

Original Article

Social Media Adoption on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Performance in Buloba Town: Wakiso District, Uganda

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the impact of social media adoption on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Buloba Town, Wakiso District, Uganda. Recognizing the global prevalence of SMEs, their role in attaining some of the SDGs and their pivotal role in national economies, the study explores the dynamics of social media engagement within this sector. Despite the popularity of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp, SMEs in Buloba exhibit a moderate level of adoption. The research utilizes regression analysis, revealing a statistically significant positive effect of social media on SME performance ($R^2 = 0.27$; $F = 10.387$, $p = 0.000$), particularly emphasizing the influential roles of YouTube ($B = 0.295$; $p = 0.001$) and WhatsApp ($B = 0.292$; $p = 0.001$). The findings underscore the broader literature highlighting the transformative potential of social media for brand enhancement, customer engagement, and marketing. Recommendations include strategic platform utilization, educational initiatives, capacity-building programs, and supportive policy frameworks to foster social media adoption among SMEs. The study contributes novel insights to the underexplored landscape of social media adoption among SMEs in Uganda, advocating for targeted interventions to maximize their digital potential.*

Keywords: Social media, SME Performance, SDGs, YouTube, WhatsApp, Uganda.

I. INTRODUCTION

On a global scale, within developing nations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) encompass approximately 90% of business entities and account for more than 50% of the workforce, thus constituting a substantial segment of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The increasing forces of globalization and the rapid digitization witnessed across various industries have ushered in heightened international competition. Concurrently, the advent of novel innovations has presented SMEs with a dynamic landscape replete with both challenges and opportunities (Karuhanja et al., 2022). As observed by Šebestová (2020), the success of SMEs will help to attain several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) and Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9).

In response to these shifts, SMEs have gravitated towards the utilization of social media applications as a means to expand their outreach to a broader audience, enhance their interactions with potential clients, and cultivate enduring relationships with existing customers. However, it is noteworthy that there's an absence of thorough research to elucidate the intricacies of social media adoption within the context of SMEs operating within developing countries. In the last decade, social media has proven to be an excellent tool to promote marketing in Uganda. This is due to the fact that social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter are prevalent as well as accessible to everyone at no expense. (Kanyoro, 2015). As a result, millions of Ugandans are active on these sites, providing opportunities for SMEs to use the opportunity to expand brand awareness and connect with their targeted customers. Social networking sites are fairly affordable platforms for conducting marketing campaigns, allowing organizations and companies of all sizes to participate on equal footing. Several SMEs can now reach out to potential customers and engage in strong branding via profile pages, messages, and social media content (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). There are also personalized companies in Uganda whose expertise is in creating Facebook and Twitter accounts and every account's layout with graphics and social media symbols to match the organisation's needs (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). A large number of SMEs websites in Kampala include links to social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp, among others. Companies use such online platforms to show photos and advertise their popular brands to their customers. Despite the previously mentioned importance of social media for advertising efficiency, few Ugandan SMEs have completely embraced its potential.



In addition, regarding boosting SMEs' significance and perceived worth (Durkin et al., 2013), There remains very little research work on how SMEs use or choose social media platforms. So far, just a few studies have examined the use of social networks to improve business management, specifically its impact on company performance (Ainin et al., 2015). A few studies have been conducted in SME contexts on social media usage levels of difficulty, barriers, and statistics (Ainin et al., 2015). Yet, very little is understood about how SMEs' use of social media impacts their performance in Africa, particularly Uganda, Wakiso District.

In 2023, an estimated 4.89 billion online social networking viewers will be worldwide, representing roughly half of the global population. (Kaliakou, 2023). Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2023) observed that Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp are the most popular social networks worldwide, each with at least over one billion active users as of 2023. As technology advances, transforming the way people communicate, socialize, and address challenges, social media has become an integral part of contemporary social life. While initially associated with developed nations, technology, particularly social media, has gained widespread acceptance in many developing countries, notably in Africa, with Uganda being a prominent example. African nations are increasingly joining social media networks such as Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, driven by the rising number of internet users on the continent (Newman, 2021). The growth rate of internet use in Africa has been remarkable, with a staggering 1,000% increase between 2000 and 2008, marking the highest growth globally (Boyinbode, O. K., & Akinyede, 2008). Specifically, in January 2023, Uganda recorded 2.05 million social media users, constituting 4.3% of its total population. This illustrates the pervasive influence of social media in shaping communication and connectivity across diverse global contexts.

