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Factors Influencing Sales Performance among SMEs in Malaysia: Online Platforms Adoption as Mediating Factor

Muhammad Ameer Syafiq Bin Mohamad Nizam¹, Dr Yasmin Kamall Khan^{2*}, Dr Nur Atiqah Rochin Demong³

¹ Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam

² Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam

³ Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam

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ABSTRACT

Sales performance is important for businesses to measure the company's conditions either to grow or sustain in the market. Among the technological landscape, there remain key challenges for businesses to understand the factors that drive sales performance. This study seeks to uncover the retail sector, among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. This study integrates two theories, Technology-Organization-Environment (T-O-E) as the basis of the framework and Attention-Based View (ABV) as a theory supporting it. The framework suggested sales performance as a dependent variable and online platform adoption as a mediator. The key factors in this research will cover perceived compatibility, relative advantages, perceived cost, top management support, and government support that is based on T-O-E framework. Focusing on the retail sector, this conceptual paper provides a deeper understanding of the adoption processes and offers actionable insights to enhance sales performance through technological integration. Adoption of quantitative research methods with a sample size of 384, determined by using the Krejcie and Morgan table with a specific retail industry in Malaysia. The data of this research are based on sources by government agencies specifically through SME Corp Malaysia, Malaysia Corporative and Cooperative Entrepreneur Development (MECD) and Malaysia Digital Economic (MDEC). Furthermore, questionnaires also are distributed among employees and employer among SMEs for collection data. Data will be measured through SmartPLS software (Partial Least Squares Equation Modelling) to determine direct and indirect mediating relationships. These studies provide insight into SMEs in Malaysia and highlight the importance of adopting online platforms into the business and propose a new landscape towards stakeholders in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can be defined as business with limitation of resources such as revenue, assets or employees. In Malaysia, SMEs can be categorized into two types which are manufacturing with less than (15 million turnover and 75 employees) small, (50 million turnover and 200 employees) medium and services and other consist of (3 million turnover and 30 employees) small and (20 million turnover and 75 employees) mediums according to (SME Corp, 2023). Small and medium

^{2*} Corresponding author. yasmin@uitm.edu.my

enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the economy for Malaysia with accounting for 96.9% of business are SMEs itself, 38.2% of GDP are from SMEs and providing 7.3 million of jobs to Malaysia according to (SME Corp, 2024). As well as 84.7% of SMEs, are from service sector which major of SMEs in Malaysia highlight by (SME Corp, 2024). Service sectors consist of wholesale, retail trade and services, textiles, foods, and beverages and many more. However, with rapid changes around us, SMEs should adapt to technological advancements. But, how currently to evaluate business digital adoption and the number of online platform penetration in Malaysia.

Previous studies by (Amoah et al., 2023; Kechik et al., 2023; L. W. Wong et al., 2020) highlight several factors of limitation faced by SMEs affect sales performance in Malaysia. According to L. W. Wong et al. (2020), the limitation of Malaysia SMEs is resource constraint, limited financial resources, high operational cost, lack of digital skills and limited trialability. These challenges hinder SMEs ability to growth their sales in the market. Additionally, the hinder of implementation of innovative sales approach is by insufficient top management support and resistance culture in the organization to take changes. With implementing online platforms adoption in the business, it offers market expanding reach and improves sales efficiency in line with (Luz, 2025). According to Hokmabadi et al. (2024), to integrate with existing systems and risk faces by SMEs to disrupt traditional operations, many SMEs struggle to implement online platforms even it offers better sales and expand market in the business.

Online platform adoption involves integrating new tools into an organization to enhance productivity and efficiency, especially sales performance for the company. Key elements in this research based on T-O-E frameworks are Technology-perceived compatibility and relative advantage, Organization- perceived cost and top management support and Environment- government support. These factors influence the decision to online platform adoption and its successful implementation by performance of their sales according to (Wasudawan et al., 2024). The importance of online platform adoption lies in its ability to enhance sales performance by improving competitiveness, increasing operational efficiency, and fostering greater customer engagement.

