Does Social Media use Impact Small Agribusiness Exploitation and Exploration Capability? Perspectives and Recommendations from the UT of J&K

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Abstract

For businesses functioning in complex environments where destabilizing factors are exacerbated, ambidexterity, or the ability of an organization to exploit and explore, becomes essential. Due to this, businesses are on the lookout for newer procedures that are practical both now and in the future. The utilization of digital and social media for marketing forms a subset of such practices that are contemporary yet pervasive. In fact, Whatsapp and Facebook have become the spearhead platforms for information dissemination, relationship building, and transaction handling for businesses around the globe. While considerable research provides insights into the adoption and acceptance of web technologies in different sectors, studies investigating the role of social media in developing dynamic capabilities for agribusinesses are scarce. Data inputs were drawn from 73 agribusinesses primarily using a quantitative approach and interpreted using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to address this issue. A qualitative inquiry through post-survey interviews was also used to strengthen the research outcomes. The findings pointed out that social media use results in greater exploitation over exploration capabilities in the study area. The possible reasons for this one-sided usage, such as lack of awareness and technical and human incapacities are explored, and a suggestion for developing ambidexterity is presented. The study's outcome can help small business owners, employees, and the government capitalize on the different social technology tools to their most significant advantage.

Keywords : **social media, agribusinesses, exploration capacity, exploitation capacity, ambidexterity,PLS-SEM**

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Businesses are either being forced to close or undergo transformations due to the rising complexity of operating in the current complex environment. In light of ongoing zoonotic spillovers, widespread technological adoption, and supply chain reconfigurations, it is clear that a company's long-term viability will depend on its ability to exploit its current competencies while concurrently investigating fundamentally new competencies (Pillania, 2020). In other words, firms must find a middle path between existing and innovating. While there are several ways to achieve this, the paradigm of IT-enabled business innovation or ambidexterity is the most contemporary. Specifically, digital and social media fall under the subset of activities that strategically drive present viability with future innovation (Ashurst et al., 2012). Social media can be defined as a group of internet-based applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which are underpinned by user-generated content and increased interactivity. It can be used for communication, electronic

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strategic networking, and electronic brokering (such as marketplaces) to reduce transaction costs and ensure ubiquity (Bahattin et al., 2008; Odoom et al., 2017). In addition, it can provide seamless integration for dealing with the "support vs. innovation dilemma" that businesses face, thereby adding to the organization's agility (Bedi, 2018). Statistics also show that 71% of small-to-mid-sized businesses use social media for marketing themselves, and 52% post daily on various social media platforms (Owen, 2021) to create a favorable digital value proposition. Although the nuances of social media remain uniform across all organizations, its usage and implications vary across sectors. Agri-based businesses in India are one sector that form part of a dynamic, complex environment and face challenges of information inequality and technological obsolescence (Bowen & Morris, 2019). Undoubtedly, social media tools can serve as an information conduit and supplement the promotional efforts of such businesses. The availability of more straightforward and accessible Web 2.0 technologies, particularly mobile-based ones (such as WhatsApp), has more usability with fewer constraints of personal contact and geographical space. As a result, small agribusinesses increasingly rely on them to create direct and indirect dialogues, form networks, and maintain robust engagement cost-effectively. The increased usage by product-based businesses is also supported by the fact that the channel supports information delivery about product attributes, variety, price, quality, nutrition, and food safety seamlessly, thereby supporting external information processing with internal liaison mechanisms concomitantly (Neirotti et al., 2018; Sarangi & Pattnaik, 2018). As a whole, it adds to an organization's ambidexterity and makes it easier to both exploit and explore markets to stay competitive over time.

Using these premises as the starting point, the paper aims to investigate the social media use of small and agribusinesses and explore its relevance in promoting exploitation and exploration capability. Data inputs were drawn from 73 agribusiness firms using the survey method, followed by post-survey interviews to strengthen the research outcomes and develop suggestions.

The study is relevant and novel as few studies investigate the exploitation and exploration opportunities provided by the internet revolution and Web 2.0 technologies in the Indian agribusiness context. Moreover, introducing business-savvy social media tools has attracted many laggards into the digital revolution, but insights into their implementation remain absent. Thus, the study's findings can be used to delineate effective social media practices that raise firm ambidexterity and deliver value effectively in the given context.

