



**Antecedents and Consequences of Social Media Marketing
Use: An Empirical Study of the UK Exporting B2B SMEs**

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Antecedents and Consequences of Social Media Marketing Use: An Empirical Study of the UK Exporting B2B SMEs

Abstract

Purpose- The social media have enabled companies to reach out to global markets and provided them with the opportunity to customize their strategies and offerings in an unprecedented way. Given the scant empirical evaluation of social media use in the SMEs Business-to-Business (B-to-B) context, this paper aims to offer a comprehensive description of the antecedents and consequences of social media use in international B-to-B Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and the way in which this use affects their export performance.

Design/methodology/approach- This study uses a sample of 277 British Business-to-Business SMEs and employs positivist research with a quantitative approach, adopting a survey strategy through questionnaires and structural equation modeling (SEM).

Findings- The results reveal that the use of social media influences export performance through the quality of international business contacts – understanding customers' views and preferences; brand awareness and knowledge of the competition in various international markets. This study contributes to the emerging literature on B-to-B SMEs digital marketing by determining the mechanism through which B-to-B SMEs may benefit from using the social media in their efforts to export.

Originality/Value- Despite the promising potential of the social media, especially for export-oriented companies, very limited attention has hitherto been paid to the relationship between the use of social media and export performance. This study attempts to fill the gap by investigating the extent to which actual use of social media impacts on the performance of exporting firms.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, B-to-B, SMEs, Structural equation modeling (SEM), and Export Performance.

1. Introduction

Some have hailed the use of different social media platforms as the next source of competitive advantage (Ahi et al., 2017; Alarcon et al., 2015; Christodoulides et al., 2015; Jun and Park, 2017; Tang et al., 2016; Siamagka et al., 2015; Neeley and Leonardi, 2018; Wang, Tian, and Li, 2019). Moreover, organizations are increasing their presence on many social media platforms (Ahi et al., 2017; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2016; He et al., 2019). As a result, many scholars have been motivated to study the use of social media to communicate with customers, widen their experience (Wilson et al., 2011; Nisar, Prabhakar, and Strakova, 2019), and employ social media strategy to reach consumers (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Duff & Segijn, 2019). This way of marketing

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3 appears to be especially advantageous for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) due to its
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5 flexible adaptation of social networks for both marketing and the development of new products
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7 (Pentina et al., 2012). Social media can be deployed even by SMEs due to their low cost and
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9 minimal technical requirements (Ferreretal, 2013). As a result, social media use continues to grow
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11 exponentially among businesses and is rapidly becoming a crucial business management
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13 phenomenon (Trainoretal, 2014). Organizations are therefore using more platforms
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15 (Kietzmannetal, 2011). The social media may be an increasingly popular choice for businesses
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17 because they allow many to communicate with many, instead of being restricted to private one-to-
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19 one conversations (Siamagka et al., 2015). Businesses can use the social media to promote their
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21 products, services and brands. Various studies have investigated the use of social media in business
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23 and found that it has many benefits (Siamagka et al., 2015).
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29 The social media have been defined in terms of both hardware and software as a series of
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31 technological innovations that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and
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33 interoperability by online users (Berthon et al., 2012; Racela and Thoumrungroje, 2019). These
34
35 media differ from traditional computer-mediated communications in three main ways: a shift in
36
37 the locus of activity from the desktop to the web (meaning greater accessibility); a shift in the locus
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39 of value production from the firm to the consumer (deriving from increased
40
41 interaction/interactivity); and a shift in the locus of power from the firm to the consumer (Berthon
42
43 et al., 2012). The social media may be used for collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs, user-
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45 generated content communities (e.g. Flickr; YouTube; Youku/Toduo), social networking sites
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47 (e.g. Facebook; Cyworld), virtual game worlds (e.g. EverQuest), and virtual social worlds (e.g.
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49 Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).
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3 Previous research reveals that information technology (IT), mostly on the Internet, has become
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5 one of the most important tools for facilitating international business and marketing activities
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7 (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, and Jean, 2013; Hannibal and Knight, 2018). IT-based capabilities have
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9 been found especially useful for promoting the emergence of international new ventures and/or
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11 helping SMEs to work internationally (Zhang, Sarker, & Sarker, 2013). In addition, many
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13 companies currently rely on the social media and the Internet for improving international supply-
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15 chain co-ordination, relationship learning, customer service management, and firm performance
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17 (Trainor et al., 2014; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018).
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22 Hitherto, little attention has been paid to the relationship between social media use and export
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24 performance. Few studies have considered the influence of the social media on factors such as the
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26 number and quality of contacts (e.g., Groza et al., 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2012); brand awareness
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28 (e.g., Mangold and Foulds, 2009; Michaelidou et al., 2011); understanding customers' views and
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30 preferences (e.g., Kietzmann et al., 2011; Jussila et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2012); and
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32 understanding competition in different markets (e.g., He et al., 2013; Guha, Harrigan, and Soutar,
33
34 2018). In addition, organizations adapt to rapidly changing market conditions by introducing
35
36 technical innovations, which lead to improved performance (Wang and Kim, 2017). Prior studies
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38 have consistently focused on the role of technology in sales and have enriched our understanding
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40 of its adoption and use, as well as the associated performance outcomes (Eid, 2009a).
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45 However, although marketing scholars have recently started to discover what factors determine
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47 the B2B use of the social media among SMEs (Eid et al., 2006; Pentina et al., 2012;
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49 Christodoulides et al., 2015, Siamagka et al., 2015; Tajudeen, Jaafar, and Ainin, 2018), there is
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51 room for improvement in our understanding of the potential effect of a firm's social media use on
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53 export marketing strategies. These applications may help to break down barriers of time and
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1 distance between the parties of supply and demand (Constantinides et al., 2008). However, despite
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3 the promising potential of the social media, especially for SMEs, few researchers have discussed
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5 the relationship between social media use and the export performance of B-to-B SMEs (Alarcon
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7 et al., 2015). Therefore, this study addresses this shortfall by asking how far the use made by
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9 exporting firms of the social media impacts on the performance of these firms. Furthermore, our
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11 study goes beyond the direct effect of social media use on export performance and tries to identify
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13 the mechanism(s) through which additional determinants (international business contacts, brand
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15 awareness, market knowledge, customer engagement and cultural adaptation) interact in
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17 explaining the performance of B-to-B exporting by SMEs. Hence, our research fills a specific gap
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19 in the literature. Academic research has yet to explore how firm performance is affected by
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21 involving the social media in B2B relationships. Further, we have little understanding of the factors
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23 and the pathway whereby the use of the social media leads to enhanced firm performance. Hence,
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25 this paper's research objective is to build upon the information communication literature and recent
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27 scholarly advances in the area of social media use in the context of exporting, and to develop and
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29 empirically test a model relating a firm's performance in this regard.
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37 **2. Theoretical Background**

38 **2.1 Social media use**

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40 The social media (SM) have evolved rapidly in the past few years, and now take many forms
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42 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The adoption and effective use of these tools, hereafter abbreviated
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44 to 'social media use (SMU)' to derive benefits is a major challenge for business organizations.
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46 More specifically, the SMU facilitates interactions, enables business partners and customers to
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48 collaborate and creates new business models and new ways of creating value (Nath, Nachiappan,
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50 and Ramanathan, 2010; Drummond, McGrath, and O'Toole, 2018). To remain relevant and
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3 competitive in this new market landscape, firms should be able to manage social media
4 conversation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and customer experience. Companies use SM with the
5 goals of creating awareness, acquiring new customers, engaging with customers, creating
6 interactions and conversations with actual and potential customers, creating a word-of-mouth
7 (WOM) reputation, enhancing brand image, building a leadership role within the industry, creating
8 relationships with customers and other stakeholders, and forming networks (Salo, 2017; Pentina,
9 Guilloux, & Micu, 2018). In the field of marketing practice, previous empirical research provides
10 evidence that companies operating in consumer markets use social media tools mainly to influence
11 customer decisions, to support brands and to generate word-of-mouth (Wang, Yu, and Wei, 2012;
12 Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2018).
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26 Previous studies have also investigated the fundamental elements that constitute the social
27 media to better understand the positive and negative implications of the social media for the firm
28 (Labrecque et al., 2013; Felix et al., 2017). For example, Ilhan et al.,(2018) indicated that brand
29 fans not only show their feelings on the social media pages about the brands they love, but also
30 post on the social media pages concerning rival brands. The implicit assumption is that such posts
31 damage the rival brands, at least on the social media platform where they appear (Fournier and
32 Lee, 2009). Furthermore, even consumers who identify weakly with a brand use the social media
33 to show a marked reaction to electronic WOM (eWOM) that criticizes it (Ho-Dac, Carson, &
34 Moore 2013; Ilhan et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the social media have also challenged organizations
35 (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). They have created a space in which stakeholders may share
36 information about organizations at high speed and express their ideas about them, while
37 organizations now have less control than they used over what is being said about them (Effing &
38 Spil, 2016). This lack of control in the social media context has increased organizations'
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3 vulnerability and, in consequence, the frequency and severity of business crises (Kietzmann et al.,
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5 2011).

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8 Despite its relevance and the benefits that B2B and B2C companies can derive from
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10 adopting SM (Siamagka et al., 2015), not all do so (Salo, 2017). At the beginning of this decade,
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12 a small percentage (under 30%) of SMEs reported SM adoption (Jussila, Kärkkäinen, and Aramo-
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14 Immonen, 2014). The reason for this low take-up, according to empirical research, derived from
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16 the barriers against adoption, such as a lack of staff understanding and technical skills and the cost
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18 of technological solutions (Michaelidou et al., 2011). SMU requires organizations to change
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20 certain aspects of their interactions with customers (Siamagka et al., 2015) and other stakeholders,
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22 to adopt new business and revenue models (Leafing et al., 2014), and to institute such marketing
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24 processes as brand management (De Varies, Gensler, and Leafing, 2012), CRM, and sales (Eid,
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26 2009).

