

**“Factors Affecting the Adoption of Social Media among SMEs using
TOE Framework”**



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Fall, 2022

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Abstract

The primary goal of this study is to improve understanding of the factors influencing social media adoption in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). To accomplish the goals of the study, a qualitative research methodology using semi-structured face-to-face interviews was used. The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) paradigm was used in this study to identify the main obstacles that SMEs faced when adopting social media marketing. The following factors, which specifically influence the adoption of social media marketing among the participant Pakistani SMEs, surfaced as barriers of different sorts during data analysis: skepticism about the benefits of social media, compatibility with the organization's rules and infrastructure, complex social media performance monitoring methods, resistance from top management, small size and structure, a lack of financial resources, favorable effects of competitive pressure on growth, Political unrest and high taxation from government and advantageous impacts of COVID-19, are a few of the factors. The emergence of new innovation has presented opportunities and problems for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). With the use of the TOE model, this study adds to the existing body of information regarding the adoption factors for social media marketing. The qualitative findings are helpful for future studies as well as policymakers, small retail organizations, authorities, and SMEs itself. The results might help SME' administrators and the government by making it easier for SMEs to use social media.

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CHAPTER No: 01

1.0: Introduction:

It is no question that the rise in social media use over the past ten years has altered how people connect and get relevant details (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). By producing and promoting content, businesses now have more ways to connect with consumers owing to the increase in online connectivity (Bala & Ver, 2018). Social media are web-based and smartphone technologies that "provide highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-produce, discuss, and alter user-generated content," (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and LinkedIn are currently the most widely used social networking sites. Social media has had a significant effect on marketing strategy because it has contributed to closing the gap between businesses and consumers at large, such as opening up channels of communication, assisting businesses in formulating long-lasting relationships with audiences, helping businesses shape the perception of their brands through consumer feedback, and because there are more individuals and resources available than ever before, offering educational and personal development opportunities within organizations.. (Appel et al., 2020)

The emergence of social media has transformed not only how people live their lives but has also enabled businesses new ways to advertise. Businesses can no longer rely on mainstream media alone to engage with their customers (Appel et al., 2020). If they wish to succeed, they must adopt innovative techniques (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011). It has been discovered that social media is currently the global trend for start-up companies and that it offers a variety of marketing opportunities that transcend conventional channels like newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and direct mail (Khorsheed et al., 2020). However, with the development of new technology and the emergence of social media marketing, the condition has evolved. For instance, better customer service, improved products, and services increased accessibility to a broader diverse audience, and the utilization of favorable pricing strategies Simon (2012). Businesses can now engage with customers in a more informative and interactive (two-way) manner (Lee & Hong, 2016). Social media users have the ability to share their opinions and experiences, which promotes creativity, open communication, and the exchange of knowledge among users. Therefore, it can improve customer and supplier relationships, make it very clear where funding and resources are available, foster innovation, and support the formation of strategic alliances (Bocconcelli et al., 2018). Previous empirical studies (Qalati et al., 2021) suggests that social media is playing an important role in the development of SMEs. Global competition has risen as a result of increasing digitization and rapid globalization

across industries (Qalati et al., 2022). Moreover, the emergence of new innovations has presented both opportunities and challenges for small and medium-sized businesses (Talukder et al., 2013).

A growing body of knowledge is emerging that small and medium-sized businesses must utilize social media to obtain a competitive edge (Dahnil et al., 2014). Further studies (Salam et al., 2019) concluded that two significant characteristics of SMEs are innovation and social cohesion since they subsequently give them the ability to compete with rivals both locally and worldwide (Alkateeb & Abdalla, 2021). Due to the benefits it provides to businesses, such as cost effectiveness, time efficiency, a minimum level of IT skills required to use it, and a high level of consumer interaction, SMEs have begun to embrace social media as a marketing tool (Abed, 2020). SMEs may be able to perform better in the market due to information technology (IT) and the utilization of social media in particular (AlSharji et al., 2018). It allows SMEs enter new markets, promote new products, and forge relationships with new partners, among other advantages (Talukder et al., 2013).

Small medium businesses are gradually embracing social media as the new marketing trend (Baines et al, 2011). For example, the infrastructure of the country, as in the instance of internet broadband spread, a lack of qualified labor, a lack of specialized social media understanding the online networking attitude of a company's executives, if top management has dedicated resources in the manner of money, time, and staff to social media marketing, as well as the difficulty of attracting users through the social media channel and achieving actual profitable results (Bogea & Brito, 2018). By overcoming such factors firms can achieve a wide range of benefits. According to earlier research (Bakri 2017) on SMEs in "Gulf" nations, 90% of business owners did not utilize social media because they were unaware of the advantages and lacked the technological know-how to incorporate social media applications into their daily operations. El-Gohary (2012) showed that substantial execution costs are an important barrier to using social media, along with a lack of innovative knowledge and abilities regarding how to use it. Other obstacles to the adoption of social media include a lack of resources (both financial and human), cultural challenges, and an unsupportive culture (Meske & Stieglitz, 2013; Panahi et al., 2014). Although barriers to adopt social media can create hurdles for small firms but still as discussed earlier many SMEs in various contexts still using social media for better performance. The lockdown measures put in place by governments around the world during the Covid-19 outbreak severely hurt SMEs, to the point where it was doubtful that they would survive (Papadopoulos et al., 2020). No matter the size of the organization, the existing supply and demand situation has been severely affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. However, SMEs have been harmed more, according to OECD (2020) research, because they lacked adaptability and resilience in the face of large environmental shocks. Additionally, SMEs generally lack access to both liquid and non-

liquid capital compared to large companies, making them more susceptible to external environmental shocks (Trawnih et al., 2021). Organizations must undertake methods to increase their resilience and capacity for change due to the effects of crises like COVID-19 (Reeves et al., 2020).

Due to Covid-19, it has been recognized that businesses must utilize both physical and digital channels in order to survive (Itliong, 2020). Since the implementation of social distancing, the only platform for businesses and customers to engage was through online shopping channels as a result of a Covid-19 response (Effendi et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has made social media significant for businesses. The focus has shifted on managing daily business operations remotely (Trawnih et al., 2021). At the same time, SMEs have also been forced to close, despite help from the government, as a result of customers being unable to visit their stores due to the limitations associated with the pandemic (Trawnih et al., 2021). Recent research on crisis management, however, mostly focuses on large organizations while giving SMEs very little consideration (Herbane, 2019). Despite the fact that they frequently innovate and develop and play a vital role in promoting economic growth and job creation, SMEs tend to be more vulnerable to crises due to a lack of resources and a weak market position (Trawnih et al., 2021)

1.1: Problem Statement:

In the current era, the possibilities with social media are endless but it also presents several challenges for small businesses. One of the main impediments is leveraging social media to preserve high levels of efficiency and improve performance. Small businesses can use social media in the same manner that big enterprises can because there are few barriers to using social networking technologies, and implementing them requires several resources (Derham et al., 2011). The key problem is that stakeholders, including businesses, consumers, and the government, are oblivious of these constraints that significantly impair their ability to affect the performance of businesses.

This research study is conducted to highlight this problem by raising the following question: “What are the significant barriers or drivers that are faced by Small – Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in adopting the social media technology within their company for marketing purposes and once highlighted, how they can be overcome”

1.2: Research Gap:

The nature of business and the environment in which small-medium enterprises work is changing dramatically, thus requiring the need for conducting updated research to help them to respond effectively to these changes (Namankani et al., 2016). Previous research suggests that social media creates benefits for businesses (Hansson et al., 2013). Thus, it is clear that SMEs could gain from social media to improve business performance. Although previous studies (Talukder et al., 2013) investigated social media use in a business as a larger context, very few studies examined the several factors on the adoption of social media which could impact the performance of SMEs in underdeveloped countries and especially in Pakistan. This is a literature gap and our study will explore the factors and some barriers while adoption of social media as a tool in small firms which could increase the performance of the firms in Pakistan. Since it is unknown how many SMEs in Pakistan are utilizing social media for business purposes, it is crucial to comprehend how social media impacts SMEs' performance by identifying several factors.

Therefore, in order to fill this gap, the primary objective of our study is to investigate the factors and barriers by utilizing the technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework, affecting Social Media Adoption among SMEs in an underdeveloped country such as Pakistan in order to better understand SMEs performance. Through this problem statement, we hope to address the knowledge gap that hinders SMEs from developing effective strategies that will facilitate overcoming any technological barriers.

1.3: Research Question:

Since the purpose of this research is to shed light on the factors that helps or act as barriers in influencing SMEs to avoid the adoption of social media technology, this research aims to address the highlighting question that

1. What are the different social media adoption factors and barriers in the SMEs of Pakistan?
2. What are the different challenges faced by SMEs in Social Media Adoption and their relevant measures to overcome them?

1.4: Research Objectives:

This question is supported with the following research objectives:

- Examine different barriers and drivers that prevent or encourage SMEs to adopt social media marketing.
- Highlight the challenges so that all stakeholders can take relevant measures to overcome all the challenges.

