

## **The Synergy of Strategy and Engagement: Unlocking Social Media's Performance Potential**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies in improving the social media performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the food and beverage sector. This study uses a comprehensive analytical approach, including descriptive and inferential analysis, to evaluate data collected through questionnaires. The method used in this study is a quantitative approach with data collection from 265 SMEs in the food and beverage sector in the cities of Solo, Semarang, Kudus, and Jepara, which were selected using a purposive sampling method. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS software. This study results that the development of social media-based brand exposure and customer engagement is critical in driving improved social media performance. The study also provides detailed insights into respondents' perceptions of the research variables, including social media marketing strategy, social media-based customer engagement, brand exposure, and social media performance.

**Keywords:** social media strategy, customer engagement, brand exposure, social media performance, MSMEs

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has become crucial for business growth and survival, prompting discussions in management and academic fields. It allows companies to interact more effectively with customers, enhance marketing communications, and improve satisfaction through long-term, two-way engagement, ultimately boosting goodwill and profitability (Susanto et al. 2023). Social media is increasingly relevant in business literature, especially for micro, small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs). Research shows that MSMEs can gain substantial benefits from social media as a cost-effective alternative to traditional management methods (Ahmad et al. 2019). Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter offer businesses opportunities to engage personally with clients and reach a broader audience (Li et al. 2021). They play a key role in building strong consumer

relationships through interactive dialogue and foster social connections (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). It is crucial to understand the role and impact of social media beyond communication professionals, acknowledging its broader business and social implications (Moreno et al. 2015). Research on social media performance is vital for MSMEs, as social media is their most effective marketing platform (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Social media marketing also provides opportunities to enhance connectivity, customer engagement, brand awareness, and competitive advantage (Audrezet et al. 2020; Joshi et al. 2023).

Social media performance is driven by positive consumer views, sentiments, or behaviors towards a company's social media activities. To achieve strategic marketing goals, businesses must effectively engage with customers through social media platforms (Tafesse & Wien,

experience better performance and enhanced brand perception (Marchand et al. 2021). Social media performance assesses a brand's online strategy effectiveness across various platforms, evaluating both the overall impact and the influence of the content produced (Ferreira et al. 2022). It encompasses both the quantity of interactions and the effectiveness of the brand's overall social media strategy. Tafesse & Wien (2018) found that effective social media marketing strategies lead to positive social media performance, while Marchand et al. (2021) reported only a marginal impact of these strategies on performance. This highlights inconsistencies in empirical results within the field.

This study aims to explore the relationship between a company's marketing performance and its social media marketing strategy. Effective social media strategies are intended to promote growth for both the company and its customers, as highlighted by Wu et al. (2020). Frameworks, such as those proposed by Ananda et al. (2016) are used to evaluate these strategies' performance, which is essential for boosting brand equity and recognition (Guha et al. 2021). The research investigates several key questions: Can companies enhance their social media performance through strategic marketing approaches? Which factor brand exposure or social media engagement most significantly improves social media performance? Additionally, do brand exposure and engagement effectively mediate the relationship between social media marketing strategy and performance?

Social media success is essential for gaining a competitive edge. Tafesse & Wien (2018) found that strategic social media efforts significantly enhance company performance. Investments in social media lead to sustained performance improvements (Marchand et al. 2021). Additionally, a focus on social media for sales and business enhances performance (Dutot et al. 2016) while personalization

and strengthened marketing efforts elevate social media performance (Oberoi et al. 2017). This research highlights the critical role of an effective social media strategy in achieving success and competitiveness in the digital era.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategy in Online Business**

The concept of social media marketing strategy was initially vague until Ananda et al. (2016) defined it as the development of targeted actions to meet market demands and achieve marketing goals via social media. Li et al. (2021) refined this by emphasizing a strategy that aligns with customer desires and converts interactions into effective engagement. Social media marketing strategy includes four key areas including social commerce strategy (Li et al. 2021) which involves technology-mediated activities on social networks, social content strategy (Järvinen & Karjaluo, 2015) which focuses on relevant and timely content, social monitoring strategy (Barger et al. 2016) which emphasizes interaction monitoring and response, and social CRM strategy (Malthouse et al. 2013) which integrates customer engagement with CRM for enhanced benefits. Researchers such as Yadav et al. (2013); Holliman & Rowley (2014); Lamberton & Stephen (2016) provide frameworks for understanding these strategies. This study explores how social media marketing strategies, particularly through customer engagement and brand exposure, impact social media performance. Social CRM, crucial for evaluating service quality and incorporating feedback (Guha et al. 2018; Ahani et al. 2017) is central to understanding the impact on company performance.

