
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Designing Digital Pathways: Social Media Adoption Among Smock Fabric Weavers in Bolgatanga

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| ABSTRACT

The smock is a traditional handwoven textile characterized by vibrant designs created to suit diverse tastes and preferences. It is unique and durable, making it suitable for various occasions such as weddings, naming ceremonies, funerals, festivals, and other significant events. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), particularly smock fabric weavers in Bolgatanga, are engaged in producing these distinctive textiles. The business environment has changed rapidly with the advancement of technology, especially with the rise of social media as an accessible marketplace for reaching target customers. Despite this shift, concerns remain regarding the level of social media adoption among these enterprises. Although social media advertising plays an important role in driving sales growth, many business owners and marketers have limited understanding of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and knowledge. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which provided rich and relevant perspectives aligned with the study objectives. The analysis followed three stages: reviewing transcripts, coding responses, and conducting thematic analysis. A significant majority (n=29) of participants expressed willingness to adopt social media for business purposes, particularly through creating Facebook pages and sharing videos on TikTok to reach customers.

| KEYWORDS

Design, Fabric Weavers, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Smock Weavers, Social Media, Northern Ghana

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The smock, locally known as "Batakari" or "Fugu," is a traditional Ghanaian garment widely recognized for its vibrant designs that align with contemporary fashion trends (Figure 1). It is a handwoven textile crafted to suit diverse tastes and preferences. This combination of aesthetic appeal and functionality results in a unique and durable garment suitable for various occasions, including weddings, naming ceremonies, funerals, festivals, and other significant events (Seidu et al., 2017; Boadi, Frimpong & Seidu, 2025).

Globally, the business environment has undergone rapid transformation due to the advancement of technology, particularly the increasing popularity of social media as a marketplace for reaching target customers. Businesses are required to adapt quickly to these changes to remain competitive and avoid losing market share and value. Social media platforms have become important channels that connect businesses with their customers. As a result, organizations can leverage these platforms to enhance profitability (Smithfield, 2024). In addition to supporting revenue generation, social media fosters communities of shared interests rather than one-time transactions, thereby strengthening customer relationships and retention. Innovation remains critical for

business sustainability in this evolving environment, and social media plays a key role in supporting digital transformation strategies (Kraus., et al. 2022).

Despite these opportunities, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face notable challenges in adopting and effectively using social media. Although these platforms can expand customer reach and improve competitiveness, SMEs often encounter constraints related to limited human and financial resources. At the same time, the relatively low cost of social media tools, such as analytics, automated publishing, content management, conversion tracking, and customer targeting, makes them accessible and practical for SMEs seeking to increase visibility and profitability. Nevertheless, persistent gaps and barriers in adoption and utilization remain and require further investigation.

Social media adoption continues to influence firm performance and competitive advantage in today's technology-driven global landscape (Ahmad et al., 2019). However, concerns related to cybersecurity and limited awareness of the benefits of social media platforms have hindered adoption among many businesses. Consequently, despite the recognized importance of social media advertising in driving sales growth, many business owners and marketers still lack a comprehensive understanding of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, especially when compared to their familiarity with traditional media (Haenlein et al., 2020).

