

# Twenty years of social media marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework, and future research agenda

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## Abstract

Social media has been around for 20 years and has profoundly affected the dynamics of interactions between companies and customers. Studies have increasingly focused on how firms effectively use social media in their marketing strategies. However, the literature appears highly fragmented. Scholars have tended to investigate individual facets of social media marketing (SMM) behaviours, adopting a narrow perspective on their antecedents and outcomes. This approach hinders a comprehensive understanding of the overall phenomenon. Against this background, we conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of 169 articles to develop a causal-chain framework based on inputs, contingency factors, and outputs to illustrate the interrelationships among different research constructs explored so far. This framework contributes to overcoming the isolated perspectives of firms' SMM that have characterized the extant knowledge, thus offering clarity and an overarching view of SMM in firms. The findings also provide concrete guidance for future research endeavours in this area.

## INTRODUCTION

Twenty years have passed since the integration of social media into people's everyday lives. Since its emergence in the early 2000s, social media has profoundly altered the way people communicate, interact, seek information, and make decisions. Defined as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), social media has been extensively applied in marketing practices. Social media platforms empower marketers to potentially connect with billions of customers, enhance visibility, and create positive word-of-mouth (Luo et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). Even today, social media remains a pervasive influence on various aspects

of users' lives and behaviours across all stages of customers' journey, thus impacting customers' relationships with organizations and brands (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Penttinen, 2023).

The increasing importance of social media platforms has attracted academic attention, resulting in a consistent increase in the number of articles published yearly across various fields such as marketing, management, consumer psychology, and computer science (Aral et al., 2013). While much of the research on social media predominantly addresses the user-consumer perspective (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022), academics emphasize the importance of expanding beyond the exclusive focus on customer use to investigate how firms employ these tools in their marketing strategies (Alves et al., 2016; Felix et al., 2017). However, a consensus on the understanding of the

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phenomenon has been elusive among scholars, leaving the boundaries of social media marketing (SMM) ambiguous. Initially perceived as a subset of online marketing activities primarily geared toward promoting a company (Akar & Topçu, 2011), the concept of SMM evolved as companies began to use social media strategically (e.g., Li et al., 2021). Thus, SMM is defined as an ‘interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders’ (Felix et al., 2017, p. 123). This definition—albeit broad—entails the need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of SMM from the perspective of the firm.

Although there are studies that have explored how firms effectively and strategically use social media for marketing purposes (e.g., de Vries et al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Ortega-Gutiérrez et al., 2021), they have focused on highly diverse areas (e.g., firms’ adoption of social media, content strategies, etc.) by employing a variety of theories. This fragmented approach has resulted in the investigation of individual SMM behaviours, often adopting a narrow perspective on their antecedents and outcomes. Despite their value, these contributions remain disjointed, and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon has yet to be achieved. To address this gap, we conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) following Tranfield et al.’s (2003) guidelines to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SMM from the firm’s perspective. Through an in-depth analysis of 169 articles, we developed a causal-chain framework based on inputs, contingency factors, and outputs (Ngai et al., 2015) to show the causal relationships among different research constructs adopted thus far. Our review sheds light on what SMM entails for firms, its associated activities, factors influencing its adoption, and the positive effects it may yield. In doing so, we bring much-needed clarity to the conceptualization of firms’ SMM behaviour. We argue that it is a multifaceted concept requiring consideration of various aspects of social media adoption and implementation beyond narrow perspectives. Our framework is expected to serve as a valuable roadmap for future research advancements in this domain.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section describes the research gap and the logic driving the development of the integrative framework. Then, we detail the process of conducting the SLR. The fourth section presents an overview of the descriptive analysis. Next, we present the findings of the thematic analysis by providing an exhaustive review of the selected articles and a detailed discussion of the development of the integrative framework. The following section further discusses the research implications from the findings and suggests future research avenues and managerial implications. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion on study limitations.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: SMM FROM THE FIRM’S PERSPECTIVE

The existing literature on SMM is fragmented, primarily focusing on the user–consumer perspective. However, our study shifts the focus to why and how firms employ SMM. On the firm’s side, two main research streams addressing firms’ SMM behaviours can be identified.

The first stream originates from the work of Kim and Ko (2010, 2012), who introduced the concept of social media marketing activity (SMMA). This includes entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth. Researchers within this stream have explored the effect of these activities on customer-based brand equity and purchase intention (Cheung et al., 2021; Sohaib & Han, 2023). However, it is worth noting that this construct is measured using customer perceptions regarding certain aspects of social media content that are not solely dependent on the firms’ activities. For example, the ‘interaction’ activity is measured by asking fans about their ease of expressing opinions through the company’s social media profile or their ability to share information with other users. Thus, while providing valuable insights into consumer preferences, this research stream does not entirely align with the firms’ perspectives.

The second research stream has effectively addressed firms’ use of social media for marketing-related purposes. This line of research has predominantly explored whether organizations adopt social media and to what extent, revealing an initial hesitancy in the adoption of these platforms, indicative of a short-term-oriented approach (Nakara et al., 2012; Veldeman et al., 2017). Concurrently, these studies attempt to understand the antecedents that can drive firms to adopt and use social media (e.g., Pentina et al., 2012; Siamagka et al., 2015) and the resultant outcomes (e.g., Martín-Rojas et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). Furthermore, scholars in this stream have devoted attention to understanding how firms design social media message strategies and features that result in higher levels of customer engagement and lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Balaji et al., 2023; Colicev et al., 2019; Drossos et al., 2023).

In addition, following the increased use of social media for marketing purposes (Martín-Rojas et al., 2020), part of the literature strives to move beyond the mere adoption of social media as a new technology. Instead, it suggests more sophisticated SMM behaviours exhibited by firms. For instance, scholars have advanced the idea of firms employing different implementation models that concurrently consider adoption approaches, social media goals, and resources (Choi & Thoeni, 2016; Drummond et al., 2020; Felix et al., 2017; Tafesse & Wien, 2018b). These stage models are characterized by incremental levels of strategy

formalization and resource commitment. In a related vein, some studies draw on the premises of relationship marketing, advocating for the strategic use of social media to foster a novel way of managing customer relationships, known as social customer relationship management (social CRM; Malthouse et al., 2013; Rodriguez & Peterson, 2012). Similarly, a relatively recent research theme has focused on understanding how SMM relates to organizational learning processes. This theme underscores the utilization of social media platforms to gain valuable insights through knowledge search, acquisition, and transfer, ultimately influencing organizational performance (e.g., Agnihotri et al., 2023; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016a).

Nevertheless, these studies remain relatively disconnected from one another due to their focus on highly diverse areas of SMM and the use of specific lenses. This highlights a narrow approach of extant SMM research, which merely considers one behavioural facet at a time as well as antecedents and outcomes in an isolated fashion, thus representing a major roadblock to advancing academic research. What is required is a thorough understanding of SMM behaviours from the firms' perspective, presenting a 'big picture' of the overall phenomenon. To this end, we conducted an SLR with the aim of developing an integrative causal-chain framework (Ngai et al., 2015). This framework illustrates the interrelationships among various research dimensions and constructs linked to the antecedents and outcomes of firms' SMM behaviour. The framework is based on a model comprising antecedents (as inputs), contingency factors, and outcomes (as outputs) (Ilgen et al., 2005; Mohammed et al., 2010). Such an approach is commonly employed in management studies and social sciences to help sense-making of complex phenomena (e.g., Guckenbiehl et al., 2021; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Researchers often display different patterns of thought and use different words to explain the same phenomenon, thus causing conceptual confusion. Integrative frameworks can help overcome such confusion by providing a visual tool and map to guide future research.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Review articles serve as valuable tools for providing a synthesized overview of the current state of knowledge and developing integrative frameworks to reconcile and extend past research on a specific topic (Palmatier et al., 2018). Therefore, we adopted an SLR approach to ensure rigor and replicability. Our methodology adhered to Tranfield et al.'s (2003) guidelines, which consist of three stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting and dissemination (i.e., analysis).

## Planning the review

In the first phase, we identified the need for a literature review on SMM from the firm's perspective, given the high degree of fragmentation in the extant knowledge. We then outlined the review protocol, which involved specifying the electronic database, search filters, keywords, and inclusion and exclusion criteria to guide the review process.