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31 Authors agree that the Internet has become one of the most important tools for conducting
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33 international business and marketing activities (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, and Jean, 2013; Hannibal,
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35 and Knight, 2018). In particular, ICT has been found especially important for promoting the
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37 emergence of new international ventures/born global firms and/or facilitating the
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39 internationalization of an enterprise (Gabriel son and Gabriel son, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). In
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41 addition, many companies currently rely on the Internet to improve the international co-ordination
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43 of their supply chain, the knowledge of relationships, the management of their customer services,
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45 and firm performance overall (Liu et al., 2013; Trainor et al., 2014; Nisar, Prabhakar, and Strakova,
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47 2019).

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51 Some authors extoll the potential influence of social media use and its connection to
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53 internationalization in international business and export marketing strategies (Berthon et al., 2012;
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Okazaki and Taylor, 2013), since these applications may help break down the barriers of time and distance between suppliers and buyers (Constantinides et al., 2008). However, despite the great potential of the social media, especially for export-oriented companies, very limited attention has hitherto been paid to identifying the drivers and outcomes of SMU in marketing, taking into account the approach of these companies to the social media—precisely the purpose of the present research.

2.2 Social media marketing

The term ‘social media marketing’ refers to the act of using social networks for marketing purposes. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) proposed a classification based on the various types of application which can be used as social media marketing channels to provide and promote social media services. These include:

- Blogs, i.e., online personal journals; these were among the earliest well-known Web 2.0 applications and can be seen as the social media’s equivalent to personal websites (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010);
- Social networks, which are applications such as Facebook that allow users to build personal websites accessible to other users for the exchange of personal content and communication;
- (Content) communities, which are websites meant for organizing and sharing particular types of content (e.g., YouTube);
- Forums/bulletin boards, which also be seen as communities; these are sites for exchanging ideas and information usually on special interests;
- Content aggregators, which are applications allowing users to fully customize the Web content they would like to access (various RSS sites).

2.3 Social media as drivers of the performance of exporting firms

Writers have evaluated firm performance with respect to the use of IT systems (Liu et al., 2013; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018), some specifically focusing on export-oriented companies and born global exporters (Zhang et al., 2013; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018). In such firms, communication with relevant players in foreign markets (providers, distributors and customers) is electronic, and the players are inevitably influenced by the technological system used. According

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3 to the literature, ICT use may lead to high performance among exporting companies, due to (1) the
4 pursuit of high, value-added ICT applications to maintain a competitive edge; (2) a reduction in
5 the costs of communicating with foreign customers/suppliers and of gathering information about
6 foreign competitors; and (3) the support/enhancement of distinctive competencies and skills in
7 other business functions (Zhang et al., 2013).
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15 Companies which are selling their products in foreign markets can use the social media as an
16 integrated set of strategic resources (human, technological, managerial, and organizational) that
17 through the use of social media applications can create competitive advantages and superior firm
18 performance based upon more effective information management (Trainor et al., 2014; Benitez, et
19 al., 2018). This can be explained by the contingency theory, which posits that each firm's export
20 performance is dependent on the context in which the firm operates, and as Robertson and Chetty
21 (2000) have demonstrated, there is a relationship between export performance and the level of 'fit'
22 between a firm's strategic orientation and its context. Moreover, as Robertson and Chetty (2000)
23 affirm, the context of a firm changes continually throughout its exporting activity. Hence,
24 managers will be required to diagnose and make adaptations as these changes occur. They need to
25 be proactive and flexible in their strategic choices; otherwise, poor performance and lost
26 opportunities may ensue. In this regard, we believe that it may favor the performance of exporting
27 firm if its key decision-makers take advantage of the social media and incorporate them into their
28 business strategy.
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46 47 **3. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses** 48

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50 In the B2B context, prospect development and customer acquisition are two central elements
51 of the sales process (Jussila et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Ancillai et al., 2019). Heinonen
52 and Michelsson (2010) have found that prospect initiation is a constant challenging requirement
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3 for B2B activities. Customers going out of business, or switching to other suppliers, or simply not
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5 maintaining relationships, show that business is dynamic. Additionally, sales professionals must
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7 collect detailed information about their customers in order to learn more about their needs and
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9 their buying processes, and must, at the same time, learn more about specific markets beyond the
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11 B2C context (Eid et al., 2006).
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15 In the B2B context, the nature of this market knowledge is varied, due to the length of the sales
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17 cycle and the complexity of the buying process (Rodriguez et al., 2012). Previous studies have
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19 revealed that brand awareness is generally the most important element for promoting brand equity
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21 in B2B markets (Davis, Golicic, & Marquardt, 2008). Furthermore, brand awareness may signal
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23 presence and substance because high awareness levels imply to a buyer that the firm has been in
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25 business for a long time, that the firm's products are widely distributed, and that the products
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27 associated with the brand are purchased by many other buyers (Aaker, 1991; Hoyer & Brown,
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29 1990; Homburg, Klarmann, and Schmitt, 2010). Because firms tend to “satisfice” (Simon, 1976)
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31 instead of aiming for optimal solutions, this information is likely to greatly reduce a firm's
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33 incentive to collect information about brands with low awareness. Most B2B practitioners thus
34
35 concentrate their branding activities on the dissemination of brand identification (i.e. name and
36
37 logo), rather than developing more complicated brand equality activities. For many B2B firms, the
38
39 creation of brand awareness—the ability to recognize or recall a brand—is a key element of
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41 branding strategy (Homburg, Klarmann, et al., 2010). This means that one of the main goals for
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43 firms engaging in online activities is to build brand awareness (Eid, 2009a). However, no previous
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45 research has examined the mechanism through which the above factors affect export performance,
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47 which would contribute to the knowledge of social media marketing.
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3 Among the factors which may affect the implications of using social media for export purposes
4 is customer engagement. There is a growing recognition that social media applications are helpful
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6 for engaging customers (Hollebeek, 2011; Nunan et al., 2018), and that customers have become
7
8 more engaged with organizations (Jun and Park, 2017). The nature of customer engagement for
9
10 the sake of B2B is not the same as for B2C's; in fact, the B2B context is unique. Compared to the
11
12 end-customer context (B2C), where the emotional dimension is considered an essential element,
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14 B2B markets are inhabited by more rational buyers (Hollebeek, 2011). Furthermore, in the B2B
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16 context, co-creation and innovation are more industry- or process-specific; however, in the B2C
17
18 context it is more service- or design-oriented (Iankova et al., 2018).
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24 Such interaction and engagement form a crucial element in improving not only the scope of a
25
26 firm's contacts and networking (Rodriguez et al., 2012) but also of its reaching qualified leads
27
28 (Rodriguez et al., 2012). One of the most important perspectives of the social media is the
29
30 development of international network relationships; these are helpful in conducting international
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32 activities (Alarcon et al., 2015). Additionally, interaction with consumers online via social media
33
34 platforms can enhance companies' opportunities to make their brands more noticeable, and, in
35
36 turn, enhance their brand's market position (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Hutter et al., 2013; Langaro,
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38 Rita, and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018). More than half of a group of marketing decision-makers
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40 indicated that improving brand awareness was one of the main objectives of their online social
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42 networking programs because this could have a significant impact on a brand's market share (Xie
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44 and Chen, 2014).
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49 The use of social media, with their potential as an internet-based technology to outdo
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51 traditional media (Hanna et al., 2011), is no exception to the fundamental tenets of the theory. As
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53 a business support system employed for several reasons with varied outcomes in various contexts,
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the use of social media as a technological innovation seems to require diffusion and alignment with an enterprise's other marketing activities. The following sections discuss the antecedents of social media use, and the ways in which they eventually influence performance outcomes for SMES.

The conceptual model of this study is drawn from two streams of research: international business literature, and current marketing theory. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model with the hypothesized linkages between the constructs. The term 'construct' is used in the present study to mean a latent variable which cannot be measured directly (Ahire et al., 1996). These linkages deal with three sets of hypotheses:

1. Those concerning the factors that lead to the effective acceptance of social media.
2. Those concerning the effect of social media use on international business activities.
3. Those concerning the effect of international business activities on export performance.