### **The Influence of Customer Engagement**

The rise of social media has transformed marketing by changing customer-company interactions. Social media content is essential for boosting customer-based Social Media Engagement

(Hollebeek et al. 2019) which Hallock et al. (2019) argued is crucial for online marketing effectiveness. Social media engagement drives sales through direct and indirect channels, influenced by a company's social media competence (Guesalaga, 2016) and impacts customer loyalty in social commerce (Molinillo et al. 2020). Hollebeek et al. (2014) define social media-based consumer engagement as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment to a brand. Grewal et al. (2017) describe it as interactions between consumers and brands on social media, while Pansari and Kumar (2017) view it as a value-adding mechanism for companies. Hollebeek et al. (2019) note that not all engagement is valuable. Previous research has explored engagement as a psychological state (Brodie et al. 2013) active participation in brand communities (Baldus et al. 2015) and habitual interaction with brand content (Dolan et al. 2016). This study will examine social media-based engagement as consumer behavior in brand interactions.

### **Brand Exposure**

Brand exposure on social media can drive word-of-mouth (WOM) and influence brand preference and user engagement, even with incidental exposure (Pace et al. 2017; Humphrey et al. 2017). Effective communication on social media enhances brand awareness (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Brand exposure encompasses indirect interactions, such as ads and recommendations, and includes consumers' exposure and experience with the brand (Baumann et al. 2015). This study highlights the significance of brand exposure in shaping brand influence and communication on social media.

### **Social Media Performance**

Social media performance is evaluated by its effectiveness in achieving goals (Zachlod et al. 2022) and is linked to optimizing return on investment (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Studies

show that intensive social media use positively impacts marketing performance and sales (Yost et al. 2021; Bai & Yan, 2020) and enhances customer engagement (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). Effective social media performance improves sales and marketing outcomes (Oberoi et al. 2017) and influences brand perception and user attitudes towards content (Marchand et al. 2021). This study supports the positive impact of social media performance on corporate marketing.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategy on Brand Exposure**

Social media marketing strategies effectively reach target consumers and enhance brand exposure, leading to increased purchases and competitiveness (Azar et al. 2016; Thornhill et al. 2017). They also boost brand exposure and user interactions cost-effectively (Taecharungroj, 2017) improve brand equity in luxury markets, especially among millennials (Zollo et al. 2020). These strategies significantly benefit companies in achieving their marketing goals. H1: Social media marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on brand exposure

### **Social Media Marketing Strategy on Social Media Based Customer Engagement**

Research by Wang & Kim (2017) highlights the importance of focusing social media marketing strategies on enhancing customer engagement. Dolan et al. (2019) support this by prioritizing increasing engagement within social media environments. Wang and Kim (2017) recommend integrating social CRM to further strengthen engagement and marketing performance, a method proven effective across the customer journey (Demmers et al. 2020). These perspectives underscore the need for Social Media Marketing Strategies centered on consumer involvement. H2: Social media marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect

on social media based customer engagement.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategy on Social Media Performance**

To achieve optimal social media performance, companies must thoroughly assess their social media marketing strategy (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Research by Marchand et al. (2021) shows that these strategies enhance social media performance and brand perception. Tafesse & Wien (2018) further demonstrate that effective social media tactics boost performance and overall marketing success. H3: Social media marketing strategy has a positive and significant effect on social media performance

### **Brand Exposure on Social Media Performance**

Repeated brand exposure on social media can influence brand preference (Humphrey et al. 2017) and stimulate brand purchases while enhancing competitiveness (Thornhill et al. 2017). Additionally, active consumer content creation and brand influence can foster co-creation and strengthen social media performance (Tajvidi et al. 2020). These findings support the positive impact of repeated social media exposure on brand preference and performance. H4: Brand exposure has a positive and significant effect on social media performance.

### **Social Media Based Customer Engagement on Social Media Performance**

Extensive research on social media-based customer engagement shows its impact on sales and performance (Guesalaga, 2016). Demmers et al. (2020) highlight its role in enhancing customer experience throughout their journey. Understanding social media engagement provides insights into its effects on performance and the customer journey. H5: Social media based customer engagement

has a positive and significant effect on social media performance.

