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DETERMINING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES' ADOPTION INTENTION OF SOCIAL CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN CHINA: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ATTITUDE

Wang Laidi
School of Economics and Management,
Huainan Normal University, Huainan. CHINA
Faculty of Business and Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam Campus, Selangor, MALAYSIA

Lennora Putit[♠]
Faculty of Business and Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor MALAYSIA
Business and Consumer Health (Biz-Health) Research Initiative Group,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA,

Xiaobo Jiao
Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Bengbu, CHINA

Herning Indriastuti
Management Department, Faculty of Economic and Business,
Universitas Mulawarman, Samarinda, East Kalimantan, INDONESIA

ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, social customer relationship management (social CRM) has become a vital tool for businesses seeking to strengthen customer relationships. Despite its advantages, the adoption of social CRM among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remains relatively low. Drawing on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this study investigated the factors influencing SMEs' intentions to adopt social CRM in China. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Based on a survey of 198 SMEs in Zhejiang, the findings reveal that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and attitude are significant direct determinants of adoption intention. Additionally, the results highlight the central role of attitude in mediating the effects of performance expectancy and effort expectancy on SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors shaping social CRM adoption in SMEs.

Keywords: Social CRM, UTAUT, Attitude, Intention, SMEs.

♠ Corresponding author: *Lennora Putit, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus, Selangor MALAYSIA; Business and Consumer Health (Biz-Health) Research Initiative Group, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA; Phone number / Corresponding email: +60166682912 / lennora633@uitm.edu.my*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social CRM is a new CRM strategy, that integrates social media technology with traditional CRM (Malthouse et al., 2013). Social CRM strategy leverages technology to organize, automate, and synchronize business processes, enhancing customer engagement across service, marketing, and sales activities (Yawised et al., 2018). This integration empowers enterprises to collaboratively manage customer expectations through social technologies, thereby enhancing both customer engagement and satisfaction, while concurrently gaining valuable insights into market trends and customer preferences (Jami Pour & Hosseinzadeh, 2021). The escalating user base on social media platforms and the heightened competition in the market accentuate the growing importance and superiority of social CRM. It has emerged as a focal point for numerous enterprises seeking to elevate their customer experience (Lamrhari et al., 2022). The adoption and implementation of Social CRM yield substantial profits for enterprises (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Particularly noteworthy is its role in assisting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), characterized by limited scale and insufficient resources, in navigating the market with minimal costs (Cappuccio et al., 2012; Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017), social CRM serves as a strategic tool for SMEs, enabling them to explore and expand their market presence effectively.

Although SMEs extensively use social media, they rarely apply it for strategic decisions or CRM metrics and often lack a formal customer-centric social media strategy (Guha et al., 2018; Marolt et al., 2020). Social CRM adoption remains limited in SMEs (Hassan et al., 2019). In China, platforms like WeChat, Tencent QQ, and Weibo are widely used (Statista.com, 2023), primarily for marketing and online sales (Wang et al., 2016; Yang & Che, 2020). Many SMEs fail to leverage social media for customer relationship building and competitive advantage (Crammond et al.,2018; Al-Omoush et al.,2021). Many enterprise executives still have not realized the value of adopting and implementing social CRM (Fraccastoro & Gabrielsson, 2018; Al-Omoush et al., 2021). In Chinese SMEs, CRM penetration is only 20%, especially in smaller firms (IResearch, 2022, February). This low adoption is attributed to financial constraints, poor information system management (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017), lack of expert knowledge (Casidy et al., 2020), and limited resources (Senarathna et al., 2018). SMEs tend to be hesitant in accepting and adopting new technologies (Dahnil et al.,2014). To fully harness the potential of social CRM, it becomes imperative to delve into the factors that motivate enterprises to adopt social customer relationship management (Gamage et al., 2021).

Social CRM is a relatively new area with limited research, particularly in SMEs (Yunis et al., 2018; Al-Omoush et al., 2021). While some efforts have been made to study social CRM adoption, most research focuses on large enterprises (Marolt et al., 2020; Harrigan & Miles, 2014), with few studies examining SMEs (Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017; Harrigan et al., 2015; Yasiukovich & Haddara, 2021). Little is known about the factors influencing SMEs' social CRM adoption and their impact on competitive advantage (Alghamdi, 2023).