This research seeks to uncover gaps which is factors influencing sales of company by integrating online platforms adoption among SMEs through specific industry particularly retail sector according to Winnie (Wasudawan & Sim, 2024; Winnie Wong et al., 2023). There are many studies regarding the manufacturing sector (e.g, Low et al., 2022; Muhamad et al., 2021; A. P. H. Wong & Kee, 2022; L. W. Wong et al., 2020) compared to the retail-service sector that contributes biggest number of SMEs based on Table 1: Number of SMEs by sector. As a result, the retail sector is still underexplored as reported by (Koe & Afifah Sakir, 2020; Roszi Naszariah Nasni Naseri et al., 2021). Table 2 the number of SMEs shows that retail trade contributes 65% of the service sector, which still remain underexplored.

Table 1: Number of SMEs by sector

Sector	Number of SMEs	Percentage (%)
Service	994,350	84.7
Construction	92,924	7.9
Manufacturing	65,657	5.6

Table 2: Composition Of SMEs for service sector

Services Sector	Percentage (%)	Services Sector
Wholesale & retail trade, food & beverages and accommodation	65.6	Wholesale & retail trade, food & beverages and accommodation
Finance, insurance, real estate and business service	18.5	Finance, insurance, real estate and business service
Transportation & storage and information & communication	10.1	Transportation & storage and information & communication

Additionally, most studies have been looking in developed countries, which different cultures and challenges compared to developing countries like Malaysia referring to (Beier et al., 2016; Solomon et al., 2023). Along with it, previous studies used T-O-E frameworks as their main theory, for instance, (Eze et al., 2021; Qalati et al., 2022) but this study used T-O-E frameworks and ABV theory. Hence, this study extends by looking performance of company focusing on sales performance as dependent variables and technology adoption (online platforms adoption) as mediator combining between T-O-E framework and ABV theory. (Shanmugam et al., 2021) also stated that the role online platforms are still inadequate in the academy. By combine, ABV theory and T-O-E frameworks and focusing on retail-service sector among SMEs in Malaysia, these study seeks to understand on impacts of sales performance by adopting online platforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sales Performance

Sales performance in this research examines the effectiveness of sales if online platform adopts in SMEs. Several studies have identified range of factors that could affects sales performance. Research by Chawla et al. (2020), determines sales by highlighting the importance of technology, support work related and strategic activities. Chawla et al. (2020), also said that sales environment has changes than the few last decade due to the changes in technology, competition and consumer preference. Changes in sales is not caused by individual abilities but significantly influence by organization support and market conditions. Yulisa et al. (2022) indicates that aids in refining marketing strategies and product innovation through customer loyalty and provide valuable feedback. Key strategy to enhance sales is through adoption of online platforms as effective sales performance in Malaysia.

2.2 Adoption of online platforms in Malaysia

The adoption of online platforms has been important technology especially for SMEs today. Online platform important since it offers to the SMEs operation efficiency, market reach and the performance of

the business. With online platform, SMEs can reach unlimited potential of customers. Online platform can reach unlimited geographic, which SMEs can reach customer with unlimited potential of customers. Research by Shanmugam et al.,(2021), indicates that SMEs that leverage with online platform such as e-commerce and social media can increase visibility and customer engagement which effects to high volume of sales. Additionally, SMEs can be efficiently when business applied customer relationship management (CRM), sales tracking and inventory management according to (Faiz, 2023).

