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Exploring the Influence of Social Media Adoption on Firm Performance of the Food Industry in Cotabato Province, Philippines

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Abstract

Firm performance is a crucial area of study in organizational research and is a key indicator of an organization's success. However, understanding it can be complex. This study investigates the relationship between social media adoption and firm performance in the food industry. It employs a quantitative descriptive correlational research design to collect relevant data from restaurant owners and managers using a combination of convenience sampling and area sampling methods. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between social media adoption and firm performance ($p < .05$), primarily attributed to the perception of its usefulness across various business functions, including operations, productivity, customer service, and inquiry management. Grounded in Social Capital Theory, the results highlight how social media enhances relational and cognitive capital by reinforcing networks and trust, essential elements in the food sector. By bridging theory and practice, this research illuminates how digital engagement can drive improved firm performance in a competitive marketplace, providing valuable insights for practitioners navigating an increasingly digital landscape.

Keywords: *social media adoption, performance, food industry, social capital theory, cotabato province*

Introduction

The integration of social media into the food industry presents a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges that significantly impact performance, leading to hesitancy in adoption for some businesses. While social media marketing offers avenues for increased brand visibility and enhanced customer engagement, it also introduces notable performance-related problems. These include the difficulty of managing negative customer feedback that can quickly tarnish a brand's reputation if not promptly addressed (Vural et al., 2024), and the struggle to gain prominence amidst the overwhelming number of food brands vying for attention online, potentially leading to customer disengagement (Waheed & Kumar, 2024). Furthermore, maintaining consistent brand messaging across diverse platforms poses a marketing challenge, potentially causing confusion among consumers (Selvakumar et al., 2024), and the reliance on influencers may not always translate into tangible sales, creating a disconnect between marketing expenditure and financial returns (Rahmawati, 2023). Operationally, many food businesses find it challenging to allocate sufficient resources for effective social media management, thereby undermining their overall marketing strategy (Kulkarni, 2024), and the need to constantly adapt to the rapid evolution of social media trends can strain their operational capabilities (Waheed & Kumar, 2024). Consequently, the combination of these challenges contributes to a reluctance among some in the food industry to fully embrace social media as a core component of their business strategy. However, proponents argue that a strategic and adaptable approach to social media marketing can indeed yield benefits such as heightened brand loyalty and valuable customer insights, potentially outweighing these concerns (Selvakumar et al., 2024; Kulkarni, 2024).

Several studies were conducted to examine the impact of social media adaptation on firm performance in the food industry and found that the former had a significant positive impact on the latter. Although customers react more to promotion information disclosure than other information disclosure, companies actively disclose certain information on social media, which may impact the firm's performance (Johari & Viveganantha, 2022). Similarly, the study by Emmanuel et al. (2022) noted that social media adaptation has a strong positive relationship with Firm performance. Today, businesses have adopted social media marketing as a strategic tool to change traditional business practices. They argue that social media adaptation positively affects business operations, improving performance. With the rapid advancement of technology, businesses have increasingly turned to social media to engage with customers, foster brand loyalty, and ultimately drive firm performance. Another study by Ainin et al. (2015) explores the relationship between social media adaptation and firm performance, highlighting the key factors contributing to successfully integrating social media platforms into business strategies. Effective social media adaptation has positively impacted firm performance by increasing brand awareness, improving customer engagement and satisfaction, providing valuable market insights, delivering cost-effective marketing opportunities, and creating a competitive advantage. By leveraging social media platforms effectively, business can enhance their overall performance and achieve their organizational goals (Tuten & Solomon, 2015).

The relationship between social media adoption and firm performance reveals several important research gaps that merit further investigation. While some studies indicate a positive correlation between social media use and improved performance, others present mixed results, particularly highlighted by Morrison et al. (2019), who found that the impact of social media significantly varies by industry and organizational context. This inconsistency suggests a critical need for deeper contextual analysis. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of emphasis on the specific mechanisms through which social media influences performance metrics. Kumar et al. (2020) underscored the necessity of understanding these pathways—such as customer engagement and retention—to establish a robust link

between social media strategies and overall firm performance. Additionally, most existing research tends to focus on short-term outcomes, leaving a gap in knowledge regarding the long-term effects of social media initiatives on firm sustainability and performance. Williams and Chatham (2018) pointed out the importance of conducting longitudinal studies to capture these evolving dynamics. Addressing these research gaps could enhance our understanding of how social media adoption impacts various dimensions of firm performance.

