features of social media, sharing pictures and videos, is the most effective method for easing and coordinating operations among parties of a relationship, alongside other features such as text or voice messages. The reason for the conflicting findings might be first the size of the organisation Camara et al.'s (2015) research investigated – a medium-sized to large business – while this thesis looked at smaller to medium-sized firms. Furthermore, the level of analysis was different: in their study they looked at supply chain integration, while this study investigated dyadic relationships. In addition, looked at manufacturing sector firms only, while this research looked at both sectors. Also, this thesis was conducted in a developing country, where other supply chain technologies might not be in use compared to developed countries. However, there is no other research that can be compared to this thesis' findings, therefore this thesis fills a gap in the literature by revealing the ability of social media to be a useful technology for conducting operations between parties, because of its richness, real-time communication and other effective communication features that help save time for all parties. One more interesting finding is that coordination of operations between buyers and suppliers in this study was mostly through direct channels of social media, in this case WhatsApp. Although the type of social media application within this research is not as important as its usability, this app is less frequently reported in the literature, especially in business. This thesis thus contributes to the inter-organisational information technology (IOIT) literature the idea that WhatsApp is an effective tool for such uses. Notable in this respect is that WhatsApp recently launched a business version of the application, with special concern for small business owners (WhatsApp Inc., 2018).

The second use found from the cases in this research is information sharing. Social media supports this use through direct and broadcast channels. Parties can share their

information (such as news, latest products or projects, or prices and availability) directly to those they have relationships with, or broadcast them in social media channels like on a website. Kuwaiti SMEs were found to use Instagram like a website for their businesses. This broadcasting allows buyers to freely and directly access information, such as updates about latest products. Pictures and videos, as a benefit of the richness of social media, support this information sharing and deliver accurate information that can minimize uncertainty, more than if information is only delivered in text or numbers. Information sharing among buyers/suppliers or supply chain partners was found to be widely covered in the literature, where it refers to the extent to which important information is communicated to other parties (Chae et al., 2005). Achieving real-time sending of information is one of the major purposes of information sharing in supply chains, in order to help in supply chain decision making (Prajogo and Olhager, 2012).

The impact and benefit of good information sharing through information technology is covered in the literature (Liu et al., 2016). But the use of social media specifically has been less widely reported. In an empirical study by Lam et al. (2016), it was found that social media eases information flow and knowledge sharing across firm boundaries, and the richness of social media is what is helpful in this respect. Lam et al. (2016) found that this information sharing in turn improves firms' effectiveness and innovation in modern business environments. The use of social media for information sharing, O'Leary (2011) suggests, is used with systems such as RFID. O'Leary suggests that using Twitter, for example, with RFID, means businesses can send a tweet at the end of the day summarizing the aggregated information in the RFID, instead of keeping it inside the system only. This is to spread a message to a large number of participants and to thus increase transparency. O'Leary suggests that the benefit of sharing information through social media is to provide a human side to the information, which in turn might create more awareness than system-generated messages. This is also one of the contributions of this research, that information sharing through social media gives the ability for social interaction between parties. Moreover, the richness of the information shared, such as pictures, is not mentioned in the literature. Social media allows this richness, which facilitates work, decreases uncertainty and helps businesses take faster decisions. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the literature regarding the ability of social media to be used for information sharing between parties because of its

richness and real-time features, and the social flavour it gives to the information shared. It should be noted that this use is dependent on the context in which it is used. It was not found to be used in regards to standard repeated products as much as in regards to innovative and creative products and services.

The third transactional use of social media for Kuwaiti SMEs is placing orders through social media channels, particularly direct channels, i.e. WhatsApp. This use is dependent on the type of products and is usually used by SMEs for small orders. It was found more in the service sector in regards to ready-made products. This use is highly bounded by trust in relationships, therefore it is not used by all parties. It is used to save time needed for visits, avoid bureaucracy (which is widespread in Arab societies) and minimise formalities. In the literature, orders were found to be placed through systems or e-procurement. E-procurement means using IT for purchasing goods or services and making contracts, whether by using email and websites or advanced systems of procurement (Hassan et al., 2014). It can be concluded that Kuwaiti SMEs are using social media as an e-procurement system, allowing their buyers to see a variety of products and place orders. The use of social media to place orders, and for procurement between buyer and suppliers, is not mentioned in the literature, to the researcher's knowledge. This thesis thus contributes to the exploration of this use of social media. What was found to aid this was the sharing of pictures and specifications of products, as well as the social interaction, which allows for negotiation. These are important findings that open up a new avenue in social media and supply chain research.

Social networking is the fourth use; this is regarded as more of a social use than a transactional one. Social media is used as a medium where SMEs can find each other or where they can connect to maintain relations. Cases indicated the benefits of exposure, where businesses can be reachable by others or can find others. This use particularly fits with collective societies such as Kuwait, that appreciate collectivism and strong relationships. A specialized type of social networking was found within cases, which is virtual communities, where people sharing the same interests gather in a virtual place; this was particularly used by real estate companies. A special feature of WhatsApp, WhatsApp groups, was found to be used for this. It works well in serving communities of suppliers, just like the social circles in Kuwait known as *Duwaniyah*, but allowing wider reach and richer communication.

In the literature, social networking is one of social media's key uses. It is sometimes used interchangeably with social media. Social networks are regarded as rich in media and social presence, compared to other social media such as wikis, because they allow more social interaction and more sharing of pictures and videos, besides text (Kaplan and Henlein, 2010). Social networking was reported as one of the most important uses of social media for SMEs (Kim et al., 2011), however these online social networks' use in and importance for supply chains has not been examined before, to the researcher's knowledge. From the supply chain perspective, offline social networks are very important and widely mentioned in the literature. One of the key arguments is Granovetter's (1985) theory of embeddedness, which states that in order to understand economic behaviour, the role of social relationships, in which economic actions are embedded, needs to be considered. Gulati (1999) builds on Granovetter's claim that the social context in which firms are embedded influences their economic actions. Gulati (1995) found that social networks in which firms are embedded affect their behaviour regarding economic actions, via the information provided through this social context, and firms makes decisions regarding whether to connect with other firms in strategic alliances or not. In addition, Gulati (1998) observed that new opportunities for alliances were presented to firms through their current alliance partners. This thesis found that social media can serve as a social context, where parties can find each other and build relationships, because of the social interaction it easily allows. Thus, this research adds to the body of literature on the importance of social media as a medium for social networking among both existing and new parties. Although supply chain technology (SCT) allows networking among parties, it is for parties who are engaged and using the system, whereas social media allows for wider networking, not only with suppliers with whom a business is currently engaged, but with new suppliers as well. Another contribution of the current study is that WhatsApp groups were found to help social networking between a number of parties at the same time. This specific use of WhatsApp is not mentioned in the literature in regards to use of social media for social networking by organisations.

Collaboration was the last use of social media for buyer and supplier relationships found from the cases. They were again found to use WhatsApp groups to share rich information between members of the group (collections of suppliers), which are managed by the focal firm. This allows parties to share information accurately because

of the richness, because the meeting is recorded digitally, and because it can be anytime and anywhere. As found in the literature on social media, the idea of Web 2.0 was built around participation, interaction, sharing of data and collaboration (Barlow et al., 2011). Collaboration is categorized as one of the main uses of social media in previous research (Schlagwein and Hu, 2017). On the other hand, in supply chain literature, much SCT is employed in organisations for information sharing, collaboration and coordination (Auramo et al., 2005). In the literature on supply chains there are no studies covering the use of social media as a collaboration tool between parties; thus this study fills this gap, as it reveals that social media can be used as an SCT for collaboration and to serve shared goals. It is richer in terms of multimedia and sociability than other supply chain technologies, which are mostly based on systems that generate text and numbers.

To conclude, the novel finding regarding social media use for supplier relationships among Kuwaiti SMEs is for the convenient sharing of pictures, which makes communication between parties richer, and which in turn facilitates work, decreases uncertainty and helps businesses to take faster decisions. Picture sharing has not been mentioned clearly or given special interest in the literature on supply chains. This study's findings argue for more research into the impact of picture sharing in supplier relationships. The other contribution concerns the sociability of social media tools, which allow for better social interaction and thus have an impact on relationships. A surprising finding is that Kuwaiti SMEs were found not to use any advanced systems such as EDI, ERP or others. They only use telephone, email, mobile and software such as Excel. Therefore, it can be concluded that the totality of social media uses, coordinating operations, information sharing, placing orders, social networking and collaboration, can serve as a supply chain system for Kuwaiti SMEs. The reason for this is that social media provides most of the uses of more technical systems, but at lower cost and requiring less experience, even though social media was not built with this use in mind. This finding cannot be generalized to all SMEs, however it might fit SMEs in other developing countries.

Finally, the first research question discussed above is more of a descriptive one, aimed at understanding in general the uses of social media in supplier relationships and

introducing the impact of social media, which is discussed in regards to the following research questions.

10.2.2 New relationships

This study contributes to current research in the field by analysing how SMEs use social media as a means of building new relationships. This is explained by exploring the ways SMEs use social media to select new suppliers through the lens of effectuation theory (Saravathy and Dew, 2005) and Read et al.'s (2009) conceptual model of effectuation processes, along with SET logic. Some SMEs were found to use social media as a social network to find and open new relationships, while others use their past experience to find new suppliers. The difference here is largely in terms of the SME's age. Newly established SMEs were found to use social media more than older, more established SMEs. The reason for this is clearly experience; older SMEs started their businesses a long time ago, before the introduction of social media. Also they have more established connections compared to newly established SMEs. Another reason is trust: older SMEs do not trust online means alone. SMEs were also found to use social media either actively or passively. Newly established SMEs use it actively, while older SMEs use it passively.

Although many models and criteria are discussed in the literature in terms of the supplier selection process (Boer et al., 2001; Zadeh and Cheng, 2016), it was expected that Kuwaiti SMEs, like other SMEs in the literature, would use less formal ways of selecting and evaluating suppliers (Pearson and Ellram, 1995; Ellegard, 2006; Pressey et al., 2009; Viljamaa, 2011). SMEs who use social media actively to find new suppliers were found to use available means such as Instagram pages to search for new suppliers or find them by chance. Through the rich information available, such as pictures and videos, regarding suppliers' products or projects, they build *intrasubjective cognition* about the prospective suppliers. This is an initial idea or perception about the suitability of the supplier to fill their needs, and is based on the pictures available, and sometime on the comments of other people on the pictures or the tags provided by other firms with good reputations. In addition, the richness of social media inspires an initial sense of trust about a new supplier.

SMEs then go further with this cognition and interact with the new suppliers; this is called *interactive behaviour*, based on the theoretical framework. Kuwaiti SMEs usually interact with new suppliers in order to build some type of trust. Some interact through social media to ask more about certain products, for instance if the Instagram pictures are clear enough and the deal is not large or requiring an ongoing relationship. For larger products and projects that require trust, it was found that social media is not the only means used for social interaction, but that trust is built through a mixture of means. Trust building in the supplier selection process was found to be important for most Kuwaiti SMEs. Kuwaiti SMEs are looking to trust other parties based on different criteria, and this depends on the type of the business they work with. For example, in regards to ready-made products, buyers are looking to trust the quality of the products more than other criteria, therefore pictures and comments on Instagram can give a good idea, as well as visits to the suppliers to view the products. However, in regards to other types of work that are mainly dependent on information exchange or are more in the nature of a service, and thus highly dependent on the parties involved, personal trust and honesty are highly important.

The cases show that some SMEs consult close groups such as their families, friends or peers for recommendations about a new supplier. This agrees with what was found in the literature, that in Arab societies people have more confidence in their families, and are reluctant to trust outsiders, particularly in regards to key business decisions (Ali, 1995). Social and personal relations are heavily depended on in Arab culture, which is the result of their collectivism. Moreover, what makes trust an important part of business for the Kuwaiti SMEs in this thesis, compared to contracts, for instance, is the lack of formality in Arab organisations, which means they rely more on trust and informal relationships. In the Arab world, “Business is personal” (AlHhussan, AlHusan and Alhesan, 2017, p. 832).

Aside from these aspects of Kuwaiti culture, trust can also develop in the supplier selection process through the *transference process*; this is using a “third party’s definition of another as a basis for defining that other as trustworthy” (Strub and Priest, 1979, cited in Donney and Cannon, 1997, p. 37). This further confirms the Kuwaiti method of selecting suppliers. Interactive behaviour also relates to a further cultural

dimension of Kuwaiti SMEs which is *uncertainty avoidance*; SMEs interact with other firms to build a sense of trust before dealing with them in order to overcome their uncertainty regarding the new supplier.

Here the researcher comes to the point that trust is missed out of effectuation theory, and by searching the literature it was found that effectuation has been criticized by Goel and Karri (2006) for assuming too much trust, because parties started work directly without building trust, or more accurately without investigation of the new party. Sarasvathy and Dew (2008, p. 728) replied to Goel and Karri by stating that effectuation is a non-predictive theory and uses the logic of “invest only what one can afford to lose”. Furthermore, the effectuator tries to shape and affect their future, including their relationships. This means that Sarasvathy and Dew did not assume trust as part of the theory in the first place. Since this theory is mainly from the literature on entrepreneurship, it promotes the use of available means and the shaping of future behaviour. As this research deals with the culture of a collectivist developing country, trust is needed in this context. Therefore, SET complements effectuation theory in this research, in order to take into account the impact of the context of Kuwait. This is as stated by the SET proposition, “Rationality proposition: the people involved in the exchange will choose the alternative with higher value rewards” (Griffith et al., 2006, p.87). This explains the other means SMEs are using in this research to build trust in new suppliers. These means help SMEs choose the best alternative, because if nothing can help to increase trust in a prospective supplier, it might be better to avoid the risk of dealing with them. This also explains the Kuwaiti cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, as well as the other SET proposition which is “Aggression proposition: the exchange will be avoided by the person if the reward is not expected, or an unexpected penalty is received from the exchange” (Homans, 1961, cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p.87). However, as mentioned before, social media’s richness helps to expedite trust building, because there is intrasubjective cognition about the supplier before the interactive behaviour. In other words, social interaction is needed to confirm the first idea about supplier that was built based on pictures and information on social media. It is important to note that this research looks at the impact of social media specifically, but explaining the trust aspect of the process is logical to understanding the full picture.

