**ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN ABUJA**

**Abstract**

*Many businesses are adopting social media networks to woo potential customers. Social media networks have been reported to help SMEs compete favorably between themselves, and in many instances compete with larger businesses. Regardless of its popularity, there is still very limited information on the impact of social media adoption on SMEs competitive advantage especially in developing countries where SMEs are predominately in the informal sector. Thus, this study investigates Social Media Adoption and its Impact on SMEs Competitive advantage in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised of 2,825 owner manager SMEs in FCT Abuja. A sample of 338 was drawn using Krejcie and Morgan table. Primary data was collected through the use of questionnaires. However, 326 questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents. Regression analysis was used to analyze the data with the aid of SPSS Version 20. The study revealed that two independent variables (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) had a positive significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage in Abuja. The study recommends that there is need for advocacy by the government agencies in charge of SME activities to enlighten SMEs on the importance of social media adoption to their businesses, it is equally recommended to train SMEs on the usage of the various social media platforms and how they can leverage on them to gain competitive advantage.*

**Keywords: Perceived ease of use, Perceived usefulness, Competitive advantage**

**INTRODUCTION**

Presently, internet diffusion amongst businesses is on an increase. The Internet-driven online technology has been regarded as a vital platform for businesses competitive advantage (Mandal, 2017). Al Mamun, Mohiuddin, Fazal, Ahmad (2018) proposed that to be competitive and satisfy potential customers’ needs, Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) must adopt new technologies such as social media (SM).

SM are communication technolo­gies that enable people to make more social connections while sharing material, participating in discussions, and controlling content through networks (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga 2018). SM has overtaken the globe, with more than 3.8 billion users and counting (Lawrence 2022). Social media has transformed communication, and one part of commu­nication where social media has had a great influence is in SMEs competitive advantage (Nasidi, Ahmad, Dahiru 2022 in Calli and Clark 2015). Companies use social media to identify and engage with customers, enhance sales through advertising and market­ing, track consumer trends, and give customer service or support (Nasidi, *etal* 2022).

Studies have highlighted that SMEs around the globe are encountering stringent competition from other SMEs and corporate ﬁrms, and SMEs are increasingly becoming less competitive (Kaneko and Yimruan, 2017; Yan & Huang 2021). According to Dinehart, (2011) in order stay competitive in business, enterprises need to use modern digital marketing techniques of the internet.

Studies have shown that there are certain attributes like ‘perceived usefulness’ and ‘perceived ease of use’ that influences behavioral intention to use a technology such as social media (Davis, 1989 in Lacurci 2021).

Perceived usefulness (PU) according to Davis 1989 in Dumpit and Fernandez (2017) is ‘the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance’. PU is an individual’s perception of how technologies or a particular technology are set to improve the individual’s tasks or roles in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (Lacurci 2021).

Perceived ease of use (PEOU) variable measures one’s perception of the technology being easy to understand, learn and operate (Lacurci 2021). According to Rauniar et al., 2014), since social media is relatively easy to understand and requires low effort, that this will be perceived well by a potential user.

One of the advantages of using social media is obtaining knowledge of customers’ needs and wants (Lacurci 2021). The “purposive inflows of knowledge from customers and competitors and capabilities to efficiently manage internal knowledge are even more relevant for sustainable competitiveness of SMEs” (Pérez-González et. al., 2017). This customer and competitor knowledge obtained from social media can help SMEs gain a competitive advantage (Lacurci 2021).

In Nigeria, many SMEs are investing and showing more interest in the Internet/online marketing business (Oyedele, Oworu and Adbulganiyu 2020). However, social media adoption and its impact on SMEs competitive advantage have not been captured in Nigeria. This study thus, examined social media adoption and the competitive advantage of SMEs within Abuja, Nigeria.

**Problem statement**

According to the national bureau of statistics (2020) report, SMEs in Nigeria have contributed about 48% of national GDP in the past five years. The report further states that with a total number of about 17.4 million, they account for about 50% of industrial job and nearly 90% of manufacturing sector in terms of number of enterprises. These SMEs are working in different sectors such as industrial, agricultural, services and constructions.

SMEs have fewer funds, but need to compete with large organizations within a limited capacity.