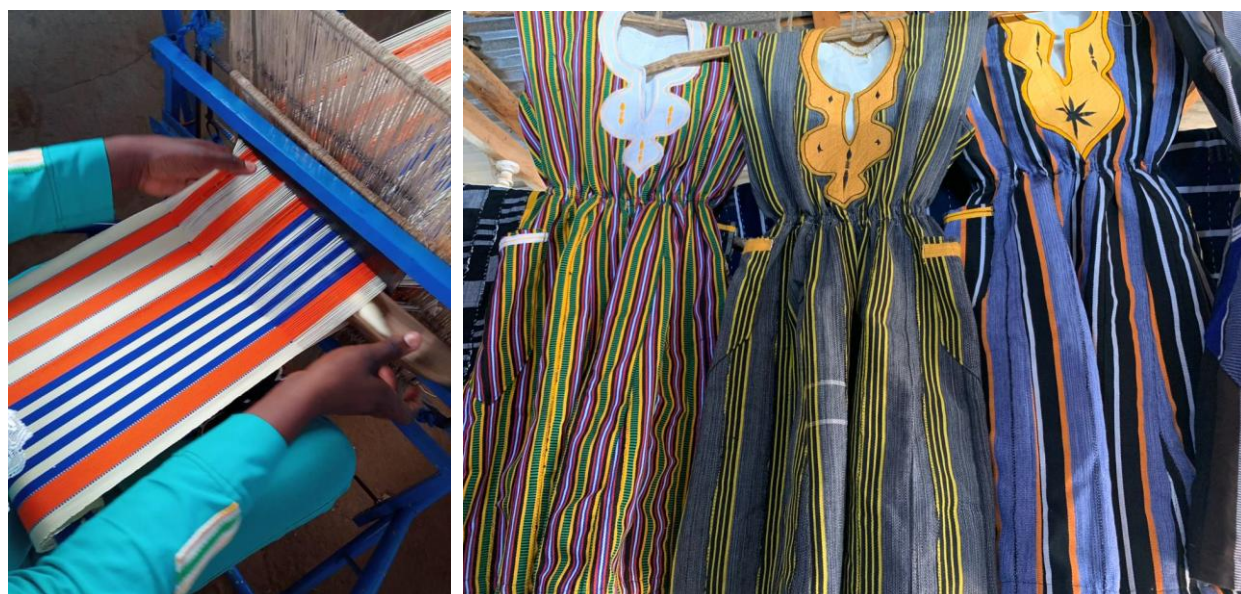


Figure 1. Traditional Smock Weaving Patterns from Bolgatanga, Ghana (Source: Authors' own photographs).

There is a limited body of empirical research on the role of social media adoption in the survival and growth of fashion-related SMEs, particularly within Ghana and the broader Sub-Saharan African context. For example, Oklander & Kudina (2021) examined the role of digital marketing in promoting fashion brands through social media. However, there remains a lack of context-specific evidence on how Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs and SMEs can effectively integrate and leverage these platforms within their operations. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how smock fabric weavers in Bolgatanga (Figure 1) adopt and utilize social media in their business activities.

The main aim of this study is to assess how SMEs can effectively adopt and utilize social media platforms in their business operations. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess smock fabric weavers' knowledge of the role of social media in their business operations.
2. To examine how smock fabric weavers can adopt and utilize social media platforms effectively.
3. To investigate the challenges and barriers faced by smock fabric weavers in adopting social media for their business operations.

2. Literature Review

Digital marketing refers to a range of activities conducted on the internet to attract customers and establish a distinct brand identity. It utilizes technological tools and digital media to enable direct communication that encourages positive responses from audiences in virtual environments (Alves, 2022). It is an essential component of modern marketing that focuses on creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers through electronic communication technologies. Digital marketing relies on electronic media to promote products and services and has evolved alongside advancements in technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence. This approach allows marketers to actively engage with customers through digital platforms (Khalaf et al. 2023).

Social media has become a key tool for communication and information exchange in the digital era. It has significantly influenced business activities by enabling entrepreneurs and consumers to interact and conduct transactions online. The use of social media platforms is closely linked to purchasing behavior and business transactions. Younger individuals, particularly college students, are more likely to use social media for business purposes compared to those with higher levels of formal education (Simangunsong & Handoko, 2012). Social media also has the potential to positively influence a company's stock value, particularly when a substantial number of followers has been established.

The integration of social media initiatives into business operations, along with a focus on continuous improvement, supports the development of customer-centered processes and informed decision making (Von Scheel et al., 2015). Social media enables real-time interaction and advertising, allowing businesses to receive immediate feedback and improve customer engagement (Adejuwon & Lawal 2022; Shukla & Bohara, 2025).

This distinguishes it from traditional media, which lacks real-time communication and responsiveness (Van-Tien Dao et al., 2014). As a result, social media advertising not only expands market reach and increases sales but also strengthens relationships between businesses for both existing and potential customers.

The use of social media by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has produced mixed outcomes in terms of performance. Some studies suggest that SMEs that adopt social media may experience lower profitability compared to those that do not. In contrast, other research indicates that social media adoption positively influences business sustainability, as well as financial and non-financial performance. Factors such as cost effectiveness, customer pressure, employee competence, financial capacity, and leadership support have been identified as key drivers of social media adoption among SMEs (Amoah et al., 2023).

3. Theoretical Frameworks

This study is guided by the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Technological, Organizational, and Environmental (TOE) framework to examine both internal and external factors influencing SMEs' adoption of social media. The Technological Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), is based on the theory of reasoned action and focuses on understanding users' intentions to adopt technology. A central concept in TAM is perceived usefulness, which suggests that individuals and organizations are more likely to adopt technologies they believe will enhance performance (Ajzen, 2011). The model also emphasizes that attitudes and subjective norms shape behavioral intention toward technology use.

