

# Conceptual Framework of the Social Media Adoption and Its Impact on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) Service Performance in UAE

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## Abstract

Through social media technologies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can communicate information and respond to competitors with minimal cost. The ability to share and access information can affect SMEs' performance, but there is little research on the link between social media adoption and their small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) service performance. The objective of this paper is to present a conceptual framework for social media adoption and assess its impact on the service performance of SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

**Keywords:** Social media adoption, Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), service performance,

## 1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 95 percent of private businesses in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and employ 86 percent of the workforce (Ahmad et al., 2018). Given the UAE's emphasis on SMEs, it would be advantageous to gain a better understanding of how these businesses utilise technology, specifically social media (Ahmad et al., 2018). Many SMEs in the UAE lack the knowledge and expertise necessary to effectively market their goods and services and to build a customer base large enough to sustain growth. Furthermore, they do not have the financial resources to hire outside marketing assistance. Businesses can connect with their customers more quickly and easily by using social media, a low-cost and tried-and-true innovation (Ahmad et al., 2018). Despite the region's increased use of social media, concerns about online privacy remain a major source of concern (Reyae and Ahmed, 2017). In the United Arab Emirates, the SME sector is significant, accounting for 95% of all private businesses and employing 86% of the workforce (Ahmad et al., 2018). It would be advantageous to gain a more strategic understanding of how SMEs in the UAE use social media (Ahmad et al., 2018). To ensure long-term viability and growth, SMEs in the UAE lack the ability to market their products or

services effectively and to acquire a sufficient number of customers. Additionally, they lack the financial resources to hire outside marketing assistance. Businesses can connect more quickly and easily with their customers by utilising social media, a low-cost and time-tested innovation (Ahmad et al., 2018). Despite the dramatic increase in social media use in this region, concerns about online privacy continue to be a major source of concern (Reyae and Ahmed, 2017).

Prior research has primarily concentrated on business-to-consumer (B2C) social media usage. Meske and Stieglitz (2018), for instance, examined the influence of social media on customer purchasing behaviour, brand recognition, and customer feedback (Siamagka et al., 2015), as well as data collection for market research (Rapp et al., 2018). Despite their growing prominence and relative benefits, few studies have examined how small businesses use or select social media channels (Kietzmann et al., 2017; Chang et al. 2016). Few studies have been conducted on the use of social media to enhance business management and, more precisely, business performance (Ainin et al., 2015). While social media adoption by SMEs has been extensively studied (Ainin et al., 2015), little is known about how it

affects service performance in the Middle East, particularly the UAE.

The TOE model was chosen by the author for this study because it focuses on the environmental context of SMEs. Past studies have shown that the TOE framework better explains the diffusion of internal innovation (e.g., Hsu et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2010). The interaction of technological, organisational, and environmental factors influencing social media adoption is depicted in Figure 2.1. A variety of factors can have an influence on SMEs, including: (Parveen, 2012). Technological properties such as relative advantage and compatibility were derived using the DOI theory. Observability and trialability were included in this list. Top management endorsed decisions regarding social media adoption. The TOE framework defines competitive intensity and competitive pressure. The influence of social media adoption on the service performance of SMEs in the UAE is investigated using the TOE framework.

Businesses of all sizes are reaping the benefits of the rise in popularity and use of social media, but SMEs are still lagging behind in their adoption of this new technology. SMEs are ranked at the bottom of the competitive world when it comes to profits, mainly due to their lack of use of social media in their business activities, marketing and advertising campaigns. This is an alarming trend that needs to change. Social media adoption and its

influence on SME service performance in the UAE has been largely overlooked in existing research. Businesses in SMEs are urgently in need of implementing social media best practises in a way that will help them better serve customers, thus increasing their service performance. Businesses like the UAE's SME sector have an important role to play in a country's economic and societal development. Consequently, this study is designed to fill in the theoretical and practical gaps in the existing literature on social media adoption by empirically investigating the relationship between social media adoption and the service performance of SMEs in the UAE.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. SMEs and social media adoption

People perceive and use social media in different ways, so it has multiple definitions (Kietzmann et al., 2017). We used Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) comprehensive definition. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), it is a set of web-based applications that allow users to create and share their own content. Effective use of social media can improve many business activities. In both developing and developed countries, SMEs using social media perform better. Comparisons of social media use by SMEs in developed countries and developing countries can be difficult. The challenges facing SMEs in developed and developing countries are different (Dewan and Kraemer, 2000).

