



## Article

# The Motivation, Strategies, and Barriers for Adopting Social Media Marketing in the Flower Retailing Business

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**Abstract:** Florists have been adopting social media as a new marketing instrument to promote their business. However, academic research has rarely looked into the existing state of that adoption. Consequently, several fundamental problems remain unknown regarding the application of social media marketing (SMM) among florists, which may limit the development of the flower retailing business in the current social media era. In seeking to address this deficiency, this study aimed to investigate florists' motivations, strategies, and perceived performance in relation to the application of SMM, as well as to explore the barriers faced by florists regarding the adoption of SMM. The authors implemented these objectives by interviewing 35 flower shop owners who each had established a brand page on Facebook. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using a grounded hermeneutic editing approach. The study's results revealed that even though there were different motivations for florists to adopt social media marketing, including increasing brand exposure, improving customer relationship, and reducing the cost of advertising, showing expertise in floral design to attract consumers was the most common motivation stressed by the interviewees. The strategies mostly used by florists in managing their Facebook brand pages included providing high quality posts, cross-industry advertising, and switching consumers from online questions to a physical store visit. The most significant benefit perceived by florists regarding the use of a Facebook brand page was the development of new customers. Although the interviewees recognized the benefits of adopting SMM, some of them faced great incompatibility in labor source for that adoption. In addition, most interviewees focused on achieving general marketing goals rather than more advanced functions, such as business intelligence, in the application of SMM. The study results implied that the interviews mostly saw Facebook brand pages as a social network platform for increasing current sales volume, rather than for reaching a long-term quality customer relationship, which has deviated from the essence of social media marketing, and thus, limiting the synergy of the application of SMM in the flower retail sector.

**Keywords:** flowers; florists; Facebook; depth interview; grounded hermeneutic editing

## 1. Introduction

Social media have been changing the lifestyles of modern human beings. They have become one of the main tools for individuals to connect with the outside world, with the result that there were 3.96 billion social media users in 2020, reflecting an annual growth rate of 10.5%, as well as a penetration rate of over 51% for the global population. In some developed regions, the penetration rate is above 80% [1]. As social media have become increasingly popular and are influencing the way individuals communicate, how to stay up-to-date in terms of maintaining good communication with

consumers using social media technology is a major concern for enterprises, including those in the floral industry.

Social media are a Web 2.0 technology-based communication platform on which the users can generate content and transmit the content to others [2,3]. They are defined as including any website that allows users to discuss their materials and views, as well as to link to other users [4]. Since there are various social media available to users, Mangold and Faulds [5] divided social media into 15 types based on the purpose for which the social media were established, including social networking sites, creativity works sharing sites, user-sponsored blogs, etc. All these social media websites are characterized by the features of Web.2.0 technology, including user-generated content, information exchange, and social networking, so they create a cyberspace that can involve a high degree of social interaction [6]. Therefore, unlike linear patterns adopted by conventional media, social media spread information through networking patterns, providing a novel benefit of viral marketing to enterprises that information transmission and word-of-mouth on behalf of the enterprises, brands, and products can achieve exponential growth [5,6].

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to the marketing approach that utilizes social media technology, channels, or software to achieve the goals of marketing, such as delivering consumer information, building quality relationships with consumers, and increasing sales, etc. The aforementioned characteristics enable the social media to have valuable benefits for enterprises, which can be mirrored from the enterprisers' motivations for adopting social media in their businesses, including (1) using social media as an information platform, (2) increasing interactions with consumers, (3) building a great reputation and brand image, (4) finding new customers, (5) collecting market intelligence or valuable information, and (6) enhancing cost effectiveness in marketing communication [7–12]. Even though social media reveal various advantages for enterprises, as described above, there are also some disadvantages for enterprises regarding the use of social media. The most highlighted disadvantages are: (1) time-consuming, so that enterprises should assign staff to invest time on monitoring their social network sites, initiating posts and answering users' questions, (2) third party's abuse of a company's trademarks or copyright, (3) losing the protection of users' personal data and, thus, losing customers' trust, and (4) negative feedbacks from users can happen and spread very fast [13–15]. Obviously, social media have great potential to affect an enterpriser's marketing operations or even to change the whole business model [16].

From the perspectives of marketing and cost-effectiveness, the application of SMM is beneficial for developing and maintaining flower retailers' niche markets, since most flower retailers are small and medium-sized enterprises or even microenterprises, mostly being incapable of advertising their products or brands due to the large budget required. Based on cost efficiency concerns in marketing communication and business competitiveness in the current commercial environment, many florists have incorporated social media into their marketing operations [17]. Some florists' dependence on social media even exceeds that on conventional media channels, such as official websites and email [18]. In addition, the use of social media has been proven to enhance the financial performance of flower retailers; social media were also ranked as the top new medium in terms of their impact on the sales volume of ornamental horticulture businesses [18,19]. Clearly the floral industry has started its SMM era.

Due to the potential impact of social media on the flower retailing business, several scholars have contributed efforts to exploring the SMM issues in this industry. Prince and Prince [17,18] measured the adoption rate of social media among US floral retailers and the effects of SMM on their operational performance. Irani et al. [20] revealed that product price; special offers; and delivery information (i.e., time required, available regions, and delivery price) were the most crucial kinds of knowledge that consumers wished to acquire on flower shops' Facebook brand pages. Drury [21] argued that social media attract the attention of consumers due to their information value; that is, social media enable businesses to attract consumers by providing information that consumers care about. Huang and Chen [22] examined Facebook messages posted by flower shops and consumer preferences regarding

them and discovered that the content and media formats of these posts significantly affected consumer preferences for them. Yue et al. [23] identified the Facebook Page posts and activities of flower shops preferred by millennials. As more consumers have switched their purchases from physical stores to online shops, Seo et al. [24] surveyed 311 adult consumers in Korea to investigate consumers' references and purchase perceptions of floral products through the social network services (SNS) market and to compare the differences between age groups. Peterson et al. [19] investigated the extent of use of new media, including social media, by the ornamental horticulture businesses. They found that, in their samples, the adoption rate for new media was as high as 89% and that Facebook was the most widely adopted site. The superiority of social media from the aspect of consumer communication has been highlighted in SMM. Stebner et al. [25] conducted a qualitative study that aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of garden center stakeholders in adopting new media into marketing practice. They found that the garden center operators preferred to reach their targeted audiences with traditional media and possessed certain stereotypes regarding the new-media in marketing communication.

Even though SMM is an emerging marketing approach with high communication and cost-effectiveness, experiences of other industries show that many enterprisers face problems, including low confidence or insufficient technology, as they engage in SMM [26]. Similar concerns are also identified in the SMM application to the flower retailing industry; e.g., Irani et al. [20] reported that some consumer opinions about flower shops on Facebook were not as positive as expected, even though Facebook was their main channel for receiving business information from flower shops and young consumers were pleased to receive such information through social media. Specifically, 39.7% of respondents reported that they did not purchase goods from a flower shop merely after browsing the shop's Facebook page; 22.3% reported that they would not buy flowers from a shop simply because they liked the shop's Facebook page, and 98% said they did not prefer any florist's Facebook page and would not become loyal fans. It is clear that flower retailers are facing obstacles with regard to applying SMM successfully.

