

Strategic Technology Adoption of social media in Indian SMEs

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[Abstract] Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) are motivated to use the technology in their processes for efficiency and effectiveness. The technology adoption can be assessed at three levels, i.e., individual, institution and societal, for SMEs' efficiency and effectiveness. This paper studied three models Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model, the Technology Organization Environment (TOE), and the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) to understand Social Media Adoption as a strategy by SMEs. The researchers have identified the dimensions of Perceived Time Taken (PTT), Access to Technology (AT), and Perceived Effectiveness (PE) for the extension of the UTAUT model. The three factors identified and proposed in the extended model of UTAUT are for the better understanding of factors which influence strategic technology adoption in Indian SMEs. The conceptual model also provides better strategic insights to SMEs to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

[Keywords] technology adoption, small and medium enterprises (SMES), perceived time taken (PTT), access to technology (AT), and perceived effectiveness (PE)

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises are the backbone of any developing economy. They are an excellent source of employment generation, balanced regional development, a good composition of exports and increased GDP. SMEs play an important role in any country's development (Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006). It affects the GDP and economy of the country (Ali Qalati, Li, Ali Mirani, & Khan, 2020). SMEs play a key role in bringing more variety in the export sector. Improving of export composition is a much-desired objective for a growing economy like India (Pujari, Kumar, Sagi, & Napate, 2021) and SMEs can play a vital role in that (Subrahmanya). Hence, SMEs are increasingly becoming the focus of policies for developing economies and have gained attention in research too. To compete with MNCs and to expand their market share, SMEs need to focus on the marketing of their products and services (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020).

Most SMEs usually use traditional marketing to approach to their customer segment (Gilmore, 2011). They still have to understand and harness the full potential of the new technologies for their stability and progress (Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007). Technology adoption can help SMEs improve their work efficiency and performance (De Burca, Fynes, & Marshall, 2005).

The involvement of the internet has allowed SMEs to compete in the national and international markets. Their existence is being acknowledged. E-commerce and ICT have benefited these organizations. That is why, technology adoption has become a necessity for SMEs (Juniarti & Omar, 2021). For the improvement in efficiency and productivity, there are many efforts that have been taken by SMEs to use the technology. Technology adoption will ease the process and will have positive effects on the growth of the company. The technological internal and external barriers have been studied by researchers as adoption within the organization and external to the organization (Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006). The use of

technology especially social media has impacted SMEs in a big way.

The study goal of this paper is to access the aspects affecting the adoption of social media by SMEs. It will assess the business purposes by applying the technology adoption models- The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) and Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM). The remaining sections of the paper are organized as follows: The second section is a literature review where the important relevant information was discussed. The third section discusses the methodology used. Section 4 discusses the findings and analysis of the results. Finally, the fifth section is the discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review and the Framework Development

SMEs and Strategic Technology Adoption

Many researchers have indicated that the adoption of technology can be a strategic path for SMEs (De Burca, Fynes, & Marshall, 2005). SMEs can benefit from adopting technologies as they can reduce costs and efforts by replacing manual and repetitive work with the latest automated technologies (Bhalerao, Kumar, & Pujari, 2022). These technologies can act as catalysts for growth, especially for developing economies. They can also facilitate better reach to markets, customers, and efficient production. There are many research articles that have mentioned the significance of technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in benefitting SMEs (Kumar, Pujari, & Gupta, 2021) (Bakshi, Kumar, & Puranik, 2022). This strategy of adopting new technologies also helped SMEs during the pandemic COVID-19 too. Most SMEs could turn the wave of pandemics on their side by a quick adoption of technology (Kumar & Ayedee, 2021).

