




# The Impact of Perceived Ease of Use on Digital Marketing Adoption Among Malaysian SME

Hidayahtul Khusna Binti Abdul Malik<sup>1</sup>

Zaidatulnisha Ab Jalil<sup>2</sup> 

Norhaninah Binti A. Ghani<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Business and Accountancy, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Graduate Studies, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
[khusna@uptm.edu.my](mailto:khusna@uptm.edu.my)<sup>1</sup>, [nisha@uptm.edu.my](mailto:nisha@uptm.edu.my)<sup>2</sup>, [norhaninah@uptm.edu.my](mailto:norhaninah@uptm.edu.my)<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract.** This study investigates the impact of perceived ease of use (PEOU) on digital marketing adoption among Malaysian small and medium enterprises (SMEs). While digital marketing offers significant opportunities for business growth, adoption among SMEs remains uneven, particularly due to individual perceptions toward technology. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 143 SME respondents across various sectors in Malaysia. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption ( $r = 0.631$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that SMEs are more likely to adopt digital marketing tools they perceive as simple and easy to use. The findings extend the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) within the SME context and provide practical implications for policymakers and platform developers to enhance digital adoption through simplified systems and targeted training initiatives.

**Keywords:** Perceived Ease of Use, Digital Marketing, SMEs, Technology Adoption

## 1 Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in Malaysia's economic development by contributing significantly to employment creation and gross domestic product (Sana et al., 2020). In recent years, digital transformation has become increasingly important for SMEs to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving business environment. Among various digital strategies, digital marketing offers SMEs opportunities to enhance market visibility, customer engagement, and overall business performance.

Despite these benefits, the level of digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs remains uneven (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023; Ab Jalil & Zakaria, 2024). While many SMEs have adopted basic digital platforms such as social media, the adoption of more advanced digital marketing tools, including e-commerce platforms and analytics systems, is still relatively limited. This situation suggests that beyond infrastructure and cost considerations, behavioral and perceptual factors may significantly influence adoption decisions.

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Digital marketing adoption is frequently examined using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key determinants of technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). In the SME context, perceived ease of use (PEOU) is particularly important, as business owners often lack formal technical training and rely on intuitive and user-friendly systems. When digital marketing tools are perceived as simple and easy to learn, SMEs are more likely to integrate them into their daily business operations.

Empirical evidence from Malaysia indicates that although digital marketing adoption can improve SME performance and competitiveness, adoption levels vary due to differences in digital readiness and individual perceptions toward technology (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023; Ab Jalil & Zakaria, 2024). Previous studies have largely focused on performance outcomes or organizational capabilities, with limited attention given to the behavioral drivers underlying digital marketing adoption decisions among SMEs.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of perceived ease of use on digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs. By focusing specifically on PEOU as a primary behavioral driver, this research extends existing literature and provides empirical insights that can support policymakers, platform developers, and SME owners in designing more effective strategies to encourage digital marketing adoption.

## 2 Research Gap

Although digital marketing adoption among SMEs has been widely discussed, existing studies in Malaysia predominantly emphasize performance outcomes and platform usage rather than the behavioral factors influencing adoption decisions (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023). In particular, empirical research that isolates perceived ease of use (PEOU) as a primary determinant of digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs remains limited. Many prior studies examine PEOU alongside other constructs, making it difficult to understand its independent effect. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by empirically examining the impact of perceived ease of use on digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs, thereby extending the Technology Acceptance Model within the SME context.

## 3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, to identify the level of perceived ease of use (PEOU) among Malaysian small and medium enterprises in adopting digital marketing practices. Second, to examine the relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs. Finally, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for policymakers, platform developers, and SME owners to enhance digital marketing adoption through user-friendly systems and targeted training initiatives.

## 4 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption among Malaysian small and medium enterprises (SMEs). A survey method was adopted as it is appropriate for collecting standardized data and analyzing relationships between variables in behavioral research.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to SME owners and managers across various business sectors in Malaysia. A total of 143 valid responses were obtained and used for analysis. This sample size is considered adequate for correlation analysis and is consistent with prior SME studies employing quantitative approaches. According to Hair et al. (2019), a minimum sample size of 100 is sufficient to detect moderate relationships in behavioral research.