SMEs play a crucial role in the economic growth of any country or region (The World Bank, 2022, Putit & Sahudin, 2023). In China, SMEs constitute over 90% of all enterprises, provide 80% of urban jobs, contribute over 70% to technological innovation, account for 60% of national GDP, and contribute 50% of national taxes (Guowuyuan, 2018). However, SMEs are particularly exposed to various vulnerabilities and risks due to their size and function, often experiencing higher risks and challenges. Most SMEs cease operations within a few years after establishment. The failure rate of new enterprises is significant, with 40% not surviving the first year and over 90% unable to survive the first ten years (Mansfield, 2019, March 28). Compared with their larger counterparts, SMEs are more dependent and more closely connected with customers (Durkin et al., 2013; Stekelorum, 2020). Maintaining a strong focus on the needs and desires of their customers is arguably the most significant determinant of success for entrepreneurs and small business owners (Liguori & Pittz, 2020). Social CRM provides enterprises with the opportunity to gain deeper marketing insights from data (Alanazi, 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). By tracking communication and engagement, pursuing leads, analyzing customer perspectives, and responding appropriately to enhance customer relationships through the review of incoming data, such as customer feedback, Social CRM helps enterprises cultivate more personalized relationships with their customers (Sharma et al., 2022). As a result, it has become a vital strategy for SMEs to enhance customer engagement and drive business growth in the digital age (Jami Pour & Hosseinzadeh, 2021).

Given the importance of social CRM in creating business value and the central role of SMEs in China's economy, understanding the factors influencing social CRM adoption among Chinese SMEs is crucial. A literature search shows a lack of studies on its adoption in the Chinese SME context. Studies from other countries on social CRM adoption in SMEs (e.g., Ahani et al., 2017; Hasani et al., 2017; Alghamdi, 2023) are difficult to generalize to China due to differences in economic development (Zhang et al.,2019). Thus, researching social CRM adoption in Chinese SMEs is necessary to fill this gap and provide valuable insights.

The literature reveals that studies on social CRM adoption drawn upon and expanded several technology adoption theories and models, including the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory (Rogers, 1995), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Technological, Organisational, and Environmental (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). However, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003) is scarcely employed in studying social CRM adoption. UTAUT is well-suited for examining innovation adoption at the organizational level (Tamilmani et al., 2021), including traditional CRM (Peltier et al., 2009), Electronic CRM (Abbes & Khemakhem, 2021), and artificial intelligence integrated CRM (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Previous research has highlighted the importance of behavioural intention in adopting new systems (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Accordingly, this study leverages the UTAUT model with modifications to explore the factors influencing SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:
RQ1. What is the current perceived level of Chinese SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM?
RQ2. What factors influence Chinese SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social CRM

Social CRM is an evolving concept without a unified definition. Trainor (2012) defined it as integrating traditional customer-facing activities with social media applications to enhance customer relationships. Malthouse et al. (2013) argued that social CRM, which focuses on social media technology, is a new version of the CRM strategy. Similarly, Yawisedet al. (2018) defined Social CRM as a corporate strategy that integrates business processes and technologies with social networking or social media to enhance traditional CRM. Furthermore, Lamrhari et al. (2022) emphasized that social CRM constitutes a set of processes enabling decision-makers to analyze customer data, facilitating the launch of an efficient, customer-centric, and cost-effective marketing strategy.

Presently, Greenberg's (2010) definition of social CRM is widely accepted: a philosophy and business strategy, supported by technology and processes, aimed at engaging customers in collaborative conversations to create mutual value in a transparent business environment. This definition perceives social CRM as a strategic approach extending traditional CRM through Web 2.0 mechanisms and others, aiming to engage customers in meaningful conversations responsive to their needs.

In summary, these definitions underscore the significant role of social CRM in engaging customers in collaborative conversations and enhancing customer relationships. Simultaneously, these definitions highlight social CRM as an innovative concept with a technical dimension.

2.2. Social CRM Adoption

Since social CRM is viewed as a business strategy rooted in IT/IS (social media technology), this study reviewed previous research on IT/IS and CRM adoption from an organizational perspective, focusing on the adoption of social CRM by SMEs.