1.5: Significance of the Study:

In order to contribute, this study will address the objective by conducting qualitative research. The findings are anticipated to further our knowledge of how social media use may enhance the performance of SMEs in the setting of Pakistan after exploring several barriers and factors. Therefore, the findings of this study will aid SMEs in decision-making in relation to social media initiatives and platforms to use. In practical terms, SMEs will be able to cut their traditional marketing expenses and boost productivity on social media. The findings theoretically contribute to the existing research by extending the TOE model. This research also looks at how future technology might be able to meet organizational social media needs in the future.

Chapter: 02

2.0: Literature and Theoretical Underpinnings:

2.1 Role of Social Media in Pakistan SMEs:

Around the world, SMEs make up 90% of businesses and 50% of jobs in underdeveloped countries, significantly boosting the GDP of those countries. (Qalati et al., 2021). SMEs are believed to be the primary force behind socioeconomic development due to their ability to boost growth, lower poverty, and create employment. There are over 3.3 million SMEs operating in a range of sectors, including the industrial, agricultural, service, and construction industries in Pakistan, also known as a developing nation. (Qalati et al., 2021) In terms of value addition and job creation, they account for a significant portion of Pakistan's economy. They mainly give low-income families opportunities. They are regarded as an important approach for eradicating poverty. With 80% of the industrial labor force, 40% of the nation's GDP, and one-fourth of the industry's export income, SMEs in particular play a vital role in the manufacturing sector. (Khaskheli, 2020)

However, Pakistan's SMEs are adopting technology at a lesser speed than those in developed nations. (Muhammad Arsalan Nazir, 2018). SMEs as well as other stakeholders in Pakistan can benefit from social media, but the country has had some constraints. Compared to SMEs in advanced nations, SMEs in Pakistan have not benefited as much from globalization and technology. (Mwika et al., 2018). For instance, (Al Bakri, 2017) discovered that 90% of business owners in "Gulf" countries did not use social media because they were uncertain of the benefits and lacked the technological know-how to integrate social media applications into their daily operations. (Dahnil et al., 2014) showed that a lack of creative knowledge and skills regarding how to use social media is one of the major obstacles to adopting it. The high cost of execution is another significant obstacle. Due to a shortage of financing, the potential for future development, globalization, technological acceptance, and other resources, SMEs in developing nations struggle more than in established economies. Lack of trust, a lack of resources (both financial and human), cultural challenges, and an unsupportive environment are further obstacles to the adoption of social media (Calli & Clark, 2015). SMEs in Pakistan are struggling with numerous problems and difficulties in this environment (i.e., rapid changes in market demand, uncertainty, and lack of resources). Due to the variety of social media platforms and how to connect with them, as well as a lack of training, some SME owners are stopped from integrating technology (Qalati et al., 2022). Lack of government laws and a lack of mutual trust are prevalent in Pakistan (Mahmood et al., 2019). The use of social media and its effect

on a company's success in developing nations like Pakistan are uncertain. Businesses have some influence over internal causes, but none whatsoever on external ones, as as the Covid-19 pandemic. In light to the constantly shifting market environment, increasing rivalry, and customers' shifts in using digital platforms, social media has thus been advocated as a critical influencing factor for improving SMEs' performance and thereby boosting developing economies (Qalati et al., 2022). Yet, according to academics, little has been published on the potential benefits of SMEs adopting social media (Al Bakri, 2017)

Numerous studies have demonstrated the advantages of social media adoption and use in the context of SMEs in both developed and emerging economies. For instance, (McCann & Barlow, 2015) recognized that Scottish SMEs benefited from implementing social media in terms of improved customer communication, enhanced brand awareness, optimised marketing of products and services, higher ability to display firm expert knowledge, acquiring more business connections, strong market research, improved client feedback, lower transmission costs, sales growth, better customer support, and enhanced satisfaction with customers. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can use social media as a tool for marketing, exhibiting current products with specific information, placing orders, promoting their brand, and interacting with customers around the world. Enhanced productivity, system integration, increased competitiveness, cost savings, and the development of a collaborative atmosphere are further advantages of social media use in the context of SMEs that have been proposed (Effendi et al., 2020). Nowadays, most consumers buy products online since it's simple, quick, and time-saving. Since economic reconfiguration and digital transformation are key to supporting economic growth and delivering more thorough globalization, developing strategic insights into the adoption of Social Media by SMEs is essential.

Social media has altered traditional marketing strategies like advertising and promotion because of its distinctive features and enormous popularity. According to studies, internet marketing is also less expensive than conventional and traditional marketing methods (Nuseir, 2018). Social media or digital marketing has been proven to be more effective than conventional marketing communication strategies including advertisement, promotional campaigns, media relations, and direct marketing in regards to communication, legitimacy, cost, and monitoring systems (Trawnih et al., 2021). The internet, computers, and the digital world are examples of the technological breakthroughs that define the modern period. Because of this, every aspect of life, including business, marketing, and entrepreneurship, has seen a significant transformation (Nuseir, 2018). In order to compete, businesses must embrace modern internet-based digital marketing techniques (Nuseir, 2018). It has changed consumer behaviour, reshaped numerous industries, and made doing business

with people easier. The sales and marketing departments of SMEs may easily automate the entire process, saving the business important time. The internet and online commerce have made it possible for even the smallest micro-business can go global. Because SMEs have a significant online presence, buyers may easily locate the goods and services they offer when they use internet search engines (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). Finding untapped market prospects that will support their expansion enables businesses to do so. Only global firms could accomplish this before these breakthroughs.

According to Michael (2014), companies and sectors should use the internet and e-markets to boost sales, broaden their clientele, and progress their commercial endeavors. According to (Dahnil et al., 2014), social media platforms like Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Messenger, among others, that provide free communications services have contributed to the globalization of personal communication. The entire world now exists as one global society. According to (Bogea & Brito, 2018), digital media may significantly support SME growth and performance, which will also help the country's economy and ultimately improve job prospects for young people who are currently unemployed. According to (Appel et al., 2020), SMEs should use digital media to promote internationally in order to access and penetrate sizable global markets, particularly in distant and challenging regions of less developed countries and regions that were previously impossible to approach.

2.2 Social Media adoption in SME's and TOE framework:

In the short time that SMEs began utilizing social media in their varied activities, it has evolved into a crucial survival tool (Alkateeb & Abdalla, 2021). When evaluating different business outcomes, many studies used frameworks and theories for technology adoption, with a wider emphasis on internal factors as the key determinants of social media adoption, according to a review of the literature. (Bogea & Brito, 2018) assert that SMEs must take into account both internal and external factors as drivers to social media adoption. In the technology adoption context, the Technology-Organization Environment (TOE) framework which was introduced by Tornatzky has often been used. This concept proposed that a variety of factors might influence the adoption of technology. In the context of SMEs, the TOE framework has consistently gained empirical validation (Alkateeb & Abdalla, 2021). Three key determinants of IT adoption are included in this model (the technology context, the organizational context, the environmental context).

Numerous investigations have evaluated how small- to medium-sized organizations embrace technology using the TOE model. (Effendi et al., 2020) examined how senior managers' attitudes,

information technology skills, risk perceptions, and adoption barriers affected the dynamics of innovation in cloud computing adoption in SMEs using the TOE framework. . Similar to this, (Trawnih et al., 2021) looked at how 250 SMEs in the Indonesian province of Yogyakarta used social media to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the study's findings, SMEs impacted by the Covid-19 crisis have a positive evaluation for social media's benefits and a strong motivation to embrace it. However, a number of factors, including perceived relative advantage, perceived complexity, perceived compatibility, employee skills, top-level management support, financial restrictions, size & structure, competitive pressure, government support, and environmental uncertainty, have a significant impact on how they intend to proceed. We therefore used the TOE framework because we believe it can fully demonstrate all of the factors that impact social media adoption in the context of Pakistani SMEs.

2.2.1 Technological context:

The adoption of IT, particularly social media, by SMEs appears to be significantly influenced by the technological environment (Ramdani et al., 2013). It discusses the technical abilities required to use social media and focuses on internal and external technology that is advantageous for businesses (Matikiti et al., 2018); (Abed, 2020). The technological environment involves compatibility, complexity, and relative advantage (Alkateeb & Abdalla, 2021).