According to Kaur (2017) traditional marketing strategies are not sufficient and relevant anymore in a highly competitive business environment, and therefore, to create a sustainable competitive edge and achieve resilience;

Reluctantly, some SMEs are still hesitant to include social media in their marketing program due to lack of solid information about the social media platforms, especially in regards to its effectiveness to (Vaynerchuk 2018). Alam and Noor (2019) buttressed that SMEs are characterized as lacking of knowledge about the possible actual advantages of social media. However, Tarutėa and Gatautisa (2013) amplified that social media adoption can improve business competitive advantage with internet providing opportunities for SMEs to compete equally with large enterprises. However, despite these gains, the rate of social media adoption in Nigeria is uncertain, hence the need to investigate social media technology adoption in SMEs and their impact on their competitive advantage in FCT Abuja as undertaken by this study.

The aim of this study is to investigate adoption of social media technology and its impact on SMEs competitive advantage in FCT Abuja. The specific objectives are as follows;

1. To evaluate perceived usefulness of social media technology and its impact on SMEs competitive advantage in FCT Abuja.
2. To determine if perceived ease of use of social media technology has impact on SMEs competitive advantage in FCT Abuja

The following hypotheses are formulated for testing;

1. Perceived usefulness of social media technology has no significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage in FCT Abuja
2. Perceived ease of use of social media technology has no significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage in FCT Abuja.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Perceived usefulness (PU)**

Davis *et. al.,* (1989) theorized and developed PU in their original Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). PU also resides in Vroom’s Expectancy Theory, as the decision to adopt and use an innovation driven by its near-term and long-term expected results (Triandis, 1977).

PU defines prospective user’s subjective probability that using a specific application improves operations (Lu, Tao and Wang 2009). It provides diagnostic lenses into how actual use and intention to use are influenced (Gekombe, Tumsifu, and Jani 2019).

Gekombe, *et al* (2019) further states that PU is “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance”. This follows from the definition of the word useful: "capable of being used advantageously. Given the context of social media, PU is an important factor in determining attitudes toward adoption when managers perceived that social media would streamline their tasks and provide valuable information or insights (Austermann & Mertins, 2014).PU for the purpose of this study explains the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his/her job (Davis, *et. al.* 1989).

**Perceived ease of use (PEOU)**

Perceived ease of use (PEOU) measures the prospective user’s assessment of the mental efforts required of the use of the target application (Davis, 1993). The PEOU variable was also theorized and proven in the original TAM (Davis *et. al.,* 1989). PEOU refers to "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort’’ (Gekombe, *et al* 2019). This follows from the definition of "ease": "freedom from difficulty or great effort." Effort is a finite resource that a person may allocate to the various activities for which he or she is responsible (Radner and Rothschild, 1975).

Perceived ease of use is the idea that using a system is somewhat free of effort, for the purpose of this study it will be defined as such. (Efosa, Mahesh & Olusola 2018) This construct measures one’s perception of the technology being easy to understand, learn and operate. This study adopted the definition of Lacurci (2021) that PEOU construct measures one’s perception of technology being easy to understand, learn and operate.

**Empirical Reviews**

Tan, Chong, Lin and Eze (2009) investigated various factors for ICT adoption in Malaysian SMEs by applying a questionnaire-based survey and collecting the data from 406 owners/managers placed in Malaysia's Southern region. The independent variables included competitive advantage, compatible services, complexity, observability, trialability, online cost, security, benefits, and barriers. The research results showed that the internet's adoption is a low cost but effective solution for the managers/owners. It improves the relationship with customers. Cost and security are significant barriers to online technology adoption in SMEs. The significant factors of online resource adoption are relative advantage, complexity, observability, compatibility, and security.

Moghavvemi, Hakimian and Feissal (2012) investigated adoption factors and competitive advantage through IT adoption in SMEs. The research was conducted in Malaysia. In the research model, various aspects connected with IT adoption in SMEs were relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, observability, trialability, self-efficacy, and attitude. All the adoption elements were taken from innovation theory; perspective and self-efficacy were the added factors. The research results show a significant contribution of information technology in SME's growth. The results further showed that IT usage can increase companies' competitive strength from process engineering, efficiency, cost reduction, and effectiveness.

Rufai (2014) evaluated the impact of communication technologies on the performance of SMEs in a developing economy: Nigeria as a case study. The study was undertaken through a firm survey and also a number of semi-structured interviews with purposively selected 100 SMEs operating in both the affluent and disadvantaged districts. The study used basic descriptive statistics and thematic analytical techniques for the survey and interview data respectively. The findings suggest that: 1) as communication technologies positively impact the performance of SMEs, existing socio-economic factors within the districts where the firms operate also influence the choice of communications technology and significantly shape its impact on business performance; 2) class differences with respect to income and education disparity, as well as communication habits in the affluent and disadvantaged communities account for different outcomes in the business performance of firms; 3) the Impact of communication technologies on the local economy seems to be more prominent and significant in regard to the performance of firms operating in the affluent districts compared to the performance of firms operating in disadvantaged districts.