Social Capital Theory, as articulated by Adler and Kwon (2002) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), provides a robust framework for examining the impact of social media adoption on food industry firm performance by focusing on the networks, relationships, and shared understandings cultivated online. In this inherently social industry where trust and word-of-mouth are vital, social media serves as a key platform for building relational and cognitive social capital through engagement and value provision, creating opportunities, fostering motivation among stakeholders, and enabling access to resources. While acknowledging potential downsides of social capital, this study posits that ethical social media strategies can generate positive social capital, leading to enhanced information flow, customer influence, and ultimately improved firm performance within the specific cultural context, thereby offering valuable insights into digital performance drivers in the food sector.

Research Questions

1. What is the status of the firm performance of the food industry in Cotabato Province in terms of:
 - 1.1. comparative performance; and
 - 1.2. internal performance?
2. What is the status of the social media adoption of the food industry in Cotabato Province in terms of:
 - 2.1. perceived usefulness;
 - 2.2. perceived ease of use; and
 - 2.3. trust?
3. What are the educational challenges in terms of:
 - 3.1. Access to education;
 - 3.2. learning environment;
4. Is there a significant relationship between firm performance and social media adoption of the food industry in Cotabato Province?

Methodology

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. Following Fowler's (2013) definition, descriptive research involves the analysis of information to elucidate the fundamental characteristics of the data gathered or utilized. Complementarily, Bhandari (2022) elucidates that a correlational design examines the associations between variables without any researcher intervention or manipulation.

This quantitative research utilized a descriptive-correlational design to explore the influence of social media adoption on the firm performance of the food industry in Cotabato, Philippines. The descriptive aspect detailed the social media adoption patterns of local food firms. Simultaneously, the study described the financial and non-financial performance of these firms. The correlational component analyzed the statistical relationships between these social media adoption characteristics and firm performance indicators. This aims to identify significant associations, revealing potential influences of social media engagement on business outcomes in this specific context.

Respondents

The respondents for this quantitative study comprised 50 conveniently sampled business owners and managers from the food industry in Cotabato Province, selected based on their availability and accessibility. This sample size, deemed sufficient for variable validity (Arianti, 2018), aimed to represent the broader population, acknowledging the impracticality of surveying all businesses. Inclusion criteria specified that respondents must be owners or branch managers with at least one year of management experience, aged 18 and above, whose businesses have been operational for at least a year, and utilize social media for marketing. Excluded were non-managing owners, respondents under 18, businesses operational for less than a year, non-managerial employees, and established national food chains.

Instrument

An adapted survey questionnaire, drawing upon relevant sections from prior research, served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. To ensure the instrument's validity, a rigorous validation procedure was undertaken, involving capable professionals with comprehensive knowledge of the study's variables. As Bhosale (2022) emphasizes, validity is crucial for obtaining reliable and sufficient data, thereby enabling the selection of appropriate statistical analysis. Specifically, the instrument's validity was established

through expert review and analysis by the research adviser and research panel, who assessed the suitability of the questions and measurement scales.

The survey questionnaire was structured into two sections: the initial part to measure firm performance within the food industry, utilizing a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to assess seven statements adapted from Darroch's (2005) study on "Knowledge Management, Innovation and Firm Performance," which provided indicators for comparative performance (three statements) and internal performance (four statements).