- **Relative advantage:**

Relative advantage is the degree to which an innovation is regarded as superior to the concept it replaces (Bocconcelli et al., 2018). It displays the gains or losses a company will experience depending on whether it adopts or rejects a technology (Qalati et al., 2021). According to (Effendi et al., 2020), owners and managers of SMEs typically adopt an innovation if they see that it has many more advantages than disadvantages. Numerous research discovered that relative advantage has a favourable effect on SMEs' adoption of social media. The adoption of ICTs by SMEs in Saudi Arabia's rural areas was examined using an enhanced model of the TOE. AlBar & Hoque (2019) discovered that ICT adoption among SMEs was significantly correlated with relative advantages. The findings were also validated by Ahani, Rahim, and Nilashi (2017). Their study's findings indicated that relative advantage is the primary element driving the adoption of social IT. Using social media, SMEs can respond to customers whenever and wherever they are. In contrast to these findings, Ahmad, Bakar, and Ahmad (2019) observed that relative advantage showed no significant relationship with social media adoption in one of the relatively few research carried out in Middle Eastern nations. SMEs in Pakistan must understand that adopting innovation will either present new

production opportunities, such as greater productivity and improved operational efficiency, or solutions to current problems. A logical adoption strategy in any company requires an evaluation of the new technology's prospective business benefits. Therefore, while considering whether to use social media, SMEs in Pakistan must take the relative advantage into account.

- **Compatibility:**

Compatibility refers to the extent to which an invention is perceived to be in line with the values, attitudes, and interests of potential customers (Rogers, 2010, p. 42). Compatibility is one of the major factors impacting SMEs' adoption of ICT, according to Premkumar (2003a) (Qalati et al., 2022). According to these authors, technology will be readily accepted in an organisation if it is in sync with the culture, can serve organisational needs, and is linked in with its core values. Additionally, corporations can reach their target audiences promptly and efficiently by incorporating social media activities into business processes in a way that is consistent with the firm's aims, policies, and values (Khaskheli, 2020). (Ramdani et al., 2013) discovered that compatibility has a considerable favourable impact for ICT adoption in the setting of SME. The same outcomes were discovered by (Sharmilaand & Kavitha, 2022). On the other hand, (Ainin et al., 2015) found no evidence of a causal link between compatibility and ICT adoption by SMEs.

The incompatibility of new technology with existing standards and operational procedures is one of the key issues preventing Pakistani SMEs from adopting IT. The adoption of new technology may be slowed by previously proposed technologies that are not well received since they will be evaluated based on how well the earlier ideas performed. As a result, compatibility procedures may play a useful part in determining if a new concept will be adopted by businesses.

- **Complexity:**

"The degree to which an innovation is seen as comparatively difficult to understand and use" is the definition of complexity (Rogers, 2010, p. 42). (Trawnih et al., 2021) connected complexity to both the application and use of technology. It is thought that the adoption of ICT is adversely correlated with innovation complexity. The intricacy of new technology, according to (Low et al., 2011), lessens the likelihood that people will adopt it. When adopting new technology and innovations, the notion of complexity is a vital technological component that must not be disregarded. Social media technology makes it feasible for SMEs to oversee their businesses. No matter what advantages the technology may have, employees in Pakistani SMEs will not use it if they find it tough to use because the adoption of IT equipment is closely tied to how complicated users believe it to be. It is quite likely that technology will be accepted if it is simple to use. Therefore,

it is intriguing to determine how social media complexity, as an illustration of a new IT-based approach, can influence SMEs' adoption decisions. (Kavitha & Sharmilaand, 2022)

2.2.2 Organizational Context:

The organisational traits that influence the adoption of technology are one part of the TOE model (Bhattacharya & Wamba, 2015). The organisational construct is linked to the internal characteristics of the company, including its size and structure (staffing, number of workers, formalisation or centralization of procedures), Employee Expertise, and Financial Constraints. It is known that these settings make it easier to acquire innovations. For businesses to encourage the adoption of technology, internal organisational processes must be adequate (AlSharji et al., 2018). Prior studies have shown that the size and structure of the company, employee experience, and financial restraints are the primary determinants of how small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) would use social media to market their goods and services (Effendi et al., 2020)

- **Top Management Support:**

This aspect relates to the level of assistance given by top management for the use of technology for business-related goals (Abed, 2020). In order to successfully implement technology, senior management support has been considered to be crucial by a number of researchers (Alrousan et al., 2020; Low et al., 2011; Abed, 2020; Salamzadeh & Arbatani, 2020). Top management is essential in determining the adoption of technology because it has the ability to impact beliefs, values, and ideas at both organizational and individual levels (Low et al., 2011). According to (Pateli et al., 2020), who believe that top management assistance is necessary for the adoption of social media marketing, senior executives are also the ones who influence colleagues by proposing a system, resources, and cognitive support. As a result, it is projected that SMEs will be more inclined to implement social media if they receive higher levels of top management support.

In order to establish a supportive environment and allocate the necessary resources for innovation adoption, managerial support is essential (Hamad et al., 2018; Irhas et al., 2020). Because they are "more ambitious, risk-takers, imaginative, and constantly creative," SME owner-managers are regarded as being crucial to an organization's readiness for adopting ICT (Muhammad Arsalan Nazir, 2018). Owner-manager characteristics include perceived benefits of adopting ICT, ICT skills, assertiveness level in company decision-making activities, perceived control over necessities for opportunities and resources, distrust of ICT, and time constraints according to Rahman et al. (2020). (Ramdani et al., 2013) state that among the perceived advantages of adopting ICTs are a focus on enhancing operational performance, market expansion, and company efficiency. Additionally,

current theories stated that small businesses had a significant propensity to use ICT if owner-managers and staff possess ICT literacy, skills, and competence. Additionally, for ICT adoption and e-business success in SMEs, access to internal and external help and incentive from ICT specialists is essential (Windrum et al., 2002). Executives must emphasize the good usability of new applications when it comes to technology adoption. A highly effective initial application may also provide staff members a significant boost and inspire excitement for technical advancement. Further reading of the literature found that SMEs that are focused on expansion and competition may lack the resources and personnel necessary to successfully implement technology and manage growth, maybe as a result of the owner's age, culture, and educational background (Windrum et al., 2002). Additionally, (Collier et al., 2011) stated that small business owners with the necessary qualifications and technological proficiency are more likely to be growth-oriented, whereas those without these needed qualities are more likely to be growth-averse. According to (Collier et al., 2011), SMEs' resources and capabilities, which are related to the owner-age, manager's experience, and firm's age and size, are seen as crucial elements for successful innovation and growth (Talukder et al., 2013).

- **Financial Constraints:**

High technological expenses are another important problem that prevents the adoption and utilization of IT. The availability of resources represents an organization's ability and willingness to forsake resources in order to adopt technological innovation. Financial resources, as defined by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990), are sums of money that can be used to pay for the costs of acquiring, implementing, and maintaining technical breakthroughs (Kim & Garrison, 2010). Financial assistance and its availability, according to (Rahman et al., 2020), show an organization's capacity and readiness to cover the cost of a new system's implementation, training, and integration. Technology adoption is hindered by the limited resources available to SMEs and the high cost of new technologies (Trawnih et al., 2021). SMEs are at a disadvantage to larger companies because they lack the resources to finance the adoption of new technology. Financial limitations have been identified as one of the key barriers preventing SMEs, particularly those in developing countries, from adopting Web 3.0 technology (Potluri & Vajjhala, 2018). Due to financial restrictions, SMEs in Pakistan are unable to expand. Due to inadequate funding to achieve their initial business goals stated at the outset of the business, the majority of SMEs fail to expand.

- **Size and Structure of the firm:**

The firm's resources, employee connections, internal communication channels, firm size, and the number of slack resources are all part of the organizational context (Oliveira & Martins, 2010). The internal characteristics of the company, such as its scale, the centralization or formalization of procedures, staffing, and managerial concerns, are referred to as organizational aspects. It describes an organization's size, scope, and management structure in particular (Oliveira & Martins, 2010). Other studies divide organizational context into three categories: CEO innovation, organizational scale, and top management support (Korkmaz, 2007).

Regardless of the advantages of IT, it is crucial for businesses to think about whether their competencies and resources are sufficient to support adoption. According to certain research, organisational characteristics have an impact on the adoption of social media by fostering a supportive work environment and allocating the necessary resources. Additionally, according to (Alshamaileh, 2013), The size of the company and the assistance of top management are two factors that have an impact on how quickly SMEs adopt new technology. Small organizations believe that because of their ability to change their vision and mission swiftly and adaptably, their small makes it easier for them to adopt recent innovations. Organizational size is seen to be a critical factor for start-ups and small businesses. It is also generally agreed upon that start-up businesses with smaller initial customer bases are more inclined to utilize social media marketing strategies because they help minimize capital expenditure due to their low implementation costs.

2.2.3 Environmental Context:

The business atmosphere is one of the key elements that can help or hinder the adoption of new technologies, according to (Talukder et al., 2013). The environmental context is viewed in this context as referring to external factors whose assistance is required for the survival and expansion of a business. Suppliers, employees, and competitors of a company all exert pressure on SMEs to adopt e-commerce platforms, according to Trawnih et al. (2021). However, businesses cannot utilize technology if they lack the necessary infrastructure and government support. According to a study by Karim et al. (2017), SMEs in Jordan gained from the adoption of digital marketing strategies. However, the benefits cannot be realized due to a lack of network infrastructure and government assistance. (Karim and others, 2021)

- **Environmental Uncertainty:**

The adoption of technology can be hindered by the uncertain business environment (Scupola, 2003). Due to the environment's rapid change, environmental uncertainties frequently are beyond the control of enterprises. According to a study by Al-Okaily et al. (2020), one of the major factors affecting how SMEs in Jordan utilize technology is environmental uncertainty. The Covid-19 pandemic and other environmental factors that have forced SMEs in Pakistan to embrace social media marketing tools as a means of survival strategy are the subject of the current study (Itliong, 2020). SME adoption of technology, however, may be restricted by additional uncertainties relating to their immediate contexts, such as a lack of infrastructure and ambiguous operating rules.

