



Research Paper

Investigating the Effect of Competition Intensity and Management Support on the Adoption of Social Media and Its Impact on the Business Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Case Study: Garment Manufacturers in Tehran Province)



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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to investigate the impact of competition intensity and management support on the adoption of social media and its effect on the business performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Tehran Province. This study is applied in terms of its purpose, and descriptive-survey and correlational in terms of data collection method. The statistical population of the present study includes managers and employees of garment manufacturing companies under the domestic brands Hakopian, Salyan, and Zagros Poosh, totaling 2,400 individuals. A sample size of 331 participants was determined using Morgan's table and selected through convenience sampling. The data collection instrument in this study was a standardized questionnaire by Ahmad et al. (2019). Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling and SPSS26 and SMART-PLS software. The results of the study showed that, from the perspective of the studied statistical population, competition intensity has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption, management support has a positive and significant effect on performance, management support has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption, and social media adoption has a positive and significant effect on the business performance of SMEs in the garment industry of Tehran Province.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the emergence of various innovations in information and communication technology has transformed most business operations and has become a valuable organizational resource in creating and increasing business value (*Sivarajah et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022*). One of the current trends in the fashion and apparel industry is the use of technology and social media applications. This use creates a new complex interaction between social media applications and businesses. Social media and related applications have emerged due to Web 2.0 innovations (participatory web) in an effort to enhance human communication and create dynamic and interactive conversations. The exceptional impact of social media can be observed in all business operations, increasing the complexity of the interaction between social media applications and businesses. Moreover, the increasing number of social media users, as well as its unique features such as real-time communication, many-to-many interactions, and user-generated content, clearly distinguish it from other web-based tools and encourage most companies to use various social media platforms (*Alalawneh et al., 2022*). Social media is not only used by companies as a marketing medium but also as a tool to access information about markets, competitors, and customers in order to enhance business performance and innovation. Small and medium-sized enterprises across different sectors use social media marketing to achieve marketing objectives and improve their performance. Accordingly, fashion and

apparel companies have not fallen behind in adopting and attracting customers through social media marketing channels. Traditional marketing channels, including television, radio, and billboard advertising, are more expensive compared to social media marketing channels, which has led more companies to turn to social media marketing. However, local companies in the fashion industry still face intense competition from rival firms. Fashion designers also face strong competition from global fashion brands that have penetrated the apparel market. High capital costs and limited access to financing are also major challenges for fashion companies, leaving many of them without sufficient resources to implement their marketing goals. Furthermore, the fashion industry is highly dynamic, and there is the challenge of changing consumer preferences related to fashion trends (*Mulunda et al., 2021*).

In the increasingly competitive environment of the apparel industry, small and medium-sized enterprises are inevitably required to adopt modern communication and marketing tools in order to maintain and improve their position. Therefore, identifying the factors that can strengthen firms' tendency to use social media is of fundamental importance. Paying attention to the role of environmental competition intensity and the level of top management support can be helpful in explaining the extent of adoption of these media. Also, clarifying the consequences of this adoption on improving business performance can make the strategic decision-making process of garment

producers in Tehran Province more targeted and facilitate the development of competitive advantage and business sustainability.

- Theoretical Foundations

Social media are becoming increasingly popular and attractive for adoption by many business actors due to their low costs and minimal technical requirements. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the use of the internet and social media has become part of business strategy. The results of an online survey reported that approximately 60% of consumers discover a product or brand through social media (*Venkateswaran et al., 2019*). Social media make it easier for consumers to find more accurate information and communicate with companies that sell the products they need. Social media constitute a network of consumers. Many businesses have adopted social media platforms to support their activities. For business owners, social media is a means of two-way communication with consumers, to listen to consumer responses and find out what they want. Companies use social media to gain advantages such as better performance compared to competitors, cost reduction, more effective operations management, improved relationships with consumers, and enhanced corporate image (*Parveen et al., 2016*), and the use of social media has a significant impact on business operations and success (*Jones et al., 2015*). Analysis of the external environment of business activities has a very important role in the development of any organization. This is due to the fact that the modern external environment of companies is characterized by a very high