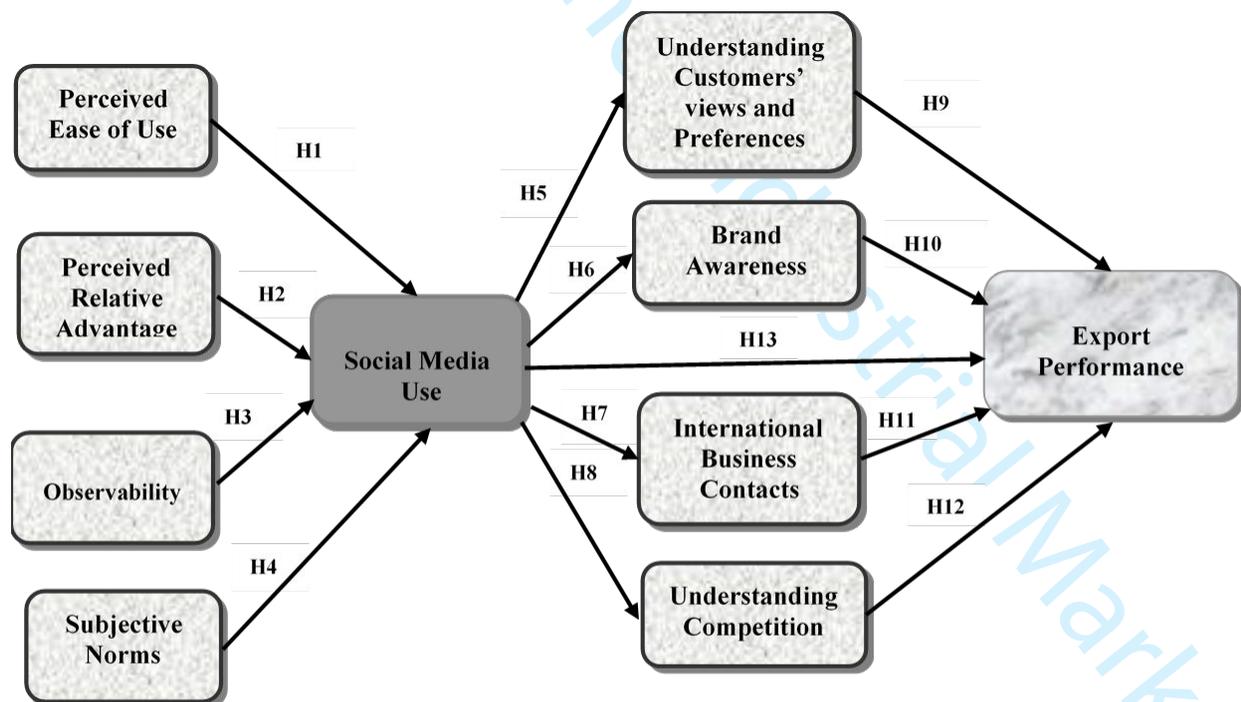


Figure 1: Proposed Generic Model

3.1 Adoption/use of Social Media for International Marketing Purposes

Researchers have taken a variety of theoretical approaches to assess technology acceptance. However, the most widely used theoretical approaches are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (Rogers, 2003), which presents a list of constructs that lead to technology acceptance and use. From the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) perspective, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), are suggested as the basic determinants of user acceptance of IT and may have broad applications. However, researchers working with TAM and IDT have discovered that the two constructs involve a similar relationship, namely between “relative advantage and complexity” on one side, and “perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use” on the other. Eid (2009a) raised a question about the appropriate terminology to use for the ‘perceived usefulness’ construct. He suggests instead using the term ‘Relative Advantage’ The logic behind this is that the meaning of ‘usefulness’ is too broad. Similarly, Grandon and Pearson (2004) suggested that relative advantage and PEOU are among the most important factors influencing SMEs’ adoption of the Internet. Organizations are more likely to be highly involved in social media marketing if they perceive that doing so will offer new benefits that were not obtained using current methods (Shaltoni, 2017). Perceived relative advantage may, for example, take the form of new markets, reduced transaction costs or better customer service (Shaltoni, 2017; Chen and Chang, 2018). Similarly, Eid (2009a) and Tang et al., (2016) asserted that relative advantage and PEOU would have significant effects on the SMEs’ adoption of e-marketing. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1. Social media’s perceived ease-of-use will positively influence its use for export purposes.

H2. Social media’s perceived relative advantage will positively influence its use for export purposes

Rogers (2003, p. 258) defines observability as “the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others”. The degree to which an innovation is observable, as perceived

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3 by members of a social system, positively affects the rate of its adoption. Hence some studies have
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5 found that observability has a positive impact on users' attitudes and intentions to use the system
6
7 (Lee, 2007). The more visible the results of an innovation, the more likely the innovation will be
8
9 adopted rapidly and implemented (Tornatzky and Klein, 1982). Indeed, Eid (2009a) found that
10
11 only observability continues to have a significant impact on the likelihood of adoption. What is
12
13 more important to the company is whether the results of the technology being adopted are easy to
14
15 demonstrate and make visible. Asare, Brashear-Alejandro, and Kang (2016) have found that
16
17 observability is positively associated with an organization's intention to adopt B2B technologies.
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19 Accordingly, because social media phenomena can be observed and are transferable through
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21 WOM (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009; Aleti, et al., 2019), this characteristic of innovation can be
22
23 tested. The current study includes observability in the conceptual framework because social media
24
25 use is highly observable, is transferable via WOM and recommendations from friends (Haridakis
26
27 & Hanson, 2009) and can be stopped without additional cost (Valenzuela et al., 2009), so this
28
29 factor may well be influential. The few studies that have examined the effect of observability on
30
31 innovation adoption found mixed results, all indicating either a positive or a non-significant
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33 relationship (Chong and Pervan, 2007; Asare et al., 2016; Sanchez-Torres and Juarez-Acosta,
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35 2019). In line with Rogers' model, it is expected that:

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42 ***H3: The social media's observability will positively influence their use for export purposes.***

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45 Finally, based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model, subjective norms have
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47 been found to be an important determinant of people's intention to adopt and use ICTs (Eid,
48
49 2009a). A subjective norm is a perceived social pressure (based on perception) to engage or not to
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51 engage in a behavior. The TRA states that subjective norms shape the cohesiveness of an
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53 individual's behavior. Meanwhile, a number of studies have investigated the influence of
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3 subjective norms in various behaviors and situations such as intelligence and security informatics
4 technology (Eid, 2009a); blogging (Wang et al., 2010); education (Robinson, 2006) and
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6 communication (Webster and Trevino, 1995). Furthermore, Eid et al. (2006) have shown that SN
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8 is a stronger predictor of intended use than either PU or PEOU. Eid (2009a) concluded that the
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10 influence of different peers has an effect on an individual's intention to use an information system.
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12 For SMEs, Nasco et al., (2008) found that there was a direct relationship between a construct of
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14 TPB comprising subjective norms and the adoption of e-commerce. On this basis, we construct
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16 the following hypothesis:
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21 ***H4: Subjective norms will positively influence the use of social media for export purposes.***

22 **3.2 The Effect of Social Media Use on Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences**

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26 The social media can help users to establish their online identities; create a presence;
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28 develop relationships; join groups; engage in conversations; and share content (Kietzmann et al.,
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30 2011). These online communities are considered to bring several benefits to organizational
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32 learning. Examples of these benefits are that they make it possible to share tacit knowledge and
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34 facilitate the acquisition of knowledge (Ribiere and Tuggle, 2010). In order to achieve business
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36 success, the social media can be used not only to deliver information to customers but also to
37
38 gather information about clients and potential markets (Kazienko et al., 2013). A considerable
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40 body of research exists on the high quality of useful information that can be obtained by
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42 monitoring social media platforms for marketing purposes, i.e. considering customers' opinions
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44 and viewpoints in relation to the firm and its products; their needs and preferences; the market
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46 potential for new products; and current trends (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Constantinides et al., 2008).
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48 From the previous discussion, it may be proposed that the use of social media affects the
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3 understanding of customers' views and preferences in any market and this understanding in turn
4 affects export performance. With the above in mind the following hypothesis is put forward:
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8 ***H5: Social media use will positively influence the understanding of customers' views and***
9 ***preferences.***
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11 **3.3 The Effect of Social Media Use on Brand Awareness**

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13 From the firm's perspective, social media marketing gives it a better basis for developing
14 communication with consumers in order to build brand loyalty beyond traditional methods. Jun
15 and Park (2017) provide evidence that numerous social network users follow brand fan pages via
16 social media and that doing so affects their loyalty. A growing number of firms have started to
17 establish their own brand community, based on social media, with a view to engaging consumers
18 with the brand and with other consumers (Okazaki et al., 2015). Firms can promote products and
19 services; provide instant support; and/or create an online community of brand enthusiasts through
20 all forms of social media including social networking sites, content communities, virtual worlds,
21 blogs, microblogging sites, online gaming sites, social bookmarking, news sites, forums and more
22 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009; Hannibal and Knight, 2018). Peer-to-peer discussion allows
23 organizations to raise brand awareness in a cost effective way through recognition and recall, along
24 with brand loyalty (Gunelius, 2011). By monitoring customer-to-customer interactions, firms can
25 become aware also of consumer dissatisfaction and unfavorable events. Consequently, they can
26 take appropriate evasive or follow-up action (Shankar et al., 2003; Chae, Koh, and Park, 2018).
27 Hence, using social media can affect export performance through increasing brand awareness.
28
29 Consequently, we can construct the following hypothesis:
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3 ***H6: The use of social media will positively influence brand awareness.***
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5 **3.4 The Effect of Social Media Use on International Business Contacts**

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8 Before the advent of social media marketing, a common barometer of success was the
9
10 extent to which information could be disseminated. Nowadays, the extent of an organization's
11
12 network is also relevant. Because the quality of the selection of customers to be targeted is
13
14 important, firms can use social media to qualify leads at an early stage of the sales process by
15
16 studying the profiles of the target customers, so long as these customers have developed their full
17
18 profiles. Sales may benefit from using social media in such actions as prospecting, qualifying leads
19
20 and managing relationships with customers. In accordance with this view, Rodriguez et al. (2016)
21
22 have found that social media use improves the quality of opportunities. Social media platforms,
23
24 such as Facebook and LinkedIn, provide detailed information on a prospective customer
25
26 (Rodriguez et al., 2012). Similarly, Milano et al., (2011) state that, within the LinkedIn site, a firm
27
28 can use customer mapping to identify the principal customer groups of interest, to build a customer
29
30 database and then sift through this network to identify the top quality contacts. Furthermore, the
31
32 social media, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn, can be valuable tools for enabling B2B firms
33
34 to identify potential partners. According to Cao et al., (2016), face-to-face communication is no
35
36 longer needed to maintain and develop network ties, but firms can instead rely on the online
37
38 community introduced by the social media, especially when people work in different places or at
39
40 a distance from firms. By connecting customers to others with employees who have similar aims,
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42 the use of social media in the workplace helps to find possible links, to maintain professional
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44 networks and to strengthen ties with colleagues. On this basis, we developed the following
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46 hypothesis:
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54 ***H7: The use of social media will positively influence international business contacts.***
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3.5 The Effect of Social Media Use on Understanding Competition in Different Markets

Competitive intelligence is defined as an information system for analyzing data from public and private sources that is associated with competitors' activities (Teo and Choo, 2001). The desire for it stems from the observation that competitors frequently divulge valuable information via social media and considerable strategic competitive advantage can be gained from examining their details more closely. New knowledge can be identified when marketers consider the wealth of available social media data that would, for instance, enable them to understand their competitors' habits and the way in which the industry is changing, thereby gaining competitive advantage (Dey et al., 2011). Accordingly, competitive advantage can be achieved in the marketplace when decision makers use these outcomes in their strategic planning (Teo and Choo, 2001). On the basis of the above discussion, we can construct the following hypothesis:

H8: The use of social media will positively influence the understanding of competition in different markets.