Review of Literature

The literature from the related fields of social media management, information systems, marketing management, and organizational ambidexterity is replete in different contexts and involves broad spectrums of exploitative and exploratory capabilities (Appiah, 2021; Kosasi et al., 2017; Mardi et al., 2018; Ngammoh et al., 2021). This phenomenon, also categorized into incremental (i.e., focus on the operational efficiency of the present) and disruptive (focus on sustained value creation for the future) innovation, or combined as ambidexterity, requires different activities and competencies (Mardi et al., 2018). Organizations cannot depend on accustomed ways of doing things for survival. Instead, a blend of dynamic capacities with structural modifications of pertinent resources is needed to ensure greater efficiency and flexibility (Helfat & Winter, 2011). In other words, it requires targeted innovation efforts at the micro-level of product development and the macro-level involving current customers, new customers, and new markets (Teubner & Stockhinger, 2020). Even though studies in the past addressed both of these through a paradoxical lens, it is evident that a healthy balance of the two can ensure core business profitability and customer value delivery concurrently (Caspin-Wagner et al., 2012; Neirotti et al., 2018). Exploitation without exploration results in obsolescence and future earnings loss.

On the other hand, too much exploration promotes a failure trap due to unrewarding research cycles and loss of economies of scale and scope (Kitapçi & Çelik, 2014; Özşahin, 2019). Thus, balancing the two, known as

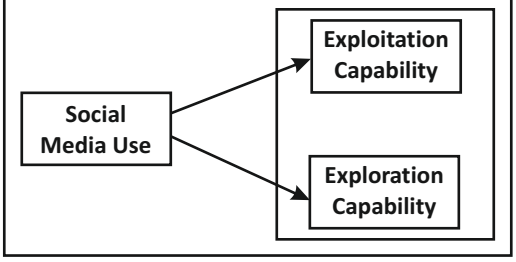
ambidexterity, is often emphasized for convenience. Ambidexterity is the ability to pursue incremental and discontinuous innovation together (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013). In other words, it refers to the organization's ability to meet current demand while exploring future possibilities. Majorly, ambidexterity can be approached either sequentially or contextually. Sequential ambidexterity is achieved through a sequential shift of structures and requires implementing conflicting strategies (explore and exploit) one after the other. Contextual ambidexterity is demonstrated through simultaneous alignment (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013). Therefore, ambidexterity is found to be positively associated with both organizational as well as marketing performance through sales growth and market value creation (Caspin-Wagner et al., 2012; Mardi et al., 2018; Peng, 2019). A careful mix of its parts improves the core business's profitability and helps reduce future risks by being proactive and flexible. This future-proofs the business and gives it a long-term competitive advantage.

While the debate over the innovative versus support dilemma (or exploration vs. exploitation) has been ongoing for some time, most investigations have focused on large businesses and corporations (Lavie et al., 2010; Özşahin, 2019). As these firms have the option of setting up separate departments and employing competent staff, optimum exploration and exploitation reap higher benefits at lower costs. However, considering the contribution of small businesses toward the growth and employment of a nation, it is safe to argue that small businesses need to be ambidextrous too. Even though literature about small business ambidexterity is relatively thin, a few studies (Arief & Paryono, 2015; Özşahin, 2019) have looked into the gaps for deeper inquiries.

A plethora of literature has approached the concept of exploitation and exploration from the perspectives of leadership, social networks, and institutional frameworks. Li (2013), for example, argued that an integrated top management team was necessary for firms to be innovative. Due to a scarcity of literature on antecedents such as technological innovation, organizational adaptation, and strategic management, in-depth investigations into emerging technologies are required. Moreover, technology can enable the development of absorptive capacity in firms, which can, in turn, lead to the development of new ideas (Joshi et al., 2010; Scuotto et al., 2017). So, the strategic use of Web 2.0 and social media is an important paradigm that needs to be pushed in the literature on organizational capability. Social media can be helpful in information dissemination, communication, and even facilitating transactions (Yadav, 2017). Previous research has elaborated on the effectiveness of social media in reconciling conflicting demands in communication (Huang et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2021; Shimpi, 2018). However, due to the expansive scope of the term, social media has been classified into collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, and social and mobile networking sites (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter). Data generated can also help track customer response to marketing campaigns, product performance, and change brand sentiment (Kaplan & Haenlien, 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Tourani, 2022). As an upgrade over traditional marketing tools, it can generate real-time insights and reduce product development costs. A well-planned social media strategy, coupled with high customer engagement capabilities, can aid the value creation process and lead to better relationship management (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020). Overall, it can positively influence the organizational ambidexterity (Arief & Paryono, 2015) of small and large businesses alike.

