

# Understanding the Factors Impacting Social Media Adoption

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## ABSTRACT

With fast growing numbers of their target customers using social media, organizations can no longer ignore social media. Increasingly, companies are adopting social media in their business strategies, especially focusing on their customers. From the perspective of research, it is important to understand what factors are driving organizations to adopt social media in their business, especially marketing, which is the first level of customer contact. Based on the review of past research in the field of social media and theoretical frameworks of Uses and Gratification, Technology Adoption Model and Technology-Organization-Environment, this paper identifies the key factors of Social Media Interaction (SMI), Social Media Communication (SMC), Social Media Leadership (SML) and Social Media Perceived Usefulness (SMPU) which may impact social media adoption. A conceptual model using these factors is also presented which can be researched further for confirmation of the impact of these factors on social media adoption.

## 1. Introduction

Advanced telecommunication networks, easy to use technology and social benefit of staying connected with family and friends can be attributed as the reasons for increasing popularity of social media with the masses. Meteoric rise in social media adoption by users is leading to business disruptions and organizations are finding newer ways of reaching their target customers through social media. It has become important for researchers and practitioners to learn about the factors that lead to social media adoption by organizations. Based on the literature of the previous research and theoretical grounding, this study is designed to identify factors leading to social media adoption by organizations for their marketing function and create a conceptual model for this adoption.

## 2. Social Media Literature

Kaplan et al. (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allowed the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. Social media applications are a collection of interactive and user controlled online applications (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008) that allow users to exchange information, views and news with other users. Facebook, Blogger, Twitter, YouTube are some famous examples of social media platforms.

The dramatic development of social media has transformed the interactions of people and organizations through different social media platforms (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011; Cho et al., 2014). Social media is used by individuals for viewing, forwarding, commenting, creating, moderating discussions, and judging/ mediating conflicts (e.g. posting complaints, giving feedback, suggestions for product improvement or new product features etc.) (Parent et al., 2011). A customer feels empowered enough to create (deduct) value for an organization through the sharing of positive

(negative) news and opinions with others (Kumar et al., 2010). So it has become important for organizations to engage with the customers positively and build the real business value of social media by connecting people and organizations and building relationships between them (Nair 2011).

Organizations can use social media tools for collaborative product development (e.g., Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Porter & Donthu, 2008), building knowledge sharing communities (e.g., Fernando, 2010; Yates & Paquette, 2011), brand management (Jin, 2012; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013), and collaborative learning and creativity (e.g., Peppler & Solomou, 2011).

Another advantage of social media is that customer interactions give a company access to customer information which may not have been previously available or were difficult and expensive to get. This makes the customer engagement and information sharing more effective for the organizations (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011).

Rising popularity of social media has caught the attention of many researchers to study how individuals and organization are using social media. de Valck et al. (2009) found that social media communications and interactions of consumers, particularly information and experience sharing, with other consumers in the virtual communities, impacted their need recognition decision-making process, actual behavior, and post-purchase evaluation. Using social media platforms, leaders and organizations can have a meaningful, real time engagement with their customers (Gruber et al., 2015).

Interactive nature of social media allows customers to share their views and feedback on products and services with the company and suggest ideas for improvement. Also, engaging customers online to share opinions and experiences gives the organization an opportunity to analyze customer interactions and develop insights and understanding of their

target customers. Using this knowledge, companies can improve their product and service features (Allan, 2005), communicate more effectively with their customers, manage customer expectations and alter the relationship customers share with businesses (Abed et al., 2015a, b; Dwivedi et al., 2015).

Other than communication, organizations are also using social media tools to involve their customers in product co-creation, where customers take active part in designing new products and services (Martini et al., 2014). Companies are leveraging social media to develop customer insights, accessing customer knowledge, co-creating ideas and concepts with customers and supporting new product launches (Roberts and Piller, 2016). Product / service co-creation initiatives built around social media are becoming popular with organizations as it allows the organizations timely and low cost customer contact and inputs (Burghin et al., 2011; Martini et al., 2014). Customer involvement in the co-creation process increases the customer's engagement with the company and acceptability of the product or service.

### 3. Theoretical Foundation of Social Media Adoption

#### 3.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory is used to identify the psychological needs that motivate the individuals to seek out media that fulfill their needs (Ko et al., 2005; Lariscy et al., 2011). Previous researches indicate that gratifications received are good predictors of media use and recurring media use (Palmgreen et al., 1979; Kaye et al., 2002). Though U&G theory was originally developed to examine traditional media (Kippax et al., 1980; Rubin, 1983), recent studies have explored U&G in social media (Dimmick et al., 2000; Eighmey, 1997) from an individual's perspective.

While investigating the digital natives' motives for using social networking sites, researchers Dunne et al. (2010) identified seven gratifications sought from social networking, including communication, friending, identity creation and management, entertainment, escapism and alleviation of boredom, information search, and social interaction. (Dunne et al., 2010).

Whiting et al. (2013), in their review of different frameworks of U&G identified themes of social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communication, convenience, expression of opinions, information sharing and surveillance as the key U&G themes for social media.