Although SMM has been adopted by the floral industry for nearly a decade, few studies have explored the status quo and actual results of SMM application in this industry. To address this deficiency, this study interviewed flower shop owners with SMM experience to determine (1) the motivations for adopting SMM, (2) the strategies for administering SMM, (3) the performance perceived for SMM application, and (4) barriers to implementing SMM among florists. Countless social media platforms have been adopted [6]—among which, Facebook has the highest global traffic worldwide [1]. Even though there are various types of social media platforms for users, such as Myspace, YouTube, Flickr, Wikipedia, etc. [5], Facebook has become the most widely applied platform for SMM [6,27], because it provides functions for self-exposure, information exchange, and social interaction, being conducive to the creation of a social media-based brand community that benefits in driving users into buyers. Besides, Facebook also plays an important role for the development of social media marketing for the flower retailing industry, since it is the most widely adopted social media platform by both the businesses and consumers. For example, Peterson et al. [19] found that Facebook was the most widely adopted social media site for the ornamental businesses in their samples, even though the time and labor allocated to new media marketing practice have varied with business sizes. It is also reported that Facebook is a major source of information for young consumers concerning floral products [20,23]. Therefore, we accomplished the study objectives under the setting of the Facebook application in the flower retailing business. The findings of this study can assist in analyzing the status of the contemporary SMM applications in the floral industry.

The Institute for Information Industry in Taiwan reported that up to 81% of internet users in Taiwan tend to search for word-of-mouth information before purchasing a product, while 70% of the online communities used most often are on Facebook [28]. At the same time, up to 80.5% of Taiwanese citizens have Facebook accounts [29]. All of this indicates that Facebook is a pivotal source of information for consumers in Taiwan [30]. Therefore, the findings of this study reflect the actual

experiences of the floral retailers located in a region where Facebook is widely adopted by businesses and consumers and to which floral retailers all around the world can refer.

This article is organized in the structure that Section 1 is the introduction section introducing the background and the objectives of this study, as well as discussing the related literatures. Section 2 is the methodology section describing the methods and procedures regarding how the authors gained the subjects and data and how the data were analyzed. Section 3 is the result section presenting the study outcomes on florists' motivation, strategies, perceived benefits, and barriers for adopting social media into their flower retailing business. Section 4 presents the discussion on the study findings and the implications summarized from the study findings.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Recruitment of Subjects

To recruit valid subjects to participate in the interview, purposive sampling was processed with the use of an official data base sponsored by the Taiwanese government. Namely, we first inquired of the Business Registration System sponsored by the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Economic Affairs of Taiwan with the entry of "flower shop" in conventional Chinese characters, resulting in an outcome of 187 flower shops located in the six special municipalities of Taiwan. We subsequently identified these shops with Facebook pages by individually searching for these 187 shops on Facebook and found that a total of 78 of these shops had administered a Facebook brand page. We then sent direct messages to these shops through their Facebook brand pages and obtained the consent for interviews from 35 (44.87%) shops. Directed interviews were conducted with the owners of these 35 flower shops by adopting a one-by-one approach. The interview comprised five themes, including the basic information of the flower shop and the motivation behind creating a Facebook brand page, as well as strategies, perceived benefits, and barriers related to running the brand pages. Table 1 lists the questions created for each theme in the interview. All items were open-ended questions that allowed interviewees to freely express their perspectives and opinions.

**Table 1.** Questions used in the interviews conducted with the flower shop owners who were located in Taiwan and hosting a Facebook brand page for achieving the research purpose of exploring the florists' motivation, management strategy, barriers, and perceived benefits for adoption social media marketing in flower retailing business.

Themes	Questions
Basic information of the flower shops	1. When was your flower shop founded?
	2. How old is the shop founder?
	3. How many employees are there in the shop?
Background and motivation for creating a Facebook brand page	1. What is your opinion about using a Facebook Page as a marketing tool?
	2. When was your Facebook Page established?
	3. Why did you create a Facebook Page for your shop?
Business model for running the Facebook Page	1. How are the actual operations of your flower shop Facebook Page? What are your Facebook Page posts mostly about?
	2. How are your interactions with followers on Facebook? How frequently do you respond to followers' comments?
	3. Do you intentionally maintain interactions with followers?
	4. What are your marketing strategies on your Facebook Page?

Table 1. Cont.

Themes	Questions
Marketing performance of the Facebook Page	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your opinion regarding using the number of likes, comments, and shares as indicators of operational performance of the page?</li> <li>2. According to your experience, what are the actual benefits of a Facebook Page to your business?</li> <li>3. What are the strategies that lead to successful operations of a business page?</li> </ol>
Operational difficulties of running the Facebook Page	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. According to your experience, what are the types of work require the most effort when running the shop's page?</li> <li>2. According to your experience, what are the challenges in running the shop's page?</li> </ol>

Since no specific sample size is required for qualitative research, researchers usually regard theoretical saturation as the standard. That is to say, researchers are encouraged to stop sampling when sampling more data no longer leads to new findings; the sampling stops as it reaches the theoretical saturation point. Thus, the sample size needed for a qualitative study varies from case to case. The evidence shows that five to eight sampling units lead to theoretical saturation when the degree of homogeneity is high between samples. By contrast, when researchers aim to identify maximum variation, the suggested sample size is 12 to 20 units [31].

Interviews were conducted between July 2016 and October 2019. Interviewees were allowed to choose to be interviewed face-to-face or by telephone or with questionnaires. Audio recordings of the face-to-face and phone interviews were made to keep a record. For those interviewees who responded with questionnaires, there were follow-up phone calls from the researchers if any of their responses were unclear to the researcher or when the researchers felt it was necessary to clarify the concerns they might have with the responses.

## 2.2. Profiles of the Subjects

The shop owners interviewed in this study were, on average, 40.69 years old and had run a flower retail business between around six months and 40 years, with an average of 14.17 years. Regardless of their history, the flower shops were either small and medium-sized enterprises or microenterprises. Eight of these shops (22.86%) did not hire any employees, so that the owner was the only person working in the shop, and only two of these shops (5.71%) had more than five employees. In actual fact, 71.43% of the shops' owners interviewed in this study hired between one and five full-time employees. The interviewees had administered their Facebook brand pages for between three months and nine years, with an average of 3.65 years (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Basic information of the flower shop owners, who were located in Taiwan and hosting a Facebook brand page, being interviewed for exploring the florists' motivation, management strategy, barriers, and perceived benefits of the adoption of social media marketing in the flower retailing business.

