

Methodological and Philosophical Approaches to Social Media Marketing Adoption Studies: A Review

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Abstract

Social media marketing (SMM) has become a pivotal area of inquiry in business research, especially among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in developing economies. This article reviews dominant research philosophies—positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism—and evaluates methodological designs, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. It also explores data collection techniques commonly used in SMM research and assesses their alignment with research objectives. The paper concludes by advocating for methodological pluralism and philosophical flexibility to better capture the multifaceted realities of SMM adoption.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing (SMM), Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Methodological Designs

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of social media has fundamentally transformed the global marketing landscape, redefining how firms promote products, engage stakeholders, and build brand communities. In particular, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into critical tools for businesses seeking to maintain visibility and competitiveness in increasingly digital marketplaces (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), especially in developing countries, these platforms offer low-cost, scalable, and interactive alternatives to traditional forms of marketing that are often inaccessible due to financial or infrastructural constraints (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015).

In contexts where access to formal advertising channels may be limited, social media provides MSMEs with an opportunity to interact directly with customers, promote goods and services, build brand awareness, and gather real-time feedback (Odoom, Anning-Dorson, & Acheampong, 2017). This is particularly pertinent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where mobile penetration has surpassed 80%, and mobile social media usage continues to rise across urban and peri-urban areas (GSMA, 2023). In Zambia, for example, platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are dominant, driven by increasing smartphone usage and bundled data plans offered by telecom providers (ZICTA, 2022).

Despite this growing trend, the adoption and effective use of Social Media Marketing (SMM) among MSMEs remains uneven. Challenges such as low digital literacy, inconsistent internet access, lack of strategic knowledge, and cultural resistance to technology adoption persist, particularly among small firms operating informally (Boateng, Okoe, & Mensah, 2020; Molla & Licker, 2005). These realities make it essential to investigate not only whether MSMEs adopt social media tools, but also how, why, and under what conditions they do so.

Understanding the dynamics of SMM adoption therefore demands methodological approaches that are sensitive to both context and complexity. Theories and models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, and Social Exchange Theory (SET) have been frequently employed to explain digital technology adoption (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Blau, 1964). Yet the applicability of these frameworks must be complemented by appropriate research designs—ranging from quantitative and qualitative approaches to mixed methods—that can capture both measurable behavior and nuanced meaning.

This article provides a comprehensive review of research philosophies (e.g., positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism), methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), and research strategies (surveys, interviews, case studies, netnography) commonly applied in studies on SMM adoption. It emphasizes the need for methodological pluralism and philosophical congruence, especially in resource-constrained and culturally diverse environments like those found in developing economies. By aligning research designs with contextual realities, scholars and practitioners can generate more valid, reliable, and impactful knowledge on the integration of social media into MSME growth strategies.

2. Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the underlying assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality that shape the research design and methodology. In social media marketing (SMM) adoption studies, particularly those focusing on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), philosophical positioning is critical in determining the type of data collected, how it is interpreted, and how conclusions are drawn. The three most commonly applied paradigms in this field are positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Each offers a different perspective on how knowledge is generated and validated.

2.1. Positivism

Positivism is a philosophical stance grounded in the assumption that reality is objective, measurable, and independent of human perception. Positivist researchers rely on empirical observation and statistical analysis to establish patterns, relationships, and generalizations. In SMM adoption research, positivism often underpins quantitative studies that use structured surveys and statistical models to examine causal relationships between variables such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and behavioral intention.

This approach is particularly useful when the aim is to test hypotheses based on established theories like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003). For example, Abbasi, Tarhini, Elyas, and Shah (2021) employed a quantitative approach to investigate the determinants of social media marketing adoption by SMEs in Malaysia. Using regression analysis, the study identified factors such as competitive pressure, relative advantage, and organizational readiness as significant predictors of adoption. The structured, replicable design enabled generalization of findings across similar business environments.

Positivist approaches in SMM research are beneficial for measuring adoption rates, modeling user behavior, and producing actionable recommendations for policy and practice. However, they may oversimplify complex social realities and fail to capture contextual subtleties that influence digital behavior, especially in informal economies.