Industry 4.0 involvement as technological advancements can be benefited all enterprises. The involvement of these technologies can do wonders for the competitiveness of SMEs. Some of the research articles have suggested models help the implementation of industry 4.0 in SMEs (Monika, Apoorva., & Kumar Anuj, 2022). It will be helpful and can be used towards automation and new technology acceptance in enterprises (Dalcher & Shine, 2003). Knowledge management can never be untouched when we discuss technological advancements (Pujari & Priyadarshini, 2021). The KM is the origin of technological implementation for any enterprise. The use of technology has been initiated with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adoption and then, and e-commerce has played an important role in the growth of SMEs. Currently, social media has played an important role and has been used worldwide to attract customers, and suppliers and contributed to the growth of SMEs (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021).

SMEs and Social Media

Social media has been proclaimed as of vital importance for the growth of SMEs (Stockdale, Ahmed, & Scheepers, 2012). These SMEs need better connect with their customers to have better growth and market share. Most of them are unable to reach out to their potential customers and create awareness about the product and services they are offering (Kumar & Pandey, 2018). This is where social media becomes crucial in enhancing its marketing and customer relations performance (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011) (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2018). It has been considered significant due to its customer reach, cost-effectiveness and need of technical knowledge (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011). It can help them gather and decode their customer taste and preferences and understand them in depth (Attanassova, 2015). It has also been proven that social media improves SMEs performance by taking cognizance of technological, environmental, and organizational parameters (Ali Qalati, Li, Ali Mirani, & Khan, 2020). The ever-changing market environment creates a challenge for these small companies. In contrast to the Multinational Companies, these SMEs have smaller marketing budgets. Hence, they need a strategy which is low cost as well as has fewer barriers to entry. Most of the employees from these industries have employees who are not skilled in using technologies and have not been trained in the same. These SMEs usually lack access to high-speed internet and maintenance services to take full benefit of e-marketing. They also are short of trained staff who can operate the website and provide long-term maintenance. All these hurdles result in dependence on external agencies for the provision of technical help and eventually result in cost escalation in terms of technology adoption. For some SMEs, the challenge is also that their suppliers and customers are not well-

versed in the use of these new technologies (Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007).

Adoption of social media by SMEs, though fraught with difficulties, usually results in value creation and competitive advantage for these SMEs (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011). The market intelligence gathered through social media could empower these SMEs to engage their customers in a more efficient way and use this tacit knowledge gathered to outdo their competitors. This strategic move can help SMEs to ensure sustainability in a dynamic and vibrant environment, especially in developing economies.

Indian SME's Perspective

A developing economy like India brings along with it many challenges as well as opportunities to its small and medium enterprises. These SMEs face challenges like paucity of funds, trained staff, and technical competencies in general (Shaikh, Kumar, Syed, & Shaikh, 2021). During the COVID times, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) faced many problems and challenges in their journey of survival and growth (Kumar & Ayedee, 2021). These enterprises need to take some strategic actions to create a better customer base along with value addition. Most of the Indian SMEs resort to traditional methods of connecting with customers like word of mouth advertising, personal relationships etc. and customer relationship management. This results in low market penetration and as a result poor growth for the company. These hurdles and growth can be reduced by the use of online resources to improve efficiency, especially marketing performance by these companies (Kumar, Syed, & Pandey, 2021). There are many technologies which can improve the performance of SMEs like artificial intelligence (Bhalerao, Kumar, & Pujari, 2022), social media marketing (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020) etc. These SMEs need to harness the benefits of social media by mitigating the organizational challenges which hinder the adoption (Kumar & Ayedee, 2018). This research focuses on the use of social media as a strategic tool to augment growth and sustainability in SMEs along with a detailed discussion about the parameters impacting the adoption of new technologies and creates a model for Social Media Strategic Adoption in SMEs.

Adoption of New Technologies

The process of the adoption of new technologies can be filled with challenges. In an emerging economy like India, SMEs face multiple trials. There have been a huge number of researchers who have studied the process of technology adoption by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (De Burca, Fynes, & Marshall, 2005). They have propagated multiple theories for technology adoption. Out of these theories, we will be considering the Unified Acceptance Theory for the Adoption of Technology (UTAUT), Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM Model) and Technology Organization Environment (TOE) theory which have been most cited. The study of UTAUT, TOE and TAM will help the researchers to give the direction to study the adoption of technology in SMEs. Also, this will provide the way forward for the implementation of the technology in SMEs.