ID	Location	Years Using Facebook Page	Age	The Person Charged with Managing the Facebook Brand Page	Number of Employees	Years of the Flower Shop	Approach of Interview
1	Taipei	5	55	Owner	1	40	Face to Face
2	Taipei	0.5	28	Owner	1	0.5	Face to Face
3	Taipei	4	34	Owner	2	5	Face to Face
4	Taipei	0.3	30	Owner	2	31	Telephone
5	Taipei	5	47	Family	0	24.5	Face to Face
6	Taipei	0.2	55	Employee	5	22	Questionnaire
7	Taipei	1.8	43	Owner	0	1.8	Face to Face
8	Taipei	4	35	Owner	11	4	Face to Face
9	Taipei	9	45	Owner	0	11	Face to Face
10	New Taipei	4	44	Owner	2	4	Face to Face
11	New Taipei	4	50	Owner	3	27	Face to Face
12	New Taipei	3	50	Owner	1	25	Face to Face
13	New Taipei	2	30	Family	3	19	Questionnaire
14	New Taipei	2	36	Family	2	4	Questionnaire
15	Taichung	5	50	Owner	3	23	Questionnaire
16	Taichung	4	35	Owner	0	4	Questionnaire
17	Taichung	3	35	Family	1	12	Questionnaire
18	Taichung	6	44	Owner	1	7	Questionnaire
19	Taichung	6.3	47	Owner	0	22	Questionnaire
20	Taichung	2.5	55	Family	1	33	Questionnaire
21	Taichung	3	29	Owner	0	4	Questionnaire
22	Taichung	4	46	Owner	0	10.8	Questionnaire
23	Taichung	2.3	28	Owner	1	2.3	Questionnaire
24	Tainan	5	52	Owner	3	30	Questionnaire
25	Tainan	2	35	Employee	1	2	Questionnaire
26	Tainan	8	58	Owner	5	36	Questionnaire
27	Tainan	5	35	Employee	1	5	Questionnaire
28	Kaohsiung	5	28	Owner	10	20	Questionnaire
29	Kaohsiung	2	50	Family	3	30	Questionnaire
30	Kaohsiung	2	53	Family	3	18	Questionnaire
31	Kaohsiung	2	32	Owner	1	2	Questionnaire
32	Kaohsiung	3	25	Owner	5	3	Questionnaire
33	Kaohsiung	4	44	Owner	0	4	Questionnaire
34	Kaohsiung	7	31	Owner	1	7	Telephone
35	Kaohsiung	2	30	Owner	1	2	Questionnaire

Note: Shop owners are excluded from the number of employees (full-time).

### 2.3. Analysis of Interviews

For every interview, the researchers transformed the interviewee's responses into transcripts. The transcripts were then sent back to the interviewees, who were asked to clarify unclear context until all their responses were correctly interpreted. After that, we performed textual analysis using a grounded hermeneutic editing approach [32].

Addison's hermeneutic editing approach for textual analysis that was proposed in 1999 is based on grounded theory. To use this approach, the words, sentences, or paragraphs in a text are first coded. Next, according to the scenarios or rationale in the text, specific behaviors or conversations are interpreted and conceptualized. Finally, the subordinating relationships or associations between these concepts are determined. Thus, the theoretical context or implications of each response can be identified. We adopted open coding in grounded theory to extract content-related concepts from sentences or paragraphs that were associated with a theme of the questions [33]. During the process, we constantly verified the coding consistency and appropriateness of how the concepts were named and then added or merged conceptualized coding categories when necessary. We also ensured that each concept category had consistent categorization logic and, also, explored associations or linkages between concept categories during the textual analysis process. The textual analysis was conducted until systemic contexts and implications were determined in relation to the florists' motivations, management strategies, application performance, and usage barriers in the adoption of SMM.



### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Interviewees' History of Social Media Adoption and Current Operations

Facebook launched business pages for the users in Taiwan in 2011. Taking the sampling year as the basis, we discovered that flower shops founded before 2011 created their own business pages one or two years after Facebook launched its brand page function in Taiwan. For the shops established after 2011, most of them created a Facebook Page immediately after they commenced operations. This indicated that floral businesses recognized the importance of SMM.

At the time of the interviews, most flower shop owners ran their Pages on their own; a few of them asked family members to manage the pages. By contrast, no shops hired or assigned professional companies to manage their Facebook pages.

#### 3.2. Motivations for Adopting SMM

The interviewees adopted SMM based on multiple motivations, which this study classified into five categories, i.e., (1) following consumer trends in social media use, (2) increasing advertising exposures, (3) exhibiting professionalism in floral works, (4) strengthening customer relationships, and (5) enhancing cost effectiveness.

##### 3.2.1. Following Consumer Trends in Social Media Use

The interviewees indicated that social media had evidently become a part of people's lives, as well as the main approach to collecting information. Therefore, they determined that only by riding the social media wave could their shops meet the information demand of consumers. Additionally, consumers tended to search for more detailed information about a product if it was successfully presented to them and caught their attention. The information capacity in relation to social media is higher than that in conventional advertising media. Social media can serve as a platform for deep communication between shop owners and consumers, thereby fulfilling consumers' demand for information. The absence of such a platform can even cause consumers to have negative perceptions of the flower shop.

*"This trend [social media use] is crucial." (1)*

*"I think it's [social media use] a modern trend that we must work on." (24)* (Numbers in the parentheses are the identification numbers of interviewees.)

*"Facebook is the mainstream because everyone uses it daily, so many businesses have created a Facebook Page for marketing ... Customers are used to searching for information on Facebook. If they cannot search for information about our shop, our exposure can suffer." (34)*

*"Nowadays, everyone is on it [Facebook], so we have to create a page for marketing." (8)*

*"People are scrolling all the time, so social media marketing is a must ... to attract people who are always online." (31)*

*"Clients do visit official websites, but they tend to search for your shop's Facebook Page beforehand. They'll be confused if they cannot find one." (3)*

*"Customers may want to find our information if they have heard of our shop from their relatives or friends. They then search for our information online. Therefore, making our page easy to be found is quite important." (16)*

*"Everyone is on Facebook, so I just created a Facebook Page. Sometimes a customer wants to see something, I make a post public for everyone to see. This way I don't have to add every customer online." (11)*

The aforementioned responses demonstrated the florist's insights into behavioral changes in consumers and using innovative marketing tools such as SMM to cope with consumers' behavioral changes. Regardless of the shop's history, each flower shop owner sought to find a channel suitable for finding new customers and increasing the efficiency of customer communication.

### 3.2.2. Increasing Advertising Exposures

Advertising was another deciding factor that motivated businesses to create a Facebook page. Flower shop owners interviewed believed that developing a Facebook page was equivalent to creating an online shop. Based on their opinions, the advertising effectiveness was higher on Facebook than on an official website. Unlike conventional official websites, Facebook provided an alternative for those shop owners to expose their brands and products and boost their advertising reach, thereby increasing the awareness of their shops. In addition to its higher information capacity, Facebook outperformed conventional advertising channels by enabling bilateral interactions. Therefore, Facebook was not only conducive to increasing brand exposure but, also, to facilitating deep communication with consumers. Therefore, creating a Facebook page allowed flower shop owners to further reach or communicate with consumers. This helped them reply to customers' questions about their shops or products more efficiently. According to several interviewees' experiences, several new customers approached them after browsing their shops' Facebook pages. These interviewees then assumed that running a Facebook page helped them not only to communicate with customers and enhance exposure but, also, to find new customers.

