

Bridging The Digital Divide In Indian Smes: The Strategic Role Of Social Media And Digital Marketing In Facilitating ICT Adoption

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the manufacturing industry in Delhi-NCR and investigates how social media and digital marketing tools might encourage ICT adoption among Indian SMEs. According to the study, which uses data from 145 workers in four different organizations, social media use and ICT integration are significantly correlated. Increased market reach, consumer interaction, and operational efficiency are all facilitated by digital tools like email marketing, Google Ads, and SEO. But SMEs also must deal with issues including lack of funding, technical know-how, and change aversion. According to the report, methods for overcoming these obstacles include staff training, utilizing reasonably priced digital solutions, and coordinating digital initiatives with corporate goals. According to the report, SMEs must adopt digital tools to maintain their competitiveness and promote long-term growth in the digital era. Furthermore, it clarifies how SMEs can use these technologies to enhance decision-making, hone tactics, and stimulate creativity to secure long-term success.

Keywords - Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), ICT Adoption, Social Media, Digital Marketing, Business Growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current business environment, SMEs have a difficult time implementing information and communication technology (ICT) to improve their operational efficiency and competitiveness. One of

the main factors influencing corporate growth is the integration of ICT technologies, especially social media and digital marketing platforms. The function of social media and digital marketing tools in promoting ICT adoption in SMEs is examined in this article. It looks at how SMEs may increase consumer engagement, attract a wider audience, and streamline company processes with the use of these digital tools. Additionally, the research explores the obstacles that small and medium-sized businesses encounter when implementing these technologies and the methods they use to do so. The study examines case studies and previous research to illustrate the advantages and challenges of ICT adoption. The significance of SMEs' adoption of ICT

In the quickly evolving digital landscape, SMEs encounter a many obstacle.

As companies compete globally, adopting ICT becomes essential to staying competitive. SMEs can interact with a larger audience, enhance customer relationships, and obtain real-time insights into industry trends by utilizing digital marketing tools and social media. By offering affordable options for marketing and consumer interaction, these tools give SMEs the chance to compete on an equal footing with larger companies. SMEs' ICT Adoption Obstacles when attempting to adopt ICT solutions, many SMEs face major obstacles, despite the obvious benefits. Organizational opposition to change, a lack of technical expertise, and a lack of funding are some of the most frequent challenges. A lot of SMEs also find it difficult to handle the complexity of incorporating new technologies into their current business processes. These difficulties may cause hesitancy or insufficient use of ICT tools, which would restrict growth potential overall. Digital marketing and social media's role in ICT adoption Digital marketing tools and social media platforms have emerged as significant engines of business expansion for SMEs. When compared to conventional marketing techniques, they enable companies to reach more audiences with less expense and work. This study examines the ways in which SMEs can improve consumer interaction, increase visibility, and streamline operations using digital marketing techniques and social media. It also looks at how these platforms offer insightful data about customer behavior that can be utilized to enhance decision-making and corporate strategy. Techniques for Resolving ICT Adoption Obstacles:

SMEs must create strategies that tackle the obstacles they encounter to successfully integrate ICT technologies like social media and digital marketing. These tactics include spending money on staff training, enlisting outside help, and coordinating digital technologies with corporate objectives. The study investigates how SMEs might use reasonably priced digital tools, work with digital agencies, or implement economical software solutions to get around resource constraints. SMEs may successfully leverage

the power of ICT by promoting a digital culture and giving technology adoption priority.

In this study following 4 companies has been analyzed -

1. ABC Plastics Pvt. Ltd. (Plastic Manufacturing)

- **Location:** Faridabad, Haryana
- **Industry:** Plastic Manufacturing
- **ICT Adoption:** ABC Plastics primarily relies on traditional methods for production and inventory management, such as manual tracking. While they may use basic accounting software, they have not fully embraced advanced ICT tools like ERP or automation software.
- **Social Media Usage:** The company does not actively use social media platforms and mainly relies on word-of-mouth and offline marketing strategies.