Our choice of the Scopus electronic database was deliberate, as it exhaustively covers high-quality journals and provides built-in filters to ensure the precision of the search process. This database has also been extensively used in previous SLRs focused on social media (Creevey et al., 2022; Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

We then conducted scoping searches to assess the relevance and scope of the literature and to refine the topic (Tranfield et al., 2003). First, we identified appropriate keywords by referring to highly cited articles in the field (de Vries et al., 2012; Felix et al., 2017). Broad search terms, such as 'social media marketing' and 'social media strategy', were deemed suitable. Since we observed trends suggesting that early SMM research largely considers adoption-related issues, we decided to include additional keywords, such as 'social media adoption' and 'social media use'. We also included the term 'social network' to ensure that the strings captured all the available research. Moreover, we employed terms such as 'firm' or 'company' to obtain relevant articles from the firm's perspective and thus limit the number of papers on the user's behaviours.

Second, these scoping searches served as a basis for establishing the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the article selection process (Hulland & Houston, 2020). Table 1 presents the finalized search strings, the applied filters, and the established inclusion and exclusion criteria.

## Conducting the review

Both researchers performed an automatic search in Scopus using two different search strings in June 2022, implementing search filters to streamline the process. We applied filters to consider the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles, specifically within the 'Business, Management, and Accounting' area. In addition, we limited the search to international peer-reviewed journals, perceived as validated knowledge sources likely to have a significant impact on the academic community (Podsakoff et al., 2005). To ensure replicability, we exclusively selected English-language publications (Hüttinger et al., 2012). To further ensure the quality of the results, we included only articles listed in the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) ranking.

TABLE 1 Search strings, filters, and selection criteria.

Search strings	Search filters	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1st string: 'social media marketing' OR 'social media strategy' OR 'social network marketing' OR 'social network strategy'</li> <li>2nd string: ('social media adoption' OR 'social network adoption' OR 'social media use' OR 'social network use' OR 'social media usage' OR 'social network usage') AND (firm OR enterprise OR company)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Search in: title, abstract, or the keywords list</li> <li>Document type: international peer-reviewed journal</li> <li>Journal quality: AJG ranking</li> <li>Language: English</li> <li>Area: Business, Management and Accounting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articles investigating the firm's perspective</li> <li>Articles investigating the external use for marketing purposes (towards customers)</li> <li>Articles focused on social media</li> <li>Articles focused on profit and private companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articles investigating the use of social media by individuals</li> <li>Articles investigating the perceived SMMA</li> <li>Articles investigating the use of social media for internal communication, HR management and social media use in sales</li> <li>Articles investigating only technologies other than social media (es. websites, Artificial Intelligence, etc.)</li> <li>Articles investigating non-profit companies, government/public entities, schools/universities</li> </ul>

This ranking includes a wide range of journals across fields central to business and management studies. It is based on peer review, editorial evaluation, and expert judgments regarding the relative standing of journals in each subject area. Unlike other journal ratings, the AJG ranking is not solely based on a weighted average of journal metrics but is informed by metrics. A few articles published in journals beyond the scope of the AJG ranking (Dolan et al., 2017; Veldeman et al., 2017) were also included due to their high citation rates in the research field.

The search initially retrieved 1177 records. After removing 34 duplicate articles, 1143 articles were available for further evaluation through abstract and text screening. Both researchers independently assessed the relevance of each article using the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1). First, as our focus was on the firm's perspective, we excluded articles focusing on the users' behaviour on social media (e.g., how users construct their personal identity on social media) and articles measuring firms' SMM efforts through consumers' perceived SMMA.

Second, we excluded articles investigating the use of social media for internal communication, human resource (HR) management, and salespeople's use of social media. In this regard, although the use of social media in sales (social selling) can be considered a subset of SMM (Salo, 2017), it considers the seller, and not the entire organization, as the 'ground zero' of social media-related activities (Moncrief, 2017).

Third, studies on digital marketing and those solely focused on other digital technologies, such as e-commerce platforms or artificial intelligence, were excluded. Lastly, the study was limited to SMM in the private sector con-

text, where companies are not state-controlled and run for profit, excluding studies that address social media in non-profit companies, public entities, public schools, and universities.

The level of agreement between the two researchers was assessed using Cohen's kappa score, with the following classifications: <0.20, poor agreement; 0.21–0.40, fair agreement; 0.41–0.60, moderate agreement; 0.61–0.80, substantial agreement; and 0.81–1.00, very good agreement. The level of agreement between the two reviewers yielded a Cohen's kappa of 0.73, indicating substantial agreement. Any ambiguities in the articles were discussed collaboratively to reach a consensus on their inclusion in the review. Ultimately, 169 articles were selected for the final analysis. Figure 1 displays an overview of the entire search process.

## Analysis

The selected articles were organized chronologically to develop a two-stage report (Tranfield et al., 2003; Thorpe et al., 2005). First, we summarized a basic set of categories (i.e., title, authors, etc.) and more detailed information (i.e., theoretical background, methodology, etc.) in an Excel spreadsheet to provide a 'descriptive analysis' of the field. Second, this analysis served as a basis for a more in-depth thematic analysis of the reviewed article. The 'thematic analysis' identified key components of firms' SMM behaviour, its antecedents, outcomes, and contingency factors. Sections 4 and 5, respectively, present the findings derived from these analyses.



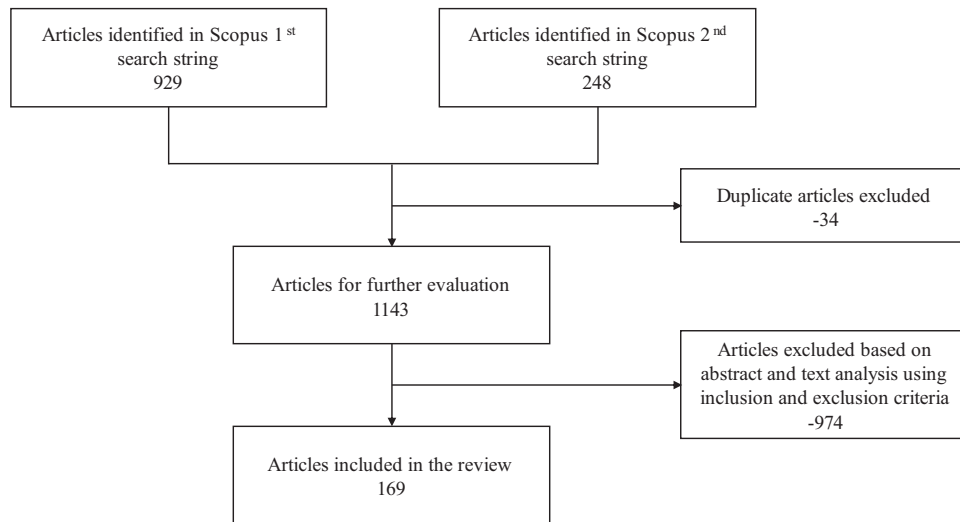


FIGURE 1 Database search process.

## FINDINGS OF THE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

### Publication outlets of the reviewed literature

Journals focusing on general management and marketing (Appendix 1), such as the *Journal of Business Research* and *Industrial Marketing Management*, have the highest number of publications, with 13 and eight articles, respectively. The topic also garners significant interest in practitioner-oriented journals like *Business Horizons*, which includes eight articles. The remaining 140 articles are distributed across 90 journals, showing a high fragmentation of the topic across several disciplines. Examining the AJG ratings provides insights into the quality of the articles. Most articles (67%) can be considered of medium-to-high quality, as they are published in journals issuing original and well-executed research that complies with widely accepted publication standards and conventions (AJG rating > 2). Of these, 52% are of high and excellent quality (AJG rating > 3) and 48% are of medium quality (AJG rating = 2). Notably, in the last five years, some articles have been published in well-rated journals, such as *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* and the *Journal of Marketing*, demonstrating that scholars are striving to raise the quality of their research.

### Research methods used in the reviewed literature

Figure 2 summarizes the methodological choices made in the reviewed articles. The steady interest in the topic is

consistent with the finding that most articles fall under the category of ‘empirical’ (92%). Among these empirical articles, a significant proportion (60%) adopted a quantitative approach, 27% applied a qualitative approach, and 5% employed mixed methods.

Regarding data collection and analysis methods, quantitative studies largely employed surveys and structural equation modelling, but content analysis was also widely used to gather social media account data to run regression analyses. Scholars have largely employed this type of analysis to study message strategies. Among qualitative studies, multiple and single case studies were predominant, followed by semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis.

