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## **THE INFLUENCE OF CONTENT MARKETING, TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ON SME'S**

**Anchala Ameena Mohammadi**

*M.Tech, Research Scholar, SP Jain School of Global Management, Sydney, Australia,*  
[Ameena.ds21dba013@spjain.org](mailto:Ameena.ds21dba013@spjain.org)

**A. Seetharaman**

*M.Com., MBA, FCA, DMA, CA(M), PhD, Dean Research, SP Jain School of Global  
Management, Singapore*  
[seetha.raman@spjain.org](mailto:seetha.raman@spjain.org)

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to understand how social media characteristics, such as content marketing, technology innovation, and customer engagement, influence small and medium-sized firms (SME) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The main objective is to give SME owners a way to increase their business revenue. SME's were chosen as the dependent variable, while content marketing, technology innovation, and customer engagement were chosen as three independent variables based on a thorough evaluation of the literature related to business. Secondary data were employed in this study. The findings show that content marketing, technology innovation, and customer engagement all have a positive significant impact on SME's in the Middle East and North Africa region. SME owners and members of the business management team*

*are highly urged to have a very strong online presence with the aid of various digital technologies in order to increase the firm's sustainability, sales improvement, business success, SME's performance, and purchase intention.*

### **Keywords**

SME's, Social Media, Content Marketing, Technological Innovation, Customer Engagement

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## **1. Introduction**

Small and medium-sized businesses (SME) have emerged as a thriving and dynamic segment of the global economy. SME's face intense competition and are compelled to use new technologies to keep up. Due to the simplicity of use and capacity to communicate with customers anywhere in the world, social media is increasingly being adopted by businesses of all sizes. Social media has been seen as a key strategy (Ali Qalati et al., 2020). Social media was extremely important to SME's during the COVID-19 period for contacting customers, offering flexibility, and sustaining customer connections (Trawnih et al., 2021).

Small and medium-sized businesses, however, are preferring social media due to the ease of connecting with end users, the clarity of communications, the ability to correctly grasp client demands, and the accuracy of customer responses (Ali Qalati et al., 2020). Although there are very few research on the use of social media by SMEs in various industries in both developed and developing countries. Existing publications have called for more research on this subject of "social media adoption" in the future (Ndiege, 2019). Current study shows how various variables, including technology, the environment, and organizational structure, have an impact on SMEs, but there are still many areas that need more exploration (Ali Qalati et al., 2020). The incorporation of social media by a multinational SME's recruiting strategy was suggested by the author as a social recruitment approach. Employers' brands have a significant positive influence on hiring decisions. Social media platforms are created in a way that makes it easier and faster for employers to locate new employees. As the majority of candidates utilize the LinkedIn platform to search for jobs, recruiters must use social media to engage with potential candidates. LinkedIn is a more appropriate platform than other social media sites like Facebook, Snap Chat, and Twitter since it creates a more professional environment and displays candidates' backgrounds (Tran, 2019).

Efficient marketing is crucial for all businesses because it aids SME's in achieving their objectives and expanding their prospective clientele. SME's can utilize the free tools of digital marketing with a minimal use of resources because marketing campaigns can be a little expensive. Many marketing techniques exist, including email marketing, pay-per-click (PPC), social media marketing, mobile marketing, search engine optimization, internet advertising, and more. SME's must grasp the rapidly evolving marketing strategies used throughout the world and implement or adopt the appropriate strategy to grow the firm. The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly increased use of social media (Alqasa & Afaneh, 2022). Social media offers a platform for interaction with stakeholders and consumers, boosts brand recognition, attracts new clients, promotes exposure to a wider audience, and drives more traffic to business websites (Beck et al., 2021).

### **1.1. Research Problem and Question**

With the help of the keywords such as SME's and social media adoption/characteristics, a thorough literature study was carried out to identify the research gaps from the existing research articles and derived the following research problems.

- What impact does content marketing have on SME's?
- How does technological innovation influence SME's?
- Does customer engagement have an effect on SME's businesses?

### **1.2. Research Objectives**

To address the research issues, the following research objectives have been developed and to identify the various aspects of factors affecting the SME's.

