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Drivers of Social Media Marketing Adoption and Export Performance in Indian SMEs: An Integrated TAM-TOE-RBV Perspective

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Abstract

Social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a transformative tool for export-orientated SMEs, yet limited research has examined its specific adoption drivers among firms in traditional industry clusters, particularly in emerging economies. Existing studies largely address technology adoption in general terms or focus on large corporations, leaving a gap in understanding how SMEs in handicrafts, textiles, woodcraft, and agro-processing sectors adopt SMM to enhance export performance. This study addresses this gap by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Resource-Based View (RBV), and Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, using SEM on data from 200 export-orientated SMEs in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, India. Results reveal digital skills, perceived usefulness, and top management support as the most critical adoption drivers. Marketing capabilities and digital presence management, customer engagement, content quality, and lead conversion mediate the SMM–export performance relationship, explaining 62.5% of the total effect, while export experience positively moderates this relationship and cost remains a significant barrier. The findings offer SME managers and policymakers actionable guidance on prioritising systematic digital-skills training, securing top management commitment, forming partnerships for less-experienced exporters, and using organic content and targeted advertising to offset cost constraints.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing, SME Internationalisation, Technology Adoption, Marketing Capabilities, Export Performance*

JEL Code: *M31, O33, F14, L25*

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1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute backbone of Indian economy. SMEs playing a crucial role in employment generation, industrial production and export earnings. According to the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (2022-23) SME based on traditional industries such as handicrafts, textiles, woodcraft and agro-processing products under export cluster has shown remarkable growth particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. SMEs faces multiple challenges this challenge comes in global markets where less resource availability and movement, inadequate technological constrains, limited infrastructure along with positing difficulties related to establishment in a brand form in international market. (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2022). Digital marketing specifically presence of social media marketing (SMM) have emerged as transformative tools for businesses seeking to enhance their global competitiveness. Through SMM, SMEs can expand their international reach (Alalwan et al., 2017). COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated worldwide digital transformation of businesses and proved digital marketing capabilities for survival and growth in turbulent times (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Social media potential accepted by everyone still there are limited understanding of specific drivers influence SMM adoption specifically in export-oriented SMEs.

Previous studies have examined technology adoption in general terms or focused on larger corporations but few have investigated unique context of SMEs in traditional industry clusters (Kumar et al., 2022). While social media's potential is widely acknowledged, limited research has examined the specific drivers influencing SMM adoption among export-oriented SMEs, particularly within traditional industry clusters (Kumar et al., 2022). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is adopted in this study for its ability to simultaneously estimate multiple interrelated constructs and test mediating and moderating relationships, offering a more comprehensive assessment of SMM adoption drivers than single-equation regression approaches (Li, 2020). This study addresses three fundamental research questions.

RQ1. To identify and analyse the key drivers of social media marketing adoption among export-oriented SMEs operating in traditional industry clusters of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, India.

RQ2. To examine the mediating role of marketing capabilities in the relationship between SMM adoption and export performance.

RQ3. To assess the moderating effects of export experience and firm size on the relationships between SMM adoption, marketing capabilities, and export performance.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Export Performance

The relationship between marketing capabilities and export performance has been extensively examined. Studies consistently show that firms with stronger marketing capabilities tend to achieve better export performance in terms of sales growth, market share, and profitability (Zou & Stan, 1998). While role of digital technologies in enhancing export performance with particular attention to how these technologies affected relationship between firm resources and export outcomes (Jean et al., 2021). SMM offer opportunities to overcome traditional barrier and increase internationalization, (Sinkovics et al., 2013). Social media platforms and SMM give opportunity to SMEs to access international customers, enabling them to bypass intermediaries and reduce transaction costs (Brouthers et al., 2016). Several studies have found SMEs with more advanced digital marketing capabilities are more likely to engage in exporting and achieve higher export intensity (Paul & Benito, 2018). SMM adoption also translates into export performance remain incompletely understood. studies show marketing capabilities mediate the relationship between digital technology adoption and export performance (Singh & Mahmood, 2014), whereas some studies show moderating role of factors such as firm size, international experience, and industry context (Ghauri et al., 2021).

2.2 Technology Adoption Model

Technology Acceptance Model developed by Davis (1989) TAM advocates that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) are primary determinants of technology adoption. Where PEU refers to degree where user believes that using a technology would enhance their performance while PEU shows users believe on technological ease and free of effort (Davis, 1989). So, in context of SMM perceived usefulness would encompass beliefs about SMM ability to improve customer reach, brand visibility and export performance. Whereas PEU related to perceptiveness and friendliness of social media platforms and researches e-commerce adoption (Gefen & Straub, 2000).

2.3 Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) Framework

Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) categorizing drivers of technology adoption into three contexts technological, organizational, and environmental. Technological context includes both internal and external technologies relevant to the firm. The organizational context encompasses the SMEs characteristics and resources which including top management support digital skills of employees along with technological infrastructure. The environmental context shows arena in which firm conducts business its competitive pressure, market turbulence, regulatory environment and trading partner readiness (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). SMM adoption in SMEs extending beyond individual perceptions to include organizational and market factors (Zhu et al., 2003).

2.4 Resource-Based View (RBV)

Barney (1991) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how SMM adoption can contribute to competitive advantage and export performance. Accumulation and deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources and capabilities help to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Firm-specific resources enhance competitive advantage (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008). SMM viewed as a strategic investment in intangible resources to enhance marketing capabilities. (Trainor et al., 2014). Adoption of SMM is not alone help to enhance performance it also required to well interdiction of SMM to firms other capabilities where export-oriented SMEs and their SMM adoption alone is insufficient.

2.5 Hypotheses Development

H1: Perceived usefulness of SMM positively influences SMM adoption.

SMEs that perceive SMM as useful for internationalisation are more likely to adopt it, dedicating resources, experimentation, and learning toward its implementation (Alalwan et al., 2017).

H2: Perceived ease of use of SMM positively influences SMM adoption.

Ease of use lowers barriers to implementation for SMEs with limited technical expertise and resources, encouraging adoption of SMM tools (Davis, 1989; King & He, 2006).