degree of dynamism, complexity, and uncertainty. A decrease or increase in business performance outcomes can actually be influenced by external environmental factors. These external environmental factors include industry structure, supplier pressure, existing competitive pressures, government regulations, technological development, and economic factors. Among these external environmental factors, competition intensity has a very significant effect on business performance. More intense competitive pressure can reduce business performance (*Yasa et al., 2017*). Accordingly, small and medium-sized enterprises in the fashion and apparel sector try to find solutions by developing promotional strategies through the adoption of social media. The adoption of social media in the digital age and their use as an effective promotional strategy is considered a means of improving business performance (*Ainin et al., 2015*). In addition to competition intensity, there are other internal factors such as organizational factors that determine the extent of social media usage. One internal factor that can determine the use of social media as a business strategy is management support (*Ahmad et al., 2015; Maduku et al., 2016*). Studies and observations have shown that the use of social media is growing exponentially among businesses and is rapidly becoming an important phenomenon in business management. Therefore, organizations are using more platforms. Social media may be an increasingly preferred option for businesses because it allows communication to move beyond a private one-to-one conversation into many-to-many interactions (*Siamagka et al.,*

2015). Social media also offers relatively low-cost options for analytics, automated publishing, content management, conversion tracking, and customer targeting, and businesses can use social media to promote their products, services, and brands. There is also evidence that social media provides greater reach through brand interaction. Therefore, social networking sites are considered an electronic marketplace in which businesses and customers interact (Gazal et al., 2016).

Competition intensity, as an environmental pressure (including increased number of competitors, product diversity, speed of fashion change, and price sensitivity of the market), can act as an external driver that pushes firms toward using social media for differentiation, direct customer communication, and competitor monitoring. In contrast, management support as an intra-organizational factor (allocation of financial resources, human resource training, acceptance of innovation, and managers' positive attitude toward technology) provides the capacity to operationalize this adoption. In other words, even under conditions of intense competition, in the absence of managerial support, the adoption of social media remains superficial and non-strategic. Undoubtedly, improving customer interaction, increasing brand awareness, accelerating market feedback, and developing online sales affect business performance indicators such as sales growth, profitability, and market share, and pave the way for the success of various small and large industries. It can undoubtedly be stated that the management of small and

medium-sized enterprises in the apparel sector in Iran has largely accepted social media as a business strategy or promotional strategy, and observations and studies in this field indicate that the adoption of social media has a positive impact on company performance outcomes. The adoption of social media for apparel SMEs provides consumers with information about products, prices, business locations, and ongoing advertisements to encourage purchasing decisions. Since consumers make purchasing decisions, this ultimately affects the performance of the companies themselves. The aim of this study is to explain the effect of competition intensity and management support on social media adoption and its impact on the business performance of SMEs in the apparel sector. This study attempts to answer the question: what is the effect of competition intensity and management support on social media adoption and its impact on the business performance of SMEs, and how can the business performance of these companies be improved?

- Research Background

Given the importance of competition and management support in the adoption of social media and their impact on business performance, numerous studies have been conducted in recent years in this field, some of which are summarized below:

Mirzajani (2023) examined the use of social media marketing by small and medium-sized enterprises and its effects. The results of this study indicated that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and compatibility have