Table 1: A summary of this literature is provided

Authors	Model	Title	Relationship
Ahmad et al. (2018)	Word of mouth, viral marketing and social presence theory	Reflections of entrepreneurs of small and mediumsized enterprises concerning the adoption of social media and its impact on performance outcomes: evidence from the UAE	Positive
Bakri (2017)	Integrated model	The impact of social media adoption on competitive advantage in the small and medium enterprises	No impact

Ainin et al. (2015)	Diffusion of innovation (DOI)	Factors influencing the use of social media by SMEs and its performance outcomes	Positive
McCann and Barlow (2015)	Grounded	Use and measurement of social media for SMEs	Positive
Trainor et al. (2014) RBV and CBP	RBV and CBP	Social media technology usage and customer relationship performance: a capabilities-based examination of social CRM	No impact
Parveen et al. (2014)	Grounded	Social media usage and organizational performance: reflections of Malaysian social media managers	Positive
He (2018)	Grounded	Is social media a fad? A study of the adoption and use of social media in SMEs	Positive
Rapp et al., (2018)	TOE	Social media readiness in small businesses	Positive
Jagongo and Kinyua (2013)	Grounded	The social media and entrepreneurship growth	
Derham et al.(2016)	Grounded	Creating value: an SME and social media	Positive
Musteen et al. (2018)	Grounded	The influence of international networks on internationalization speed and performance: a study of Czech SMEs	Positive
Zhou et al. (2016)	Grounded	Internationalization and the performance of bornglobal SMEs: the mediating role of social networks	Positive

It's important to note that the data in Table I does not represent all studies on the influence of social media adoption on business performance. Only three of the seven SMEs in Table 2.1 dealt specifically with SMEs. Studies have examined how various industries use social media, with most of them employing one of two primary models: the TOE framework

(Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990) or the diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory. As a result, both look at how and why new technology and ideas are adopted by different people, as well as how quickly they do so (Rogers, 2003). As a result, they take environmental factors into account, such as the characteristics of the industry. Adoption is

linked to the company's technological, organizational, and environmental characteristics. This provides an overall picture of the factors influencing the adoption of new technologies.

## **2.2. Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) characteristics**

This study focused on a few key factors thought to be important in understanding TOE implementation. The model assumes that nine determinants influence company adoption of TOE technology. The study's goal was to identify factors that can predict a firm's category (i.e., adopter or non-adopter of TOE technology). The model assumes that nine determinants influence company adoption of TOE technology. We didn't look into the relationships between the nine factors because the study's goal was to identify factors that predict TOE adoption.

### **2.2.1 Technological (T) context**

Describes both existing and new technologies relevant to the firm such as prior technology usage and number of computers in the firm which determines the ability of the firm to move to e-commerce and other technology initiatives (Ahmad et al. 2018; Wang et al, 2010). Rogers identified five technological characteristics as antecedents to any adoption decision: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Ahmad et al. 2018). Parveen, (2012) directly excluded the trialability and observability constructs in their research models. Therefore, three technological characteristics – complexity, compatibility and observability are included in the model.

### **2.2.2 Organizational (O) context**

Refers to descriptive measures related to organizations such as firm scope, firm size and managerial beliefs (Ahmad et al. 2018). Rogers identified five technological characteristics as antecedents to any adoption decision: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Ahmad et al. 2018).

### **2.2.3 Environmental (E) context**

External factors that have a significant impact on the industry and the firm such as government incentives and regulations are given priority

over internal factors in areas where the firm conducts business operations (Ahmad et al. 2018).

## **2.3 Service Performance**

Service performance is to make the company have the ability to create and distribute to maintain long-term business performance. Sun Ying thinks that service performance is the ability of enterprises to develop new services or improve the existing services to meet the needs of enterprises themselves, suppliers, customers and internal staff and other stakeholders in order to maintain the competitive edge of the enterprise (Wang, 2010). For long-term success, a company must be able to manufacture and sell its own goods and services. Service performance is an organization's ability to develop new or improved services that better meet the needs of customers, suppliers, employees, and others (Rapp et al., 2018). Understanding what drives service innovation, a good place is to start. Service innovation flow design and completion situation (Wang, 2010).