2.3 Perceived Compatibility

Perceived compatibility can be defined as the innovation with existing values. In the context of SMEs, perceived compatibility can be applied when the owner of the business willing to implement new technologies which is online platforms from traditional operations. Research indicates when SMEs perceive technology into SMEs compatible by their current business operation, SMEs tendence to adopt high into their business operation. A study by Shanmugam et al.,(2021), found that online platforms gain between 26% to 60% higher productivity gains when they adopt technology into their business. Conversely, SMEs faces difficulty to achieve sales improvement when they remain traditional method. Research by (Kechik et al., 2023; Qalati, Yuan, et al., 2021), found that SMEs may faces difficult to integrate new system which online platforms with existing methods of operations. Kechik et al. (2023) found that these problems cause by SMEs faces lack of infrastructure to adopt online platforms which led to operation insufficient to adopt online platforms. Thus, this gaps important which SMEs need to have target intervention from new technologies and infrastructure to ensure smooth transition for SMEs to turn digitalization.

2.4 Relative Advantage

Relative advantage can be defined as the degree which new technology is better than the solution it replaces. Research by (Razali et al., 2018; Shanmugam et al., 2021), shows that Malaysian SMEs realized with the potential benefit when they adopt online platforms such as market sales and improved operational efficiency. For instance, business that utilizing e-commerce tendence in high of sales performance due to the great accessibility to customer and streamline operations. A lot of SMEs, underutilize digital tools for simple tasks rather than completely incorporating them into the business operations. This underutilization may leave them to perform in sales business. Carried out by Razali et al. (2018), SMEs not fully utilize online platforms compared to large companies. This lacks opportunity hinders SMEs to utilize their sources which it could perform overall business.

2.5 Perceived Cost

Perceived cost refers to the financial implications when the business adopts with new technologies. In terms of business cost could be in shape of investments, training and maintenance. A survey SME Corp (2023), finance is one of the barriers that SMEs faces to adopt new technologies due to the high cost. The perception led to underinvestment in digital business that enhance sales performance. The perception by SMEs led to underinvestment towards sources that can helps their business such as online platforms markets. Underinvestment towards digital business hinder business to growth especially with today technology play a crucial role in customer engagement and operation efficiency. According to Kechik et al. (2023), many SMEs operate their business with tight budget due limitation of cost in their business. To adopt online platforms, SMEs has limited worker skills and financial for utilize online platforms. This gaps indicates that there are need to invention for SMEs to integrate financial and skills problems to ensure SMEs can utilize benefits of digitalization.

2.6 Top management Support

Top management support is the crucial role for technology to adopt into the business. With leadership commitment adoption of online platforms will contribute innovation and embraces to the SMEs. Research by SME Corp (2023), indicates that many SMEs in Malaysia lack to implement adoption of online platforms which affects their ability to implement online sales strategies. Previous research by Amoah et al. (2023), indicates that leaders are the person that influences to adopt online platforms into organizations by determining resources in the company. The study conducted by Amoah et al. (2023), also indicates that top management has capabilities to make decisions. The strong relationship between top management is vital for encouraging adoption environment and encourage SMEs. Investigated by Amoah et al. (2023), found gaps in this variable which there are inconsistent support, there are not all SMEs has consistent support from top management to adopt online platforms into the business.

2.7 Government Support

Government support is important for SMEs to adopt online platforms into their business. Under Government several initiatives for SMEs have been introduced to helps SMEs in terms of cost for implement technology adoption. Government also helps in terms of skill and developments under agencies such as Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), which this agencies helps SMEs in terms of empower for digital business and helps Malaysia with model of digital economy. However, with grants and initiatives by government to helps SMEs in digitalization their business, research by (Priya Terumalay, 2024), indicates that only 32% of respondents aware of this initiative by the government.

This study adopts two theories as this underpinning theories which are, Technology-Organization-Environment (T-O-E) frameworks and Attention Based View (ABV) Framework for examine factors influence adoption of technology among SMEs in Malaysia. T-O-E framework developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) classified three dimensions which are Technology, Organization and Environment in their theory. William Ocasio (1997) was introduced ABV arguing that firm behaviour result by allocation of resources and attention by firm. In this study, to see how SMEs adapt technology into their business, ABV helps to explain how business allocate focus and resources towards online platforms and improve sales performance.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Integrating the Attention Based View (ABV) theory provides additional insight into these study especially in the strategic role of business to adopt online platforms and enhance sales performance in this study. ABV stands as drives as attention allocation their resources to adopt online platforms into their business and how businesses manage their outcomes which in this research context is sales performance. Through integrating in this research T-O-E will focus on how factors that influence meanwhile, ABV explains on decision making and actions to distribute allocation (perceived compatibility, relative advantage, perceived cost, top management support and government support) towards limited resources (online platforms adoption) with impacts of the business (sales performance) as prescribed by Figure 1 Conceptual Framework.