- To access the impact of content marketing on SME's.
- To examine how the technology innovation influence SME's.
- To investigate the impact of customer engagement on SME's.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Social Media and SMEs**

Social media, also known as Web 2.0, is a significant tool for SME's in order to grow their business. Several studies have shown how social media benefits businesses in a variety of ways (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020). Social media assists Businesses in both strengthening their relationships with current clients and attracting new ones. Also, social networking builds trust and helps in the search for new business partners. The benefits of a solid client connection include a

rise in customer loyalty, stability, security, profit, and a reduction in marketing expenses (Sedalo et al., 2022). The effectiveness of SME businesses is strongly influenced by social media (Luthen & Soelaiman, 2022). Many actions are being taken to examine the possibilities of this social media platform in order to improve supply chain management. Customer-to-customer email, word-of-mouth, social networking sites, websites, and blogs are all examples of social media. To boost business growth, several SME's in Saudi Arabia are using e-commerce with the use of social media. SME's have a variety of features, including their industry, size, location, top management support, IT infrastructure, employees' use of the most recent technology, and more which has impact on customer relationship management (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020). Social media aids in brand expansion and increases its visibility to consumers. Customer acquisition is positively impacted by brand awareness, relationships (maintaining strong bonds with customers), and sharing ability - able to exchange business related facts in real time without any delay (Sedalo et al., 2022). SME's use social media platforms, particularly TIKTOK, to advertise their products and services. SME's may directly reach customers and advertise via videos on the TikTok platform (Luthen & Soelaiman, 2022). Social media technology provide SMEs new advantages to strategically position them (Ndiege, 2019). In manufacturing trading and service sectors, SME's are more likely to use social media marketing when several factors, such as perceived ease of use, perceived utility, compatibility, and enabling conditions, are favourable. However the expense makes it difficult for SME's to implement social media marketing. In Indian region, social media marketing has a positive impact on business. Social media marketing helps to strengthen customer relationships, attract new clients, boost revenues, develop staff innovation, get favourable reviews, and generate more inquiries (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020). Using social media, SMEs can easily acquire the direct feedback from clients and maintain a strong link with them (Sedalo et al., 2022).

## **2.2. Social Media Adoption and Business Performance**

The adoption of social media is positively impacted by technology, environment, and organization. The SME's investment in adopting social media technology is not in vain as it ultimately improves the performance of SMEs. The technological components that improve SME performance overall, such as interaction, interoperability, cost effectiveness, and visibility. Environment construct includes performance of environmental SME's both internally and externally, vendor support, consumer pressure, competitive enforcement, and consumer pressure (Ali Qalati et al., 2020).

SME's in Jordan using both the TAM (technology acceptance model) and TOE (technological organizational environmental) models. The adoption of social media is highly influenced by all of the elements, according to the data. Adoption of social media is affected by both the perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use. Adoption of social media is positively impacted by the technological context factor, which consists of relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity. Social media adoption is positively impacted by the variable known as organizational context, which comprises of employee expertise, top management support, and perception of cost. Government support, competitive pressure, and environmental uncertainty are elements of the environmental context that positively affect the adoption of social media (Trawnih et al., 2021).

SME's in Kenya are selecting new inventive strategies to position themselves strategically. SME's are selecting less complex, more affordable technologies that provide significant potential rewards (Ndiege, 2019). Like with Facebook, Tiktok, and other platforms that offer business performance analytics for business accounts, these tools assist SME owners in assessing their companies' success. Several free tools and solutions are available on social media to enhance business success. The continuous interaction with customers in real time, which covers time zones and numerous regions, is what is meant by the term "interactivity factor". A cost-effective element is an organization's budget that is set aside to boost performance at a reasonable or cheap cost. SME's may interact with their customers through social media at a reasonable cost. High compatibility for SME adoption of innovations is referred to as the compatibility factor for innovations. The three factors such as interactivity, cost effective and compatibility have a positive influence on social media (Luthen & Soelaiman, 2022).

A case study with ten SME business owners from the Ghana region about their experiences in diverse sectors. All of the businesses have been quite successful at leveraging social media. All of the participants came to the same conclusion: social media helps SMEs closely monitor consumer behaviors and efficiently keep their customers engaged (Sedalo et al., 2022). A case study conducted in Saudi Arabia revealed that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and e-marketing orientation all had a positive significant impact on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) during COVID-19. This relationship was mediated by social media marketing (Alqasa & Afaneh, 2022). Understanding what consumers really think about a business is crucial. SME's may better understand their clients' expectations through social media,

which affects customer happiness and impacts business performance, by getting information from beyond the company's walls. The performance of SME's innovation is positively and significantly impacted by social media use. The informational trust factor mediates this relationship (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

### **2.3. Content Marketing**

Visual content engagement is the use of videos, photos, and other attractive visual material, such as info graphics as a post, to connect with social media audiences. Several successful businesses are implementing visual content marketing, producing material in a most attractive, genuine, and relevant manner (Ikeni & Tonye, 2022). The optimized website pages are find largely in Google. Search engine optimization techniques have an impact on the gain visibility and ranking in search engines (Lewandowski et al., 2021).

