

## Leveraging Digital Innovations during External Shocks: Analyzing Social Media's Flexibility in Sustaining Jordanian SME Performance

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**Abstract.** This empirical study investigates the impact of social media marketing on the business performance of SMEs in Jordan during the COVID-19 crisis. Analysis of survey data through SEM techniques indicates digital marketing activities strongly influenced market resilience, revenue growth and customer engagement. Findings reveal SMEs realizing the usefulness of social media platforms and integrating them smoothly in operations demonstrated better performance trajectories. The paper elucidates digital marketing's role as an agile strategy for SMEs to respond to external shocks like the pandemic. As one of first studies examining social media marketing outcomes for SMEs in the Jordanian context, these timely insights have salient implications for similar developing economies.

**Keywords:** Marketing, Performance Trajectories, Leveraging Innovations, Marketing

## **1. Introduction**

Following the Corona virus's development, nations had to issue directives to address the pandemic, particularly from a commercial and economic standpoint. Small and medium-sized businesses were then integral to this environment and played a critical role in fostering business (Salameh et al., 2020). Considering these choices and the pandemic's effects, all industries were affected, particularly small and medium-sized businesses (AlSondos & Salameh, 2020). As a result, small and medium-sized businesses faced several challenges that ultimately caused many of them to close since their capacity to withstand such hardships was insufficient compared to giant businesses, which have abundant resources and cash flow (Alghizzawi, Alhanatleh, et al., 2023). The damages that affected small and medium-sized businesses were caused by a number of factors, including the underutilization of technology in the industry, which caused disruptions to small and medium-sized businesses' operations, as well as the high cost and difficulty of obtaining the necessary raw materials (Alghizzawi, Ahmed, et al., 2023; Mazzarol, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned, it was required to rely only on government actions in order to address these issues facing small and medium-sized businesses. Increasing digital distribution and marketing channels and diversifying business operations help small and medium-sized businesses overcome obstacles and recover from the epidemic (Alqurashi et al., 2023). Using social media platforms for marketing improves business performance and creates constant consumer communication channels (Alnaser et al., 2023; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Social media marketing has fundamentally altered how businesses engage with their target audience and potential customers, ultimately leading to an improvement in overall performance (J. Al-Gasawneh et al., 2020). The enormous growth of social media platforms in recent years has created a dynamic, ever-evolving digital ecosystem that presents businesses with never-before-seen opportunities to reach a global audience (J. A. Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022). This move has ushered in a new era of marketing that goes beyond traditional promotional strategies (Alsmadi et al., 2022). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok have become valuable tools for businesses of all sizes seeking to boost website traffic, build deeper relationships with their customers, and build brand awareness (Al-Okaily et al., 2023; Daoud et al., 2024). The benefits of social media marketing are not limited to any one industry because it provides an adaptable and reasonably priced means of showcasing products, services, and content (Aljabari et al., 2023). Businesses need to adapt and utilize the immense potential of social media platforms in order to thrive in this digital age (Daoud, Al-Qeed, et al., 2023). This essay will look at how social media marketing may help businesses perform better by increasing lead generation, fostering customer connection, increasing brand awareness, and providing useful data and analytics to enhance marketing strategies. We'll look at the various ways that social media marketing may propel growth and success in the modern business setting. Therefore, it is essential to look at how social media platforms could enhance business performance in order to boost this industry. This study examined how easy social networking sites were to use and how much value users felt they were receiving for their time in order to better grasp this link. From here, some research questions can be derived.

- 1- What extent do the features of social media platforms effect on marketing?
- 2- What extent does marketing through social media platforms effect on business performance?