## **3. Theory of the Research**

These theories have enabled the recent development of a more meaningful understanding of the relationship between social media and competitive advantage. These theories have enabled the recent development of a more meaningful understanding of the relationship between social media and competitive advantage. By applying its productive resources most effectively, a company's ability to gain a competitive advantage is determined by the theory of resource-based view (Barney, 2001). According to this theory (Barney, 2001), competitive advantage and superior performance can only be achieved through a company's unique resources and capabilities. SMEs are viewed through the lens of a resource-based perspective (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018). Resources in the SME industry include physical and human resources (building exterior and interior design as well as location, facilities, and finances), as well as organisational resources (culture, business processes and strategies, information technology, and knowledge sharing) (Reyae and Ahmed, 2017; Maduku et al., 2016). A variety of resources contribute to travel-related

businesses' value-creation strategies (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018). Capabilities, on the other hand, refer to a company's ability to maximise its resources and assets. In this regard, social media allows companies to maximise the value of their IT and networking resources (Trainor et al., 2014). Organizational performance in SMEs can be enhanced by knowledge gained through networking activities (Maduku et al., 2016). Firms and customers benefit greatly from the exchange of information made possible by social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Rapp et al., 2018). Social media has a significant impact on SME customers' purchasing and decision-making behaviours (Zhou et al., 2016). Through its internet-based resource capability, social media provides businesses with synergies and complementarity with other resources (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018).

#### 4. Development of hypotheses

Because of its focus on the three key contexts of SMEs, the author determined that the TOE model was the appropriate theoretical foundation for this study. Previous studies have shown that the TOE framework is better able to explain the diffusion of innovation within companies (e.g., Hsu et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2010). Figure 2.1 depicts the interplay between technological characteristics (TC), organisational characteristics (OC), and environmental characteristics (EC) as determinants of social media adoption. SME can be influenced by a variety of factors (Parveen, 2012). There were TCs such as relative advantage and compatibility that were derived from the DOI theory. Observability and trialability were also included in these characteristics. Top management support for social media adoption decisions was OC. In terms of the TOE framework, competitive intensity, and competitive pressure are all defined. The framework used to construct the four research hypotheses contains nine constructs across the three domains.

##### 4.1. Technological characteristics and social media adoption

Rogers defines innovation in terms of five technological features (2003). A relative advantage is the degree to which potential users believe an innovation is superior to alternatives. Are there any compatibility issues? If an innovation is difficult to use or if the results

cannot be observed by others, the term "complexity" is used (i.e., whether other organisations and individuals can see that the technology has helped). Trialability refers to the ease of testing an innovation. Relative advantage is one of the most reliable predictors of adoption in DOI theory. In mobile technology and electronic payment systems, observeability and trialability had little impact on technology adoption (Plouffe, 2001; Teo and Pok, 2003; and Plouffe et al., 2001). It was decided to include these aspects in the research because they are easily observable, easily spread through viral marketing and referrals, and they are also completely free to stop. Thus,

**H1.** Technology will have a positive effect on SMEs Social Media adoption.

##### 4.2. Organizational characteristics and social media adoption

The administrative characteristics of the company are known as the "organizational context." Employee networks and relationships, as well as staffing and management issues, are also part of this issue (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990). As a proxy for the entire organisational context, this study relied on the support of social media owners and managers. An SME's overall social media strategy and the company's approach to rewarding innovation are both enhanced by social media. To foster an environment conducive to technology adoption and to providing adequate resources, top-level management support is critical (Lin, 2014). According to previous research, organisational adoption of new technology is highly dependent on top-level management support (Ahmad et al., 2018; Maduku et al., 2016). This leads us to our second hypothesis.

**H2.** Organizational will have a positive effect on SMEs Social Media adoption.

##### 4.3. Environmental characteristics and social media adoption

The climate in which the organisation operates has an impact on environmental factors. Studies have looked at the industry's structure, suppliers, and oversight bodies (Tornatzky and Fleischer, 1990). The threat of losing a competitive advantage causes a high level of competitive intensity (Zhu et al., 2003). According to Porter and Millar (1985), firms can alter the structure of their industry through

the adoption of new technologies. It's possible that this will alter the way competition works in the industry, which would give the adopter an advantage. Therefore, the third hypothesis of the study is:

**H3.** Environmental will have a positive effect on SMEs Social Media adoption.

#### **4.4. Impact of social media on service performance**

For businesses in the digital world, social media has a significant impact on customer service and relationship building. A whole slew of Web 2.0 applications like blogs and forums, as well as social networking sites, as well as product or service review sites, are examples of social media. User-generated content can be created and shared through social media. As a result of this, Becker et al. (2012) argue that SMEs use social media as an interrelated set of strategic resources to achieve superior performance.

According to the authors, SME performance is linked to social media adoption because of a resource-based view of business (2019). The exchange of knowledge between businesses and their stakeholders is facilitated by these platforms (Mustkibil, 2019). According to Cao et al. (2018), management researchers acknowledge the importance of SM use for organisations. For the most part, academics should concentrate on how social media aids the co-creation of new knowledge by researchers (Dias Canedo et al., 2020).