The Technology Adoption Framework, developed by Tornatzky (1990), is grounded in the Technological, Organizational, and Environmental (TOE) model. This framework examines technology adoption across three dimensions: technological factors, organizational characteristics, and environmental conditions. It provides a structured approach for analyzing how organizations adopt new technologies. The TOE framework has been widely applied in studies of SMEs technology adoption and also used as a model to examine other areas such as cloud computing adoption among SMEs in different regions such as the United Kingdom.

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2, adapted from Trawnih et al. (2021) and informed by the selected theoretical frameworks, was used to guide this study.

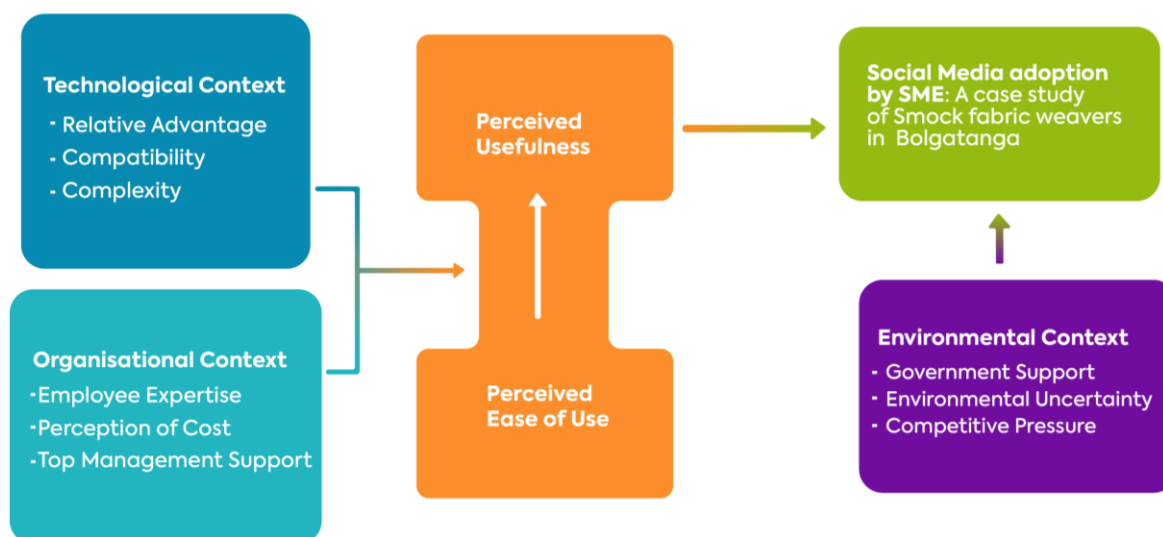


Figure 2: Conceptual Model (Source: Authors' own construct).

5. Methodology

This study adopted a constructivist research philosophy, which focuses on understanding participants' perspectives regarding the adoption of social media in their business operations. An inductive research approach was employed to enable an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and knowledge in relation to the study objectives. A qualitative research method was used, as it allows for rich and detailed insights into participants' views and practices.

The research design involved selecting a suitable sample of participants, conducting in-depth interviews, and applying qualitative techniques to collect and analyze data. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, which provided meaningful insights into participants' experiences and knowledge relevant to the study. The analysis followed three stages: reviewing interview transcripts, coding responses, and conducting thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes.

Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and adhering to institutional research guidelines.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Participants' Knowledge of the Essence of Social Media in Their Business Operations

The first objective sought to assess participants' knowledge of the role of social media in their business operations. Findings from the study showed that a significant majority ($n = 29$) were aware of social media and its influence on their business activities (see Figure 3). The results further indicated that most participants were familiar with and actively used Facebook for their business operations. In addition, a few participants mentioned using platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok to enhance sales and strengthen their online presence (See Figure 3).

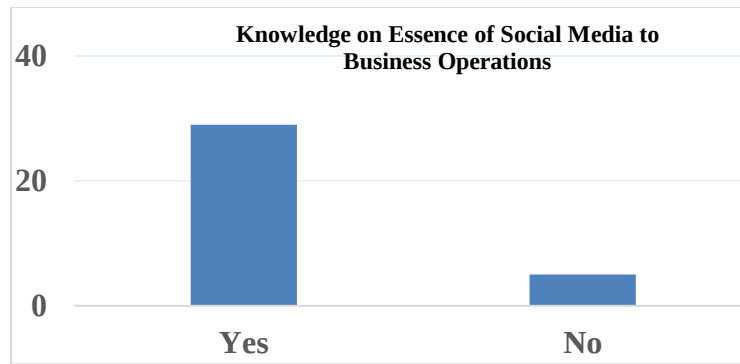


Figure 3: Smock Fabric Weavers' Knowledge of the Role of Social Media in Business Operations (Source: Field Survey [2025]).

