Investigating the Antecedents and Impact of Social Media Usage on the Performance of Women-owned SMEs in Pakistan

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Abstract

Although the nature of Social Media (SM) marketing is thriving, the nuances and impacts between women-owned Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) seem to be poorly studied in the literature. The objective of the current study is to improve and expand the understanding of the Performance Benefits (PB) and motivations of SM accumulated by women-owned SMEs through empirical studies of emerging economies. This employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique on the data collected through a structured questionnaire from Pakistani SMEs owned by women. By employing the online survey method, 253 valid responses were recorded and examined in this paper to measure the motivation of SM use to get the highest PB. The current study finds that interaction, compatibility, and cost-effectiveness are the predictors affecting the use of SM, thus enabling SMEs to achieve certain performance benefits. These findings provide evidence for potential research and management interest issues and have profound implications for academia and the practitioner community. Clearly, despite some usage blocks, women-owned SMEs in developing economies appear to be gaining increased SM benefits by implementing marketing strategies across multiple platforms.

Keywords: Developing economies; Small and Medium Enterprises; Social media; Women entrepreneur

Introduction

The progress of Information Technology (IT) leads to the explosion of revolutionary business (Ostrom *et al.*, 2015). In recent years, SM and social networking sites have become the pioneer platforms for enterprises to establish and manage transactions and related activities (Mohd Hisham *et al.*, 2017), and brand management and communications (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Therefore, the booming of this phenomenon requires more research at multiple business levels, departments, and environments to study the adoption, use, strategies, and results of SM to develop theories (Ratchford, 2015). From the perspective of two companies (Ainin *et al.*, 2015; McCann & Barlow, 2015) and the perspective of consumers (Dessart *et al.*, 2015), a large number of empirical studies on SM topics are available from the literature. For example Zeng and

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Gerritsen (2014) and Knoll (2016) duly conducted a systematic review of this booming concept. Despite its growing acceptance, literature suffers from three major flaws.

First of all, there are differences in existing studies, and conclusions based on background differences are usually not clear (Knoll, 2016). Therefore, the need for further research into the nuances of SM use may be endless, especially in the business world, where the use of these nuances is booming. Second, from the perspective of SMEs, there is little evidence on this subject, particularly from emerging economies (Ainin *et al.*, 2015). Third, a careful study of the SM marketing literature shows that European, Asian, and American works dominate, while South Asian representation is small (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Recent studies have concluded that the application of IT is specifically appropriate for SMEs because of its attractive features including cost efficiencies, minimal participation barrier, and optimal IT-based skills required for usage (Durkin *et al.*, 2014; Toole, 2011).

In an emerging country such as Pakistan, for example, most SMEs do not have enough resources to compete in the higher market space of foreign enterprises. In addition, the media consumption of Pakistani consumers has also changed, and SM is known as a major platform for strategic communication used by many companies to conduct information and interactive activities (Pathan *et al.*, 2017). The organization of the rest of the article is as follows. The coming section will discuss the theoretical background, the review of literature, research models, and hypotheses. The methodology of this study also includes the results, analysis, and discussion. In the end, this paper gives some enlightenment to theory and practice and provides some approaches for future research.

Theoretical Context and Hypotheses Development

Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory supports the procedure of innovation dispersion within an organization or between people over time, which can lead to the adoption of innovation for multiple purposes (Abduljalil & Zainuddin, 2015; Rogers, 1976). Innovations in this area can take the form of products, services, ideas, information, or what people consider to be new practices (Rogers, 2003). In general, organizations can think of innovation as something new in its application, but not necessarily something new based on the date the project was created (Newby *et al.*, 2014; Odoom *et al.*, 2017). As per followers of this theory, this innovation is categorized by a comparative advantage over existing approaches, easy to understand and observe results, the aptitude to be strained by potential users, and compatibility with prevailing standards, practices, and desires. Investigations on the adoption and use of technological innovation usually tend to come from the DOI theory (Chong & Chan, 2012; Mohammed *et al.*, 2017).

Relying on its potential, advocated in traditional media, regarded SM as an internet-based technology, and the basic characteristics of this theory are no exception (Komulainen *et al.*, 2007). As a corporate support system with multiple reasons and different results under different backgrounds, we believe that the use of SM is a technical innovation that needs to be communicated and coordinated with the marketing actions of organizations. Therefore, according to Safko (2013), he defines the concept of SM as "*an extension of traditional media, which adopts a more complex set of tools, technologies, and techniques for connection, relationship building, and social interaction*". Therefore, the expansion of marketing activities on SM platforms adds new content to the existing traditional media of enterprises.