Finally, the results of intrasubjective cognition and interactive behaviour are an inter-subjective outcome in the form of opening new relationships and dealing with new suppliers, based on Read et al.'s (2009) conceptual model of effectuation processes and Sarasvathy and Dew's (2005) effectuation theory. After the relationship is built and trust is developed, social media can become the only tool used in the relationship, as the next sections will show.

This section contributes to previous research by exploring SMEs' practices of supplier selection in a developing country and through social media. In general, literature about SMEs' practices in terms of supplier selection is limited (Pressey et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is a lack of research into the impact of new technologies in terms of selecting suppliers (Zadeh and Cheng, 2016). Although it was conceptually expected by O'Leary (2011) that social media would aid supplier selection, because the information available in social media channels allows transparency, it has not been widely examined. This thesis contributes an exploration of the role of social media in facilitating the selection of new suppliers. It uses effectuation theory in the context of a collectivist developing country, where trust is highly valued. SET complements effectuation theory in this regard. Future research could specifically integrate trust into the effectuation processes, and investigate its importance and impact.

10.2.3 Social media's impact

Social media's impact was found to be similar to other IT, in saving parties time when used for transactional purposes. The other impact is a social impact, which is less widely reported in the literature. An important point that needs to be addressed here is that most (cases') relationships found using social media are transactional, meaning there is no long-term contract to hold them.

The social impact found was circular, where each element impacts the other in some way, and trust is at the heart of this. Before discussing social impact, it is important to demonstrate the importance of trust in the use of social media as a medium for Kuwaiti buyer-supplier relationships. Although trust is widely discussed in the literature (Vengen and Huxham, 2003), trust through social media as a medium of exchange

between buyers and suppliers is less widely reported. This research found that trust should exist prior to social media use for existing relationships. It is a requirement for effective use of social media, such as for sharing important information, placing orders, operational coordination or collaboration for shared goals. This finding is in line with researchers who argue that trust is needed for effective use of interorganisational information systems between parties (Chae et al., 2005; Vijayasathy, 2010; Salo, 2012; Mirkovski et al., 2016). It is important to note here that this is the case for transactional uses. When the use is for social purposes such as maintaining relationships, although trust must appear first, it can be strengthened with social media use. Thus it can be concluded that trust usually exists prior to social media use, however in some cases (social uses) it can be strengthened through social media interaction.

10.2.3.1 Social impact

Relationship nurturing and maintenance

Relationship nurturing and maintenance is a social impact of using social media channels with buyers/suppliers. First, the common direct channel use of social media as a communication tool for greetings on special occasions. Second, broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat were found to be used as indirect interaction channels to maintain and nurture relationships: for example, through the use of tags on Instagram to tag suppliers that work with the SME, or complimenting suppliers' work in Snapchat live broadcasts. It was found that when complimentary messages or tagging come from well-known and well-reputed SMEs, it works like electronic word of mouth and is mostly trusted and appreciated. Kuwaiti SMEs consider this a favour because it increases their exposure in social media channels, so they are benefiting from this. Third, another way for indirect interaction is by broadcasting live videos and pictures about SMEs' work through Snapchat, which is indirect frequent communication that reminds buyers of the SME's existence, because as mentioned before most of the relationships are transactional. These are different strategies used by SMEs in this research to nurture and maintain their relationship with suppliers or buyers.

Studies of the nurturing and maintenance of supply relationships through social media are rare in the literature. Some studies recommend looking to social antecedents, because mostly the impact of IT is researched from IT-related antecedents (Kim et al.,

2011). Furthermore, advanced IT is used to facilitate operations and information sharing (Chae et al., 2005; Vijayasathy, 2010), but largely not to build and enhance relationships. This thesis' finding regarding the nurturing and maintenance of relationships through indirect interaction, tags or Snapchat live broadcasting was not found in the literature in regards to other IT. This use allows continuous interaction and communication, not directed to a specific supplier, where they have to pick up the phone to answer it or reply to an email. This is a novel finding in the literature of interorganisational relationships or more specifically interorganisational IT literature (IO-IT), where social media should be considered more often. One of the most interesting points is the use of Snapchat for live broadcasting. Studies about Snapchat's impact in business in general are scarce. This thesis contributes an exploration of a use and impact that might be specific for Kuwait, however further research is needed to fill this big gap in the literature.

Bringing the lens of SET to bear, some types of broadcasting are considered a favour for other SMEs, while other types of broadcasting, e.g. Snapchat, bring benefits to the broadcaster, as stated by the following proposition of SET: "the more valuable the outcome of the exchange to the person the more the person is likely to perform the action again" (Blau, 1964 cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p.86). Therefore, if parties consider this a favour, it means that it is valuable to them. They usually return the favour via better prices and better services, and most importantly this leads them to maintain the relationship for longer. Favours are intangible; their outcome is not countable; the return of a favour is not obligated, but they are mostly returned. So there is reciprocity, and this reflects SET logic as well. Other social impacts also help to maintain relationships for longer, as will be explained in the following sections.

Reputation

Reputation is another impact of using social media. The key consequence for SMEs of social media use for information sharing and social networking, such as via broadcasting projects, products, visits to suppliers or other activities on Instagram and Snapchat, is building reputation. This was found more in regards to SMEs that deliver innovative and creative services or products. They can broadcast their innovativeness and creativity, and this in turn gives other parties an idea about their professionalism.

It was also found in this thesis that it is a norm among SMEs who use social media that the number of followers is considered an indicator of SMEs' reputation.

Reputation, like other social impacts, is intangible, and is related to other social impacts such as trust and relationship nurturing and maintenance. An increase in a firm's reputation increases trust in it. Therefore, when a well-reputed SME broadcasts about or tags another firm, it will be trusted and it will add to the reputation of the tagged SME. This is why it is a favour, as mentioned before (in relationship nurturing and maintenance). Having a good reputation also increases the probability of future dealings with an SME, thus maintaining relationships. The openness of social media allows for widespread information sharing. This without doubt expedites reputation building compared to not using social media channels.

Reputation is very important in IOR literature. One of firms' key goals in forming IORs is to conduct tasks and enhance inter-organisational and interpersonal relationships in order to improve their reputation and legitimacy (Parmigiano and Rivera-Santos, 2011). Relationships with well-reputed firms enhance the reputation of firms. Although reputation is important in IORs, however, in the literature reputation building through means such as IT is not clear. In other words, it is not clear if IT facilitates reputation building, like social media in this research. What was found in the literature is that firms have a reputation for their information technology capabilities (e.g. Lim et al., 2013). Social media literature about reputation is usually in regards to marketing or brand reputation. However, from the supply relationship side there is not much research that covers it. From supply chain literature, social media was expected to help gather information about suppliers' reputations by offering the ability to monitor them through their social media content (O'Leary, 2011), However, this was not explored or examined. In a similar context to that of this research (Gulf countries), a study by Ahmad et al. (2018) found the impact of social media on SMEs to be in the increased online presence, where customers can like, comment on and share information about SMEs with others. This was found to help SMEs reach new customers. In turn, this increases the SME's reputation, and reputation helps to increase customer loyalty. This study's findings confirm this, although on the customer level. SMEs benefit from building a reputation via social media, and this reputation has an impact on their

relationships. This impact is not discrete but is related to other social impacts such as relationship nurturing and maintenance and trust.

Looking at this through the lens of SET, the *success proposition* can be applied here, which states that the more a specific action is rewarded, the more the person engaged in the exchange is likely to repeat it (Blau, 1964, cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p.86). This is the case with SMEs using broadcast channels to display their professionalism and supply relationships on a daily or frequent basis. This increases their reputation, and their reputation has an impact on their relationships with suppliers, such as increasing trust, maintaining relationship with them and loyalty, as the next sections will show.

As above, it is social media's features, allowing interaction, broadcasting and real-time sharing, that makes reputation an outcome of its use. Suppliers are able to reflect real-time events of their work, and this can be on a daily basis. This continuous broadcasting was not available through other media used by Kuwaiti SMEs, or by other general IT, according to the literature. Therefore, this can be considered a special feature of social media and a novel finding for use of social media in buyer-supplier relationships.

Loyalty

Loyalty is a social impact of social media. Social media interactions can be via a special form of communication, not necessarily direct communication. Likes, tags and short comments on pictures on Instagram are examples of special interaction that is only available through social media channels. This type of interaction was found in some cases to create feelings of loyalty towards other parties. Loyalty, like the other social impacts, is connected to them. It was found that trust facilitates loyalty, because loyalty was found within existing relationships where trust had already been built. Carter et al. (2014), in their study of loyalty in online business, comparing trust and switching costs for e-loyalty, found that trust is more important. Instant and continuous communication with customers through social media channels helps to build trust and customer loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2018). Although both of these studies are on the customer level, because the first refers to online settings, which is close to our study, and the latter is in social media in an Arab context, they are both relevant here.

In the literature this is called attitudinal loyalty, which is represented in the extent of *psychological attachments* for the supplier (Rauyran and Miller, 2007). The other type of loyalty is behavioural loyalty. It seems that social media's impact is more towards attitudinal loyalty than behavioural loyalty, because of the special types of communication, as mentioned earlier. Tags can be considered a form of word of mouth. If we consider tags as word of mouth, this thesis confirms the findings of a study by El-Haddadeh et al. (2012), which found that word of mouth is important for loyalty and customer retention, and the social impact, i.e. trust, of positive electronic word of mouth. It was found in the literature that numbers of likes and comments are considered a metric for brand popularity (Swani et al., 2017). However, this is from a marketing perspective; most of what is written about likes and comments is in regards to brands and marketing. A study by Rapp et al. (2013), although from the marketing perspective, examined the social media contagion effect across channels of distribution. They found a positive impact of social media use on consumer-retailer loyalty. Ahmad et al. (2018), as noted above, found that social media allows SMEs to build relationships with customers because of direct social interaction with them, which increases customer loyalty. This thesis does not go further in exploring the impact of likes, comments or tags, except as touching their impact as an outcome of social media use. More research is needed about this interesting finding in the area of social media and IORs.

From the SET perspective, likes, tags and comments are rewarded action, and help build attitudinal loyalty between parties. This happens faster compared to without social media. In other words, social media as a medium for interaction seems to bring faster rewards for buyer-supplier relationships. Thus, this thesis contributes to the literature on mediated IORs with the finding that loyalty is an outcome of relationships mediated via social media, and loyalty is part of the other social impacts found in this thesis. More specific research is needed to cover this area in more depth.

Satisfaction

Because of the richness of social media, Kuwaiti SMEs were found to deliver better services that satisfy their buyers. Communicating rich and real-time information and receiving faster feedback from buyers allows them to deliver what is expected by buyers; this is more relevant for customized products or services in this research. This is in line with previous research; delivering the expected service or product is what

constitutes customer satisfaction (Biong, 1993). Satisfaction in this research, like the other social impacts, cannot be discrete, but is related to trust, loyalty and relationship maintenance. This is also in line with what is seen in previous studies about customer satisfaction. Satisfaction “is not an end in itself” (Sashi, 2012, p. 262). Satisfaction leads to loyalty (Lin, 2008; Sashi, 2012). Shiau and Luo (2012) found that trust and reciprocity are keys that explain customer satisfaction. *Retention* is an outcome of satisfaction over time or an outcome of strong positive emotions. It might be an outcome of a long relationship with no emotional bond, or an emotional bond outside of a long relationship (Sashi, 2012). This is the same as relationship nurturing and maintenance.

Although satisfaction is very important in any relationship, as the literature makes clear, in order to maintain the relationship, taking it through a medium such as information technologies or systems is not much reported. The literature on information systems and satisfaction usually examines user satisfaction with the system itself (Shiau and Luo, 2012). For example, Chompis et al. (2014) found that satisfaction with B2B virtual communities as a medium or system is derived by social ties, content and technology. Shiau and Luo (2012) found that a critical impact on engagement in online group buying is product and service satisfaction. It is not the online group that is making them satisfied with the vendors. In other words, online group (as a medium) buying did not contribute to their satisfaction. In this research, the findings show that using social media (as a medium) brings satisfaction to relationships in itself, because of its richness, which facilitates negotiations and taking shared decisions. Furthermore, where rich social interaction is possible, the outcomes of this rich medium are positive, such as buyer satisfaction. Taking this from another corner, this agrees with previous literature about effective communication, which can reduce transaction costs by increasing behavioural transparency, reducing uncertainty, advancing learning between organisations, increasing performance and satisfaction in relationships, and providing more opportunities for better joint action (Gligor and Autry, 2012).

From the SET perspective, when buyers are satisfied with the supplier they will repeat their exchanges with them. Both buyers and suppliers are benefiting from better services, so there are mutual benefits that maintain relationships for longer.

Social impacts were not realized and explained by all participants directly and clearly, unlike time saving (transactional impact). The reason for this might be that most SMEs' managers do not carefully plan the use and impact of social media. It is instead used informally, despite all the benefits it offers to Kuwaiti SMEs. Finally, although not all social impact themes were mentioned by all interviewees (see table 9.1), they were all mentioned at some point and cannot be avoided, because, as the analysis and previous literature show (e.g. Sashi, 2012), there is a relationship between them, so in order to give the complete picture they were all included.

10.2.3.2 Transactional impact

The second social media impact is transactional, in terms of saving time. It was found that the richness and openness of social media are features that save buyers and suppliers time and boost transactions. However, as mentioned before, this research is qualitative in nature so it did not measure the time saved.