Table 1: Related Studies on CRM Adoption

Authors/Year	IT Adoption (Dependent variable)	Theory	Data and Context	Country
Alghamdi (2023)	Social CRM adoption	TOE	SMEs	Saudi Arabia
Gamage et al. (2021)	Social CRM adoption	/	Semi-structured interviews with 12 hotels	Sri Lanka
Ramadan & Eleyan (2021)	Social CRM adoption intention	TOE & TAM	220 questionnaires, banks	Palestinian
Chatterjee et al. (2021)	Intentions and Behavior to AI Integrated CRM Systems	Meta-UTAUT	Data was collected from 315 organizational users by a survey	India
Chatterjee et al. (2021)	Actual use of Social CRM in organizations	TOE	Data was collected from 308 organizational users by a survey	India
Abbes&Khemakhem (2021)	Adoption of Electronic CRM	DOI& UTAUT &The task technology fit model	A quantitative study was conducted with 340 respondents from Tunisian companies	Tunisian
Marolt et al. (2020)	Social CRM adoption, Customer relationship performance	TOE & DOI	a semi-structured interview approach was used to collect data from six SMEs and; an online survey of 119 micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.	Slovenian
Yawised et al. (2018)	Social CRM adoption	/	147 questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with senior IT and marketing managers from 14 different companies	Australian
Ahani et al. (2017)	Social CRM adoption	TOEP (TOE + process)	147 questionnaires from SMEs in Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia
Hasani et al. (2016)	Social CRM adoption intention	TOE & DOI & TAM	E-mail survey of 389 SEMs	Malaysia
Askool & Nakata (2011)	The Acceptance of Social CRM	TAM	A literature review and informal discussions with the CRM managers and experts in Saudi banks were conducted.	Saudi
Peltier et al. (2009)	CRM technology	DOI&TOE &TAM & UTAUT	E-mail survey of 386 Small Retailers	US

Table 1 highlights the limited empirical research on social CRM adoption by SMEs, with most studies relying on theories such as DOI, TAM, and TOE. Ahani et al. (2017) introduced the TOEP model, adding information processing to the TOE framework in the Malaysian SME context. Key adoption factors included compatibility, IT knowledge, top management support, and competitive pressure. Similarly, Hasani et al. (2017) examined how environmental, technological, and organizational factors influence start-up businesses' social CRM adoption intention in Malaysia. The findings indicated that observability, compatibility, perceived advantage, and trialability positively affect start-up businesses' intention to adopt social CRM. Marolt et al. (2020)

integrated DOI with TOE to explore social CRM adoption in Slovenian SMEs, finding observability and compatibility crucial. Alghamdi (2023) evaluated SME adoption of social CRM in Saudi Arabia, underscoring the importance of contextual factors.

While these studies have contributed significantly to the comprehension of primary factors predicting SMEs' adoption intention and usage of social CRM, it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of other crucial factors that warrant further investigation. Therefore, a comprehensive exploration is essential to uncover additional variables, contextual nuances, and potential interactions that might play pivotal roles in shaping SMEs' attitudes and behaviors toward social CRM adoption.

UTAUT is a comprehensive model that has served as a robust baseline model in technology adoption research (Kwarteng et al.,2024). However, a bibliometric analysis of the literature found a scarcity of research utilizing the UTAUT model to investigate social CRM adoption. Furthermore, while reviewing the literature, it became evident that very few studies have conducted empirical research in the context of social CRM adoption by SMEs in different countries, including Palestine (Ramadan & Eleyan, 2021), Slovenia (Marolt et al., 2020), and Malaysia (Ahani et al., 2017; Hasani et al., 2016). There is a scarcity of studies specifically addressing social CRM adoption in Chinese SMEs, resulting in a lack of concrete data on its adoption in this context. To address these research gaps, this study endeavors to utilize the UTAUT model to understand the factors impacting the intention of SMEs in China to adopt social CRM.

3. THEORETICAL BASIS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Conceptual Model

UTAUT provides a more comprehensive understanding of behavioural intention variance and has been widely used to study SME technology adoption, including social media adoption (Alshourah et al., 2022) and digitalization adoption (Kwarteng et al., 2024). It has also been applied in research on CRM adoption, including traditional CRM (Peltier et al., 2009), E-CRM (Abbes & Khemakhem, 2021), and AI-CRM (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Thus, UTAUT is a suitable theoretical foundation for this study.