Olusegun, Olympus and Olakunle (2020) investigated Online Marketing and the Performance of Small and medium scale enterprises in Ikeja Local Government Area of Lagos State. Survey research design was employed for the study where 142 respondents (sample size) from the selected total estimated population of 221 SMEs for the study area were gathered using structured questionnaire. Their responses were tested using statistical tools of SPSS package. The study revealed that the online marketing affected the performance of SMEs positively which has allowed youths to be self-employed and created economic growth and regional development.

Djakasaputra,Wijayab, Utama,Yohana, Romadhonie and Fahlevif (2021) evaluated the empirical study of Indonesian SMEs sales performance in digital era: The role of quality service and digital marketing. The research methodology was quantitative method which was divided into research design and research subjects, data collection methods, and analysis methods. The study was conducted on 125 small and medium (SMEs) in Banten, Indonesia in the digital region. The study used primary data based on the results of distributing online questionnaires to 125 managers of SMEs in Banten who were selected by simple random sampling. The tool for data analysis was Smart PLS version 3.0 software. Based on the results from the analysis, digital marketing had a significant effect on quality service, digital marketing had a significant effect on sales performance, quality service had a significant effect on sales performance, and digital marketing significantly affects sales performance through quality service in the digital era.

Al Asheq, Tanchi, Kamruzzaman and Karim (2021) investigated the impact of e-marketing orientation (EMO), technological orientation (TO) and learning capacity on online SMEs performance. In the study, the dependent variable is online SME performance, whereas the independent variables are EMO, TO and LC. 320 questionnaires were distributed among online SME owners using the online survey system (Google form), 156 responses were realized as fully completed responses. SPSS version no. 26 was used to analyze the correlation among independent and dependent variables and to test the hypotheses. The study results shows that EMO, TO and LC have a statistical and significant impact on online SME performance.

Fan, Ali Qalati, Khan, Mir, Shah, Ramzan, Khan (2021) examined the Effects of entrepreneurial orientation on social media adoption and SME performance: The moderating role of innovation capabilities. The study employed a closed-ended questionnaire to collect data from SMEs located in Pakistan. Partial-Least-Squares-Structural Equation-Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized for the analysis of 423 responses. The results proved a direct positive link between EO±SMEs performance, EO±SM adoption, SM adoption ± SMEs performance, innovation capabilities (IC), and SME performance. Partial mediation was found between EO and SME performance, and the significant moderation effect of IC was found between SM adoption and SME performance.

**Gaps identified in the literatures**

After reviewing past studies, a variable inclusion gap was identified which this present study sought to address. Most of the empirical studies reviewed focused on using performance as the DV, and used growth, productivity, profits to measure performance of social media adoption. This study focused on using competitive advantage as the DV, as suggested by Lacurci 2021). The study further separates competitive advantage from performance and does not include any characteristics of the performance concept. The study measured competitive advantage with exploitation of market opportunities and neutralization of competitive threats as suggested by Sigalasa and Pekka-Economou (2013).

**Theoretical framework**

The study is underpinned by The Technology Acceptance Model by Davis (1986) (1970)

**Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a theory describing the perception of technology users. Davis (1986) created this model to explain the effects of system characteristics on users of computer-based Technology Systems. TAM is the most widely used model for identifying factors contributing to technology acceptance. The theory suggests that, when users are presented with a new piece of technology, several factors influence their decision about how and when they will use the technology (Ardiansah, Chariri, Rahardja, & Udin, 2020). TAM identified fundamental variables (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use) suggested by previous research and specified the relationships among these variables as the intention to use technology. This model shows that, when users are presented with new technology, some factors influence their decisions about how and when they will use them.

Researchers developed the TAM to explore and gain increased insight into motivators for use of

technology (Davis, 1985; Svendsen, Johnsen, Almås-Sørensen, & Vittersø, 2013). The TAM predicts user acceptance of a technology based upon estimation of three core constructs; perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PeU) and behavioral intention (BI) (Svendsen et al., 2013).

**METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprised 2,825registered SMEs in FCT Abuja. The figure was extracted from National MSMEs survey report (2017). Sample size of 338 was drawn from usingKrejcie and Morgan (1975) table.

Primary data was used with the aid questionnaires. The FCT Abuja comprises of 6 area councils of Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Bwari, and Kwali Abuja. Hence the FCT was stratified into six clusters. The sample size was divided by the number of the area councils (338/6= 55). Thus, each area council got 55 respondents which totaled 55 questionnaires. Simple random technique was used to select SMEs that got questionnaires from the 6 area councils.

A pilot study was conducted in order to test for the validity and reliability of the instrument. Each scale item was rated in terms of the relevance of its constructs. The items were rated on 5-point ordinal scale: strongly agreed, agreed, undecided, disagreed and strongly disagreed as suggested by Lynn,Waltz and Bausell (1981) cited in Polit and Beck (2006).

*Table 1 Reliability analysis*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Number of Items** | **Cronbach Alpha** |
| Perceived ease of use | 6 | 0.792 |
| Perceived usefulness | 6 | 0.867 |
| Competitive advantage | 6 | 0.868 |

**Source**: *SPSS Output, 2023*

From table 1 above, all the measures possess a high reliability standard judging from Cronbach’s alpha, ranging from 0.792 to 0.868 for all the variables and this is considered reliable.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Multiple regression analysis** **and test of hypotheses**

To test for the hypotheses formulated in this research, multiple regression was used to determine the multiple effects of, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use on competitive advantage of SMEs in FCT Abuja. The outputs are

*Table 2* ***Regression Output***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Coefficientsa** | | | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
| B | Std. Error | Beta |  |  | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.312 | 1.250 |  | 1.026 | .300 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Perceived usefulness | .165 | .066 | .135 | 2.156 | .027 | .626 | 1.367 |
| Perceived ease of use | .612 | .062 | 0.410 | 5.465 | .000 | .651 | 1.460 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| a. Dependent Variable: competitive advantage | | | | | | | | |

**Source**: *SPSS Output, 2023*

**Hypothesis I**

H02: Perceived usefulness have no significant effect on the competitive advantage of SMEs in FCT Abuja.

The coefficient of “perceived usefulness” stood at 0.165 which is positive. This implies that an increase in how SMEs perceived that SM is useful to them, would lead to an increase in their competitive advantage.

The *t* statistics of “perceived usefulness” stood at 2.156 with a p-value of 0.027. The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship depicted in the model is significant at 95% confidence level. This implies that the study rejects the null hypothesis which stated that perceived usefulness does not have a significant impact on the competitive advantage of SMEs in FCT Abuja, and accepts its alternate hypothesis (H12), which states that perceived usefulness has a significant effect on the competitive advantage of SMEs in FCT Abuja.

**Hypothesis II**

H02: Perceived ease of use has no significant effect on the competitive advantage of SMEs in FCT Abuja.

The coefficient of “perceived ease use” stood at 0.612 which is also positive. This implies that an increase in how SMEs perceived the ease in using SM, the more competitive they become. The *t* statistics of “perceived ease of use” stood at 5.465 with a p-value of 0.000. The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship depicted in the model is significant at 95% confidence level, the study then rejects the null hypothesis, and accepts its alternate hypothesis (H12), which states that perceived ease of use has a significant impact on the competitive advantage of SMEs in Abuja.

**Discussion of findings**

The first finding showed that perceived usefulness have significant positive effect on competitive advantage of SMEs in Abuja. This indicates that the more SMEs perceive the usefulness of social media, the more they adopt it, and the more competitive advantage they become. This finding is supported by the study of Davis, 1989; Yen, 2009) which states that attitude (perceived usefulness) is the key factor in analyzing the usage technology of social media.

On the effect of perceived ease of use; the study revealed that perceived ease of use had a positive and significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage in Abuja. This indicates that the more SMEs perceive the ease of usefulness of social media, the more competitive advantage they have.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be put forward:

1. The finding established that perceived usefulness had a positive significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage. The study recommends that there should be policy interventions to direct big companies that are grounded in social media to encourage SMEs on the usefulness of social media.
2. The findings also indicated that perceived ease of use have positive significant impact on SMEs competitive advantage. The study recommends that government agencies in charge of digital technology like NITDA should help in developing social media platforms that have ease of use, and peculiar to the needs of SMEs. Institutions of learning should also be encouraged to create social media platforms that are unique to SMEs needs. There should be a clear linkage between tertiary institutions and businesses.

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