By offering business products and services as well as company brand identity, content marketers want to engage consumers and attract potential customers while also retaining existing ones (Charmaine, 2022). Paid search marketing and search engine optimization are the two methods that fall under the category of search engine marketing. Paid search marketing is the practice by which content providers pay search engines to display their website at the top of the search results page. On the other hand, search engine optimization refers to the process of enhancing a website through the natural use of popular keywords. One of the tools used to help search engine optimization measures is the yeast SEO plugin (Lewandowski et al., 2021).

Marketers must take the lead in creating content and manage customer attention and behavioral metrics. Businesses utilize content marketing as one of their primary channels to promote deals, educate customers about new items, entertain current customers while upselling other products, and encourage profitable behaviors that will boost sales (Ho et al., 2020).

### **2.4. Technology Innovation**

Strategic planning is the process of choosing the best product for the proper market, introducing unique products into the market, and managing the leadership, all of which are stated to have innovative capabilities. This has a significant impact on enhancing entrepreneurial performance. Enterprises must recognize the value of technological innovation, which maintains the firm sustainability and accelerates business development while paving the way for innovations that dominating the market. Technology adoption and innovation have a significant influence on the success of SME's (Jalil et al., 2022). On-page optimization is the process of the website owner

managing factors such the meta description, content, headings, and pictures. Off-page optimization is dependent on outside factors that affect Google ranking. It is extremely reliable and of a high caliber, which raises the website's ranking position (Milla & Oliver, 2021). The live-stock industry is a rapid change sector that requires excellent business strategies and it has to be restructured with more efficiency and adopting latest technologies. The latest technology sensors are utilized in the live-stock sectors to monitor daily activities and health-related concerns. Other technologies, such radio frequency identification (RFID), global positioning system (GPS), biometric sensors, controlled traffic farming, drones, big data for data management, the internet of things (IOT) for decision-making, forecasting artificial intelligence, and robots for automated milking, all benefit company growth, sustainability, and productivity (Md Sin et al., 2021).