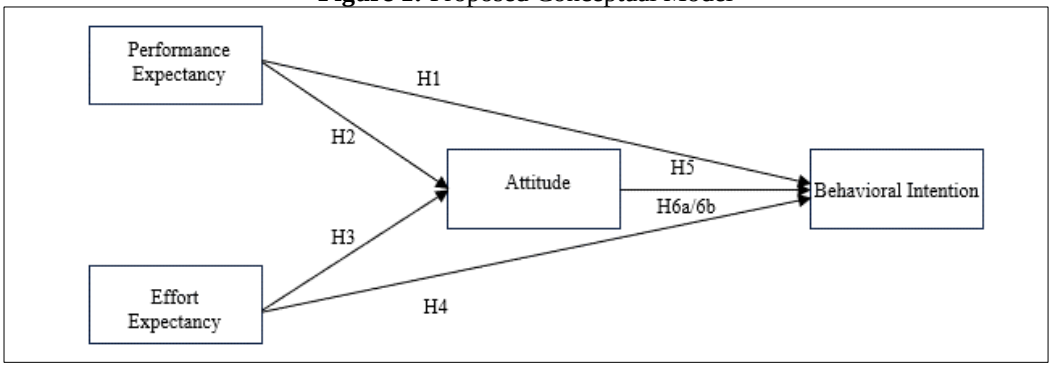
The main limitation of UTAUT is its complexity, which can confuse research results (Hiran & Henten, 2020). The moderators specified in the original UTAUT model may not be universally applicable, and it lacks "individual" attributes, such as attitude (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Tamilmani et al., 2020). Consequently, prior research suggests including context-specific attributes instead of replicating the entire model (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Therefore, all moderating variables in this study were excluded.

Currently, social CRM is not widely adopted in China, and behavioural intentions are known to predict actual behaviour (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Thus, this study focuses solely on the intention to adopt, excluded the act of adoption. The original UTAUT model does not consider a direct link between facilitation conditions and behavioural intentions, so facilitation conditions were also excluded. Furthermore, the adoption of social CRM by SMEs in China has not yet reached a level sufficient to facilitate the diffusion of information about its benefits and the relatively low risks

associated with its adoption from current adopters to potential adopters (Mansfield, 1963; Bourke & Roper, 2014). Therefore, social influence was also excluded.

Finally, the proposed conceptual model incorporated attitude toward using technologies as a factor influencing the intention to adopt and also positioned attitude as a mediating variable. Figure 1 outlines the proposed research model and corresponding hypotheses based on these discussions.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model



3.2. Research Hypotheses

3.2.1 Performance Expectancy

Performance expectancy (PE) refers to the degree to which an individual believes that the system helps improve work performance (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Venkatesh et al. (2003) argued that performance expectancy is the most powerful predictor of behavioural intention for adopting new technology. In previous studies, Tamilselvi and Balaj (2019) found that performance expectancy is significant and positively influences the intention to adopt Mobile Banking. Tamilmani et al. (2020) also confirmed that performance expectancy is a direct determinant of Indian consumers' intention to use the Airbnb Platform. Previous research has consistently shown that performance expectancy is a significant predictor of individual attitudes toward using the underlying technology, in addition to their intention (e.g., Chatterjee et al., 2021; Patil et al., 2020). Hence, the stated argument encourages the development of the following hypothesis:

H1: Performance expectancy will positively influence SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM.

H2: Performance expectancy will positively influence SMEs' attitudes toward adopting social CRM.

3.2.2 Effort Expectancy

Effort expectancy (EE)refers to 'the degree of ease associated with the use of a system' (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 450). In the UTAUT model, effort expectancy is the direct determinant of behavioural intention. This has also been confirmed in specific studies. Hoque and Sorwar (2017) found that effort expectancy had a significant impact on the user's behavioural intention to adopt

mHealth services. Applying the UTAUT model, Tan and Leby Lau (2016) examined the intention to adopt mobile banking services among the millennial generation. Data analysis revealed that performance expectancy is the strongest predictor, followed by effort expectancy. Similarly, several studies have examined the relationship between effort expectancy and attitude (e.g., Cao et al., 2021; Patil et al.,2020). These research findings underline that effort expectancy significantly positively affects attitudes. Therefore, this argument leads to the development of the following hypotheses.

H3: Effort expectancy will positively influence SMEs' attitudes toward adopting social CRM.
H4: Effort expectancy will positively influence SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM.