a positive effect on post-adoption social media use by firms. *Valizadeh Oghani and Rahimzadeh (2021)*, in a study on the use of social media technology and its relationship with firm performance with the mediating role of strategic customer relationship management capabilities, showed that customer coercive pressure has a positive and significant relationship with social media technology, whereas mimetic competitive pressure has no significant relationship with social media technology. The use of social media technology has a positive and significant relationship with firm performance. Other results indicated that strategic customer relationship management plays a mediating role between the use of social media technology and firm performance. *Khosravi (2019)*, examining consumer perception of social media marketing activities on brand equity, customer response, and purchase intention, showed that consumers' perception of social media marketing activities affects brand equity, customer response, and purchase intention. Therefore, companies can strengthen their relationship with customers through such activities. *Akbari et al. (2019)* investigated the effect of online social networks on the innovation performance of home-based businesses by explaining the mediating role of innovation capacity. The results showed that higher levels of online social network usage can increase the likelihood of improving innovation performance. Also, innovation capacity can act as a driver for the use of online social networks and consequently improve innovation performance in home-based

businesses. *Amoah et al. (2023)* investigated social media adoption in the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises in emerging economies. The findings indicated that affordability, customer pressure, employee competence, availability of financial resources, and leadership support positively affect social media adoption, while social media adoption also positively affects SME sustainability. *Mataruka and Muzurura (2023)* examined the adoption of social media tools to enhance SME performance. Their results showed that the integration of theoretical frameworks provides determinants that insightfully explain social media adoption and usage. Technological structure elements such as relative advantage, visibility, and interactivity were key factors. Organizational characteristics such as top management support and entrepreneurial orientation positively influenced social media adoption in innovation-oriented contexts. *Alalawneh et al. (2022)* showed that the use of social media platforms is positively associated with restaurant performance (financial, marketing, and operational). In addition, results indicated a significant moderating effect of competition intensity only on the relationship between social media use and restaurant marketing performance. *Mulunda et al. (2021)* studied the effect of social media marketing on SME sales growth in the fashion industry in Nairobi, Kenya, and found that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on SME sales growth. *Zu et al. (2019)*, in studying the effect of social media input intensity on firm performance using Sina Weibo data, found that (1) establishing Weibo accounts

increases firm performance; (2) higher input intensity leads to greater performance improvement; (3) input intensity has a nonlinear effect on performance, specifically an inverted U-shaped relationship; and (4) firm size positively moderates this relationship, while ownership type has no significant statistical effect. *Trainor et al. (2014)* concluded that resources alone are not sufficient to achieve significant firm performance and that firms should instead focus on distinctive capabilities.

Research Methodology

This study is applied in terms of its purpose and descriptive-survey and correlational in terms of data collection method. The statistical population includes managers and employees of garment manufacturing companies under the domestic brands Hakopian, Salyan, and Zagros Poosh, totaling 2,400 individuals. A sample of 331 participants was selected using Morgan's table and convenience sampling. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire by *Ahmad et al. (2019)* with a reliability coefficient of 0.839, used to measure competition intensity, management support, social media adoption, and business performance. Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM)

and SPSS26 and SMART-PLS software. Structural equation modeling is a powerful multivariate technique from the family of multiple regression and, more precisely, the general linear model, which allows researchers to test a set of regression equations simultaneously. In this model, confirmatory factor analysis or measurement model is used to assess validity and reliability of indicators, while the structural model is used to test hypotheses. The software used in this section is SMART-PLS.

Research Findings

- Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Figure (1) shows the structural model in PLS form, or the path coefficients between relationships. These values represent standardized beta coefficients in regression or the correlation coefficient between two constructs, which in fact form the weighted combination of indicators. The values inside the circles indicate the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the main construct, and its value always varies between zero and one. The higher the coefficient of determination, the better the regression line has been able to attribute changes in the dependent variable to the independent variable.