First, in terms of the positive impact of time saving: Kuwaiti SMEs were not found to use any advanced technologies that boost their transactions and work with their suppliers. Most SMEs were found to use traditional means such as telephone, email, paperwork and personal visits, especially with their upstream Kuwaiti suppliers (which make up this study's sample); with suppliers outside Kuwait such as suppliers from Europe or the US, they were using suppliers' websites and email, and some mentioned suppliers' online systems where they can place orders. The main reason for the use of traditional communication means with suppliers might be the small size of Kuwait in terms of land. Traditional means have been effective for the SMEs until this point. However, with the introduction of social media, SMEs experienced a great impact in their old ways of interactions and communication; this impact is strongly felt in terms of speeding up work and saving time. Saving time without doubt is cost saving, but again this economic side of the impact was out of the boundaries of this research.

The richness of social media helps SMEs to overcome the need for physical nearness by saving them meetings and visiting time, by sharing pictures and videos of their work during operations and meeting in WhatsApp groups to speed up the work. This helps SMEs to take faster decisions, because information is mostly accurate, as it is typed and

supported by pictures. The openness of social media makes suppliers' information accessible for buyers at any time, via news and updates, and this in turn saves both parties time, as information is broadcast for multiple participants at the same time.

As mentioned in the conceptual paper by Tingling et al. (2011), the time and geography of supply chain relationships will be significantly adjusted with the use of Web 2.0 and mobile devices. As outlined in the conceptual paper by Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska (2013), social media can help supplier communities to share information in real time, which might help organisations to be at the leading edge. Also as expected, increasing the speed of communication amongst supply chain partners helps effective decision making (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska, 2013). All this previous conceptual literature agrees with the time saving impact found by this empirical research found.

An empirical study by Lam et al. (2016) found that social media eases information flow and knowledge sharing across intra- and inter-organisational boundaries. Social media's richness is key in this respect, and this in turn improves firms' effectiveness and innovation in the modern business environment, which is mostly knowledge-based. Salo (2012) also looked to the difference between traditional methods such as telephone and fax, and Wi-Fi and PDS devices, and found a massive amount of time saved in all processes, from ordering to the delivery process. Although the study was not about social media use but IORs and mobile technologies, it gives an insight, similar to the findings of the present research, into the impact of technology compared to simple, traditional methods.

This research contributes the finding that the outcome of the richness and openness of social media is time-saving for parties in business relationships. This in turn saves costs. There is a mutual benefit in using social media as the medium for buyer-supplier relationships, as both parties can save time needed for transactions. This in turns reflect the SET success proposition. Therefore, it can be concluded that the more the social media exchanges in buyer-supplier relationships are rewarded, the more the buyer and supplier engaged in the exchange are likely to repeat them. Here the rewards are social and transactional, as explained above.

10.2.3.3 Negative impact

Although richness and openness are the main features of social media that speed up work and save parties time, at the same time they bring negative impacts to SMEs, although not specifically in regards to business relationships. But these negative impacts cannot be ignored, because they show the full picture of social media use in this context.

Social media allows more pictures to be shared in social media channels, and this was found to affect the intellectual property of innovative and creative designs. The problem is that this sharing cannot be fully controlled, because if suppliers hide their designs, buyers are unable to share them and mention the suppliers to compliment them on their work, as mentioned before. This is the case not only for buyers but also the end consumers, who when satisfied with a product can recommend it on social media channels. This is a problem not only of richness but also openness. Although this has a positive impact, some SMEs whose work is mainly based on designs and innovation were affected where picture sharing affected the shelf-life of their designs; their innovative designs become old quickly compared to before social media. Furthermore, they can be copied by other businesses. Rivals also benefit from having this information available in broadcast channels. This in turn negatively affects suppliers' time, because they always need new designs to cope with changing markets demands and competitor actions, and this is costly and time-consuming.

The richness of social media allows frequent communication, which has a positive social impact, building better relationships, but this frequent communication was found by some participants to be wasting their time, by bothering them and distracting them from focussing on innovations and designs. Openness also has a negative side for suppliers, specifically where buyers can compare suppliers easily compared to old ways such as visits, and while this is a positive aspect for buyers, it is negative for suppliers.

As the literature review revealed, there is a gap in current research regarding the negative impact of social media in general and in supply relationships specifically. As expected from the literature review, more communication and greater connection do not always enhance the decision-making process, and may be damaging (Tingling et

al., 2011). Relationships may change more quickly and be more shallow, and there may be greater levels of conflict in supply chains, with both producers and suppliers taking the opportunity to cut out links in the supply chain (Tingling et al., 2011). This is close to the findings of the present study, which indicate that due to the openness of social media, rivals can take the opportunity to take actions such as those mentioned. Moreover, organisations who use social media activity for their supply chain might find it being used by their employees for personal use, which affects productivity (O’Leary, 2011). In the current research, the users of social media are the business owners themselves, but despite this they feel distracted because of social media.

The SET aggression proposition, as mentioned above, states that: “the exchange will be avoided by the person if the reward is not expected, or an unexpected penalty is received from the exchange” (Homans, 1961, cited in Griffith et al., 2006, p.87), but social media is a tool that cannot be dispensed with by Kuwaiti SMEs, as they indicated. This might reflect the SET rationality proposition: “the people involved in the exchange will choose the alternative with higher value rewards” (Griffith et al., 2006, p.87). Although social media has a negative impact, it seems that this is less than the positive impact it brings for SMEs’ relationships. This to say that social media is a double-edged sword; if used properly it will yield positive impacts, but if not controlled it has the potential to yield negative impacts. Therefore, strategies and planning for use are highly needed for Kuwaiti SMEs, though they were not found to be of high importance for Kuwaiti SMEs in the cases.

This research contributes to the literature on supply relationships and social media by revealing some of the negative impacts of using social media. Nevertheless, this gap in the literature needs more research. Comparisons of the negative and positive impacts of the richness and openness of social media are very much needed as well. Future research might address this point.

10.2.4 Social media and other technologies

The cases showed that Kuwaiti SMEs are not using any advanced systems or supply chain technologies with their Kuwaiti suppliers. However, some were using systems with their non-Kuwaiti suppliers. Kuwaiti suppliers and buyers were using telephone,

email and face-to-face visits. They use computers and software such as Excel spreadsheets, and mobile phones for most of the social media channels they use. Although it was expected at the beginning of this research that social media would be compared to supply chain technologies, based on the findings it will be compared to less advanced technologies that are currently used by Kuwaiti SMEs, i.e. email and telephone. The comparison will be via the lens of media richness theory and an SET rationale.

Social media's introduction in Kuwaiti SMEs replaced the use of fax, pagers and online forums for some SMEs, but not email and telephone. It was found instead to complement telephone and email. Social media's richness was found to complement voice-only telephone calls with pictures, videos and text. The ability for frequent communication in a convenient way adds to social media's appeal. Social media has the advantage of delivering indirect social feeling that can be expressed through likes and tags. Messaging through social media is task-oriented compared to telephone calls' side talks, which are a Kuwaiti style of phone calls in long relationships where it is etiquette to include questions about personal life and family, and not just about business, and this wastes time. Moreover, information shared in social media can be retrieved, compared to verbal-only telephone calls.

Social media is preferred over emails for Kuwaiti SMEs because of its speed, or more specifically for its convenience. However, email is still the official formal tool, especially for large deals. Social media is used to speed up the deals, but when it comes to documenting the deal, email is used. Hence it complements it for speed. In most cases, Kuwaiti SMEs rely on their trust of the other parties and use social media as a medium.

As noted in the literature review, there is not much research about the use of ICT by SMEs from an inter-organisational perspective (see Bordonaba-Juste and Cambra-Fierro, 2009; Mirkovski et al., 2016; Scuotto et al. 2017). This is despite the fact that the use of ICT within SMEs' supply chains is important, because it helps SMEs generate value from their partnerships and gain a competitive advantage in a knowledge-based economy (Scuotto et al., 2017; Bordonaba-Juste and Cambra-Fierro, 2009). Although not a study specifically about social media, but rather comparing manual means with mobile means, Salo (2012) looked at the impact of mobile solutions

on improving processes, coordination and total value creation in buyer-supplier relationships in industrial sectors. It was found that they have a significant role in enhancing inter-organisational coordination between parties. Another study, comparing developed and developing countries in an SME context (Mirkovski et al., 2016), found that SMEs in both developing and developed countries prefer to use ICT-mediated interactions to save costs and to benefit from better efficiency. These studies agree with the findings of this thesis, that a convenient and fast medium adds a positive impact to SMEs' relationships, and is highly necessary nowadays.

In terms of the richness of social media, other studies confirm its importance for relationships using an MRT lens (Daft and Lengel, 1983). As discussed in the literature review, Vickery et al.'s (2004) research focused on two media from Daft and Lengel's (1983) framework, face-to-face and telephone communication, and they extended it to add electronic communication (email and EDI) to the framework. They found a direct effect of richness on performance in a relationship. Ambrose et al. (2008) used the same framework and found that face-to-face is the preferred communication medium in new relationships, because of its ability to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty; when the relationship develops it was found that less rich media such as telephone and email are used, depending on the needs of buyers and suppliers. Although they do not consider social media as a medium, these studies indicate the importance of the richness of a medium for relationships and this confirms the findings of the current research.

From the literature on social media, Priyono's (2016) study indicated that it was the first to investigate the use of WhatsApp as an ICT in project-based organisations to support knowledge exchange, and they found a positive impact on project performance. The three projects investigated highly relied on WhatsApp and less on face-to-face meetings, and the outcome of the projects were successful because of this intensive communication through WhatsApp. Participants of Priyono's study considered WhatsApp a complete package for project management communication, compared to email: "email is less responsive compare to chatting applications" (Priyono, 2016, p. 9). Other studies also agree that although email is a popular tool it is not a synchronous medium like WhatsApp (Juarez-Ramirez et al., 2013). Wang et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between social media capabilities, B2B communication and business performance, and found that social media's capabilities support B2B communication

and hence business performance. These findings support the findings of the present study.

Through the lens of MRT, social media can be considered a medium of high richness, and this is what makes it different to telephone and email. Richness and speed are the most important points that should not be ignored when comparing social media with other technologies in future research. Looking through the SET lens, using a rich and fast medium is of benefit for both parties. Besides this, the use of social media is rewarding for parties in their relationships, and it is rational to choose the medium with higher value rewards. This reflects the success and rationality propositions of SET.

To conclude, research on social media suggests that it facilitates rich communication and interaction that can overcome face-to-face meetings and the need for physical nearness (Barnes et al., 2012; Fosso and Carter, 2014). It was expected that the potential of using social media for SMEs would involve more collaboration and networking between parties, as well as rich and fast information sharing (Kim et al., 2011). This research provides an empirical contribution in this respect. Social media's richness has a positive impact on buyer-supplier relationships, as well as complementing simpler communication media and interaction (telephone and email) with both richness and speed. It can be concluded that social media can provide the purpose of supply chain technologies and systems in enabling coordination and collaboration and facilitating operations between parties, as well as offering a rich medium for interaction and communication between parties. These capabilities and impacts come with low cost and effort, and this is a particular advantage for SMEs. The findings of this research are based on a comparison of social media with telephone and email, therefore this case might not apply to developed countries; future research should consider differences in IT capabilities between the samples investigated.

10.3 Propositions

Based on the findings discussed in the previous section, a number of propositions emerge. These propositions are based on the more impactful themes. This section introduces them as recommendations for future research. It should be noted that the

findings of this thesis and the propositions generated are based on the Kuwaiti context. Examining these in other cultures and contexts may reveal different results.

10.3.1 New relationships

As found in the new relationships section (10.2.2), social interaction (interactive behaviour) is a very important part of effectuation theory and a main reason for the popularity of social media, because social media allows unlimited social interaction in a way that was not convenient before; however, it has been less frequently examined in the literature (Fischer and Reuber, 2011). Previous research has found that the communication channel used at the stage of supplier selection can affect the level of trust in a supplier (Huang et al., 2008). Although social media's richness and ability to enable social interaction can help to build trust, social media's role was found to be less prominent here. This was not expected by the researcher; it was expected that the richness of social media would help to develop trust. The finding shows that social media is of help in the first initial impression about a supplier (intrasubjective cognition), but when the matter is trust building, other means besides social media are used, and social media cannot be used as the sole means of building trust. However, it does have a role in expediting the trust-building process because of its richness, which facilitates the initial decision, because usually trust is built gradually in relationships, but with social media and other means it can be built faster. Although this was not measured in this research, and it is a social feeling, this is based on participants' explanations. However, it confirms the conclusions of previous research, that although trust in the context of social media is built gradually, the "compression of time" in the digital world has lessened the time required for the trust-building process (Quinton and Wilson, 2016, p. 21). Based on the findings and the discussion around them, the following proposition emerged;

Proposition 1:

Social media's richness positively impacts the supplier selection process.

10.3.2 Social media impact

10.3.2.1 Social impact

The impact of social media comes from its uses and features, as found in section (10.2.3). Most of the impact is an outcome of broadcast channels such as Instagram and Snapchat, through using them for information sharing and social networking, and by using features such as tags, comments, likes and live broadcasting. These features are unique compared to other IT or more specifically compared to other supply chain technologies.

These uses and features of social media bring different social impacts that are related to each other and can be graphically represented as a circle (see figure 9.1). Each social impact is facilitated by other social impacts. Social impacts are not discrete, as the findings reveal. For example, trust is important for most social impacts, as it facilitates their emergence. Reputation increases loyalty and maintains relationships. Satisfaction leads to loyalty, and so on. It is a complex process, because it is a collection of business and social relationships that interact through a social medium. However, the manner in which each social impact is related to the other is not within the current research project's objectives or boundaries, and is better suited to future research. This research's contribution is to reveal that a complex social impact can arise through the use of social media. It is a rich medium that has social impacts within its use. Moreover, social impact has not been widely examined in the literature. Most research into the impact of IT has focused on IT-related antecedents (Kim et al., 2011), as mentioned previously. The findings of this thesis reveal that social media's impact can be social, such as relationship nurturing and maintenance, reputation, loyalty, and satisfaction, and that trust is at the heart of these different impacts. However, although social impacts are related to each other, this thesis does not examine how. Therefore, this brings us to the following proposition, which would benefit from further research in the future:

Proposition 2:

Social media is an interactive, rich medium that has different interrelated social impacts on buyer-supplier relationships.