H3: Cost considerations negatively influence SMM adoption.

High perceived costs of content creation, advertising, analytics tools, and indirect costs such as employee time and training discourage SMEs from adopting SMM (Ghobakhloo et al., 2011).

H4: Competitive pressure positively influences SMM adoption.

When SMEs perceive that competitors are gaining advantages through SMM, they are more likely to adopt it themselves to avoid falling behind, consistent with institutional theory's account of competitive isomorphic pressures (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

H5: Digital skills of employees positively influence SMM adoption.

Higher levels of employee digital skills help SMEs overcome technical barriers and implement more sophisticated SMM strategies, facilitating adoption (Zhu et al., 2003).

H6: Top management support positively influences SMM adoption.

Strong management support leads to greater resource allocation, strategic direction, and employee motivation, contributing to more effective SMM adoption (Zhu & Kraemer, 2005).

H7: Technological infrastructure positively influences SMM adoption.

Firms with stronger infrastructure for creating, distributing, and analyzing social media content adopt SMM more readily and effectively (Zhu et al., 2003).

2.6 Mediating Effects

H8: SMM adoption positively influences marketing capabilities.

As SMEs adopt SMM, they develop firm-specific marketing capabilities including digital presence management, customer engagement, content quality, and lead conversion that constitute valuable resources for competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

H9: Marketing capabilities positively influence export performance.

Marketing capabilities enable firms to translate SMM adoption into tangible international outcomes, consistent with the Resource-Based View's premise that firm-specific capabilities drive performance (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008).

H10: SMM adoption positively influences export performance directly, with marketing capabilities partially mediating this relationship.

Beyond its indirect effect through marketing capabilities, SMM adoption is expected to have a direct effect on export performance, as greater digital presence and visibility can independently enhance international market outcomes (Sinkovics et al., 2013).

Based on the hypotheses following is the proposed model Conceptual model:

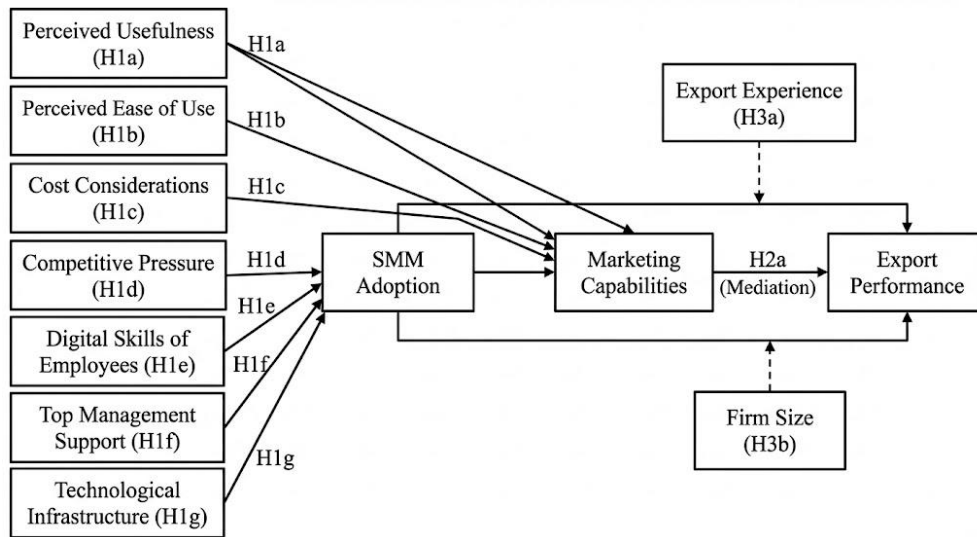


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Source: authors creation

2.7 Moderating Effects

H11: Export experience moderates the relationship between SMM adoption and export performance.

The relationship is expected to be stronger for firms with greater export experience, as experienced exporters possess established international networks and more sophisticated marketing strategies that allow them to leverage SMM more effectively (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

H12: Firm size moderates the relationship between marketing capabilities and export performance.

Firm size, measured by number of employees or annual revenue, is expected to influence firms' ability to exploit marketing capabilities for international growth (Lu & Beamish, 2001; Calof, 1994).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative and cross-sectional survey-based design to examine (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This relation between drivers of social media marketing adoption, marketing capabilities, and export performance of SMEs in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, India. The target population consists of export-oriented SMEs operating in key industry clusters in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Clusters were selected on the basis of labour-intensive and cultural significance.

3.2 Sampling

The sampling frame was constructed using databases from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Export Promotion Councils, and industry associations in both states. From this frame, SMEs were stratified from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The target sample size is 200 SMEs, appropriated for structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2019).

Table1: Sampling Framework by Industry Sector and Firm Size

Industry Sector	Firm Size Category	Number of Employees	Target Sample (n)	Percentage of Sample (%)
Handicrafts	Micro	1-10	19	9.5
	Small	11-50	25	12.5
	Medium	51-250	14	7.0
	Subtotal		58	29.0
Textiles	Micro	1-10	17	8.5
	Small	11-50	22	11.0
	Medium	51-250	13	6.5
	Subtotal		52	26.0
Woodcraft	Micro	1-10	15	7.5
	Small	11-50	20	10.0
	Medium	51-250	11	5.5
	Subtotal		46	23.0
Agro-processing	Micro	1-10	13	6.5
	Small	11-50	19	9.5
	Medium	51-250	12	6.0
	Subtotal		44	22.0
Total	All Categories		200	100.0

Source: authors calculation

3.3 Data collection

Sample was conducted through a combination of online surveys and face-to-face interviews. Where SMEs email addresses available and internet access is easy. Online questionnaire distributed while SMEs with limited internet connectivity face-to-face interviews were conducted by trained research assistants.