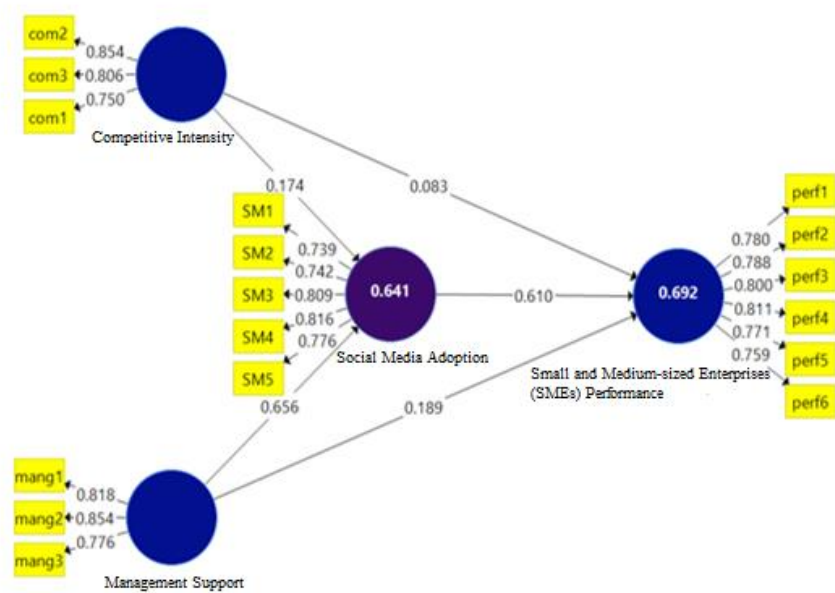


Figure 1. Structural model of the research hypotheses in path coefficient form

Figure 2 shows the structural model of the research. These figures present the structural model in the bootstrapping mode or in the significance coefficients mode. In this mode,

the values of the t-statistic are displayed on the paths within the model. Since the threshold or critical value is 1.96, hypotheses that obtain a t-statistic greater than 1.96 are accepted.

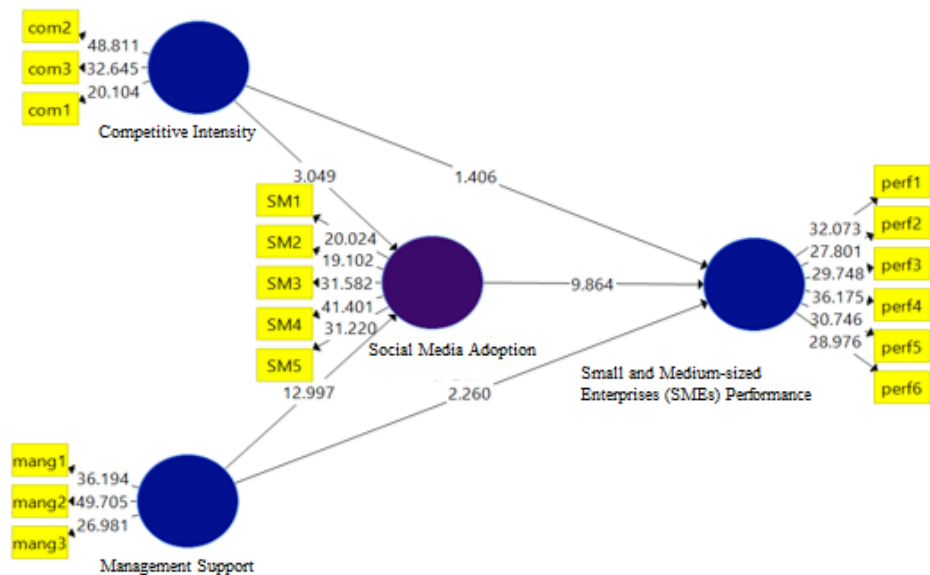


Figure 2. Structural model of the research hypotheses in standardized form

After running the structural model, it is necessary to examine the model fit indices as well, and the results of this examination are reported below.

- Model Fit

The model fit indices in SmartPLS version 3 differ from version 2, and this version reports two important indices, SRMR and NFI, in its output. In this regard, according to

Table 4-12, the SRMR value for the structural model was obtained as 0.06, and the NFI value was reported as 0.82, both of which indicate an acceptable fit of the structural model. In other words, the SRMR value, which indicates the percentage of poor model fit, should be close to zero and less than 10 percent, and the NFI value, which reports the goodness of fit, should be above 90 percent. These values were achieved and indicated that the model has an appropriate fit.