10.3.2.2 Transactional and negative impacts

As found in the previous section, there is a positive transactional impact from using social media for relationships because of its richness and openness. This is reflected in the massive amount of time saved by both parties as they indicated. Time saving leads to cost saving, without a doubt. However, as mentioned, this research is qualitative in nature, so counting the time or the cost saved is not within the boundaries of this research. At the same time, the findings of this research reveal a negative impact of the richness and openness of social media, such as affecting the intellectual property of innovative and creative designs. Also, the openness of social media can affect the shelf-life of designs, which in turn creates additional demands upon SMEs' time as they constantly need new innovative designs and ideas. The frequent communication between parties through social media can be a nuisance and distracting although it has other clear benefits. Moreover, comparing suppliers' products is easier through social media, and this is affecting suppliers negatively. Despite all the negative impacts, however, Kuwaiti SMEs cannot dispense with social media use because of the extent of positive impacts. Although this research did not count or measure the positive or the negative impacts by numbers, or more specifically economically, it seems that the positive impacts significantly outweigh the negative impacts. This leads to the following proposition, which requires future research to count the positive and the negative impacts carefully in order to weigh the benefits versus the costs:

Proposition 3:

The positive transactional impacts of social media's richness and openness overcome any negative impacts.

10.3.3 Social media and other technologies

Social media was not compared in this research to advanced technologies or supply chain systems, because of the context of the research, though it was compared to less advanced technologies such as telephone and email, because these are what are used by Kuwaiti SMEs. However, the analysis of the cases reveals the special features of social media that make it a unique technology, which complements existing means for Kuwaiti SMEs and might complement, compete with or have no impact on other supply

chain technologies in other contexts, such as the developed world. Therefore, based on the findings of this thesis, the following proposition emerged;

Proposition 4:

Richness and speed (synchronisation) are unique features of social media compared to traditional supply chain technologies.

To conclude, the above propositions emerged from the findings of this thesis. These propositions cover the points that this research does not cover. It is expected that they will be taken further and examined in future research. The next section will cover the theoretical contribution of the thesis.

10.4 Theoretical contribution

This thesis contributes to the literature by blending interdisciplinary theories to explore complex topics in a new context and location. This blending of theories, effectuation, SET and MRT, reveals the complementary role each theory offers to the other as explained within the discussion (section 10.2). For example, effectuation theory lacks the trust point which is important in collective, high uncertainty societies such as Kuwait (or Arabic society in general). SET complements effectuation in this case. Based on MRT, social media can be suggested to be a rich technology as is shown in the analysis. The richness of social media is a major feature; taking this richness to supply relationships, the findings show the preference for using social media over other less rich media such as telephone or email is based on the SET logic of reciprocity. Where parties choose the medium that offers better rewards, using social media as the medium saves both parties time as well as the social benefits it brings to the relationships. This means that SET covers all parts of the research and complements effectuation and media richness theory in explaining the full picture of social media use in supply relationships. This is a contribution to the literature that might need a special focus in future research to reveal how exactly the theories are extended, because it is not this current research's aim to extend the theories but to use them as a lens; however, complementarity has emerged from the analysis of the cases. In addition, this thesis contributes by using the theoretical framework in a collective society, Kuwait; using the same theories in other such individualistic societies may bring other findings.

This thesis' main contribution lies in the propositions that emerged from the case findings. These propositions can be a base for future research in the area of supply relationships and social media, and the broader literature of operations management, as each research question can be investigated separately to unfold more focused findings and insights in different areas of supply relationships, such as new relationships (supplier selection).

This thesis covers an under-researched part of the world and adds to current knowledge by revealing new cultural contexts that have a significant impact on the use of social media. It opens the doors for more research in developing parts of the world.

The sample of this research is unique. The sample was chosen from different business tiers, all of which were Kuwait SMEs that use social media specifically with suppliers/buyers. This careful selection helps to reveal complex business and social interactions among SMEs within social technologies in collective societies, from both buyers and suppliers and across different tiers. This complexity is not easily explored and revealed in quantitative research. This research has helped to reveal the complexity of the relationships and gives rich explanations and insights into the details of interaction and its impact. This contribution is unique to the body of literature. This sample reveals that social media is used with some suppliers but not all types of suppliers. Social media is used with buyers/suppliers of customised, innovative and creative work because this needs more discussion and sharing of pictures and information. Suppliers of standard and large orders, such as core materials suppliers, were not found to be using social media with them in this research. This contributes to our understanding of the type of suppliers social media is used with and opens a path for research to explore the reasons behind not using social media with other suppliers.

One of the unique findings of this research in regards to social media is its sociability in different ways. New ways of interaction among buyers and suppliers, called "indirect interaction", have been revealed by this research, via such tokens as likes, tags or mentions. The impact of this type of communication was found to be social in this research, which leads to the question "what is the social impact of other supply chain technologies compared to social media?" Social impact in this research might be

because of the cultural context of Kuwait, collectivism, therefore it is sensible to explore the question “what is the social impact of social media in individualistic cultures?”

The richness of social media is one of the major findings. This richness is more represented by picture and video sharing. The impact of picture and video sharing in operations is a new contribution to knowledge. As most supply chain technologies do not mention pictures or video specifically, in this thesis the impact is evident and important as it adds a new richness and facilitates the work as well as speeding it up. It reduces the effort and time needed for face-to-face meetings. This poses new questions that have not been asked before, such as “what is the impact of picture or video sharing on supply chain relationships?”

10.5 Limitations and future research

This research mainly relied on interview data. Archival data was planned to be collected and analysed but access proved difficult because of the confidential nature of the customers’ information and the personal communication involved. Some archival data was viewed by the researcher in the interviews and some participants agreed on allowing captures of certain data (Appendix 2) which was not sufficient for analysis but reflects their claims. This research has revealed that broadcast channels are used for supply relationships; this provides an opportunity for future research in which online observation might aid deeper understanding and reflection, together with the interviews.

The research questions are broad and not so specific or focused, because of the exploratory nature of the research and the limited research in supply chain and social media literature. This in turns makes it difficult to generate a conceptual framework, therefore general propositions were generated. The broad findings of this research open the path for future, more focused research as mentioned within the discussion of the findings. Also, each research question could be a separate focused piece of research covering one area of supply relationships.

Some “social impact” themes are stronger than others in terms of repetition across cases (see table 9.1). However, they are all analysed and discussed in this research because they all relate to each other in one way or another. In addition, the complexity of the social interaction makes it difficult to separate the social impact themes. Looking for the relationship of each social impact theme to the other, or more specifically the impact of each theme on the other, is not within the scope of this research. Therefore, future research might pay attention to this complex point and study social media’s impact carefully, looking for the different social impacts and how they relate to each other.

Negative impacts were less often reported in the four case studies compared to positive impacts, which were conveyed overwhelmingly. This might be due to “courtesy bias”, which is common in Asian countries (including Middle Eastern countries), where “the respondent provides information which he feels will please the interviewer” (Jones, 1993, p. 236). This is due to the norms of personal relations that govern conversations. The researcher, as a Kuwaiti national, knows that this style of conversation is common in friendly chats in Kuwait, where respondents might switch between the interview style of talking and friendly chat. Another obvious reason is that the social media benefits that Kuwaiti SMEs have realised might make the negatives look insignificant. Therefore, it is suggested that future research should consider this point, by focusing specifically on negative impacts, and by using strategies to overcome courtesy bias.

The research studied emerging technologies which can alter rapidly; the uses and impact may change over a short period of time, even from the beginning of the study till the end of it. This research was restricted by time, therefore longitudinal research would be helpful to see the impact over a period of time, and future research should take this into consideration.

Generalization is not the main purpose of this research, but because of the high impact of the Kuwaiti context on the findings, the findings should not be generalized for other contexts such as Western countries, so future research should consider Western countries, and comparative studies will be interesting. This research covers two general sectors, namely service and manufacturing, which in their definition might differ across countries and this impacts generalization as well. Moreover, The definition of SMEs in Kuwait is new; this definition was mainly introduced in Kuwait for government support; no other definitions were available in Kuwait. The definition might be totally

different in other countries, especially developed Western countries; for example, in Kuwait there are no micro firms, only small and medium, which means a 'micro' firm in the UK is classed as 'small' in Kuwait. Therefore, caution should be taken when generalizing to other contexts in regards to the definition of SMEs. This research used qualitative research methods; future research might adopt quantitative methods such as surveys for broader generalizability.

10.6 Implications for policy and practice

Kuwait and other Gulf countries are looking to diversify their economies beyond oil by supporting SMEs. The Kuwait's government's national SMEs fund, the largest SME fund worldwide, could benefit from this research for the training programs they offer to entrepreneurs and SMEs by indicating the positive impact of social media for business relationships and as a substitute for other high-cost technologies. It will also be of benefit for other Gulf countries' funding programs that promote SMEs growth. This research will also help foreign investors doing business in Kuwait and other Gulf countries or wishing to enter Kuwaiti and Gulf countries' markets to understand how social media can be used to build relationships with Kuwaiti or Arab SMEs, as well as understanding the impact of culture on their use, in order to carry out better and more effective business.

It could also be of benefit for SMEs' managers, allowing them to use social media more strategically and in a more planned way. As the findings show, the totality of social media uses, coordinating operations, information sharing, placing orders, social networking and collaboration, can serve as a supply chain system for SMEs. However, careful planning is needed to gain the maximum benefits of social media and avoid the drawbacks. Moreover, it can help SME managers who are not using social media to realize the efficiency, richness and sociability of social media as a medium for supply relationships, as well as the potential of the tools to search for and select new suppliers through the rich information available in social media channels. This is in addition to using the tools and channels to promote their firms by adopting the trending social media channels such as Snapchat and Instagram and sharing rich information about their products and projects. This makes them available for buyers looking for new suppliers. Furthermore, for SME managers who are not using any advanced technology

this research helps to reveal the complementary role of social media in regard to traditional technologies, as well as its broader capabilities, that are of benefit for different types of businesses and operations.

For researchers and academics, it opens plenty of paths for interesting future research. It can be considered a base for more empirical research in supply chain relationships and social media.

10.7 Conclusion

Some studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media use in the area of supply chains and operations. However, empirical research is scarce. This research has investigated different areas of the use and impact of social media in different dyadic relationships in four supply chains. It explored the ways SMEs utilise social media with buyers and suppliers and found that the richness, real-time features, as well as the direct and broadcast channels of social media yield transactional and social uses with buyers and suppliers that can serve as a supply chain technology that is highly sociable. This research has also investigated how SMEs use social media as a means for new relationships. It was found that social media's richness and openness play a role in aiding SMEs in the selection of suppliers. However, the culture of Kuwait requires more than use of social media for building trust in a new relationship, therefore for opening new relationships other means beside social media are used for trust building, and this is explained by the uncertainty avoidance dimension of Kuwaiti culture. This research has also investigated how social media as a medium for interaction and exchange affects buyer-supplier relationships. The findings show the positive impact of social media. The impact of social media with existing buyer-supplier relationships is transactional, such as time-saving, and this is similar to most information technologies. The other impacts are unique compared to technologies used for operations and transactions between parties in relationships, and these are the social impacts, such as relationship nurturing and maintenance, loyalty, satisfaction and reputation. The flexibility of SMEs and the collective nature of Kuwaiti culture might aid the emergence of this social impact, however, more comparative research is needed to confirm this. There are some negative impacts, such as the impact on intellectual property and time wasting, but it seems that positive impacts overcome the negative.

This research also compared social media with other technologies used. Comparisons with the technologies used within Kuwaiti SMEs, telephone and email, showed the strength of social media's richness and efficiency. Theoretical contributions were outlined, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research, and implications for policy and practice were suggested.

Bibliography

- Adams, J., Khoja, F., & Kauffman (2012). An empirical study of buyer-supplier relationships within small business organizations. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 50 (1), 20-40.
- Ahmad, S. Z., Ahmad, N., & Abu Bakar, A. R. (2018). Reflections of entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized enterprises concerning the adoption of social media and its impact on performance outcomes: Evidence from the UAE. *Telematics and Informatics*, 35 (1), 6-17.
- Al-Awsat, A. (2007). *Diwanias: Kuwait's Feature and Sign. Report*. [online] Available at: <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10261&article=442953> [Accessed: 7 July 2018].
- Al Dardari, A. (2012). UN ESCWA, regional expert group meeting on “SMEs Role in Sustainable Development in the Arab Region”, 6-7 November 2012, Kuwait.
- Al-Saif, W. (2002). *Creation: The Experience of Kuwait Small Projects Development Company*. Kuwait: KSPDC.
- AlTamimi, A. D. (2013). *Plan to Support Small Businesses: In Kuwait Lacks Clear Vision*. London: Al-Hayat; Al-monitor.
- Aladwani, A. (2013). A cross-cultural comparison of Kuwaiti and British citizens' views of e-government interface quality. *Government Information Quarterly*, 30, 74-86.
- Aladwani, A. (2015). The 6As model of social content management. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34, 133-138.
- Allhussan, F., Alhusan, F., & Alhesan, L. (2017). The role of senior executives in managing key customers in Arab context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 23 (6), 825-835.
- Ali, A. J. (1995). Cultural discontinuity and Arab management thoughts. *International Studies of Management*, 25 (3), 7-30.
- Ali, G. E., & Magalhaes, R. (2008). Barriers to implementing e-learning: A Kuwaiti case study. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 12, 36-53.
- Altayyar, A., & Beaumont-Kerridge, J. (2016). External factors affecting the adoption of e-procurement in Saudi Arabian SMEs. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 229, 363-375.
- Ambrose, E., Marshall, D., Fynes, B., & Lynch, D. (2008). Communication media selection in buyer-supplier relationships. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 28 (4), 360-379.
- Andreas, H., & Jasper, C. (2010). Subcontractor procurement in construction: The interplay of price and trust. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 15 (5), 354-362.
- Arab social media report (2014). [online] Available at: <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=24&mnu=Cat> [Accessed: 16 Dec 2016].
- Arab social media report (2017). [online] Available at: <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=>

[24&mnu=Cat](#) [Accessed: 11 Jan 2018].