Resource-crunched businesses are capitalizing on such cost-saving, ubiquitous tools to find, interact with, and convert prospective buyers into loyal customers. In the agribusiness context, literature on ambidexterity typology was added by De Castro and Depositario (2020) in the case of Filipino agripreneurs, and institutional framework was explored as an antecedent of ambidexterity in Vietnamese agribusinesses by Minh and Hjortsø (2015). In the techno-centric domain, studies have extended social media functions to include shortening the agro-food supply chain (Davis, 2017). This is facilitated through active and direct customer interaction (Elghannam et al., 2019; Khasawneh, 2017). Moreover, continuous information transfer enhances the creativity-innovation cycle and generates a comprehensible customer experience (Arena et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2016). It increases income and simplifies complex transactions when used directly for sale activities. It also ensures personalized advertising and

Figure 1. *Research Framework*



customized sales, thereby reducing storage and other costs (Lipaj & Davidavičienė, 2013). This forms the basis of the first hypothesis:

↳ **Ha1 :** Social media use positively influences the exploitation capabilities of agribusinesses in the study area.

One of the significant advantages of social media is its one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many interactive abilities. For smaller firms, it not only facilitates stakeholder engagement at the micro (individuals and suppliers), meso (customers), and macro levels (society and citizens) (Mention et al., 2019), but can create digital ecosystems with nonlinear value chains (Tan et al., 2016). These can also build strong external social relationships to enhance knowledge acquisition and strengthen the sensory and product research toolbox (Carr et al., 2015; Soto-Acosta et al., 2018). For agribusiness firms, social media can play a crucial role in integrating diverse social networks, thereby balancing various hassles in complex intertwined networks (Asha Vijay & Raju, 2019). Information can be collected through surveys and contests to develop new products and distribution relations. A greater inclination to introduce contemporary marketing practices and e-commerce options can further lead to market expansion and agri-waste reduction (Kiran & Bose, 2020; Siji, 2021), product development, and promotion (Eze & Obikeze, 2017). Figure 1 depicts the research framework of the study. Therefore, the corresponding hypothesis is :

↳ **Ha2 :** Social media use positively influences the exploration capabilities of agribusinesses in the study area.

Methodology

The objective of the paper is to investigate the influence of social media adoption on the exploitation and exploration capabilities of agribusinesses. Exploitation includes items related to cost reduction, improved product quality, and improved flexibility and networking capabilities (Arief & Paryono, 2015; Riedl et al., 2013). For exploration, accessibility to new markets, introducing new product ranges, entering e-commerce, and faster discovery of customer wants were included (He & Wong, 2004; Lubatkin et al., 2006; Pertusa-Ortega & Molina-Azorín, 2018). For the study, agribusinesses engaged in the agri-value chain formed the population, and a mixed-method approach was utilized to analyze the data. A survey technique was used to collect data inputs quantitatively, and further insights on the reasons and suggestions were elucidated qualitatively. The constructs of the research model were developed following an extensive literature review of relevant theoretical backgrounds and studies. A total of 12 items were generated. This was evaluated by eminent academicians with research interests in the study area. Based on the feedback, the items were further modified and deleted. The online survey asked respondents about their experiences using instant messaging or social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc., along with eight statements for exploitation and exploration.

The sample for the data collection covered agri-product processors, traders, wholesalers, and retailers in the region of Jammu city with internet access. The data were collected over three months (February – May 2021), and 80 firms responded. From this, responses from 73 firms were found to be complete and included in the data

analysis. A 5 - point Likert scale was used, where 1 = *strongly disagree* (SD) and 5 = *strongly agree* (SA). Social media use was measured through reported usage on a scale, where 1 = "*never"* and 5 = *"always."* Finally, data were analyzed using SPSS and PLS due to their suitability for small samples with mixed constructs. The reliability values are provided in Table 3. As the study used a mix of methods, post-survey interviews were used to learn more about the results of the quantitative analysis.

Analysis and Results

The sample for the data collection was first analyzed using descriptive statistics. In terms of size, the majority of the firms (35%) were small (capital investment > 25 lakhs = 5 crores), followed by micro (28.7%) and medium and large businesses (17.8%).