## **2. Literature Review**

In terms of improving the performance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), social media has emerged as a revolutionary force (Halim et al., 2023; Ziółkowska, 2021). Research has consistently shown how important social media is in increasing brand recognition and exposure among target consumers. Businesses who have a significant online presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter have a higher chance of having customers know and recall their goods and services (Habes et al., 2023). Increased consumer interest as a result of this increased visibility

typically boosts the effectiveness of the business overall. (Mehdi & Kalim, 2023). Building relationships and interacting with customers have received a lot of attention in the discourse surrounding social media's impact on SMEs. A plethora of content highlights how using social media platforms allows for in-person interactions with clients (Fraccastoro et al., 2021; Habes et al., 2021). SMEs foster a feeling of community and client loyalty by responding to inquiries, resolving issues, and offering personalized interactions. These methods of fostering relationships result in closer bonds, recurring business, and positive word-of-mouth referrals, all of which boost SMEs' performance (Cartwright et al., 2021). One important part of social media's influence on SMEs is how effective it is as a marketing and promotion tool. Scholars generally agree that targeted advertising and content promotion on social media sites work (Al-Shibly et al., 2019; Alghizzawi et al., 2018). By connecting with certain clientele groups through these activities, SMEs can raise website traffic, customer engagement rates, and possibly even conversion rates. Consequently, leveraging social media to bolster marketing campaigns leads to an instant improvement in business performance metrics (Al-Samirae et al., 2020). The literature unequivocally shows that social media significantly affects the financial performance of SMEs. Direct consumer interactions boost marketing campaigns, promote customer involvement, elevate brand awareness, boost sales, and foster creativity. A methodical approach to social media management can yield substantial benefits for SMEs hoping to enhance their overall business performance in the digital era, despite certain hurdles.

## **2.1. TAM Model**

The idea that a system or piece of technology is easy to use is connected to the idea that using it involves effort. (Alghizzawi et al., 2019; Kulviwat et al., 2014). It is believed that these elements motivate SMEs to use social media. (M. Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and other models that try to explain how consumers accept and use technology contain the idea of "Perceived Ease-of-Use" (PEOU) (Habes et al., 2018). In the context of social media, perceived ease-of-use refers to people's subjective assessments of how easy and simple they believe using social media platforms to be. This view affects users' attitudes and intentions toward utilizing social media, which affects how people actually accept and use these platforms (Rahi et al., 2019b). A crucial factor in influencing how SMEs feel, plan to use, and act on social media platforms is perceived ease of use. Platforms that are viewed as being easy to use have the potential to reduce obstacles, encourage adoption, boost user satisfaction, and even enhance business performance. As SMEs continue to navigate the digital landscape, comprehending and resolving perceptions of ease-of-use is essential for successful social media integration into operations (Moslehpour et al., 2018). On the basis of these findings, the following theory is put forth:

H1: (PEOU) has a positive impact on the use of SM for SMEs

A major topic in the literature on technology adoption and business is the connection between "Perceived Usefulness" (PU) and the use of social media to improve the performance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) (M. Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022; Salloum et al., 2021). Perceived usefulness is the subjective belief held by employees and SME owners that utilizing social media platforms will improve and aid their business's operations (Rahi et al., 2019a; Uğur & Turan, 2019). When SMEs include social media into their strategy, this commitment plays a crucial role in their attitudes, intents, and behaviors (S. A. Raza et al., 2017). Perceived utility and social media uptake have a complicated relationship. SMEs who view social media as a useful tool embrace it with positive attitudes and intentions (Kang & Namkung, 2019). The foundation for additional research and engagement with these sites is established by this initial impression. SMEs are encouraged to actively invest time and resources in social media because they believe it can help them achieve certain goals, such as increasing brand awareness, expanding their clientele, or increasing customer involvement to using these platforms (Kuo et al., 2019). The relationship between social media use in SMEs and perceived utility is a major element influencing the uptake and engagement of technology. SME views,

intentions, and actions with regard to using and embracing digital platforms are influenced by their perception that social media can enhance business performance (Ahamat et al., 2017; Habes et al., 2019). The foundation for integrating social media initiatives into SMEs' larger business processes is the correlation between perceived value and actual results. These results lead to the proposal of the following theory:

H2: (PU) has a positive impact on the use of SM for SMEs

## 2.2. Social Media Marketing

The relationship between social media marketing and the improvement in the performance of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) encapsulates the convergence of digital communication, brand visibility, and customer engagement. In the current business environment, social media marketing has evolved into a potent tool that could significantly affect the expansion and success of SMEs (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016; Salloum et al., 2019). At the core of this relationship is the chance for SMEs to leverage social media platforms to expand the visibility and reach of their brand. By carefully crafting content, SMEs may showcase their products, services, and unique value propositions to a wide online audience. Because social media is so widely used and accessible, small and medium-sized businesses have an unparalleled opportunity to connect with potential customers and enter new markets beyond their local area (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015). Furthermore, social media marketing allows SMEs to establish a distinctive and interesting relationship with their target audience. The direct engagement offered by the platforms enables SMEs to promptly respond to consumer inquiries, resolve problems, and obtain feedback. This two-way communication helps SMEs to tailor their offerings based on real-time information, which helps to develop products or services in line with client preferences in addition to increasing customer satisfaction (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Rahi et al., 2020). Numerous relationships exist between social media marketing and the enhancement of SMEs' performance, including those that impact quantitative metrics, customer interaction, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. SMEs who use social media marketing effectively can grow their audience, establish deep connections with them, and encourage a culture of continuous improvement. With their adept handling of social media marketing, SMEs are better positioned to spur growth and thrive in an increasingly digital business climate. These results lead to the proposal of the following theory:

H3. SMM has a positive impact on the performance of SMEs

## 2.3. Research Model

This study will examine the impact of social media platforms for digital marketing on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in light of the major negative effects the Corona pandemic has had on this industry. The proposed conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates how the features of social media platforms are reflected in their usability and perceived value to small- and medium-sized business performance.

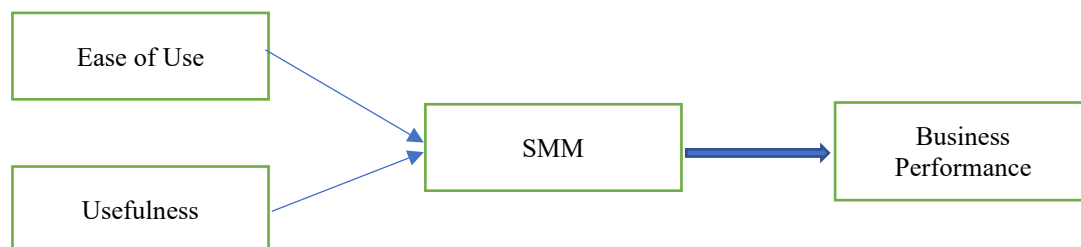


Fig.1: Research Model

### 3. Methodology

The present study employs a quantitative design to response its objectives through developing survey aiming at collecting users' opinion toward using social media technologies (ex, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to enhance the performance of SMEs in Jordan context. The method of the current study followed several stages, targeting at achieving the drown objectives. In the first place, well- substantiated theoretical literature was constituted to support the aim of this study. Later, empirical studies have carefully been chosen in developing research model. Next, the quantitative approach has been candidate as a methodology to confirm the model of this study. Lastly, SPSS AMOS 22 software was appointed to evaluate the hypotheses and results of this study.

The questionnaire of this research is multi-stage constructs, starting from TAM dimensions as independent variables, passing from Social Medial marketing as mediating variable, ending with SMEs performance as dependent variable. The items of survey constructs have been adapted and developed depending on well-justified investigations from scope of this study literature. First, Perceived ease-of-use and Perceived usefulness represent TAM dimensions as exogenous constructs. The four items of perceived ease-of-use have been developed and measured from (H. Alhanatleh & Akkaya, 2020; H. M. Alhanatleh, 2021). The four items of Perceived usefulness have been developed and measured from (Syaifullah et al., 2021). As a second stage of this study constructs, the three items of social media marketing have been adapted and measured from (Shareef et al., 2019). Finally, the six items of performance of SMEs have been developed and measured from (M. T. Nuseir & Aljumah, 2020). To confirm the items validity and reliability of the current study constructs, the pilot study was held through inviting 20 digital users of social media apps in Jordan. The primary result of this study was to void and reduce the potential language mistakes and syntax errors in the developed constructs items.