### Underpinning theories and models in the reviewed literature

The extant literature has employed several theories and models to study specific and isolated aspects of firms’ SMM. The diversity in theoretical lenses suggests that academics are still struggling to find a commonly agreed-upon view to understand firms’ SMM. These theoretical perspectives can be categorized into three domains: behavioural theories, strategic management theories, and advertising and mass communication theories. Out of the 169 articles, 87 clearly stated their theoretical background (Appendix 2). It is worth mentioning that some researchers combine two or more theoretical underpinnings (Siamagka et al., 2015). Below are discussions on some of the most essential theories and models selected from the literature.

Behavioural theories have been extensively employed to explain the use of social media as a new technology and to

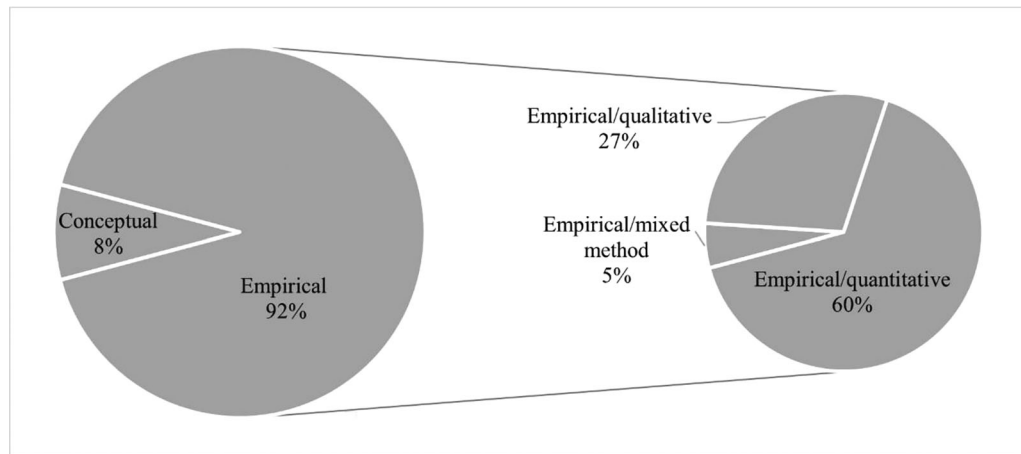


FIGURE 2 Methodological choices of the selected articles.

identify various antecedents. This category encompasses 27 articles, incorporating a total of 11 different theories. These theories fall into the domains of *technology and innovation adoption models* and *social behavioural theories*.

In the first group, the technology acceptance model (TAM), the diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory, and the technology–organization environment (TOE) framework are commonly cited. Developed by Davis et al. (1989), TAM has been consistently applied in social media research to identify what drives organizational decision-makers to use social media (Pentina et al., 2012). This model has also been integrated with other theories, such as motivational theory (Chatterjee et al., 2021) and the resource-based view (RBV; Siamagka et al., 2015). The DOI theory and the TOE framework, developed to investigate the use of IT innovation at the organizational level, are also prevalent. Considering social media as tools used in innovative ways by firms to support their marketing strategies, researchers have employed the DOI model to highlight how social media technical characteristics drive SMEs' social media use (Odoom et al., 2017). Conversely, the TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) has been employed to investigate how technological, organizational, and environmental factors influence firms' adoption of social media (Kwon et al., 2021).

Moreover, a few articles have recently explored the role of organizational and external forces through the lenses of social behaviour theories, such as social cognitive theory, social network theory, and institutional theory. For instance, social cognitive theory explains human behaviour through a three-way, dynamic, reciprocal model in which personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour continually interact (Bandura, 2001). In contrast, institutional theory has been employed to unveil how social media helps establish legitimacy in the external context (e.g., Lin et al., 2021).

Subsequently, emphasis was placed on the strategic management literature to clarify firms' effective exploitation of social media. The RBV, the dynamic capability view (DCV), social capital theory, and the knowledge-based view are among the most widely used theoretical foundations. The RBV and the DCV suggest that performance depends on a firm's resource endowment and the firm's effectiveness at converting these resources into capabilities (Barney, 1991; Day, 1994). For instance, such perspectives are used to investigate the relationship between firms' resources, SMM, and performance in the fashion industry (Wu et al., 2020). Similarly, part of the literature employs the knowledge-based perspective to claim that social media creates several capabilities linked to knowledge management and learning processes, thereby positively influencing organizational performance (Ammirato et al., 2019; Schlagwein & Hu, 2017).

Finally, 19 studies are grounded in the advertising and mass communication literature. Scholars in the realm of SMM have borrowed concepts from the literature on developing effective creative content and advertising to analyse social media content strategies and features (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

## FINDINGS OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

We performed a thematic analysis by adopting a concept-centric approach, which consists of identifying more than one key theme per article (Webster & Watson, 2002). To this end, articles were coded via NVivo. The in-depth content analysis concerning the theoretical basis, key concepts under study, methodology, and contribution of the articles revealed notable heterogeneity among the studies. They were found to be focused on differing specific aspects of SMM and seldom apply any commonly shared constructs,

making the research highly fragmented across research areas (e.g., social media adoption, social media content strategy, etc.). Such heterogeneity pointed out the need for a more systematic synthesis to advance the research in this field. Hence, we developed a causal-chain framework to express the interrelationships of different research concepts, including antecedents and outcomes of firms' SMM behaviour.

We coded the content of each article into four themes: the firms' SMM behaviour, including papers addressing how firms adopt, use, and implement social media for marketing purposes and which activities it implies; potential antecedents, considered as all input variables that have been studied to predict different behaviours; potential outcomes, encompassing all the expected results generated by different SMM behaviours; and potential contingency factors, including all the challenges firms may experience when implementing SMM. This analysis informed the development of an integrative framework that unifies the fragmented research findings into a 'big picture' of firms' SMM behaviour, representing a solid basis for identifying future research directions.

## Firms' social media marketing behaviour

The analysis of the articles reveals a rather fragmented picture of how firms behave (or should behave) on social media. Over the past decade, as new streams of research (from content marketing to social CRM and innovation management) have started investigating the potential of SMM, the concept of social media adoption, use, and implementation has become more and more complex, requiring more sophisticated and strategic approaches to craft and manage social media for marketing purposes. Different authors (e.g., Choi & Thoeni, 2016; Felix et al., 2017) have proposed different frameworks trying to classify firms' SMM behavioural patterns, entailing different activities and levels of commitment. Consequently, to offer a clearer understanding of the firms' SMM behaviour, we analysed the selected papers by dividing them into two distinct blocks that clearly emerged from the reviewed papers: adoption decisions and activities (see Table 2).

### Adoption decisions

The SLR sheds light on the most important decisions a firm needs to make when choosing to adopt and implement a marketing strategy on social media. Based on the analysis of the selected papers, we found three main adoption decisions: intention to use (if), usage intensity (how much),

and degree of social media integration into the marketing strategy.

Early studies on SMM have investigated *whether companies use/adopt* (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Pentina & Koh, 2012) or *intend to use* (Pentina et al., 2012; Turan & Kara, 2018) social media in their marketing strategy. Along this line, some scholars have also investigated the adoption of specific social media platforms (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Bartoloni et al., 2019).

Going beyond simple 'yes or no' adoption behaviours, firms' *social media usage intensity* has been studied using different constructs and measures to see how much and how often companies engage with these platforms. The most applied measures are social media frequency (Martin-Rojas et al., 2020; Shay & Van Der Horst, 2019), the extent to which companies use social media (Siamağka et al., 2015), and the number and frequency of firm-generated content posted (Kumar et al., 2016). However, these studies largely provide a descriptive picture of firms' SMM behaviours, thus limiting adoption decisions to a simple matter of frequency.

With the increasing adoption of social media for marketing purposes by firms of various sizes, countries, and contexts (B2B or B2C; Iankova et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2021), the literature has begun to approach SMM as a complex phenomenon that encompasses different decisions about how to effectively integrate these platforms into the overall marketing strategy. In this regard, some authors have developed objectives-oriented constructs of social media use (Marchand et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2016; Sun & Liu, 2023), exploring aspects such as acquiring new customers, generating leads, serving existing customers, building relationships, obtaining marketplace information, and educating customers (Wu, 2016). Another line of inquiry focuses on different implementation strategies in which the rate of adoption, usage intensity, and frequency are intertwined with goals and resources allocated to SMM activities (Drummond et al., 2020). For example, Choi and Thoeni (2016) proposed a four-step organizational process comprising initiation, coordination, engagement, and measurement for the successful implementation of SMM. Similarly, Fernandes et al. (2016) identified three behavioural patterns with varying involvement with social networks. Implementation-staged models are characterized by incremental levels of formalization and resource commitment. Firms in advanced stages are presumed to follow specific tasks and goals, thus presenting a formalized SMM strategy. Based on these streams of research, we can conclude that *the degree of social media integration into the marketing strategy* encompasses decisions regarding the firm's goals, the dedicated resources (both human and financial), and governance in terms of people or departments responsible for handling social media.