Using social media for interacting with friends or like minded consumers and companies may be a key theme of gratification as interaction on social media can be entertaining and relaxing pass-time for its users. Interactivity is characterized by two-way communication between firms and/or among customers (Goldfarb and Tucker (2011). And social media by allowing interactions has become a more effective form of marketing than traditional methods (Lim, 2010). Social media interactions allow marketers to gather information about the target customers using their sites. These interactions also enable marketers to share personalized messages and content

target audience (Dunne et al., 2010) engage them with the brand.

Seeking information through the communication channels of the organization may be a key gratification users might seek in a social media platform. So for the marketers, it is important to share information and have regular communication with the customers. Badea (2014), in his research mentioned that firms employed social media tools to announce, contact, educate, and connect with their customers and prospects. This gives the firm a voice and opportunity to conduct discussion on shared interests in order to enhance their relationship with the consumers. A steady flow of communication can help in keeping a positive company image. It is important to understand how strongly the factors of communication and interaction encourage organizations to adopt social media.

#### 3.2 Technology Adoption Model

Davis (1986) developed Technology Adoption Model (TAM) as a study of user behavior acceptance patterns for computer information systems. TAM is based on two key constructs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PE). Davis (1986) defined perceived usefulness as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance", and perceived ease of use defined as, "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort".

Users' willingness to adopt a new technology is primarily based on the perception of usefulness of that technology in conducting the job, and less on whether the technology is perceived as easy or difficult to use (Davis, 1989). In their research, Romero et al. (2014) indicated that there is a relationship between perceived usefulness and intention to use and people create their intentions toward the use in view of how the technology will improve the performance of their work. So if an organization decides to adopt a particular social media platform, one important factor for consideration will be its usefulness for the job to be done.

TAM has been applied in multiple technology contexts to predict usage of technology in both B2B and B2C environments (e.g. Adams, 1992; Ha et al., 2009). Past research confirms that in context of organization and individuals, for technologies old and new, perceived usefulness is a stronger predictor of technology usage or adoption (Chen et al., 2002; Koufaris, 2002; Pavlou, 2003; Porter et al., 2013), than perceived ease of use.

Siamagka et al.(2015) in their study of determinants of social media adoption by B2B organizations found that while the application of TAM in the context of the Internet and online shopping is well established, no research existed which examines and models adoption of social media by organizations. With the growing importance of social media for organizations, it has become imperative to identify the impact of perceived usefulness on social media adoption by organizations.

#### 3.3 TOE Framework

Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework put forward by DePietro et al. (1990) states that a decision to adopt a new technological innovation is affected by three aspects of an organization - Technological context, Organizational context and Environmental context. TOE framework is free from industry and firm-size restrictions (Wen and Chen, 2010). And TOE provides a holistic picture for adoption of technology, of factors influencing business innovation-adoption decisions, its implementation, foreseeing challenges, impact on value chain activities, the post-adoption diffusion among firms, and help develop better organizational capabilities using the technology (Zhu et al., 2004; Lin and Lin, 2008; Salwani et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2010).

TOE framework has been successfully applied to numerous studies of communication technologies (e.g., Premkumar and Roberts, 1999), EDI (e.g., Kuan and Chau, 2001), enterprise systems (e.g., Ramdani and Kawalek, 2008), Internet (e.g., Tan and Teo, 1998), Websites (e.g., Oliveira et al., 2008) and e-commerce (e.g. Seyal et al., 2004; Liu, 2008). Studies, grounded in the TOE framework for assessing the value of e-business at the organizational level (e.g., Zhu et al., 2004, Lin, 2006; Lin and Lin, 2008; Oliveira and Martins, 2010) have found technological readiness, financial resources, global scope, top management support and regulatory environment to be important factors strongly adding to e-business value. There is limited research in social media adoption by organizations which is grounded in TOE framework. However, as social media is based on similar technologies as e-business, it will be safe to say that some of the factors key for e-business adoption by organizations may hold true for social media adoption also.

In an organization, Top Management, can influence technology innovation adoption through its support and attitudes towards change (Premkumar and Michael, 1995; Edger et al., 2001) and by allocating sufficient resources (Premkumar and Potter, 1995; Annukka, 2008). 'Tiago et al. (2014) in their study found "facilitation of top-down directives" to be one of the top three factors influencing effective utilization of digital media for marketing purposes. Role of Leadership (top management) in social media adoption needs further exploration.

#### 4. Conceptual Model

Based on literature review and theoretical background, four factors stand out as important for companies looking to adopt social media for their marketing activities. The marketing activities considered for this research are marketing communication and product / service improvement and development. Marketing communication covers communication in form of advertising, direct marketing, special offer promotions and brand updates. Information collection in form of feedback and suggestions and developing customer insight for product / service development and improvement is considered as the other important aspect of marketing for this research.

The four factors that may impact social media adoption are Social Media Interaction (SMI), Social Media Communication (SMC), Social Media Leadership (SML) and Social Media Perceived Usefulness (SMPU).