The population of this study is all digital users of social media marketing in Jordan. The users of social media marketing was 6.61 million in the first quarter of 2023 (Datareportal, 2023). In terms of determining the sample size of the present study, the required sample size to measure the role of TAM dimensions and social media marketing on SMESs performance, is at least 385 digital users of Jordanian as determined and calculated of known population by (Morgan, 1996). However, the convenience approach was assigned to access the sample in terms of its benefits such as saving cost and time (Mou et al., 2017). Before distributing the final draft questionnaire to digital customers in Jordan, the items' constructs were scaled and measured using five point-Likert measurement, applying 1 for representing "Completely disagree" to 5 for representing "Completely agree". An electronic (e) version of questionnaire has been generated depending on Google drive platform. After that, the e- questionnaire link was to deploy for collecting the consumers experiences toward using digital social media marketing application in Jordan. The number of digital users who received the e-questionnaire was 500. Just 463 digital users provided their responding to fulfill the e-questionnaire. The number of valid questionnaires that used in analysis processes was 438 respondents due to various techniques of data preparation (like; cleaning data, outlier, and missing value). As accepted by (Hair et al., 2019), the valid respondents (438) are sufficient to perform the data analysis stages. Finally, the data collection procedures was held in the period from September 15 and October 9, 2023.

### 4. Result

SPSS and AMOS 22 software have been candidate for evaluating and retrieving reliable outcomes of the conceptualized hypotheses regarding the present study as asserted by (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Two common procedures have been executed in terms of ensuring the validity conditions and the hypotheses outcomes: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Model (SEM).

#### - Demographic variables

There are three main demographic features of the digital users of social media marketing in Jordan: gender, age, and education. Table 1 provides the results of the demographic characteristics of this

research. The results indicate that the number of male, who participated in this study, was 258 with 58.9%. In addition, the maximum number of age feature was fallen in range (From 31 to 40 years) with 39.7%. The results also confirm that the number of digital users, who gain the Bachelor's degree certification, was 241 with 55%.

Table1: The features of sample Demographic variables

Category	Sub- Category	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	258	58.9
	Female	180	41.1
<b>Age</b>	≤ 20 years	79	18.1
	From 21to 30 years	135	30.8
	From 31 to 40 years	174	39.7
	≥ 41 years	50	11.4
<b>Education</b>	Secondary school or less	22	5.0
	Diploma	36	8.0
	Bachelors	241	55.0
	Master degree	127	29.0
	Ph. D degree	12	3.0

### - Evaluating CFA

As the first stage in the analysis processes, the estimating of CFA is statistically confirmed in accordance with three mandatory categorizes of validity regarding of the model constructs: 1) convergent validity, 2) composite reliability, and 3) discriminant validity as affirmed by (Awang, 2014). As the first process of the validity of the study model constructs, all items' model constructs have been subjected to CFA pool for checking the factor loading of all items. This process confirms two compulsory matters that are: 1) ensuring the factor loading of all items exceed the accepted value ( $\geq 0.60$ ) and 2) confirming the covariance correlation values between all model constructs is less than the benchmark value ( $\leq 0.85$ ) as supported by (I. Raza & Awang, 2021). However, after subjecting all items to pool of CFA, the results indicate that one item from was removed because it did not meet the cut-off value of factor loading. The remaining items of all constructs with their loading values are provided in Table 3. The results also ensure that the covariance correlation values between all model constructs are not exceeded (0.85). Thus, it can be resulted that the model fit of the study model can be estimated. To evaluate the model fit, there are three classifications of model fit indices should be confirmed: incremental fit (IF), parsimonious fit (PF), and absolute fit (AF) as suggested by (Z. Awang, 2014; P. Awang, 2018). The returned results of this research confirm that the model of this study provides an adequate model fit indicators as supported in Table 2.