Large corporations, SMEs, and individual consumers swiftly embraced social media networks to expand their online presence, utilizing these platforms for both personal and public interactions, as noted by Andzulis et al. (2012), Barnes and Jacobsen (2013), and Effendi et al. (2020). The appeal lies in the cost-effectiveness, user-friendly interfaces, and widespread accessibility of social media platforms, making them attractive to a diverse and extensive audience (Beier & Wagner, 2016). However, despite the recognized significance of social media adoption in Africa, Uganda faces a scenario where the utilization of social media for business purposes is notably low, as highlighted by Bwiino et al. (2016). Studies by Kademeteme and Twinomurinzi (2019) and Yeboah-Boateng and Essandoh (2013) affirm that small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly those in developing nations, exhibit sluggish uptake technological advancements. The Freedom on the Net report (2014) reveals a mere 15% of Ugandans employ social media networks for business activities. This suggests that although Uganda witnesses a surge in social media subscribers, the platforms predominantly serve personal rather than business-oriented objectives. A probable explanation could be the lack of knowledge among SME owners on how to successfully integrate social media into their company's marketing plans. This knowledge gap has repercussions on the business community, contributing to low retention rates, limited socialization, diminished engagement, and a lack of control and ownership of knowledge among SME owners (Wee & Chua, 2013). Therefore, knowing how to improve social media network adoption amongst SME owners in Uganda remains a crucial and vital research area. Furthermore, particularly SMEs owned by young entrepreneurs in Uganda express substantial problems faced using social media, specifically, strategically implying that social media application in the business world has been a challenge. The purpose of the research is to investigate the effect of social media adoption on the performance of SMEs in Buloba Town, Wakiso District, Uganda.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A) Social Media

As technology and communication progress, social media use has taken over as the primary method for SMEs to disseminate information in today's world. Social media has been defined in various ways, but none of them are generally recognized. These attempts have been recognized and explained across a wide range of social, technological, and communication contexts. (Al Rahbi, 2017). Social media refers to any digital device that allows users to quickly create and distribute content to consumers. According to another definition, social media refers to interaction methods in which individuals create, share, and/or exchange knowledge and concepts in online groups and networks. (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022).

Social media has a lot of possibilities for an endeavour to advance, which is one of its benefits. Because of this, SME actors must be able to form themselves as technology advances through social media. Businesses may communicate with their consumers using social media, affecting their ability to enter more markets (Samuel & Sarprasatha, 2016). Social media is used for corporate communication, to assist with product and service marketing, to communicate with clients and vendors, to support brands, to cut expenses, and for online sales (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Today, social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, WhatsApp, and TikTok are expanding the reach and impact of SMEs in the marketplace (Arianty & Julita, 2019). Several research studies have confirmed the benefits of social media adoption and usage for small and medium-sized enterprises in both developed and developing nations.

B) Social Media and SME Performance

According to Sahaym et al. (2021), social media presents a valuable avenue for organizations to enhance their performance by facilitating brand establishment and reinforcement and providing a novel platform for potential advantages. SMEs can identify customers using social media, engage in reciprocal communication, share information to learn what products customers like track customer attendance, build relationships with customers based on location and interaction patterns, and work more closely with other business owners to improve performance and advance SMEs, among other advantages (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Social media platforms constitute an essential part of marketing endeavors, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), owing to their cost-effective attributes. These platforms enable SMEs to contend effectively with bigger and multinational businesses despite resource constraints. An increasingly crucial method for SMEs to engage with customers is through social media, which consists of online platforms for exchanging content and engaging in various activities (Murdough, 2009). However, according to researchers (Bakri, 2017), little has been written on the potential advantages of social media usage for SMEs, especially in developing nations like Uganda. Literature has suggested that there are several challenges and barriers to the adoption of social media. Bakri (2017) discovered, for example, that 90% of Arabian Peninsula entrepreneurs weren't using social media since they had been unaware of its benefits and didn't have the technological know-how to integrate applications for social media into their daily operations.

Tajvidi and Karami (2021) pointed out that engaging with social media platforms yields various benefits for SMEs, including the augmentation of brand value, sales growth, e-commerce and social commerce facilitation, cultivation of customer trust and loyalty, stimulation of innovation and new product development, promotion of knowledge sharing, enhancement of customer relationship management (CRM), and the dissemination of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) recommendations. Several research conducted in other parts of the world regarding social media usage in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) has yielded noteworthy findings. According to Qalati et al. (2022), Odoom et al. (2017), Parveen et al. (2016), and Tajudeen et al. (2018), social media may assist SMEs in getting more information about their products or assistance, which will win over potential customers and ultimately boost output. These studies, including those by Ahani et al. (2017), Eze et al. (2021), and Hamad et al. (2018), have underscored their positive influence on performance. On the contrary, Chatterjee and Kumar Kar (2020), Skafi et al. (2020), and Tajudeen et al. (2018) have reported insignificant effects in the contexts of Indian, Lebanese, and Malaysian SMEs. In light of this, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media has a significant effect on SME performance in Buloba Town, Wakiso, Uganda.