3.2.3 Attitude

Attitude (AT) is defined as "an individual's positive or negative feelings about performing the target behavior" (Davis et al., 1989). In dominant adoption theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Azjen, 1991), and TAM, attitude is commonly used as a mediating variable to predict individual behavioural intentions. Attitude was excluded in the UTAUT model. Conversely, it has been incorporated into the UTAUT model in several studies that utilize UTAUT to study IT adoption; it has been empirically verified by many studies under various backgrounds (e.g. Dwivedi et al., 2019; Patil et al., 2020; Tamilmani et al., 2020; Putit et al., 2022, Chuah et al., 2023). IT/IS researchers have affirmed that an individual's positive attitude towards new technology ultimately results in a higher likelihood of adopting the underlying technology. In the context of social CRM, Ahani et al. (2017), and Chatterjee et al. (2020) confirmed that the attitude of senior management is the most important organizational variable affecting the adoption of social CRM by SMEs. The current study assesses SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM in the Chinese context and thus proposes the following hypothesis:
H5: Attitude will positively influence SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM.
H6a: Attitude will mediate the relationship between performance expectancy and adoption intention.
H6b: Attitude will mediate the relationship between effort expectancy and adoption intention.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative research design was employed for data collection using a cross-sectional online survey questionnaire. This study used scale items from the technology adoption literature to measure the selected constructs based on the UTAUT model. A 7-point Likert scale was used to examine the degree of responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To ensure the validity of all measures, the measurement items of key constructs in this study were adapted from previous research (e.g., Alalwan et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2003), with some modifications to better reflect the uniqueness of the technologies relevant to social CRM. Table 2 presents the specific items for each construct and their respective sources.

Table 2: Survey Constructs and Measurement Items

Construct		Corresponding Items	Items Sources
Performance Expectancy (PE)	PE1	I find social CRM useful in my daily job.	Alalwan et al., (2017); Venkatesh et al., (2003)
	PE2	Using social CRM helps me accomplish tasks more quickly.	
	PE3	Using social CRM increases my productivity.	
	PE4	Using social CRM increases my chances of achieving tasks that are important to me.	
Effort Expectancy (EE)	EE1	My interaction with social CRM is clear and understandable.	
	EE2	It is easy for me to become skillful at using social CRM.	
	EE3	I find social CRM easy to use.	
	EE4	Learning how to use social CRM is easy for me.	
Attitude (AT)	AT1	Adopting social CRM is a good idea.	Dwivedi et al. (2019); Cao et al., (2021)
	AT2	I like the idea of adopting social CRM.	
	AT3	Adopting social CRM would be pleasant	
Behavioural Intention (BI)	BI1	I intend to adopt social CRM in the future.	
	BI2	I will always try to adopt social CRM in my daily job.	
	BI3	I plan to adopt social CR frequently.	

The target population comprises owners, managers, or senior executives of SMEs, who are considered as the primary decision-makers in adopting innovation within their companies. They possess sufficient information to respond to the questionnaire (Maroufkhani et al., 2020), thus lending their views a certain degree of corporate representativeness. To overcome cultural and linguistic barriers, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese using the back translation method (Brislin, 1970; Brislin & Freimanis, 2001). A pilot study was conducted using 30 questionnaires distributed to SME owners and managers in China. They were asked to provide feedback if they encountered any difficulties in answering the questionnaire.

The large-scale survey was conducted in Zhejiang province, a region highly representative of SME development in China due to its concentration of SME activity. The standard definition of SMEs in this study is based on the classification provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in the 2017 division of large, medium, and small enterprises, which categorizes Chinese SMEs as follows: micro-sized SMEs (fewer than 20 employees), small-sized SMEs (20 to 99 employees), and medium-sized SMEs (100 to 499 employees). The researcher obtained information on Zhejiang SMEs from two sources: a) the list of the First and Second Batch of Specialized, Refined, Specialized, and New Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Zhejiang Province for 2022 (announced by the Economy and Information Technology Department of Zhejiang), b) an SME directory purchased from a business database. However, this list cannot serve as the actual sampling framework for the study due to its incomplete coverage of all SMEs. Additionally, not all business owners/managers have listed email addresses and phone numbers. Given the absence of a formal sampling frame for all Zhejiang SMEs, a non-probability quota sampling technique was employed, this study included seven key industries in Zhejiang for quota sampling. Quota

sampling offers several advantages, including lower costs, highly representative samples, rapid setup, and does not require sampling frames (Saunders et al.,2016).

For minimum sample size, When the maximum number of arrows pointing at a construct in the structural model is 3, 176 responses are required to detect a minimum R^2 value of 0.10 in any construct at a significance level of 1% (Hair et al., 2014). Questionnaires were distributed via "Questionnaire Star" from February to August 2023. Out of 235 collected questionnaires, 198 were deemed valid for further analysis. IBM-SPSS 26.0 to analyse preliminary data analysis and Smart PLS 3.0 to perform PLS-SEM analysis.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Respondents Demographic Profile

This study obtained 198 valid responses from Chinese SMEs to assess their intention to adopt social CRM. Tables 3 and 4 present the demographic profiles of SMEs and respondents. Table 3 shows the SME sector distribution: Manufacturing (22.2%, N=44), Construction (6.6%, N=13), Transport and Postal (4.0%, N=8), Wholesale and Retail (25.8%, N=51), Hotel and Restaurant (14.6%, N=29), Software and Information (7.1%, N=14), Business Services (15.7%, N=31), and other sectors (4.0%, N=8).