TABLE 2 Summary of the firms' SMM behaviour.

Adoption decisions	Description	Example references
<i>Intention to use</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rate of adoption</li> <li>• Intention to adopt/use</li> <li>• Platform selection</li> </ul>	Michaelidou et al., 2011; Pentina and Koh, 2012; Pentina et al., 2012; Turan and Kara, 2018; Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Bartoloni et al., 2019
<i>Usage intensity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of use</li> <li>• Usage intensity</li> <li>• Level of use</li> </ul>	Martín-Rojas et al., 2020; Shay and Van Der Horst, 2019; Siamagka et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2016
<i>Degree of social media integration into marketing strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective-oriented constructs</li> <li>• Implementation strategies</li> <li>• Patterns of social media use</li> </ul>	Marchand et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2016; Sun and Liu, 2023; Wu, 2016; Drummond et al., 2020; Choi and Thoeni, 2016
SMM activities	Description	Example References
<i>Crafting social media content</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Message strategy (message's objective)</li> <li>• Message features (vividness, interactivity, text readability, position, timing)</li> </ul>	Chawla and Chodak, 2021; Colicev et al., 2019; de Vries et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2019; Juntunen et al., 2020; Tafesse and Wien, 2018a; Zhang and Du, 2020
<i>Knowledge acquisition and management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and integrate valuable social media insights for supporting decision-making processes</li> <li>• Innovation management through social media</li> </ul>	Muninger et al., 2019; Nijssen and Ordanini, 2020; Ortega-Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016a, 2016b; Zhan et al., 2020
<i>Customer relationship management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiring new customers and managing these relationships to actively engage customers by focusing on interaction rather than transactions (Social CRM)</li> </ul>	Al-Omoush et al., 2021; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Kim and Wang, 2019; Trainor et al., 2014; Wang and Kim, 2017
<i>Social media marketing measurement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcoming challenges in assessing social media returns</li> <li>• Designing appropriate social media metrics and constructing sensible social media dashboards</li> </ul>	Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Chikandiwa et al., 2013; Michopoulou and Moisa, 2019; Silva et al., 2020; Keegan and Rowley, 2017; Peters et al., 2013.

## SMM activities

SMM activities represent the second block of firms' SMM behaviour and include all the actions that companies may perform to run their social media presence. These activities are closely interrelated yet usually studied separately in the literature (i.e., content marketing, social CRM, or innovation management literature).

The SLR reveals that one of the most important SMM activities concerns *how to craft social media content*. Social media content is understood in a myriad of ways, thus providing a rather fragmented picture of the core elements a company should focus on when designing its social media posts. For instance, Chawla and Chodak (2021) studied the best time for posting and the best position of a web link to organically promote content. Others focus on brand post topics by investigating how companies communicate sustainable practices and CSR activities on social media (Testa et al., 2021; Yang & Basile, 2022). However, two main

aspects of SMM behaviour related to content strategy can be identified: message strategy and message features.

Message strategy is related to the objective of the message. Various strategies have been investigated: informational/rational, transformational/emotional, interaction/relational, entertaining, and promotional/remunerative (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang & Du, 2020), which might be pursued simultaneously in social media brand content (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Tafesse & Wien, 2018a). For instance, studies investigating functional versus emotional strategies focus on the extent to which brand content includes useful and factual information about products/services, the company, the industry (de Vries et al., 2012; Sridevi et al., 2020) or contains emotional cues, such as happiness, sadness, surprise, excitement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Cheng et al., 2021), and symbolic elements, namely brand personality, brand heritage, brand logo, and brand slogan (Lee et al., 2018; Tafesse & Wien, 2018a).



Message features refer to what companies post for each strategy. Some scholars (e.g., Colicev et al., 2019; Tan & Chen, 2022) have investigated whether a brand's social media messages include vividness—the extent to which a brand post stimulates various senses through multimedia features such as pictures and videos—and interactivity—the presence of links, hashtags, questions, quizzes, calls-to-action, etc. Other features might relate to text readability (length, lexicon, syntax, and emoji frequency; Davis et al., 2019; Sridevi et al., 2020), position (de Vries et al., 2012), and timing of publication (Dolan et al., 2017; Pinto & Yagnik, 2017).

Another important activity of firms' SMM behaviour regards *knowledge acquisition and management* and encompasses the need to collect and integrate valuable social media insights to support decision-making processes. Articles on this theme highlight the importance of these platforms for acquiring external valuable knowledge (Zhan et al., 2020, 2021), offering a new way to connect and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, and competitors. The objective is to gain valuable knowledge that is ultimately useful in driving innovation processes and the firm's performance. Social media data, which are unstructured text data, can be transformed into actionable information to support decision-making (Zhan et al., 2021). Users' social media profiles, activities, and conversations constitute a promising source of valuable insights that can inform concrete business actions, such as the personalization of marketing campaigns and the creation of new products and services (Wieneke & Lehrer, 2016). Studies largely emphasize that knowledge gained through social media improves New Product Development (NPD) processes, from ideation and design to product research and development and, finally, to testing and launch (Muninger et al., 2019; Zhan et al., 2020). Overall, social media insights have the potential to improve innovation quality by augmenting the knowledge that resides in a firm's marketing and R&D departments (Nijssen & Ordanini, 2020). Moreover, studies suggest that leveraging external knowledge gathered in social media enhances customer and supplier participation during NPD processes (e.g., Jiao et al., 2020). According to this line of thought, it is not social media information per se but rather its integration that affects firms' outcomes. To extract value from social media, organizations need to be able to gather social media data and transform that data into relevant insights (Zhan et al., 2021).

Likewise, *managing customer relationships through social media* has become a vital part of an SMM strategy, representing the third activity firms might perform. Articles within the social CRM literature have addressed this issue, shedding light on the need to adopt more sophisticated behaviours on social media by exploiting their

potential in creating and managing valuable customer relationships. In fact, using social media in marketing enables organizations to gain deeper customer insights and allows the customer to participate in a mutually beneficial conversation. Defined by most studies (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Kim & Wang, 2019) as 'the integration of customer-facing activities, including processes, systems, and technologies, with emergent social media applications to engage customers in collaborative conversations and enhance customer relationships' (Trainor, 2012, p. 319), social CRM is redesigning the way firms can generate value through customer relationship management. Therefore, firms should use social media in all three components of traditional CRM, namely acquisition, maintenance, and termination, with the aim of actively engaging customers (Malthouse et al., 2013; Rodriguez & Peterson, 2012).

Finally, the fourth activity that emerged from the selected articles relates to *SMM measurement*. Performance measurement is an important aspect of building firms' social media presence to understand the effectiveness of using social media for marketing purposes and to what extent it contributes to overall goals.

However, SMM measurement has been highlighted as a major challenge that companies face in SMM (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013). In general, despite the increased pressure on marketing managers to provide evidence of social media effectiveness, they struggle to assess the results of their activities (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Marketing managers are not able to provide quantified data that demonstrate the importance of social media, giving rise to scepticism surrounding these tools. Furthermore, the extant literature highlights that crafting suitable metrics poses significant problems for companies (Chikandiwa et al., 2013; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Notably, although it might be easier to evaluate the achievement of results related to brand awareness and engagement by measuring the number of followers, the number of comments, etc. (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Michaelidou et al., 2011), evaluating financial returns is far more difficult (Silva et al., 2020). In this regard, the literature has attempted to craft guidelines and frameworks to assist firms in designing appropriate social media metrics and constructing sensible social media dashboards (Keegan & Rowley, 2017; Peters et al., 2013).