3.6 The Effect of Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences on Export Performance

In order to achieve business success, the social media can be used not only to deliver information to customers but also to gather information about clients and potential markets (Kazienko et al., 2013). A considerable body of research exists on the high quality of useful information that can be obtained from monitoring social media platforms for marketing purposes, i.e. considering customers' opinions and viewpoints in relation to the firm and its products, their needs and preferences, the market potential for new products and current trends (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Constantinides et al., 2008; Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2018; Benitez, et al., 2018).

A number of researchers (Groza et al., 2012; Eid et al., 2006) have argued that relevant, topical information is necessary for firms wishing to expand their export capacities and to compete proactively for a good market position. Riddle (1999) adds that one of the key tools available to

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3 firms seeking to expand into international markets is the Internet's capacity to accumulate business
4 intelligence. A study of SMEs in Singapore has revealed a positive relationship between firm
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6 intelligence. A study of SMEs in Singapore has revealed a positive relationship between firm
7
8 export performance and both the acquisition and use of market knowledge in marketing mix
9
10 decisions (Eid et al., 2006). This leads us to propose the following hypothesis:

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12 ***H9: Understanding customers' views and preferences will positively influence export***
13 ***performance.***

14 **3.7 The Effect of Brand Awareness on Export Performance**

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16
17 Brand awareness in the B2B sector has been defined as “the ability of the decision-makers
18
19 in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand” (Homburg et al., 2010, p. 202).
20
21 The attributes of the brand that are communicated to industrial customers or the members of a
22
23 buying center are usually embedded in their memory (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010). Such brand
24
25 knowledge and associated benefits are what industrial buyers recall during the process of purchase
26
27 evaluation and decision-making. Industrial buyers are prone to rely on their past experiences or
28
29 learn from peer experiences to form expectations about a supplier's brand and predict outcomes
30
31 (Davis et al., 2008). The concept of brand awareness is found within an economic-information-
32
33 centered theoretical framework (Erdem et al., 2006), which argues that high levels of brand
34
35 awareness reduce the personal risk and information cost of industrial buyers and positively affect
36
37 the market performance of a B2B supplier (Homburg et al., 2010; Tajudeen, Jaafar, and Ainin,
38
39 2018).

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41
42 Previous research concerning the relationship between marketing communications, brand
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44 awareness and export performance focused only on traditional marketing communication
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46 instruments (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). When firms use new media simply to inform customers
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48 of new products or services, this can be understood as a form of traditional online marketing (Eid
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50 and Trueman, 2002). However, Weber (2009) argues that a strong brand ought to be based on
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3 dialogue between a firm and its customers and, in this regard, the social media have allowed
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5 companies to enter into dialogue for this purpose. By this action the social media are considered
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7 to have offered a new way to expose customers to a brand; the more customers engage with the
8
9 brand, the greater their awareness of it and the greater the company's exports (Hutter and Hautz,
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11 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Langaro, Rita, and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018). Consequently, we
12
13 can construct the following hypothesis:
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17 ***H10: Brand Awareness will positively influence export performance.***
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19 **3.8 The Effect of the International Business Contacts on Export Performance**

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21 The social media are likely to be a new sphere of influence and to provide networking
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23 opportunities for firms because they enable firms to extend their ability to search and allow
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25 contacts of interest to access them through the use of various platforms such as blogs, Twitter and
26
27 so forth (Trusov et al., 2009). Searcy (2012) contended that the social media are valuable channels
28
29 for gathering information about B2B firms, which help to build the profiles of prospective buyers.
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31 Ways of generating leads can be identified by the sales team through the social networks used by
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33 customers, on the assumption that these customers communicate with others (Groza et al., 2012;
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35 Duff & Segijn, 2019). The social media, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn, could be valuable to
36
37 B2B firms by enabling them also to identify potential partners. Kazienco (2013) asserted that
38
39 organizations' use of the social media enhances international customer relations and therefore their
40
41 export performance. Michaelidou et al. (2011) stated that B2B companies can use the social media
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43 both to attract new customers and to cultivate existing relationships. In accordance with this view,
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45 Rodriguez et al. (2016) have concluded that the social media can be used positively to affect the
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47 acquisition of new accounts. On this basis, we develop the following hypothesis:
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54 ***H11: International business contacts will positively influence export performance.***
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3.9 The Effect of Understanding Competition in Different Markets on Export Performance

A number of scholars illustrate the significance of acquiring foreign market knowledge as a basis for effective internationalization (Ahi et al., 2017). Nowadays, firms have the opportunity to gather location-specific knowledge via the marketplace which they could in the past have acquired only through direct interaction with a specific foreign market. Soh (2003) has found that firms which use network alliances to obtain more information about other firms reap the benefits of gaining an information advantage which leads to improvements in the performance of new products. In this respect, Akyol and Akehurst (2003) have found that firms which acquired export market information performed better in their export markets. Eid (2009b) asserted that a firm's performance is affected by the generation, analysis and dissemination of information about competitors. Given the above discussion, we propose that the use of social media affects the understanding of the competition in different markets and this understanding of competition affects export performance. Hence, the effects of using social media on export performance can occur through understanding the competition in different markets. On the basis of the above discussion, we can posit the following hypothesis:

H12: Understanding competition in different markets will positively influence export performance.

Finally, although previous studies have investigated the organizational use of social media, only a few studies have examined the impact of social media use on performance. For instance, Rodriguez et al. (2014) provided evidence that social media such as Facebook positively impact the customer-orientated processes which in turn impacts the sales performance of an organization. Ferrer et al. (2013) demonstrated that the use of social media positively influences the social capital of an organization and therefore its performance. In addition, Wong (2012) found that Facebook

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3 use has a positive impact on SME business (Wong, 2012). This is supported by the finding from
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5 Kwok and Yu (2013) that sales can be increased with social media use. Therefore, along with the
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7 emergence, further development and use of ICT in general and of the social media in particular,
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9 companies now have greater ability than ever to take advantage of international market-growth
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11 opportunities (Mathews et al., 2016; Ancillai et al., 2019). Therefore, the adoption and current use
12
13 of the social media may have unique implications for improving international marketers' strategy
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15 and performance (Berthon et al., 2012; Okazaki and Taylor, 2013; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado,
16
17 2018). This can be empirically tested by setting the following hypothesis:

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22 ***H13: Social media use will positively influence export performance.***

23 24 **4. Research methodology**

25 26 **4.1 Data collection**

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28 The generalizability of a study relies on the use of a representative sample. Therefore, the
29
30 present study sought a representative selection of UK B-to-B SMEs. The aim was to select a
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32 population of UK Business-to-Business SMEs which used the social media for their exporting
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34 activities.

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37 As a country with SMEs in this category, the United Kingdom is particularly interesting to
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39 examine, because it is Europe's second largest economy, being responsible for about one third of
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41 the total GDP for Europe. According to the World Bank, the United Kingdom is the fifth largest
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43 economy in the world in terms of GDP (World Bank, 2018). In addition, exporting activity is
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45 important for all governments, since improving the international competitiveness of their economy
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47 is a major concern for them. It is a major concern of individual firms, too, because it serves their
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49 significant growth. Exporting is a particularly appropriate mode of entry for small-and medium-
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51 sized firms (SMEs) wishing to break into a foreign market, since it offers much flexibility and a
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3 minimal commitment of resources, besides limiting the risk of leaving the firm exposed (Sousa
4 and Novello, 2014).
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8 A list of firms was generated from the population of firms covered in the Department of
9 Trade and Industry (DTI) database in the UK, the FAME database, the Dun and Bradstreet
10 database, and the Applegate Directory (at www.applegate.co.uk). Firms included in the list had to
11 meet two criteria: the EU criterion of being an SME (namely, having fewer than 250 employees)
12 and that of being involved in exporting and using the social media for exporting purposes. These
13 criteria yielded 11,420 firms across all manufacturing industries. Questionnaires were sent to all
14 these firms with the support and endorsement of the DTI. The respondents were those such as
15 marketing managers and senior managers deemed most likely to be knowledgeable about their
16 firm's exporting business and the use of social media. Support and engagement from the DTI were
17 vital, since we were drawing on elements of Dillon's 'Tailored Design Method' (Dillman et al.,
18 2014) and aiming to meet the requirements of 'social exchange' (Dillman et al., 2014) to improve
19 industry cooperation and response rates. Multiple contacts by phone and email were employed,
20 replacement questionnaires were sent out, and industry reports were offered.
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38 We obtained a systematic random initial sample of 3806 firms, to which 1043
39 questionnaires was distributed to them. Having employed the social exchange procedures and
40 multiple contacts noted above, we finally received 277 usable responses, a response rate of about
41 26.6%. The firms represented various industries (aerospace, automotive, agriculture, textiles,
42 chemicals, industrial supplies, and services). This representation of the population was judged
43 good, considering the difficulties encountered in survey projects these days, and the decline in
44 response rates reported in organizational and international business research journals (Rogelberg
45 & Stanton, 2007).
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The sample can be described as follows: 41.9% of the respondents to this survey were in upper management positions and 53.1% were in middle management positions, while only 5.1% were owners of the firms. Most of them (79.8%) held the position of the firm's Marketing & Sales manager, 20.2% held the position of the exporting manager. With respect to the type of industry, 53.4% of the firms were in manufacturing industry and 46.6% were in a service industry; this confirmed that the mixture of respondents corresponded well to the mixture of industries. With respect to the numbers employed, 41.5% of the sample firms employed fewer than 50 people; 22% had from 50 to 99 employees; 22.4% had between 100 and 149 employees; and only 14.1% had between 150 and 250 employees. In terms of the overseas markets where the firms traded, 22.7% of them exported to Europe; 5.4% exported to Asia; 6.1% to America; 1.1% to Africa; and 64.6% exported to more than one country. Regarding the social media sites used by the firms, 218 (78.7%) of them used Facebook; 180 firms (65%) used LinkedIn; 219 firms (79.1%) used Twitter; 157 firms (56.7%) used YouTube; and finally 71 firms (25.6%) used other social media platforms. 32.4% of the sample had worked in exporting for up to 5 years; 29.5% had worked in exporting for more than 5 but less than 10 years; and 38.1% had worked in exporting for more than 10 years. Finally, 59.2% of the sample had used social media platforms for up to 3 years; 25.6% had used them from more than 3 but less than 7 years; and 15.2% had used them for more than 7 years.