- **Government Support:**

Based on the research of (Goldberg, 2009), government policies are essential for SMEs to promote e-commerce. The goal of the government's e-commerce policy should be to secure businesses and customers from the threat of cybercrimes (Faqir et al., 2014). Regarding the regularity system, it has been suggested (Alkateeb & Abdalla, 2021) that government regulation offers adequate protection for SMEs' usage of ICT and helps or hinders their use of new technology. This viewpoint was also backed by (Trawnih et al., 2021), who made the case that SMEs are unable to implement e-commerce since there is no government policy control in this area. As a result, it is clear that the governmental environment can either positively encourage technological innovation by introducing regulations that encourage businesses to adopt new technology or negatively restrain the use of new technology by obstructing the implementation of restrictive regulations (Borgman et al., 2013). As a result, the Pakistani government can encourage the adoption of technology by SMEs by establishing supportive settings including tax deductions, funding for infrastructure, and regulatory monitoring.

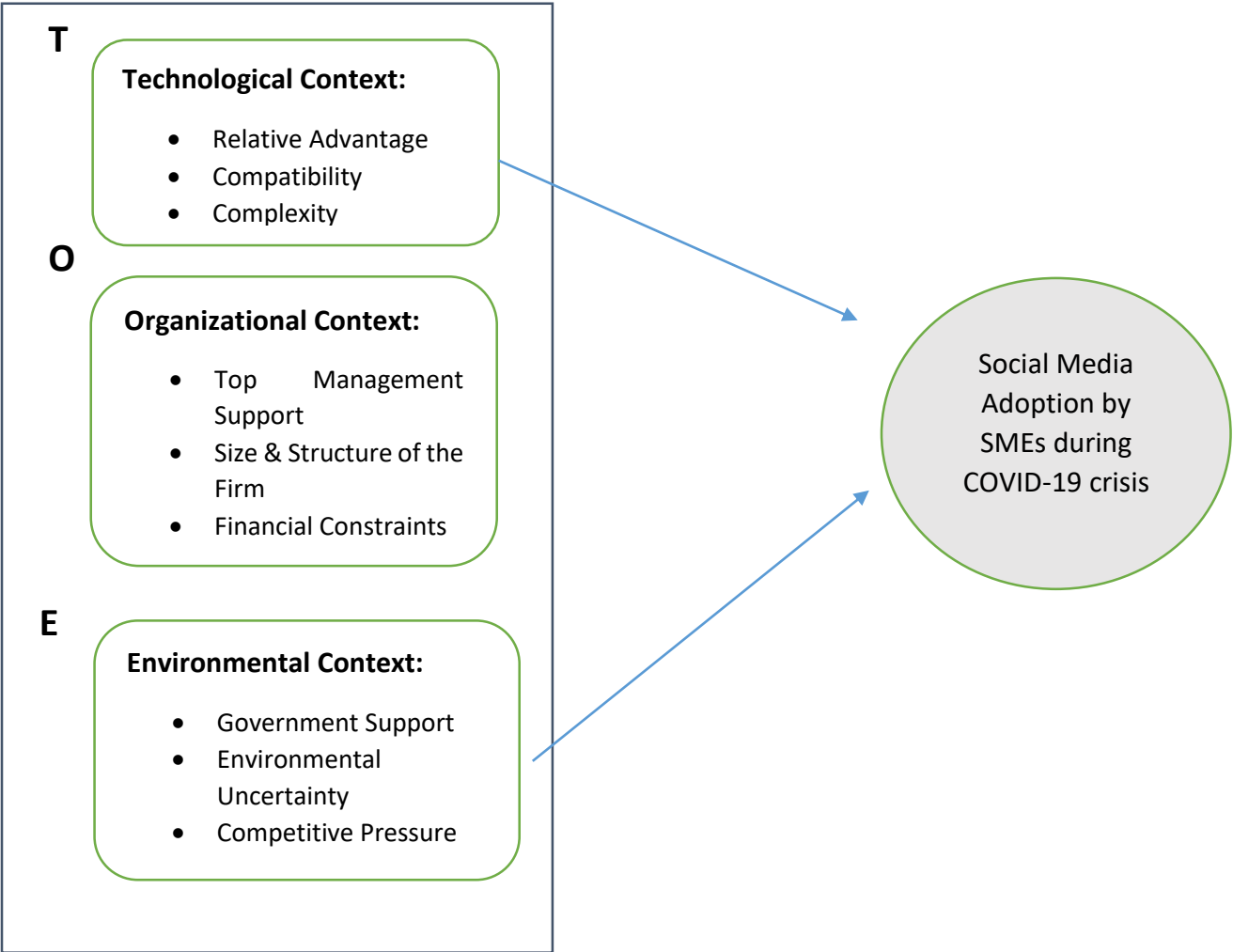
- **Competitive Pressure:**

Competition pressure is a major factor in e-commerce adoption (Stiles, 2006). Referencing Porter and Millar (1985), it can be proposed that industry competition tends to modify the industry's landscape and that technology can be a game-changer and frequently leads to an industry's reorganization. For instance, Covid-19 has compelled businesses to use technology since businesses are spending money on technology to gain a competitive advantage (Klein & Todesco, 2021). It has been stated that SMEs will adopt new technologies at a higher rate the more competitors there are in the market (Scupola, 2003).

In the past, several authors have noted that competitive pressure has a favourable and considerable impact on the adoption of innovation in developing nations, such as Pakistan (Qalati et al., 2022), the UAE (Nuseir, 2018), and Thailand (Tripopsakul, 2018). (Ahani et al., 2017) claim that competitive pressure had a major role in the choice to use social media and that competitors utilize social media to polish their competitive advantages, raise consumer satisfaction levels, and generate income. According to (Lin, 2014), there is a positive relationship between the willingness to use social media and competitive pressure. Elevated levels of environmental uncertainty are also brought about by competition, which in turn increases the demand for and rate of adoption of IT innovation. For instance, the introduction of touch phones drastically altered the 238 landscapes of the mobile phone industry over the world, forcing market leaders like Nokia out of business. The use of social media was not significantly impacted by competitive pressure, according to Ahmad, Bakar, and colleagues (2018).

Conceptual Framework:

Fig 2.1



Chapter: 03

3.0: Research Methodology:

The study's objective, which is to identify the constraints and factors to SME adoption of social media in developing nations like Pakistan, will be carried out utilizing the most relevant interpretivism philosophy. Through interpretivism, participants were able to develop a thorough understanding of certain situations and the challenges SMEs face in adopting social media. A qualitative approach was chosen as the preferred method of investigation because social media use is still relatively young. Qualitative research views the world from a practical, interpretive approach (Cepeda & Martin, 2005). This suggests that qualitative researchers observe phenomena in their natural settings with the intention of comprehending or interpreting situations in the context of the values that people attribute to them (Denzin et al., 2006). In qualitative techniques, the objective is to fully comprehend behavior in order to assess its scope of it.

This allows researchers to focus on a small number of observations in order to fully comprehend them rather than having to justify them with a big amount of quantitative data (Ghauri & Grnhaug, 2005, p. 112). This exploratory study aims to develop a fresh and better knowledge of an emergent phenomenon (i.e. the adoption of social media by SMEs). This study makes use of qualitative analysis to identify key characteristics and obstacles SMEs have when adopting new technology, which ultimately improves performance. The owner-managers' experiences implementing social media networks for their companies are the source of the information that is being shared. The semi-structured interview was selected as the technique for gathering this data after choosing SMEs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of one-on-one semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study allows for a thorough examination of all the aspects and owner-managers' perspectives of the social media adoption process.

3.1: Sampling:

The SME (or a portion of it) is the unit of analysis for this study. The factors that influence SMEs' adoption of social media may also be examined by an owner-manager with experience and interest in the topic and study area, or by an event such as a decision, functioning of society, or implementation process. The SMEs in the Twin Cities, Punjab, and the federal region (Islamabad-
ISB) provided the information (Rawalpindi-RWP). These two cities are significant as service hubs, and many specialized businesses are based there. Table 1 contains a list of the respondents and SMEs who took part in the study.