Antecedents for the Adoption and Use of Social Media

SM supports many organizations to carry out a business around the world (Chen *et al.*, 2008). As per the report of eMarketer (2017), by the end of 2021, about 3.02 billion people around the world's internet users will have access to social networking sites. Other reports show that over 1.3 billion Internet users watch videos on YouTube every month (Dogtiev, 2019). At the corporate level, SM use by Fortune 500 organizations flattered in 2018 (Barnes *et al.*, 2019), with 91% of corporate users using Twitter, 89% of corporate users using Facebook, and 77% corporate users using YouTube. There is evidence that these numbers are rising every year. This continuous growth means the long-term trend and/or norms of SM use by enterprises (and personal brands). Therefore, SM has become a promising podium for enterprises and customers to trade and connect in a beneficial and commonly valued way (Odoom *et al.*, 2017).

SM, identified as "user-generated communication", has revolutionized the strategies and tools used by multiple firms (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011) to communicate with customers, who have a strong influence on information control. The literature contains a considerable amount of studies about SM from both consumers' viewpoints (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2017) and the firm's viewpoints (Odoom *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, many companies create interactive brand communities by providing services and links on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms, and thus interact through these tools. As a tool for companies to sustain the existing system of business in innovative ways, the propagation of SM in its adoption, use, and consequences can be described by the principles of the theory of DOI. As per Ainin *et al*. (2015), the study investigated two SM platforms (Facebook and Twitter) and specified that current reports submitted imply that they are rated as the top media used by companies and people (Aladwani, 2015).

Interactivity

The study of Liu and Shrum (2002) defines interactivity as "*the degree to which two or more communicators can interact, in the communication medium, and the*

synchronization of information with these effects". The "social" setting of SM underlines communication at the person/interpersonal or inter-group level (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2012), which usually entails a certain degree of response, especially from enterprises. In such cases, it is imperative to respond immediately and to some extent, communication is similar to human dialogue (Li *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, virtual existence requires real-time and synchronous communication and interaction with consumers, as well as effective collaboration (Elaluf-Calderwood *et al.*, 2005).

Moreover, it is not enough to have only one SM; however, some think this should be complemented by customer interaction (Lovejoy *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, it is pointed out that accidental interaction functions such as responses and references permit an organization to interact with its consumers. Interactivity eventually brims the gap between time and geography (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011) and becomes a key consideration in the adoption of SM. Accordingly, the hypothesis is as follows:

H₁: Interactivity has a significant positive influence on SM usage

Cost-effectiveness

According to Fisher (2009), among the recent frequent marketing manager verdicts, there is pressure to prove that people prefer online communication than to the use of traditional advertising ways. Factually, marketing expenses in the delivery of information have been paid for in cash and are often seen as high fees (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). However, there are many free or low-cost methods that can be used excellently. Moreover, it is possible to generate target groups at a relatively low cost through SM (Dong-Hun, 2010) and to spread organized advertising and promotional activities to these groups.

In addition to relatively inexpensive platforms, SM can effectively extend collective content sharing to a huge number of users athwart geographic detachments (Korda & Itani, 2013). Reaching potential customers through traditional media can be costlier. Therefore, enterprises can now effectively attract and contact customers in numerous ways through innovative strategic brand communication that does not need high-priced media spending and ingenuity (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, we formulated as follows:

H₂: Cost-effectiveness has a significant positive influence on SM usage

Compatibility

Very intensely, the conclusions drawn from experiential studies evaluating the structure of new technology compatibility have both optimistic and pessimistic consequences. Ramdani and Kawalek (2009) find, for example, that compatibility is a trivial aspect in organizational system adoption. Moreover, Low, Chen, and Wu (2011) also concluded that compatibility had little effect on cloud adoption. However, other

studies (Ainin *et al.*, 2015; Brown & Russell, 2007; Hsu *et al.*, 2007; Odoom *et al.*, 2017; Pathan *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2010) also provide evidence to the contrary, showing a positive relationship between compatibility as a pre-cause of adoption/use of technological innovation. This type of work seems to indicate that companies are more prone to reflect the adoption and use of SM constructed on their compatibility along with corporate standards and objectives (Ainin *et al.*, 2015). While the results of the existing studies are not convincing in relation, we hypothesize a positive correlation, because, in the context of SMEs, it is more likely to describe arguments that favor inter-firm adoption/use of SM compatibility. Thus, the following hypothesis was postulated:

H$_3$: Compatibility has a significant direct effect on SM usage

The Usage and Benefits of Social Media

In line with the uses and satisfaction theory, media users are consistently vigorous, goal-oriented, and often driven to pick the medium that perfectly meets their requirements (Roy, 2009). Therefore, continuous use of explicit media is premised on meeting these needs, usually represented by user satisfaction. According to (Burton-Jones & Gallivan, 2017), we have adopted a system-centric technique to the use of SM in our current research. SM researchers list some of the uses most company's usage for SM. Notably, appealing new customers, calming relations, raising consciousness, cooperating brands online, and getting a response from consumers and business customers (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). Circumstantial evidence suggests that these measures are applied when businesses generate communities, allocate content (Gautam, 2016) and upsurge traffic to their websites to seek novel corporate prospects and establish positive relations with prevailing and potential customers (eMarketer, 2017).

Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H$_4$: SM usage has a significant direct influence on the PB attained by firms

Based on the discussed literature, this research formulated the conceptual framework of the research hypothesis, showed in Figure 1.
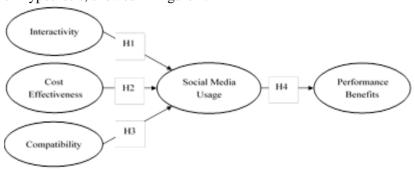

Fig. 1: *Research Model*

Methodology

Research Design and Instrument

Rather than a qualitative approach, current research employed a structured survey as a quantitative approach of research. This study used this technique for the measurement of the original statistical results of hypotheses developed through collected data (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The survey contained two portions, demographic information, and constructs of interest. The demographic portion collects the profile/bio-information of the organization including the size of organization in terms of human resources, nature of the product offered, and business age in terms of the number of years. While the constructs of interest portion collected the information about the variable of the hypotheses including INT, SMU, CE, COMP, and PB. Likert scale (Seven-point) was utilized to measure the constructs anchored with "7 = very likely" to "1 = not at all". The current study uses an already established construct and modifies according to the requirement. CE was measure through 3 items adapted from the study of Ainin *et al.* (2015). Construct of the variable INT (3 items) were adopted form the studies of Ainin *et al.* (2015), and Kietzmann *et al.* (2012). Four items were used for the measurement of compatibility (COMP) adopted from the literature (Chong & Chan, 2012; Teo & Pian, 2003), while 6 items were adopted from the studies of McCann and Barlow (2015) and Michaelidou *et al.* (2011) for the measurement of SM usage. This research used 3 items to measure the construct of PB extracted from the research of Ainin *et al.* (2015). Purification and scale generation process was implied to refine the scale as proposed by the literature (DeVellis, 1991; Flynn & Pearcy, 2018; King *et al.*, 2012), specifically performing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This research utilized the Partial Least Squares (PLS) based on the SEM for the evaluation of hypotheses because of the exploratory nature of our research through AMOS 23 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981b; Hair *et al.*, 2010). This type of measurement method enables researchers to control the errors of measurement, apply multiple relationship analysis, and make available the information of model fitness (Byrne, 2013).

Sampling Technique

SMEs were selected from the database of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select the firms that were using Twitter and Facebook actively for their business. They were contacted via phone and email obtained from their profile information available at the SMEDA database. Content and face validity of the research instrument was carried out using academic experts and specialized consultants form SM (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Questionnaire administration was conducted from two levels of company employees including CEO (fill the organizational profile section) and marketing officer (the same

person is handling SM filled the prognosticator and outcome measures) to decrease the common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012).

The perceptual response was taken from organizations in the questionnaire related to PB because objective financial data was unreliable, unavailable, and complicated to crossmatch in many cases (Woodcock *et al.*, 2007). Former researchers recognized this method reliable to generate fruitful results that are in line with objective measures (Ainin *et al.*, 2015). Researchers had contacted 275 SMEs and get a response from 261 organizations. Because of incomplete responses of 8 organizations they were dropped. Therefore, the current study performed the analysis of the measurement model on the sample of 253 SMEs, which is sufficient for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

This section discussed the results of the empirical analysis performed to test the study hypotheses based on data collected from women-owned SMEs working in Pakistan. Table 1 describes the demographics of the respondents. The results showed that 80.6% of respondent firms are offering goods while 19.4% are providing services. 23.3% of the firms are less than 5 years of its establishment. 59.7% of firms have the experience of doing business for around 6 to 10 years, while overall, 17% of the firms have the age of more than 11 years. Regarding the size of the firms based on human capital, 22.5% of the respondent's firms have less than 20 employees, 32.8% have 21 to 40 employees, 36% of the firms having 41 to 60 employees, and only 8.7% of the respondent firms have 61 to 80 employees.