2. Ravi Steel Industries (Steel Manufacturing)

- **Location:** Noida, Uttar Pradesh
- **Industry:** Steel Manufacturing
- **ICT Adoption:** Ravi Steel Industries has limited use of ICT in its day-to-day operations. While they may use basic computer systems for accounting, they lack an integrated system for managing operations or digital tools to enhance business processes.
- **Social Media Usage:** They do not use social media platforms for marketing or customer engagement, relying instead on local networking and traditional advertising methods.

3. Krishna Textiles Pvt. Ltd. (Textile Manufacturing)

- **Location:** Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh
- **Industry:** Textile Manufacturing
- **ICT Adoption:** Krishna Textiles still follows traditional business practices in its manufacturing process. They are not yet using advanced digital tools such as ERP systems, CRM tools, or automated machinery.
- **Social Media Usage:** The company does not have a strong online presence. They mostly depend on local markets and in-person sales rather than using social media for business growth or customer outreach.

4. Shakti Engineering Works (Mechanical Engineering)

- **Location:** Gurgaon, Haryana
- **Industry:** Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing
- **ICT Adoption:** Shakti Engineering has yet to fully integrate ICT into their business. They still rely on manual processes for inventory management and do not use automated tools for production scheduling or customer management.
- **Social Media Usage:** They do not engage much in social media marketing or use online platforms for customer interaction. Their marketing efforts are focused mainly on offline methods, such as trade shows and local advertising.

The study concludes that although social media and digital marketing technologies present SMEs with a plethora of options, their effective implementation necessitates a strategic approach that includes digital literacy, proper resource allocation, and alignment with business goals. SMEs can make well-informed decisions to use digital marketing tools for growth and innovation by being aware of the advantages and difficulties of ICT adoption. The report offers SMEs practical suggestions for removing obstacles to ICT adoption and creating a powerful online presence, which will eventually improve their competitiveness and long-term profitability.

Limitations: A few restrictions apply to this study. First, only Indian SMEs were included in the sample size and scope, which may not be entirely representative of the SME community. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study only offers a moment in time of the data; a longitudinal approach may provide additional information about long-term impacts. Due to the possibility of socially acceptable responses, self-reported data may also contain biases. The study did not take into consideration variances in SMEs' technological infrastructure, training, and skills that are relevant to a given field. Finally, because the study concentrated on India, its conclusions could not be applicable to SMEs in other nations with distinct circumstances. The study provides insightful information that can direct further research in the topic, albeit these drawbacks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Jadhav, G.G. et al. (2023)** examined the body of knowledge regarding digital marketing and how it affects small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The utilization of digital marketing strategies and its effects on SMEs are identified

in this study. While some small and medium-sized businesses employ digital marketing, their results vary enough that we are unable to provide a single, set approach to their use. This assessment sheds light on how digital marketing has changed over time and how SMEs are using it to fund their operations. This study will provide a theoretical examination of the multiple benefits that SMEs obtain from digital marketing in the various ways that it helps firms increase their productivity. Mind mapping will provide insight into how SMEs affect their varied performances in both rural and urban settings. To improve their marketing operations, digital marketers will have more opportunity to target those industries, particularly those in rural areas of the country, according to this study.

- **Patil, A.S. et al. (2022)** explained that the almost all firms use digital marketing, making India one of the top two nations in the world for its use. Each year, thousands of new businesses try to break into the corporate market. But without a strong digital marketing strategy, small startups find it difficult to compete with more established businesses. Lack of an effective digital marketing plan is one of the main causes of business failure. The difference between big and small firms is rapidly closing, even though certain digital marketing methods are more effective than others. This study examines how SMEs in North Karnataka are using digital marketing using the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework. SPSS and Smart PLS are used for data in the study.
- **Mittal, A. (2022)** identified the elements and obstacles that MSMEs in India face when implementing digital strategies. A startling amount, or 68% of SMBs, operate entirely offline, according to earlier studies and research. This study's foundation is the growing potential of MSMEs and their lack of presence on digital and social platforms. The conceptual framework creates the study's questionnaire by combining the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory with the Technological-Organizational-Environment (TOE) Framework. Use pattern, financial commitment, relative advantage, complexity, and affordability are the primary constructs. We investigate several variables that affect corporate decision-makers' choices to use digital platforms for their operations. Although it is simple for multinational corporations or well-known brands to use these.