Table 3.1: Respondent's information and SMEs participated in this study

No.	Total Number of staff	Owner/Manager Age & Education	Est. Year	SME Type	Location	Size
1	49	41 & Diploma	2011	Hospitality	Islamabad	Medium
2	16	38 & Msc	1998	Real estate	Rawalpindi	Medium
3	31	36 & MBA	2014	Tourism	Rawalpindi	Medium
4	21	46 & Certification	2010	Tourism	Islamabad	Medium
5	17	48 & Bachelors	2008	Real estate	Islamabad	Medium
6	27	32 & MBA	2001	Hospitality	Islamabad	Small
7	19	35 & MS	2004	Real estate	Rawalpindi	Small
8	12	43 & Diploma	2012	Tourism	Rawalpindi	Small
9	33	49 & Bachelors	1999	Hospitality	Islamabad	Small
10	28	38 & Certification	2015	Real estate	Rawalpindi	Small

Owner-managers were approached by the authors about taking part in the study using a purposive sample design. Researchers utilizing this technique are strongly urged to start with a "small and simple sample size," as organizing and interpreting enormous amounts of data could be difficult (Yin, 2018). Although Rashid et al 2019 's study highlighted a number of proposals made by other academics, there is no ideal number of samples for qualitative research. For example, (Lee, Falahat, and Sia, 2020) claim that less than 10 samples are usually used in small company research; Less than ten samples, according to (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), four to ten samples, according to (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), and six to eight samples, according to (Nazir and Roomi, 2021), are recommended for a homogeneous sample. In order to confirm the existence of the businesses and secure permission to take part in the study phone calls were made to ten SMEs that were selected (five in each region) and met the requirements of this study. SMEs in the import, hotel, tourist, and ICT (hardware and software) sectors who were contacted all consented to take part in the study. One

owner-manager from each of these SME companies was chosen to give this study qualitative information.

3.2: Questionnaire design and data collection:

Various versions of a semi-structured questionnaire were developed based on the literature in order to modify the study's framework. Semi-structured interviews allow for a lot of flexibility and do not require the interviewer to strictly follow a set of predetermined questions (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Open-ended questions from the final questionnaire were used as an instrument in the interviewing process. A conversation is either recorded in handwritten notes or as audio in order to capture the responses (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009).

The research questions received outstanding feedback from the pilot study, and as a result of the thorough submissions, the interview questions' validity was raised. Relationships were formed throughout the pilot interviews with the different participants to become familiar with each company, it made it easier to contact the SMEs to conduct the final in-person interviews. In order to fully comprehend the perspectives of the respondents, semi-structured interviews are relatively fluid and the interviewer does not completely adhere to a predefined list of questions (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Ten (10) in-depth, face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured checklist were used in this study to gather data. In semi-structured interviews, participants can explain opportunities, challenges, and barriers as well as how these contextual factors affect their SMEs.

3.4: Data analysis:

Handwritten notes and numerous audio transcriptions were carefully scrutinized manually for patterns and differences in the responses of the participating SMEs in order to better understand the acquired data. The qualitative collected data for this study were examined using thematic techniques, which are recognized as an efficient qualitative data analysis technique (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The six-phase analysis approach utilized was as follows:

First phase: Multiple readings were used to manually transcribe the material obtained by taking notes and some audio recordings following the interviews in order to familiarise and interpret it.

Second Phase: Based on the responses/narratives that the respondents had provided, codes were manually discovered once the data had been evaluated.

Third Phase: Initial sub-themes and themes were identified by integrating codes.

Fourth phase: After carefully examining the data, the initial theme was modified and developed in order to better serve the study's goals, which were established after the themes were identified. The themes were therefore obvious from the study purpose and were found from the data obtained after repeating the data many times.

Fifth phase: During this phase, the themes were defined and sub-themes were pursued after.

Sixth Phase: This report was generated after the discovery of codes, the development of themes and sub-themes, and the formulation of a TOE framework based on the findings of the study.

Chapter: 04

4.0: Findings:

The extensive data gathered from several interviews offers various thematic insights that help identify the challenges faced by Pakistani SMEs while using social media for marketing. Table 2 lists the three themes, sub-themes, and codes that were found in the interview data after the data was carefully transcribed. The three themes are: 1) Technological factors; 2) Organizational factors; and 3) Environmental variables. In order to examine the opinions received from respondents and find answers to study questions, a framework was supplied by the categorized topics that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Table 4.1: Themes, sub-themes and codes derived from thematic analysis

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Technological context:	<i>Skepticism of Benefits:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager-owners unsure of the benefits • Hesitated in adopting social media platforms • Adopted it slowly • Multiple channels for their customer to reach • Using customer service software Watch out for market trends
	<i>Compatibility with Infrastructure & Firm Policies:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require a good internet connection • Criticism, and negative comments online. • Respond to frustrated customers professionally • Ads culturally aligned

Complex Social Media Metric Tools:

- Social media tools are complex and difficult to use
- Not everyone on the team knows how to use the software
- Not everyone knows how to fetch facts and figures from data
- Requires on-hand practice too

Organizational Context:

Reluctance in Top Management Support:

- Senior executives do not express interest in others' ideas
- No cognitive support
- Big gap between mindsets due to age, background

Financial Constraints:

- Have to manage everything on a budget
- Cannot freely play the ground with creativity
- Not spending on leads as much as we need
- Stay within budget to implement strategy
- Difficult to hire a separate person for each task
-

Small Size and Structure of the firm:

- Need a full fledge team
- Need resources in terms of finances and employees.
- No adequate size of the marketing team to strategize and implement both at the same time.
- Outsourcing to a marketing agency

Environmental Context:

Political Instability & High Taxes:

- High taxes
- Political instability
- Increased media cost

- Hesitate to implement strategies

Advantageous effect of Covid-19 pandemic:

- Had to adapt to online practices after the Covid-19 lockdown
- Updated website for order placing
- The main focus shifted from offline marketing to online
- Positive response online

Beneficial impact of Competitive Pressure:

- Increase social media presence as competitors
- Spending on online marketing more than offline
- Landing pages
- Run weekly leads campaigns
- Live influencer interaction on promotional events to gain an edge
- Collaboration with top influencers
- Complete website/social platforms makeover

4.1: Technological context:

Overall, three technology challenges have hindered the adoption of social media technology in SMEs including 1) Relative Advantage, 2) Compatibility, and 3) Complexity, as discussed further.

4.1.1 Skepticism of Benefits:

All of the respondents mentioned that this challenge came up when they started shifting towards social media and its implications, they were unsure of the benefits they would be getting from it. So in the start, they hesitated in adopting social media platforms for their businesses which cost them in long run. Nobody believed in the online selling of products and services. Only big brands and firms would have websites and social media platforms. But then the Covid-19 lockdown happened, and everyone had to stay at home. That's when they also started utilizing social media and got huge results. They continued adopting it slowly, they realized several advantages from it. As time passed, they started using it more efficiently in a way, that helps them create more value for themselves. Following are the narratives, of a few respondents, related to this aspect:

“Since we joined social media and created our presence on multiple platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, we get more responses than ever”

Companies build profiles and engage through all of the trendy social platforms that people are using nowadays, not just a few because not everyone checks their email regularly or scrolls Facebook daily. They create their presence on Youtube and Instagram and LinkedIn too if they want to create multiple channels for their customer to reach them from anywhere and expand their business. With the help of multiple apps, companies are able to utilize social media to its full extent with more ease. To back up these arguments, the following quote is from one respondent:

“Our business flourished after becoming online through proper channels. To make our daily engagement on social media more accessible, we use an app it is one platform that has all of our social apps integrated into it to manage all these at once, we get all our messages, inquiries, and comments from any of these social media apps on it. We get notified instantly whenever there is a comment, inquiry, or a message so we are connected with our customers throughout the day and ready to serve them”

Customer service is the essence of any company, whether it operates online or off. It is crucial in creating a loyal customer base that enables businesses to retain clients and grow over time. Following the implementation of customer assistance, many respondents felt that both the business and the customers benefited in various ways. They have understood that using customer service

software should be an important factor of their business in the digital age since giving customers a platform to engage with them in real time is a useful technique to connect with and assist them. Their firms' customer satisfaction ratings soared as a result of the promptness of the support they received. Another respondent showed his point of view in the following words:

“For our online customer service, we use “LIVECHAT”, which is an online help desk software with online chat that our customers can use for 24/7 customer service. Customers and our agents are promptly connected through “live chat”. No need to send an email or dial a number. Customer inquiries are answered promptly. People typically find phone calls unpleasant, and emails frequently require a lot of back and forth. However, our representative can fix problems using Livechat in just one session. Customers can get immediate answers to questions about their purchases. This is a significant benefit because 30% of our customers contact us via “LIVECHAT” at the time of purchase and complete the transaction after being satisfied”

4.1.2 Compatibility with Infrastructure & Firm Policies:

Technological innovation in companies is easier to adopt when technology is consistent with the organization's systems. Introducing technological change into an organization presents a different set of challenges to a company. Such as with its infrastructure systems, it is also important that the technology is also in line with the company's existing values and policies. If the company systems are not well-equipped then, then it can be an issue to adopt social media technologies. The implementation of social media marketing falls within the organizational values for it to be adopted.