2.2. Interpretivism

Interpretivism offers a contrasting worldview, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of reality and the importance of understanding phenomena through the meanings that individuals assign to them. Rather than seeking universal laws, interpretivist research aims to uncover rich, contextualized insights into human behavior. In SMM adoption studies, this philosophy often manifests in qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and thematic content analysis.

Such an approach is particularly useful in exploring how entrepreneurs experience and interpret their engagement with digital platforms, what meanings they assign to concepts like “digital presence” or “customer engagement,” and how sociocultural norms shape their usage of technology. For instance, Lupo (2015) conducted a multiple-case study using interviews with small business owners in the U.S. landscape industry to explore their experiences with social media marketing. The study revealed that while many owners were initially skeptical, those who adopted SMM did so for relationship-building rather than solely for sales, reflecting context-specific motivations and constraints.

Interpretivist approaches are especially valuable in developing country settings where digital practices may be deeply embedded in cultural, linguistic, and informal business systems. They provide depth and nuance that quantitative studies often miss, making them ideal for exploratory research and theory-building.

2.3. Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical middle ground that prioritizes practical solutions and research questions over adherence to a single methodological tradition. Pragmatic researchers accept that both objective and subjective realities exist and can be studied using appropriate tools. Consequently, they often employ mixed-methods approaches, combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative inquiry.

In SMM adoption research, pragmatism enables scholars to explore complex, multifaceted phenomena from multiple angles. For example, Ahmad, Bakar, and Ahmad (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate factors

influencing SMM adoption among SMEs in Pakistan. The study used structured surveys to capture general patterns and follow-up interviews to gain deeper insight into individual experiences and contextual barriers. The combination of methods allowed for triangulation of findings, increasing both validity and richness of the results. Pragmatism is especially relevant in developing economies like Zambia, where resource constraints, infrastructural limitations, and diverse business cultures require flexible and adaptive research designs. It encourages researchers to remain responsive to the field while ensuring rigor and relevance in their studies.

3. Research Methodologies

Methodology refers to the overarching strategy for conducting research. In the context of SMM adoption, three dominant methodologies have emerged: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

3.1. Quantitative Methodology

Quantitative methodology is widely employed in social media marketing (SMM) adoption studies due to its capacity to measure, model, and generalize findings across larger populations. It is particularly useful for researchers seeking to identify and quantify the factors influencing technology adoption, assess usage behaviors, and test theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). In the context of SMM, quantitative research typically involves the administration of structured questionnaires incorporating Likert-scale items that assess constructs such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, social influence, organizational readiness, and external pressures. These constructs are often tested using multivariate statistical techniques such as multiple regression analysis, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2010).

These techniques offer a robust means of validating conceptual models, identifying key predictors of adoption, and generalizing findings across similar populations. For instance, Ahmad, Bakar, and Ahmad (2023) used a quantitative survey of SMEs in Pakistan to identify determinants of SMM adoption. Their findings showed that perceived relative advantage, competitive pressure, and top management support were significant predictors of adoption behavior. The use of Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) allowed the researchers to test complex relationships between multiple variables simultaneously, ensuring both statistical rigor and explanatory depth.

Similarly, Odoom, Anning-Dorson, and Acheampong (2017) conducted a survey of Ghanaian SMEs and applied hierarchical regression analysis to examine the relationship between SMM usage and firm performance. Their findings confirmed that social media engagement positively influences brand awareness and customer acquisition, especially when mediated by the firm's market orientation.

Quantitative methods are particularly suited for examining large samples and generating policy-relevant insights. In developing economies such as Zambia, these methods enable researchers to analyze patterns across sectors, regions, and business types, thus contributing to evidence-based decision-making for MSME development. However, it is important to recognize the limitations of quantitative approaches in capturing context-specific behaviors, informal practices, and cultural nuances. These shortcomings underscore the need for complementary qualitative or mixed-method strategies in SMM research.

3.2. Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology plays a critical role in social media marketing (SMM) adoption studies by offering rich, contextualized insights into the subjective experiences, motivations, and perceptions of entrepreneurs and business managers. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on measuring and modeling observable variables, qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning-making processes that influence behavior. This is especially relevant in the study of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), where social, cultural, and experiential factors often shape digital technology adoption in ways that cannot be fully captured through numerical data.