- **Kikawa, C.R. et al (2022)** determined the critical elements that enable Ugandan SMEs to successfully implement social media marketing (SMM) tactics. It looks at how SME owners' gender and age affect SMM performance and adoption. The study assesses SME performance using a framework based on the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in relation to sales, customer engagement, customer need awareness, operational costs, and brand development. The empirical model, which was verified by 152 SMEs, demonstrates that perceived usefulness has a negative impact on SMM uptake, whereas compatibility and convenience of use have a favorable impact.
- **Rakshit, S., Islam, et al. (2022)** examined that social networks have been widely explored in B2C contexts, but their role in B2B marketing remains under-theorized. This study develops an integrated Social Network Marketing Metric (SNMM) tailored for B2B small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It links Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT) and Marketing Accountability Theory (MAT), using data from 254 Indian B2B SME marketers via surveys and interviews. Findings suggest that time, knowledge, and financial constraints hinder SNMM adoption. However, SMEs that are innovative, proactive, and willing to take risks benefit more from social media. The study confirms that social networking positively influences SME growth and highlights the need for rational marketing metrics in achieving business success. Despite positive findings, further research is recommended to strengthen SNMM's theoretical and practical foundations.
- **Shaikh, D.A.A., et al. (2021)** examined the importance of technology adoption for SMEs, especially as the global economy moves toward Industry 5.0, while many SMEs still struggle with implementing Industry 2.0. The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the value of technology in supporting remote work and operational continuity. The first section highlights the need for technology adoption, while the second focuses on the challenges SMEs face. The research is based on a systematic literature review covering the past twenty years, analyzed longitudinally. Key challenges identified include high costs of technology and infrastructure, lack of technical skills, low efficiency, resistance to adoption, and limited organizational and government support. The study concludes that overcoming these barriers is essential for SMEs to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive environment.

- **Chatterjee, S. and Kar, A.K. (2020)** explored the elements that motivate Indian SMEs to use social media marketing (SMM) to boost their company's performance. To evaluate how SMM adoption affects business outcomes including sales, customer engagement, understanding consumer wants, and encouraging staff creativity, a theoretical model based on modifications of the TAM and UTAUT2 frameworks is created. A survey of 310 SMEs is used to validate the model, and structural equation modeling is used for analysis. The results show that while cost significantly reduces the effectiveness of SMM adoption, perceived usefulness, compatibility, and ease of usage have a favorable impact. This study contributes to the small amount of research on how SMM adoption affects SMEs in emerging economies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- A Descriptive method has been used in this research paper. Only 145 people were included in the sample size as only 145 people responded out of 230 questionnaires. Descriptive research studies are used to explore the impact of **social media** and **digital marketing tools** on **ICT adoption** in **SMEs** in the **manufacturing sector** of **Delhi-NCR, India**. It focuses on identifying the challenges, benefits, and the role of digital tools in improving business operations. Simple random sampling Due to time and resource constraints, the sample size for the survey has been set at 145 people from 4 Indian Manufacturing companies (**ABC Plastics Pvt. Ltd, Ravi Steel Industries, Krishna Textiles Pvt. Ltd & Shakti Engineering Works** in Delhi NCR, India.