Table 1. Structural Model Fit Indices

The result	value	index name
desirable	0.82	Softened Fit Index (NFI)
desirable	0.06	Standard Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)

- Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is related to the endogenous (dependent)

variables of the model. This index indicates the extent to which an exogenous variable influences an endogenous variable. The

values 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are considered as criteria for weak, moderate, and strong coefficients of determination, respectively (Sobhani-Fard & Akhavan, 2011). In Table (4-13), the value of this index for the

endogenous construct is reported, indicating the appropriateness of the structural model fit in the hypothesis testing stage and the dimensions of the research variables.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination of the Structural Model of the Research Hypotheses

Adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted R ²)	Coefficient of determination (R ²)	Endogenous variable
0.689	0.692	Performance of small and medium-sized enterprises
0.638	0.641	Social media adoption

- Results of Hypothesis Testing

Examination of the Relationships Proposed in the Study

Table (3) presents the results of the structural model of the study for testing the

relationships proposed in the research. According to the values presented in this table, when the t-statistic is greater than (+1.96) or less than (−1.96), the relationship is confirmed.

Table 3. Examination of the Relationships Proposed in the Study

result	significance	coefficient	t-statistic	Proposed relationships in the research
Accepted	0.02	0.18	2.26	Management support → Performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry
Accepted	0.000	0.656	12.99	Management support → Social media adoption
Accepted	0.002	0.174	3.4	Competitive intensity → Social media adoption
Accepted	0.000	0.610	9.864	Social media adoption → Performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry

Investigation of the Proposed Hypotheses in the Study

Based on the results obtained from data analysis presented in Table (3), the t-statistic output from the hypothesis test of the effect of management support on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry is equal to 2.260, which is

greater than 1.96; and it is located in the H1 region, i.e., the hypothesis confirmation region. Therefore, considering the p-value (significance level) of 0.024, which is less than 0.05, it can be stated with 95% confidence that management support has a positive and significant effect on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province. On the other

hand, the path coefficient obtained from this hypothesis test is 0.189, which indicates the intensity of the effect of management support on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province.

As shown in Table (3), the t-statistic output from the hypothesis test of the effect of management support on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry is equal to 12.997, which is greater than 1.96; and it is located in the H1 region, i.e., the hypothesis confirmation region. Therefore, considering the p-value (significance level) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, it can be stated with 95% confidence that management support has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province. On the other hand, the path coefficient obtained from this hypothesis test is 0.656, which indicates the intensity of the effect of management support on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province.

The statistics in Table (3) show that the t-statistic output from the hypothesis test of the effect of competitive intensity on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry is equal to 3.049, which is greater than 1.96; and it is located in the H1 region, i.e., the hypothesis confirmation region. Therefore, considering the p-value (significance level) of 0.002, which is less than 0.05, it can be stated with 95% confidence that competitive intensity has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province. On the other

hand, the path coefficient obtained from this hypothesis test is 0.174, which indicates the intensity of the effect of competitive intensity on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province.

The statistics in Table (3) also show that the t-statistic output from the hypothesis test of the effect of social media adoption on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry is equal to 9.864, which is greater than 1.96; and it is located in the H1 region, i.e., the hypothesis confirmation region. Therefore, considering the p-value (significance level) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, it can be stated with 95% confidence that social media adoption has a positive and significant effect on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province. On the other hand, the path coefficient obtained from this hypothesis test is 0.610, which indicates the intensity of the effect of social media adoption on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Tehran province.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of examining the effect of competitive intensity and management support on social media adoption and its impact on the business performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry in the province, using a descriptive-survey method.