Third, social media adoption has been shown to have a positive impact on a company's performance in a few research studies (Cao et al., 2018; Dias Canedo et al., 2020). Despite this, the operationalization of a company's performance has been different in many of these studies. According to these studies, additional context evidence is needed to support the use of social media in the context of improving a company's performance. Particularly in the development context, there is a lack of evidence. Further study into the relationship between social media adoption and company performance is also recommended, according to the authors.

The influence of social media adoption on SMEs needs to be studied further. This means that only a very small amount of data that is not based on long-term studies is available. If you want to better understand the link between social media adoption and SME

performance, we recommend taking a longer-term view. A time-lag approach is used in this study to gather more reliable empirical evidence. This study's findings support the following hypothesis:

**H4.** The SMEs Social Media adoption will have a positive effect on service performance.

#### **4.5. The mediating effect of social media adoption**

Instead of focusing on a single customer, "service failures and recovery strategies" are increasingly being defined in terms of global web quality. The motivations for using social media have been extensively studied by a wide range of researchers. This study looks at social media as a tool for SMEs. Studies show that technology can improve business efficiency (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Others have discovered a link between corporate social media adoption and business performance (Manfreda et al., 2017). Lin (2014) says that social media benefits customer-facing activities and sales. According to Meske and Stieglitz (2018), an organization's social capital is positively influenced by its adoption of social media, which in turn influences its results. According to a study (Mustkibil, 2019), social media helped SME businesses increase their sales. With regards to business, social media has the potential to have a major impact (Li et al. 2020).

For example, Nunnally (2009) and Mustkibil (2019) have both used communication skills as a mediator between SMEs and the performance of social media (Li. et al., 2020). According to the findings of this study and other similar ones, social media acts as a mediator between TOE characteristics and SME performance, in addition to having direct effects on SME performance (Li. et al., 2020). In a customer-based review study, Wang et al. (2010) found that social media experience was a useful mediator between behavioural intention and user motivation. It was shown that social can play a role in SMEs' online service failures and recovery strategies. D'Attoma, and Ieva, further strengthen the mediation role of social media motives between trait emotional intelligence and problematic social media use among Turkish State University students (2020). Segmentation is an effective method for developing hypotheses about the role of SM adoption in mediating the relationship between

TOE constructs and SME performance (D'Attoma and Ieva, 2020). Thus:

**H5:** The adoption of social media mediates the relationship between technology characteristics and service performance.

**H6:** The adoption of social media mediates the relationship between the organizational characteristics and service performance.

**H7:** The adoption of social media mediates the relationship between the environment characteristics and service performance.

## 5. Research Gap

The decline in oil prices has left only a few Arab countries with government-backed knowledge management programmes to help them transition from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. In the World Bank's Knowledge Economy Index, the UAE ranks first in the Arab world and 42nd globally (Nelson, 2018). As a result, the United Arab

Emirates provides an ideal setting for examining the impact of social media on public sector organisations at the federal, state, and semi-government levels (Ahmad et al., 2018).

## 6. The Conceptual Framework Proposed for the Research

Figure 1 depicts a conceptual framework derived from the above literature review. In the previous section, we briefly discussed these practises. This section discusses the use of social media by SMEs as well as their performance in the fields of technology, organisations, and the environment. In the research model, the adoption of social media by SMEs is viewed as an independent variable, while the quality of their service is viewed as a dependent variable in the research. This design was inspired by Wang et al., (2010) and Ahmad et al., (2018).