To ensure that the replies were representative of the whole population, we checked the non-response bias to compare the early and late replies (Armstrong and Overton, 1977; Eid, 2009b). Chi-square tests showed no significant differences between the two groups of respondents at the 5% significance level, reflecting that a non-response bias was an unlikely problem. Given the difficulty in most cases of acquiring objective financial data when information may be unavailable, unreliable or difficult to crosscheck, we assumed that the responses about export performance for

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3 the survey would be perceptual. Such approach is recognized as reliable; past research shows that
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5 it produces results which are consistent with objective measures (Aininetal, 2015). In order to
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7 reduce response bias, we used a rotational function for multiple choice items, resulting in each
8
9 respondent's answering a different sequence of questions. Furthermore, we asked each respondent
10
11 to provide the name of the social media platform that s/he had most frequently used in connection
12
13 with exporting. Each particular survey screen showed the name of this social media platform with
14
15 every subsequent question. Common method bias was a risk with these data, since they had come
16
17 from self-reports, but following the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2012), we conducted a
18
19 Harman one-factor test and found that no dominant factor emerged (the first factor explained only
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21 14% of the total variance). This result confirmed that common method bias would not be a major
22
23 threat to our subsequent hypothesis testing. Furthermore, in order to minimize concerns about
24
25 common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), the information provided by the SMEs came from
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27 two categories of personnel in each enterprise. Specifically, the CEOs completed the section on
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29 the determinants of social media use (i.e. ease of use) and export performance, while the marketing
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31 managers (in charge of social media use) completed the predictor and outcome measures.
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37 **4.2 Research Instrument Development—Measures**

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40 The development of the research questionnaire lay mainly in providing new scales, because
41
42 we could not find any previous social media marketing studies that directly covered all of the
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44 issues in the present paper. However, wherever possible we used validated measures that had been
45
46 previously applied.
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50 Our procedure was as follows: A) in conceptualizing Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived
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52 Relative Advantage, we used the original scale of Davis (1989) and Agarwal and Prasad (1999).
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54 Six five-point Likert-type questions measured the perceived ease of use and seven five-point
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3 Likert-type questions then measured perceived relative advantage; B) in conceptualizing the
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5 Observability construct, the present study adapted three of Moore and Benbasat's (1991) five items
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7 to measure observability; C) subjective norms were conceptualized using five five-point Likert-
8
9 type questions adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1975). In conceptualizing the building brand
10
11 awareness construct we used two different sources (Aaker (1996); Rossiter and Percy (1987)) and
12
13 operationalized it in four five-point Likert-type questions. Finally, D) we conceptualized export
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15 performance on the basis of scales in the work of Evangelista (1994) and Katsikeas et al., (1996)
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17 and used three five-point Likert-type questions to measure it (see Appendix1).
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22 Second, we conceptualized the constructs of social media marketing use, international
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24 business contacts, understanding customers' views and preferences and understanding competition
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26 in different markets on the basis of new scales. We generated items in a qualitative study that
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28 represented the manifestations of these constructs. We conducted 10 in-depth interviews with
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30 marketing/export managers whose profile matched those of the respondents to the questionnaire.
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32 In a field study, each manifestation tends to be measured by an item on a scale. However, following
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34 the approach of Ahire et al., (1996), when the items on a scale span the scope of the construct
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36 sufficiently, this scale is said to have content validity (Ahire et al., 1996). To ensure the content
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38 validity of the constructs in the present research, we identified both constructs and representative
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40 items in light of a thorough review of the relevant literature.
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45 Third, we purified our constructs by convening a panel of four experts. It consisted of two
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47 professors who specialized in research on international marketing and two managers working in
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49 exporting industries. Each item passed a content validity test and so did the overall scale. Finally,
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51 to test the normality of the data, we measured the skewness and kurtosis index. All the values of
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3 skewness and kurtosis for all the constructs fell below three and ten respectively. Hence, the
4 distribution of the data according to the recommendations of Eid (2009) can be considered normal.
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7 8 **5. Data Analysis** 9

10 SEM appears to be an adequate analysis instrument, for two main reasons. First, our hypotheses
11 create a complex pattern of interrelationships among the variables showing the multiple ways in
12 which they could affect each other. Second, the suggested variables PEU, SMU, OB, and export
13 performance represent higher-order constructs that could not be captured with one single item and
14 thus were subject to measurement error. In order to control the measurement error and avoid
15 method variance by applying related but different estimation methods, we tested all hypotheses,
16 taking the SEM approach. For this research we took the two-stage approach to structural equation
17 modeling (SEM) proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The SEM technique was suggested
18 because it is the most appropriate and most widely used for testing when a model is complex and
19 has many constructs; this applies to the present study (Hair et al., 2014). In the first stage, we
20 analyzed the measurement model for adequacy, and used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to
21 assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model. After achieving a satisfactory fit, the
22 second stage involved testing the structural model and the hypotheses by the path coefficients
23 provided for each hypothesized relationship (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).
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43 To begin with, we assessed the psychometrical properties of our constructs by calculating
44 Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and items-to-total correlation (Nunnally and Bernstein,
45 1994). This procedure resulted in the elimination of two items from the scale of social media
46 marketing use and of one item from the international business contacts, the inclusion of which
47 decreased the number of reliability coefficients. As can be seen in Table 1, all the scales had
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reliability coefficients ranging from 0.832 to 0.935, which all exceeded the cut-off level of 0.60 set for basic research (Bagozzi, 1994, p. 96; Salaheldin and Eid, 2007).

Table 1. Measurement statistics of construct scales.

Construct/Indicators	Indicator loadings	Mean	SD	CR	VIF	AVE
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)		3.95	0.78	0.89	2.051	0.70
PEOU1	0.97					
PEOU 2	0.95					
PEOU 3	0.88					
PEOU 4	0.93					
PEOU 5	0.98					
PEOU6						
Perceived Relative Advantage (PRA)		4.04	0.70	0.92	1.812	0.64
PRA1	0.95					
PRA2	0.94					
PRA3	0.95					
PRA4	0.87					
PRA5	0.80					
PRA6	0.89					
PRA7	0.93					
Observability (OB)		4.39	0.60	0.85	2.045	0.79
OB1	0.93					
OB2	0.92					
OB3	0.90					
Subjective Norms (SN)		4.01	0.75	0.83	2.056	0.76
SN1	0.90					
SN2	0.91					
SN3	0.94					
SN4	0.89					
SN5	0.88					
Social Media Use (SMU)		4.15	0.38	0.86	2.740	0.80
SMU 1	0.95					
SMU2	0.94					
SMU3	0.96					
SMU4	0.91					
SMU5	0.89					
SMU6	0.86					
SMU7	0.90					
SMU8	0.90					
SMU9	0.92					
SMU10	0.89					
Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences (UCVP)		3.31	0.99	0.91	2.039	0.58
UCVP1	0.96					
UCVP2	0.93					
UCVP3	0.95					
Brand Awareness (BA)		3.46	0.94	0.93	2.139	0.51
BA1	0.93					
BA2	0.94					
BA3	0.95					

BA4						
International Business Contacts (IBC)		3.13	1.04	0.89	1.849	0.63
IBC1	0.96					
IBC2	0.94					
Understanding Competition in Different Markets (UCIDM)		3.40	1.0	0.91	1.043	0.90
UCIDM1	0.92					
UCIDM2	0.92					
UCIDM3	0.91					
Export Performance (EP)		3.97	1.12	0.91	1.267	0.58
EXP1	0.92					
EXP2	0.90					
EXP3	0.91					

Finally, to meet the requirements for satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity, we used confirmatory factor analysis to test the ten scales. Convergent validity describes the extent to which the indicators of a specific construct converge on or share a high proportion of variance (Hair et al., 2006). Convergent validity can be demonstrated if the average variance extracted (AVE) for a measure is more than 0.50. Table 2 also summarizes the results of the convergent validity analysis. Note that all of the measures had an acceptable convergent validity.