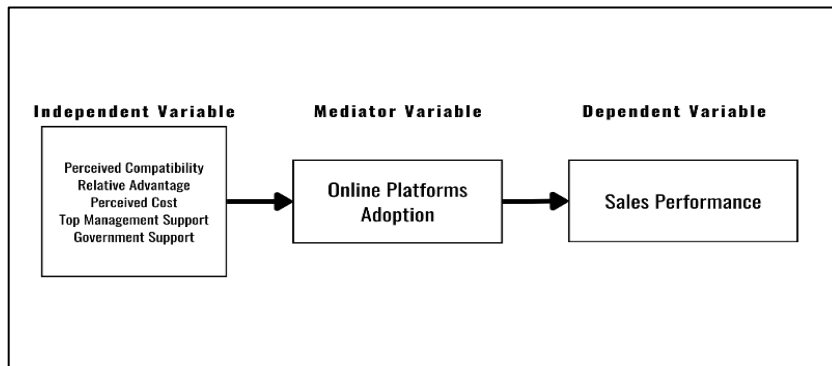


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Compatibility plays a crucial role in changes SMEs from traditional methods to adopt new technologies in their business and operations. Shanmugam et al., (2021), indicates that SMEs gain 26% to 60% when SMEs trying compatibility with new technologies into their business. Alkateeb & Abdalla, (2021); Shanmugam et al., (2021) also shows that perceived compatibility is strong significance influencing adoption online platforms towards sales performance. But, according to (Kechik et al., 2023; Qalati, Li, et al., 2021), challenges arise when SMEs faces barriers such as infrastructure and integration difficulties which lead to slower or failure transitions of digitalization towards the business. Kechik et al. (2023) argue that SMEs that prioritize with compatibility may hinder SMEs from exploration of solutions. Thus, there is a significant positive relationship between perceived compatibility on adoption online platform and sales performance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Relative advantage refers to the new technology that replaced traditional or already technology to improves the business. When SMEs adopted online platforms, new technologies offer with increased in market reach, increase sales performance and streamlined operations by (Razali et al., 2018; Shanmugam et al., 2021). By utilizing online platform such as e-commerce, SMEs can gain higher sales of volume, better engagement with customer and maximize operation efficiency according to (Razali et al., 2018). However, many SMEs in Malaysia especially still not using online platform to benefits the platform maximization which consequences could not help their sales performance. Mairura (2016), mentioned that SMEs still not using online platform as useful platforms compared to large companies which hinder them from utilize their sources of business. SMEs are recognized with relative advantage of online platform to enhance their sales performance can gain opportunities and beneficial with online platforms. Research by C. Low et al. (2011), relative is less significant unless with support by top management. C. Low et al. (2011) indicates in certain industry relative may be irrelevant to implement in the business. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between perceived relative advantage and sales performance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Perceived cost can be defined as financial burden that SMEs should associated with regarding to implementation of new technologies. SME Corp (2023) indicates that cost is one of the barriers for SMEs to adopt new technologies especially online platforms. Cost to adopt online platform which required many cost could be burden for SMEs especially when they face limited with resources to operate the business. Kechik et al. (2023) found that SMEs faces with tight budget, limited to invest in skill workers and technology infrastructure are elements causes to higher cost to implement online platform in the business. This underinvestment by SMEs limits their ability to utilize online platforms into their business as mentioned by (Kechik et al., 2023). Despite of cost as factors for SMEs to adopt new technologies as significant barriers, there are past research indicates that cost could not be major influence for adopting new technologies into the business. Research by Zhou et al. (2023), indicates that cost could be more than affects