The final section of the survey questionnaire focused on measuring social media adoption, drawing upon the instrument developed by Ng Qing Xuan (2022) in their study "Factor Affecting Adoption Social Media in Business among Young Entrepreneurs: Using the Tam Model." This section comprised three key indicators: perceived usefulness, assessed through five statements; perceived ease of use, also measured by five statements; and trust, evaluated using three statements. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each of these thirteen statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To establish the trustworthiness of the research instrument, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents sharing similar characteristics to the target population, a crucial step for assessing reliability prior to full-scale data collection (Bryman, 2016). This trial run, as emphasized by Bryman, aimed to identify and rectify any design flaws or ambiguities within the adapted survey questionnaire. The pilot test results demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of more than .70. Furthermore, the instrument's validity was strengthened through content validation, involving expert review by faculty members from the CBE department and the study's advisors, ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the research findings through this combined approach of statistical and expert assessment.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured from Professor Mila Rose Javellana, Dean of the College of Business Education, followed by the dissemination of introductory letters and customized questionnaires, accompanied by permission requests, to owners and managers within the Cotabato food industry. Upon receiving the necessary approvals, the research team personally distributed the survey questionnaires, along with informed consent forms enclosed in sealed envelopes to ensure confidentiality, to eligible respondents. To maximize response rates and address potential queries, data collection was conducted in person, with researchers either awaiting the immediate return of completed surveys or arranging for subsequent collection. Once the target sample size was achieved, the gathered data underwent meticulous encoding, collation, and tabulation under the guidance of a qualified statistician, paving the way for comprehensive analysis and interpretation utilizing appropriate statistical tools to derive meaningful findings.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers rigorously upheld the highest ethical standards throughout this investigation, encompassing the principles of social value, informed consent, due consideration for vulnerable populations, a favorable risk-benefit analysis, stringent protection of privacy and confidentiality, adherence to justice, transparency in research protocols, researcher competence, adequate research infrastructure, and meaningful community engagement within Cotabato, Philippines. Paramount among these commitments was the unwavering dedication to safeguarding the confidentiality of all collected data, strictly adhering to the stipulations of the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173). This crucial legislation mandated complete transparency in data management, the establishment of clear and legitimate purposes for data acquisition, and the assurance that all data collection and processing activities were proportionate to the study's objectives. The research team diligently observed these critical tenets of data privacy and security at every phase of the research endeavor within the local context.

Results and Discussion

Performance Level of the Food Industry in Cotabato province, Philippines

Table 1 indicates a consistently high level of organizational performance across both comparative and internal metrics. The comparative performance obtained a high mean score of 3.65, while the internal performance achieved a mean score of 3.85, which is also considered high. Furthermore, the overall mean performance of 3.77 with a standard deviation of 0.67 further substantiates this robust performance, highlighting the organization's success both in comparison to its peers and in achieving its internal goals over recent periods.

The strong comparative performance suggests a potential competitive advantage within the industry, which could be leveraged for further market penetration and growth. This superior performance relative to the industry average, particularly in profitability, market share, and growth, indicates effective strategies and operational efficiencies that are yielding positive results. Furthermore, the robust internal performance and consistent attainment of organizational objectives over the past one and two years highlight effective internal management, goal setting, and execution. This implies a well-functioning organizational structure and potentially a strong organizational culture that drives performance.

The finding of high organizational performance across both comparative and internal measures is supported by contemporary literature.

Studies suggest that achieving superior performance relative to industry peers in areas like profitability and market share often stems from strategic advantages gained through unique capabilities or effective competitive actions (Bharadwaj et al., 2017; Ketchen Jr et al., 2017). Simultaneously, strong internal performance and the consistent attainment of organizational objectives are linked to factors such as effective supply chain collaboration (Cao et al., 2020), positive organizational culture (Струнный & Струнный, 2021), and efficient knowledge management processes that foster innovation (Imran et al., 2020). These interconnected internal and external dynamics contribute to a holistic state of high organizational performance.

Table 1. *Level of Performance*

<i>Indicators / Domains</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Descriptive Level</i>
Comparative Performance	0.64	3.65	High
1. Profitability over the industry average.	0.67	3.58	High
2. A more significant share than the industry average.	0.76	3.52	High
3. Growing rapidly over the industry average.	0.81	3.86	High
Internal Performance	0.71	3.85	High
4. Organization performance 12 months ago.	0.87	3.82	High
5. Organization performance two years ago.	0.84	3.84	High
6. Attainment of organization performance objectives over the past 12 months.	0.88	3.96	High
7. Attainment of organization performance objectives over the past two years.	0.89	3.78	High
Overall Mean	0.67	3.77	High

Status of Social Media Adoption of the Food Industry in Cotabato, Philippines

Table 2 presents the status of social media adoption, revealing a generally high overall mean with a mean score of 3.98 and a standard deviation of .70. The overall mean signifies that the social media adoption of firms is manifested. Specifically, the perceived usefulness of social media for business scored particularly very high, were a mean range from 4.12 to 4.30, indicating strong agreement on its value for business operations, productivity enhancement, query management, and customer satisfaction. In contrast, perceived ease of use and trust in social media for business purposes both registered high mean scores ranging from 3.90-4.12 and 3.90-4.00, respectively, suggesting a positive but slightly less emphatic perception regarding the simplicity of adoption and the level of trust associated with social media for business.