Table 2: Measurement Model Results: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Correlations										
	PEOU	PRA	OB	SN	SMU	UCVP	BA	IBC	UCIDM	EP
PEOU	.83									
PRA	.31**	.80								
OB	.10**	.03*	0.89							
SN	.26**	.21**	.19**	0.87						
SMU	.34**	.50**	.07**	.29**	0.89					
UCVP	.34*	.43**	.05**	.24**	.44**	0.76				
BA	.34**	.32**	.07**	.27**	.44**	.65**	0.71			
IBC	.34**	.47**	.03**	.21**	.63**	.68**	.57**	0.79		
UCIDM	.33**	.36**	.03**	.21**	.33**	.71**	.56**	.00 ^{ns}	0.84	
EP	.31**	.56**	.01**	.19**	.42**	.67**	.56**	.38**	.63**	0.76

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); ns = Correlation is insignificant.

The diagonals represent the average variance extracted (AVE) and the lower cells represent the squared correlations between the constructs.

To inspect discriminant validity, we applied the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For this reason, we compared the latent variable correlations with the square root of the AVE of the latent constructs. The square roots in this case were higher than the correlations between these variables. Thus, discriminant validity was not believed to be an issue in the ongoing analysis. Table 2 presents the latent variable correlations together with the square roots of the respective AVEs. We also investigated discriminant validity at the indicator level. All the indicators loaded higher on the proposed construct than on any other construct, once again indicating discriminant validity (Eid, 2009b).

5.1 Structural-model testing

Given that the aim of the research was to examine the hypothesized causal relationships among the variables of the model, we used the structural equation-modeling package (see Figure 2). The factor scores were used as single item indicators to carry out path analysis, implementing the maximum likelihood estimates (MLE) method, as directed in the guidelines proposed by Joreskog and Sorbom (1982). A more detailed analysis of the outputs and measures for model fit is reported in Table 3.

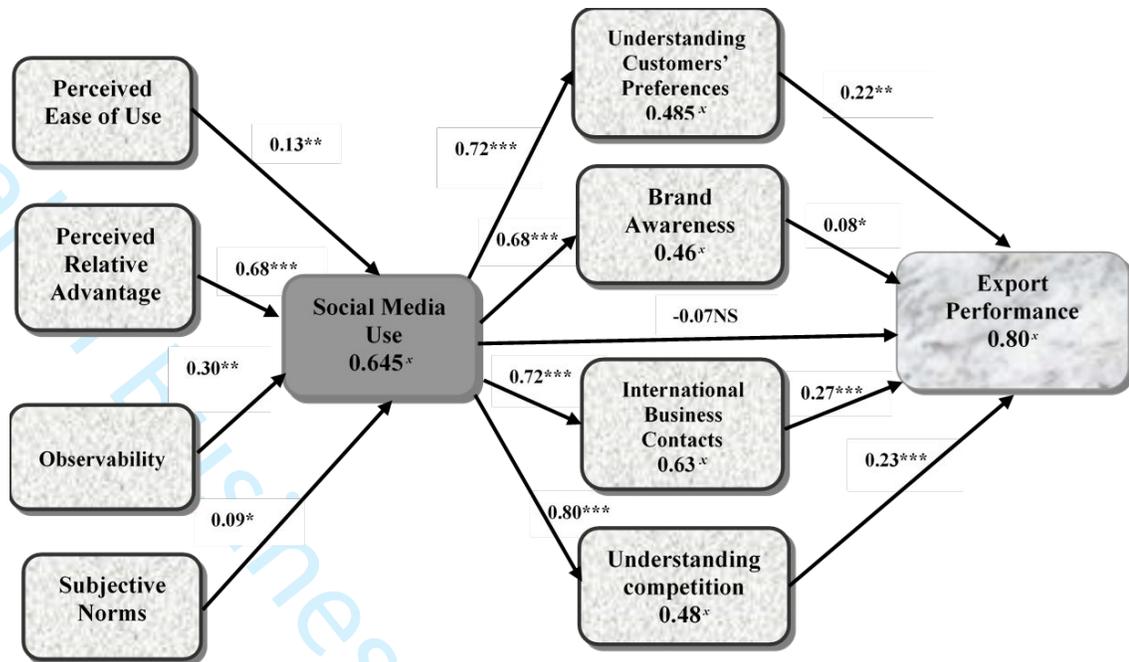


Figure 2: Final Tested Model

Because there is no definitive standard of fit, the above figure provides different indicators, together with suggested guidelines. The measurement model fit results showed a good fit with the data, according to Hu and Bentler's two-index strategy (1999), which suggests using a combination of (SRMR) value ≤ 0.09 and (RMSEA) value ≤ 0.06 , or (NNFI) value ≥ 0.96 and an SRMR value ≤ 0.09 , or (CFI) value ≥ 0.96 and an SRMR value ≤ 0.09 . In accordance with the SRMR and RMSEA combination of this strategy, the measurement model fit was acceptable, with values of SRMR = 0.04 and RMSEA = 0.04. The other fit indices also had acceptable levels, for example, the normed χ^2 (χ^2/df) = 2.704, p-value for the test of close fit (RMSEA < 0.05) = 0.92, CFI = 0.97, and NNFI = 0.96.

Because these indices confirm that the overall fit of the model to the data was good, we decided that the structural model was an appropriate basis for hypothesis testing.

Table 3: Standardized Regression Weights

Predictor variables	Criterion Variables	Hypothesized relationship	Standardized coefficient	P value	R2a
Perceived Ease of Use	Social Media Use	H1	0.13**	0.05	0.64
Perceived Relative Advantage	Social Media Use	H2	0.68***	0.01	
Observability	Social Media Use	H3	0.30**	0.05	
Subjective Norms	Social Media Use	H4	0.09*	0.10	
Social Media Use	Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences	H5	0.72***	0.01	0.48
Social Media Use	Brand Awareness	H6	0.68***	0.01	0.46
Social Media Use	International Business Contacts	H7	0.72***	0.01	0.63
Social Media Use	Understanding Competition in Different Markets	H8	0.80***	0.01	0.48
Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences	Export Performance	H9	0.22**	0.05	0.80
Brand Awareness	Export Performance	H10	0.08*	0.10	
International Business Contacts	Export Performance	H11	0.27***	0.01	
Understanding Competition in Different Markets	Export Performance	H12	0.23***	0.01	
Social Media Use	Export Performance	H13	-0.07ns	0.27	
Statistic			Suggested		Obtained
Chi-Square Significance (X ² = 24.319, df = 9, p = 0.001)			≥0.05		0.12
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (0.924)			≥0.90		0.947
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) (0.893)			≥0.80		0.839
Comparative fit index (CFI) (0.952)			≥0.90		0.972
Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) (0.051)			≤0.08		0.071

*P<0.10, **P<0.05, ***P<0.01, ns is not significant

The causal effects of social media use on export performance may be direct or indirect (i.e., mediated via the effects of other factors), or both. In this case, we calculated the total of causal effects. These come from adding the direct effect to all the indirect effects. Table 4 shows the direct, indirect and total effects of the suggested factors.

Our findings generally support our conceptual model. The results give support to most of the hypotheses. Table 4 shows the estimated standardized parameters for the causal paths. First, the suggested factor positively affects the *social media use for international marketing activities*,

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3 namely *perceived ease of use* (**H1**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.13**, $P < 0.05$), *perceived relative*
4 *advantage* (**H2**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.68**, $P < 0.01$), observability (**H3**) (Standardized
5 Estimate=**0.30**, $P < 0.05$) and *Subjective Norms* (**H4**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.09**, $P < 0.01$).
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10 Second, the *social media use* for international marketing purposes positively affects the specified
11 international marketing activities, namely, *understanding customers' views and preferences* (**H5**)
12 (Standardized Estimate=**0.72**, $P > 0.01$), *brand awareness* (**H6**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.68**, $P <$
13 0.01), *international business contacts* (**H7**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.72**, $P < 0.01$) and
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19 *understanding competition in different markets* (**H8**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.80**, $P < 0.01$) .
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23 Finally, apart from social media use (**H13**) (Standardized Estimate=**-0.07**, $P < 0.10$), the
24 suggested factors positively affect B-to-B SMEs export performance, namely, *understanding*
25 *customers' views and preferences* (**H9**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.22**, $P > 0.05$), *brand awareness*
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27 (**H10**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.08**, $P < 0.05$), *international business contacts* (**H11**)
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29 (Standardized Estimate=**0.27**, $P < 0.01$) and *understanding competition in different markets*
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34 (**H12**) (Standardized Estimate=**0.23**, $P < 0.01$).
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37 Scholars have discussed several approaches to examining indirect or mediation effects
38 (MacKinnon et al., 2002). The most common method is the causal steps approach, popularized by
39 Baron and Kenny (1986). In recent years, some have criticized this approach because it does not
40 provide statistical tests for the size of the indirect effect and because the requirement of a
41 significant association between the independent and dependent variables seems too restrictive
42 (e.g., Hayes 2013). MacKinnon, Krull, and Lockwood (2000) and MacKinnon et al. (2002), using
43 the intervening variable approach, have all tackled the problems of taking the causal step approach.
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52 Therefore, we used the intervening variable approach to investigate the flow mediation hypothesis.
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(Hayes, 2013). The process of bootstrapping creates a large sample from the original data (5000 for the present study) through a strategy of sampling with replacement. It constructs a confidence interval (95% in this study) around the indirect effect, and if the interval does not contain a zero it is assumed to have a significant indirect effect (Knoll, Schramm, & Schallhorn, 2013). As shown in Table 4, our findings confirmed that improving the B-to-B SMEs' ability to understand customers' views and preferences, improve their international brand awareness, enhance their international business contacts and understand competition in different international markets partially mediate the relationship between social media use and export performance. Here, the estimates for the indirect effects are stronger than those for the direct effects.