3.4 Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was developed based review of existing literature and adapted to the specific context of Indian SMEs. The instrument consists of several sections measuring the key constructs in the conceptual model while Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Table 2: Measurement Scale

Construct	Manifest Variable Dimension	Item Code	Survey Question / Item	Adaptation
Drivers of SMM Adoption	Perceived Usefulness	PU1	Using social media for marketing improves our ability to reach international customers.	Davis (1989); Alalwan et al. (2017)
		PU2	Social media marketing enhances our firm's export performance.	Davis (1989); Alalwan et al. (2017)
		PU3	Social media helps us understand international customer preferences better.	Davis (1989); Alalwan et al. (2017)
		PU4	Using social media increases our brand visibility in foreign markets.	Davis (1989); Alalwan et al. (2017)

	PU5	Social media is useful for generating export leads and inquiries.	Davis (1989); Alalwan et al. (2017)
Perceived Ease of Use	PEU1	Learning to use social media platforms for marketing is easy for our employees.	Davis (1989); Venkatesh (2000)
	PEU2	We find it easy to get social media to do what we want it to do.	Davis (1989); Venkatesh (2000)
	PEU3	Interaction with social media platforms is clear and understandable.	Davis (1989); Venkatesh (2000)
	PEU4	It is easy to become skillful at using social media for marketing.	Davis (1989); Venkatesh (2000)
	PEU5	Overall, we find social media platforms easy to use for our marketing activities.	Davis (1989); Venkatesh (2000)
Cost Considerations	CC1	The cost of implementing social media marketing is too high for our firm.	Ghobakhloo et al. (2011)
	CC2	The return on investment of social media marketing is uncertain.	Ghobakhloo et al. (2011)
	CC3	Maintaining active social media presence requires significant financial resources.	Ghobakhloo et al. (2011)
	CC4	The ongoing costs of social media advertising exceed our budget.	Ghobakhloo et al. (2011)
Competitive Pressure	CP1	Our competitors are gaining advantages by using social media marketing.	Zhu et al. (2003)
	CP2	We feel pressure from competitors to adopt social media marketing.	Zhu et al. (2003)

	CP3	Businesses in our industry that use social media are perceived as more modern.	Zhu et al. (2003)
	CP4	We risk losing international customers if we do not adopt social media marketing.	Zhu et al. (2003)
Digital Skills	DS1	Our employees have the necessary skills to use social media effectively.	Zhu and Kraemer (2005)
	DS2	We can easily find employees with social media marketing expertise.	Zhu and Kraemer (2005)
	DS3	Our staff understands how to create engaging content for social media.	Zhu and Kraemer (2005)
	DS4	We have employees who can analyze social media performance metrics.	Zhu and Kraemer (2005)
	DS5	Our team keeps updated with new features on social media platforms.	Zhu and Kraemer (2005)
Top Management Support	TMS1	Top management in our firm strongly supports social media marketing initiatives.	Thong et al. (1996)
	TMS2	Top management is willing to invest resources in social media marketing.	Thong et al. (1996)
	TMS3	Our leadership actively promotes the use of social media for export growth.	Thong et al. (1996)
	TMS4	Top management encourages employees to experiment with new social media approaches.	Thong et al. (1996)

Technological Infrastructure	TI1	Our firm has reliable internet connectivity for social media activities.	Zhu et al. (2003)
	TI2	We have the necessary hardware and software for effective social media marketing.	Zhu et al. (2003)
	TI3	Our technological infrastructure supports regular social media content creation.	Zhu et al. (2003)
	TI4	We have access to tools that help schedule and manage social media posts.	Zhu et al. (2003)
Marketing Capabilities			
Digital Presence Management	DPM1	Our firm maintains an active presence on relevant social media platforms.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	DPM2	We regularly update our social media profiles with current information.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	DPM3	We maintain consistent branding across all our social media channels.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	DPM4	Our social media presence is tailored to the platforms our international customers use.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
Customer Engagement	CE1	We effectively engage with international customers through social media.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	CE2	We respond promptly to customer inquiries and	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies

		comments on social media.	and Morgan (2005)
	CE3	We actively encourage international customers to share their experiences on our social media.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	CE4	We use social media to build relationships with potential international buyers.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
Content Quality	CQ1	Our social media content is professional and appealing.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	CQ2	We create content that is relevant to our international target markets.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	CQ3	Our social media content effectively showcases the quality of our products.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
Lead Conversion	LC1	We effectively convert social media interactions into sales leads.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	LC2	Our social media activities contribute to international customer acquisition.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	LC3	We have a clear process for following up on social media inquiries from potential buyers.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
	LC4	Social media has helped us secure repeat business from international customers.	Trainor et al. (2014); Vorhies and Morgan (2005)
Export Performance			

Export Growth	EG1	Our export sales have increased significantly over the past three years.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
	EG2	We have experienced growth in our international customer base.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
	EG3	The volume of our exports has steadily increased year after year.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
Export Revenue	ER1	Exports contribute significantly to our total revenue.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
	ER2	Our export revenue has shown consistent growth.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
Market Expansion	ME1	We have successfully entered new international markets in recent years.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
	ME2	We have expanded our presence in existing export markets.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
	ME3	We have diversified our export destinations over the past three years.	Zou and Stan (1998); Singh and Mahmood (2014)
Moderating Variables			
Export Experience (Perceptual)	EE_P1	Our firm has extensive experience in international markets.	Johanson and Vahlne (1977)
	EE_P2	We have well-established processes for managing export operations.	Johanson and Vahlne (1977)
	EE_P3	We possess deep knowledge of international business practices.	Johanson and Vahlne (1977)
Export Experience (Objective)	EE_Obj	Number of years the firm has been engaged in exporting	Johanson and Vahlne (1977)

Firm Size	FS_Emp	Number of employees	MSME Development Act, 2006
	FS_Rev	Annual revenue (INR)	MSME Development Act, 2006

Source: authors' compilation

Table 3 presents the control variables incorporated in this study to account for extraneous factors that might influence export performance beyond the primary constructs of interest.