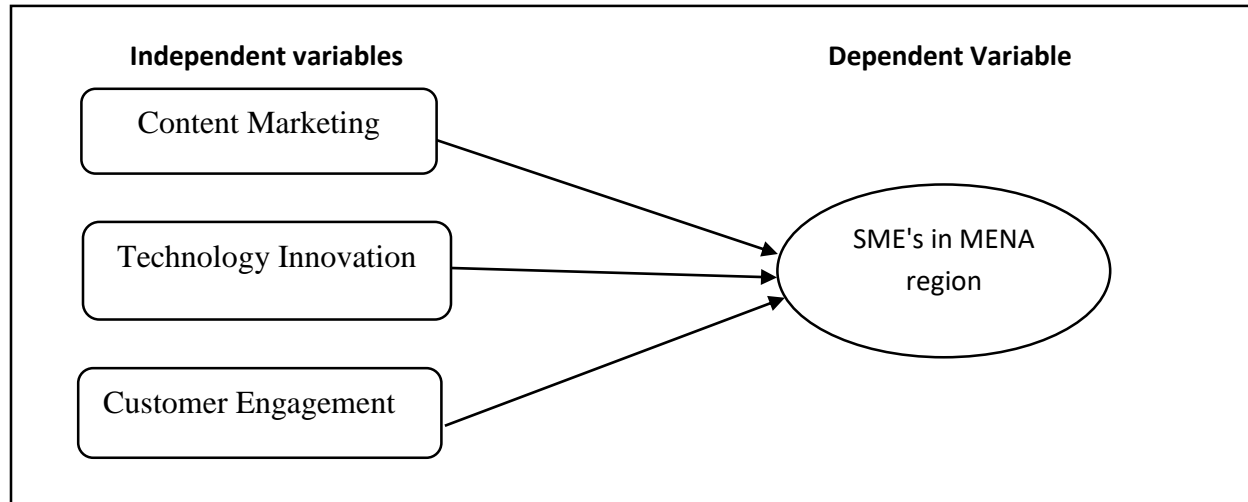
## **2.5. Customer Engagement**

Customer engagement is nothing more than the emotional, behavioural, and psychological condition of involvement from customer's end. All kind of business must prioritize customer engagement since it affects word-of-mouth (WOM), assessment, loyalty, and co-creation which has impact on sales. The generation z group are increasingly attracted to digital platforms and influenced by purchase intentions (Kaihatu, 2020). The value will gain only after providing clients with services. Customer value is always the foundation of market offerings. In business, customer value which is nothing more than the manner in which a supplier delivers services to a client is always plays a crucial role. Three levels make up a valuable interaction: the connection layer, which offers relationship value; the matching layer, which offers matching value; and the service layer, which offers service value. Value interactions affect perceived relationship quality (Manuel, Franziska, & Susanne, 2021). Videos attract viewers more than standard plain-image postings and plain-text posts. Interactive websites drive greater website traffic, which has an effect on lead generation, purchasing, frequent website visits, favourite websites, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and brand perception. The followership is impacted by consumer engagement (Clement Addo et al., 2021).

## **3. Research Methodology**

In this research study, a qualitative methodology was used for the data collection and analysis. The most recent publications published between year 2019 and 2023 were used to complete the literature review. These articles were found in databases such as Google Scholar,

EBSCO, Proquest, and others. carefully studied and identified the gap variables from each article and formulated three independent variables such as content marketing, technological innovation, and customer engagement. The proposed conceptual framework for social media's characteristics influence on SMEs in the MENA area is shown below.



**Figure 1:** *Conceptual Framework*

*(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)*

## **4. Analysis, Outcome and Proposition**

### **4.1. Effects of Content Marketing on Business Success and Sales**

Technology advancements enabled marketing simple. The growing rate of consumer interest in making purchases is influenced by the content marketing strategy. The author proved that in north sumatra, the content marketing strategies have a positive impact on maximize product sales SME's (Sembiring et al., 2022). The six factors such as search engine optimization (SEO), pay per click, mobile marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, website traffic, all the factors have a positive significant impact on the business performance, online sales and after sales (Anju, 2021). Social media strategy and SEO techniques has a positive impact on sales, which boost sales in retail business. Social media attracts new clients and has a significant impact on purchases, businesses must improve traffic to their websites (Mohammad Waliul Hasanat et al., 2020).

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the using content marketing strategies in the SME's has a major positive impact on Business success and Sales improvement.



#### **4.1.1. Outcome**

Digital Content Marketing factors such as perceived enjoyment and perceived convenience, had an impact on customer attitudes, which in turn impacts customer intention and customer behavior in tourism industry specifically located in Middle East and North Africa region (Mathew & Soliman, 2021). The author conducted a detailed study from twenty-one different countries and stated that content marketing activities have an impact on online consumer behavior (Charmaine, 2022). The visual content engagement (marketing tool) have a positive significant relationship on sales growth and market share which means to achieve cost effectiveness and business success. This relationship is mediated through the marketing performance (Ikeni & Tonye, 2022).

#### **4.1.2. Proposition**

Content marketing has a positive impact on SME's, which leads to an increase in sales, customer purchase intentions and cost effectiveness, all of which lead to an improvement in Business performances, success and sales growth.

#### **4.2. Effect of Technology Innovation on SME's Performance and Sustainability**

Author (Qalati et al., 2022) conducted a detailed quantitative research in the developing countries such as SME's in Pakistan and highlighted the results that social media adoption (SMA), entrepreneurial orientation (EO), customer relationship management capabilities (CRMC) and Innovation capabilities (IC) all have a positive significant effect on SME performance (SMEP). SME performance (SMEP) consists of seven sub variables such as increase in number of customers, increase in customer loyalty and retention, improved customer services and relationships, increase in sales volume and transactions, decrease in cost of communication with stakeholders, decrease in cost of marketing activities, increased information accessibility. This research also proved that if the SME's increases their Innovation capabilities then social media adoption will give greater effect on SME performance (SMEP). The findings clearly indicate that technology innovation has a direct significant impact on SME's performance. The indicator (social contribution value per share (SCVPS)) of stock exchange have a positive impact on stock price synchronicity and firm performance. The firm performance consists of firm profitability and firm value (Zhang et al., 2021). The adoption of digitalization by businesses would enhance the value activities, according to the author who studied 93 multinational organizations and obtained

findings using structural equation modeling. Business need to incorporate a digital organizational culture, a best digital strategy in order to improve the firm performances (Martinez et al., 2020).