## **METHOD**

This research is a type of causal research that aims to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between various relevant variables (Hair et al. 2010). The primary focus of this study is on Small and Medium-Sized businesses (SMEs) in Solo, Semarang, Kudus, and Jepara that are involved in the food and beverage industry. The data required to support this research has been collected through primary data sources as well as relevant secondary data. All food and beverage MSMEs in the Central Java area are included in the study population, and 265 MSME entrepreneurs who operate in the four cities of Solo, Semarang, Kudus, and Jepara make up the representative research sample. The primary data collection method in this study was conducted through the application of a survey using a questionnaire. Data analysis in this study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques with the support of AMOS software.

Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) is employed in this research to evaluate intricate relationships, develop models of higher-order constructs, provide precise estimates of paths, examine measurement errors, conduct confirmatory factor analysis, serve predictive and exploratory objectives, and manage data (Hair et al. 2014). It is appropriate for marketing, as well as for testing models that involve formative and reflective components, as well as single-item assessments.

The main objective of this research is to test a number of hypotheses related to the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables under investigation. The research model has been designed with an approach that emphasizes hypothesis testing and adheres to the basic principles of causal research. The entire research is focused on the context of MSMEs in the food and beverage sector in the aforementioned

geographical areas. The process of data collection and hypothesis testing was conducted through the use of questionnaires, and data analysis was carried out utilizing SEM techniques using AMOS software.

## RESULTS

The presentation of the results of this study is done in two main components that reflect a comprehensive analytical approach, namely descriptive analysis and in-depth inferential analysis. The first part, descriptive analysis, reveals an in-depth understanding of the collected data through the application of relevant index values. By describing the data in detail, this descriptive analysis provides a strong foundation for an initial understanding of the observed phenomenon. Meanwhile, the second part, inferential analysis, adopts SEM technique, a sophisticated methodological approach to dig deeper and test fundamental hypotheses. Through SEM, this study was able to explore the cause-and-effect relationships between significant variables in the research framework. This allows for a deeper understanding of how these factors interact and contribute to the observed

phenomenon, providing deeper insights in order to enrich academic and practical understanding of the research topic.

In evaluating the responses given by the respondents to various relevant variables, such as social media marketing strategy, social media based customer engagement, brand exposure, and social media performance, an assessment approach using the index method has been adopted. This approach allows us to comprehensively and systematically analyze the responses received from respondents to these variables. This process involves the calculation of an index that aims to measure the level of impact or significance of each variable within the research framework. Each variable was evaluated using an index approach that covers various relevant aspects. In this endeavor, we will present the results of the index calculations we have conducted for each of the variables (see Table 1). These results will provide a deeper understanding of each variable's contribution to the research framework and will serve as an important foundation in elaborating on the findings of this study in greater depth.

**Table 1. Tendencies of Respondents' Answers to Research Variables**

Constructs	Index
Social Media Marketing Strategy	77.5
Social Media Bases Customer Engagement	73.9
Brand Exposure	75.5
Social Media Performance	76.3

The conclusions drawn from the preceding index computations' findings indicate that there is a significant degree of tendency present in the respondents' replies to each research variable. These results indicate that participants in this study generally showed a significant level of agreement or acceptance of the variables being studied.

### Inferential Analysis

A comprehensive inferential analysis has been carried out with the aim to test the proposed research model as well

as to explore the complex relationships among the variables involved in this study. The method used in this analysis is SEM, a statistical approach carefully applied to test and validate the formulated conceptual model.

### Confirmatory Analysis

Confirmatory analysis is a critical step in this research, which aims to ensure that the indicators that have been selected as variable measurement tools properly reflect the concept being observed. To measure the quality of indicators, a number of important

criteria have been used as guidelines in this confirmatory analysis. The first criterion used is the Standardized Estimate value. The Standardized Estimation value above 0.5 is an important parameter in evaluating the validity of indicator construction. This indicates the extent to which the indicator contributes significantly to measuring the variable in question. Furthermore, the Confidence Ratio (CR) criterion is also used as a benchmark. A CR value that

exceeds 1.98 at the  $\alpha = 5\%$  significance level is a further indicator of indicator quality. This indicates that the indicator has a significant contribution to the measured variable. In addition, the significance values are also an important consideration. A significance value of less than 0.05 indicates that the indicator is statistically significantly different from zero, supporting the use of the indicator in this analysis