*"Indeed, I created a Facebook Page for advertising. With advertising effects, promotional effects will follow." (2)*

*"Compared with developing an official website that requires additional costs and increasing product exposures on other websites, creating a Facebook Page seems to provide greater marketing effects." (5)*

*"In the beginning, we created the Facebook Page to increase awareness of the shop and let people know about it. Now, Facebook has become an excellent marketing channel." (15)*

*"Well, it's [creating a Facebook Page] about increasing exposure. For example, someone asks me what I do or what my family does, and I can just share the page's link with him. I don't need to spend time on explaining." (4)*

*"[Facebook Page] increases exposure and provides a reference for consumers . . . There are numerous online channels, and a Facebook Page can be both an advertising channel and a catalog. In addition, because many young customers are used to shopping around, quite a few of our customers came to us through Facebook." (32)*

*"[We] want to have more interactions with customers and increase our reputation." (24)*

*" . . . to expand our customer source." (29)*

### 3.2.3. Exhibiting Professionalism in Floral Works

Another reason for creating a Facebook page was that the interviewees regarded Facebook as a platform for exhibiting their professionalism in floral works. In their opinion, Facebook pages enable them to generate powerful promotional effects via floral work exhibitions. In particular, customers who are new to a flower shop can understand its business, floral design style, and innovations by exploring its Facebook page. Since the floral industry emphasizes the styles and aesthetics of floral designs, presenting sufficient work on floral design to customers is critical for persuading consumers to trust a floral shop. Customer preferences and demand can be abstract; thus, the interviewees determined that showcasing floral works on Facebook allowed customers to quickly view actual products, which,



in turn, facilitated effective communication concerning the details. In brief, exhibiting floral works was a pivotal business activity on Facebook pages among the interviewees. This demonstrated that Facebook has become a medium for customers to understand the floral industry; it is equivalent to a virtual catalog that provides references to customers and saves them time when searching for relevant information.

*“... to post works for customers’ reference ... ” (30)*

*“... to increase customers’ understanding of our products and buy them ... ” (15)*

*“From the photos we uploaded to the Facebook Page, consumers recognize that we not only do venue decoration but also hold tea parties and provide floristry courses as well as other services. We upload photos whenever we have a new design.” (2)*

*“The Facebook Page enables us to upload photos of our work. If customers want to know more about our flower shop, they can simply browse those photos on Facebook ... For Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day, we create some relevant posts for customers to check out.” (11)*

*“Some customers have never bought my products, but they want to have a general understanding about my style. To me, an easier way is to let them browse the photos [collections] I posted on Facebook. They then pick arrangements they like and discuss the details about the design they want with me. Therefore, Facebook is really important; it compensates for the lack of on-site samples in the flower shop.” (1)*

*“Photos of our work are posted on the shop’s Facebook Page. These photos help first-time customers quickly recognize whether our works fit their preferences. Customers who are not living in this city don’t have to actually visit our shop. Instead, they can learn about our style online, send private messages to us, and place orders if they feel satisfied.” (24)*

### 3.2.4. Strengthening Customer Relationships

Most interviewees maintained that a Facebook page is an ideal platform for customer relationship management. Since Facebook is a social networking site that consumers visit daily and is part of their daily social life, florists can follow customer trends in social media use through using Facebook as an interaction platform. Furthermore, this has helped the florists lift technology-related barriers and save costs on information transfer, thereby leading to more convenient and efficient contacts between businesses and consumers. The design of customer feedback systems on official flower shop websites only allows customers to ask questions, and thus, managers cannot interact instantly with their customers. However, Facebook allows for mutual interactions between shops and customers, thereby increasing the possibility of instant conversations. By using Facebook’s messaging function, owners can actively reach customers who are interested in their products and promote sales.

*“It’s [having a Facebook Page] been about 6 years. We have run a business for 30 years and opened a Facebook account right after it was launched. We want to interact more often with customers and increase shop awareness.” (24)*

*“If customers have a good impression of us, they will continue to contact us, and we interact as if we are friends online.” (2)*

*“At first, I created this Facebook Page to introduce to people Nanjichang and Nanjichang Night Market and to tell people that there’s a flower shop in the Nanjichang Night Market. Because the flower shop is located near a night market and the site of an old airport, I named my shop 4F [fly, food, flower, and fragrance] ... ” (4)*

*“We founded the Facebook Page to teach customers about Chinese poetry to give them some education. Before that, we sold our products on our website.” (28)*

### 3.2.5. Enhancing Cost-Effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness was one of the factors motivating the florists in Taiwan to adopt Facebook marketing. Compared to the cost of subscribing to and managing a store online, the cost of creating a Facebook page is lower. The advertising fees are also lower or even free on Facebook. These characteristics provide advantages to the interviewees to initiate marketing campaigns. Several interviewees purchased business services from Facebook to produce desirable market segmentation and increase their marketing effectiveness. For example, Facebook can accurately identify target consumers selected by a flower shop and then use its backend information management technology to increase the shop's advertising reach to the target groups, thereby increasing the number of page followers. Facebook calculates the rate of advertising exposure based on the number of new likes that a page receives. The interviewees discovered that this approach incurred lower fees compared with those from website development and store subscriptions on a shopping website. Therefore, the interviewees preferred using Facebook pages. They maintained that the sales effects produced by Facebook pages were greater than those of websites, and several interviewees said that they created Facebook posts to facilitate festival promotions. This yielded more customer inquiries.

*"We do have an official website, but I feel it's not as effective as the Facebook Page." (5, 9, 24, 25)*

*"I guess the main difference [between a website and Facebook Page] is pricing. We have stores on other shopping platforms, and their annual fees are quite high. As a newly-founded shop, we can hardly afford these fees . . . Another difference is that customers cannot leave comments on a website, whereas they can comment on any Facebook post. If customers from a website have questions, they have to call or email the shop. Thus, customers cannot receive instant replies . . . Returns on investment also differ. Building a website is more expensive because we have to pay not only website development fees but also virtual hosting rent. Facebook does not charge such fees. Facebook only charges advertising fees, and that's the difference [between conventional websites and Facebook pages]." (2)*

### 3.3. Strategies Adopted in Running a Social Media-Based Brand Page

Corporate strategy is defined as "the direction and scope of an organization over the long term, which achieves advantage in a changing environment through its configuration of resources and competences with the aim of fulfilling stakeholder expectations [34]". It aims to integrate external competitive environments with a company's internal resources, thereby developing a series of actions conducive to long-term development, as well as achieving the goal of earning profits. Michael Porter, a business strategy expert, proposed that corporate strategy not only enhances a business' operational effectiveness but, also, enables a firm to perform activities or adopt methods that differ from those of its competitors to produce similar results through strategic positioning; therefore, the sustainable competitiveness of the firm can be strengthened [35]. The interviewees developed their strategies with two aims: to keep consumers interested in their Facebook pages and increase sales by enabling Facebook pages to reach more consumers. Through analyzing the interview content, we discovered that the interviewees mostly relied on post optimization, in which they set post topics by meticulously observing the current trends and preferences of users. This maintained users' interest in the Facebook pages. Additionally, the interviewees could ensure that Facebook guided consumers to actually visit their flower shops, thereby increasing communication depth and transaction opportunities [5,36]. The interviewees adopted the following strategies to run their brand pages on Facebook.