### Antecedents and outcomes of firms' social media marketing behaviour

As revealed by the analysis of selected articles, the first half of the decade has witnessed growing attention to investigating the drivers of firms' social media adoption (Pentina et al., 2012; Siamagka et al., 2015). More recently, scholars

have invested efforts to understand firms' SMM outcomes (Martin-Rojas et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). The literature appears scattered across different fields, and there is no consensus about which factors drive SMM behaviour or their effect on business performance. The authors adopted various constructs to measure antecedents and outcomes, thus making it difficult to compare study results and frame them into a single picture. For example, different labels were used to identify the same construct, such as the pressure exerted by the external environment, referred to as 'external pressures' (Kwon et al., 2021), 'social influence' (Pentina et al., 2012), or 'subjective norms' (Eid et al., 2020). Conversely, the same label was applied to different concepts measured with different items. For example, the outcome 'organizational performance' was measured by Garrido-Moreno et al. (2020) with items related to both customer performance (acquisition, retention, satisfaction) and financial performance (increase in sales, market share, profitability), while Martin-Rojas et al. (2021) measured organizational performance with financial items such as return on assets, return on equity, and return on sales. Moreover, several factors that serve as antecedents in the integrative framework can also function as outcomes (or vice versa). We present the current research constructs based on how they were used in the selected papers (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). It is worth noting that some concepts such as 'entrepreneurial orientation' have been studied and found to be significant as both an antecedent (Fang et al., 2021) and an outcome (Wu et al., 2020). Therefore, such variables can appear in different positions within the framework.

Consequently, prompted by this lack of clarity regarding the naming and measurement of certain variables, we examined the items of the most studied constructs to facilitate a more coherent grouping of the antecedents and outcomes of firms' SMM behaviour.

## Antecedents of firms' SMM behaviour

The literature review reveals how studies dealing with antecedents and drivers of different SMM behaviours mostly draw on technology and innovation adoption models such as TAM, TOE, and DOI (Eid et al., 2020; Kooli et al., 2019; Oyewobi et al., 2022). Such variety in the theoretical lenses employed resulted in the use of different labels to describe the same concepts. However, despite a rather confused picture, we suggest that the antecedents can be grouped into three different categories: organizational, social media-related, and external antecedents (see Table 3).

**Organizational antecedents** represent the internal contextual elements that might affect a firm's SMM

behaviour (Al-Omouh et al., 2021). Among them, *management support*, in terms of managerial consent, commitment, and provision of resources dedicated to SMM, appears to be a key driver of social media adoption and use (Ahmad et al., 2019; Qalati et al., 2020). Similarly, other significant factors relate to *organizational readiness* (Cao et al., 2018; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020) and *organizational culture*, as members inside the company (employees, managers, entrepreneurs) should be task-oriented, risk-taking, and generally open to sharing, exchanging, and learning from each other in order to extensively and strategically use social media in marketing (e.g., Kwon et al., 2021). Moreover, the extant research highlights that innovative firms (Siamagka et al., 2015) and entrepreneurship-oriented firms (Wu et al., 2020) are more likely to adopt and use social media for marketing purposes.

The category of **social media-related antecedents** encompasses all the specific characteristics of social media platforms that encourage firms' SMM use. While organizational factors may be common to the adoption of different technologies, social media factors are strictly linked to their intrinsic features. In this regard, *perceived usefulness*, or in some cases perceived advantages (see Eid et al., 2020), is considered one of the most significant adoption antecedents (Kooli et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2021). Defined as the degree to which a person believes that using social media will bring benefits in terms of performance (Chatterjee et al., 2021), perceived usefulness seems to play a crucial role in convincing managers to adopt and use social media, thereby impacting different aspects of the SMM behaviour (intention to use, usage intensity, SMM goals, etc.). Within the TAM domain, *perceived ease of use*—much like complexity in TOE (Oyewobi et al., 2022) or effort expectancy (Vatanasakdakul et al., 2020)—can be defined as the degree to which a person believes using social media will be free of effort. In the SMM literature, companies usually perceive a high level of social media ease of use, positively impacting usage behaviours. In addition, the TOE's *compatibility* antecedent is deemed to be another important factor related to technology features that impacts if and how firms use social media (Odoom et al., 2017; Oyewobi et al., 2022). Compatibility refers to the extent to which an innovation can match the technology infrastructure, value, work practices, and culture of the organization (Chatterjee et al., 2021).

Furthermore, if companies can easily demonstrate the effectiveness of social media, they are more willing to invest in such technologies. This factor emerges from the DOI literature and has been mostly referred to as *observability*, namely, the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible and communicable to others (Eid et al., 2020). The literature has also identified other social media-related factors, such as *cost-effectiveness*,

TABLE 3 Summary of antecedents.

Antecedents	Topic's description	Example References
<b>Organizational antecedents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management support</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> <li>• Organizational readiness</li> <li>• Organizational innovativeness</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial orientation</li> </ul>	Ahmad et al., 2019; Qalati et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2018; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Kwon et al., 2021; Siamagka et al., 2015, Wu et al., 2020.
<b>Social media-related antecedents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived usefulness</li> <li>• Perceived ease of use</li> <li>• Compatibility</li> <li>• Observability</li> <li>• Cost effectiveness</li> <li>• Interactivity</li> <li>• Visibility</li> </ul>	Chatterjee et al., 2021; Eid et al., 2020; Kooli et al., 2019; Kwon et al., 2021; Oyewobi et al., 2022; Vatanasakdakul et al., 2020; Gavino et al., 2019; He et al., 2017; Nakara et al., 2012; Odoom et al., 2017; Canovi and Pucciarelli, 2019; Odoom et al., 2017; Qalati et al., 2020
<b>External antecedents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive pressure</li> <li>• Customer pressure</li> <li>• Social network pressure (partners, experts, media, etc.)</li> </ul>	Ahmad et al., 2019; Bartoloni et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2018; Eid et al., 2020; Kwon et al., 2021; Pentina and Koh, 2012; Pentina et al., 2012; Qalati et al., 2021, 2020

interactivity, and visibility (Canovi & Pucciarelli, 2019; Odoom et al., 2017; Qalati et al., 2020).

The literature review pinpoints the existence of some **external antecedents** that may affect firms' decision-making and activities related to SMM. Previous studies have specifically highlighted *competitive, customer, and social network* (partners, experts, media, etc.) pressures (Ahmad et al., 2019; Pentina et al., 2012). Notably, companies commonly employ social media to cope with changes in customers' and competitors' behaviours, to stay abreast of current trends, and to satisfy the expectations of partners and experts within the industry.

### Outcomes of firms' SMM behaviour

In the analysis of SLR results, three categories of outcomes have been discerned from the extant literature. These have been characterized as organizational capabilities, marketing performance, and financial performance (see Table 4).

Previous literature uniformly concurs on the assertion that the adoption of strategic SMM behaviours allows firms to develop different **organizational capabilities**. These capabilities include enhancing the firm's ability to engage customers (social CRM capabilities), deriving value from information and knowledge acquisition (absorptive capacity), generating new ideas for products and services (innovation capabilities), adapting and updating organizational processes (organizational unlearning), and seizing entrepreneurship opportunities (entrepreneurial capabilities).

Drawing on RBV, *social CRM capabilities* are considered an important combination of technological resources

and customer-centric management systems that can lead to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. They refer to a firm's competency in generating, integrating, and responding to information obtained from customer interactions facilitated by social media technologies (Tainor et al., 2014). The evaluation of social CRM capabilities typically involves dimensions such as information generation, information integration, information dissemination, and responsiveness (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020). Interestingly, the findings within this research area consistently point to how the specific path to value creation in social media goes through social CRM capability development. Simply having an active presence on social media (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020, 2018) does not seem to translate into improved customer relationship performance unless these capabilities are effectively developed. The integration of social media use with firms' resources to form social media capabilities leads to enhanced CRM performance (i.e., customer acquisition, customer retention, customer expansion, relational information process) (Al-Omouh et al., 2021), increased customer engagement (Wang & Kim, 2017), and financial performance (Kim & Wang, 2019). Therefore, these capabilities are deemed the missing link between social media use and a firm's CRM and organizational performance (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020, 2018).

Similarly, scholars claim that SMM helps firms develop knowledge management-related capabilities, namely *innovation capability* (Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016a), *absorptive capacity* (Ammirato et al., 2019; Wieneke & Lehrer, 2016), and *organizational unlearning* (Ortega-Gutiérrez et al., 2021), which are able to activate organizational processes that eventually lead to important organizational outcomes. Absorptive capacity is defined

TABLE 4 Summary of outcomes.