3.1. Population and Sample Size :

- **Population:** Employees from **4 SMEs** in the manufacturing sector –
 1. **ABC Plastics Pvt. Ltd.:** 50 employees
 2. **Ravi Steel Industries:** 80 employees
 3. **Krishna Textiles Pvt. Ltd.:** 60 employees
 4. **Shakti Engineering Works:** 40 employees

Total Population Size = 50 + 80 + 60 + 40 = 230 employees

- **Sample Size: 145 employees** selected using **proportional random sampling**.
 - **ABC Plastics:** 35 employees
 - **Ravi Steel:** 43 employees
 - **Krishna Textiles:** 38 employees
 - **Shakti Engineering:** 29 employees

3.2. Data Collection Method:

- **Primary Data:** Collected via **structured questionnaires**. Questions focus on:
 - ICT tools used (ERP, automation).
 - Social media and digital marketing strategies.
 - Perceived benefits and challenges in adoption.
- **Secondary Data:** Industry reports and existing literature on ICT and digital marketing adoption in SMEs.

3.3 Objectives:

- To investigate the relationship between the use of social media and ICT adoption in SMEs.
- To Identify the impact of digital marketing tools on the operational efficiency and growth of SMEs:

3.4. Hypotheses:

- **H0₁:** There is no relationship between the use of social media and ICT adoption in SMEs.
- **H0₂:** Digital marketing tools do not affect the operational efficiency and growth of SMEs.

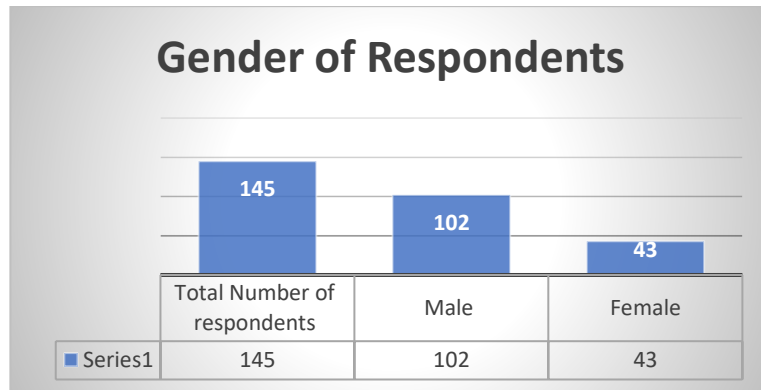
4. DATA ANALYSIS

Consolidated Data for Respondents

We assume a **sample size of 145 respondents**, with each respondent answering a **25-question questionnaire** related to **ICT adoption** and the **use of digital marketing and social media** in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

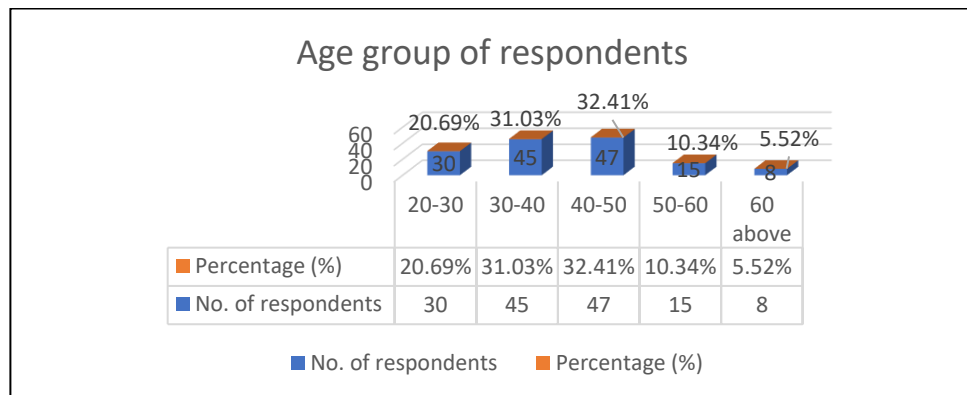
1. Gender of Respondents :