#### 3.3.1. Maintaining Users' Attention by Creating Posts of High Quality and Related to Hot Topics

Most interviewees recognized the importance of using Facebook posts to manage consumer communities on social media. Thus, they actively optimized post contents and created topics to boost the response rate of posts on their pages. Posts with high publicity not only attract users to follow a page but also encourage users to like, comment on, and share it [26]. Favorable posts

can generate an effective social media ecology, thereby improving the effectiveness of social media management [5,36]. To optimize Facebook posts, the interviewees edited articles according to users' reading habits. They sometimes asked professional editors to enhance the post's readability. In addition to ensuring the richness and quantity of posts, the interviewees emphasized the posting time and frequency. Specifically, they adjusted the posting frequency according to the differing demands of peak and off-peak seasons. Since flowers are a seasonal and festive product, most of the interviewees created posts with topics and contents according to seasons and festivals, allowing them to maintain the attractiveness of their Facebook pages.

*"Having a [social media] community is necessary. For example, people share things about succulents in succulent pages. They talk about why succulents die and why a cactus-like plant is so expensive. They exchange opinions with each other and attract followers. This topic is hyped and receives quite some attention, which raises the price of a succulent to a more profitable level [NT \$1,000]. This is how a popular topic is created."* (10)

*"I used to post articles discussing indoor environments or plants suitable for office workers, stories about flowers, or some inspirational stories ... I also attached relevant content and pinned the post."* (4)

*"We set a topic; for example, theme weddings in other countries, such as snowy wedding pictures or spring weddings. We collect these photos and introduce their themes."* (7)

*"We take a good picture, edit it, and then put it online. We don't post bad pictures, and we try to make our posts be seen regularly. People will forget us if we don't post for a while. Valentine's Day is coming, so we might post ads related to Valentine bouquets."* (25)

*"Most of the posts are photos of floral works. Sometimes, such as on Valentine's Day, another manager, a Chinese major from National Taiwan University, writes emotional articles [Facebook posts] because his writing is better than mine."* (11)

*"We arrange our posting schedule. We post ads regularly, so situations in which ads are posted too often or suddenly not at all won't happen."* (3)

### 3.3.2. Purchasing Facebook Advertisements or Seeking Strategic Alliances with Other Companies

Many interviewees admitted that they purchased the advertising services provided by Facebook to improve the operational performance of their pages. They used the service with expectations of accurately reaching target customers and obtaining more business information and, in turn, improving the performance of their marketing strategies. The interviewees adopted diverse Facebook marketing strategies. They did not allocate a high budget for Facebook marketing possibly because of limited capital, yet they published posts about new products using their creativity, as well as developed strategic alliances with other companies using tag sharing. This achieved cross-marketing to attract more users to follow a page and increase shop exposures.

*"A photographer cooperated with us and posted our work on his page. This is like Co-Op advertising."* (2)

*"I spend more money on advertising high-priced decoration work. I won't pin these works, but I will intentionally recommend them because they look great, are of high quality, and are more attractive."* (3)

*"We keep creating new products, and the successful ones are popular. About one in every four to five products can succeed. Some products are not accepted by consumers [innovation failure]. Work creation is probably like this. They [innovative products] must be posted before a festival because it'll be too late in the festival like now."* (10)

*"Yes, we do that [observing consumer feedback in the backend]. We found that certain groups of people follow our Facebook Page."* (2)

*"I don't care about the number of likes. But I will buy ads for posts once I have published new work, because I want to see whether those who view the ads are our target group."* (33)

### 3.3.3. Effectively Linking Online Facebook Advertising to Offline Shop Visits

Facebook has become a crucial medium for new customers to ask questions related to flower shop businesses, from initial inquiries to final purchase decisions. Some interviewees reported that some customers have no intention to buy a product, and hence, they ask vague questions, but they must spend time replying to such questions once they initiate their brand page on Facebook. Even if the inquirers buy their products in the end, the duration between an inquiry and purchase can be one to two months. The interviewees saw other problems in communicating with users on Facebook. For example, even though customers saw the posted collections of the florists' works, they still felt they did not obtain rich information without a face-to-face discussion with the florists. Moreover, sending online messages generated problems such as unproductive and sporadic conversation. To solve the aforementioned problems and increase the possibility of purchases being made, the interviewees sought to guide new customers to visit their physical stores when these customers sent an inquiry using Facebook. Another way of solving the aforementioned problems by the interviewees was to develop measures to identify those consumers with greater purchase intentions and then to give these consumers a higher priority when responding. For example, they asked basic questions to determine customers' willingness to learn more about their products, or they steered the conversation with customers and subtly persuaded them to visit their physical stores. These methods helped the interviewees remove limitations from the online platform of Facebook and increase the possibility of successful transactions. In brief, Facebook allowed the florists to be reached by new customers with a greater chance of purchasing. Additionally, the interviewees attempted to identify those online customers with an actual interest in purchasing and encouraged such customers to visit their physical stores, thereby creating opportunities for actual contact leading to successful transactions.

*"Some customers ask about my shop on Facebook, and then I invite them to pay a visit to my shop." (24)*

*"[On the Facebook Page] Consumers have to ask questions so that I can answer them. If they continue to interact with me, they are pretty likely to buy a product." (10)*

*"It's better to talk with them [customers] face-to-face. On Facebook, we can only talk about prices, yet we cannot explain the details unless we meet in the shop." (24)*

*"Face-to-face communication enables us to understand customers' needs." (15)*

*"[On Facebook] Because we cannot talk to our customers face to face, we must be careful with our tone and avoid irritating them. The greatest advantage of a shop visit is that the shop provides a complete space in which information is comprehensively provided, thereby enabling customers to acquire more information about our products." (21)*

*"Say that a customer asks, 'What's your basic rate?' or 'What services do you provide?' These questions are quite general. Therefore, I provide general replies on Facebook. Next, the customer might ask individual questions. Sometimes I don't like answering questions on Facebook because neither the customer nor I are always online. My reply can be left unread for a while, such as two to three days. If the customer can talk to me in person, we can resolve trivial problems together right away. I think the saying 'It's hard to be cold and detached when you look someone in the eyes' still makes sense. On Facebook, you cannot actually see customers. You don't have any contact with them. On the other hand, when you meet your customers in person, they can tell how professional, reliable, and kind you are from a chat. These things can never be communicated on Facebook." (3)*