Outcomes	Topic's description	Example References
<i>Organizational capabilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social CRM capabilities</li> <li>• Innovation capabilities</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial capabilities</li> <li>• Absorptive capacity</li> <li>• Organizational unlearning</li> </ul>	Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020, 2018; Al-Omouh et al., 2021; Wang and Kim, 2017; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016a; Ammirato et al., 2019; Wieneke and Lehrer, 2016; Martín-Rojas et al., 2020; Troise et al., 2022
<i>Marketing performance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand awareness</li> <li>• Purchase intent</li> <li>• Customer acquisition</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Customer retention</li> <li>• Service quality</li> <li>• Thought leadership</li> <li>• Innovation performance</li> </ul>	Eid et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2016; Qalati et al., 2021, 2020; Magno and Cassia, 2020; Martín-Rojas et al., 2021; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016b
<i>Online performance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media reach</li> <li>• Web traffic</li> <li>• Customer behavioural engagement</li> <li>• Conversion rate</li> </ul>	Dhaoui and Webster, 2021; Testa et al., 2021; Grover and Kar; Lee et al., 2018; Tafesse and Wien, 2018a; Antoniadis et al., 2019; de Vries et al., 2012; Colicev et al., 2019
<i>Financial performance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased revenues and sales</li> <li>• International export performance</li> <li>• Product demand and orders</li> <li>• Brand equity</li> <li>• Customer spending</li> </ul>	Cao et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2017; Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2018; Mazzucchelli et al., 2021; Gong et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2013; Estrella-Ramón et al., 2019; Dolega et al., 2021

by Cohen and Levinthal (1990, p. 128) as 'the ability of a firm to recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends'. This concept considers the dynamic process in which resources are created, reconfigured, and used based on what the organization learns over time (Schlagwein & Hu, 2017). Acquiring externally generated knowledge critical to operations, routines, and processes through social media has been shown to yield performance gains (Ammirato et al., 2019). Furthermore, *organizational unlearning* allows the firm to leave behind the old mental models through the realization that certain rules, routines, and processes are obsolete, thus gaining the ability to learn new things. Recent suggestions by some authors (Martín-Rojas et al., 2020; Troise et al., 2022) propose that the use of social media influences several entrepreneurial aspects, such as entrepreneurial orientation and capabilities. SMM activities can enhance entrepreneurs' proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking, as well as influence their ability to discover and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities that are useful for increasing business development outcomes.

Furthermore, the SLR shows how SMM improves **marketing performance** (Lin et al., 2021). For example, some authors consider *brand awareness* (Eid et al., 2020) and other marketing variables, such as *customer acquisition*, *customer satisfaction*, *customer retention*, and *service quality* (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2016; Qalati et al., 2021, 2020). In addition, social media activ-

ities increase *thought leadership* (Magno & Cassia, 2020), meaning the extent to which the customer recognizes the firm as an authority on industry issues, a top-of-mind trusted voice, and a go-to resource in its field of expertise. Other studies suggest that social media use positively affects *innovation performance* (Martín-Rojas et al., 2021; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2016b), the understanding of customers' views and preferences, and the understanding of competition in different markets (Eid et al., 2020).

Among marketing outcomes, *online performance* drew much attention from scholars, especially in the content marketing stream of research, where the growing academic interest has been focused on understanding how different message strategies and features can impact customers' behavioural engagement. In the investigated papers, customer engagement has mostly been measured in terms of the number of likes, number of shares, number of comments, and/or number of reactions (Dhaoui & Webster, 2021; Testa et al., 2021).

However, conflicting findings emerge due to a lack of consensus on measuring message strategies and behavioural engagement. Grover and Kar (2020) found that different message strategies lead to the same results, whereas other studies showed that transformational messages elicit favourable responses over purely informational and interactional strategies (Lee et al., 2018; Tafesse & Wien, 2018a). Regarding message features, both vividness and interactivity seem to positively affect customers' behavioural engagement (Antoniadis et al., 2019;



de Vries et al., 2012). For instance, less vivid posts (i.e., text) that require users to invest more effort receive lower behavioural engagement than vivid posts (i.e., photos and videos), which allow viewers to grasp the message quickly (Estrella-Ramón et al., 2019). Content vividness also has the strongest relationship with brand consideration and purchase intent (Colicev et al., 2019). Moreover, firms' social media use impacts their online performance by increasing social media reach in terms of community size (He & Lu, 2016), popularity of the social media page (Marchand et al., 2020), conversion rate (Mazzucchelli et al., 2021), and overall social media performance (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2021).

Finally, SRL points out how SMM behaviours lead to some important **financial performance**, either directly (i.e., Cao et al., 2018) or by increasing organizational capabilities (i.e., Kim & Wang, 2019) or marketing performances (i.e., Kim & Jang, 2021). Some scholars have found that social media use for marketing enhances financial performance with an increase in revenues and sales (Chang et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2017), international export performance (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2018; Mazzucchelli et al., 2021), and product demand (Gong et al., 2017). Very few articles have investigated whether content strategy-related efforts have economically significant effects beyond the online environment. The extant empirical evidence suggests that such strategies might positively affect brand equity (Yu et al., 2013), which is considered the ultimate measure of firms' financial performance and is assessed in millions of dollars (Estrella-Ramón et al., 2019). Interestingly, Kumar et al. (2016) found that firm-generated content positively affects both customer spending—the dollar amount spent on products—and cross-buying behaviour—the number of distinct categories in which a customer purchases. Other studies have found that advertised social media content generates a markedly greater number of product orders (Dolega et al., 2021).

## Contingency factors

The SLR identifies additional significant factors that extend beyond the antecedents and outcomes categories. These factors represent challenges that firms experience when employing social media for marketing purposes. They do not affect a firm's decision to implement SMM; instead, they have been studied as difficulties that arise after companies have implemented social media within their marketing strategies. As such, they can be viewed as contingencies that may prevent firms from achieving the expected outcomes (see Table 5).

The SLR highlights how firms usually struggle in *monitoring and analysing social media data* to gain valuable

market and customer knowledge (Guillet et al., 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013). If firms understand the needs and emotions of their users, this helps them promote their message properly and gain their customers' confidence and trust (Ghouri et al., 2022). However, much of the data generated in social media is unstructured, thus hampering companies in gaining valuable insights regarding new products, unanticipated benefits, or uses of existing products and in finding better ways to segment existing customers (Malthouse et al., 2013). Moreover, Cawsey and Rowley (2016) point out that understanding and predicting audience perceptions regarding the usefulness, relevance, compelling nature, and timeliness of content is a major challenge for B2B firms. Another challenge relates to the *lack of control over message diffusion* (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013), as the path a firm's content on social media may take can be highly unpredictable. Peters et al. (2013) argue that, despite the willingness of managers to post relevant content, if it does not catch customers' interest, it will neither be read nor shared with third parties. These challenges inevitably hinder firms' ability to effectively tailor engaging messages.

Importantly, *data security issues* pose a formidable challenge for companies utilizing social media in their marketing endeavours (Malthouse et al., 2013). Companies often struggle to guarantee consumer privacy interests. While customers may have initially agreed to allow their data to be used in a specific way, using the data for other purposes without explicit authorization can erode customer trust (Malthouse et al., 2013). Moreover, adhering to regulatory and legal policies aimed at safeguarding consumers can impose conditions that complicate the use of social media for marketing purposes (Chikandiwa et al., 2013). In contrast, effective SMM for B2B companies might face challenges due to customers' reluctance to share information about their purchasing procedures and practices (Luo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, *social media management* has emerged as an additional significant challenge for companies dealing with SMM strategies (Malthouse et al., 2013). For instance, one major problem seems to be maintaining updated social media profiles (Phelan et al., 2013) and keeping up with the fast-evolving nature of such platforms (He et al., 2017). Frequently, the lack of a designated person taking full responsibility for the firm's social media accounts leaves them inactive (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Moreover, managing multiple accounts can be extremely time-consuming, especially for small firms (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). Coping with the lack of employee expertise in SMM practices is also a major challenge (Bartoloni et al., 2019). In this context, firms struggle to maintain consistency in conveying the company's message and to be mindful of the importance of tone of voice when replying

TABLE 5 Summary of contingency factors.