Despite their awareness and use of a few social media platforms, it was observed that many participants had limited expertise in using these platforms to their full advantage. A small number of participants ($n = 5$) who lacked knowledge of the impact of social media on their business operations attributed this to limited or no formal education. However, they expressed willingness to adopt social media technologies to increase sales if provided with appropriate training.

"Social media is a place on the internet used to chat with old friends and also sell items" (Participant 4).

"...Social media helps me to get more work and also helps me to weave or sell my already woven clothes to people I have never met before. It has helped my business grow well. They call my phone and say they saw my clothes on Facebook, so they want to buy them" (Participant 2).

"In addition, we advertise on WhatsApp and other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok to create awareness and recognition, meet new clients, differentiate my products from others, and increase sales and income" (Participant 3).

6.2 Best Adoption and Utilization of Social Media Platforms for Business Operations

The second objective examined how social media platforms can be effectively adopted and utilized for business operations. The findings showed that all participants ($n = 34$) were willing to use social media for their business activities. This included those who were not currently using social media and those already using it but requiring additional training to maximize its benefits. Some participants ($n = 19$) indicated the need to create dedicated Facebook business pages, separate from personal accounts, as many were currently using personal profiles. This approach was seen as a way to better utilize Facebook to reach new customers (see Figure 4).

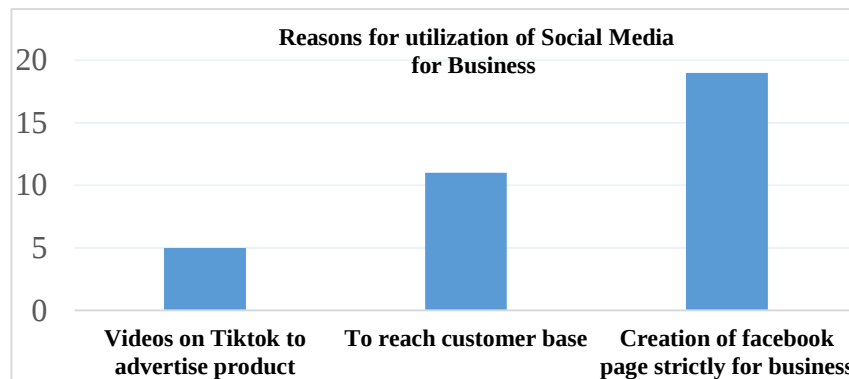


Figure 4: Use of Social Media Platforms in Business Operations (Source: Field Survey [2025]).

Some other participants ($n = 5$) also reported using videos on TikTok to promote their products, considering the platform's popularity. In addition, a group of participants who demonstrated greater knowledge of social media use for business operations

(n = 11) explained that they target customers between the ages of 20 and 55 by creating and posting content that encourages interaction. They also ensure that each post includes their location, contact details, delivery options, price, and a brief but clear caption to attract attention, which helps them gain new clients and increase sales.

"The target audience I seek to reach through social media are between 20 and 55, and I create content that they will better appreciate and engage with" (Participant 15).

"I use social media. On my business page, I post pictures of my cloth and then attach my location, contact, price of the product, and delivery mode" (Participant 23).

"Oh, for our company, we use social media a lot. We have someone in charge of that. He knows how to manage most of the platforms, so he posts pictures, videos, and creative content to advertise the smocks, including images of people wearing them. He sometimes boosts advertisements or promotions. This helps us generate a lot of sales, especially during festive seasons" (Participant 30).

Participants also described strategies used in adopting social media. Based on responses to interview questions on integration strategies, it was evident that many enterprises had already taken initial steps by creating accounts on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. Participants indicated that sharing product images, contact information, location, and prices represents the most effective content for their businesses. This view was reflected in several responses from participants.

"Oh... this one is difficult for us at the beginning, but gradually we are getting used to it. We already have an account on Instagram. We post pictures of my products, contact, location, and price" (Participant 18).