Table 3: Control Variables and Their Measurement

Control Variable	Measurement Method / Sub-element	Specific Information Collected
Firm Age	Objective Numerical Data	Number of years since the firm's establishment.
Industry Sector	Categorical Classification	The firm is categorized into one of the following sectors: • Handicrafts • Textiles • Woodcraft • Agro-processing
Location	Categorical Classification	Whether the firm is located in an: • Urban area, or a • Rural area.
International Market Focus	Categorical Classification	Whether the firm primarily exports to • Developed countries, or • Developing countries.

Source: authors calculation

3.5 Hypothesis Testing

SEM method is applied through Python and R Studio. The measurement model ensured reliability and validity, followed by structural model evaluation. Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) tested path significance (Hair et al., 2019). Mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and moderation effects were examined.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4: Demographic Profile of Respondent SMEs (N=200)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
State	Uttar Pradesh	118	59.0
	Uttarakhand	82	41.0
Industry Sector	Handicrafts	58	29.0
	Textiles	52	26.0
	Woodcraft	46	23.0
	Agro-processing	44	22.0
	Micro (1-10 employees)	64	32.0
Firm Size	Small (11-50 employees)	86	43.0
	Medium (51-250 employees)	50	25.0
	Less than 5 years	42	21.0
Firm Age	5-10 years	68	34.0
	11-20 years	54	27.0
	More than 20 years	36	18.0
Location	Urban	122	61.0
	Rural	78	39.0
Export Experience	Less than 3 years	48	24.0
	3-7 years	82	41.0
	8-12 years	44	22.0
	More than 12 years	26	13.0
International Market Focus	Developed Countries	114	57.0
	Developing Countries	86	43.0
Primary Export Markets	USA/Canada	68	34.0
	Europe	72	36.0
	Middle East	36	18.0
	Asia-Pacific	24	12.0

Source: authors calculation

Table 4 shows Demographic Profile of respondent where higher number of SMEs related from Uttar Pradesh (59%) while 41 percent SMEs from Uttarakhand. The distribution across industry sectors is relatively balanced, with handicrafts (29%) and textiles (26%) being the most prominent sectors. Small firms (11-50 employees) constitute the largest category (43%), followed by micro firms (32%). The majority of firms have been in operation for 5-10 years (34%) and are

located in urban areas (61%). Most firms have moderate export experience (3-7 years, 41%) and primarily target developed country markets (57%).

Table 5: Reliability and Validity Assessment of Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Drivers of SMM Adoption				
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	5	0.892	0.921	0.702
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	5	0.876	0.908	0.665
Cost Considerations (CC)	4	0.845	0.887	0.624
Competitive Pressure (CP)	4	0.861	0.896	0.648
Digital Skills (DS)	5	0.884	0.915	0.684
Top Management Support (TMS)	4	0.873	0.912	0.678
Technological Infrastructure (TI)	4	0.858	0.891	0.632
Marketing Capabilities				
Digital Presence Management (DPM)	4	0.846	0.882	0.615
Customer Engagement (CE)	4	0.872	0.906	0.662
Content Quality (CQ)	3	0.834	0.879	0.608
Lead Conversion (LC)	4	0.851	0.889	0.629
Export Performance				
Export Growth (EG)	3	0.826	0.871	0.594
Export Revenue (ER)	2	0.812	0.864	0.581
Market Expansion (ME)	3	0.838	0.883	0.617

Source: authors calculation

4.2 Reliability and Validity

All constructs demonstrate reliability with Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.812 to 0.892, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.864 to 0.921 above 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values range from 0.581 to 0.702, all exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) where it establishing convergent validity.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	PU	PEU	CC	CP	DS	TMS	TI	DPM	CE	CQ	LC	EG	ER	ME
PU	0.838													
PEU	0.482	0.815												
CC	-0.324	-0.356	0.790											
CP	0.418	0.392	-0.284	0.805										
DS	0.456	0.512	-0.412	0.368	0.827									
TMS	0.524	0.438	-0.394	0.446	0.482	0.823								
TI	0.442	0.486	-0.428	0.384	0.524	0.468	0.795							
DPM	0.486	0.442	-0.368	0.412	0.456	0.492	0.474	0.784						
CE	0.452	0.426	-0.342	0.394	0.482	0.468	0.452	0.526	0.814					
CQ	0.424	0.408	-0.318	0.376	0.442	0.424	0.418	0.492	0.504	0.780				
LC	0.398	0.382	-0.394	0.358	0.468	0.436	0.442	0.468	0.482	0.456	0.793			
EG	0.368	0.342	-0.286	0.324	0.384	0.396	0.362	0.422	0.442	0.418	0.436	0.771		
ER	0.352	0.328	-0.272	0.312	0.368	0.382	0.348	0.402	0.422	0.402	0.422	0.532	0.762	
ME	0.338	0.314	-0.258	0.298	0.352	0.364	0.334	0.392	0.412	0.388	0.412	0.496	0.488	0.785

Source: authors calculation (Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of AVE; off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations.)

Table 7: Discriminant Validity Assessment (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio — HTMT)

Constr uct	PU	PE U	CC	CP	DS	TM S	TI	DP M	CE	CQ	LC	EG	ER	M E
PU														
PEU	0.57 8													
CC	0.38 9	0.42 7												
CP	0.50 2	0.47 0	0.34 1											
DS	0.54 7	0.61 4	0.49 4	0.44 2										
TMS	0.62 9	0.52 6	0.47 3	0.53 5	0.57 8									
TI	0.53 0	0.58 3	0.51 4	0.46 1	0.62 9	0.56 2								
DPM	0.58 3	0.53 0	0.44 2	0.49 4	0.54 7	0.59 0	0.56 9							
CE	0.54 2	0.51 1	0.41 0	0.47 3	0.57 8	0.56 2	0.54 2	0.63 1						
CQ	0.50 9	0.49 0	0.38 2	0.45 1	0.53 0	0.50 9	0.50 2	0.59 0	0.60 5					
LC	0.47 8	0.45 8	0.47 3	0.43 0	0.56 2	0.52 3	0.53 0	0.56 2	0.57 8	0.54 7				
EG	0.44 2	0.41 0	0.34 3	0.38 9	0.46 1	0.47 5	0.43 4	0.50 9	0.53 0	0.50 2	0.52 3			
ER	0.42 2	0.39 4	0.32 6	0.37 4	0.44 2	0.45 8	0.41 8	0.49 0	0.51 1	0.48 2	0.50 9	0.63 8		
ME	0.40 6	0.37 7	0.31 0	0.35 8	0.42 2	0.44 2	0.40 1	0.47 0	0.49 4	0.46 6	0.49 4	0.59 5	0.58 6	

Source: authors' calculation

Table 7 shows the HTMT discriminant validity. To further substantiate discriminant validity beyond the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations was examined (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values range from 0.310 to 0.638, remaining well below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (and the more liberal threshold of 0.90 recommended for conceptually distinct constructs). This confirms that discriminant validity is robustly established across all fourteen constructs, corroborating the results of the Fornell-Larcker analysis reported in Table 6.