The test of the first hypothesis showed that management support has a positive and significant effect on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry in Tehran province. These results are

consistent with the findings of *Mirzajani (2023)*, *Valizadeh Oghani and Rahimzadeh (2021)*. *Chatterjee et al. (2020)* believe that top management support in any organization engaged in B2B activities helps stimulate employees to share knowledge and essential information with employees in other organizations. This knowledge sharing creates a strong business-to-business relationship that further affects organizational performance. In addition, top management support for subordinates influences new methods of organizational performance production. With top management support, customer relationship management can be successfully implemented, as the financial resources required for maintaining customer databases, hardware, and software are provided, and employees are adequately trained to understand and work with complex systems. Those at the top of the organization must be the main drivers of CRM and create sufficient motivation and commitment at all organizational levels. As a result, organizational performance can be improved and strengthened, enabling firms to remain competitive.

The test of the second hypothesis showed that management support has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption in small and medium-sized enterprises in the clothing industry in Tehran province. These results are consistent with the findings of *Mirzajani (2023)*, *Valizadeh Oghani and Rahimzadeh (2021)*, *Akbari et al. (2019)*, and *Khosravi (2019)*. Findings by *Amoah et al. (2023)* showed that social media helps SMEs gain competitive advantage through

information sharing, customer awareness, customer relationship management, customer service, corporate image, and improved co-creation efficiency. Previous empirical evidence shows that social media adoption has a significant impact on business growth. Moreover, the importance of top management in influencing technology adoption lies in the fact that organizational hierarchy controls attitudes, principles, and opinions at both individual and organizational levels.

The test of the third hypothesis showed that competitive intensity has a positive and significant effect on social media adoption in SMEs in Tehran province. This result is consistent with the findings of *Valizadeh Oghani and Rahimzadeh (2021)* and *Alalawneh et al. (2022)*. These studies align with previous technology adoption research showing positive effects on financial and non-financial performance and competitive advantage creation. In general, social media-based advertising campaigns are more cost-effective and easier for SMEs compared to traditional media. Technology improves business processes and performance. Social media adoption provides benefits and positively affects firm performance, increasing customer engagement and ultimately sales performance. Social media adoption also enhances organizational social capital, which in turn improves performance.

The results of the fourth hypothesis showed that social media adoption has a positive and significant effect on the performance of SMEs in the clothing industry in Tehran province. Considering the results of data analysis, this hypothesis is confirmed

because the t-value (9.864) is greater than 1.96 and falls in the acceptance region of the hypothesis. Therefore, with a significance level of 0.000 (less than 0.05), it can be stated with 95% confidence that social media adoption has a positive and significant effect on SME performance. The path coefficient is 0.610, indicating the intensity of this effect. These findings are consistent with studies by *Valizadeh Oghani and Rahimzadeh (2021)*, *Akbari et al. (2019)*, *Amoah et al. (2023)*, *Mataruka and Muzurura (2023)* and *Trainor et al. (2014)*. Overall, the use of social media has a strong positive effect on firm performance, reducing costs in marketing and customer service, improving customer relationships, and increasing access to information, thereby enhancing profitability.

Generally, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the clothing and fashion sector are trying to find solutions by developing promotional strategies through the adoption of social media. Social media adoption in the digital age and its use as one of the effective promotional strategies is used to improve business performance, and this is why social media adoption is currently popular among SMEs and enables SMEs to develop through increased sales transactions, turnover, customer satisfaction, closeness to consumers, and brand strength. This phenomenon is practiced by most SMEs in the clothing and fashion industry. However, social media adoption still differs in terms of intensity, duration of use, expansion of social media as a marketing tool, and budget allocation across companies.

Based on the results of this research and similar studies, it is suggested that managers of SMEs in the clothing industry should accurately identify the needs and expectations of their customers and design their products based on customer preferences in order to gain competitive advantage over rivals and improve organizational performance. It is also suggested that managers of these companies qualitatively evaluate the infrastructure related to the use of social media in the organization so that optimal conditions for the utilization of this process are precisely determined, and in case of weaknesses, they are identified and strategies are developed to address them.

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