Common qualitative data collection techniques include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis. These methods allow researchers to probe deeply into how MSMEs perceive the opportunities and challenges of social media, how they define success, and how they navigate digital platforms within local norms and constraints (Mason, 2002).

For example, qualitative studies often uncover nuanced reasons behind adoption or resistance to social media tools, such as trust in digital platforms, fear of online criticism, preference for face-to-face marketing, or community-based customer acquisition models. In the African context, Odoom and Mensah (2019) used in-depth interviews with Ghanaian SMEs to explore the role of social media in brand-building. Their findings revealed that while many SMEs recognized the potential of social media, they lacked the skills and resources to fully exploit its capabilities. The study also highlighted how informal learning and peer influence played significant roles in shaping adoption decisions—factors that would be difficult to capture through surveys alone.

Another example is the study by Tiago and Veríssimo (2014), which employed qualitative interviews to explore perceptions of digital marketing among Portuguese SMEs. The research provided insights into how firms balance traditional and digital tools, revealing that many owners adopt a hybrid marketing strategy based on intuition, trial-and-error, and limited

formal planning.

In small business environments, especially in developing economies, qualitative approaches are particularly valuable for understanding contextual barriers such as digital illiteracy, lack of access to training, and informal market structures (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). They also enable researchers to identify emergent themes, build grounded theory, and propose culturally sensitive recommendations for digital inclusion.

Moreover, qualitative methodologies are well-suited for exploratory research in contexts where existing literature is sparse, and standardized measurement tools are lacking—such as in many African or Southeast Asian MSME ecosystems. The flexibility of qualitative designs allows for adaptation in response to new findings, making them ideal for studies with evolving research questions or complex field conditions.

3.3. Mixed Methods

Mixed methods research has gained increasing prominence in social media marketing (SMM) adoption studies, particularly within the context of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), where both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights are necessary to understand adoption behavior holistically. This approach, which integrates both quantitative (e.g., surveys, structured instruments) and qualitative (e.g., interviews, focus groups) methods within a single study, enables researchers to capture both breadth and depth in their analysis of SMM adoption phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In the domain of digital marketing and technology adoption, the rationale for using mixed methods stems from the complexity and multifaceted nature of digital behavior. While quantitative methods can statistically validate relationships between constructs such as perceived usefulness, trust, or organizational readiness, qualitative methods are essential to uncovering context-specific motivations, barriers, and strategies used by entrepreneurs (Venkatesh et al., 2013; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

For instance, a typical mixed-methods study in this field may begin with a quantitative phase involving structured surveys to measure SMM adoption rates and related influencing factors. This may be followed by a qualitative phase, using in-depth interviews or focus groups, to explore the underlying reasons behind the adoption or resistance to digital platforms. Such sequential explanatory designs are particularly effective in developing countries, where numerical trends must be contextualized within local socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural realities (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

A pertinent example is the study by Ahmad, Bakar, and Ahmad (2023), which employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to explore the adoption of social media marketing among SMEs in Pakistan. The researchers collected quantitative data through surveys to identify significant predictors of adoption, such as competitive pressure, ease of use, and top management support. Simultaneously, qualitative interviews provided deeper insight into strategic motivations, digital literacy gaps, and perceptions of online credibility. The triangulation of findings not only enhanced internal validity but also allowed for the development of more grounded recommendations.

Mixed methods approaches are also aligned with pragmatic research philosophies, which prioritize research questions and practical outcomes over methodological purity (Morgan, 2007). This philosophical flexibility is particularly useful when studying emerging or under-researched phenomena like SMM adoption in MSMEs within resource-constrained environments. Furthermore, mixed methods are effective in informing both academic theory and practice, as they bridge empirical generalization and contextual understanding—two essential components of MSME research.

4. Research Strategies and Data Collection Methods

Research strategy is the specific plan used to implement a study. In SMM adoption research, several strategies are commonly employed.

4.1. Survey Strategy

The survey strategy remains one of the most widely adopted approaches in empirical research on social media marketing (SMM) adoption, particularly within the realm of quantitative studies. Surveys offer an efficient, structured, and scalable means of collecting data from a broad cross-section of respondents. This is especially relevant when researchers seek to examine behavioral trends, model adoption determinants, or test hypotheses based on theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), or the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990).