**Table 2. Results of Research Model Analysis**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
SMMS7	<---	SMM	0.530	0.069	7.677	***
SMMS3	<---	SMM	1.067	0.068	15.646	***
SMMS1	<---	SMM	1.000			
BE1	<---	BE	1.000			
BE4	<---	BE	1.431	0.097	14.764	***
BE5	<---	BE	1.621	0.110	14.700	***
SMP4	<---	SMP	1.000			
SMP3	<---	SMP	0.958	0.036	26.277	***
SMP2	<---	SMP	0.778	0.036	21.378	***
CE4	<---	SMBCE	1.000			
CE3	<---	SMBCE	0.785	0.046	17.078	***
CE2	<---	SMBCE	0.875	0.045	19.307	***

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that the indicators used in this study successfully reflect the observed variables.

### SEM Assumptions

In conducting the normality test of the data used in this study, it refers to the predetermined criteria. Univariate normality, which refers to numbers that reach values in the range of  $\pm 2.58$ , indicating results that conform to the assumption of normality. Meanwhile, in the context of multivariate normality, the score obtained was 5.395. While this score exceeds the commonly recommended cutoff value, it is important to note that it is

still below the threshold of 8.0 which is considered a very critical value in the evaluation of multivariate normality (Ferdinand, 2014). These results provide confidence that the data used in this analysis has met the assumption of adequate data normality (see Table 3). Therefore, it can confidently proceed with the analysis to the next stage in this research. A careful understanding of the normality of this data provides a solid basis for the interpretation of the analysis results and ensures that the findings of this study can be relied upon in order to achieve the research objectives

**Table 3. Result of Normality Test**

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	c.r.	Kurtosis	c.r.
CE2	5.000	10.000	0.458	2.973	-0.238	-0.774
CE3	6.000	10.000	0.592	3.844	-0.337	-1.093
CE4	5.000	10.000	0.362	2.351	-0.634	-2.060
SMP2	6.000	10.000	0.032	0.205	-0.530	-1.720
SMP3	5.000	10.000	-0.014	-0.091	-0.552	-1.791
SMP4	5.000	10.000	-0.162	-1.052	-0.701	-2.277
BE5	5.000	10.000	0.098	0.636	-0.618	-2.006
BE4	5.000	10.000	0.181	1.177	-0.358	-1.163
BE1	6.000	10.000	-0.122	-0.790	-0.386	-1.252
SMMS1	5.000	10.000	-0.151	-0.982	-0.106	-0.346
SMMS3	6.000	10.000	0.435	2.825	-0.329	-1.068
SMMS7	6.000	10.000	-0.302	-1.964	-0.350	-1.137
Multivariate					12.436	5.395

Multicollinearity and singularity checks were carried out with the aim of assessing the extent of interrelationships among the observed exogenous variables. However, it should be noted that in this model framework, only one relevant exogenous variable is involved, making these assumptions irrelevant in the context of this study. Residual analysis has been applied to monitor errors that may arise during the testing of the research model, with the aim of assessing whether adjustments need to be made to the model. The assessment of the expected residual

values aligns with the predefined standard of  $\leq 2.58$ . Through the model calculations performed, the results showed that none of the residual values exceeded the limit of 2.58, so it can be concluded that there are no significant problems associated with the residuals in this analysis. Furthermore, the relevant requirement for construct reliability and variance extracted is that their values should exceed 0.5. Table 4 shows the results of the calculations applied to evaluate the level of construct reliability and variance extracted in the context of this study.

**Table 4. Reliability Construct and Variance Extracted**

Variable	Construct Reliability	Variance Extracted
Social Media Marketing Strategy	0.544	0.587
Social Media Based Customer Engagement	0.654	0.782
Brand Exposure	0.744	0.894
Social Media Performance	0.720	0.869