#### **4.2.1. Outcome**

Social media adoption (SMA) mediates the connection between entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and SME performance (SMEP). Moreover, the relationship between the social media adoption (SMA) and SME performance (SMEP) is moderated by the innovation capabilities (IC) variable (Fang et al., 2022). In Saudi Arabia, Artificial intelligence-assisted social media marketing (AISMM) has a direct positive impact on increasing SME's performance (SMEP) and this relationship is mediated through effective business management factor (Basri, 2020).

#### **4.2.2. Proposition**

Technology innovation has a positive relationship on social media adoption by SME's. This leads to an increase in business profit, customer relationship and overall SME's performance and sustainability.

### **4.3. Effect of Customer Engagement on Purchase Intension**

According to the results of the studies (“how to reach generation Z customers in the target market”), digital marketing has a favorable effect on customer engagement. The consumer engagement factor mediates the link between digital marketing and online purchase intention, having a favorable influence on consumers' intentions to make purchases online (Kaihatu, 2020). According to a case study the author conducted on the private university of Sarajevo, Search engine optimization (SEO), search engine results pages have a positive impact on increase in user engagement, average customer retention, number of new visitors to the website, which improves annual sales revenue (Porturak et al., 2022). In live-streaming digital marketing, the customer engagement factor which includes likes, visits, exposure time, and chats is positively significant on the purchase intention variable. This relationship is mediated through followership. As a customer becomes a follower, a moderator like price becomes insignificant on purchase intention (Clement Addo et al., 2021). The findings of this study clearly show that customer engagement has a significant positive impact on customer relationship, brand perceptions, purchase intentions which had a direct impact on improve SME's business performance.

#### **4.3.1. Outcome**

By doing research on the interactions between consumers and brands, the author concludes that the involvement, customer perception, and commitment factors that drive customer

engagement have a positive, considerable impact on loyalty. Also, the author discovered that the three sub-dimensions of consumer engagement such as emotional, behavioral, and cognitive have a favorable, substantial impact on customer loyalty (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Studies (Jaitly & Gautam, 2021) to analyze the connections between brand awareness, consumer engagement, and social media influencers. According to the findings, the antecedents (social factors, user attributes, marketing, and customer orientation) have an effect on the influencers (choice of social media platform, influence of social influencer, user perceptions and behavior), which in turn have an effect on the personal outcome (consumer perception, consumer engagement), which in turn has a positive impact on the organizational outcome (customer relationship, brand perception).

#### **4.3.2. Proposition**

Customer engagement have a positive relationship on purchase intentions and customer loyalty which leads to improvement on Business performance.

### **5. Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This research examined the different factors that may affect SMEs and created an environment that is conducive to incorporating content marketing, technology innovation and customer engagement to improve business. This research provides valuable guidelines to assist SME owners and management to adapt social media in business strategic plans successfully. Finally, the results of this research encourage practitioners to include social media into their business plans for SME's by giving them important insights.

### **6. Conclusion**

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge. This study explains how social media affects SME businesses in the MENA region for the benefit and responses research questions. This study provides a clear picture of how SME's are using social media effectively in business growth. The findings of this study show that all the three independent variables such as (content marketing, technology innovation, customer engagement) significantly impact on purchase decision, improvement in sales, business success, business performance and business sustainability. This research gives effective inputs to SME owners that they can achieve business success by adopting social media and its characteristics in their business strategies. Although only qualitative research methods were used in this study, additional investigation using quantitative

research methods is recommended. Studies on the influence of social media on SMEs are limited, especially when it comes to the Middle East and North Africa so further study is necessary to increase awareness of SME usage of social media. The generalizability of the results is impacted by the research's limited focus on the Middle East and Northern Africa. Future research can thus use this information to apply to other developing countries with similar settings because different countries will have distinct political, economic and environmental settings, thus future research can be applied to other countries. Further research is advised to examine other variables such as customer retention, customer re-purchase intention, purchase frequency, employee engagement, quality of the product and many more variables that influence on SME businesses.

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