Contingency factors	Example References
Monitoring and analysing social media data	Guillet et al., 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013; Ghouri et al., 2022; Cawsey Rowley, 2016
Lack of control over the message diffusion	Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Malthouse et al., 2013; Pieters et al., 2013.
Data security issues	Chikandiwa et al., 2013; Malthouse et al., 2013; Luo et al., 2021
Social media management	Bartoloni et al., 2019; Guillet et al., 2016; He et al., 2017; Malthouse et al., 2013; Michopoulou and Moisa, 2019; Phelan et al., 2013

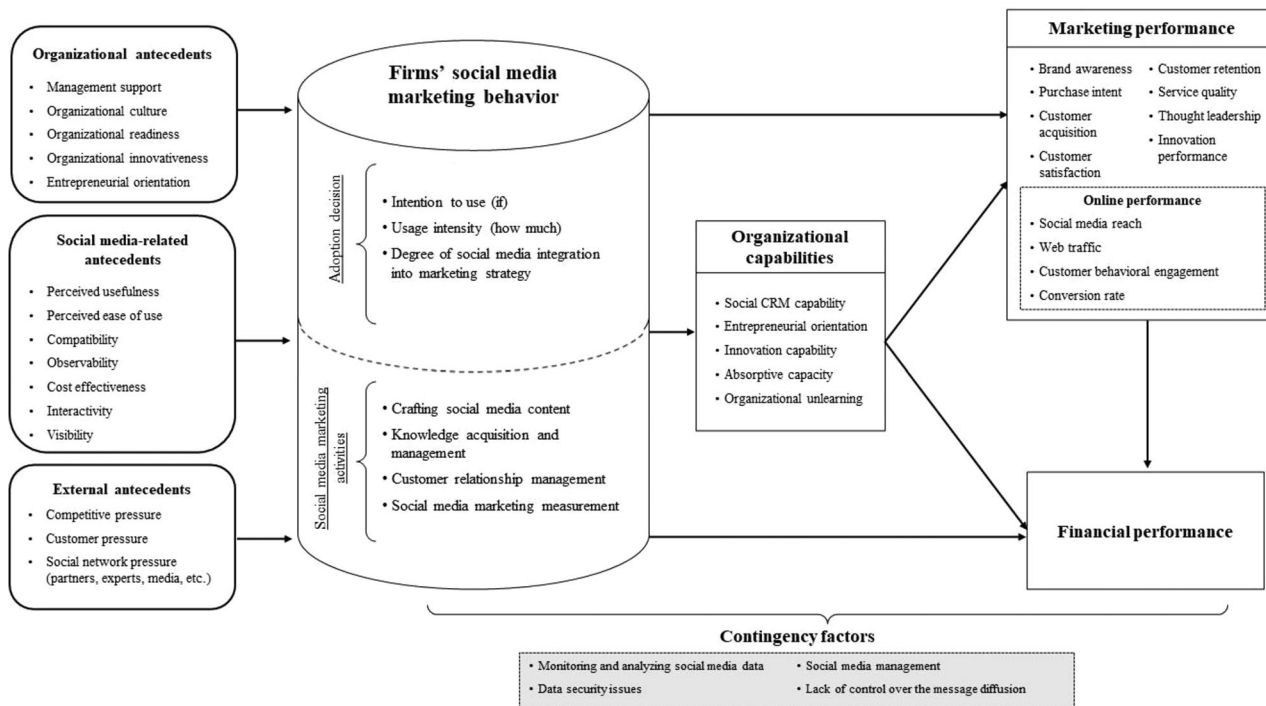


FIGURE 3 Integrative SMM framework from the firms' perspective.

to customers with personalized messages (Guillet et al., 2016).

### Integrative SMM framework from the firm's perspective

The SLR conducted in the previous sections has led to the formulation of an integrative framework presented in Figure 3. This framework serves as a comprehensive summary of firms' SMM behaviour, encompassing its extensively explored antecedents, outcomes, and contingency factors derived from the literature. The proposed framework aims to address the fragmentation prevalent in the extant SMM research, which mainly focuses on one behavioural facet at a time and adopts isolated and narrow perspectives in investigating antecedents and outcomes based on the specific theoretical lens used. By systematically organizing and showing the identified con-

ceptual categories and constructs featured in the reviewed literature, along with their interrelationships, this framework provides a holistic perspective of the overall phenomenon, facilitating a thorough understanding of the SMM behaviour from the firms' perspective.

The framework displays the multifaceted concept of firms' SMM behaviour at its core. The SLR shows that understanding how firms engage in social media involves considering decisions on intention to use, usage intensity, and the degree of integration into marketing strategies, all in conjunction with SMM activities. These activities encompass crafting social media content, involving decisions on message strategies (informative, emotional, relational, promotional) and features (vividness, interactivity, readability, timing); knowledge acquisition and management; managing customer relationships; and SMM measurement.

The framework also integrates different input variables that have been studied to predict different SMM

behaviours. Three categories of antecedents that can affect firms' decision-making and activities related to SMM have been identified: organizational antecedents, social media-related antecedents, and external antecedents. Furthermore, the framework classifies the anticipated outcomes resulting from different SMM behaviours into three categories: organizational capabilities, marketing performance, and financial performance. Thematic analysis reveals that firms' SMM behaviours yield performance outcomes, spanning both marketing and financial realms. However, the analysis also indicates that achieving these outcomes may require companies to develop different organizational capabilities. These intermediary outcomes may lead to better marketing results, such as brand awareness, purchase intent, customer acquisition, and online performance (i.e., website traffic, social media reach, customer behavioural engagement, and conversation rate), as well as financial results, usually measured through general revenue and sales metrics (i.e., profit margin, ROI, ROA, market share), brand equity, customer spending, and product/service orders. In addition, based on the thematic analysis, the integrative framework proposes that the realization of superior marketing outcomes may enhance a firm's overall financial performance.

The SLR highlights various factors posing challenges for companies in implementing SMM. We suggest that these factors represent pivotal contingencies that affect firms' SMM behaviour and expected outcomes. These factors encompass monitoring and analysing social media data, concerns about data security, social media management, and the lack of control over message diffusion.

## DISCUSSION

### Implications for research

The academic community increasingly emphasizes the need to pay closer attention to how firms strategically employ social media for marketing-related purposes (Li et al., 2021). A substantial research stream understands SMM by inferring firms' activities from consumers' perceptions (Kim & Ko, 2012; Sohaib & Han, 2023). While this approach provides valuable insights, its applicability to the firms' perspective may be questionable. Another stream of research is devoted to investigating how firms effectively use these platforms. However, the extant literature on this aspect is highly scattered, and studies appear to be disconnected from one another.

Therefore, this SLR offers a significant contribution to the SMM literature from the firms' perspective by providing conceptual clarity to this area through an integrative framework that unites fragmented knowledge and identi-

fies key interrelationships in extant research. Based on this comprehensive review, several areas have been identified as potential avenues for further research, highlighting the need for new empirical studies in these domains.

While scholars have extensively covered various aspects of SMM, the predominant approach involves considering one behavioural facet at a time. This approach has made the understanding of SMM from the firms' perspective somewhat elusive. Although numerous academic studies have mentioned and considered the strategic side of firms' SMM behaviours, closer attention has been devoted to adoption decisions, thus mirroring a technology-centred view of the topic (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Pentina et al., 2012). However, a detailed analysis of the articles in the SLR suggests that social media offers a more profound potential to contemporary marketing strategies (Chawla & Chodak, 2021; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2020; Zhan et al., 2021). Therefore, we propose a multifaceted concept of SMM behaviour that expands the dominant view that currently considers SMM-related choices independently. In this expanded concept, adoption (if), usage intensity (how much), message choices, knowledge management, and CRM decisions should be integrated to capture the overall phenomenon. We believe that understanding firms' behaviour in terms of both adoption decisions and SMM activities adequately reflects the needed strategic outlook on SMM.

The SLR shows that extant literature adopts several theoretical lenses (i.e., behavioural, strategic management, advertising, and mass communication theories) to understand the antecedents and outcomes of SMM. The lack of a common theoretical basis makes research findings seldom comparable. The integrative framework unifies such perspectives by bringing clarity to the literature, which generally lacks consistency in how it defines and measures variables (Kwon et al., 2021; Martin-Rojas et al., 2021), and by illustrating interrelationships among constructs. Specifically, we suggest a clearer grouping of these factors, organizing the diverse theories into a comprehensive picture. Regarding antecedents, we merge different theoretical constructs derived from behavioural (i.e., TAM, TOE, etc.) and strategic management theories (i.e., dynamic capabilities, institutional theory, etc.) into organizational, social media-related, and external factors.

Similarly, since SMM has been individually linked to several positive outcomes, we draw on resource-based theory, dynamic capabilities, and the knowledge-based view (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018; Troise et al., 2022) to group these outcomes into three broader categories: organizational capabilities, marketing, and financial performance. By doing so, we further contribute to the extant literature by suggesting that the relationship between firms' SMM behaviour and performance outcomes, either marketing or financial, may not be straightforward but

TABLE 6 Future research agenda.