*"I think it's better to discuss with customers here [actual shop] because I can determine what customers want. Facebook is inconvenient in this regard. Customers can only send me pictures and I have to explain what styles are in the pictures and provide several choices. Also, I type slowly, and it's difficult to give a detailed response. Usually the customers who visit my shop have come here before. They*

*know how to communicate their requirements. I'm not saying Facebook is useless, but certain things cannot be clarified if Facebook is used all the time. On the other hand, people who have visited here [actual shop] many times can send direct messages because they have seen my work. Some customers decide to have a look in my shop and make final decisions ... some customers ask about my shop on Facebook and then I ask them to come."* (1)

### 3.4. Actual Benefits Perceived from Facebook Marketing

Based on interviewees' opinions, new customer development and brand image enhancement are the two major benefits perceived by the florists for adopting social media into marketing practice. The details for this are provided as follows.

#### 3.4.1. New Customer Development

According to the interviewees' experiences, the most noticeable revenue generated from Facebook pages was finding new customers. The interviewees agreed that the greatest benefit of running Facebook pages was receiving more inquiries from new customers. Although inquiries were mostly related to prices, they created opportunities for the florists and new customers to interact with each other. Through such interactions, the florists could introduce products and services to these potential buyers. Thus, these new customers could understand or experience their products or services, thereby increasing the possibility of purchasing. The interviewees also identified how consumers raised inquiries based on the posted images of floral works, implying the essentialness of photos of florists' floral works for running a florist's social media-based brand page through which consumers could understand the abstract concepts and styles of the florist in floral designs. This attracts customers to visit florists' physical stores and facilitates transactions.

*"Previous experience has shown that approximately 70 to 80% of new customers find us through Facebook, 60% of whom make purchases. This percentage is high, which is because consumers have already seen our works on the Facebook Page ... I can keep advertising on Facebook ... "* (2)

*"We advertise some works on Facebook. Because of ads, new customers contact us after browsing the works we have posted ... Most [inquiries] are about pricing. People ask about the price first and then inquire about our basic service rate."* (16)

*"People who haven't bought flowers from me are new customers. I give my LINE ID to regular customers and they contact me online."* (29)

*"They [works posted on Facebook] can definitely receive some clicks, and these clicks mostly come from new customers. Most new customers will ask me about the work they see. It's possible that some time remains before a customer's wedding. He first follows my Facebook Page for reference, and when the wedding is approaching, he can ask relevant questions, yielding a higher response rate. The performance [of the Facebook Page] will surely increase if the page is managed well."* (35)

#### 3.4.2. Increasing the Florist's Professional Business Images

The interviewees recognized that Facebook pages were facades of their businesses. Their pages allowed consumers to obtain brief profiles of their flower shops. The interviewees also mentioned that photos they posted affected consumers' first impressions about their shops. The aforementioned findings indicated that flower shop owners should verify whether posted floral works matched the style and innovation of their brand positioning.

*"The Facebook Page is like the shop's facade, leaving customers with a first impression of our shop."* (14)

*"It [Facebook Page] actually affects consumer ratings of the flower shop in terms of its quality and taste. From the works posted on Facebook, consumers can instantly tell the level of the shop. Therefore,*

*the work posted must be of a high level, but not too high because an extremely high-level product can scare customers off [consumers might think that such a high-level product is extremely expensive].” (2)*

*“How we run it [Facebook Page] can make consumers feel that our shop focuses on design of floristry. That is, a fixed image of the shop and image of its pricing is created. Frankly speaking, they [consumers] will determine whether the shop sells high-end or budget goods once they see the work we post on Facebook.” (3)*

### 3.5. Barriers to Facebook Page Management

Although the interviewees recognized the importance of social media adoption for enhancing business competitiveness and they enjoyed the benefits produced by SMM, they faced several problems and negative experiences, as described below, that decreased the effectiveness of their SMM that was implemented using Facebook brand pages.

#### 3.5.1. Insufficient Time or Labor for Facebook Page Management

Several interviewees determined that, as with developing a website, running a Facebook brand page requires time for maintenance and responding to questions. This indirectly prolonged the amount of time required for customer service and increased the workload. Due to a limited budget, most of the interviewees did not hire someone specializing in page management on a full-time job basis. Instead, their Facebook pages were mostly administered by themselves or together with their staff or family members on a part-time basis. Some interviewees complained that sometimes the assigned staff devoted too much attention to following users' feedback and ignored their regular responsibilities. This impeded the daily operations of their shops and, in turn, increased the burden of the shop managers. The interviewees also reported that, sometimes, they felt that responding to users' inquiries or comments required more time than interacting with customers in their physical shops. As they recognized that they did not have the time or effort to manage their Facebook pages, they sometimes ceased promoting their Facebook pages to customers.

*“It [Page management] consumes my rest time. I rarely check Facebook during working hours. I have even asked my staff to take care of the Page. They only reply to questions during working hours. After they get off work, no one helps me. It doesn't mean that I can ignore all the questions asked after 6 pm, after working hours. I feel that if I don't respond to a follower's questions right away, or at least before 11 pm that day, I will miss a chance. He or she [follower] might be eager to get an answer right away.” (3)*

*“Yes, she [staff member] is sometimes absent-minded and this affects our work. She not only posts articles on the Page, but also replies to their [followers] questions. Other than this, she does nothing. I've told her, but she just ignores me. Every day, she creates posts and feels happy when followers comment on those posts.” (1)*

*“Overall, it's me [the one who manages the Facebook Page] ... I can't let my staff do this during working hours, and it's impossible for me to hire someone who solely maintains and manages the Page. But spending NT \$500 [to advertise on Facebook] is quite effective. We usually buy the advertising service on Facebook. New customers come and the effect is good. It [managing the shop's Facebook Page] comes back to cost considerations.” (5)*

*“Yeah, we are not like young people who have nothing to do all day. Sometimes notifications don't stop, then we'll just turn the sound off. You know that? We also have to talk to customers online, but I can spend all morning dealing with just two customers. When customers are picky, I have to let them pick the photos they want and reshoot the work if they are not satisfied, which takes another one to two hours. Because I've got a lot of things to do, I don't have the time or the budget to hire a guy [to administer the Facebook Page]. Since we are a small flower shop, we cannot break down too many job tasks. One has to work on multiple things at a time.” (7)*

*"It's a waste of time, like going to work and having another part-time job. That's exhausting. I have to check it [the Page] during off-hours. (10)*

*"Things [on the Page] must be updated frequently. Posts must be different, which means we have to spend quite some time on management to see the effects." (34)*

### 3.5.2. Low Consumer Engagement

Several of the interviewees complained that spending a long time on managing or even creating promotions on Facebook pages produced few returns. It was very often the case that users rarely commented on posts or left low-quality comments. These problems possibly occurred because the interviewees did not possess sufficient skills to run Facebook pages, thereby failing to build trust between users or enhance users' engagement toward their brand pages. The interviewees perceived that Facebook pages generated few benefits when the number of comments was low (e.g., only clicking "like") or the comments were nonspecific (e.g., merely expressing support). Therefore, some of the interviewees bought advertising services on the social networking site to increase the exposure of their brands.