Table 4. Multiple mediation analysis

Paths	Specific indirect effects	Specific direct effects	Specific total effects	T statistics	P-level	95% Bc CI
SMU→UCVP→ EP	0.15	-0.07	0.08	7.40	0.000	0.17 - 0.10
SMU→BA→ EP	0.05	-0.07	-0.01	3.69	0.000	0.03 - 0.01
SMU→IBC→ EP	0.19	-0.07	0.12	9.17	0.000	0.20 - 0.19
SMU→UCIDM→ EP	0.18	-0.07	0.11	8.35	0.000	0.18 - 0.12

Our study revealed interesting findings. They suggest that social media use has no direct influence on export performance. This negligible direct effect is offset by the indirect positive effect (0.59) of the use of social media on B-to-B SMEs' export performance. This supports the findings of both Eid and Trueman (2002) and Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000), which state that it is not the use of the social media per se, but rather the efforts of the international marketing staff, that lead to enhanced export performance. The use of social media indirectly affects export

performance through improving the B-to-B SMEs' ability to understand customers' views and preferences, improve their international brand awareness, enhance international business contacts and understand competition in international markets.

6. Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this paper is (A) to enhance our understanding of the antecedents of B-to-B SMEs use of social media marketing for their international marketing activities and (B) to enhance our understanding of its impact on the B-to-B SMEs export performance.

6.1 Social Media Use for International Marketing Activities

Overall, the study variables explain 64% of the variance in social media marketing use, which is in line with the results of previous studies (e.g. Davis et al., 1989; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018). Among the antecedent variables of acceptance, the strongest effect comes from perceived relative advantage (Eid, 2009a). That is, the marketing managers of B-to-B SMEs who perceive social media marketing to be useful in conducting their international marketing activities are more likely to adopt it in their day-to-day international marketing activities. Moreover, the study findings clearly demonstrate that observability is the second most important factor affecting the use of social media marketing. This finding is consistent with Tornatzky and Klein (1982), who conclude that the more visible the results of an innovation, the more likely the innovation is to be adopted.

Furthermore, the research results support previous research which states that the perception that the social media are easy to use affects people's use of them for international marketing activities. These results are consistent with the previous research findings that indicated a significant relationship between PEOU and the adoption/use of an innovation (e.g. Davis, 1989; Grandon and Pearson, 2004; Peng, Sun, and Guo, 2018). However, these results contradict the

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3 findings of other research which observes no significant relationship between PEOU and the
4 adoption/use of social media. As noted above, Christodoulides et al. (2015) and Siamagka et al.
5 (2015) found that the insignificant relationship was possibly due to the ease of use of the social
6 media, as perceived by the users in their sample.
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12 Finally, consistent with previous research findings, subjective norms were, as expected,
13 found to be a significant predictor of the use of social media for international marketing activities.
14 These results are in line with some previous studies (e.g. Hu et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2010;
15 Robinson, 2006; Nasco et al., 2008 ; Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado, 2018).
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21 ***6.2 Impact of Social Media International Marketing on International Marketing Activities***

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24 The results clearly demonstrate that social media use has a catalytic influence on several
25 international marketing activities. More analytically, the most important influence of the social
26 media on international marketing activities appears to be their influence on the understanding of
27 competition in different markets, followed by both the understanding of customers' views and
28 enhancing of the quality and quantity of international business contacts. The research model
29 demonstrates a very strong positive relationship between social media use and the understanding
30 of competition in different markets. These findings are consistent with previous research findings
31 (Agnihotri et al., 2016). The above studies conclude that social media can be used to observe
32 competitors' digital interactions with customers; access customers' reactions to competitors;
33 monitor what is being said about a competitor; and track the industry's trends.
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47 Similarly, the research results demonstrate a positive relationship between social media use
48 and understanding customers' views and preferences through social media. These findings are
49 consistent with previous research findings (e.g. Kietzmann et al., 2011; Ribiere and Tuggle, 2010;
50 Kazienko et al., 2013; Constantinides et al., 2008; Jussila et al., 2014; Nord et al., 2018). Such
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3 research argues that, by using social media, marketers can collect ample and high quality
4 intelligence by listening to their customers' voices; for example, to what customers say online
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6 about the firm, its products and about their own needs and preferences.
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10 The findings also indicate a positive relationship between social media use and both the
11 number and the quality of international business contacts. These findings are consistent with
12 previous research findings (e.g. Trusov et al., 2009; Groza et al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011;
13 Rodriguez et al., 2012; Drummond, McGrath, and O'Toole, 2018). These studies suggest that the
14 social media offer a new platform that provides networking opportunities for businesses, giving
15 them a chance to extend their ability to search and allowing access to a range of contacts. Finally,
16 the findings are consistent with previous research which illustrates a positive association between
17 social media use and the building of brand awareness (Keller and Lehmann, 2003; Srinivasan et
18 al., 2010; Jamali, M. and Khan, 2018).
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30 31 **6.3 Export Performance**

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33 The findings clearly demonstrate that B-to-B SMEs export performance is positively
34 influenced by the suggested variables, namely, an understanding of competition in different
35 markets, understanding of customers' views, the building of brand awareness and enhancement of
36 the quality and quantity of international business contacts. With regard to the role played by the
37 use of social media in the effort to export, the present study is one of the first to examine
38 empirically the effects of social media use on the exporting efforts of B2B SMEs. This study's
39 contribution to the literature is that it examines the effect of social media use on export
40 performance through a number of international business contacts, building brand awareness,
41 understanding customers' views and preferences, and understanding competition in different
42 markets. No-one has previously examined the mechanism through which the use of social media
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3 affected the effort to export. Although a number of studies have illustrated the direct effects of the
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5 adoption/use of social media on the number and quality of contacts (Groza et al., 2012; Rodriguez
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7 et al., 2012; Drummond, McGrath, and O'Toole, 2018); building brand awareness (Michaelidou et
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9 al., 2011; Mangold and Foulds, 2009); understanding customers' views and preferences (Jussila et
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11 al., 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Jamali, M. and Khan, 2018); and understanding competition in
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13 different markets (Agnihotri et al., 2016; He et al., 2013; Dey et al., 2011; Chae, Koh, and Park,
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15 2018), most of these studies were theoretical except for a very few which statistically used different
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17 measures to examine the direct relationships only and not the indirect effects (see Rodriguez et al.,
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19 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Ancillai et al., 2019). Hence, this study is the first to provide an
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21 analysis of the indirect effects through the above factors of the use of social media on export
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23 performance.
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29 Our study has revealed interesting findings. They establish that social media use has a negative
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31 direct influence on export performance. This negligible negative direct effect is offset by the
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33 indirect positive effect (0.59) of the use of social media on B-to-B SMEs export performance. This
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35 supports the findings of both Eid and Trueman (2002) and Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000), which
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37 state that it is not the use of social media per se, but rather the efforts of the international marketing
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39 staff that lead to enhanced export performance. The use of social media indirectly affects export
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41 performance through improving the B-to-B SMEs' ability to understand customers' views and
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43 preferences, improve international brand awareness, enhance the international business contacts
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45 and understand the competition in a range of international markets.
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50 This study makes several contributions to the literature on social media and firm performance
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52 among SMEs. It provides results from developed economies, specifically the U.K. There is very
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54 little literature on the nuances and implications of social media adoption, especially at the firm
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3 level, even though the U.K. shows many of the characteristics of other developed economies. This
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5 study advances theory by extending the TAM model and using it first to link to factors from the
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7 DOI theory and then to examine the expanding phenomenon of social media use in firms. This
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9 study offers a modest contribution by providing empirical support from a social media perspective
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11 for a conceptual framework with good explanatory power. Unlike previous studies identifying the
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13 factors influencing the adoption of a specific type of technology, the application of the integrated
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15 TAM framework with the DOI theory to determine the factors that influence different types or
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17 platforms of social media technology adoption demonstrates the robustness and relevance of the
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19 TAM model. This is significant because future technologies may be similar, with firms adopting
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21 different platforms for the same purpose. There are few studies on social media that integrate and
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23 examine the relationships among the constructs used in this study, particularly from an SME
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25 perspective. Previous studies have either studied the constructs in isolation or in different settings
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27 (Low et al., 2011; Porter, 2001; Ramdani et al., 2009) calling into question the need for further
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29 empirical examination for validation and theory building. This research therefore helps to
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31 determine the relevancy and the parsimonious approach of the TAM model for an emergent
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33 research phenomenon. This research therefore helps to
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35 determine the relevancy and the parsimonious approach of the TAM model for an emergent
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37 research phenomenon.
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41 One reason for the lack of contributions about the link between social media adoption and
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43 performance may be the nature of the factors affecting adoption. Previous studies have also found
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45 that one of the main influences on social media adoption in SMEs was bandwagon pressure (Drury,
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47 2008; Rasiah, 2014). This suggests that adoption decisions, and therefore the commitment of effort
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49 and resources, may be made without careful consideration of the firm's strategy or the influence
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51 of the technology on firm performance. Adopting a technology simply to "keep up with the
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53 Joneses" may explain why firms do not seem to be gaining any performance benefits from adopting
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3 this technology ion. This highlights Porter's (2001) arguments about the need to view technology
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5 as a tool to meet strategic goals rather than an end in itself.
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9 In addition to its theoretical implications, this study is relevant for B2B organizations that
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11 do not currently use the social media, but plan to invest in the near future. Our results illustrate
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13 that B2B companies value the use of social media for enhancing their performance overall, which
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15 suggests that an increase in B2B companies investing in social media is likely. In addition, B2B
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17 organizations which have not yet adopted the social media for marketing purposes will probably
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19 feel themselves under face increasing pressure from prospective and existing buyers who wish to
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21 interact via this platform, and also (indirectly) from competitors who will increasingly use these
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23 tools to their own advantage. B2B organizations intending to adopt the SMU should seek to
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25 enhance their managers' perceptions about the relative advantages and usefulness of the social
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27 media, and address the perceived barriers through training programs that will enhance employees'
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29 Internet skills and identify the importance and relevance of the social media within B2B
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31 organizations and their industries. B2B organizations which have used social media platforms
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33 effectively might also develop case studies focusing on practices adopted to enhance the perception
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35 of usefulness within and across their organizations with the aim of encouraging more organizations
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37 to seek a presence on social media platforms. In this regard, since perceived ease of use, relative
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39 advantage, and the observability of social media use are among the most important factors
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41 affecting the decision to use them, governmental agencies can be asked to provide exporting B2B
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43 SMEs owners and employees with suitable training (e.g. business, IT, IS, marketing, and
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45 entrepreneurship training) to increase their skills and help them to understand the importance of
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47 adopting the social media. In particular, our research supports the idea that positive attitudes and
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49 beliefs and a greater use of social media can improve firm performance, thanks to the opportunities
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3 that these digital applications bring to international business strategies. Accordingly, export
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5 marketers should be aware of the fact that a more proactive managerial involvement with social
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7 media actually pays off in terms of company performance, since the digital social media offer
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9 strong communicational advantages for exporters who are willing to incorporate them into their
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11 business strategy. In addition, the outcomes are also relevant for policy-makers because they reveal
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13 that firms are not isomorphic from the viewpoint of social media use and managerial beliefs. Thus,
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15 policy-makers should facilitate the effort to encourage adoption and exploitation by means of
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17 policies promoting digital infrastructure, social media attitudes, subjective norms, and the current
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19 use of social media tools on the part of both firms and customers.
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24 Recent research (e.g., Agnihotri et al., 2016) provides practical advice, concluding that in
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26 order for a social media strategy to be successful, it should set clear goals to guide the processes
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28 of information sharing, gathering information about competitors, and monitoring performance.
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30 Given the findings of the present study, firms wishing to maximize their performance would do
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32 well to follow this advice. Management should define the goal information that they want to
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34 communicate through the social media and their expectations of the salespeople who will interact
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36 across these media. From the beginning of social media planning, firms should also consider how
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38 they want their customers to interact with the sales force. As new social media duties will reduce
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40 the time spent on other work objectives, potential timeframes and guidelines should be given to
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42 help salespeople plan how much time to allocate to the social media. All the employees in a firm
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44 should share their understanding of what information and types of interaction are not appropriate
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46 for social media use as well, keeping in mind that content posted on the social media is generally
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48 publicly available.
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3 In order to assess the effectiveness of the sales force's use of the social media and to
4 conserve resources, firms need to develop ways to measure the outcomes of social media use so
5 they can ensure that their goals are being met and that the social media are being used
6 advantageously. The findings of the present study indicate that social media use will indirectly
7 impact firm performance, since the link will be mediated by the factors of brand awareness,
8 understanding the competition, and understanding consumers' views. Therefore, the firm must
9 assess the cost of this enhanced performance, since the benefit is derived from the above factors
10 rather than directly from the social media.
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21 Governmental agencies can also develop policies to provide exporting B2B SMEs with the
22 needed (mainly financial and technical) resources to adopt social media as a channel. Moreover,
23 such governmental agencies can in part reduce the cost associated with social media adoption. This
24 will in turn increase the diffusion of social media practices by export-aware B2B SMEs and may
25 lead to a positive impact on their performance. Accordingly, export marketers should be aware
26 that a more proactive managerial involvement with the social media actually pays off in terms of
27 company performance, because these digital social media offer strong communicational
28 advantages for exporters willing to incorporate them into their business strategy. Thus, policy-
29 makers should facilitate this adoption and exploitation by means of policies promoting digital
30 infrastructure and the current use of social media tools on the part of both firms and customers.
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44 **7. Limitations and suggestions for further research**