- Aral, S., Bakos, Y., & Brynjolfsson, E. (2017). Information technology, repeated contracts, and the number of suppliers. *Management Science*, 64 (2), 592-612.
- Auramo, J., Kauremaa, J., & Tanskanen, K. (2005). Benefits of IT in supply chain management: An explorative study of progressive companies. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 35 (2), 82-100.
- Bachmann and Zaheer, (2008). Trust in inter-organizational relations. Chapter 20 In Cropper, S., Ebers, M., Huxham, C., & Ring, P. S. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-organizational Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Baller, S., Dutta, S., & Lanvin, B. (2016). *The Global Information Technology Report Innovating in the Digital Economy*. Geneva: World Economic Forum and INSEAD.
- Barlow, A., McCann, M., & Smith, A. (2011). *Innovations in SMEs and Conducting E-Business: Technologies, Trends and Solutions*. UK: IGI GLOBAL.
- Barnes, D., Clear, F., Dyerson, R., Harindranath, G., Harris, L., & Rae, A. (2012). Web 2.0 and Micro-Business: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 19 (4), 687-711.
- Barnett, A., Yandle, B., & Naufal, G. (2013). Regulation, trust, and cronyism in Middle Eastern societies: The simple economics of “wasta”. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 44, 41-46.
- Barringer, B., & Harrison, J. (2000). Walking a tightrope: Creating value through interorganizational relationships. *Journal of Management*, 26 (3), 367-403.
- Belkhamza, Z., & Wafa, S. (2009). Cultural interpretation of e-commerce acceptance in developing countries: Empirical evidence from Malaysia and Algeria. In Rouibah, K., Khalil, O., & Hassanien, A. (eds), *Emerging Markets and E-commerce in Developing Economies*. London: IGI Global.
- Benton, T., & Craib, I. (2011). *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berends, H., Jelinek, M., Reymen, I., & Stultiëns, R. (2013). Product innovation processes in small firms: Combining entrepreneurial effectuation and managerial causation. *Journal of production innovation management*, 31 (3), 616-635.
- Berger, R., Silbiger, A., Herstein, R., & Barnes, B. R. (2015). Analyzing business-to-business relationships in an Arab context. *Journal of World Business*, 50 (3), 454-464.
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M., Pitt, L., & Naude, P. (2003). Understating B2B and the web: The acceleration of coordination and motivation. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 32, 553-561.
- Bilbao-Osorio, B., Dutta, S., & Lanvin, B. (2014). *The Global Information Technology Report: Rewards and Risks of Big Data*. Geneva: World Economic Forum and INSEAD.
- Biong, H. (1993). Satisfaction and loyalty to suppliers within the grocery trade. *European Journal of Marketing*, 27 (7), 21-38.
- Bjerke, B., & Al-Meer, A. (1993). Culture's consequences: Management in Saudi Arabia. *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, 14 (2), 30-35.

- Bjorn, B., & Abdulrahim, A. M. (1993). Culture's consequences: Management in Saudi Arabia. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 14 (2), 30-35.
- Boer, L., Labro, E., & Morlacchi, P. (2001). A review of method supporting supplier selection. *European Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management*, 7, 75-89.
- Bongsug, C., HsiuJu, R. Y., & Chwen, S. (2005). Information technology and supply chain collaboration: Moderating effects of existing relationships between partners. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 52 (4), 440-448.
- Bordonaba-Juste, V., & Cambra-Fierro, J. (2009). Managing supply chains in the context of SMEs: A collaborative and customized partnership with the suppliers as the key for success. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 14 (5), 393-402.
- Bourland, K. E., Powell, S. G., & Pyke, D. F. (1996). Exploiting timely demand information to reduce inventories. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 92, 239-253.
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2008). Social networks sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13 (1), 210-230.
- Brink, T. (2017). B2B SME management of antecedents to the application of social media. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 64, 57-65.
- Brinkhoff, A., Ozer, O., & Sargut, G. (2015). All you need is trust? An examination of inter-organizational supply chain projects. *Production and Operations Management*, 24 (2), 181-200.
- Bruhn, M., Schnebelen, S., & Daniela, S. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of the quality of e-customer-to-customer interactions in B2B brand communities. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 43, 164-176.
- Bryman, A., & Burgess, R. G. (1994). *Reflections on Qualitative Data Analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Bunduchi, R., Weisshaar, C., & Smart, A. (2011). Mapping the benefits and costs associated with process innovation: The case of RFID adoption. *Technovation*, 31, 505-521.
- Burgess, K., Singh, P. J., & Koroglu, R. (2006). Supply chain management: A structured literature review and implications for future research. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 26 (7), 3-29.
- Burgess, S., & Bingley, S. (2014). The small business social media web presence: An Australian snapshot. In *Proceedings of the European Conference on Social media ECSM2014*. July 10th-11th, 2014. Brighton.
- Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Karanasios, S. (2009). *Effective Web Presence Solutions for Small Businesses: Strategies and Successful Implementation*. IGI Global.
- Burhanuddin, M. A., et al. (2009). Barriers and challenges for technology transfer in Malaysian small and medium industries. *International Conference on Information Management and Engineering*. IEEE Computer Society. 21st-23rd October, 2009, Macao, S.A.R.
- Cai, S., Goh, M., Souza, R., & Li, G. (2013). Knowledge sharing in collaborative supply chains: Twins effect of trust & power. *International Journal of Production Research*, 51 (7), 2060-2078.

- Cai, S., Jun, M., & Yang, Z. (2010). Implementing supply chain information integration in China: The role of institutional forces and trust. *Journal of Operation Management*, 28, 257-268.
- Calefato, F., Lanubile, F. & Novielli, N. (2013). A preliminary investigation of the effect of social media on affective trust in customer-supplier relationships. In *Proceedings of the 6th Annual EuroMed Conference of the EuroMed Academy of Business: Confronting Contemporary Business Challenges through Management Innovation*. 23rd-24th September, 2013, Estoril, Cascais, Portugal.
- Cámara, S. B., Fuentes, J. M., & Marin, J. M. (2015). Cloud computing, Web 2.0, and operation performance: The mediating role of supply chain integration. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*, 26 (3), 426-458.
- Carlo, D. P., Carlo, P. B., de O., & Hagelaar, G. (2006). Coordinating collaborative joint efforts with suppliers: The effects of trust, transaction specific investment and information network in the Dutch flower industry. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 11 (3), 216-224.
- Carr, A., & Kaynak, H. (2007). Communication methods, information sharing, supplier development and performance: An empirical study of their relationships. *International Journal of Operation and Production Management*, 27 (4), 346-370.
- Carter, M., Wright, R., Thatcher, J. B., & Klein, R. (2014). Understanding online customers' ties to merchants: The moderating influence of trust on the relationship between switching costs and e-loyalty. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 23, 185-204.
- Cepeda, G., & Martin, D. (2005). A review of case studies publishing in Management Decision 2003-2004: Guides and criteria for achieving quality in qualitative research. *Management Decision*, 43 (6), 851-876.
- Chae, B., Yen, H. R., & Sheu, C. (2005). Information technology and supply chain collaboration: Moderating effects of existing relationships between partners. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 52 (4), 440-448.
- Chen, Y.-H., Lin, T.-P., & Yen, D. C. (2014). How to facilitate inter-organizational knowledge sharing: The impact of trust. *Information & Management*, 51, 568-578.
- Chetty, S., & Campbell-Hunt, C. (2003). Explosive international growth and problems of success amongst small to medium-sized firms. *International Small Business Journal*, 21 (1), 5-27.
- Chicksand, D., & Rehme, J. (2018). Total value in business relationships: Exploring the link between power and value appropriation. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 33 (2), 174-182.
- Chin Lau, L. (2009). Blogging as an innovation tool of integrated communication for small and medium sized enterprises in Brazil. In *Proceedings for the 6th International Conference on Innovation and Management*. 8th-10th December, 2009, Sao Paulo.
- Chiu, M.-C., & Okudan, G. (2010). A small to medium-size enterprise oriented methodology for optimizing product and supply chain design decisions. *Proceedings of the ASME 2010 international design technical conference and computers and information in engineering conference*, 15-18 August, 2010, Montreal.
- Chompis, E., Bons, R., Hooff, B., Feldberg, F., & Horn, H. (2014). Satisfaction with virtual

- communities in B2B financial services: Social dynamics, content and technology. *Electronic Markets*, 24, 156-177.
- Chong, Y-L et al. (2009). Influence of interorganizational relationships on SMEs e-business adoption. *Internet Research*, 19 (3), 313-331.
- Chui, M., et al. (2012). *The Social Economy: Unlocking Value and Productivity through Social Technology*. McKinsey and Company.
- Corbin, A. J. (1998). *The Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Country Economy (2016). Kuwait Population. [online] Available at: <http://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/kuwait> [Accessed: 17 March 2017].
- Cox, A. (2001). Understanding buyer & supplier power: A framework for procurement & supply competence. *The Journal of Supply Chain Management: A Global Review of Purchasing & Supply*, 8-15
- Cox, A., & Chicksand, D. (2005). The limits of lean management thinking: Multiple retailers: Food and farming supply chains. *European Management Journal*, 23 (6), 648-662.
- Cox, A., Chicksand, D., & Palmet, M. (2007). Stairways to heaven or treadmills to oblivion: Creating sustainable strategies in red meat supply chains. *British Food Journal*, 109 (9), 689-720.
- Cox, A., Sanderson, J., & Watson, G. (2000). *Power Regimes: Mapping the DNA of Business and Supply Chain Relationships*. Boston: Earlsgate Press.
- Cox, A., Sanderson, J., & Watson, G. (2001). Power regimes: a new perspective on managing in supply chains & network. *Proceedings of the 10th international annual IPSERA conference*, April, Jonkoping, 215-227.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31 (6), 874-900.
- Cropper, S., Ebers, M., Huxham, C., & Ring, P. S. (2008). *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cunningham, R., & Sarayrah, Y. (1993). *Wasta: The Hidden Force in Middle Eastern Society*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1983). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behaviour and organization design. In Staw, B. M., and Cummings, L. L. (eds), *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 6. Greenwich, CT: JAI Pres, pp. 1-60 and 191-233.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32 (5), 554-571.
- Daniela, et al. (2013). Can a social network marketing strategy benefit small and medium enterprises? In *Proceedings of the 6th Annual EuroMed Conference of the EuroMed Academy of Business: Confronting Contemporary Business Challenges through Management Innovation*. 23rd-24th September, 2013 Estoril, Cascais, Portugal.
- Delbufalo, E. (2012). Outcomes of inter-organizational trust in supply chain relationships: A

- systematic literature review and a meta-analysis of the empirical evidence. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 17 (4), 377-402.
- Donney, P., & Cannon, J. (1997). An examination of the nature of trust in buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 61 (2), 35-51.
- Duberley, J., Johnson, P., & Cassell, C. (2012). Philosophies underpinning qualitative research. In: Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (eds). *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. United Kingdom: Sage.
- Dutta, S., & Bilbao-Osorio, B. (2012). *The Global Information Technology Report: Living in a Hyper Connected World*. Geneva: World Economic Forum and ISEAD.
- Easterby-Smith, M. (2008). The philosophy of management research. From: Easterby-Smith, M. (ed.), *Management Research*, 3rd edition. London: Sage, pp. 55-79.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, P. R., & Jackson, P. R. (2008). *Management Research: Theory and Practice*. United Kingdom: Sage.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (4), 532-550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*. 50 (1), 25-32.
- El Asrag, H. V. (2011). Enhancing the competitiveness of the Arab SMEs. *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*. [online] Available at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30018/> [Accessed: 1 April 2017].
- El Ouiridi, A., El Ouiridi, M., Segers, J., & Henderick, E. (2015). Employees' use of social media technologies: A methodological and thematic review. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 34 (5), 454-464.
- Elamin, A.M. (2012). Perceived organizational justice and work-related attitudes: a study of Saudi employees. *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, 8 (1), 71-88.
- Elbeltagi, I., Alsharji, Y., Hardaker, G., & Elsetouhi, A. (2013). The role of the owner-manager in SMEs' adoption of information and communication technology in the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of Global Information Management*, 21 (2), 23-50.
- El-Haddadeh, R., Weerakkody, V., & Peng, J. (2012). Social networking services adoption in corporate communication: The case of China. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 25 (6), 559-575.
- Ellegaard, C. (2006). Small company purchasing: A research agenda. *Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management*, 12, 272-283.
- Emerson, R. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2, 335-362.
- Fattahova, N. (2011). Diwaniyas define Kuwaiti social life. *Kuwait Times Facebook page*. [online] Available at: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/notes/kuwait-times/diwaniyas-define-kuwaiti-social-life/199662073432728/>. [Accessed: 25 July 2018].