Regarding operating years, 70 enterprises (35.4%) have been in business for over 10 years, 54 (27.3%) for 3-5 years, 48 (24.2%) for 6-9 years, 17 (8.6%) for 1-2 years, and 9 (4.5%) for less than one year. In terms of enterprise size, 161 respondents (81.3%) are from small enterprises, while 37 (18.7%) are from medium enterprises.

Table 3: Profile of the SMEs (N =198)

Constructs	Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of enterprise	Manufacturing sector	44	22.2
	Construction sector	13	6.6
	Transport and postal sector	8	4.0
	Wholesale and retail sector	51	25.8
	Hotel and restaurant sector	29	14.6
	Software and information	14	7.1
	Business service	31	15.7
	Others	8	4.0
Operating years	Less than 1 year	9	4.5
	1-2 years	17	8.6
	3-5 years	54	27.3
	6-9 years	48	24.2
	10 years and above	70	35.4
Enterprise size	Medium enterprise	37	18.7
	Small enterprise	161	81.3
The number of employees	Fewer than 10 employees	24	12.1
	10-19 employees	55	27.8
	20-99 employees	83	41.9
	100-299 employees	31	15.7
	300-499 employees	5	2.5
Enterprise geographical location	Hangzhou	57	28.8
	Ningbo	66	33.3
	Wenzhou	6	3.0
	Shaoxing	25	12.6
	Jinhua	11	5.6
	Others	33	16.7

Table 4: Profile of the Respondents (N =198)

Demographic	Measurement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	117	59.1
	Female	81	40.9
Age	20-29 years old	3	1.5
	30-39 years old	87	43.9
	40-49 years old	64	32.4
	50-59 years old	39	19.7
	60 years old and above	5	2.5
Education level	High school	7	3.5
	Vocational/ Diploma	26	13.1
	Bachelor	92	46.5
	Master	62	31.3
	Doctorate	6	3.1
	Others	5	2.5
Position	Business Owner	22	11.1
	Manager	61	30.8
	Senior executive	97	49.0
	Others	18	9.1
Working years of relevant positions	Less than 1 year	19	9.6
	1-2 years	83	41.9
	3-5 years	68	34.3
	6-9 years	21	10.6
	10 years and above	7	3.5

Table 4 indicates that the majority held senior executive positions (49%), followed by managers (30.8%), and business owners (11.1%). Respondents' ages varied from 20 to above 60, and a significant portion of the respondents had a high level of education. Regarding tenure, 41.9% had been in their current positions for 1-2 years, and 34.3% for 3-5 years.

5.2. SMEs' Current Level of Adopting Intention of Social CRM in China

Social CRM adoption analysis (Table 5) indicates that most of the SMEs (69.2 %) had not adopted any social CRM applications and were thus classed as non-adopters for this study. Among respondents, 30.8 % (61 SMEs) were adopters, with 15.2% adopting one social CRM application, 12.6 % adopting two, and only 3.0 % adopting three social CRM applications.

Table 5: Social CRM adoption (N =198)

Availability of SCRM application	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	61	30.8
No	137	69.2
Number of adopted SCRM applications		
One application	30	15.2
Two applications	25	12.6
Three applications	6	3.0

The current perceived level of SMEs' behavioural intention to adopt social CRM in China is presented in Table 6. The data analysis results indicate that most respondents (74.3%) intend to use social CRM in the future.

Table 6: SMEs' Current Perceived Level of Behavioural Intention to Adopt Social CRM in China (N =198)

	Intend to adopt social CRM in the future	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Disagree	7	3.5
Slightly Disagree	20	10.1
Neither Agree or Disagree	19	9.6
Slightly Agree	25	12.7
Agree	75	37.9
Strongly Agree	47	23.7

5.3. Common method variance

To address common method variance (CMV), this study employed both procedural and statistical measures. Anonymity was assured to minimize socially desirable responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's one-factor test, conducted using SPSS 26, revealed that the variance explained by the first factor was below 50%, indicating that CMV was not a significant concern in this study.