Table2: Model Fit indicators of the study model

Classification name	Indicators	Cut-off value	Retrieved results
AF Index	RMSEA	RMSEA < 0.08	0.065
	GFI	GFI > 0.85 or if GFI > 0.90.	0.924
IF Index	AGFI	IF indicators > 0.85 or IF indicators > 0.90.	0.895
	CFI		0.953
	TLI		0.942
	NFI		0.929
	IFI		0.952
PF Index	ChiSq /df	Chi-Square/df < 5 or Chi-Square/ df < 3.	2.791

After confirm the model fit indices, the composite reliability and convergent validity can mathematically and statistically be assessed by computing the CR and AVE values of all constructs' model in terms of accepted values ( $CR \geq 0.60$  and  $AVE \geq 0.50$ ) as indicated by (I. Raza & Awang, 2021).

Table 3 indicates a strong evident in terms of evaluating composite reliability and convergent validity of the current study model.

Table3: Evaluation of composite reliability and convergent validity

Construct items/ Factor loading		CR	AVE	Mean	Std
<b>Perceived ease-of-use</b>		.912	.689	3.9061	.96025
ES1	.833				
ES2	.897				
ES3	.747				
ES4	.855				
<b>Perceived usefulness</b>		.803	.654	3.1218	.76860
US1	.634				
US2	.815				
US3	.773				
US4	.610				
<b>Social Media Marketing</b>		.861	.648	3.3271	.80720
SM1	.807				
SM2	.818				
SM3	.811				
<b>Performance of SMEs</b>		.867	.564	3.3537	.81644
PE1	.779				
PE2	.676				
PE3	.722				
PE4	.797				
PE5	.779				

As the last process in CFA measurements, evaluating the discriminant validity is fulfilled when the square root of all model constructs is more than the absolute values of the correlations of interior AVEs (Awang, 2014; Daoud, Al-Srehan, et al., 2023). Table 4 confirms that the measurement of discriminant validity has been accomplished for the study model, ensuring further guidance to estimate the SEM.

Table 4: discriminant validity measurement

Constructs	Social Media	Perceived ease-of-use	Perceived usefulness	Performance of SMEs
<b>Social Media Marketing</b>	<b>0.813</b>			
<b>Perceived ease-of-use</b>	0.590	<b>0.835</b>		
<b>Perceived usefulness</b>	0.802	0.554	<b>0.791</b>	
<b>Performance of SMEs</b>	0.538	0.452	0.537	<b>0.752</b>

#### - Estimating the results of SEM

After ensuring the CFA measurements, SEM has been approached to evaluate the theorized hypotheses of the present study. Figure 2 and Table 5 show the SEM results of this study. The returned results provide the squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) of endogenous constructs. The findings confirm that the computed  $R^2$  of Social media marketing construct is (.799), asserting that the exogenous constructs (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use) elucidate approximately (79.9%) of variance on social media marketing construct. The results also indicate that the computed  $R^2$  of SMEs performance is (.355), revealing that the exogenous construct (social media marketing) elucidate approximately (35.5%) of variance on SMEs performance construct. As supported in Figure 2.

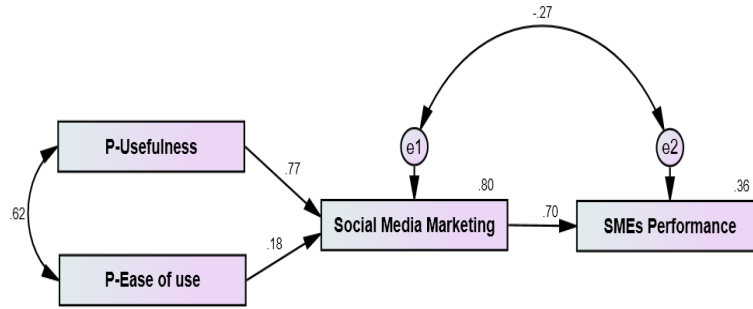


Fig.2: Estimation of SEM of the study model.

Lastly, Table 5 and Figure 3 also confirm the evaluation of the hypotheses results regarding this study, ensuring that all the hypotheses directions significantly supported. The SEM results uncover that perceived ease of use provides a direct and positive effect on social media marketing ( $\beta = .151, p = .000$ ), supporting that the first hypothesis is successfully confirmed. In addition to, the findings of SEM reveal that perceived usefulness provides a direct and significant effect on social media marketing ( $\beta = .811, p = .000$ ), ensuring that the second hypothesis is successfully supported. At the end, the results show that social media marketing confirms a direct and positive effect on SMEs performance ( $\beta = .708, p = .000$ ), indicating that the third hypothesis is successfully affirmed.