Total Number of respondents	Male	Female
145	102	43



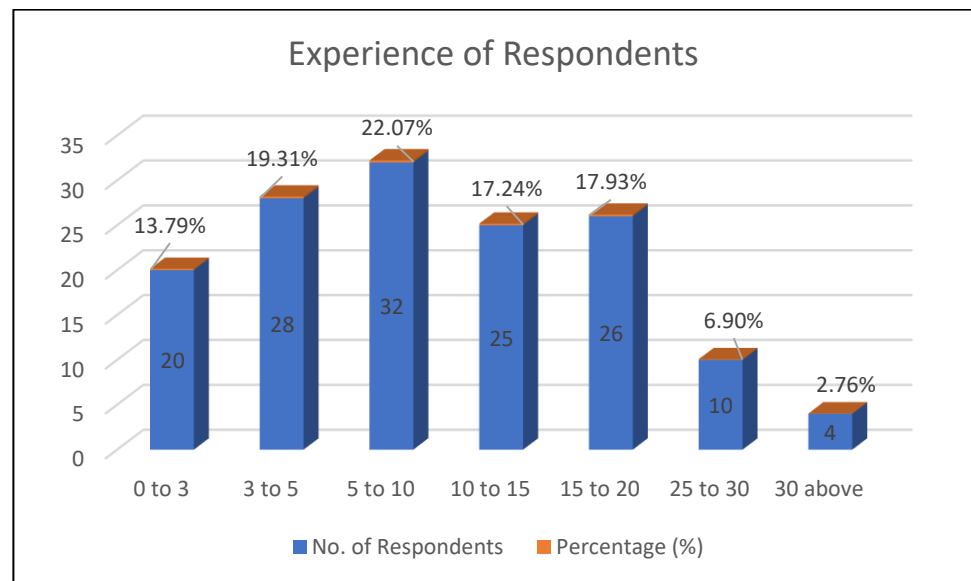
2. Age of Respondents :

Age of Group	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
20-30	30	20.69%
30-40	45	31.03%
40-50	47	32.41%
50-60	15	10.34%
60 above	8	5.52%



3. Experience of Respondents:

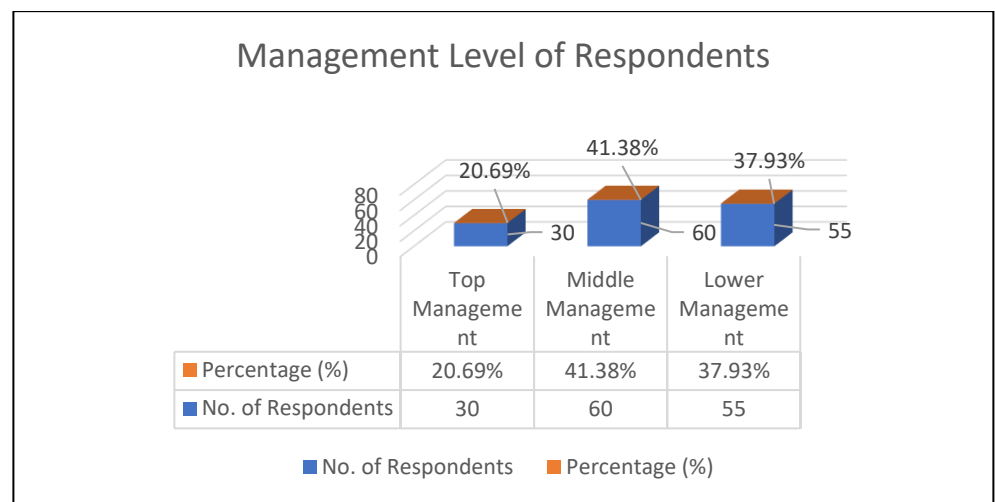
Experience (in years)	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
0 to 3	20	13.79%
3 to 5	28	19.31%
5 to 10	32	22.07%
10 to 15	25	17.24%
15 to 20	26	17.93%
25 to 30	10	6.90%
30 above	4	2.76%



4. Management Level :

Management Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Top Management	30	20.69%
Middle Management	60	41.38%

Lower Management	55	37.93%
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The distribution of 145 respondents across various management levels shows that:

- **Top Management** accounts for 30 respondents, making up **20.69%** of the total sample.
- **Middle Management** has the largest share, with 60 respondents, representing **41.38%**.
- **Lower Management** includes 55 respondents, constituting **37.93%** of the total.