4.3 Discriminant Validity

The square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal values) exceeds the correlations with other constructs (off-diagonal values), confirms discriminant validity and indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from others in the measurement model.

Table 8: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Fit Indices

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold
Absolute Fit Indices		
Chi-square (χ^2)	1248.64	-
Degrees of freedom (df)	812	-
χ^2/df	1.538	< 3.00
GFI (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.892	> 0.85
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	0.042	< 0.08
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.048	< 0.08
Incremental Fit Indices		
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.946	> 0.90
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	0.938	> 0.90
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.912	> 0.90
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	0.948	> 0.90
Parsimonious Fit Indices		
PNFI (Parsimonious Normed Fit Index)	0.724	> 0.50
PGFI (Parsimonious Goodness of Fit Index)	0.658	> 0.50
AIC (Akaike Information Criterion)	1562.84	Lower is better
BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion)	1846.32	Lower is better

Source: authors calculation

4.4 CFA Fit Indices

The measurement model demonstrates excellent fit across multiple indices. The χ^2/df ratio (1.538) is well below the threshold of 3.0, indicating good model parsimony. RMSEA (0.042) and SRMR (0.048) are both below 0.08, suggesting close fit to the data. Incremental fit indices (CFI=0.946, TLI=0.938, NFI=0.912) all exceed the recommended 0.90 threshold, confirming that the proposed measurement model represents the observed data well.

Table 9: Factor Loadings and Item Reliability

Construct	Item Code	Standardized Factor Loading	t-value	R²	Item Reliability
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.842	18.64***	0.709	High
	PU2	0.858	19.22***	0.736	High
	PU3	0.826	17.98***	0.682	Moderate
	PU4	0.814	17.42***	0.663	Moderate
	PU5	0.792	16.86***	0.627	Moderate
Perceived Ease of Use	PEU1	0.826	17.84***	0.682	Moderate
	PEU2	0.838	18.26***	0.702	High
	PEU3	0.804	17.12***	0.646	Moderate
	PEU4	0.788	16.58***	0.621	Moderate
	PEU5	0.772	16.14***	0.596	Moderate
Cost Considerations	CC1	0.812	16.98***	0.659	Moderate
	CC2	0.824	17.42***	0.679	Moderate
	CC3	0.788	16.36***	0.621	Moderate
	CC4	0.756	15.48***	0.572	Moderate
Competitive Pressure	CP1	0.834	17.68***	0.696	Moderate
	CP2	0.818	17.22***	0.669	Moderate
	CP3	0.792	16.48***	0.627	Moderate
	CP4	0.776	16.02***	0.602	Moderate
Digital Skills	DS1	0.852	18.46***	0.726	High
	DS2	0.838	18.02***	0.702	High
	DS3	0.814	17.28***	0.663	Moderate
	DS4	0.796	16.68***	0.634	Moderate
	DS5	0.782	16.24***	0.612	Moderate
Top Management Support	TMS1	0.846	18.12***	0.716	High
	TMS2	0.832	17.68***	0.692	Moderate
	TMS3	0.818	17.24***	0.669	Moderate
	TMS4	0.794	16.52***	0.630	Moderate
Technological Infrastructure	TI1	0.828	17.42***	0.686	Moderate
	TI2	0.814	17.02***	0.663	Moderate
	TI3	0.796	16.48***	0.634	Moderate
	TI4	0.768	15.72***	0.590	Moderate
Digital Presence Management	DPM1	0.818	17.12***	0.669	Moderate
	DPM2	0.802	16.68***	0.643	Moderate
	DPM3	0.786	16.22***	0.618	Moderate

Customer Engagement	DPM4	0.762	15.58***	0.581	Moderate
	CE1	0.842	17.98***	0.709	High
Content Quality	CE2	0.828	17.54***	0.686	Moderate
	CE3	0.804	16.82***	0.646	Moderate
	CE4	0.788	16.38***	0.621	Moderate
	CQ1	0.824	17.22***	0.679	Moderate
Lead Conversion	CQ2	0.808	16.78***	0.653	Moderate
	CQ3	0.782	16.08***	0.612	Moderate
	LC1	0.826	17.28***	0.682	Moderate
	LC2	0.812	16.88***	0.659	Moderate
Export Growth	LC3	0.794	16.42***	0.630	Moderate
	LC4	0.772	15.82***	0.596	Moderate
	EG1	0.818	16.98***	0.669	Moderate
	EG2	0.802	16.58***	0.643	Moderate
Export Revenue	EG3	0.786	16.12***	0.618	Moderate
	ER1	0.824	17.02***	0.679	Moderate
	ER2	0.808	16.62***	0.653	Moderate
Market Expansion	ME1	0.832	17.28***	0.692	Moderate
	ME2	0.816	16.88***	0.666	Moderate
	ME3	0.798	16.42***	0.637	Moderate

Source: authors calculation (** $p < 0.001$)

4.5 Factor Loadings

All standardized factor loadings are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.756 to 0.858. This indicates that each item reliably measures its respective construct. R^2 values range from 0.572 to 0.736, indicating that the items explain substantial variance in their constructs. Items with $R^2 > 0.70$ are considered to have high reliability (e.g., PU2, DS1), while others demonstrate moderate reliability. Common Method Bias is tested on Harman single factor test where test shows first unrotated factor explains only 32.84% of the total variance, which is well below the recommended threshold of 50%. This indicates that common method bias is not a significant concern in this study.