The questionnaire consisted of two main constructs: perceived ease of use (PEOU) and digital marketing adoption. Measurement items were adapted from established studies to ensure content validity. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results indicated satisfactory reliability levels for both constructs, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

To address the research objectives, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption. Pearson correlation is appropriate when examining linear relationships between continuous variables and is widely used in behavioral research (Hair et al., 2019). Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality and linearity were assessed and found to be acceptable. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Table 1:** Questionnaire Items for Digital Marketing Adoption and PEOU

QUESTIONS	SOURCES
<p><b>Adoption of Digital Marketing</b></p> <p>We are keeping up with the growth of digital marketing.</p> <p>I believe my business will be successful using the latest technologies.</p> <p>Businesses who use digital technologies are more successful.</p> <p>We expect our business will use more digital technologies in future.</p> <p>Digital technology we have adopted met our expectations.</p>	<p>Maria Wishart and Stephen Roper, (2021)</p>

<p><b>Perceived Ease of Use</b></p> <p>Creating promotions on the Internet for our products or services would be easy for me.</p> <p>I find it easy to get digital marketing to do what I want it to do.</p> <p>It would be easy for me to become skillful at Internet promotions of our products or services.</p> <p>I believe developing digital marketing for our products or services is easy.</p>	<p>Suroso and Rafinda, (2021)</p>
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**Fig.1.** The conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Digital Marketing Adoption among Malaysian SMEs.

## 5 Result

This section presents the findings of the study based on the quantitative analysis conducted. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the level of digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs. Overall, the results indicate varying levels of adoption across different digital marketing tools, with social media platforms being the most widely adopted, followed by e-commerce and online advertising tools.

To address the main research objective, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived ease of use (PEOU) and digital marketing adoption. The results reveal a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption ( $r = 0.631, p < 0.01$ ). This finding indicates that SMEs are more likely to adopt digital marketing tools when such tools are perceived as easy to use and require minimal effort to learn and operate.

These findings support the hypothesis and align with previous research under scoring the role of user-friendly technology in promoting digital engagement (Davis, 1989; Almaiah et al., 2022).

**Table 2:** Research Findings on the Relationship between PEOU and Digital Marketing Adoption

Variables	Correlation
DV - Adoption of Digital Marketing	0.631**
IV - Perceived Ease of Use	1

## 6 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between perceived ease of use (PEOU) and digital marketing adoption among Malaysian SMEs. This result supports the Technology Acceptance Model, which emphasizes perceived ease of use as a key determinant influencing technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). In the SME context, where owners often manage multiple operational responsibilities, ease of use becomes a crucial factor in determining whether digital marketing tools are adopted.

The strength of the relationship ( $r = 0.631$ ) indicates that SMEs are more inclined to adopt digital marketing platforms that are simple, intuitive, and require minimal effort to learn. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that user-friendly digital systems increase adoption likelihood, particularly among small businesses with limited technical expertise (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023). This finding is also aligned with prior research indicating that digital marketing adoption can positively influence SME performance when supported by accessible and easy-to-use digital platforms (Sharabati et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2024). When platforms are perceived as complex or technically demanding, SMEs may hesitate to adopt them despite their potential performance benefits.

The findings also help explain the widespread adoption of social media platforms compared to more advanced digital marketing tools such as analytics systems or e-commerce platforms. Social media platforms are often perceived as familiar and easy to use, as many SME owners already engage with them in their personal lives. In contrast, tools that require data interpretation or advanced technical skills are perceived as more complex, which may reduce adoption rates (Ab Jalil & Zakaria, 2024).

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that efforts to enhance digital marketing adoption among SMEs should prioritize reducing perceived complexity. Policymakers and support agencies should design training programs that emphasize practical, hands-on learning rather than technical theory. Similarly, platform developers should focus on improving usability, offering localized language support, and providing step-by-step guidance to enhance SMEs' confidence in using digital marketing tools.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by empirically validating perceived ease of use as a significant behavioral driver of digital marketing adoption within the Malaysian SME context. By isolating PEOU as a key determinant, the study provides clearer insights into adoption behavior and offers practical implications for encouraging more inclusive and sustainable digital transformation among SMEs.

## 7 Conclusion

This study examined the impact of perceived ease of use (PEOU) on digital marketing adoption among Malaysian small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The findings reveal a strong and significant positive relationship between perceived ease of use and digital marketing adoption, indicating that SMEs are more likely to adopt digital marketing tools when these tools are perceived as simple, intuitive, and easy to operate.

The results highlight that perceived ease of use is a critical behavioral factor influencing adoption decisions, particularly in the SME context where business owners often face limited time, resources, and technical expertise. Platforms that are familiar and user-friendly, such as social media, tend to be adopted more readily compared to more complex digital tools.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers, platform developers, and support agencies should prioritize simplicity and usability when promoting digital marketing adoption among SMEs. Training programs should focus on hands-on, practical learning to reduce perceived complexity and build confidence among SME owners. Future research may consider extending this study by incorporating longitudinal designs or intervention-based approaches, such as training programs, to examine how digital marketing adoption evolves over time.

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