The very high perceived usefulness of social media for business in food industry strongly suggests that organizations recognize and value the tangible benefits it offers for various operational aspects, particularly in enhancing productivity and customer relationships. This high level of perceived value likely drives and justifies the continued and potentially increased adoption of social media strategies. However, the comparatively lower "High" ratings for perceived ease of use and trust indicate potential areas for improvement and consideration. While users generally find social media usable and trustworthy for business, efforts to further simplify its application and build stronger trust could lead to even wider and more effective adoption.

Literature supports the finding that perceived usefulness is a strong driver of technology adoption, including social media for business. Studies consistently show that when users believe a technology can enhance their productivity, efficiency, and overall effectiveness, they are more likely to adopt and utilize it extensively (Venkatesh et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2018). While perceived ease of use and trust are also important factors influencing adoption, perceived usefulness often emerges as a primary predictor, particularly in organizational contexts where the benefits to business outcomes are paramount (Dwivedi et al., 2017; Rana et al., 2019). The slightly lower ratings for ease of use and trust suggest that while the benefits are clear, ongoing efforts to improve user experience and build confidence in the platform's reliability and security can further enhance adoption and impact (Alalwan et al., 2016; Kapoor et al., 2020).

Table 2. *Status of Social Media Adoption*

<i>Indicators / Domains</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Descriptive level</i>
Perceived usefulness	0.64	4.22	Very High
1. Usefulness of social media for business	0.83	4.20	Very High
2. Valuableness of social media as a tool for conducting business.	0.74	4.30	Very High
3. Usefulness of social media in enhancing the productivity of the business.	0.74	4.22	Very High
4. Usefulness of social media in query management.	0.77	4.12	High
5. The usefulness of social media in improving customer satisfaction.	0.82	4.24	Very High
Perceived ease of use	0.71	4.00	High
6. The ease of learning social media for business purposes.	0.89	3.90	High
7. The ease of identifying new customers using social media.	0.90	3.96	High
8. The ease of identifying customers' demands using social media.	0.84	3.98	High
9. The ease of information retrieval about customers using social media.	0.84	4.06	High
10. The ease of advertising products and services on social media	0.94	4.12	High



Trust	platforms.	0.75	3.95	High
11.	Trusting social media for business purposes.	0.81	3.90	High
12.	Reliability of social media for business purposes.	0.81	4.00	High
13.	Trustworthiness of social media for business.	0.83	3.96	High
OVERALL		0.70	3.98	High

Relationship Between Variables

The correlation analysis revealed a robust and statistically significant positive relationship between Social Media Adoption and Firm Performance ($r = .60, p < .001$). This strong positive correlation suggests that higher levels of social media adoption within the firm are associated with enhanced firm performance. The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that this relationship is not due to random chance and indicates a meaningful connection between the extent to which a firm integrates and utilizes social media and its overall performance outcomes. This finding underscores the potential of social media as a valuable tool for driving positive results within organizations.

Furthermore, the significant positive correlation between Social Media Adoption and Firm Performance carries notable implications for business strategy and practice. Organizations should recognize social media not merely as a communication channel but as a potentially strategic asset that can contribute meaningfully to firm performance. This finding suggests that investing in and strategically implementing social media initiatives, fostering broader adoption across relevant organizational functions, and developing sophisticated social media capabilities could lead to tangible improvements in key performance indicators. Furthermore, this result encourages organizations to move beyond basic social media presence towards a more integrated and strategic approach to leverage its full potential for enhancing business outcomes. Future research could delve deeper into the specific mechanisms and mediating factors through which social media adoption influences various dimensions of firm performance to provide more granular guidance for practitioners.

The result of the study is an affirmation of the result from the survey by Emmanuel et al. (2022), which stated that social media adoption has a strong positive relationship with firm performance. Many related studies confirmed that social media adaptation positively affects business operations, improving business performance. Also, another study by Ainin et al. (2015) explores the relationship between social media adaptation and firm performance, highlighting the key factors that contribute to the successful integration of social media platforms into business strategies. This means that adopting social media for business can increase business operations and performance. These findings are also similar to the study of Tuten and Solomon (2015), in which effective social media adaptation has been found to positively impact firm performance by increasing brand awareness, improving customer engagement and satisfaction, providing valuable market insights, delivering cost-effective marketing opportunities, and creating a competitive advantage. By leveraging social media platforms effectively, business can enhance their overall performance and achieve their organizational goals. With the rapid advancement of technology, companies have increasingly turned to social media to engage with customers, foster brand loyalty, and ultimately drive firm performance.