Table 10: Structural Model Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	β	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Decision
H1	Perceived Usefulness → SMM Adoption	0.286	0.058	4.93	< 0.001	0.172	0.398	Supported
H2	Perceived Ease of Use → SMM Adoption	0.194	0.052	3.73	< 0.001	0.092	0.296	Supported
H3	Cost Considerations → SMM Adoption	-0.168	0.048	-3.50	< 0.001	-0.262	-0.074	Supported
H4	Competitive Pressure → SMM Adoption	0.226	0.054	4.19	< 0.001	0.120	0.332	Supported
H5	Digital Skills → SMM Adoption	0.248	0.056	4.43	< 0.001	0.138	0.358	Supported
H6	Top Management Support → SMM Adoption	0.312	0.062	5.03	< 0.001	0.190	0.434	Supported
H7	Technological Infrastructure → SMM Adoption	0.208	0.054	3.85	< 0.001	0.102	0.314	Supported
H8	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.584	0.068	8.59	< 0.001	0.450	0.718	Supported
H9	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.526	0.064	8.22	< 0.001	0.400	0.652	Supported
H10	SMM Adoption → Export Performance	0.184	0.052	3.54	< 0.001	0.082	0.286	Supported

Source: authors calculation

statistically significant relationship occurred where ($p < 0.001$). Top Management Support ($\beta = 0.312$) and Perceived Usefulness ($\beta = 0.286$) are strongest drivers of SMM adoption. While perceived costs act as a barrier ($\beta = -0.168$) that negatively influences adoptionism adoption strongly predicts Marketing Capabilities ($\beta = 0.584$), which in turn strongly predicts Export

Performance ($\beta = 0.526$). The direct effect of SMM adoption on Export Performance ($\beta = 0.184$) is significant and suggesting partial mediation.

Table 11: Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	z-value	p-value
SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.307	0.048	0.214	0.402	6.40	< 0.001
Perceived Usefulness → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.167	0.038	0.094	0.242	4.39	< 0.001
Perceived Ease of Use → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.113	0.032	0.051	0.176	3.53	< 0.001
Cost Considerations → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	-0.098	0.029	-0.156	-0.042	-3.38	< 0.001
Competitive Pressure → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.132	0.035	0.065	0.201	3.77	< 0.001
Digital Skills → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.145	0.037	0.074	0.219	3.92	< 0.001
Top Management Support → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.182	0.042	0.101	0.265	4.33	< 0.001
Technological Infrastructure → SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.121	0.034	0.056	0.189	3.56	< 0.001

Source: authors calculation (*Note: Bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples; Boot SE = Bootstrap Standard Error; Boot LLCI = Bootstrap Lower Limit Confidence Interval; Boot ULCI = Bootstrap Upper Limit Confidence Interval*)

4.6 Mediation Effects

The indirect effect of SMM Adoption on Export Performance through Marketing Capabilities ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$) is significant and larger than the direct effect ($\beta = 0.184$), confirming partial mediation. All driver constructs show significant indirect effects on Marketing Capabilities

through SMM Adoption, with Top Management Support ($\beta = 0.182$) and Perceived Usefulness ($\beta = 0.167$) having the strongest mediated effects.

Table 12: Moderation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Moderator	Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	ΔR^2	Decision
	Export Experience	SMM Adoption $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.438	0.062	7.06	< 0.001	—	—
	Export Experience	Export Experience $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.186	0.048	3.88	< 0.001	—	—
H11	Export Experience	SMM Adoption $\times$ Export Experience $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.142	0.038	3.74	< 0.001	0.032	Supported
	Export Experience	Marketing Capabilities $\rightarrow$ Export Performance	0.486	0.058	8.38	< 0.001	—	—
	Export Experience	Export Experience $\rightarrow$ Export Performance	0.224	0.052	4.31	< 0.001	—	—
	Export Experience	Marketing Capabilities $\times$ Export Experience $\rightarrow$ Export Performance	0.128	0.036	3.56	< 0.001	0.028	Supported
	Firm Size	SMM Adoption $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.512	0.064	8.00	< 0.001	—	—
	Firm Size	Firm Size $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.168	0.046	3.65	< 0.001	—	—
H12	Firm Size	SMM Adoption $\times$ Firm Size $\rightarrow$ Marketing Capabilities	0.086	0.034	2.53	0.012	0.018	Supported
	Firm Size	Marketing Capabilities $\rightarrow$	0.502	0.062	8.10	< 0.001	—	—

	Export Performance							
Firm Size	Firm Size → Export Performance	0.146	0.044	3.32	0.001	—	—	
Firm Size	Marketing Capabilities × Firm Size → Export Performance	0.074	0.032	2.31	0.021	0.014	Supported	

Source: authors calculation

4.7 Moderation Effects

Export Experience moderates SMM adoption marketing capabilities relationship ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.001$) where Marketing capabilities export performance relationship ($\beta = 0.128$, $p < 0.001$), explaining an additional 3.2% and 2.8% of variance respectively. Firm Size shows weaker moderation effects on both paths ($\beta = 0.086$ and $\beta = 0.074$, $p < 0.05$). So positive effects of SMM adoption and marketing capabilities are stronger for firms containing greater export experience and larger size.