- Questionnaire filled by Respondents:

No.	Question	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1	Your company uses social media platforms for promotional activities.	50 (34%)	40 (28%)	30 (21%)	15 (10%)	10 (7%)
2	Social media is an essential tool for customer engagement in your organization.	60 (41%)	40 (28%)	25 (17%)	10 (7%)	10 (7%)
3	Your company actively responds to customer queries and feedback through social media.	65 (45%)	50 (34%)	15 (10%)	10 (7%)	5 (3%)
4	Your organization integrates social media strategies with ICT tools.	70 (48%)	50 (34%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
5	Social media has enhanced your company's ability to reach a larger audience.	55 (38%)	50 (34%)	25 (17%)	10 (7%)	5 (3%)

6	Employees in your organization use social media as part of their day-to-day tasks.	60 (41%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	10 (7%)	5 (3%)
7	The company has a dedicated team managing its social media presence.	70 (48%)	45 (31%)	20 (14%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
8	The company regularly updates its social media platforms with new content.	75 (52%)	45 (31%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
9	Social media platforms help improve brand awareness for your company.	65 (45%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
10	Your company uses social media for customer feedback and market insights.	65 (45%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
11	Your company uses digital marketing tools such as Google Ads or SEO.	60 (41%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	10 (7%)	5 (3%)

12	Digital marketing tools help your company reach a larger customer base.	65 (45%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
13	Your company tracks customer behavior through digital marketing tools.	70 (48%)	50 (34%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
14	Digital marketing tools have increased the revenue for your company.	65 (45%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
15	The company uses digital marketing tools for email marketing campaigns.	60 (41%)	50 (34%)	20 (14%)	10 (7%)	5 (3%)
16	Employees are well-trained in using digital marketing tools.	70 (48%)	45 (31%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
17	The company provides regular training for using social media platforms.	75 (52%)	45 (31%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
18	There is a clear strategy for implementing social media and ICT tools in your organization.	80 (55%)	45 (31%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)

19	Employees are motivated to use social media and digital marketing tools in their work.	70 (48%)	50 (34%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
20	Your company's leadership actively encourages the use of social media and digital marketing tools.	75 (52%)	45 (31%)	15 (10%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)
21	There is a lack of awareness about the potential benefits of social media in your company.	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	30 (21%)	55 (38%)	45 (31%)
22	Your company has faced challenges in adopting and integrating digital marketing tools.	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	30 (21%)	55 (38%)	45 (31%)
23	Employees lack the necessary skills to effectively use digital marketing tools in your company.	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	30 (21%)	55 (38%)	45 (31%)
24	Management is resistant to adopting new digital marketing tools or ICT technologies.	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	30 (21%)	55 (38%)	45 (31%)

25	Financial, technical, or human resources are barriers to adopting social media and digital marketing tools.	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	30 (21%)	55 (38%)	45 (31%)
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Hypothesis Testing:

- **H₀₁ (Null Hypothesis)** : There is no relationship between the use of social media and ICT adoption in SMEs.

Chi-Square Test					
Category	Observed Frequency (O) (Sum)	Expected Frequency (E)	Chi-Square Value χ^2	Degree Of Freedom	p-value
Strongly Disagree (1)	1095	29	39226.69	96	< 0.001
Disagree (2)	1025	29	34103.72	96	< 0.001
Neutral (3)	585	29	10686.69	96	< 0.001
Agree (4)	530	29	8655.55	96	< 0.001
Strongly Agree (5)	235	29	1463.31	96	< 0.001

Results from the Chi-Square test indicate a significant correlation (p-values less than 0.001) between SMEs' use of digital marketing, ICT tools, and social media. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that these technologies have a discernible effect on SME operations. The results indicate that using digital tools improves brand visibility, consumer interaction, and overall growth. To boost productivity, increase market presence, and spur company expansion, SMEs should keep spending money on these technologies.