All of the respondents believed that for social media adoption, companies must have a good internet connection in order to be compatible with all their online process needs. The world without the internet is unimaginable. That's why nowadays, fast and reliable internet is very important for businesses. Their daily work tasks, internal external communication, the sharing and exchanging of ideas, information, the latest trends, and news all need a reliable internet connection. It is essential to the digital marketing of any brand or product since it lets companies to connect with a wide range of foreign customers. While slow internet might result in a loss of time and money, fast internet will accommodate multiple people working online at once. Below are the selected narratives:

“An unreliable internet connection presented us with a lot of inconvenience and allowed us to complete tasks with much less hassle, whether it's downloading files or uploading photos and videos, updating the website and social media platforms on daily basis, using software, etc”

“Having a good internet connection now, we work efficiently and save time. If our employees spend several hours per day online downloading data, uploading posts, dealing with clients, or

conducting research, having fast internet is one of the most considered to be essential. This is because even a few seconds' worth of page loading time might reduce our productivity. Working with a slow connection used to be so frustrating because it cost us money and valuable time”

Since everything has downsides, social media is no different. More than before, everyone has easy access to the internet, thus there are always going to be a few who want to ruin someone's reputation. Anyone can easily write unpleasant remarks about your company because it's so simple to comment or engage. Another hurdle to the adoption of social media is the fact that for any brand with a social media presence, criticism and unfavorable comments have practically become the norm, making businesses reluctant to get online. Few responders expressed their concerns in the words listed below:

“We aim to serve our customers as per their demands and requirements, but when we get customers online that are sent by rival companies to trash us publicly, to comment harsh language on our posts to harm our image or say untrue things about our products to devalue them, we deal with them in good faith, for example, we have a proper script on how to respond to people like that in a professional manner”

Negative remarks are inevitable given that thousands of customers are connected to their social media profiles. How a firm respond to negative feedback, whether it comes from a rude customer, someone who has been misunderstood, or a fake account created by competitors to harm the company's name publicly, greatly affects its online credibility. Even though dealing with the negative could be difficult, they must do so strategically. Companies must create social media rules that plainly describe how employees should behave online. It assists in protecting the digital image of their business or discourages third parties from attempting to start unpleasant discussions. Another respondent showed his concern in the following words:

“We make sure that if any frustrated customer comes at us, we talk to them calmly, sort out their issue and deal with them well. We don't use any swear words, even if they use them. Our company prohibits us from taking negative action against any customer because of our company's strict policies and values. If our loyal customers see that we are rude to other customers, they will change their opinions about our company and our products and we do not want that. So we make sure our replies are as polite and friendly as possible.”

4.1.3 Complex Social Media Metric Tools:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic propelled millions of enterprises to online sales, the transition to the use of social media applications for businesses has been progressively accelerating. According to respondents, as they attempted to adopt social media applications for marketing purposes, they realized they also need to use certain websites and software that people find complicated to use, collect information from social media and provide its significance in order to assist business decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of operations taken as a result of such decisions. The above aspect is supported by the following statement from the manager who said:

"It is very important to collect data from social media platforms through performance analytics to gain insights that help us in order to improve the performance of our social media campaigns but since they are complicated, we cannot fully utilize it yet"

"Our social media team learns what works and what does not work when it comes to content and strategy but it is not an easy job, takes practice and experience to extract data and understand it"

Managers are discovering the complexity of social media technology and its processes and that driving innovation at scale through social media is even more challenging if they do not also use social media analytic metrics to measure performance. One of the respondents showed this concern in the following words:

"We use multiple tools for understanding and analyzing traffic and user behavior, it can be complex and require a certain level of technical knowledge to use effectively. Our marketing team includes 6-7 people but one or two people know how to operate them and gather data, and how to decode the graphs and numbers, or how to fetch reports from social analytics metrics such as click-through-rates, conversion rates, and impressions per mile, engagement rate, and leads. Without proper training sessions on it, it is difficult to use it effectively. When people realize the complexity of tools and find it difficult, they run from it"

4.2: Organizational Context:

Overall, three technology challenges have hindered the adoption of social media technology in SMEs including 1) Top Management Support, 2) Financial Constraints, and 3) the Size & Structure of the firm, as discussed further.

Participants revealed that a senior employer's ability to successfully incorporate technology and manage expansion may depend on their age, culture, and educational background. The adoption of social media marketing requires the cooperation of top management since senior managers are the

ones who influence staff by offering direction, resources, and cognitive support. Businesses must stay current with social media trends; if they don't, they risk missing out on future opportunities. As a result, it is projected that SMEs will be less inclined to embrace social media technology if they receive less support from senior management. According to the following narratives, respondents claimed that some of the most senior executives (older employees) have never shown an interest in their suggestions for social media strategies:

"We face a big issue with our upper management since they are old school. They have old-times experiences, there is a big gap between their era and our digital times, we have totally different mindsets about creativity for social media ideas"

"We present social media strategies but they reject because they cannot comprehend today's trends social media trends and how things work. Getting them approved is the biggest challenge when it comes to social media. We cannot create good content without approval"

4.2.2 Financial Constraints:

Without the necessary funding in place, it is challenging to expand and make investments in your company. One of the main problems small businesses have is raising enough money. While some companies are fortunate enough to have investors who are ready to provide operating capital, the majority of business owners start their companies with their own money or by taking out personal loans. To generate sales online, you have to let customers know that you are in existence.

You must have a marketing and promotion plan in order to accomplish that. Marketing and advertising both heavily rely on social media but there is never enough money for it. All firms mentioned that they have a very limited marketing budget to spend on online marketing, as well as branding, advertising, print media, etc. So cost is a big factor because otherwise they cannot afford to run effective paid campaigns nor they can be fully creative with their ideas for their organic campaigns to work. The following are narratives from selected respondents:

"We do not spend on online leads as much as we should because of our budget constraints. We have to stay within the budget which we are allocated to implement our strategy and achieve objectives"

"We spend 20\$ for each lead and depending on how many leads we are targeting. We have to get a certain budget for the quarter and manage everything else too while staying within that budget such as making TVCs, making animated posts, static posts, and website posts, we have to give agency fees too. Budget allocation cost is a big constraint for us because one cannot freely execute ideas if you have to see your budget limit"

4.2.3 Small Size & Structure:

Another obstacle small firms have to face while adopting social media marketing in an organizational context is, in order to adopt social media marketing they need resources in terms of finances and employees and small firms usually lack either of these. Respondents mentioned they require people for every task, such as people for media spending, graphic designers, animators for content creation, copywriters for blogs and captions, content strategists for multiple strategies, social media analysts, etc.

It is definitely difficult to hire each person for each task when there is a tight budget in small and medium firms. They cannot increase their size when they do not have the structure for it. So to save themselves from this they can opt for outsourcing. The agency will provide all of these services in exchange for a monthly fee. Since Social media handling is not that easy, nor it is a one-person job, instead of needing an in-house team for which companies are not built, they find the best solution to outsource an agency for this. The above aspect is supported by the following statements from the managers who said:

"To run social media platforms effectively, we needed a proper team for our marketing materials including graphic designers, animators, and UI/UX designers but sadly our firm size is very small so we outsourced this domain to an agency"

"We needed someone for our website coding and its development too, so we outsourced that, we also outsourced its security and maintenance"

Some of the respondents said that the team is very small with only a few people in the marketing department. Either they can think creatively and develop marketing material, or they will make a strategy because there is only have the budget and manpower for only one thing. One statement is given below:

“Either we strategize or we can implement and execute ideas. We can give creative ideas but we can’t execute those ideas because we don’t have that expertise. We don’t have a proper size of our marketing team to strategize and implement both at the same time. We have only a department that is looking after branding, online marketing offline marketing too”

4.3 Environmental Context:

For the theme of the impact of Environmental factors on SME’s social media adoption, the derivation includes the following sub-themes, 1) Environmental Uncertainty, 2) Government Support, and 3) Competitive Pressure.