Survey instruments in SMM studies typically use closed-ended Likert-scale questions to measure constructs such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, digital literacy, trust, and organizational readiness. These variables are subsequently analyzed using statistical methods including descriptive analysis, correlation, multiple regression, factor analysis, or structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2010). This standardized approach facilitates comparability across demographic groups (e.g., urban vs. rural MSMEs), industry sectors (e.g., services vs. retail), and geographic contexts (e.g., developed vs. developing countries).

For example, Abbasi et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative survey involving 214 SMEs in Malaysia to investigate factors influencing the adoption of social media marketing tools. The study identified perceived relative advantage, competitive pressure, and top management support as statistically significant predictors of adoption. Using regression analysis, the authors were able to validate the influence of both internal and external organizational factors within the TOE framework.

The survey methodology enabled broad generalization of findings and provided evidence-based insights for practitioners and policymakers.

Similarly, Odoom et al. (2017) used a structured questionnaire survey to assess how Ghanaian SMEs use social media tools and how usage impacts performance. Their hierarchical regression analysis revealed that the intensity of SMM usage significantly influenced brand awareness and customer engagement. The survey allowed for comparisons between firms with different resource endowments and market orientations, illustrating the versatility and value of this research strategy. Despite their advantages, surveys are not without limitations. They often suffer from self-reporting bias, where respondents may overstate or understate their digital engagement. Additionally, surveys may not capture the full complexity of adoption behaviors, especially in informal MSME contexts characterized by improvisation and learning-by-doing. As such, many scholars recommend triangulating survey data with qualitative methods to enhance contextual interpretation and overall validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.2. Case Study

The case study strategy is a qualitative research approach that facilitates in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context. In social media marketing (SMM) adoption studies—particularly those involving Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)—the case study method allows researchers to examine how specific businesses conceptualize, implement, and benefit from SMM tools within the complexity of their operational environments (Yin, 2018).

This strategy is especially useful when researchers aim to uncover the “how” and “why” of SMM practices, particularly in contexts where adoption is uneven or where digital transformation is influenced by localized socio-cultural, institutional, and infrastructural factors. Case studies can be single-case or multiple-case designs and may incorporate various data sources such as interviews, observations, document analysis, and digital media analytics to build a rich understanding of SMM dynamics (Stake, 1995; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

For instance, in a study examining SME branding practices, Centobelli et al. (2020) conducted multiple case studies of Italian SMEs to explore how digital technologies, including social media platforms, were integrated into marketing operations. The findings showed that while many firms lacked formal digital strategies, they adopted flexible and experimental approaches to SMM driven by customer feedback and resource availability. This emphasized the non-linear and adaptive nature of digital marketing in small business contexts—something difficult to capture through surveys alone. Another example is Lambertson and Stephen (2016), who employed case-based and secondary data analyses to understand how firms, including SMEs, respond to consumer engagement through social media. Their work highlights the strategic considerations that firms must make regarding platform selection, content creation, and engagement tactics, based on the business model and industry characteristics.

In developing countries, case study research is particularly effective in examining how MSMEs overcome barriers such as digital illiteracy, infrastructural deficits, and financial constraints in adopting social media tools. For example, Odoom (2016) used case study methodology to investigate the branding strategies of Ghanaian SMEs. The study revealed that informal and experiential learning processes shaped social media usage, and that brand identity was often co-created with customers through online interactions.

The strength of the case study strategy lies in its contextual richness and explanatory depth, which are invaluable when theory development, rather than hypothesis testing, is the research objective. However, its limitations include restricted generalizability and susceptibility to researcher bias, which can be mitigated through triangulation and rigorous documentation of analytic procedures (Yin, 2018).

4.3. Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus group discussions are indispensable tools in interpretivist and mixed-method research designs, especially when exploring nuanced perceptions, motivations, and lived experiences related to Social Media Marketing (SMM) adoption. These qualitative strategies are particularly appropriate when the aim is to uncover the why and how behind digital behaviors—insights that cannot be easily captured through structured surveys or numerical data.

Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to probe deeply into specific themes while maintaining flexibility to explore emergent issues. They are well-suited for understanding how MSME owners conceptualize the purpose and impact of social media within their marketing strategies. For example, Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with managers from Finnish SMEs to investigate their use of digital marketing tools, including social media. The study found that many businesses viewed social media not just as a promotional tool, but as a mechanism for customer service, brand building, and stakeholder engagement. These insights underscored the multidimensional value of SMM and how its perceived utility evolves over time through user experience and trial-and-error learning.

In resource-constrained or culturally diverse environments, focus groups offer additional benefits by facilitating collective reflection and social interaction among participants. This method is particularly effective for eliciting shared values, beliefs, and behaviors within specific sectors or communities. According to Odoom, Anning-Dorson, and Acheampong (2017), focus groups conducted among Ghanaian SMEs revealed that peer influence, word-of-mouth communication, and communal trust were critical determinants of social media usage. These findings reflect the embeddedness of marketing behavior within broader social and cultural networks, especially in African and other developing country contexts.

Furthermore, focus groups are useful for identifying barriers to adoption such as lack of digital skills, limited

understanding of platform functionality, or concerns about online reputation. They also help capture intersubjective meanings and group dynamics, which may shape digital technology perceptions and practices (Barbour, 2007). This makes them particularly effective when studying socially constructed phenomena such as brand identity, trust, and customer engagement.

To enhance reliability and depth, interviews and focus groups are often recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically using coding frameworks or software tools such as NVivo or MAXQDA (Miles et al., 2014). The iterative process of coding and theme development facilitates inductive reasoning and the generation of grounded theory—a key objective of qualitative research.

In conclusion, interviews and focus group discussions are crucial methodologies for uncovering context-specific insights into how MSMEs adopt and utilize SMM. They enrich understanding of the interpersonal, experiential, and cultural factors that shape digital behavior, offering valuable contributions to both academic theory and practical interventions.

4.4. Ethnography and Netnography

Ethnography is a qualitative research strategy rooted in anthropology and sociology, focused on the immersive study of people and cultures within their natural settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the context of social media marketing (SMM) adoption by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), ethnographic methods enable researchers to observe and interpret how entrepreneurs engage with digital platforms in everyday business routines.

With the rise of digital environments, traditional ethnography has evolved into netnography—a term coined by Kozinets (2010) to describe ethnographic research conducted within online communities. Netnography applies participant observation and content analysis techniques to digital spaces such as social media platforms, online forums, and virtual brand communities. It allows researchers to gather data on how MSMEs construct brand narratives, interact with customers, and engage in real-time marketing conversations.

Netnography is especially suited to SMM studies because of its capacity to analyze user-generated content (UGC), such as customer reviews, comments, and shared posts, as well as business-generated content, such as promotional campaigns, influencer collaborations, and visual storytelling. For example, Kozinets (2015) emphasizes that netnographic research can provide a deep, contextual understanding of consumer-brand relationships, social engagement, and emotional resonance—key elements in SMM strategy.

In MSME contexts, particularly in developing economies, netnographic studies offer unique insights into how businesses navigate informal, digitally mediated customer relationships. Sefiane and Nour (2022), in their study of small fashion retailers in North Africa, demonstrated how Instagram and Facebook were leveraged not only for product visibility but also for community building and trust formation. The retailers utilized storytelling, interactive posts, and behind-the-scenes content to humanize their brand and connect emotionally with customers. Such insights are difficult to capture through traditional surveys or interviews, highlighting the distinctive strength of ethnographic and netnographic approaches.

Ethnographic techniques are also useful for understanding implicit norms and behaviors associated with digital communication, such as tone of voice, posting frequency, visual aesthetics, and hashtag use. Moreover, they allow researchers to study longitudinal changes in SMM strategies by tracking brand activities over time—capturing shifts in engagement tactics, platform migration, or crisis responses.

While ethnographic research provides unparalleled contextual depth, it is not without limitations. Challenges include ethical concerns around informed consent in public online spaces, researcher subjectivity, and time-intensive data collection and analysis (Kozinets, 2020). Nevertheless, when applied rigorously, ethnography and netnography offer a rich and nuanced lens for studying the lived realities of MSMEs in the digital age.