Regarding technology infrastructure, most firms owned a desktop computer and a smartphone (45.2%), but a significant portion of owner-managers reported having only a smartphone (54.7%). Summary information from the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. ***Sample Characteristics***

Measure	Category	Frequency	Percent
Nature of Activity	Processing	35	47.94
	Trading	38	52.06
Investment	Less than 25 lakhs	21	28.76
	25 lakhs – 5 crores	26	35.61
	5 crores – 10 crores	13	17.80
	More than 10 crores	13	17.80
Scope of Business	Only Local	34	46.57
	National	29	39.72
	International	10	13.69
Target Buyers	B2B	38	52.05
	B2B and B2C	35	47.94
Years of Operation	Less than 10 years	20	27.39
	10 – 20 years	14	19.17
	20 – 30 years	13	17.80
	30 – 40 years	11	15.06
	More than 40 years	15	20.54
IT Infrastructure	Desktop, laptops, computers,	33	45.20
	Only smartphones	40	54.79
Type of Internet Connection	Broadband	33	45.20
	Only Mobile Internet	40	54.79
Website	No	53	72.60
	Yes	20	27.39
If yes,			
Whether	Yes	18	90
IT outsourced	No	2	10

Table 2. ***Mean Usage of Social Media Tools***

Statement	Mean
We use WhatsApp for our business dealings.	3.96
We use social media such as Facebook for our business dealings.	2.98

The findings show that small businesses use social media tools and follow an overlapping pattern, with many businesses only relying on mobile social media applications such as WhatsApp to send and receive inquiries, quotations, and product pictures. As it supports one-to-one and one-to-many interactions through personal windows and group creations, it aids quick media transfer around the globe at no additional cost (Table 2).

To test and validate the framework developed from the extensive literature review, partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using Smart PLS 3. Additionally, the suggestion of Tzempelikos et al. (2019) to utilize the covariance-based SEM rather than the maximum likelihood SEM for evaluating the model fit in organizational and marketing management was taken into consideration. Analysis was conducted using both the measurement and the structural model (Hair et al., 2017).

Measurement Model

The measurement model is the first step toward model assessment and involves the assessment of the reliability and validity of the constructs under study. The reliability and validity of the constructs in the measurement model were subjected to factor and reliability analysis. For the reflective measurement model, the guidelines provided by Hair Jr. et al. (2013) were followed to examine the construct reliability and convergent, discriminant validity reported a minimum of 0.40 (Table 3) as a guideline for checking indicator reliability. Therefore, all the indicators of the latent variables used are reliable as they exceed the minimum value required for individual indicator reliability. The indicator loadings for all reflective constructs were above 0.708 (Hair Jr. et al., 2013), indicating that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance. Therefore, all items above 0.6 are taken as given in Table 3.

Composite reliability is used for examining the internal consistency reliability (value > 0.6) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2012).

Previous studies (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2012) have insisted researchers use composite reliability for examining internal consistency reliability. The minimum acceptable value for establishing internal consistency

Table 3. ***Cross-Loadings***

Statements	Exploitation	Exploration
Reduces cost of local and international marketing	0.831	
Networking and collaboration with suppliers/ partners	0.808	
Flexible for use	0.741	
Improves product quality	0.617	
Accessibility to new markets		0.730
Tool for research and product development		0.716
Means to enter e-commerce		0.752
Faster discovery of customer needs		0.585

reliability is 0.6, and the preferred level is 0.7 or higher value of composite reliability in PLS-SEM. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores were taken to establish internal reliability. The results are satisfactory, with all composite reliability scores >.70 (Table 4). Convergent validity implies the degree to which a measure shows convergence or divergence with other measures of the same construct and is indicated by the AVE scores being equal to or greater than 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair Jr. et al., 2016) or inspection of the composite reliability to be > or equal to the 0.70 cut off. Lastly, the discriminant reliability is checked, wherein the AVE for each construct extracted is higher than the squared correlation between the construct and other constructs. Based on the recommendation of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of the AVE of the model's constructs can be utilized to examine the discriminant validity. Their suggestion highlights the importance of getting the square root of AVE higher than the other correlation values among the latent factors. In bold font, Table 5 shows the square root of AVE and the other correlation values between the latent variables.

Structural Model

With respect to the structural model, the significance of the path coefficient was evaluated to ascertain the explanatory power. Bootstrapping with 1,000 bootstraps was used to determine the stability of estimates. It is also used to measure the *t*-value and beta coefficient of the variables, thereby establishing strength and validity between the connecting variables.

Table 4. ***Reliability Measures of the First-Order Latent Variables***

Construct	Item	CR	AVE
Social Media Use	2	1	1
Exploitation	4	0.845	0.580
Exploration	4	0.781	0.631

Table 5. ***Fornell–Larcker Criterion Analysis***

	Exploit	Explore	Social Media Use
Exploit	0.756		
Explore	0.494	0.742	
Social Media Use	0.086	0.177	1.00

Table 6. ***Path Coefficients and Results***

	Original Sample (O)	*T* Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p* - values	Result
Social Media Use > Exploitation (Ha1)	0.470	5.648	0.000*	Supported
Social Media Use > Exploration (Ha2)	0.161	1.143	0.253	Not supported

Note. *Significant at the 0.05 level.