Table 13: Slope Analysis for Moderation Effects

Hypothesis	Moderator	Moderator Level	Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Slope Interpretation
H11	Export Experience	Low (−1 SD)	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.326	0.072	4.53	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Export Experience	Mean	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.438	0.062	7.06	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Export Experience	High (+1 SD)	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.568	0.068	8.35	< 0.001	Stronger positive
	Export Experience	Low (−1 SD)	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.382	0.068	5.62	< 0.001	Significant positive

	Export Experience	Mean	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.486	0.058	8.38	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Export Experience	High (+1 SD)	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.602	0.072	8.36	< 0.001	Stronger positive
H12	Firm Size	Low (−1 SD)	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.438	0.074	5.92	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Firm Size	Mean	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.512	0.064	8.00	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Firm Size	High (+1 SD)	SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.584	0.076	7.68	< 0.001	Stronger positive
	Firm Size	Low (−1 SD)	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.434	0.072	6.03	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Firm Size	Mean	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.502	0.062	8.10	< 0.001	Significant positive
	Firm Size	High (+1 SD)	Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.562	0.074	7.59	< 0.001	Stronger positive

Source: authors calculation

4.8 Slopes

The simple slope shows positive relationships are significant at all levels of the moderators. However, strength of these relationships increases gradually from low to high levels of both export experience and firm size. Effect of SMM adoption on marketing capabilities strengthens from $\beta = 0.326$ (low export experience) to $\beta = 0.568$ (high export experience). Similarly effect of marketing

capabilities on export performance strengthens from $\beta = 0.382$ to $\beta = 0.602$ across low to high export experience levels, confirm that export experience and firm size enhance the effectiveness of SMM adoption and marketing capabilities.

Table 14: Control Variables Effects on Export Performance

Control Variable	β	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)	Significance
Firm Age	0.124	0.042	2.95	0.003	0.042	0.206	Significant
Industry Sector							
Handicrafts (Reference)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Textiles	0.086	0.038	2.26	0.024	0.012	0.160	Significant
Woodcraft	0.052	0.036	1.44	0.150	-0.018	0.122	Not Significant
Agro-processing	0.094	0.040	2.35	0.019	0.016	0.172	Significant
Location (Urban vs. Rural)	0.108	0.044	2.45	0.014	0.022	0.194	Significant
International Market Focus	0.142	0.046	3.09	0.002	0.052	0.232	Significant

Source: authors calculation

4.9 Control Variables

Except woodcraft sector all control variables show significant effects on export performance. Firms targeting developed countries demonstrate higher export performance ($\beta = 0.142$, $p = 0.002$) compared to those targeting developing countries. Urban location ($\beta = 0.108$, $p = 0.014$) and greater firm age ($\beta = 0.124$, $p = 0.003$) are associated with better export performance. Agro-processing ($\beta = 0.094$, $p = 0.019$) and textiles ($\beta = 0.086$, $p = 0.024$) show significantly higher export performance compared to handicrafts no significant difference.

Table 15: Multi-Group Analysis (State-wise Comparison)

Path	Uttar Pradesh (n=118)	Uttarakhand (n=82)	Group Difference			
	β	p-value	β	p-value	$\Delta\beta$	p-value
Perceived Usefulness → SMM Adoption	0.298	< 0.001	0.272	< 0.001	0.026	0.482
Perceived Ease of Use → SMM Adoption	0.186	0.002	0.204	< 0.001	- 0.018	0.624
Cost Considerations → SMM Adoption	-0.182	< 0.001	-0.152	0.004	- 0.030	0.386
Competitive Pressure → SMM Adoption	0.214	< 0.001	0.242	< 0.001	- 0.028	0.442
Digital Skills → SMM Adoption	0.236	< 0.001	0.264	< 0.001	- 0.028	0.458
Top Management Support → SMM Adoption	0.326	< 0.001	0.294	< 0.001	0.032	0.368
Technological Infrastructure → SMM Adoption	0.218	< 0.001	0.196	0.002	0.022	0.524
SMM Adoption → Marketing Capabilities	0.602	< 0.001	0.558	< 0.001	0.044	0.286
Marketing Capabilities → Export Performance	0.538	< 0.001	0.512	< 0.001	0.026	0.492
SMM Adoption → Export Performance	0.192	< 0.001	0.174	0.003	0.018	0.586

Source: authors calculation

Table 12 shows multi group state wise comparison where no significant differences between states while generalizability across region. A slightly stronger effects in Uttar Pradesh reflect due to its superior infrastructure and market access.

5. Discussion

5.1 Integration of Findings with Theoretical Frameworks

The findings suggest that SMM adoption among export-orientated SMEs cannot be fully explained by any single theoretical lens but instead reflects the interplay of technology acceptance, resource-based, and internationalisation logics operating simultaneously. The prominence of perceived usefulness and ease of use indicates that, for resource-constrained traditional-sector SMEs, adoption decisions remain fundamentally utilitarian: owners weigh whether SMM demonstrably helps them reach buyers before they weigh strategic or reputational considerations. This is consistent with prior technology-adoption research in SME contexts, which has generally found utility perceptions to outweigh more abstract strategic motivations when resources are scarce (Davis, 1989; Ghobakhloo et al., 2011), though findings extend this logic specifically to the export dimension of SME activity, a context earlier TAM-based studies rarely isolated. The joint significance of cost considerations (negative) and competitive pressure (positive) points to a more institutional reading of adoption behaviour than utility alone would suggest. Rather than adopting SMM purely because it is useful, many SMEs in traditional clusters appear to be adopting it defensively to avoid falling behind competitors who have already digitised, even while cost remains a genuine constraint.

This pattern echoes the institutional isomorphism argument advanced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and aligns with Kumar et al. (2022) observation that SME digitalisation in traditional industries is often reactive rather than strategically planned. Where our findings diverge from general technology-adoption literature is in showing that this competitive pressure operates alongside, not instead of, utility-driven adoption, suggesting that traditional-cluster SMEs are adopting SMM under a "have to, and it helps" logic rather than either pure institutional mimicry or pure rational calculation.

The mediating role of marketing capabilities between SMM adoption and export performance offers a resource-based explanation for why some SMEs convert digital presence into export gains while others do not. This supports Barney's (1991) core RBV proposition that technology itself confers little advantage unless internalised into firm-specific, difficult-to-imitate capabilities, conclusion consistent with Sinkovics et al.'s (2013) finding that digital tools function as enablers rather than direct drivers of internationalisation outcomes. What our results add to this line of work is empirical evidence, within an under-studied traditional-industry SME population,

that this capability-conversion process is not automatic: the relatively modest direct effect of SMM adoption on export performance (compared to its indirect effect through capabilities) implies that many SMEs in these sectors are still at an early stage of translating platform use into genuine marketing competence.