*People who really wanted to ask question would send direct messages to you. To me, people commenting [on a Facebook post] things such as 'You are great' or 'I support you' do not really want to interact with you. The whole thing is a delusion." (1)*

*"I later found that few people reply [to Facebook page posts] and felt that we had to put more effort into managing this thing [the shop's Facebook page]. However, after we spent much effort on it, it seemed that they [users] were indifferent to our efforts. This is imbalanced [between the effort made by the shop and users' comments on Facebook]. Since then, we've rarely done this thing [Facebook marketing]" (19)*

*"We've held a promotion before. Customers could get a free dried flower bouquet if they checked into the shop's location. The followers were indifferent, however. I guess it's not attractive because we didn't set a complete promotional plan. To obtain strong promotion effects, we might need to buy advertising from the Facebook Company, so I think that the low user engagement that occurred for our Facebook brand page indicated that it [low engagement of followers to the promotional campaign] was because we didn't buy the advertising service from Facebook." (4)*

*"Interaction is low. The content on the Facebook Page can only be seen by our fans. It's difficult to get potential customers to like the Page." (18)*

*"Very few people click on 'Like'. Maybe it's because our posts are overlooked by customers whose news feed is constantly updated. (10)*

*"It's difficult to build trust with friends on Facebook." (11)*

*"People often associate the posts with commercial advertisements. After all, I create posts under the name of my own shop." (23)*

### 3.5.3. The Risk of Being Plagiarized after Posting the Shop's Floral Works on Facebook

The interviewees indicated that they heavily relied on Facebook pages to exhibit their floral creations and introduce their style and innovation to consumers. However, some interviewees were concerned that their ideas or pictures could be imitated or copied. For example, one of the interviewees explained that competitors went to their pages to find inspiration or even ordered raw materials from the wholesalers before them, thereby stopping her from delivering orders on time. Since cyberspace is open to the public, plagiarism is difficult to avoid. To solve this problem, she delivered the order first before she uploaded the photos of her works. To avoid plagiarism, some interviewees either added



their shops' names or watermarks to photos. Conversely, other interviewees described how they did not care about the issue of "plagiarizing", because innovativeness was difficult to imitate and referring to finding inspiration from competitors was acceptable to them. This controversy raises problems associated with user ethics in using internet resources.

*"It's not only about inspiration. For example, I used to make a floral arrangement using a special container bought from a trader. This container was rarely used by other florists. I just wanted to give it a try. I made the arrangement and posted it on Facebook. Many customers placed orders, about 20 or 30 orders, asking for the same design. Then, when I approached the trader to buy more of the containers, I found out that it had been sold out to other florists. This happens quite often, so I must be extremely careful, and now the only thing I tell customers on Facebook is my style of design."* (1)

*"We add our logo to uploaded photos. Some floral businesses place their logos in not-so-visible places to avoid spoiling the photo. However, the logos on these types of photos can be easily trimmed out and the photos reused without authorization. By contrast, we place our logo in a visible place [to prevent photos from being stolen]." (2)*

*"We definitely will place our logo on photos ... Honestly speaking, I think stealing designs or ideas is meaningless. Even if you can make an identical product, your sense of aesthetics and color are still different from those of the original designer. Well, I'm not really worried that people will imitate my arrangements because when someone changes several elements of your arrangement and makes a new work, it becomes a new design. So the person has actually just referred to your design, and has not stolen your ideas. Also, where's your innovation from? It's from others' arrangements ... " (3)*

*"I mainly post my arrangements. I don't like others stealing my photos. If they want to repost my photos, they should obtain my permission. When sharing others' photos, I check whether the photo is copyrighted. If not, I won't share it. Our photos have been illegally copied in this way before."* (13)

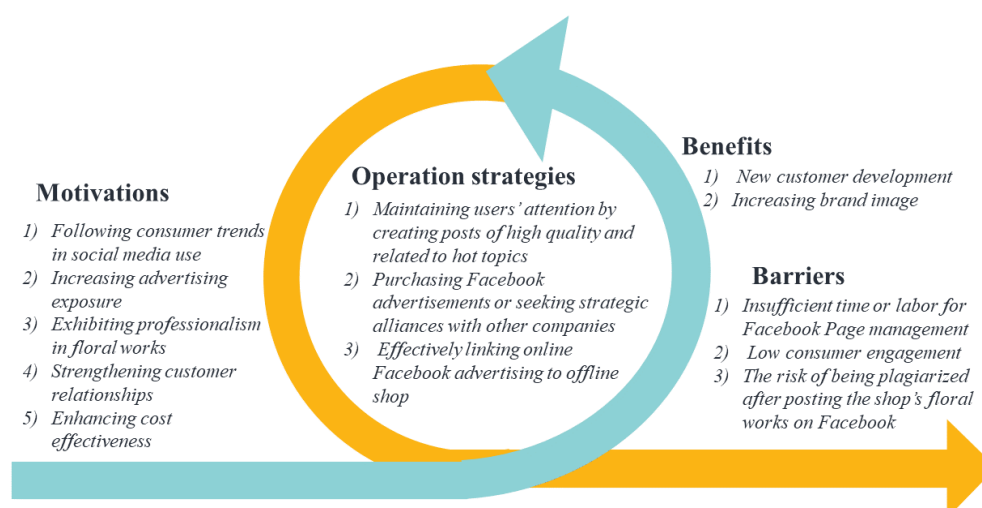
*"Because information is more easily searched for [on the Internet], "plagiarism" is commonly seen."* (14)

*"Our arrangements are now well-protected. Otherwise, other online flower shops will steal [our ideas]." (9)*

*"Copying others' photos is quite embarrassing to us, so we never do this. The floral industry is small. We always exchange opinions with other floral businesses. If people are found to be doing this [stealing others' ideas], they will feel ashamed."* (7)

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study explored the status quo of social media adoption among florists located in Taiwan in terms of florists' motivations, implementation strategies, perceived effectiveness, and barriers faced. All the findings regarding the motivation, strategies, benefits, and barriers for the adoption of social media in the flower retailing business are summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The study findings regarding the florists' motivations, management strategies, barriers, and perceived benefits for the adoption of social media marketing in flower retailing businesses.