Methodology Used

To study the technology adoption in SMEs, there are many Technology Adoption Models. This research paper will discuss the three important models. The discussions are as follows:

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) Model

UTAUT is considered as an extensively accepted theory which summarize technology acceptance (Momani, 2020). The framework emphasizes on the prolonged use of technology which is primarily founded on 'intention for continued usage' this basically depends on two key aspects – acceptance and satisfaction (Williams, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2015). The UTAUT theory gives us a model for technology acceptance (Venkatesh & Morris, 2003). Variables comprising the expectations of users regarding performance, and perceived ease of use, impacts of societal parameters, and settings which benefit the same are considered to study behavioral intentions and usage behaviors (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). Also, some regulating factors are suggested e.g., sex, age, experience and voluntary use, to study adoption behavior.

The UTAUT has been used as a base for understanding the adoption of social media by businesses (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). The model in this research exhibited that expectations regarding performance and approach towards the use of technologies had substantial impacts. It also suggested duration of use of social media and rank of entrepreneurs as constructs which impact the social media usage by the companies. Another research on this model suggested that effort expectancy has less influence compared to other factors of UTAUT (Abdat, 2020). PE was found to be of the least significance when compared to other factors by some researchers. (Zamrudi & Wicaksono, 2018). The UTAUT theory embraces the Theory of reasoned action (TRA), Motivational model (MM), social cognitive theory (SCT), Theory of planned behavior (TPB), Technology acceptance model (TAM), a combined theory of TAM and TPB (C-TAM-TPB), Model of personal computer utilization (MPCU), and information diffusion theory (IDT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM Model)

TAM has been considered a very significant theory while studying technology implementation in any domain. It explores the factors impacting the user's behavioral intention to adopt any technological innovation (Davis, 1989). The level up to which any person thinks that specific technology adoption will be beneficial for augmenting efficacy is termed PU. PEU indicates the level up to when an individual expects that adopting a technology would be easy and effortless. The TAM model has one dependent parameter – behavioral intent, the level up to when a person makes notions regarding implementing or not implementing definite forthcoming behavior.

There has been multiple research which have attempted to understand the constructs of TAM model in terms of social media adoption. Level of knowledge about social media along with PEOU has been suggested an impacting factor with respect to TAM model (Salam, Imtiaz, & Burhan, 2021). TAM model has been considered important to examine the usage of social media as SMEs decision-making process is like an individual decision-making process (Dahnil, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014). Hence, TAM has been a theory which has been used to understand the parameters.

Technology Organization Environment (TOE)

TOE is one of the main theories that facilitates the study of the process of adopting of any technology in any sector or industry. It is a framework which analyzes the constructs which facilitate adoption of technology in any organization. The TOE model suggests that technology, organization, and the environment are parameters which should be studied while taking decisions regarding technology adoption. Technological factors include relative advantages, complexity, compatibility, IT capabilities and technical skills. Organizational factors include to the organizational level, readiness, and employee approaches towards technology and ownership type. Environmental factors refer to the level of competition, pressure from trading partners, governmental support, and environmental dynamics (Ali Qalati, Li, Ali Mirani, & Khan, 2020). The TOE model has been found very useful for understanding technology adoption in SMEs (Ahmad, Bakar, & Ahmad, 2018). Awareness regarding social media is a significant factor in its adoption (Effendi, Sugandini, & Istanto, 2020).

Methodology

The primary data collection was done through structured in-depth interviews with key employees in the organization who are involved in key decisions regarding technology adoption. This kind of research demands in-depth interviews to understand the opinions and stand of the key employees regarding Social Media adoption. In general, in-depth interviews permit the researchers to explore the views and ask relevant subsequent questions and achieve significant insights into the benefits expected and hurdles faced in the process of social Media adoption. To analyze the Strategic technology adoption in total 36 in-depth interviews were conducted with the key personnel in the chosen SMEs; in total this amounted to 16 executives across the three organizations. All respondents interviewed had significant roles in the adoption of social media within their organization. The data was collected over a period of two months.