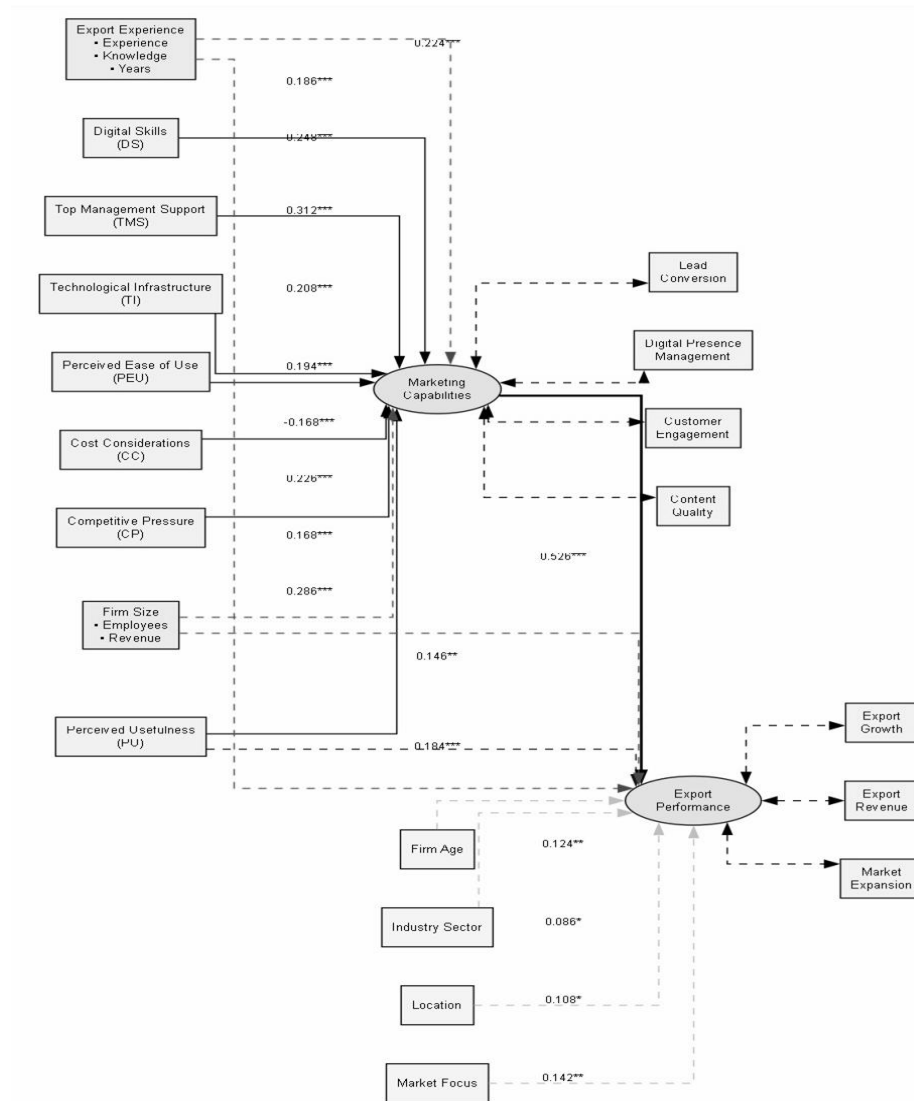


Figure 2: Path modelling

Source: authors calculation through Python

5.2 Marketing Capabilities as the Critical Mediator

The stronger influence of marketing capabilities on export performance, relative to SMM adoption itself, reframes how digital transformation should be understood in this context: SMM adoption is

best viewed not as an outcome in itself but as an input to capability formation, with export performance ultimately depending on what firms do with their digital presence rather than merely whether they have one. This distinction matters practically because it implies that policy or managerial interventions focused solely on encouraging platform adoption (e.g., "get your business on Instagram") are unlikely to yield export gains unless paired with capability-building support that is absent from digital-inclusion initiatives aimed at traditional-sector SMEs in India.

This capability-centric interpretation also helps explain a puzzle in the broader SME internationalization literature: why some studies report weak or inconsistent links between digital marketing adoption and export outcomes (Kumar et al., 2022), while others report strong effects (Alalwan et al., 2017). Our mediation results suggest that these mixed findings may partly reflect variation in firms' capability-development stage rather than contradictory underlying effects — SMEs that have progressed from mere digital presence toward substantive customer engagement, content quality, and lead conversion appear positioned to realize far greater export benefits than those that have adopted SMM tools without developing these competencies (Trainor et al., 2014; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).

The moderating role of export experience adds an experiential-learning dimension to this capability story. Rather than simply confirming that "experienced exporters do better," the finding indicates that experience specifically strengthens firms' ability to convert SMM-derived capabilities into performance — suggesting that accumulated market knowledge helps firms interpret and act on digital customer signals more effectively, consistent with Johanson and Vahlne's (1977) argument that experiential learning progressively reduces the psychic distance and market uncertainty that constrain SME internationalisation. This implies that less experienced exporters may derive comparatively little export benefit from SMM investment alone until they accumulate sufficient market experience to exploit it. Direct relevance for how support programmes might sequence digital-skills training against export-readiness initiatives for early-stage exporters.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

This study captures only a snapshot of entrepreneurs navigating digital adoption. Future research should embark on longitudinal studies to understand entrepreneurs' experience in digital

transformation. Cross-cultural investigations across emerging economies also required to understand how local wisdom and cultural tones shape digital engagement with global customers.

This study investigates how social media marketing adoption drives export performance among various traditional sector of SMEs where this study shows that digital skills, perceived usefulness, and top management support are the most critical drivers of successful SMM adoption. Crucially, marketing capabilities including digital presence management, customer engagement, and lead conversion serve as essential mechanism through which social media adoption translates into improved export performance. Export experience strengthens these relationships, while cost considerations act as barriers that can be overcome through capability building. Prioritizing digital skills development and capability building is required for their digital transformation in emerging economies.

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