We found that most of the florists recognized the importance of SMM to the flower retailing business, so they launched a Facebook brand page either immediately after Facebook started its business page service or once their flower shops were established. Factors that motivated the interviewees to use social media varied, including (1) following the trend of SMM development to increase the shop's competitiveness, (2) increasing brand exposure, (3) presenting the flower shops' proficiency in flower design, (4) increasing interactions with consumers, and (5) saving costs in marketing communication. All these are very similar to those found in other industries [7,8,10–12]. The approaches that the florists use to operate their brand pages on FB also match the suggestions provided by previous studies, such as setting suitable post topics according to the characteristics of targeted users [37], posting new posts regularly to ensure popularity, and demonstrating the shops' proficiency and trustworthiness in posts [2].

The most tangibly perceived benefits for the florists regarding adopting social media in their marketing practices included gaining more opportunities to reach new customers and improving brand image to targeted consumers. The interviewees agreed that the greatest benefit from running Facebook pages was receiving more inquiries from new customers. Even though the inquiries were mostly about price or products, they provided opportunities for the florists to reach and interact to new customers, which usually increases the exposure of shops' products or services to new consumers. The study's results also showed that posted photos were the basis for inducing users' inquiries. This is consistent with a previous finding that florists' posts with photos attracted more likes, comments, and shares from users [22]. It is also consistent with the finding by Seo et al. [24] that consumers have positive attitudes toward the photos of floral products posted on social network services, and they refer to those photos to shape their image of the floral products and make purchase decisions. The study results also indicated that photos posted on the brand page were also the basis for shaping the consumers' image of the florists. Many florists like to share their works with users via photo galleries on their brand pages. Therefore, users are used to judging florists' innovativeness and professionalism with posted photos, and this, in turn, influences the users' overall image of and trust toward the florists. Therefore, the other perceived benefit on the part of the florists regarding adopting social media into their marketing practices is the enhancement of brand images. The study's results suggest that quality and meaningful photos are an essential element enabling the florists to adopt SMM successfully.

Even though florists are motivated to adopt SMM and can vividly perceive the benefits of its adoption, the study results revealed several significant implications that reflect the problems in the status quo of SMM application in the flower retailing business. These implications are valuable for the

industry to rethink about the appropriateness of their current strategies on the use of SMM, as well as for the researchers to find the focus for their future studies.

- (1) The florists tend to ignore the functionality of social media in business intelligence. The flow of information on social media is two-way that, via social media, the enterprises can not only make information available to users, but they can also receive information back from users to generate business intelligence for their respective businesses. For example, enterprises can analyze the consumers' characteristics, post preferences, and behavioral attributes through users' feedback on their experiences with the products and services, as well as through the backend management of the brand pages [7,8]. Compared with the SMM experience in other industries, where enterprisers had a desire to integrate their services with social networking sites and aimed to obtain ideas from customers [38], the florists were less motivated to utilize the social media's market intelligence function.
- (2) Florists are less likely to develop incentives to facilitate consumers' engagement with their social media-based brand pages. Jaakkola and Alexander [39] defined "consumer engagement" as "customers make voluntary resource contributions that have a brand or firm focus but go beyond what is fundamental to transactions, occur in interactions between the focal object and/or other actors, and result from motivational drivers". This definition implies that, when consumers have high levels of engagement with a brand or product, they are more willing to invest personal resources, e.g., time, energy, knowledge, and skills, into recommending, supporting, or endorsing the enterprises, which is favorable for the creation of brand value. Therefore, many enterprises in various industries plan incentives to encourage online users to engage in their brand pages [7,12]. In this study, we found that florists contributed the most resources to post creation, brand exposure, or exploring new customers, instead of developing strategies to facilitate consumer engagement toward their brand pages, but they lacked the effort in developing appropriate incentives to facilitate consumer engagement toward such pages, even though they were not satisfied with the current status of consumer engagement with their brand pages.
- (3) The florists are suffering from the myth of being eager to have transactions from their brand pages on social media. Most interviewees still considered their Facebook brand pages a tool for increasing advertising exposure and transactions. They were not aware of using social media's characteristics of social networking to facilitate consumers' word-of-mouth and brand engagement. Consequently, their brand pages on Facebook were as ordinary as average business information platforms, which could hinder the florists from using SMM effectively. As the social media-based brand page is excessively commercialized, it cannot gain trust and loyalty from users, and the florists are more likely to be disappointed with the performance of their brand pages in relation to their sales volume [40]. Even though some florists can vividly perceive that users' engagement on their brand pages is low, they rarely consider finding a solution for it, such as outsourcing it to third parties or paying for consultants to improve their skills for managing their brand pages. This may be because most of the florists are small in size and, thus, are not motivated or lack the budget to outsource it or find a consultant to solve the problem, as some larger florists do [19].
- (4) There is a severe human resource incompatibility faced by florists in the operation of SMM. In general, enterprises are more likely to adopt SMM, as it is more compatible with their resources or marketing goals [9,11]. This study has found that the florists experienced severe labor shortages in the operation of their brand pages. The florists are aware of the importance of cooperating with social media in their retail businesses and have opened brand pages on social media to put this into practice. However, the operation of brand pages quite often surpasses the workload that the florists can handle based on the current size of their labor force, thereby increasing the difficulty that florists face in managing their shops' existing administrative workload. That is to say, there is an incompatibility between the use of social media and existing labor forces in florists' current SMM practices. The shortage of labor in general seems to pervade the whole of

the flower retailing industry with regards to the implementation of SMM. For example, among ornamental horticulture businesses, the lack of time was one of the top two reasons to prevent non-social media businesses from incorporating social media into their businesses [19].

The aforementioned problems seem to be very common among florists engaging in SMM. However, previous studies have shown that these problems may vary with the size of businesses. For example, Peterson et al. [19] studied the trends of new media marketing in US ornamental horticulture industries, including nurseries, garden-center businesses, and landscape businesses, and found that, although smaller businesses invested less time in social media, they were more likely to believe in social media's value "to improve sales" and "to increase customer traffic into the store". The respondents attached the lowest value to social media as a means "to learn about the marketplace". Meanwhile, larger businesses were more likely to see social media as an instrument to convey their messages to users and to increase two-way interactions with consumers. To compare with US businesses in ornamental horticulture, florists in Taiwan are less likely to see social media as a tool to foster a virtual consumer community. This is probably because most of the florist shops interviewed were small in size, family-owned, and had less than five full-time employees, so they were less likely to allocate time and labor in running social media as a consumer community, instead of being more likely to treat social media as a platform to increase sales [19]. US ornamental businesses are also less likely to treat social media as a means "to learn about the marketplace" [19].

This study investigated the status quo of florists' implementation of SMM and found that, with limited human resources, the florists could not afford to have someone specializing in producing and managing posts in the management of their brand pages and further enhancing the effectiveness of SMM. Consequently, the flower shop owners experienced difficulty in regard to producing comprehensive plans to utilize social media effectively or to enhance consumer engagement with their Facebook pages. Social linkage and a sense of belonging are the key for successful SMM, since they incubate trust between users [41–43]. Future research should focus on the issues regarding resource compatibility and the factors driving consumer engagement with florists' social media-based brand pages, from which the findings can help the floral industry lift the barriers to social media adoption.

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