4.5. Methodological Challenges in Developing Country Contexts

Conducting SMM adoption research in developing economies like Zambia presents unique challenges. First, digital infrastructure remains underdeveloped in rural areas, limiting access to consistent internet and mobile connectivity (ZICTA, 2022). This creates disparities in social media usage between urban and rural MSMEs.

Second, digital literacy levels vary significantly. While many young entrepreneurs are adept at using platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook, older or informal business owners may lack the skills or confidence to engage digitally (Boateng et al., 2020). Researchers must therefore consider varying levels of familiarity with digital tools when designing their studies.

Third, cultural and linguistic diversity affects communication in digital spaces. In Zambia, for example, English is the official language, but many MSMEs and their customers communicate in local languages, posing challenges for content creation, survey design, and interview interpretation.

Fourth, researchers may face trust issues when collecting data. MSME owners may be hesitant to share business practices or financial data, especially in informal sectors. Building trust and ensuring anonymity are critical for ethical and accurate data collection.

Finally, many studies are constrained by limited funding and time, making longitudinal or ethnographic research difficult. Researchers often rely on cross-sectional designs, which may not capture the evolution of SMM strategies over time.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media marketing (SMM) has rapidly evolved into a critical tool for business growth, offering MSMEs in both developed and developing economies an affordable and flexible means of promoting their products, interacting with customers, and building strong brand identities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). As digital transformation accelerates across global markets, SMM is increasingly recognized not just as a communication tool, but as a strategic enabler of competitiveness and innovation.

However, understanding the factors that drive or hinder the adoption of SMM among MSMEs requires more than technical knowledge of digital platforms. It demands a strong foundation in research philosophy and methodology, which shapes how knowledge is generated, what questions are asked, and how findings are interpreted (Saunders et al., 2019).

This review underscores the value of philosophical pluralism in guiding research on SMM adoption. Each philosophical stance contributes unique strengths. Positivism, with its focus on objectivity and empirical measurement, enables rigorous testing of relationships between variables and the generation of generalizable patterns. It is particularly useful when the goal is to quantify adoption rates or assess the influence of factors like perceived usefulness or organizational readiness (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In contrast, interpretivism allows researchers to capture the subjective meanings and cultural nuances that influence how entrepreneurs understand and engage with social media tools, especially in informal and resource-constrained business environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pragmatism, straddling the two, supports methodological flexibility and responsiveness to complex, real-world conditions—making it well-suited for studying MSMEs in dynamic markets where both measurable outcomes and contextual understanding are essential (Morgan, 2007). From a methodological perspective, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches each offer significant value, depending on the research objectives. Quantitative strategies provide statistical precision and are instrumental in theory testing. Qualitative designs, on the other hand, uncover rich, contextual narratives, allowing for deeper insight into the motivations, perceptions, and lived realities of entrepreneurs. The increasing adoption of mixed-methods designs reflects recognition that digital behavior is multifaceted, requiring both statistical generalization and contextual depth (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

In terms of data collection, a diverse set of strategies—including surveys, interviews, focus groups, case studies, and netnography—enables comprehensive investigation of SMM behaviors. For instance, while surveys can quantify adoption patterns across sectors, interviews and ethnographic techniques reveal how cultural norms, trust dynamics, and informal learning influence social media use (Kozinets, 2015; Miles et al., 2014).

Looking ahead, future research on SMM adoption among MSMEs should prioritize context-sensitive and inclusive approaches, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing regions where digital infrastructure, literacy, and cultural norms vary widely (Boateng et al., 2020). Scholars should also adopt longitudinal research designs to track the evolution of digital marketing strategies over time, offering insights into sustainability and impact. Moreover, embracing community-based and participatory research models—where MSMEs are engaged as active contributors rather than passive respondents—will improve the relevance, ethics, and utility of research outcomes (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

By aligning methodological strategies with local contexts and philosophical paradigms, researchers can generate more grounded, inclusive, and actionable knowledge to inform both academic discourse and policy interventions aimed at promoting digital inclusion and entrepreneurship development through SMM.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicting interests

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Data Availability statement

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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