Top management of the organization whose engagement and direction can be important for social media adoption is represented by the factor Social media leadership (SML). Social media leadership can influence new technology adoption through its interest, support and attitude towards the change (Daylami et al., 2005). Leadership can enable faster social media adoption by setting the right processes, providing the right resources and creating clear social media roles and responsibilities.

*H1: Social Media Leadership will positively impact the adoption of Social Media*

Social media perceived usefulness signifies the benefits the organization enjoys by adopting social media into their marketing function. Rauniar et al. (2013) defined Perceived Usefulness for social media as "the extent to which the social media user believes that using a particular social media site helps to meet the related goal-driven needs of the individual". This definition can be extended beyond an individual, to an organization. Increase in productivity, improvement in customer engagement and better decision making can be key predictors of perceived usefulness.

*H2: Social Media Perceived Usefulness will positively impact the adoption of Social Media*

Interactive nature of social media is enabling organizations to create opportunities to engage customers in a dialogue which can be helpful in product development, advertising campaign development, and marketing research (McAfee et al. 2011). Social media interaction (SMI) is a two way process of interaction between customers and the organization and amongst the customers to encourage engagement, feedback and insights. Encouraging customer interactions with the company and amongst themselves on social media could lead to increased customer attachment with the company and its products and services. This could lead the customer to purchase, re-purchase and eventually become a champion for the company.

*H3: Social Interaction Utility will positively impact the adoption of Social Media*

In fact the insights received from these interactions can help marketers be more effective in fulfilling customer expectations, decision making and creating new products and services or improving the existing ones. What this also means is that social media interaction can improve the perceived usefulness of social media.

*H4: Social Media Interaction Utility will positively impact Social Media Perceived Usefulness*

Social media communication (SMC) is a one way communication by the organization with its customers to share information and promote their products and services and the brand. Whiting et al. (2013) defines communication as a facilitation to provide information to share with others. In spirit of this definition, communication utility is an important social media theme that organizations can leverage to communicate and inform customers about their products and services, discounts and promotional schemes, new product roll-outs etc.

*H5: Social Media Communication will positively impact the*

*adoption of Social Media*

Based on these factors, a conceptual model as shown in

Figure 1 is designed to validate and study the extent of impact of these factors on social media adoption.

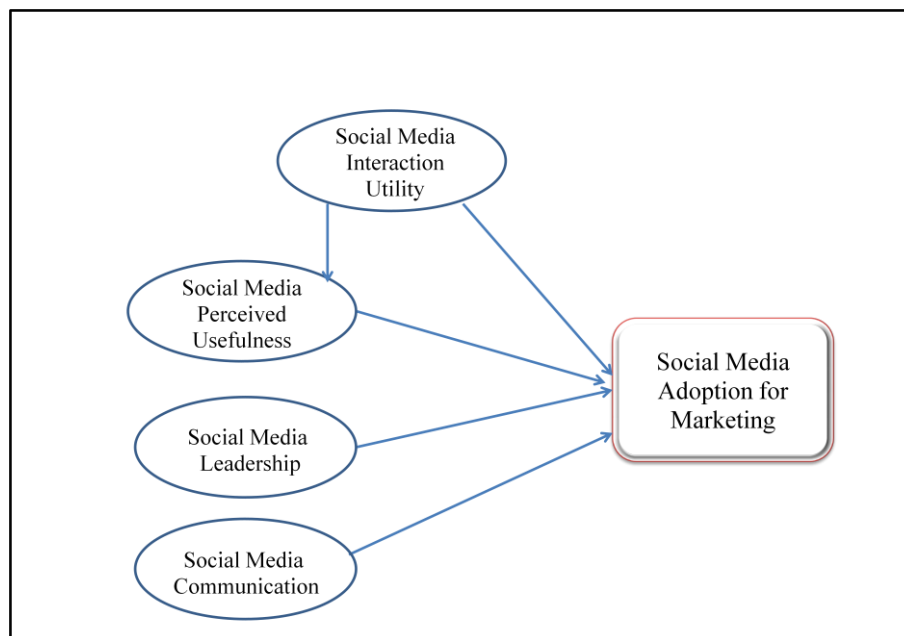


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

## 5. Conclusion

As the extant research shows, there is limited work done in understanding the adoption of social media from an organization's perspective. There are important factors of perceived usefulness and leadership that have played a role in adoption of other technologies. Also factors like interaction and communication have largely been studied from a user's perspective in selecting a technology, product or a service. As social media is a technology based service which is poised to play an important role in the marketing strategies of organizations in India, it is important to understand the role of these factors in social media adoption within these companies. Further research in this area is proposed.

A conceptual model defining relationships between

identified factors has been suggested in Figure1. Further, a quantitative research study is proposed to empirically test the conceptual model using the questionnaire survey method. The results from this research would validate and refine the conceptual model.

Confirmation of the impact of constructs of interaction and communication on social media adoption from the perspective of an organization would extend the U&G theory at the organization level. Validation of the conceptual model will also add to the limited research available on theories of TAM and TOE influence on social media adoption by businesses. Also, there is very limited research on social media adoption by organizations in India. Results from this research will contribute to the repository of India based research.

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