General research directions	
Theme	Future research avenues
Investigate the overall effectiveness of the integrative framework to represent the SMM phenomenon	
<i>Firms' social media marketing behaviour</i>	Develop fine-grained constructs and measures that consider a holistic perspective on firms' SMM behaviour as a multifaceted concept comprising adoption decisions and social media marketing activities
<i>Antecedents of firms' SMM behaviour</i>	Employ a theoretically robust naming and understanding of the selected variables Use the provided categorization of the antecedents into organizational, social media-related, and external factors
<i>Outcomes of firms' SMM behaviour</i>	Employ a theoretically robust naming and understanding of the selected variables Investigate the relationship between firms' SMM behaviour and marketing performance Investigate the relationship between firms' SMM behaviour and financial performance by using objective measures instead of subjective measures Investigate the role of organizational capabilities on marketing performance and financial performance Investigate the role of marketing performance on financial performance
<i>Contingency factors</i>	Investigate the role of contingency factors as moderators in the relationship between firms' SMM behaviour and performance outcomes

could, instead, require the development of organizational capabilities.

The framework also displays contingencies that may affect how firms behave on social media and the expected outcomes. The extant literature has generally paid less attention to these factors, despite them emerging as difficulties that companies experience in using social media for marketing purposes (Bartoloni et al., 2019; Ghouri et al., 2022). Therefore, the framework provides a more complete picture of the phenomenon by clearly highlighting the role of these contingencies.

We believe that this study helps develop research in this area in a more systematic direction, as discussed in more detail below.

## Future research agenda

The contribution of this study extends beyond synthesizing and integrating fragmented research into an overall framework. While our analysis and the integrated framework of the firms' SMM behaviour present an overview of what has been researched within the boundaries of the SLR, they also serve as a basis for outlining directions for future research (see Table 6).

To truly advance knowledge in this area, we suggest that researchers interested in investigating firms' strategic use of social media in marketing should shift their focus from studying one behavioural facet at a time to adopting a holistic perspective on firms' SMM behaviour as a multifaceted concept. Hence, more empirical research is needed to advance the proposed concept by developing more fine-

grained constructs and measures that consider all aspects of firms' behaviours.

Researchers are encouraged to enhance the connections between the identified theoretical strands of research by further investigating the relationships suggested by the proposed framework. The SLR shows that the investigated antecedents are difficult to compare since studies lack consistency in how they define and measure such factors. Therefore, there is a need for a theoretically robust and agreed-upon naming and understanding of these variables. In this regard, the proposed framework provides a novel grouping and categorization of the most investigated antecedents, representing a valuable basis for advancing research in this direction.

Similarly, we encourage scholars to provide additional evidence on the effectiveness of firms' SMM behaviours. Specifically, we have highlighted how authors tend to evaluate such a relationship by employing the broad concept of 'organizational performance', which is usually operationalized through measurement scales that encompass items of different natures, both marketing and financial. Scholars may further contribute to the current body of knowledge and provide more valuable insights by investigating the relationship between SMM behaviour and each type of performance. To this end, the framework can serve as the groundwork for research by displaying various dimensions of marketing performance that might be used for studying the effect of SMM behaviour. For instance, considering online marketing performance, scholars could expand the relationship between the holistic concept of firms' SMM behaviour and customer engagement, which has hitherto been investigated only in message strategies.



In addition, the extant literature mostly understands customer engagement through its behavioural components, while the concept is much broader and includes cognitive and emotional dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011). Consequently, future studies should embrace this all-encompassing notion of customer engagement.

Although the extant empirical evidence suggests a link with financial performance, with some rare exceptions aside (Chang et al., 2018; Rapp et al., 2013), these studies are largely based on managers' perceptions rather than on objective measurements (Cao et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2020), probably due to the difficulty in accessing financial data. Therefore, an alternative and promising research direction involves exploring the impact of firms' SMM behaviour on financial outcomes through the use of more objective measurement scales.

The proposed framework suggests that the relationship between firms' SMM behaviour and performance outcomes may be indirect. To elaborate, we advocate for future research to provide additional empirical evidence regarding the mediating role of organizational capabilities and marketing performance.

In addition, given the predominantly qualitative nature of studies on contingency factors, an opportune avenue for research would involve empirically testing the influence of these factors as moderating variables.

## Managerial implications

While primarily designed to enhance the theoretical understanding of SMM, the proposed framework also holds the potential to offer insights for practitioners seeking to improve their comprehension of the broader SMM phenomenon.

The conceptualization of firms' SMM behaviour provides managers valuable guidance on structuring and executing effective SMM strategies. As the study findings suggest, there is a need for firms to embrace a more strategic approach to SMM that prioritizes proactive long-term orientation over a short-term approach based on reactive behaviours. To this end, managers should integrate adoption decisions and SMM activities, treating them as a unified process. Merely deciding on investment levels for platforms, resources, and time, as well as defining goals, may not suffice for developing a successful strategy. In this context, the framework outlines critical and strategic activities necessitating significant organizational changes. For example, to enhance customer engagement through personalized content, managers should develop cross-functional processes for systematically acquiring and managing customer knowledge through social media. Acquiring external knowledge through social media mon-

itoring and listening offers valuable insights that firms should store, transform, transfer, and integrate to make more informed decisions regarding NPD and innovation processes, content creation, and customer preferences. Similarly, managing customer relationships through social media allows a company to acquire new customers and manage these relationships in the long term. This activity should focus on interactions rather than transactions to cultivate engaged and satisfied customers. The framework underscores the importance of SMM measurement activities and the design of appropriate metrics, emphasizing their vital role for firms struggling to discern the actual value of their SMM behaviour beyond simple customer engagement. Managers should invest time and effort in designing a proper SMM measurement system to ascertain whether the implemented strategy is yielding expected outcomes and whether adjustments are needed.

In this regard, our findings can be useful in addressing this issue. The integrative overview of the outcomes offers practitioners a better understanding of how to effectively measure the results of their initiatives, thus helping them create a set of indicators. It is crucial for them to recognize that investments may not always generate direct financial or marketing results. Instead, managers should acknowledge that continuous interactions with customers through social media might not immediately translate into improved performance outcomes. However, these interactions could have a long-term impact on organizational skills, ultimately influencing performance over time.

Furthermore, by summarizing the most important antecedents of SMM behaviours, the framework helps practitioners better understand the factors that can either boost or hinder the effective use of social media for marketing purposes. It underscores the need for establishing appropriate internal organizational elements. The study findings reveal the important role played by the right managerial mindset and support, as well as the proper technological infrastructure and trained employees, in shaping firms' SMM behaviour. Organizational innovativeness and entrepreneurial orientation are two additional factors that create a supportive environment for SMM adoption and implementation.

Managers should promptly look at the contingency factors that can eventually alter the expected outcomes of SMM. For instance, difficulties in monitoring and analysing social media data might hinder the collection and evaluation of valuable knowledge. Data security issues also warrant attention, as misalignments between firms' expectations regarding the availability of valuable information on social media and the actual willingness of customers to share such information can occur, leading to potential overestimation of data richness and hindering SMM effectiveness. Governance-related challenges

arising from social media management may significantly influence the overall success of SMM behaviours. Firms may face difficulties in updating profiles and maintaining a consistent message on various platforms, especially when pursuing different goals and trying to match customers' characteristics. This affects how firms create content, both in terms of message strategies and features, and its effectiveness. Likewise, the lack of control over message diffusion can hamper efforts to craft engaging messages.

To effectively address these issues, firms should delegate the responsibility of managing social media to individuals within the organization who possess the requisite expertise and skills and should also create specific SMM teams. This approach enables better management of customer relationships, extraction of value from stored data, and control over message diffusion. It also enhances the firm's ability to monitor and align the correct data with the expected outcomes regarding customers' responses.

## LIMITATIONS

The article is not without limitations, mainly associated with the SLR process. First, the limitation of selecting only one database may be noted. Although Scopus includes most peer-reviewed international journals, the exclusion of publications not listed in this database could lead to omissions. Second, although we carefully crafted the search strings by drawing upon the relevant literature and using alternative keywords to include as many relevant articles dealing with firms' SMM as possible, contributions using other (related) keywords to study the same topic were inevitably excluded. Third, we also decided to limit the extraction only to articles listed in the AJG ranking to guarantee the inclusion of medium-to-high-quality research. Hence, some findings might have been excluded. Moreover, pertinent publications written in languages other than English were also excluded. Other limitations pertain to the thematic analysis and findings of the review. While the review synthesizes the extant knowledge to develop an integrated framework, it neither operationalizes its main constituents (antecedents, firms' SMM behaviour, and outcomes) nor tests any of the suggested relationships. Despite these limitations, we believe that they present opportunities for interesting research avenues, and the proposed framework can serve as a valuable tool for structuring future research.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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