towards sales performance, even though cost is the critical factors however cost may not be the most critical factor in decision making. Research by Naeher (2022), also indicates that cost could not affects top management to implements new technologies, but top management itself is the factors for SMEs to adopt online platforms into the business and at the end affects sales performance. Therefore, there is significant relationship between perceived cost and sales performance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Top management support can be defined as a commitment by organization to facilitate and involve in the adoption of new technology into the business. Top management plays a crucial role in the adoption process, which their role is to allocate the resources and making strategies on how to utilize in the business. Research by SME Corp (2023), many Malaysian especially SMEs failed to implement online platform due to the unsupported by top management. Previous studies by Amoah et al. (2023), found that top management plays a crucial in facilitating, allocated the resources and maximize it. Amoah et al. (2023), also found that inconsistent by top management to facilitate their resources which come to challenges for the business to implement and gain beneficial from online platform by boosting their sales performance. Research such as (Prokop & Hajek, 2023; Scott Stiver, 2021) indicates that top management effectively effect sales performance. In other context, top management may not be the factors that affects sales performance, but it is because of the inside culture by the business itself. In the context of culture and organization, research by (Adele Crane, 2024; Hasan et al., 2015) indicates that employee that motivate will influence top management. According to Hasan et al. (2015), contextual outside the business may influence top management to implements in the business. Hence, strong support from top management positively influences sales performances in Malaysian SMEs.

Government support can be included with policies by government such as initiatives, grants and programs by purpose to encourage and support SMEs to adopt online platform. Government usually serves financial assistant, training program and infrastructure to support SMEs. Agencies such as Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) serves as agencies that facilitate and support SMEs for business digitalization. MDEC also support SMEs to lead Malaysia's digital economy. Research by, indicates only 32% of respondent are well known initiatives and supports by government. Limited awareness especially by SMEs may hinder them to utilize support by government and less exposure towards SMEs on adoption of online platforms and ultimately sales performance. Several studies such as (Ismail & Othman, 2014; Mary Hall, 2024; Songling et al., 2018) support that government support may help in terms of policies, incentives and training but there is no evidence that government helps SMEs in terms of improve in their sales performance. Research by, Ismail & Othman (2014) found that government support may help in terms of business growth, but sales performance remains questionable. Thereby, government support significantly enhances sales performance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Online platform is important for businesses today as tools for businesses to operates which this platform provides such as market accessibility, customer relationship management (CRM) to the businesses, and as a part of sales to the businesses as stated by (Kate Gibson, 2024). SMEs can gain beneficial with adoption online platform by enhance their sales performance. SMEs also can reach wide of customer engagement without limitation by geography. However, despite of the benefits of online platforms, there are past research indicates online platforms does not influence towards sales performance. Research by (Barbu et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020) found that online platforms are not set to influence in all set of form to influence sales performance. Meanwhile, according to SME Corp (2023), business that adopt with online platforms can improved their sales performance. Prior studies by (Igwe & Sunny R, 2020; Kai Wen & Anisah Atan, 2021; Qalati, Yuan, et al., 2021), if business adopting online platforms, they can reduce cost which impacts towards SMEs with competitive pricing and reinvest saving to marketing efforts. Prior research by Kai Wen & Anisah Atan (2021), indicates that SMEs engaging with online platform experience to have boost in their productivity gains, which turn to better sales performance. Thus, T-O-E framework has positively associated with sales performance mediated by online platforms adoption.

3. Research Methodology

The proposed research will adopt quantitative research method with a purpose to understand the comprehensive of factors influencing sales performance. Quantitative research approach is to measure and analyse numerical data statistically and ensuring objective and statistic are valid. The data also will use cross-sectional survey for collect data in a single period of time. The purpose of use cross sectional data is to ensure collection data in a single point could be a snapshot regarding implementation of online platforms adoption among SMEs that effect their sales performance. The population of this data are based on SMEs specifically using online platforms into their business and retail-service sector as the focus sector to study.