- Fawaz Baddar, A., Faten Baddar, A. L. H., & Lulu, A. (2017). The role of senior executives in managing key customers in an Arab context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32 (6), 825-35.
- Fawcette, S. E., Jones, S. L., & Fawcette A. M. (2012). Supply chain trust: The catalyst for collaborative innovation. *Business Horizons*, 55, 163-178.
- Fischer, E., Reuber, A. R. (2011). Social interaction via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 26 (1), 1-18.
- Fosso Wamba, S., & Carter, L. (2014). Social media tools adoption and use by SMEs: An empirical study. *Journal of End User and Organizational Computing*, 26 (1), 1-16.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Fuller, T., & Lewis, J. (2002). "Relationships mean everything": A typology of small-business relationship strategies in a reflexive context. *British Journal of Management*, 13, 317-336.
- Gelinas, R., & Bigras, Y. (2004). The characteristics and features of SMEs favorable or unfavorable to logistics integration. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 42 (3), 263-278.
- Gligor, D., & Autry, C. (2012). The role of personal relationships in facilitating supply chain communications: A qualitative study. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 48 (1), 24-43.
- Goel, S., & Karri, R. (2006). Entrepreneurs, effectual logic, and over-trust. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 30 (4), 477-493.
- Goethals, F. G., Carugati, A., Leclercq, A. (2009). Differences in e-commerce behavior between neighboring countries: The case of France and Belgium. *SIGMIS Database*, 40 (4), 88-116.
- Goodrich, K., de Mooij, M. (2014). How 'social' are social media? A cross-cultural comparison of online and offline purchase decision influences. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20 (1-2), 103-116.
- Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91 (3), 481-510.
- Griffith, D. A., Harvey, M. G., & Lusch, R.F. (2006). Social exchange in supply chain relationships: The resulting benefits of procedural and distributive justice. *Journal of Operations Management*, 24 (2), 85-98.
- Gronroos, C. (1990). Relationship approach to marketing in service contexts: The marketing and organizational behavior interface. *Journal of Business Research*, 20, 3-11.
- Grover, V., & Malhotra, M. (2003). Transaction cost framework in operations and supply chain management research: Theory and measurement. *Journal of Operations Management*, 21, 457-473.
- Gulati, R. (1998). Alliances and networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 19, 293-317.
- Gulati, R. (1999). Network location and learning: The influence of network resources and firm capabilities on alliance formation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 20, 397-420.
- Gulati, R., & Kletter, D. (2005). Shrinking the core, expanding the periphery: The relational architecture of high performing organizations. *California Management Review*, 47 (3), 77-104.

- Gulf Investment Corporation Weekly Economic Digest (GICWED) (2013). 3 (109). [online]
Available at: www.gic.com.kw [Accessed: 31 Jan 2017].
- Gupta, H., & Barua, M. K., (2018) A novel hybrid multi-criteria method for supplier selection among SMEs on the basis of innovation ability. *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*, 21 (3), 201-223.
- Gupta, V., & Singh, S. (2013), An empirical study of the dimensionality of organizational justice and its relationship with organizational citizenship behaviour in the Indian context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24 (6), pp. 1277-1299.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday.
- Harland, C., et al. (2004). A conceptual model for researching the creation and operation of supply networks. *British Journal of Management*, 15 (1), 1-21.
- Harland, C. M., Caldwell, N. D., Powell, P., & Zheng, J. (2007). Barriers to supply chain information integration: SMEs adrift of eLands. *Journal of Operation Management*, 25, 1234-1254.
- Harland, C. M. (1996). Supply chain management: Relationships, chains and networks. *British Journal of Management*, 7 (1), 63-80.
- Hassan, H., Tretiakov, A., Whiddett, D., & Adon, I. (2014). Extent of e-procurement use in SMEs: A descriptive study. *Procedia-social and Behavioural Science*, 164, 264-270
- Tlaiss, H.A., & Elamin, A., M.. (2015) Exploring organizational trust and organizational justice among junior and middle managers in Saudi Arabia: Trust in immediate supervisor as a mediator. *Journal of Management Development*, 34 (9), 1042-1060.
- Hernandez, L., et al. (2013). World report: Authentic Kuwait. [online] Available at: www.worldfolio.uk [Accessed:01/12/2016].
- Hinchcliffe, D. (2010). Why all the fuss about Web 2.0. *Infonomics*, 24 (1), 26-31
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values (Cross Cultural Research and Methodology)*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hotho, S., & Champion, K. (2011). Small businesses in the new creative industries: Innovation as a people management challenge. *Management Decision*, 49 (1), 29-54.
- Huang, X., Gattiker, T., & Schwarz, J. (2008). Interpersonal trust formation during the supplier selection process: The role of the communication channel. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 44 (3), 53-73
- Humphreys, L., & Wilken, R. (2015) Social media, small businesses, and the control of information. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18 (3), 295-309.
- Iacovou, C. L., Benbasat, I., & Dexter, A. S. (1995) Electronic data interchange and small organizations: Adoption and impact of technology, *MIS Quarterly*, 19 (4), 465-485.
- Ibrahim, A. A. (2010). Bill tabled on establishment of independent authority for SMEs. *Arab Times*, p. 3.
- Ireland, R. D., & Webb, J. W. (2007). A multi-theoretic perspective trust and power in strategic supply chains. *Journal of Operations Management*, 25, 482-497.

- Itani, O. S., Agnihotri, R., & Dingus, R. (2017). Social media use in B2b sales and its impact on competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling: Examining the role of learning orientation as an enabler. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 66, 64-79.
- Johnson, P. F., Klassen, R. D., Leenders, M. R., & Awaysheh, A. (2007). Utilizing e-business technologies in supply chains: The impact of firm characteristics and teams. *Journal of Operation Management*, 25 (6), 1255-1274.
- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 188 (2), 282-293.
- Jones, C., Hesterly, W., & Borgatti, S. (1997). A general theory of network governance: Exchange conditions and social mechanisms. *Academy of Management Review*, 22 (4), 911-945.
- Jones, E. (1993). The courtesy bias in South-East Asian surveys. In Bulmer, M., & Warwick, D. (eds), *Social Research in Developing Countries: Surveys & Censuses in the Third World*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Joujeir, R., & Brennan, R. (2017), The influence of culture on trust in B2B banking relationships. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 35 (3), 495-515.
- Juarez-Ramirez, R., Pimienta-Romo, R., & Ocegueda-Miramontes, V. (2013). Supporting the software development process using social media: Experiences with student projects. IEEE 37th Annual Computer Software and Applications Conference Workshops, 22-26 July 2013. Kyoto, Japan. pp. 656-661.
- Kadam, A., & Ayarekar, S. (2014). Impact of social media on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial performance: Special reference to small and medium scale enterprises. *SIES Journal of Management*, 10 (1), 3-11.
- Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 59-68.
- Kar, A. K., & Pani, A. K. (2014). Exploring the importance of different supplier selection criteria. *Management Research Review*, 37 (1), 89-105.
- Karanasios, S., & Burgess, S. (2006). Exploring the internet use of small tourism enterprises: Evidence from a developing country. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 27 (3), 1-12.
- Karanasios, S., Thakker, D., Lau, L., Allen, D., Dimitrova, V., & Norman, A. (2013). Making sense of digital traces: An activity theory driven ontological approach. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 64 (12), 2452-2467.
- Kauremaa, J., Karkkainen, M. & Ala-Risku, T. (2009). Customer initiated interorganizational information systems: The operational impacts and obstacles for small and medium sized suppliers. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 119, 228-239.
- Kembro, J., Selviaridis, K., & Naslund, D. (2014). Theoretical perspectives on information sharing in supply chains: A systematic literature review and conceptual framework. *Supply Chain Management, An International Journal*, 19 (5-6), 609-625
- Kemp, S. 2014. *Social, Digital & Mobile in the Middle East*. [online] Available at: <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2014/07/social-digital-mobile-middle-east/> [Accessed:

12/12/2016]

- Kern, T., & Willcocks (2000). Exploring information technology outsourcing relationships: Theory and practice. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 9, 321-350.
- Khakhar, P., & Rammal, H. G. (2013). Culture and business networks: International business negotiations with Arab managers. *International Business Review*, 22, 578-590.
- Khoo, C. (2014). "Issues in Information Behaviour on Social Media", pre-conference workshop of ISIC2014: The Information Behaviour Conference, 2nd September, Leeds.
- Kietzmann, et al. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54, 241-251.
- Kim, H., Lee, I., & Lee, C. (2011). Building Web 2.0 enterprises: A study of small and medium enterprises in the United States. *International Small Business Journal*, 31 (2).
- Kim, N., & Kim, W. (2018). Do your social media lead you to make social deal purchases? Consumer-generated social referrals for sales via social commerce. *International Journal of Information Management*, 39, 38-48.
- Kingshott, R. (2006). The impact of psychological contracts upon trust and commitment within supplier-buyer relationships: A social exchange view. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35, 724-739.
- Kiron, D., et al., 2012. Social Business: What are companies really doing? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 1-28.
- Kotler, P. (1994). *Marketing Management*. NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) (2016). *Laws*. [online] Available at: <https://kdipa.gov.kw/laws> [Accessed: 2 May 2017].
- Kuwait Statistical Bureau (2011). National Census. [online] Available at http://www.csb.gov.kw/Default_EN.aspx [Accessed: 18 March 2015].
- Kuwait Today* (2013). In press. Kuwait government official newspaper.
- Kwon, I. W. G., & Suh, T. (2005). Trust, commitment and relationships in supply chain management: A path analysis. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 10 (1), 26-33.
- Kyu Kim, K., Yul Ryoo, S., & Dug Jung, M. (2011). Inter-organizational information systems visibility in buyer-supplier relationships: The case of telecommunication equipment component manufacturing industry. *Omega*, 39 (6), 667-676.
- Lai, K. H. (2009). Linking exchange governance with supplier cooperation and commitment: A case of container terminal operations. *Journal of Business Logistics*, 30 (1), 243-263.
- Lam, H. K. S., Yeung, A. C. L., & Cheng, T. C. E. (2016). The impact of firms' social media initiatives on operational efficiency and innovativeness. *Journal of Operations Management*, 47-48, 28-43.
- Lambe, C., Wittman, C. M., & Spekman, R. E. (2001). Social exchange theory and research on business-to-business relational exchange. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 8 (3), 1-36.

- Lancastre, A., & Lages, L. F. (2006). The relationship between buyer and a B2B e-marketplace: Cooperation determinants in an electronic market context. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35, 774-789.
- Lee, A. (1991). Integrating positivist and interpretive approaches to organizational research. *Organization Science*, 2 (4), 342-365.
- Leonard, L. N. K., & Davis, C. C. (2006). Supply chain replenishment: Before-and-after EDI implementation. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 11 (3), 225-232.
- Leonardi, P. M. (2014). Social media, knowledge sharing, and innovation: toward a theory of communication visibility. *Information Systems Research*, 25 (4), 796-816.
- Lim, J., Stratopoulos, T., & Wirjanto, T. (2013). Sustainability of a firm's reputation for information technology capability: The role of senior IT executives. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 30 (1), 57-96.
- Lin, C.-T., Chen, C.-B., & Ting, Y.-C. (2011). An ERP model for supplier selection in electronics industry. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 38 (3), 1760-1765.
- Lin, H. F. (2008). Determinants of successful virtual communities: Contributions from system characteristics and social factors. *Information & Management*, 45, 522-527.
- Liu, Z., Prajogo, D., & Oke, A. (2016). Supply chain technologies: Linking adoption, utilization, and performance. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 52 (4), 22-41.
- Low, K. Y. J., & Robins, J. A. (2014). Finding knowledge: The role of reputation in knowledge-transfer to Chinese companies. *Long Range Planning*, 47, 353-364.
- Mahoney, J. T. (2005). *Economic Foundations of Strategy (Foundations for Organizational Science)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Makkonen, H., & Vuori, M. (2014). The role of information technology in strategic buyer-supplier relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 43 (6), 1053-1062.
- Manpower and Restructuring Program (2014). [online] Available at: <http://www.mgrp.org.kw/UIEn/default.aspx> [Accessed: 18 March 2015].
- Markova, S., & Petkovska-Mircevska, T. (2013). Social media and supply chain. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 15 (33).
- Martin, L., & Matlay, H. (2001). "Blanket" approaches to promoting ICT in small firms: Some lessons from DTI ladder adoption model in the UK. *Internet Research*, 11 (5), 339-410.
- Michaelidou, et al. (2011). Usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing: An exploratory investigation of small and medium B2B brands. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40, 1153-1159.
- Mikhailitchenko, A., & Lundstrom, W. (2006). Inter-organizational relationship strategies and management styles in SMEs: The US-China-Russia study. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 27 (6), 428-448.
- Mirkovski, K., & Lowry, P. B., (2016). Factors that influence interorganizational use of information and communications technology in relationship-based supply chains: Evidence from the Macedonian and American wine industries. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 21 (3), 334-351.

- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58 (3), 20-38.
- Morrissey, B., & Pittaway, L. (2004). A study of procurement behavior in small firms. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 11 (2), 254-260.
- Morrissey, W. J., & Pittaway, L. (2006). Buyer-supplier relationships in small firms: The use of social factors to manage relationships. *International Small Business Journal*, 24 (3), 272-298.
- Murthy, V., & Paul, B. (2017). Nature of buyer-supplier relationships: Small businesses in a small city. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 55 (3), 365-387.
- Naguyen, T. H., Newby, M., & Macaulary, M. J. (2015). Information technology adoption in small business confirmation of a proposed framework. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53 (1), 207-227.
- Namankani, H. et al. (2014). Social networks' (SN) effect on SMEs: Focused study on Saudi Arabia (SA). In *Proceedings of the the European Conference on Social Media ECSM2014*, July 10th-11th, 2014, Brighton.
- Ngai, E., Tao, S., & Moon, K. (2015). Social media research: Theories, constructs, and conceptual frameworks. *International Journal of Information Management*, 35, 33-44.
- Nyaga, G., Whipple, J. M., & Lynch, D. F. (2010). Examining supply chain relationships: Do buyer and supplier perspectives on collaborative relationships differ? *Journal of Operation Management*, 28, 101-114.
- O'Dell, J. (2010). RFID tagged cows start tweeting. [online] Available at: <http://mashable.com/2010/04/27/cows-on-twitter/> [Accessed: 10 Jan 2015].
- O'Leary, D. (2011). The use of social media in the supply chain: Survey and extensions. *Intelligent Systems in Accounting, Finance and Management*, 18, 121-144.
- Oliver, C. (1990). Determinants of interorganizational relationships: Integration and future directions. *Academy of Management Review*, 15 (2), 241-265.
- Ollier-Malaterre, A., Rothbard, N., & Berg, J. (2013). When worlds collide in cyberspace: How boundary work in online social networks impacts professional relationships. *Academy of management review*, 38 (4), 645-669.
- Olorunniwo, F. O., & Li, X. (2010). Information sharing and collaboration practices in reverse logistics. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 15 (6), 454-462.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005). What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. [online] Available at: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> [Accessed: 18 March 2015].
- Oviatt, B. S., & McDougall, P. (1994). Toward a theory of international new venture. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 25 (1), 45-64.
- Park, D., & Krishnan Hema, A. (2002). Supplier selection practices among small firms in the United States: Testing three models. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 39 (3), 259-271.
- Parmigiano, A., & Rivera-Santos, M. (2011). Clearing a path through a forest: A meta-review of interorganizational relationships. *Journal of Management*, 37 (4), 1108-1136.

- Paul, B., Wortmann, J.C. (2014). Joint operational decision-making in collaborative transportation networks: The role of IT. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 19 (2), 200-210.
- Paulraj, A., Lado, A. A., & Chen, I. J. (2008). Inter-organizational communication as a relational competency: Antecedents and performance outcomes in collaborative buyer-supplier relationships. *Journal of Operations Management*, 26 (1), 45-64.
- Pavlou, P. (2002). Institution-based trust in interorganizational exchange relationships: The role of online B2B marketplaces on trust formation. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 11, 215-243.
- Pearson, J. N., & Ellram, L. M. (1995). Supplier selection and evaluation in small versus large electronics firms. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 33 (4), 53-63.
- Pérez-González, D., Trigueros-Preciado, S., & Popa, S. (2017). Social media technologies' use for the competitive information and knowledge sharing, and its effects on industrial SMEs' innovation. *Information Systems Management*, 34 (3), 291-301.
- Perren, L., & Ram, M. (2004). Case-study method in small business and entrepreneurial research. *International Small Business Journal*, 22 (1), 83-101.
- Prajogo, D., & Olhager, J. (2012). Supply chain integration and performance: The effects of long-term relationships, information technology and sharing, and logistics integration. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 135 (1), 514-522.
- Pramatari, K. (2007). Collaborative supply chain practices and evolving technological approaches. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 12 (3), 210-220.
- Pressey, A., Winklhofer, H., & Tzokas, N. (2009). Purchasing practices in small- to medium-sized enterprises: An examination of strategic purchasing adoption, supplier evaluation and supplier capabilities. *Journal of Purchasing & Supply Chain Management*, 15, 214-226.
- Priyono, A. (2016). The use of ICT platforms to promote knowledge exchange in project-based organizations. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Knowledge*, 2 (4), 5-21
- Quinton, S., & Wilson, D. (2016). Tensions and ties in social media networks: Towards a model of understanding business relationship development and business performance enhancement through the use of LinkedIn. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 15-24.
- Ralston, et al. (2012). Managerial values in the world – Greater Middle East: Similarities and differences across seven countries. *International Business Review*, 21, 480-492.
- Ramlan, R., Engku Abu Bakar, E. M. N., Mahmud, F., & Ng, H. K. (2016). The ideal criteria of supplier selection for SMEs food processing industry. MATEC Web Conf. 70.
- Ramzi, E. H., Vishanth, W., & Juanjuan, P. (2012). Social networking services adoption in corporate communication: The case of China. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 25 (6), 559-575.
- Rapp, A., Beitelspacher, L. S., Grewal, D., & Hughes, D. (2013). Understanding social media effects across seller, retailer, and consumer interactions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41, 547-566
- Rauyruen, P., & Miller, K. E. (2007). Relationship quality as a predictor of B2B customer loyalty.

- Journal of Business Research*, 60, 21-31.
- Razmerita, L., & Kirchner, K. (2011). How wikis can be used to manage knowledge in SMEs: A case study. *Business Information Review*, 28 (3), 175-178.
- Read, S., et al. (2009). Marketing under uncertainty: The logic of an effectual approach. *Journal of Marketing*, 73 (5), 1-18.
- Revilla, E., & Knoppen, D. (2015). Building knowledge integration in buyer-supplier relationships: The critical role of strategic supply chain management and trust. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 35 (10), 1408-1436.
- Richards, L. (2012). Stats: Social media growth and impact across the Middle East. [online] Available at: <https://econsultancy.com/blog/10491-stats-social-media-growth-and-impact-across-the-middle-east/> [Accessed: 14 Dec 2014].
- Ring, P., & Van de Ven, A. (1994). Developmental processes of cooperative interorganizational relationships. *Academy of Management Review*, 19 (1), 90-118.
- Rishika, R., Kumar, A., Janakiraman, R., & Bezawada, R. (2012). The effect of customers' social media participation on customer visit frequency and profitability: An empirical investigation. *Information Systems Research*, 24 (1), 108-127.
- Robinson, M., & Robertson, S. (2010). Young men's health promotion and new information and communication technologies: Illuminating the issues and research agenda. *Health Promotion International*, 25 (3), 1-8.
- Rose, G., & Straub, D. (1998). Predicting general IT use: Applying TAM to the Arabic world. *Journal of Global Information Management*, 6 (3), 39-46.
- Roy, A., & Dionne, C. (2014). Social media: How small and medium sized enterprises perceived and used them? In *Proceedings for the European Conference on Social Media ECISM2014*, July 10th-11th, 2014, Brighton.
- Salo, J. (2012). The role of mobile technology in a buyer-supplier relationship: a case study from the steel industry. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 27 (7), 554-563.
- Salo, J. (2017). Social media research in the industrial marketing field: Review of literature and future research direction. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 66, 115-129.
- Sanders, N. (2008). Patterns of information technology use: The impact on buyer-supplier coordination and performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, 26, 349-367.
- Sarasvathy, S. (2001). Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, 26 (2), 243-263.
- Sarasvathy, S., & Dew, N. (2005). New market creation as transformation. *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 15 (5), 533-565.
- Sarasvathy, S., & Dew, N. (2008). Effectuation and over-trust: Debating Goel and Karri. *ET&P*, Baylor University, 1042-2587, 727-735.
- Sarosa, S. (2012). Adoption of social media networks by Indonesian SME: A case study. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Small and Medium Enterprises Development*, 14-16 June 2012, Bali.

- Sashi, C. M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50 (2), 253-272.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students*. United Kingdom: Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2013). *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
- Schlagwein D., & Hu, M. (2017). How and why organisations use social media: Five use types and their relation to absorptive capacity. *Journal of Information Technology*, 32 (2), 194-209.
- Scott, S. V., & Orlikowski, W. J. (2014). Entanglements in practice: Performing anonymity through social media. *MIS Quarterly*, 38 (3), 873-893.
- Scuotto, V., Caputo, F., Villasalero, M., & Del Giudice, M. (2017). A multiple buyer-supplier relationship in the context of SMEs' digital supply chain management. *Production Planning & Control*, 28 (16), 1378-1388.
- Sebastián Bruque, C., José Moyano, F., & Juan Manuel Maqueira, M. (2015). Cloud computing, Web 2.0, and operational performance: The mediating role of supply chain integration. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*, 26 (3), 426-58.
- Shabbir, M., Saarim Ghazi, M., & Rasool Mehmood, A. (2016). Impact of Social Media Applications on Small Business Entrepreneurs. *Management and Economics Research Journal*, 1, p.1-5
- Sevaldson, B. (2008). Rich Design Research Space, *Research Journal Of Design and Design Education*1 (1), 28-44.
- Shahizan, H., Norshuhada, S., Nor Laily, H., Sobihatun Nur, A. S., & Mohd Samsu, S. (2012). Social media for business: Knowledge gathering through focus group session with business owners. In *Proceedings of Knowledge Management International Conference (KMICe)*, Johor Bahru, Malaysia.
- Shiau, W. L., & Luo, M. M. (2012). Factors affecting online group buying intention and satisfaction: A social exchange theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 2431-2444.
- Singaraju, S., Nguyen, Q., Niininen, O., & Sullivan Mort, G. (2016). Social media and value co-creation in multi-stakeholder systems: A resource integration approach. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, p.44-55
- Singh, A., & Teng, J. (2016). Enhancing supply chain outcomes through information technology and trust. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, 290-300.
- Sinkovics, R. & Alfoldi, E. (2012). Facilitating the interaction between theory and data in qualitative research using CAQDAS. In Symon, G. & Cassell, C. (eds), *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage.
- Sonmez, M. (2006). Review and critique of supplier selection process and practices. [online] Available at: <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/2160> [Accessed: 04/04/2017].
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Statista (2015). Global social network penetration rate as of 1st quarter 2015, by region. [online] Available at: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/269615/social-network-penetration-by-region/> [Accessed: 18 March 2015].

- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd edition). London: Sage.
- Subramaniam, C., & Shaw, M. (2004). The effects of process characteristics on the value of B2B E-procurement. *Information Technology and Management*, 5, 161-180.
- Sudani, Y., & Thornberry, J. (2013). Nepotism in the Arab world: An institutional theory perspective. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 23 (1), 69-96.
- Swani, K., Milne, G., Brown, B., Assaf, G., & Donthud, N. (2017). What messages to post? Evaluating the popularity of social media communications in business versus consumer markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 62, 77-87.
- Terpend, R., Tyler Beverly, B., Krause Daniel, R., & Handfield Robert, B. (2008). Buyer-supplier relationships: Derived value over two decades. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 44 (2), 28-55.
- Tingling, P., Gemino, A., & Parker, D. (2011). Changing channels: The impact of Web 2.0 on supply chain management. *Production and Inventory Management Journal*, 47 (2), 31-44.
- Todeva, E., & Knoke, D. (2005). Strategic alliances and models of collaboration. *Management Decision*, 43 (1), 123-148.
- Touboulic, A., Chicksand, D., & Walker, H. (2014). Managing imbalanced supply chain relationships for sustainability: A power perspective. *Decision Sciences*, 45 (4), 577-619.
- Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Uzzi, B. (1996). The sources and consequences of embeddedness for the economic performance of organizations: The network effect. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 674-698.
- Uzzi, B. (1997). Social structure and competition in interfirm networks: The paradox of embeddedness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42 (1), 35-67.
- Vandaele, D., Rangarajan, D., Gemmel, P., & Lievens, A. (2007). How to govern business services exchanges: Contractual and relational issues. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 9 (3), 237-258.
- Veldeman, C., Van Praet, E., & Mechant, P. (2015). Social media adoption in business-to-business: IT and industrial companies compared. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 54 (3), 283-305.
- Vengen, S., & Huxham, C. (2003). Nurturing collaborative relations: Building trust in interorganizational collaboration. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 39 (1), 5-31.
- Vickery, S. et al. (2004). The performance implication of media richness in a business-to-business service environment: Direct versus indirect effect. *Management Science*, 50 (8), 1106-1119.
- Vijayasathy, L. (2010). An investigation of moderators of the link between technology use in the supply chain and supply chain performance. *Information and Management*, 47, 364-371.
- Viljamaa, A. (2011). Exploring small manufacturing firms' process of accessing external expertise. *International Small Business Journal*, 29 (5), 472-88.
- Wagner, S., Coley, L. S., & Lindemam, E. (2011). Effects of suppliers' reputation on the future of buyer-supplier relationships: The mediating roles of outcome fairness and trust. *Journal of*

- Supply Chain Management*, 47 (2), 29-48.
- Wang, W., Pauleen, D., & Zhang, T. (2016). How social media applications affect B2B communication and improve business performance in SMEs. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 4-14.
- Ward, M., & Rhodes, C. (2014). Small businesses and the UK economy. [online] Available at: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn06078.pdf [Accessed: 8 Oct 2014].
- Weaver, K. M., & Dickson, P. H. (1998). Outcome quality of small- to medium-sized enterprise-based alliances: The role of perceived partner behaviors. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 13, 505-522.
- Wei, H., Wong, C., & Lai, K. (2012). Linking inter-organizational trust with logistics information integration and partner cooperation under environmental uncertainty. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 139, 642-653.
- Welsh, D. B., & Raven, P. (2006). Family business in the Middle East: An exploratory study of retail management in Kuwait and Lebanon. *Family Business Review*, 19 (1), 29-48.
- WhatsApp Inc. (2018). [online] Available at: www.whatsapp.com [Accessed: 6 July 2018].
- Wiltbank, R., et al., (2009). Prediction and control under uncertainty: Outcomes in angel investing. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 24, 116-133.
- World Bank (2010-2014). Gdp per capita. [online] Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> [Accessed: 30 Dec 2014].
- World Bank (2016). Building Kuwait's future, one small enterprise at a time. [online] Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/03/01/building-kuwait-future-one-small-enterprise-at-a-time> [Accessed: 5 July 2018].
- World Factbook (2018). Kuwait. [online] Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html> [Accessed: 10 July 2018].
- Wu, I. L., Chuang, C. H., & Hsu, C. H. (2014). Information sharing and collaborative behaviors in enabling supply chain performance: A social exchange perspective. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 148, 122-132.
- Xuan, Z., Dirk Pieter Van, D., & van der Taco, V. (2016). The different impact of inter-organizational and intra-organizational ICT on supply chain performance. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 36 (7), 803-824.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. United States: Guilford Publications.
- Young-Ybarra, C., & Wiersema, M. (1999). Strategic flexibility in information technology alliances: The influence of transaction cost economics and social exchange theory. *Organization Science*, 10 (4), 439-459.
- Yung-Cheng S., Chun-Yao, H., Chia-Hsien, C., & Hui-Chun, L. (2010). Virtual community loyalty: An interpersonal-interaction perspective. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 15 (1), 49-74.
- Zadeh, H. S., & Cheng, K. (2016): Manufacturing supplier selection in cloud manufacturing context and its implementation and application perspectives. *Proceedings of the ASME 2016*

International Manufacturing Science and Engineering Conference. MSEC2016, June 27- July 1, 2016, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA.