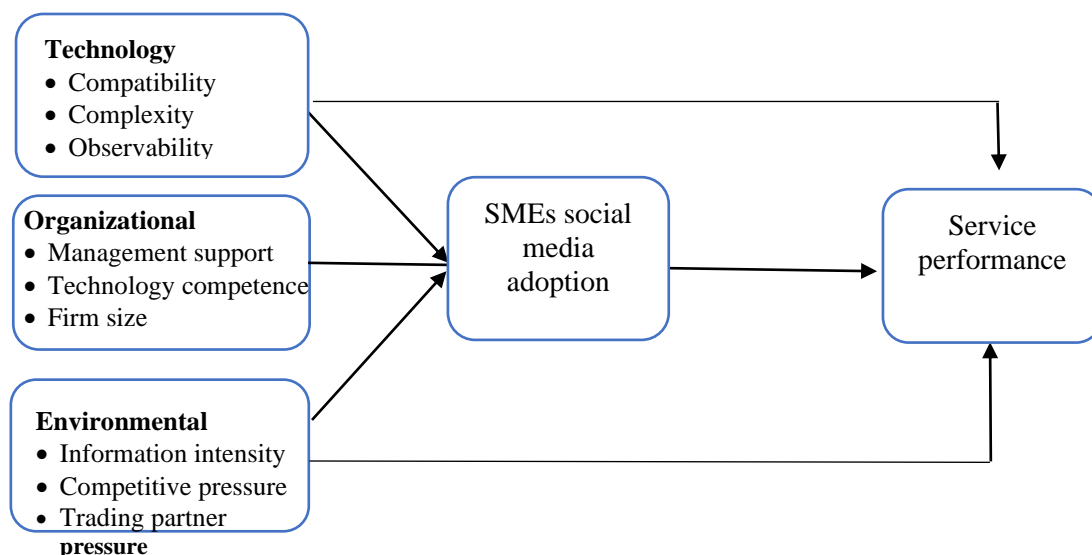


Figure 1. Research Framework

SME social media adoption (technological, organizational, and environmental constructs) and service performance are depicted in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows a conceptual framework that incorporates all these elements and the research objectives. The research objectives prompted the identification of five theoretical constructs that were used in the development of this conceptual framework.

## 7. Discussion

As a technology with a direct connection to consumers, social media, these findings are all

the more compelling. Previous studies have looked at how various technologies, such as e-commerce and cloud computing, have improved the efficiency of organisations and their internal processes. Because of this, the impact of social media on businesses is difficult to predict. SME social media use was not influenced by technological constructs. When it comes to small and medium-sized businesses' adoption of new technology, there is no clear answer in the literature. An ERP system adoption decision in SMEs is more likely to be influenced by internal rather than external

factors (Mustkbil, 2019). SM, on the other hand, is not likely to adhere to this rule because it is geared toward the end user.

Businesses are expected to adopt new technologies primarily because of the advantages they provide (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018). It is based on the firm's knowledge and understanding of the subject rather than its actuality (Wang and Wang, 2010). Social media can have a positive impact on the bottom line for many SMBs (McCann and Barlow, 2015), but they didn't have any proof and weren't aware of the extent of this benefit.

Similarly, Meske and Stieglitz (2018) found a significant association between complexity and a desire to use social media. The perceived complexity of RFID and Taiwanese retailers' intent to adopt it strongly correlate. This correlation may be explained by respondents' lack of familiarity with certain social media tools. Trialability and observability had no impact on social media adoption. Trialability and observability are strongly linked to e-commerce adoption intentions (Mustkbil, 2019). (Mustkbil, 2019). Lin (2014) This study's lack of trialability may be because social media can be adopted without a significant financial investment, lowering the risk of use. Due to the use of social media by UAE SMEs, there may no longer be any noticeable effect of other SMEs using social media. (Wang et al., 2010). Prior research has shown that top-level management support for technology adoption is critical. in line with previous research on small businesses (Ahmad et al., 2018; McCann and Barlow, 2015). According to the findings of this study, SMEs are required to use social media technology in tactical or marketing activities.

For example, in this case, the goal of social media adoption should be used as a metric of success (McCann and Barlow, 2015). As Wang and Wang (2010) point out, the question isn't whether to blog or tweet, but rather what goals need to be achieved, as well as which tools and metrics will be most effective in accomplishing them. Businesses need a strategy for using social media, as well as a clear understanding of why they're using it and how it can help them achieve their goals (Stockdale et al., 2012). This argument echoes that of Blanchard (2011). Social media can help businesses achieve their goals if used as a tool rather than a substitute.

## 8. Conclusion

This study conceptualised the adoption of social media by SMEs in the UAE. The review shows that the adoption of social media by the study organisations had little effect on service quality. This could be since many businesses have jumped on social media because of market pressure to do so. Adoption is therefore unplanned and unrelated to the organization's strategy or goals. As a result, many businesses may have overlooked the potential benefits (Meske and Stieglitz, 2018; Wamba and Carter, 2014). This study's review may serve as a foundation for future social media research. It would be interesting to know whether firms whose strategy influenced the adoption of social media applications saw stronger effects on service performance. In addition, the results therefore represent a snapshot in time, but the effects of social media adoption may not be static. Future research should consider a longitudinal study to examine effects over time, perhaps as expertise develops.

## 9. Limitations and future research

Companies that may be more active on social media, such as restaurants, fashion retailers, and travel agencies, should be examined for their social media use. Social media adoption and firm strategy did not appear to be linked in the study. It would be interesting to see if companies with a social media strategy had a greater impact on service quality.

## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka UTeM for their direct and indirect contributions.

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