It was also evident that some participants had integrated social media into their business operations from the early stages of their businesses. Although this applied to a small number of participants, they emphasized that sharing the business name, product images, location, prices, delivery processes, and short but engaging captions is effective for reaching customers. They identified their target audience as individuals aged 20 to 55, celebrities, affluent customers, and anyone interested in looking fashionable. These participants measured the effectiveness of their social media efforts using tools such as Facebook Ads Manager and customer referrals generated through these platforms.

"Madam, for me my business is already on some social media. Even the business name, posting of products, location, prices, delivery process, and short but interesting captions. Yes, the age range is between 20 and 55 years, celebrities, the rich, and anybody who wants to look good. We normally use Facebook Ads Manager" (Participant 15).

The findings show that the majority of participants understood social media and its impact on their business operations, as reflected in the high number of respondents who actively used Facebook for their businesses. Others also mentioned using WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok to enhance sales and strengthen their online presence.

Overall, participants demonstrated a strong willingness to adopt social media for business purposes. This included creating Facebook pages and using TikTok videos to reach target audiences, as well as sharing key business information such as location, contact details, delivery options, prices, and concise product descriptions to attract new clients and increase sales.

Despite this willingness, participants faced several challenges in adopting social media for their business operations. These challenges included limited knowledge and lack of formal education on how to effectively use social media platforms, which affected their ability to communicate with customers online. Other barriers included limited understanding of analytics tools for measuring reach and performance, concerns about account security and hacking, and the high cost of data. Additional issues included difficulty remembering account details, the time required to manage social media, lack of access to smartphones, and the high cost of delivery associated with online sales.

7. Key Findings

The study revealed the following key insights:

- Although SMEs were generally aware of technology, their understanding of how to effectively use social media platforms was limited. This gap in knowledge affected their confidence and willingness to integrate social media into their daily business operations. As a result, their ability to fully benefit from these platforms remains constrained. The TAM and TOE models help explain how such limitations, despite the clear advantages of social media in today's digital business environment, can hinder adoption and effective use.
- Despite these challenges, all participants expressed a strong interest in adopting and using social media for their business operations due to its potential to provide a competitive advantage. Even in the face of barriers such as limited knowledge, cost, cybersecurity concerns, and regulatory issues related to e-commerce, participants remained open and willing to engage with social media. They recognized its potential to expand their customer base and increase profitability. This suggests that with the right training, support, and guidance, these SMEs can effectively leverage social media to strengthen and sustain their competitive position.
- The study also identified several key challenges affecting adoption. These included limited expertise and lack of awareness of the benefits and practical use of social media platforms, as well as a low level of investment in skilled social media professionals. Additional barriers included limited government support, high cost of data, cybercrime risks such as online scams, concerns about intellectual property theft, and account hacking. Addressing these challenges will significantly enhance the ability of smock fabric weavers in Bolgatanga to adopt and effectively utilize social media platforms for their business growth.

8. Conclusion

Using a qualitative research approach, this study examined the level of social media adoption and utilization among smock fabric weavers in Bolgatanga. The TAM and TOE models were applied to provide a clear framework for understanding the relationship between theory and practice within this context. The findings highlight the growing importance of technology adoption for SMEs, particularly the need to integrate social media platforms into their daily business operations. At the same time, the study brings attention to the various challenges SMEs encounter when attempting to adopt and effectively use these technologies.

The results further reinforce the critical role that social media plays in enhancing visibility, customer engagement, and business growth. However, they also reveal persistent barriers such as limited knowledge, lack of technical expertise, cost constraints, and security concerns that continue to affect adoption and usage. These findings suggest that while SMEs recognize the value of social media, there is a need for targeted support, training, and enabling environments to help them fully leverage these platforms. Overall, addressing these challenges will be essential in strengthening SMEs' capacity to adopt technology and remain competitive in an increasingly digital business landscape.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), particularly smock fabric weavers in Bolgatanga, should be supported through seminars and workshops organized by the Ghana Enterprises Agency (GEA). These programs should focus on building their capacity in the use of technology, especially social media. Structured training programs should be developed to address identified gaps, with content covering areas such as digital marketing and effective use of social media platforms for business growth.
- Institutions such as the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) could also support capacity building among smock fabric weavers by enhancing their skills in using social media to improve business efficiency, marketing, and revenue generation. These institutions could conduct needs assessments to identify the most appropriate social media platforms for the weavers. This can be achieved through methods such as focus group discussions, surveys, and interviews, to ensure that interventions are tailored to their specific needs.

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