5.4. Measurement Model

This study employed a reflective measurement scale, as all constructs were adapted and adopted from previous studies (Hair et al., 2017). The reflective measurement model is evaluated for internal consistency, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The measurement model evaluation results were satisfactory (Tables 7 and 8). Composite reliability values (CR) ranged from 0.876 to 0.938, exceeding the 0.7 threshold. All the items' loading passed the preferred value of 0.70, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). The correlation coefficients' estimates were smaller than the corresponding square roots of the AVE estimates for all construct pairs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), establishing discriminant validity. Thus, the measurement model demonstrates adequate convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 7: Results of Reflective Measurement Model Assessment

Constructs	Indicators	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude	AT1	0.908	0.880	0.925	0.805
	AT2	0.921			
	AT3	0.863			
Behavioural intention	BI1	0.905	0.902	0.938	0.837
	BI2	0.922			
	BI3	0.918			
Effort expectancy	EE1	0.807	0.841	0.893	0.676
	EE2	0.837			
	EE3	0.816			
	EE4	0.827			
Performance expectancy	PE1	0.813	0.811	0.876	0.639
	PE2	0.807			
	PE3	0.827			
	PE4	0.749			

Table 8: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	AT	BI	EE	PE
AT	**0.897**			
BI	0.660	**0.915**		
EE	0.562	0.521	**0.822**	
PE	0.588	0.599	0.470	**0.800**

5.5. Structural Model

The structural model depicts the relationships between constructs using path coefficients (β) and t-statistics to assess the links between dependent and independent variables and test hypotheses. Figure 2 presents the validated model, while Table 9 summarizes the bootstrapping results (5000 samples).

Figure 2: Analysis Using Smart PLS Algorithm

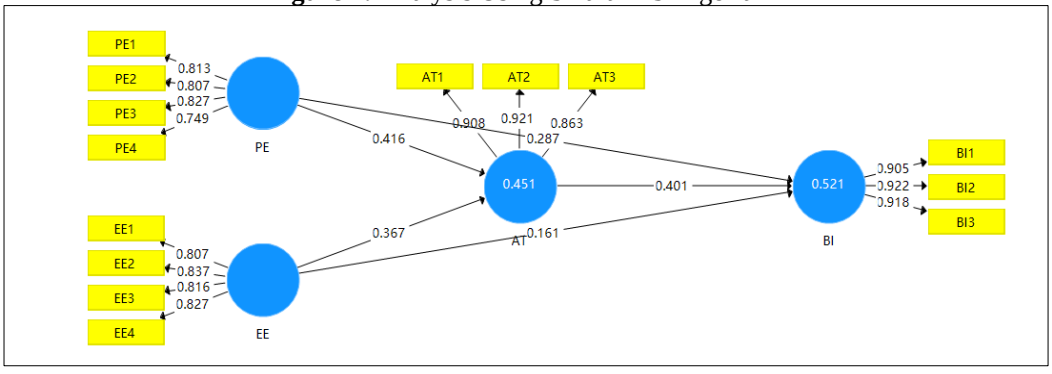


Table 9: Structural Model

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficients(β)	*t*-Values	*p*-Values	Decision	R^2
H1	PE -> BI	0.287	3.225	0.001	Supported	0.521
H4	EE -> BI	0.161	2.411	0.016	Supported	
H5	AT -> BI	0.401	4.261	0.000	Supported	
H2	PE-> AT	0.416	5.457	0.000	Supported	0.451
H3	EE -> AT	0.367	5.328	0.000	Supported	

The results reveal significant relationships between performance expectancy and adoption intention (t = 3.225, β = 0.287), effort expectancy and adoption intention (t = 2.411, β = 0.161), performance expectancy and attitude (t = 5.457, β = 0.416), effort expectancy and attitude (t = 5.328, β = 0.367), attitude and adoption intention (t = 4.261, β = 0.401). Therefore, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5 were supported.

5.6. Validation of the Mediating Effect

H6a and H6b focus on the mediating role of attitude. Table 10 presents the results of bootstrapping; all four indirect effects are significant as both bounds of this interval are greater than zero. Therefore, H6a and H6b were supported in the current study. As found in Table 9, performance expectancy exerts a pronounced (β =0.287) and significant (t = 3.225; $p < 0.05$) effect on intention to adopt. Further on, since the direct and indirect effects are both positive, the sign of their product is also positive (0.287 * 0.167 = 0.047). Hence, attitude represents complementary mediation of the relationship from performance expectancy to intention to adopt. Similarly, attitude also complementary mediation of the relationship from effort expectancy to intention to adopt.