III. METHODOLOGY

Kothari (2004) emphasizes the descriptive survey's ability to uncover facts and attributes about individuals, groups, or contexts, which informs the choice of a descriptive survey design for this study. This design blends quantitative and qualitative aspects to assess the effectiveness of Buloba SMEs. The study population comprises SMEs in Buloba. Out of the target population of 170 SMEs, 150 questionnaires were sent out to respondents. 120 questionnaires were retrieved, encompassing owner-managers and leadership in the SMEs.

The questionnaire used for data collection is structured according to Bowling's (1997) survey-enhancing perspective and is based on findings related to social media adoption and SME performance in Buloba. It is organized into demographic, technology adoption, and SME performance sections. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the Content Valid Index (CVI) is utilized, as per Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). SME owners and experts score the questionnaire, and this study's CVI stands at 0.76. Reliability, as described by Kasomo (2006), is assessed for method consistency. The test-retest method confirms reliability with a coefficient ≥ 0.7 , meeting the minimum requirements. Ethical guidelines are followed throughout the data collection process, with university approval and informed consent obtained from participants. Data analysis involves SPSS coding quantitative analysis utilizing frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulation, and correlations. To establish the impact of social media adoption on Buloba Town's SME performance, we conducted the multiples regression below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \mu$$

Where: Y = dependent variable, β_0 = intercept of Y, β = parameter of the independent variables, and μ = error term.

To estimate the multiple regression models, it was converted as follows: $SMEP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FB + \beta_2 TW + \beta_3 YT + \beta_4 WA + \mu$

Where: SMEP= SME Performance, FB = Facebook Usage, TW= Twitter Usage, YT= YouTube Usage, WA = WhatsApp Usage, β_0 = Constant or Intercept, β_1 = Coefficient of Facebook Usage, β_2 = Coefficient of Twitter Usage, β_3 = Coefficient of YouTube Usage, β_4 = Coefficient of WhatsApp Usage, μ = Error term

The sign of the slope coefficients (β_1 to β_4) was used to determine the impact of the aspects of Social Media adoption on SME Performance. Positive and significant slope coefficients in the context of Social Media adoption and SME Performance

would suggest that the adoption of social media positively influences SME performance. Conversely, negative and significant slope coefficients would imply that social media adoption has a negative impact on the efficiency of SMEs within Buloba Town, Uganda. The anticipated expectation of the slope coefficients are as follows: $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5 > 0$. Every test was conducted at the significance level of five percent (5%).

IV. RESULTS

A) Demographic Characteristics

The gathered data provides valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The gender distribution among participants reveals that 50.8% are male and 49.2% are female. Regarding age, 38.3% of respondents are under 25, 28.3% fall between 26 and 30, 25.8% are aged 31-40, and 7.5% are above 41. Regarding education, 28.3% possess Bachelor's degrees, 20.8% have diplomas, 13.3% hold Form Four qualifications, and 9.2% have Master's degrees. Marital status indicates that 51.7% are single, 30.8% are married, 11.7% are widowed, and 5.8% are divorced or separated. The duration of business operations reveals that 45.8% have been in business for under 5 years, 26.7% for 6-10 years, and 12.5% for 11-15 years. The employment status distribution shows that 47.5% are business owners and 52.5% are employed staff.

B) Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on levels of Social Media adoption and SME performance

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
SMEs Performance	3.69	1.201	High
Facebook	3.46	1.315	High
Twitter	2.74	1.226	Moderate
YouTube	2.76	1.241	Moderate
WhatsApp	3.78	1.219	High
Average Social Media Adoption	3.185	1.250	Moderate

Table 1 shows the levels of utilization of social media and the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The mean SME performance score is 3.69, with a standard deviation of 1.201, indicating a high overall level of SME performance. Examining individual social media platforms, Facebook (mean = 3.46), YouTube (mean = 2.76), and Twitter (mean = 2.74) fall within the moderate range, suggesting a moderate level of adoption variability among SMEs for these platforms. While WhatsApp (mean = 3.78) demonstrates a higher mean score, indicating a high level of adoption and performance. The standard deviations for Facebook (SD=1.315), Twitter (SD=1.226), YouTube (SD=1.241), and WhatsApp (SD=1.219) are relatively high, indicating significant variability in the adoption levels among SMEs for these platforms. The overall average score for social media adoption is 3.185, placing it in the moderate range. This suggests that, on average, SMEs exhibit a moderate level of engagement with various social media platforms.