3.1 Population and sample selection

To ensure equal chance of selection and minimizing bias, a simple random sampling technique is applied to ensure every SMEs has equal chance of selection. By using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) Table, the sample size of 382 SMEs has been determined to ensure statistical adequacy for generalizing the findings. With a number of 994,350 business owners in service sector in Malaysia, the service sector is a backbone of economy and technology advancement Malaysia. Quantitative research method purposely develop data and collect data through SMEs Corp, Human Resource Development (HRD) Corp, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE). The data will be gathered through a questionnaire that will be distributed through workshop by government agencies and among participants that involve in service sector specifically retail industry.

Primary and secondary data are sources of data that been used through this study. A structure questionnaire will be developed which used as primary data. Secondary data in this study based on literature, statistical report from SME Corp, Department of Statistic Malaysia (DOSM) and MDEC. A questionnaire will be developed based on past studies (e.g. Qalati et al., 2022; Razali et al., 2018; Yulisa et al., 2022; Kai Wen & Anisah Atan, 2021; Winnie Wong et al., 2023; Yulisa et al. ,2022; Faiz, 2023; Sakrabani & Teoh, 2020; Wasudawan & Sim, 2024 and Costa & Castro, 2021). Five likert-scale questions will be measuring all the variables including dependent variable sales performance, mediator variable online platforms adoption and independent variables (perceived compatibility, relative advantage, perceived cost, top management support and government support).

3.2 Research Design

The questionnaire is based on existing literature and validate scales being measured. Before full deployments, a pilot test will be conducted among small groups of SMEs to ensure the clarity and reliability of data collection. Among participants the data will be collect through workshop that has been conducted by SEM Corp, MEDC and MDEC. When collection of data is complete, the data will be analysed by using statistical software such as SPSS 26. To summarize the demographic of the respondent and provide overview of the perception regarding online platforms adoption, descriptive statistic will summarize it. Normality will used as parametric statistical test such as Regression analysis, ANOVA, and T-test. Linearity test in this study used as to determine straight line between independent and dependent variables in a study. A linear test can determine the relationship between both variables as explained by (Intellectus Consulting, 2024). Regression analysis used as to test the hypothesis relationship between variables and

sales performance with mediating online platforms. Reliability analysis in this study used as for measure consistency and stability

Mediator and SmartPLS software (Partial Least Squares Equation Modelling) will be used as structural model for this study. The mediator in this study (online platforms adoption) act as between independent variables (Technology-perceived compatibility and relative advantage, Organization- perceived cost and top management support, Environment- government support) and dependent variables (Sales performance). Software that used for analysing complex relationships in this study which can be used as independent, dependent and mediator are SmartPLS software (Partial Least Squares Equation Modelling). SmartPLS focuses on variance-based modelling which different between Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS). SmartPLS can be used as direct, indirect and total effects while testing mediator in other to generate mediating effect in purpose to get the result mediating effect through bootstrapping. To help interpret the relationship between variables SmartPLS provides path coefficients, R², and effect sizes (f²).

4. Conclusion

SMEs in Malaysia are backbone of Malaysia's economy contribute towards GDP , employment and business opportunities towards Malaysian. However, to adopt new technologies in the context online platforms, SMEs faces several challenges which crucial for business to performance operation efficiently and enhance sales performance. This study seeks to explores the factors influencing sales performance by adopting online platform focus on service-retail sector which remain underexplored compared to the manufacturing sector. This research provides a comprehensive to understand Technological, Organization and Environmental (T-O-E) framework and the Attention Based View (ABV) theory that drives online platform adoption and impacts towards sales performance. SMEs can enhance sales performance by contribute by contribute towards economy and ensure long term sustainability if they can address barriers to adopt and leverage beneficial of technology. Future research should role of emerging technologies in further driving SMEs growth and innovation and focus on exploring other sector in Malaysia.

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