Table 5: Findings of recent research hypotheses.

Hypothesis direction	$\beta$	S.E.	C.R.	P
perceived ease-of-use $\rightarrow$ social media Marketing	.151	.023	6.665	***
perceived usefulness $\rightarrow$ social media Marketing	.811	.029	28.236	***
social media Marketing $\rightarrow$ performance of SMEs	.708	.044	15.938	***

## 5. Discussions

The complex interplay between digital marketing initiatives, particularly those made through social media platforms, and the business success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) during the trying Corona era was the subject of the study. The assessment of two crucial variables—perceived usefulness and ease of use—was the focus of this investigation. The conversations that followed made clear the complex interactions between these factors and their ensuing effects on the performance trajectories of (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Rugova & Prenaj, 2016; Salloum et al., 2019). Digital marketing tool usability emerged as a driving force behind quick adoption and integration inside SME operations. SMEs who found these technologies easy to use were better able to realize their potential. The perception of usefulness served as a driver, encouraging SMEs to investigate and invest in digital marketing channels since they saw them as workable solutions to deal with the pandemic's disruptions. The conversations make clear how important a connection exists between perceived utility, convenience of use, and company performance in SMEs throughout the Corona period. The benefits of increased engagement and resilient company performance were realized by SMEs that adopted digital marketing



with recognition of its worth and found it simple to integrate into their operations, confirming the revolutionary power of digital marketing through social media platforms.

## **6. Conclusions**

This timely study analyzing social media marketing adoption by SMEs in Jordan during the pandemic contributes vital insights. The conclusions underscore recognizing the value and usability of digital platforms as pivotal for SMEs in effectively responding to the crisis. The findings reveal nuances in performance impacts determined by smooth technology assimilation. By highlighting digital channels' flexibility in connecting SMEs to customers, the research bears practical implications for businesses aiming to harness marketing innovations. As exploratory research confined to the Jordanian context, future studies can enrich understanding by examining more organizational and external factors influencing technology deployment. Comparing findings across cultures and economic backgrounds can reveal further contextual insights. Overall, as social technologies continue evolving, sustained investigations into their business outcomes can help SMEs devise adaptive strategies.

This study focused on small and medium-sized businesses in the Corona era, which allowed for the inclusion of demographic variables that may have a greater influence on consumers' purchasing decisions by addressing certain factors that could be discussed with clients to provide a more comprehensive picture. Additionally, it is imperative that further research in this area will be carried out soon. This is because consumers' purchasing habits have grown extremely erratic, and because the Corona era is now over, there will be more difficulties in the future. There are several ways in which our understanding of the impacts of social media platform marketing could be improved.. One method to achieve this is to examine how new technology and social media platforms impact marketing strategy. As new platforms and technologies are developed on a regular basis, researchers can look into how businesses might employ these breakthroughs to enhance their marketing efforts. Virtual reality, augmented reality, and other cutting-edge technologies could be some of these advancements. Understanding the effectiveness of marketing on these platforms is essential if you want to stay on the cutting edge of digital marketing. Another area that needs further investigation is the development of cross-platform marketing tactics. Many businesses today use a variety of social media platforms to engage with diverse audiences. Research can look into the nuances of various platforms' synergy and assess how cross-platform tactics can be optimized to boost reach and engagement to find the best approaches to connect platforms for marketing success. Content personalization is another interesting area for further investigation. With so much data at our disposal, understanding how to appropriately personalize information while abiding by privacy concerns and rules might be revolutionary. Further research endeavors could examine the possibility of employing data-driven insights to personalize information according to user choices and actions. The difficulties in precisely building attribution models and calculating return on investment (ROI) in social media marketing require more research. Because of the sheer volume of these interactions, businesses need to understand how social media interactions and touchpoints translate into revenue and customer acquisition. Subsequent investigations might look into advanced methods and tools for figuring out ROI and the impact of social media marketing.

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