C) Inferential Statistics

Table 2: Effect of Social Media adoption and SME performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.510	.402		3.754	.000
	Facebook	.064	.081	.070	.786	.433
	Twitter	.016	.087	.016	.180	.857
	YouTube	.295	.086	.305	3.442	.001
	WhatsApp	.292	.083	.297	3.510	.001
	R	0.515				
	R ²	0.265				
	Adjusted R ²	0.240				
	F	10.387				
	Sig.	0.000				

Table 3 outlines the results of a regression analysis assessing the effect of social media adoption on SME performance. The significant constant term (1.51) implies a significant baseline SME performance even without any social media adoption. YouTube (B = 0.295; p= 0.001) and WhatsApp (B = 0.292; p= 0.001) have significant positive effects on SME performance. The standardized coefficient (β) highlights that YouTube has the strongest relative influence ($\beta = 0.305$) among the social media platforms considered.

The overall model is statistically significant (F = 10.387, p = 0.000), affirming that including social media adoption variables contributes significantly to explaining SME performance variance. The R-squared (0.265) indicates that 26.5% of

SME performance variability is accounted for, and the adjusted R-squared (0.240) adjusts for predictor count, providing a more realistic reflection of the model's explanatory power. Based on these findings, the hypothesis that states the performance of SMEs is greatly affected by social media in Buloba Town, Wakiso, Uganda, is therefore accepted.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has established several findings. Firstly, the correlation results indicate that the mean SME performance score of 3.69, coupled with a standard deviation of 1.201, indicates a generally high level of SME performance. The mean scores for Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp were all moderate or above, suggesting a high level of adoption and performance for this particular platform. Secondly, the regression analysis demonstrates the significant positive impact of SME performance on social networking adoption. The coefficients for YouTube and WhatsApp are statistically significant, with YouTube having the strongest relative influence. The overall model is highly significant; the R-squared value of 26.5% indicates that social media adoption accounts for a substantial proportion of SME performance variability.

The study's conclusions align with the existing literature on the pivotal role of social media in enhancing SMEs' performance. The literature review highlights the diverse benefits of social media adoption for SMEs, emphasizing its potential to facilitate brand establishment, communication with customers, marketing of products and services, cost reduction, and online sales (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Samuel & Sarprasatha, 2016). The literature suggests that platforms like YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and others can significantly impact SMEs, fostering brand value, sales growth, customer trust, and loyalty (Tajvidi & Karami, 2021). The study's focus on Buloba Town, Wakiso, Uganda, brings valuable insights to a context where limited studies on the benefits of social media use for SMEs have been done. (Bakri, 2017). This study had the hypothesis that SMEs' performance is significantly impacted by social media, which is substantiated by the results presented in Table 3. The regression analysis demonstrates that both YouTube and WhatsApp have a substantial positive effect on SME performance. This aligns with findings from other regions, such as those reported by Qalati et al. (2022) and Odoom et al. (2017), emphasizing what part social media plays in obtaining information about goods or services and persuading potential clients, ultimately improving SME performance.

The study's conclusions allow for the formulation of the following recommendations.

1. SMEs should strategically leverage high-performing platforms, particularly WhatsApp, which demonstrated the highest mean score for both adoption and performance. This platform could be utilized for customer engagement, marketing, and communication to enhance overall business performance. Strategic emphasis should also be placed on YouTube is advised, as it emerged as a platform with a notable improvement in SME performance, having the highest standardized coefficient.
2. To address variability in adoption levels among SMEs, educational initiatives should be developed to improve awareness and comprehension of the benefits of social media adoption, mainly for platforms with moderate adoption levels, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
3. There is also a need for capacity-building programs to enhance digital skills, content creation, and social media marketing strategies.
4. Policymakers should also consider developing supportive frameworks or policies that encourage and facilitate social media adoption among SMEs; this can include the reduction in the price of internet access and the acquisition of technology hardware (mobile phones and computers).

Though this study has attempted to investigate how SME performance is affected by social media adoption, more investigation is required to examine specific factors contributing to the observed variability in embracing social media levels among SMEs, providing more insights for targeted interventions and strategies.

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