Table 10: The Mediating Effect of Attitude

Relationship	Path Coefficients(β)	*t*-Values	*p* -Values	2.5%	97.5%	Decision
PE -> AT -> BI	0.167	3.019	0.003	0.078	0.293	Supported
EE -> AT -> BI	0.147	3.291	0.001	0.074	0.247	Supported

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Discussion of Results

This study applied a modified UTAUT model to investigate factors influencing Chinese SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM. The proposed conceptual model incorporates performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and behavioural intention from the original model, along with a newly introduced mediating variable, attitude. The empirical results validate the model extension, explaining 52.1% of the variance in adoption intention and 45.1% in attitude. These R^2 values are considered moderate to high for IT-related research (Hair et al., 2017).

This study tested seven hypotheses, all of which were supported. The findings show that performance expectancy (H1) and effort expectancy (H4) significantly impact Chinese SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM. These results align with prior research on technology adoption,

such as studies on E-Money (Gunawan et al., 2019), and the Internet of Things (Abushakra & Nikbin, 2019). Additionally, research on social CRM has highlighted the significant influence of relative advantage on SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM (Hasani et al., 2016; Marolt et al., 2020; Ramadan & Eleyan, 2021).

For H2 and H3, the study found that performance expectancy and effort expectancy significantly influence SMEs' attitudes toward social CRM. These findings indicate that SMEs' attitudes toward social CRM may be influenced by the ease of use and perceived usefulness of social CRM. These results are consistent with prior IT research (e.g., Cao et al., 2021; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2019).

For H5, the analysis shows that attitude (β = 0.401) is the strongest direct predictor of SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM, emphasizing its key role in technology adoption (Kim et al., 2016; Merhi et al., 2019; Najib & Fahma, 2020). This is consistent with findings from Ahani et al. (2017) and Chatterjee et al. (2020), who highlighted senior management's attitude as crucial. Additionally, for H6a and H6b, attitude significantly mediates the effects of performance expectancy and effort expectancy on the intention to adopt social CRM. These findings underscore the central role of attitude as a mediator in determining Chinese SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM and provide empirical data to support the study of Dwivedi et al. (2019).

6.2. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study examined factors influencing SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM and provides significant theoretical and practical insights. It enhances social CRM literature by focusing on Chinese SMEs. By applying the UTAUT model, this study advances understanding in the Chinese context and provides a valuable tool for predicting SMEs' adoption intentions, explaining 52.1% of the variance in behavioural intention and 45.1% in attitude. The study also extends the UTAUT theory by incorporating attitude as both a direct influence and a mediator of performance and effort expectancy, thus enriching the meta-UTAUT (Dwivedi et al., 2019). Significantly, the findings corroborate that managers' behavioural intentions toward adopting social CRM can be elucidated and anticipated by their attitudes.

The study provides key managerial insights, emphasizing the benefits of social CRM for SME owners and decision-makers. Findings highlight the importance of performance and effort expectancy in shaping attitudes and intentions towards social CRM. Developers should focus on creating user-friendly applications with high performance to maintain positive attitudes among SMEs. IT providers should emphasize the benefits of social CRM and offer training to ensure effective system use by managers.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study investigated factors influencing SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM, using a revised UTAUT model that includes attitude. The data gathered from the survey revealed that the current social CRM adoption rate among Chinese SMEs is 30.8%, with most adopters having implemented only one or two functions of social CRM. Additionally, the majority of respondents (74.3%) plan to adopt social CRM in the future. The proposed model explained about 52.1% of the variance in

Zhejiang SMEs' intention to adopt social CRM and 45.1% of the variance in attitude, indicating strong predictive power. The empirical results of this study identify that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and attitude have a significant influence on SMEs' behavioural intention to adopt social CRM. These findings provide valuable information for SMEs and IT software providers to develop strategies for the successful implementation and acceleration of social CRM adoption by SMEs in China.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. It investigates factors influencing SMEs' intentions to adopt social CRM but does not include user behavior due to the limited adoption of social CRM among Chinese SMEs. Future research could address these aspects and incorporate user behaviour. Additionally, the study's sample of 198 SMEs from Zhejiang limits generalizability; larger or randomized samples are recommended for broader applicability. Finally, while this study uses quantitative survey data, qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into SMEs' adoption intentions. Future researchers may conduct a longitudinal study with qualitative approaches to develop a richer and deeper understanding.

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