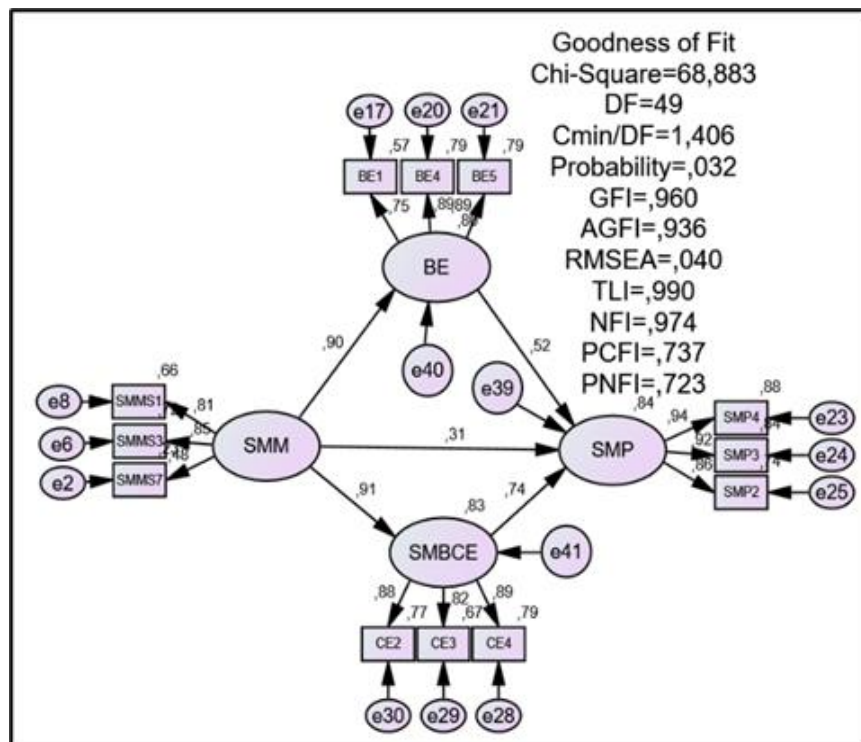


Figure 1. SEM Structural Model

Table 5. Result of Goodness of Fit Test

Goodness of Fit Index	Cut off Value	Result	Model Evaluation
Chi-Square (df = 147)	< 66.424	68.663	Marginal
Probability	$\geq 0.05$	0.032	Marginal
CMIN/DF	$\leq 2.00$	1.406	Good
GFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.960	Good
AGFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.936	Good
TLI	$\geq 0.95$	0.990	Good
CFI	$\geq 0.95$	0.992	Good
RMSEA	$\leq 0.08$	0.040	Good

Goodness of fit results for SEM Structural Model (Figure 1) are presented in the Table 5.

Because the CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI and RMSEA values meet the standard cut-off values, even though the

chi-square and probability values are at a marginal level, it can be concluded that the model has met the expected goodness of fit standards (Table 6).



**Table 6. Measurement Items**

Variable	Indicator Name	Indicator	Source
Social Media Marketing Strategy	SMM1	The business's social media provides a means for customers to share content	Adapted from Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol (2019)
	SMM3	This social media business serves customers personally, according to their wishes	
	SMM7	We use this business social media to develop our business brand	
Brand Exposure	BE1	Our social media followers are growing	Adapted from Baumann, Hamin, & Chong (2015); Dijkmans et al. (2015)
	BE4	Users who interact with us on social media are increasing	
	BE5	Users who are already familiar with our social media business are increasing	
Customer Engagement	CE2	I consider that more and more users often visit this business's social media	Adapted from Garg et al. (2020)
	CE3	I consider that more and more users like this business's posts on social media	
	CE4	I consider that more and more users comment on this business's posts on social media	
Social Media Performance	SMP2	I think that more and more users are contacting this business through social media	Adapted from Tafesse & Wien (2018)
	SMP3	I think the more customers this business gets through social media	
	SMP4	I see that there are more and more customers that this business can serve through social media	

### Hypothesis Testing

At a significance level of less than 0.05, the probability value has been analyzed using predefined criteria in order to conduct hypothesis testing. Probability analysis has been the primary method utilized to gauge the degree of confidence

in the test findings and to assess the validity of the hypotheses put forward in this study. At the predetermined significance level, this probability value has become a key indicator in evaluating whether the hypothesis can be accepted or should be rejected (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Hypothesis Test Results**

Hypothesis Testing Results				Std Estimate	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H <sub>1</sub>	BE	<---	SMM	0.896	0.715	0.061	11.757	***
H <sub>2</sub>	SMBCE	<---	SMM	0.912	1.221	0.085	14.338	***
H <sub>3</sub>	SMP	<---	SMM	-0.312	-0.441	0.275	-1.601	.109
H <sub>4</sub>	SMP	<---	BE	0.521	0.923	0.214	4.310	***
H <sub>5</sub>	SMP	<---	SMBCE	0.743	0.784	0.151	5.194	***

Social media marketing strategy notably enhances brand exposure and significantly improves social media-based customer engagement. However, its impact on overall social media performance is limited. Brand exposure and customer engagement both positively and significantly affect social media performance. These findings highlight the complex interactions among these variables and underscore the importance of understanding their relationships in social media marketing strategies.