Discussion

The hypothesis that social media usage is positively related to exploitative capability is supported (H1a), while the hypothesis that social media usage is positively related to explorative capability (H1b) is rejected (Table 6). This contrasts with the findings of Ashurst et al. (2012), wherein social media contributes to both capabilities together.

The findings show that a higher influence of social media for exploiting the present opportunities is prevalent in the study area. In other words, it brings forth the role of Web 2.0 technologies in promoting overall efficiency by saving direct and indirect communication costs. However, no significant influence on exploration or innovative abilities is evident from the fact that owner-managers still utilize social media to meet essential requirements in the Indian context. In other words, they are just "being present" in the digital arena without having to capitalize or "change" the existing norms (Brodie et al., 2007; Tomar, 2017). Social media plays an important role in e-commerce adoption and the development of new products. Yet, agribusinesses in developing countries such as India are slow to jump on the bandwagon (Derham et al., 2011). This could be because they have an innate preference for relying on their experience and trusted R&D mechanisms for product development. Also, using social media data for innovation requires actively monitoring, processing, and analyzing content, which some businesses may not be able to do. From the sectoral limelight, agribusinesses have been characterized by a lack of digital and infrastructure access and social media engagement. Subsequently, a passive approach to growth opportunities is evident (Bowen & Morris, 2019). The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the post-survey interviews:

- Changing attitudes of the key stakeholders through awareness creation, mandatory training and skill development as well as recognition and incentives.
- Developing technological infrastructure including hardware, software, and communication technologies with easy accessibility and low cost.
- Promoting hands-on knowledge of Web 2.0 for innovation so firms can effectively balance exploration and exploitation through capable leadership and skilled human resources. Hence, the government and associations should work to give the owner-manager hands-on experience with Web 2.0 technologies, like how to use WhatsApp for payments or Facebook to get information.
- Creating a policy and legal framework requires stringent and consistent policy guidelines to drive e-business adoption at the grassroots level. It also includes stricter privacy and security laws to ensure better transparency.
- Outsourcing e-commerce and complex functions to specialists can offer long-term cost advantages for small businesses (Hilal, 2019). It can also help firms function more professionally while making informed decisions. This requires all businesses, industry associations, government agencies, IT service employees, and outsourcing agencies to be adequately trained in building strategic e-business solutions customized according to the type of agribusiness.

Managerial and Theoretical Implications

This study adds to our understanding of social media adoption and its usage for exploitation and exploration in the context of small agribusiness. It incorporates the suggestions of Mardi et al. (2018) and Martini et al. (2013) to explore the role of ICT and social media in promoting ambidexterity. The findings of this research reduce the controversy and inconsistency regarding the relationship between social media use and the dimensions of ambidexterity. Moreover, Huang et al. (2015) claimed that the social networks inside and outside the firm could serve managers with a large amount of data that can be synthesized to attain knowledge. This knowledge can be the

foundation for solving the support vs. innovative dilemma by integrating both. Therefore, the research results bring together multiple perspectives under a common ambit and highlight the endpoints hindering the growth of disruptive power. The owners of agribusinesses can do feasibility studies on how their businesses are expected to perform and use both the efficiency and creativity of simpler technologies.

Conclusion

The study focuses on understanding the use of digital marketing tools such as social media by agribusinesses in India. Modeling organizational ambidexterity as a multidimensional construct is a practical approach to studying the complementary relations between the two prominent constructs. The findings will aid in understanding current technology usage and identify the future potential of innovative social media functions.

Limitations of Study and Scope for Future Research

The study is limited as it is a work in progress and considers a small sample of data from self-reported assessments. Even though it abides by the recommendations of Pertusa - Ortega and Molina - Azorin (2018) to examine the micro-foundations of organizational ambidexterity through the lens of individual role or perceptual analysis, it partakes of a narrow view of ambidexterity. Another limitation is the common method bias, as the independent and dependent data were collected from the same respondents. The future part of the study can include intermediate variables such as absorptive capability, network externalities, and outcome variables such as marketing performance and firm performance. Using contemporary mediating variables, it can also explore ambidexterity in different industries and contexts. Comparative studies between other sectors can also be conducted to understand innovation ambidexterity better.

Authors' Contribution

The research paper forms a modified part of the thesis work by Avantika Bakshi (SRF), under the guidance of Prof. Vinay Chauhan, The Business School, University of Jammu. The authors extracted research papers with high repute for conducting the literature review, collected data, and analyzed it to present meaningful findings. The manuscript was written by Avantika Bakshi and modified in consultation with the second author.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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