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47 As with any study, there are certain limitations that should be recognized and addressed in the
48 future. Although a great effort was made to obtain a larger sample size of U.K. exporting
49 companies, the final one used in this study is somewhat limited; hence, any application of its
50 findings should be cautious. First, this study did not examine how far certain social media
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platforms had more impact than others on export performance. Further research could focus on social media platforms at the micro level; this is the most critical next step with B2B firms because the study has evidence only of the respondents' use of social media in general. As mentioned by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), many social media applications, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, with distinct or unique functionalities and characteristics, are available for these firms to use. Second, the measures employed for social media use, such as understanding customers' views and preferences, understanding competition in different markets and developing international business contacts, were new, although they were shown to be valid and reliable in predicting export performance. Third, this study did not address the challenges/barriers entailed in social media use in the international marketing environment. Future research could examine the challenges that might arise from using this new technology. Moreover, our survey covers only a limited sample of cultures. Future research could cover more countries, yielding greater variation in cultural dimensions. Further research could also apply additional cultural measures in order to account for the possibility of cultural differences within a nation, which could help identify further effects. Fourth, the use of the social media is as important in the business-to-customer context as it is in the business-to-business context. Future research could explore the factors that affect the use of the social media when firms are seeking to export their products to end users, which may be different from those in the business-to-business context. Future studies should, therefore, check the robustness of these findings by conducting similar research in other industrial contexts. Different industrial settings might shed further light on the reasons why the results of this research show effects distinct from those hypothesized. Furthermore, because internet marketing is changing rapidly, with new and disruptive technologies and platforms constantly being introduced into the market, research in this domain is time sensitive. Finally, this study focused on the

exporters' use of social media in the UK context. Future research should look at other contexts, such as emerging markets, which are very likely to be different from the UK context. Comparative studies based on large samples from many countries present another future research avenue.

Appendix. Scale items and sources

Construct/Items	Source
<i>Perceived Ease of Use</i>	
It is easy for me to remember how to perform tasks using the social media platforms. (PEOU1)	Adopted from Davis (1989); Agarwal and Prasad (1999)
I believe that it is easy to get social media sites to do what I want them to do. (PEOU2)	
My interaction with social media sites in my efforts to export is easy and understandable. (PEOU3)	
I find social networks sites flexible to interact with. (PEOU4)	
It is easy for me to become skillful at using social networks for my efforts to export. (PEOU5)	
Overall, I believe that social media sites are easy to use for marketing to other companies. (PEOU6)	
Perceived Relative Advantage	
Using social media sites enables me to make successful efforts to export efforts more quickly. (PRA1)	Adopted from Davis (1989); Agarwal and Prasad (1999)
Using social media sites improves our export performance. (PRA2)	
Using social media sites gives me greater control over my international social interactions. (PRA3)	
Using social media sites improves the quality of the firm's exporting activities. (PRA4)	
Using the social media would make our firm more effective in its efforts to export. (PRA5)	
Using social media sites allows me to accomplish more exporting work than would otherwise be possible. (PRA6)	
Overall, I find using social media sites will be advantageous to my company. (PRA7)	
Observability	
I have seen the social media in use outside my company. (OBSERV1)	Adopted from Moore and Benbasat (1991)
It is easy for me to observe others using the social media outside my company. (OBSERV2)	
There are plenty of opportunities to see others using the social media. (OBSERV3)	
Subjective Norms	
Most people who are important to our company (stakeholders) think that we should use social media sites. (SN1)	Adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1975)
It is expected that companies like ours should use social media sites. (SN2)	
Companies like ours think that we will benefit from the social media in our company. (SN3)	
Our competitors use social media sites. (SN4)	
Our customers use social media sites. (SN5)	
Social Media Use	
We use the social media to generate leads abroad. (SMUSE1)	New scale
We use the social media to sustain our relationships with our present customers. (SMUSE2)	

We use social media to strength our relationships with our present customers.

(SMUSE3)

We are unsure how to make the best out of social media. **(SMUSE4)**

The social media offer a channel through which we collect intelligence on the needs of customers abroad. **(SMUSE5)**

We keep an eye on what international customers have to say about us on various social media platforms. **(SMUSE6)**

Every social media initiative we launch abroad has very clear objectives to serve. **(SMUSE7)**

We actively try to have international customers engaged with our social media initiatives. **(SMUSE8)**

We have revised aspects of our exporting strategy based on the intelligence we generated through the social media. **(SMUSE9)**

We have revised aspects of our exporting tactics based on the intelligence we generated through the social media. **(SMUSE10)**

International Business Contacts

We have established expanding contacts with business customers abroad.

(NOIBC)

It is important to

New Scale

Reach top quality international business contacts. **(QOIBC)**

Brand Awareness

Recognize your company/brand among other competing companies/brands in the social media. **(BA1)**

Make your company/brand come to the minds of your business customers. **(BA2)**

Adopted from Aaker (1996); Rossiter and Percy (1987)

Make your business customers aware of what your brand stands for (brand knowledge). **(BA3)**

Enable your business customers to have an opinion about your brand (brand opinion). **(BA4)**

Understanding Customers' Views and Preferences

Understand what customers say about your firm and its products. **(UCUST1)**

Understand the preferences of your international B2B customers. **(UCUST2)**

New Scale

Monitor the experience of doing business with your existing customers as discussed on different social media platforms. **(UCUST3)**

Understanding Competition in Different Markets

Gain insights into the trends in different markets. **(UCOMP1)**

Gain insights into your competitors' strengths and weaknesses compared to your company. **(UCOMP2)**

New Scale

Gain insights into your competitors' strategy changes. **(UCOMP3)**

Forecast your competitors' future plans. **(UCOMP4)**

Export Performance

Assess the contribution of the social media to the overall profit of your company. **(EXP1)**

Assess the contribution of the social media to the market share of your company. **(EXP2)**

Adopted from Evangelista (1994); Katsikeas *et al.* (1996)

Assess the contribution of the social media to export sales. **(EXP3)**

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