Table 1: *Demographics of Respondents*

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nature of product offered	Goods	204	80.6
	Services	49	19.4
	Total	253	100.0
Firm Age	1 to 5 years	59	23.3
	6 to 10 years	151	59.7
	11 to 15 years	33	13.0
	Above 15 years	10	4.0
	Total	253	100.0
Firm Size	Less than 20 employees	57	22.5
	21 to 40	83	32.8
	41 to 60	91	36.0
	61 to 80	22	8.7
	Total	253	100.0

Measurement Model

The reliability of measurement items is evaluated by checking the corresponding structural loads and internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Outcomes from

Table 2 showed loadings ranging from .773 to .857 and the values of Cronbach's alpha between .895 and .948. CFA was applied to test the good fitness of the measurement model as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010). The value of CMIN/DF is 2.06, CFI is .96, SRMR is .034 and RMSEA is .065. All CFA indicators surpassed the threshold values and were in good fit with the collected data. For our sample, the factor loadings are significant, which supports the convergence validity of the measures. Meanwhile, the Copositive Reliability (CR) and values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are also describing that there is no issue of convergent validity and reliability.

Table 2: *Results of Factor Loadings, Convergent Validity, and Reliability*

SR	Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
1	Interactivity	INT1	.857			
		INT2	.845	.920	.921	.795
		INT3	.870			
2	Cost-effectiveness	CE1	.893			
		CE2	.8660.85	.932	.934	.825
		CE3	7			
3	Compatibility	COMP1	.834			
		COMP2	.851	.895	.895	.682
		COMP3	.811			
		COMP4	.824			
4	Social media usage	SMU1	.838			
		SMU2	.818			
		SMU3	.773	.948	.948	.753
		SMU4	.780			
		SMU5	.841			
		SMU6	.810			
5	Performance benefits	PB1	.862			
		PB2	.851	.915	.916	.784
		PB3	.846			

The results from Table 3 describe the inter-construct correlations and discriminant validity of the measurement model. The diagonal values show the square root of AVE which is greater than the values of inter-construct correlations. The outcomes confirmed that there is no issue of discriminant validity (a sign that the structures are different from each other) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the data can be used for further structural analysis.

Table 3: *Inter-Construct Correlations and Discriminant Validity*

	SMU	COMP	CE	PB	INT
SMU	.868				
COMP	.513***	.826			
CE	.535***	.332***	.909		
PB	.563***	.413***	.483***	.885	
INT	.570***	.415***	.427***	.413***	.892

*Significant at: * p < .05, ** p <.01, *** p<.001. Inclined lines rendered in Boldface show the Square Root of the AVE*

Structural Model

After the confirmation of the validity and reliability of the collected data, the structural model was applied to evaluate the hypotheses of the study. The parameter estimations shown in Table 4 and Fig 2 show the overall results, which describe the outcome of the research and conform to the earlier assumptions. The fitness of the structural model was also measured as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The results of CMIN/DF are 2.987, CFI is 0.942, NFI=.917 and RMSEA is .059 showing the good fitness of the structural model.
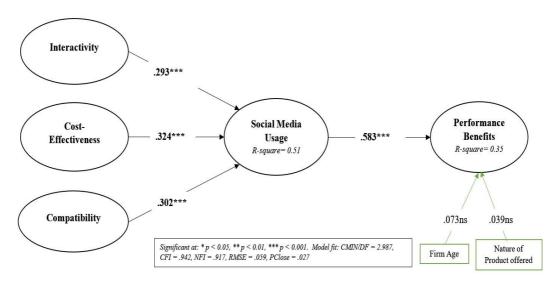

Fig. 2: *SEM Results for Hypotheses Testing*

Table 4 shows the values of the path coefficient showing the relationship among the selected constructs. The SEM analysis proved that a significantly positive association exists between INT and SMU's (.293, .001) path coefficient and p-value respectively. Therefore, the results support H_1. Based on the results, CE has a significantly positive effect on SMU's (.324, .001) path coefficient and p-value respectively. Similarly, H_2 is

also proved to be significantly supported. H_3 showing the significant positive association between compatibility and SM usage's (.302, .001) path coefficient and p-value respectively. The value of R-square of SMU is .51 which also describes that 53% variance in SMU has been recorded due to INT, CE, and COMP. Finally, H_4 is also found as a significant and positive predictor contributing to obtaining PB for SMEs (.583, .001) path coefficient and p-value respectively. The value of R-square is .35 which also describe that 35% variance in PB is recorded due to SM usages. Therefore, all the stated research hypotheses were proved by empirical analysis. It is noteworthy that the use of SM has the greatest effect on PB for women-owned SMEs working in Pakistan.