Table 3. Relationship Between Variables

Pair	Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Remarks
IV and DV	Social Media Adoption and Firm Performance	.60	.00	Significant

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the food industry in the province demonstrates a robust level of performance when evaluated against industry benchmarks and its internal targets. This consistently high standing across both external competitiveness and internal effectiveness suggests a well-functioning operational framework and strategic alignment. The organization's ability to perform strongly in comparison to its peers, coupled with its success in achieving internal goals, points towards a potentially sustainable model of high performance driven by effective strategies and efficient execution. This dual strength positions the organization favorably within its competitive landscape and indicates a capacity for continued success.

Moreover, the findings indicate a notable level of social media adoption among firms, driven significantly by a strong perception of its usefulness across various business functions, including operations, productivity, customer service, and query management. While firms generally perceive social media as relatively easy to use and trustworthy for business purposes, the slightly less emphatic agreement on these aspects compared to perceived usefulness suggests that the recognized value is a primary impetus for adoption. This highlights the importance of demonstrating and communicating the tangible benefits of social media to encourage its integration within organizations.

Additionally, the robust and statistically significant positive correlation between Social Media Adoption and Firm Performance underscores the increasingly vital role of social media as a strategic tool for organizational success. The strong association suggests that firms actively embracing and integrating social media into their operations are likely to experience enhanced performance

outcomes. This finding emphasizes the need for organizations to move beyond viewing social media as a mere communication channel and instead recognize its potential as a key driver of performance improvement. Strategic investments in social media infrastructure, training, and sophisticated utilization strategies are likely to yield tangible benefits in terms of overall firm performance. Further research could explore the specific mechanisms and contextual factors that mediate and moderate this strong positive relationship to provide more nuanced insights for effective social media implementation.

The significant positive correlation between Social Media Adoption and Firm Performance aligns with the tenets of social capital theory. The theory posits that the network of relationships and the resources embedded within these networks can provide firms with valuable advantages. The adoption and effective utilization of social media platforms enable organizations to build, maintain, and leverage broader and more diverse networks of stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and industry peers. This enhanced social capital, manifested through increased connectivity and engagement, can facilitate the flow of information, foster collaboration, build trust, and ultimately contribute to improved firm performance. The observed positive association thus suggests that social media serves as a powerful tool for accumulating and leveraging social capital, thereby supporting the theory's predictions regarding the benefits of strong network ties for organizational success.

Given the established positive link between social media adoption and firm performance, food industry businesses are strongly recommended to strategically integrate social media into their operations. This includes actively engaging with consumers to build relationships and loyalty, leveraging platforms for marketing and promotion to expand reach, utilizing social media for gathering customer feedback and market insights to inform product development and service improvements, and exploring its potential for supply chain communication and collaboration. By strategically investing in a comprehensive social media strategy, food businesses can enhance brand visibility, improve customer engagement, and ultimately drive better business outcomes in a competitive market.

Future research should delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which social media adoption impacts firm performance within the food industry. Investigating the mediating roles of factors such as customer engagement, brand equity, innovation, and supply chain efficiency would provide a more nuanced understanding of this relationship. Additionally, exploring the moderating effects of firm size, type of food business (e.g., restaurants, manufacturers, retailers), and specific social media platform usage on performance outcomes could yield valuable insights for both theory development and practical application within the food sector.

This study is susceptible to limitations. A primary limitation of this study is its correlational nature, which, while establishing a significant positive relationship between social media adoption and firm performance, does not definitively establish causality. While higher social media adoption is associated with better performance, the study does not definitively prove that increased social media adoption causes the improved performance; other unexamined factors could be influencing both variables, or the causality could potentially run in the reverse direction, with higher-performing firms having more resources to invest in social media. Furthermore, the study's findings may be context-specific and may not be generalizable across all industries or firm sizes, particularly given the unique characteristics and consumer behavior within the food industry, which was the focus of the recommendations. Future research employing longitudinal designs or experimental approaches would be necessary to establish causality and explore the generalizability of these findings.

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