4.3.1 Advantageous effect of Covid-19 pandemic:

In the Environmental context, the COVID-19 pandemic was the latest uncertainty that affected the SMEs because it caused many changes regarding SME marketing and led to major shifts. Many SMEs experienced a fall in sales during this period due to the nationwide lockdown because there were no customers to be allowed outside. The Conditions of sales worsened when the Covid-19 uncertainty increased with multiple back-to-back waves. As a result, it made SME managers more aware of the existence of social media and its importance of having the potential to create a stream of revenue without needing the customers to step out. They felt a high need to implement social media and use it in a way to attract customers through marketing but also as a channel to ensure sales with no human interaction. The above story is supported by the following statement from a respondent who said:

"At first, we used to send a person over to the customer’s house, to get the form filled, out to get the payment. Everything was happening in person. Later Covid-19 happened and the whole city was in lockdown, we had to adapt, we got a section made on our website for order placing and used social media "sign up now" links, then customers were able to directly place orders, now we just call them, confirm the order, and address and get their connection finalized, it was not like this before, we had to go door to door to get this done, but after Covid-19 this was changed"

Marketers are continuously being challenged to reach new levels in a field that experiences continuous changes in order to increase sales and attract more customers to their goods and services. As more and more people switch from traditional TV, radio, and print media to news and entertainment through the internet on their smart phones, the demand for traditional marketing strategies has steadily decreased with the rise of social media. Due to the special circumstances COVID-19 provided, typical advertising channels and audiences with restricted access are becoming

less popular. Out-of-home (OOH) advertising was among the worst affected by the epidemic because lockdowns forced individuals to stay at home instead of at work and prevented them from commuting or traveling domestically and abroad. As a result, a lot fewer people are now exposed to billboards. Companies have depended extensively on digital marketing techniques at this time to stay current and increase sales. Participants thought social media and digital marketing had vastly increased the effectiveness of personalization and customer interaction. The shift to digital did neither begin nor finish with the epidemic, but the absence of physical movement and real-time, in-person media like billboards and newspapers highlighted the potential of social media. A participant summed up the importance of digital marketing in the following words:

"We used to do most of our marketing offline like on streamers, billboards, and float activities, our main focus was on offline marketing, but then the Covid-19 lockdown happened and offline marketing was not working for us anymore, then we adopted social media and started spending on ad campaigns, ads boosting, SEO, we got much positive response, people got awareness through social media, our offline campaigns were not as successful as our online ones, Covid-19 impacted our business because it made us explore new effective ways of marketing"

4.3.2 Political Instability & High Taxes:

The nation's government is important in fostering an atmosphere for innovation among local companies and formulating useful regulations that aid SME technology implementation. But in many emerging economies, such as Pakistan, governments do not play an essential role in promoting e-commerce in daily life. All participants agreed that the organization's decision to conduct digital marketing through social media campaigns that boost e-commerce is being affected by Pakistan's unpredictable political and governmental environment. Owner-managers feel that due to the absence of political stability in Pakistan, every time the government changes, SME policies and financing rates also shift. The implementation of new ICT taxes and regulations by newly elected governments has caused issues for SMEs who want to use social media as a new marketing platform. Small and medium-sized businesses are subject to high taxes, which discourages them and may eventually cause them to close. A common view on government support among those interviewed was that:

"The marketing agency that we have hired for our creatives for social media has certain high commissions. On top of that, there are also government commissions. The government gets taxes on them. If the agency gets so much money from us, we hesitate to implement our strategies and ideas because it increases our spending costs"

"Due to the political instability of our country, our currency has severely devalued, which increases our social media campaigns payments because they are in USD, we are paying so much more money than we used to just because of these political uncertainties"

4.3.3 Beneficial impact of Competitive Pressure:

Small business owner-managers experience pressure as they become more aware of and follow their competitors' adoption of new technologies because the tech industry is known for its quick development. When more businesses in an industry start using social media as a tool for marketing business, an organization may be under competitive pressure and will need to make changes to stay competitive (Kaun and Chau, 2001). It is a basic driver of change whereby firms compete for business improvements that put pressure on their competitors to do better, it pushes firms to add more value at less cost. When the rivals are all adopting trendy ways of marketing through social media, it will be a loss to not do the same thing or even better.

Staying behind the trends of social media and not jumping on the bandwagon when they have the chance will make companies work two times harder to achieve their goals. The critical role of competitive pressure between businesses is summed up by following statements from the managers who said:

"Influencer marketing is very in these days. Our competitors are all doing influencer marketing but we did not. We are trying to increase our social media presence but we stepped in late"

"Our company has a lousy approval system from higher management when it comes to social media campaign ideas. Our competitors have millions of followers but we don't so we have to compete for more now"

"People reach out to companies because of their social presence and influence. To make it happen for us, we are running campaigns throughout, spending on online marketing more than offline. To gain an edge we use the best creatives and techniques like a landing page to get more leads, and we run weekly leads campaigns to engage more customers. We are engaging people with live influencer interaction on our promotional events so we get an edge over competitors.

Recently we collaborated with an influencer to promote our product in their videos so we are getting prominent too. Now we are doing a complete makeover on the website, and social media platforms"

Chapter No: 05

5.0: Discussion:

The adoption of social media technologies as a marketing strategy has been hindered or otherwise influenced by three technological issues overall. Numerous academics utilize the relative advantage factor because it is understood to have a fundamental impact on the adoption of new technologies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the likelihood of innovation adoption increases as SMEs' perception of its benefits increases. If SMEs believe that adopting social media has many benefits rather than being indecisive and unsure, then it would enhance the performance of their businesses. This suggests that Pakistani SMEs in particular will be encouraged to utilize social media due to the anticipated benefits. 90% of business owners in "Gulf" countries, as reported by SMEs, said they were unaware of the benefits of adopting social media (Bakri 2017). This result is also in line with earlier studies by Ahmad Syed et al. (2019), Hamad et al. (2018, 2020, and 2020), Irhas et al. (2020), and Wong et al. (2020), which claim that relative advantage is one of the crucial elements in SME adoption of new technology (Hamad et al., 2018; Maduku et al., 2016; Pateli et al., 2020; Skafi et al., 2020). The study then provided evidence that compatibility is a key element in SMEs' use of social media. This study reveals that there is a barrier to slow Internet speed that prevents SMEs from adopting social media in their businesses, as confirmed by (Kozma and Vota, 2014; Lawrence and Usman, 2010; Scupola, 2009, Chong et al., 2009) in the literature. According to the literature, anyone with sufficient internet connectivity can utilize social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. This study shows that SMEs cannot use social media and its tools because of the slow Internet speed, which is supported by the literature (Kozma and Vota, 2014; Lawrence and Usman, 2010; Scupola, 2009; Chong et al., 2009). An economy's competitiveness is increased by physical infrastructure and fast Broadband speeds. and foster a vibrant business climate that supports the expansion and growth of the economy. On the other hand, poor infrastructure hinders chances for productivity and raises expenses for all enterprises, from SMEs to large corporations. If the government introduces plans for improving internet services, the likelihood of SMEs adopting social media and its tools will increase. This research also suggests that technology will be readily accepted in an organization if it is in sync with the culture, can serve organizational needs, and is linked in with its core values. Firms can reach their target audiences promptly and efficiently by incorporating social media activities into business processes in a way that is consistent with the firm's aims, policies, and values as confirmed by (Khaskheli, 2020). The same outcomes were discovered by (Sharmilaand & Kavitha, 2022). An important element in identifying the challenges with social media adoption is the complexity of the use of social media

tools in Pakistani SMEs. (Ghaleb et al., 2021). Many respondents realized as they attempted to adopt social media applications for marketing purposes, they also need to use certain websites and software that people find complicated to use, gather and find meaning in data that is gained from social channels to support business decisions and measure the performance. Literature has shown that complexity issues are found to be more critical in developing countries, and have revealed their negative influence on technology adoption whereas the simplicity of use promotes developing countries to adopt new technology/innovation as confirmed by (Chow et al., 2021). The intricacy of new technology, according to (Low et al., 2011), lessens the likelihood that people will adopt it. Employees must therefore immediately acquire expertise in a new technology given that the adoption process is more unpredictable and complex the more advanced the technology.

The second theme looked at how the organizational setting affected how SMEs used social media. According to the literature, this concept had a considerable impact on the adoption of social media, which is consistent with other findings (Ramdani et al., 2013; Ahani et al., 2017; AlBar, & Hoque, 2019). But regarding the effect of top management on social media adoption, this study evidenced a lack of support from them because of a big gap between their era and these digital times, a difference between mindsets about creativity for social media ideas is a challenge. Participants mentioned that good content cannot be created without approval which they are highly reluctant with. Some of the most senior executives (older employees) were quoted as stating that they had never shown interest in their suggestions for social media techniques. Top management is critical for influencing the adoption of technology since hierarchy has the ability to regulate attitudes, principles, and opinions at both the individual and organizational levels as demonstrated by (Low et al., 2011). The use of social media marketing, according to Matikiti et al. (2018), is vital because senior managers are the ones who affect subordinates by offering vision, resources, and cognitive support. Senior managers are also the ones who influence subordinates. As a result, it is projected that SMEs will be more inclined to implement social media if they receive higher levels of top management support. This outcome conflicts with earlier research by Tajudeen et al. (2019), Ahmad Syed et al. (2020), and Abed (2020). (2018). All participants agreed that the financial budget's limitations are the elements that have the greatest impact on SMEs. Due to problems with the owner-managers' financial capabilities, e-commerce and ICT adoption and development within SMEs have frequently failed (Modzi, Ankrah, Twum, & Asamoah, 2016). Participants believed their firm had a limited financial budget, because of its smaller size and informal business structure. Cost is a big constraint for social media marketing because they cannot freely execute ideas when there is a very small budget. Social media plays a significant role in both marketing and advertising plans, which are

essential if you want people to know that your business exists, but there is never enough money allocated for either. The findings are consistent with other research that looked at the crucial elements for the social media acceptance and implementation in both emerging and developed countries (Chatzoglou & Chatzoudes, 2016; Ghobakhloo & Tang, 2013; Scupola, 2009; Zhu & Kraemer, 2005). The findings demonstrate that a company's human and financial assets limitations significantly influence how each SME adopts social media marketing. The majority of SME managers and other research participants said that the organization's size and structure were seen as essential components that showed the business's capacity to provide the necessary resources, both financial and human, to implement the new technological standards. According to the study's results, medium-sized SMEs are better able to offer their company unique resources than smaller SMEs. Medium-sized SMEs are more likely to embrace digital marketing as a result. The adoption of social media marketing is adversely impacted by the fact that small SMEs lack the necessary management structures and resources to support social media programs. This study's findings support earlier findings (Dholakia & Kshetri, 2004; Iacovou et al., 1995; Jeyaraj et al., 2006; Lertwongsatien & Wongpinunwatana, 2003; Martins et al., 2015; Scupola, 2009) that a company's size and structure are key determinants in its decision to utilize social media marketing.