Table 4: *SEM Hypothesis Testing*

	Hypotheses			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
H1:	SMU	<---	INT	0.293	.049	5.700	***	Supported
H2:	SMU	<---	CE	0.324	.049	6.475	***	Supported
H3:	SMU	<---	COMP	0.302	.062	6.061	***	Supported
H4:	PB	<---	SMU	0.583	.051	11.435	***	Supported
	PB	<---	Nature of Product Offered	0.039	.135	.762	ns	Not-Supported
	PB	<---	Firm Age	0.073	.074	1.430	ns	Not-Supported

*Significant at: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p <.001$, ns= not significant.*

Conclusion

Current research expounds the motivation of SMEs use of SM and the PB brought by their use. This research explores these associations based on the theory of DOI. Overall, the study finds that interaction, compatibility, and cost-effectiveness are the predictors affecting the use of SM, thus enabling SMEs to achieve certain PB. The results are in line with prior researches (Ainin *et al.*, 2015; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2012; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011; Odoom *et al.*, 2017; Sundar *et al.*, 2003). First, prior researches have shown that SM interaction is a vital discussion for companies choosing and deploying marketing actions on such podiums. Interactivity provides firms with richer rents, feedback through two-way communication, and a sense of better response and mutual information flow. Therefore, in line with prior studies, current research strengthens the consideration of SM interaction elements as a key prerequisite to encourage SMEs to use them.

In addition, the prior study has highlighted the essential character of compatibility and cost-effectiveness as other key predictors leading to SM usage (Hanna *et al.*, 2011; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011; Odoom *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2010). This study similarly reinforces this argument, through the confirmation of relevant empirical analysis. Consistent with existing research, SM seems to offer a better alternative to SMEs as compared to traditional media. More intensely, the extent to which SM meets the requirement and practices (compatibility) of firms has become an important consideration for SMEs to use SM. The outcomes of the present study are also consistent with (Hsu *et al.*, 2007; McCann & Barlow, 2015; Odoom *et al.*, 2017; Wamba & Carter, 2014). Moreover, the SEM results revealed that women-owned SMEs could get the maximum PB by using a SM platform for their marketing activities and sales of goods and services. Using SM platforms are highly interactive, cost-effective, and more compatible as compare to other media networks for the promotion of business.

In the context of companies' perceived slow adoption of e-commerce related technologies, the findings suggest that SM is being adopted to enhance the marketing related activities of women-owned SMEs. In an era when stories created by consumers have a stronger voice in brand promotion, it has become very important for SMEs to reach different levels of end-user groups through unconventional means. SMEs can use SM at different business levels and in different economic environments, and there are now multiple possibilities to position and promote good relationships and interactions with customers.

Research Implications and Limitations

The results of this research subsidize to the existing literature. This study has pushed the DOI theory forward by extending it to an emerging but never-ending phenomenon of SM marketing. Existing researches on SM marketing among SMEs, particularly women-owned SMEs show that there is a scarcity of research based on theories. Therefore, the recent study provides a modest role in this area of research, backed by an empirical analysis that assists for the widely accepted DOI theory from the perspective of SM, and a theoretical framework with virtuous descriptive ability.

In the literature on SM research, few studies are integrating and exploring the association between hypotheses used in this paper, particularly in the context of women-owned SMEs in developing economies. Existing studies have either examined the relationship between structures in isolation and/or under diverse settings (Boumediene Ramdani *et al.*, 2009; Odoom *et al.*, 2017) questioned the necessity of further empirical tests for verification and theoretical construction with respect to women-owned SMEs. Therefore, this paper subsidizes to the literature by showing the results of examining the multiple interdependencies between constructs and using data from the women-owned SMEs in developing economies.

The practical implication of the current discussion is that for the executives of women-owned SMEs in emerging economies seeking to increase their marketing activities on SM, which may offer exceptional benefits in its use. The deceptive consequence of using SM provides greater performance advantages. In addition, regardless of the motivation for adoption and use, SMEs executives may not be able to optimally exploit their SM existence if their primary objective is simply to have a prevailing account and not to use them for any marketing campaign. Generating and sharing content, attracting prevailing and potential customers, and monitoring the content of competitors through SM are some of the probable assistances for companies embracing SM marketing campaigns.

Besides the advantages and role of the study findings, we also acknowledged a few limitations. The outcomes of the study are based on one developing country; Pakistan which may reflect the same cultural bounding. Therefore, the cultural factors should be discussed along with the comparative analysis of various countries having dissimilar cultural values. It opens additional debate on the spectacle under the theme, particularly the potential gap between "product-based SMEs" and "service-based SMEs" which can be studied in the future. Moreover, a comparative study using the responses of large and small firms to examine the research framework could yield fascinating outcomes for theory advancement.

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