Company Profiles

Industry	Electrical, Electronics, Batteries, Food, FMCG, Office Automation, Stationery, Pharmaceuticals , Labs
Sub Industry	FMCG, Equipment, Machines, Electrical, Electronics

Company one (C1) is one rural apparel firm, which is based in a city in south of India. C1 uses the computer for keeping records but adoption of technology is major concern. They are working towards sustainable practices and open for technology adoption but due to manpower and financial issues it finds it difficult to implement.

Company two (C2) is a small company located in the city of Mumbai. It deals with Pharmaceuticals. They provide the services to the customers but don't have a setup IT infrastructure. There is a Quality department that take cares of many deliverables, but the use of technology will help in efficiency and effectiveness. They use the deliverables that uses innovative ways for betterment of society and environment.

Company three (C3) is a Construction Material company located in Kanpur, UP, a northern state of India. It provides the construction materials and provide the services in the low cost to sustain in the market. It looks forward to the digital transformation for the growth of organization. The stakeholders are satisfied with the services provided by C3.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the interviews of the senior technical persons in companies regarding social media adoption following findings can be presented. The first findings from the interview were that companies are considering social media adoption cautiously. The opinion of interviewee was reflecting the Perceived Time Taken (PTT). This was understood during the interview and same reflection was noticed for C2 and C3 as well. The perceived time taken in the shift to adoption of social media was one of the impacting factor regarding the decision.

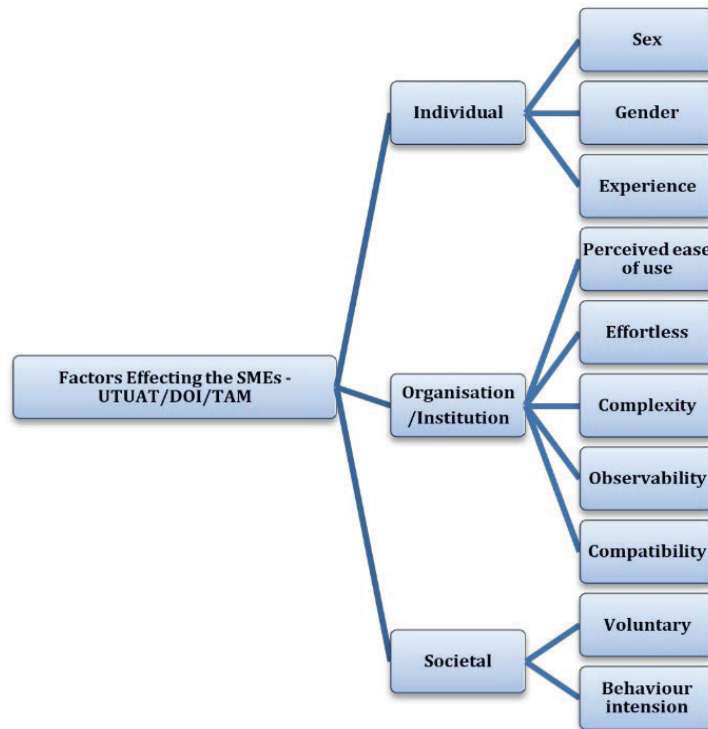
In the interview of C1 and C2, the Access to Technology has been a hindering factor in term of SMEs especially rural company. The use of technology depends on internet, servers, hardware, software and social media used. This was common in both the cases and considered as important for study.

Further, Perceived Effectiveness has been driven by their stakeholders and discussed by company C2. In reference to the data usage and its importance was discussed in the interview by company C3.

Finally, when SMEs uses the in-house applications use the single vendor and best-of-breed approach. Social media applications, it presents a strong web-based applications usage.

All three technology were studied as the methodology for technology adoption in social media. The factors used in TAM, UTAUT and TOE impact working in SMEs at all three levels. The three models were studied in detail and found their relevance at an individual, Organizational and societal levels.