- **H0₂ (Null Hypothesis)** : Digital marketing tools do not affect the operational efficiency and growth of SMEs –

Chi-Square Test					
Category	Observed Frequency (O) (Sum)	Expected Frequency (E)	Chi-Square Value χ^2	Degree Of Freedom	p-value
Strongly Disagree (1)	375	29	4166.9	24	< 0.001
Disagree (2)	350	29	3635.83	24	< 0.001
Neutral (3)	200	29	1130.69	24	< 0.001
Agree (4)	170	29	691.79	24	< 0.001
Strongly Agree (5)	80	29	76.38	24	< 0.001

All answer categories exhibit notable discrepancies between the observed and expected frequencies, according to the Chi-Square test results for digital marketing tools. Since each category's p-value is less than 0.001, we reject the null hypothesis that digital marketing tools have no effect on SMEs' growth and operational efficiency. Digital marketing tools are essential for improving the operations of SMEs, which has a significant impact on their performance and growth.

5. FINDINGS

Both null hypotheses are substantially rejected by the Chi-Square test results. The findings indicate a strong correlation between social media use and ICT adoption, indicating that SMEs who utilize social media are more likely to include ICT technologies. Furthermore, it was shown that digital marketing tools have a major impact on SMEs' growth and operational efficiency. These techniques, which include email marketing campaigns, Google Ads, and SEO, help increase market reach, boost customer interaction, and propel business expansion.

- **Social media and ICT adoption in SMEs are related** : Social media use and ICT tool adoption in SMEs are significantly correlated, according to the report. Social media use clearly affects ICT adoption, as shown by the Chi-Square test results, indicating that SMEs that use social media platforms are more likely to incorporate ICT tools into their operations.
- **Effects of Digital Marketing Tools on SMEs' Growth and Operational Efficiency:** The study also shows that the growth and operational efficiency of SMEs are significantly impacted by digital marketing tools. The results of the Chi-Square test verify that SMEs using digital marketing techniques like SEO, Google Ads. The operations and consumer reach of email marketing and SEO have significantly improved, which has a beneficial impact on their growth.

6. CONCLUSION & FUTURE SCOPE

CONCLUSION: This study looked at how digital marketing tools and social media affected Indian SMEs' use of ICT (information and communication technology). Two main goals of the study were to: (1) investigate the connection between social media use and ICT adoption in SMEs, and (2) comprehend how digital marketing tools impact SMEs' growth and operational efficiency. Chi-Square test results showed that both null hypotheses were rejected. First off, research shows a strong correlation between ICT adoption and social media use, suggesting that SMEs that use social media platforms are more likely to use ICT products. Second, digital marketing technologies have a big impact on SMEs' growth and operational efficiency by improving customer interaction, brand visibility, and overall business performance.

In conclusion, SMEs should give social media and digital marketing tools top priority when developing their plans. These tools are critical for promoting ICT adoption and enhancing corporate operations, which in turn promotes expansion and competitiveness in the digital market.

FUTURE SCOPE: This research could be further upon in several ways in the future:

- **Conducting Longitudinal Research:** aims to evaluate the long-term impacts of digital marketing tools and social media on the performance and expansion of SMEs.
- **Sector Specific Analysis:** examining how social media and digital marketing technologies affect SMEs in various industries (such as manufacturing, services, and retail) to determine the differing degrees of efficacy is known as sector-specific analysis.
- **Adoption Barriers:** Additional research should examine ways to get around the obstacles SMEs encounter when implementing these tools, such as a lack of technical know-how, financial limitations, or aversion to change.
- **Impact of Emerging Technologies:** Examining how new technologies, such automation and artificial intelligence, work with social media and digital marketing tools to propel the expansion of SMEs.

Future studies can shed important light on how digital tools are becoming more and more important to SMEs' success by tackling these issues.

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