- Zahra, S. (2011). Doing research in the (new) Middle East: Sailing with the wind. *Academy of management perspective*, 6-12.
- Zaidan, E. (2016). Analysis of ICT usage patterns, benefits and barriers in tourism SMEs in the Middle Eastern countries: The case of Dubai in UAE. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 23 (3), 248-263.
- Zhong, W., Su, C., Peng, J., & Yang, Z. (2017). Trust in interorganizational relationships: A meta-analytic integration. *Journal of Management*, 43 (4), 1050-1075.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Context related questions:

1. What is the size of your business based on the Kuwaiti definition of SMEs?
(Definition will be provided).
2. In which sector does your company fall?
3. How many years have you been in the business?
(new, SME age from 2010, OR old, before social media?)
4. In order to understand the use of social media in your business, I would like you first to explain the nature and the type of your business.
5. What is the nature of your supply chain? Or “how would you describe your supply chain?” or “what would you say are the key characteristics of your supply chain?”
(e.g. complicated, must respond quickly to customer needs, etc.)
6. Can you briefly map the different types of relationships you have in your supply chain? (To explore where the use of social media is, and how it differs in different points.) (An example of a simple map will be provided to help them visualize it.)
7. How long approximately have you been using social media? And for business purposes?
8. Who is in charge of using social media (with suppliers) in your company?
9. How many people use it for business relationships in your organization? (We might interview them after.)
10. Do you have an official account for your SME in social media or do you use your personal account for both personal and business use?
11. What are the key social media applications used to support “supplier” and/or “business customer” relationships?
12. What is the use of each application for the business relationship?
(e.g. Twitter for Instagram for... and WhatsApp for...)
13. Are the social media applications used to the same extent with all types of relationship? Explain the differences (transactional relations vs relational ones)
OR (new, short-term relations vs long-term relations).
14. What are the reasons for the existence of these differences?

15. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media with suppliers (or business customers?)

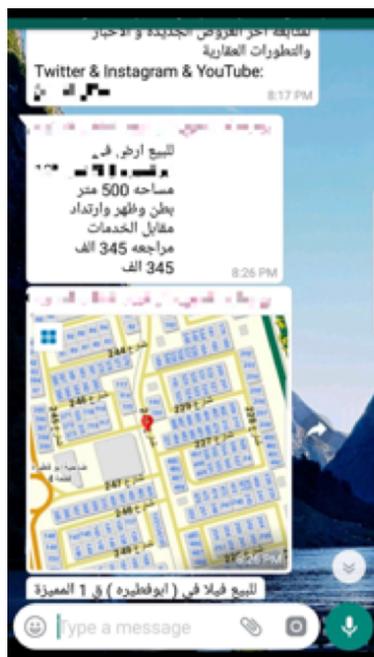
Choose 2-3 suppliers that you use social media with extensively.

16. How long have you been in this relationship?
17. How do you think the use of social media has impacted your relationship with each of these suppliers?
How does it support the relationship?
How does it affect it negatively?
18. Do you use social media as a means of finding new suppliers/business customers?
19. Can you explain the process of using social media to choose a new supplier/buyer (new relationship)?
20. In comparison to how you used to choose new suppliers, how has social media impacted this process of choosing and decision-making?
21. Are you using any other technologies (advanced/traditional) with your existing suppliers?
22. After adopting social media, how have the previous technologies used with suppliers been affected (complement/substitute) and why?

Closing questions

23. In general, what does social media add to your business relationships?
24. Is there any negative impact of social media use on your business relationships?

Real estate and supplier information sharing



Appendix 3: Screen shots of ATLAS.ti software (coding and quotations)

The image displays two screenshots of the ATLAS.ti software interface, illustrating document analysis, coding, and quotations.

Top Screenshot: Shows a document titled "participant 17.docx" with Arabic text. The text discusses the use of WhatsApp for communication and the challenges of using it for research. Key phrases are highlighted with codes: "information sharing tool", "communication tool", "negative impact whatsapp", and "email vs. whatsapp". The interface includes a search bar, a list of documents on the left, and a right-hand panel for document details and comments.

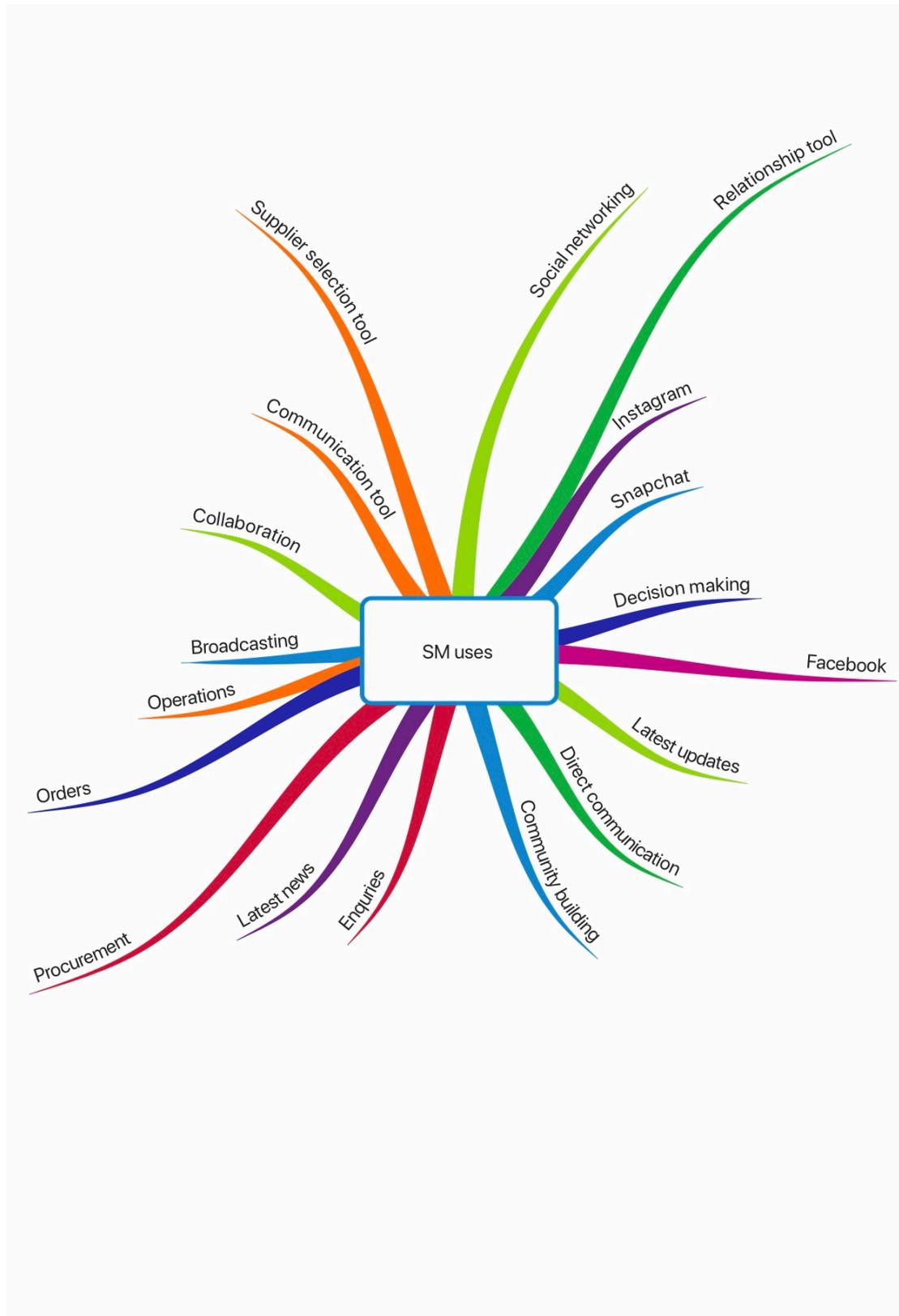
Bottom Screenshot: Shows a document titled "PARTICIPANT 21.docx" with Arabic text. The text discusses the challenges of using WhatsApp for research and the need for alternative communication methods. Key phrases are highlighted with codes: "supplier selection tool" and "supplier/BC reach". The interface includes a search bar, a list of documents on the left, and a right-hand panel for document details and comments.

Appendix 4: Codes and categories list

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Codes</u>
<u>Social media uses</u>	Broadcasting tool Collaboration Communication tool Community-building tool Decision making Direct communication Duwaneya Enquiries Latest news Latest updates Operations Orders Procurement Relationship tool Updates Instagram Snapchat Facebook Twitter Social communication Supplier selection tool Tags Direct channel Broadcast channel Picture sharing Whatsapp Whatsapp groups
<u>New relationships</u>	Awareness (cognition) Connections Duwaneya Experience Exposure Initial communication Interactive behaviour New suppliers Personal relationships Personal visits Product type SM users Supplier selection tool Supplier/buyer reach Trust Instagram Snapchat WhatsApp WhatsApp groups
<u>Social media impact</u>	Copyright Cost saving Instagram Snapchat Distraction Effective communication Instagram

	<p> Likes/comments Limitation of the media Live broadcasting Long relationships Loyalty Maintaining relationships Nurturing Picture sharing impact Rivals Satisfaction SM users Snapchat Social communication Social impact (a theme ?!) Social interaction Tags Time saving Time wasting Trust WhatsApp </p>
<u>Other technologies</u>	<p> Cost saving Dependence Documentation </p> <p> Email Fast Focus Formal communication Instant Language Media richness Other technology Rich communication SM features Speed Telephone WhatsApp richness Trust Instagram Snapchat </p>
<u>Context</u>	<p> Collectivism Kuwaiti context SMEs context </p>

Appendix 5: Sample of categories and codes mind map



Appendix 6: Sample of themes and quotes table

Category	Quotes	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
SM uses	<p>I use WhatsApp for everything... at the time of preparation they share photos to get my opinion and ask if it is appropriate... they share samples of wedding invitation cards... sometimes we hire illustrators for the cards... they send pictures to get instant feedback to complete their work. (Wedding planner)</p> <p>“WhatsApp is a main tool for communication and for coordination for meetings, picture sharing and designs” (Florist).</p> <p>We heavily rely on social media for communication... WhatsApp, we cannot dispense with it ever... in Kuwait communication is through WhatsApp... we send pictures... for example, to show where we have reached in the work, through WhatsApp. (Carpentry)</p>	<p>Operations Updates Direct channels WhatsApp Communication tool Decision-making Picture sharing Updates</p>	Coordinating operations	
	<p>WhatsApp is used for sending and receiving real estate offers and requests; Twitter and Instagram, in addition to sending and receiving real estate offers and requests, are used to post news and reports about real estate. (F-RE manager)</p> <p>“We have one supplier that always brings new items from France. I follow them and see their new items through Instagram instead of going to the shop each time to see what is the latest. If I need an item I call them to reserve it for me.” (wedding planner)</p> <p>Instagram – we use it as a reference, if they want to see our work we refer them to see our Instagram, so they see our previous projects. (D&C assistant).</p> <p>I use Instagram for showing products like catalogues. (Interiors manager).</p> <p>“[I use] Instagram to document most of the weddings and events and tag all the suppliers who worked with me in the event [or wedding]” (wedding planner).</p>	<p>Latest updates Latest news Direct channel Broadcast-channel Procurements Inquiries Tags Picture sharing</p>	Information sharing	
	<p>I use Instagram to search for new suppliers... before social media you had to go by yourself to discover new suppliers... I shopped a lot... I wasted whole days out of the office to find new suppliers in the market... I was dedicating three days of the week to searching and discovering... Still for some suppliers who do not have an Instagram account, I need to go by myself... however, visiting these is becoming more rare for me, because Instagram is easier for me... nowadays, I don't go by myself to find</p>	<p>Supplier selection tool Broadcast-channel Social-communication Relationship-tool Broadcast-channel</p>	Social networking	

	them unless I can't find what I need completely. (D&C manager)	Direct channel		
	We usually connect to each other through WhatsApp groups. Now I'm in more than one group, one is for GCC companies, one for Kuwaiti real estate companies, one for investment offers, one for residential estates. And one which is general for all types of real estate news, that sometimes includes construction A-RE's manager.	Community-building tool Whatsapp Whatsapp groups Duwaniyah Relationship tool		Virtual communities
	<p>"For the catering I send one WhatsApp message including the kind of sweets they [the end customer] have chosen, how many kilos of each kind, a picture of the plates, what plates for which sweet... also some other details about the cake heights and colour". (Wedding planner)</p> <p>With long relations I finalise many matters through WhatsApp... for example, I ask do you have this product? ... they reply with a photo... if I like it, I finish the transaction and the purchase through WhatsApp. (D&C manager)</p>	Orders Enquiries Photo sharing Whatsapp	Orders	
	<p>"it is so important [the WhatsApp group] because it is difficult to meet each time for small changes... this is the best way [to meet] ... the discussion is clear for all parties" (Designer)</p> <p>"Sometimes I create a WhatsApp group for the team, wedding family and some important suppliers such as the DJ and photographer to ease the discussions and agreements." A WhatsApp group allows collaborators to 'meet' at anytime and anywhere, as indicated by (Wedding planner).</p>	Communication tool Updates Whatsapp groups	Collaboration	

Appendix 7: Sample of theme mind map