Figure 1. Proposed Model Based on Factors



The researchers could identify that these are very significant inhibiting factors for cash-crunched SMEs in a developing country like India.

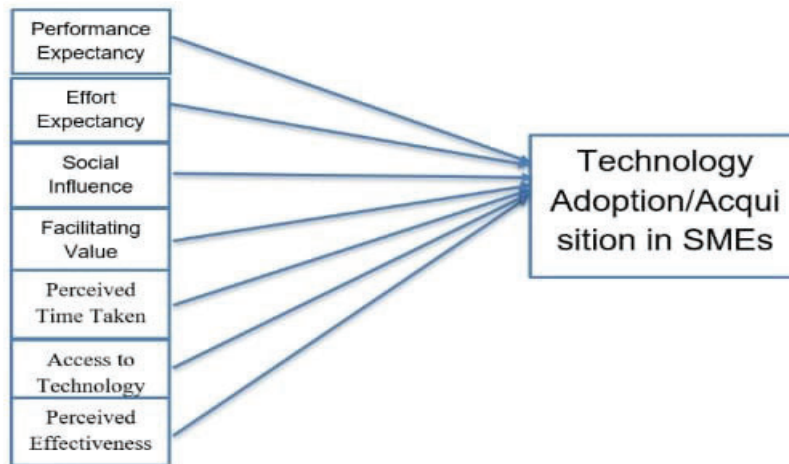
Perceived Time Taken (PTT) - Perceived time taken can be defined as the total time required to adopt that new technology into any organizational system. Most of the SMEs in India faced a shortage of resources like capital and manpower, which restricts their ability to adopt any new technology. If the owner expects the time taken to adopt new technology to be along one along with the resistance to change from his employees, this may change his perception about the new technology in question. The owners of the SMEs take into consideration parameters like how much time it would take to adapt to new technologies. These small companies usually consider this as they are usually managing the business with a limited workforce and the time needed to adopt a new technology would be a very critical factor while selecting the technology.

Access to Technology (AT) - Access to Technology has also been found to be an inhibiting parameter for most SMEs as the availability of the technology could be a challenge for SMEs. Especially the SMEs in rural areas lack access to the new technologies. This along with the high cost of acquiring the technology has resulted in poor technology adoption. Any technological adoption requires skilled manpower to introduce and maintain the technology in any organization. The acquisition of these technologies is also impacted by factors like perceived cost and efforts. If coupled with these factors, SME owners feel that they do not have access to these technologies, this factor could end up being a challenge to the adoption process.

Perceived Effectiveness (PE) - Perceived effectiveness has been a very significant decision-making factor for SMEs to adopt any new technology. The perception of owners regarding the effectiveness of the new technology in enhancing the performance of the SME will be a decisive factor regarding the adoption. As UTAUT model effects and is based on all the three level. The factors identified in the study are Perceived Time Taken (PTT), Access to Technology (AT) and Perceived Effectiveness (PE). The UTAUT model is modified and is as follows:

Figure 2

Extended UTUAT Model for technological Adoption in SMEs



Conclusion

This article highlights the parameters which influence the SMEs and create favorable and encouraging environment for strategic adoption of social media. The expected result of this research is to propose operational and significant contributions to the entrepreneurs and policy makers. After an extensive literature review, the researchers have recognized the parameters which influence the Social Media adoption in Indian SMEs. The researchers would like to suggest the constructs of Perceived Time Taken (PTT), Access to Technology (AT), and Perceived Effectiveness (PE) as key important aspects which impact the strategic adoption of social media for any Small and Medium Enterprise.

Limitations and Future Scope

Limitations of this research are that it requires a more detailed assessment after contacting SMEs in various domains and geographic locations. The proposed model needs to be validated after interacting with more SMEs who have adopted the social media. Regarding the future lines of research, we propose expanding the study to a sample of a SMEs in various industrial sectors and also various developed and underdeveloped economies.

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