## DISCUSSION

This study proves that H<sub>3</sub> is rejected, so that the social media marketing strategy carried out by the company is not able to directly improve social media performance. The results of this study contradict previous opinions by Tafesse & Wien (2018) which found that social media marketing strategy has a positive and significant impact on social media performance. This contrasts with the view of Marchand et al. (2021), who assert that social media marketing strategy has a positive but negligible effect on social media performance. This research has the main objective to test the effectiveness of social media marketing strategy implemented by SMEs in an effort to improve their marketing performance. To achieve maximum results from this social media marketing strategy, it is necessary to develop both aspects of brand exposure and social media based customer engagement. These developments play a key role in stimulating improved social media performance, and can be realized through two different pathways, namely Brand

Exposure (H<sub>1</sub> + H<sub>4</sub>) or social media based customer engagement (H<sub>2</sub> + H<sub>5</sub>). As such, this research will provide a deeper understanding of how SMEs can optimize their social media marketing strategies, with the aim to improve their marketing performance and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market. The demographics of MSME respondents, predominantly food and drinks, show that MSMEs with a longer company age, over 3 years, perform better on social media. Using social media for marketing takes time for MSMEs to get known and receive buyer reactions (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Abbasi et al. 2022).

## Brand Exposure Strategy

SMEs that implement a social media marketing strategy, including the use of corporate social media that provides facilities for customers to share content, provides personalized customer service according to customer preferences, and utilizes social media to strengthen brand image, will be able to develop their brand exposure. This is reflected in an increase in the number of followers on the company's social media, growth in user interactions with the company, and an increase in the number of users who become familiar with the company's social media presence. SMEs that implement such an approach will achieve significant improvements in their social media performance, including growth in the number of users communicating with the company through its social media platforms, increased customer acquisition through social media marketing efforts, and a greater ability to

serve customer needs through social media platforms. These findings highlight the benefits of a strong social media marketing strategy for SMEs in the digital era, as it may optimize marketing performance and bring substantial additional value.

### **Social Media Based Customer Engagement Strategy**

SMEs that implement a social media marketing strategy, which includes the use of various aspects of corporate social media, such as facilitating customers in sharing content, customer service tailored to their preferences, and brand development efforts through social media, will observe significant developments in terms of social media-based customer engagement. In this context, this development involves improvements in various indicators, including an increase in the number of users who regularly visit a company's social media platforms, growth in the number of users who "like" company posts, and increased user participation through comments on company posts. Increased user interactions with businesses on social media will enhance customer acquisition and improve the ability to meet and service customer needs, positively impacting social media performance. SMEs adopting this strategy will see significant benefits, improving their social media performance and integrating it effectively into their overall marketing plan.

The research questions previously posed can now be answered through the results obtained in this study. The first question, regarding the potential of social media marketing strategy in improving the company's social media performance, empirical results show that social media marketing strategy is not directly able to shape the company's social media performance. This finding validates

previous research conducted by Marchand et al. (2021) which also concluded that the relationship between social media marketing strategy and social media performance does not have high statistical significance. The second question, regarding factors that are important for companies in an effort to improve the effectiveness of social media marketing, identified that the two main factors are brand exposure and social media based customer engagement.

The findings suggest that customer engagement through social media has a greater impact as a mediating factor between social media marketing strategy and social media performance. The comprehension of the significance of consumer involvement through social media in accomplishing business marketing goals is strengthened by these results. The third question, regarding whether brand exposure and social media based customer engagement have a role as mediators in filling the gap between social media marketing strategy and corporate social media performance, shows that these two factors do indeed act as significant mediators in linking social media marketing strategy and social media performance.

### **CONCLUSION**

These findings make a valuable contribution to understanding the complex dynamics between the variables involved in the context of social media marketing strategy. This study proposes further investigation for future research due to the limited exploration of variables in previous studies and this particular study. Therefore, it is imperative to delve deeper into the variables, particularly those pertaining to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as they play a significant role in understanding the essence of SMEs.

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