The third theme explored how the surrounding environment affected SMEs' use of social media. Implementing social media requires consideration of a wide range of environmental issues, including competitive advantage, government assistance, and the uncertainty factor. This study produced some findings that corroborate the results of (Effendi et al., 2020) on the previous work of SMEs' adoption of social media, which used the TOE model to investigate factors affecting SME social media implementation. Implementing social media can therefore help businesses overcome challenges caused by growing competitive pressure, expand their consumer base, and improving sales (Salamzadeh, 2020). The findings supported the claim by AlBar&Hoque (2019) and Lin (2014) that environmental factors influence social media adoption. This suggests that governmental regulations and competitive pressure are significant factors for SMEs to adopt social media in their business since they may facilitate or restrict the adoption process (AlBar&Hoque, 2019). In our case, competitive pressure helped the SMEs towards online growth and an extended market that made them survive. This finding is in line with earlier research from Chong and Ooi (2008) and Oliveira and Martins (2010) and suggests that businesses implement changes more promptly when there is fierce competition. Participants said the move to social media and digital marketing was what made customer interaction and personalization so successful. The environmental context with an indicator of uncertainty also positively affects awareness of social media as confirmed by (Effendi et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused changes regarding SME marketing. The Conditions of sales worsened when the Covid-19 uncertainty increased with multiple back-to-back waves which made SME managers more aware of the existence of social media. Companies primarily relied on digital marketing techniques during this time to increase sales and maintain credibility. Because social media marketing enables SMEs to attract customers from beyond the region and even from abroad, SMEs feel a strong necessity to adopt it. The government plays a crucial role in promoting new technologies in the country (Ghobakhloo and Ching, 2019; Qalati et al., 2021), but this study found that poor government policies and taxation decisions mean SMEs lag in implementing technology infrastructure that supports e-commerce and adoption of social media. The unstable political and governmental situation in Pakistan negatively affects SMEs' decisions concerning the adoption of social media as a marketing strategy since the campaigns are paid in dollars so the cost is increased when our currency devalues. Local business organizations can assist Pakistani SMEs in getting funds for enhancing their e-commerce operations, according to Abrar-ul-Haq et al. (2015), who also noted that political instability and ineffective government policies and taxes on e-commerce are the main obstacles to the adoption of digital marketing for SMEs' e-commerce.

Chapter: 06

6.0: Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the elements that may help or hinder SMEs' adoption of social media and its impact on productivity. The T-O-E framework was employed in this study to examine various social media adoption factors influencing SMEs in Pakistan. The thematic analysis approach has been used in the research and through this technique, it has been identified that there are a few drivers that helped SMEs to adapt to Social Media Marketing but there are also various challenges that cause a significant hinderance for SMEs to achieve successful marketing practices by adopting Social Media. With the results of the interview data and cross-case analysis, the findings have been arranged into themes and sub-themes in accordance with the TOE framework, showing that technical context elements such as disbelief in the benefits of social media, incompatibility with infrastructure company's values, and the complexity of social media applications; organizational context factors such as a limited financial budget, smaller size, and structure of firms; environmental context factors such as lack of stable political environment, government policies, high taxes, and competing with firms are essential considerations in social media adoption in all SMEs. Each of the themes and sub-themes explained is supported by quotes from the interview transcripts as discussed above.

Adopting Social Media as a new marketing technique rather than the old traditional way of marketing is a much more efficient and effective method which shall enable them to increase their profitability, gain competitive edge over competitors and lead them to a higher a market shares within Pakistan. Furthermore, this qualitative research also highlights the fact that if these challenges are highlighted, the ambitious and self-driven SMEs will be much likely to focus on them with a drive to overcome them having a vison of target market at an international level. Therefore, local SMEs, government, entrepreneurs, and all other stakeholders should consider this a need to be fully aware of an innovative marketing technology like Social Media and what benefits that it brings if a company strives to adopt it. Lastly, it should also be highlighted that what are the challenges and barriers which hinder the company to opt for such a method like Social Media Marketing so that relevant measures can be taken proactively to overcome all obstacles.

6.1 Suggestions:

Professionals and decision-makers can focus on the elements that have significant and positive impacts and take action to address the adoption difficulties owing to the discovered influencing factors and barriers. In contrast to other considerations, relative advantage, for instance, has a significant effect on the adoption of social media. Therefore, decision-makers must be in favor of social media use and understand its advantages. The findings might also help the Pakistani government make legislation and tax breaks to encourage SMEs to use social media and e-commerce. SMEs will be more likely to utilize e-commerce in their enterprises if the government lowers tax rates and offers greater facilities.

6.2 Limitations & Future Research Agenda:

The authors are aware of the present study's number of drawbacks. First off, the business climate in Pakistan and the country's overall economic and political uncertainty limit this study. In terms of the use of social media, this study's concentration is on small to medium-sized businesses in just two of Pakistan's major cities (ISB and RWP). Other SMEs from various rural areas of Pakistan may be included in such research in the future to examine the function of social media in their operations. Thirdly, since this is a qualitative study, its conclusions cannot be generalized to other emerging nations. Therefore, more research in various cultures is still wanted. For the purpose of validating the conclusions of the SMEs that took part in this study, additional quantitative research can be carried out in the context of Pakistan. In order to better understand the roles of owner-managers and management while incorporating social media marketing as a new technology in their SMEs, more study is required to extend the TOE paradigm in different contexts, particularly developing economies.

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Annexure

Thesis7

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1. Student Name: Hadia Rizwan Enroll #: 01-321212-015

Course Code: SBW 693 Cr. Hrs 3.0 Degree Duration: 1.5 yrs Cell No. 0340-8196357

Email: hadia.rizwan.436@gmail.com CMS Registration: Yes/No.

(In case of Project, details of other Members)

2. Student Name: _____ Enroll #: _____

Course Code: _____ Cr. Hrs _____ Degree Duration: _____ Cell No. _____

Email: _____ CMS Registration: Yes/No.

3. Student Name: _____ Enroll #: _____

Course Code: _____ Cr. Hrs _____ Degree Duration: _____ Cell No. _____

Email: _____ CMS Registration: Yes/No.

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Thesis

Project

Research Area:

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Marketing

HRM

Finance

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Arsalan Nazir

1. Student Signature: Hadia. Date: 06/10/2022

2. Student Signature: _____ 3. Student Signature: _____

Supervisor Signature A. Nazir 11-Oct-2022

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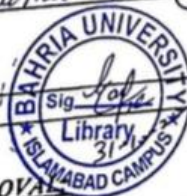
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Date: _____

1st Half Semester Progress Report

Name Of student	Hadia Rizwan
Enrollment No.	01-321212-015
Thesis/Project Title	Factors Affecting Social Media Adoption among SMEs usingTOE Framework

Supervisor Student Meeting Record

No.	Date	Place of Meeting	Topic Discussed	Signature of Student
1	2/10/22	office	Introduction of topic	
2	23/10/22	office	Literature review	
3	5/11/22	Office	methodology	
4	26/11/22	office	Data analysis technique	

Progress Satisfactory / Progress Unsatisfactory

Remarks: _____

16/01/2023

Signature of Supervisor:  Date: _____

2nd Half Semester Progress Report & Thesis Approval Statement

Name Of student	Hadia Rizwan
Enrollment No.	01-321212-015
Thesis/Project Title	Factors Affecting Social Media Adoption among SMEs usingTOE Framework

Supervisor Student Meeting Record

No.	Date	Place of Meeting	Topic Discussed	Signature of Student
5	3/12/22	Office	Data analysis	
6	17/12/22	Office	Data analysis	
7	8/01/23	Office	Final review	

Progress Satisfactory / Progress Unsatisfactory

Remarks: _____

Signature of Supervisor:  Date: 16/01/2022

