“The influence of technological, organizational, and environmental factors on marketing performance through talabat adoption”

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THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGICAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON MARKETING PERFORMANCE THROUGH TALABAT ADOPTION

Abstract

Profitability is a key indicator of marketing performance and is essential for the success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in the food and beverage sector. With the growing adoption of mobile applications like Talabat, understanding how these platforms affect profitability is critical. This study explores the impact of technological, organizational, and environmental factors on profitability through Talabat adoption in Kuwaiti SMEs. A survey of 330 SME owners and managers, primarily from restaurants, cafes, and catering services, was conducted. The analysis showed that relative advantage ($\beta = 0.186$, $t = 2.386$, $p = 0.017$), top management support ($\beta = 0.272$, $t = 3.272$, $p = 0.001$), competitive pressure ($\beta = 0.224$, $t= 3.533$, $p < 0.001$), mobile payment gateways ($\beta = 0.195$, $t = 2.915$, $p = 0.004$), and information intensity ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 4.873$, $p < 0.001$) all had significant positive effects on Talabat adoption. In contrast, compatibility ($\beta = 0.043$, $t = 0.662$, $p = 0.508$) and complexity ($\beta = -0.029$, $t = 0.850$, $p = 0.395$) showed no significant effects. Furthermore, Talabat adoption had a strong positive impact on profitability ($\beta = 0.516$, $t = 7.208$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating its significant role in enhancing profitability. Moreover, the mediation analysis revealed that Talabat adoption mediated the relationships between relative advantage, top management support, competitive pressure, mobile payment gateways, and profitability. The findings provide valuable insights for SME managers and policymakers.

Keywords TOE, mobile adoption, Talabat, SMEs, food & beverage, profitability, Kuwait, mediation

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INTRODUCTION

Talabat is a business model used for advertising and marketing food and beverages by adopting technology in business activities. This application was developed to replace traditional marketing methods and support manufacturers and sellers in the food and beverage industry (Devi & Chandrasekar, 2023; ALosaimi et al., 2020). Talabat has become the largest marketing platform in the Middle East, showcasing products from manufacturers, wholesalers, restaurants, and cuisines across the region, including Kuwait. Safieddine and Nakhoul (2018) found that the Talabat application provides significant business development opportunities, significantly enhancing SMEs' sales growth and marketing efforts. The platform also supports SMEs by saving time, costs, and resources, enabling businesses to focus on improving service delivery.

The adoption of mobile applications like Talabat has become increasingly relevant in the food and beverage industry in the Middle East, particularly for SMEs in Kuwait. Talabat is one of the largest online

food delivery platforms, helping businesses engage directly with customers and expand their market reach. However, despite its success, SMEs face several challenges in adopting the platform, including concerns over platform fees, technological infrastructure requirements, and operational complexities, all of which can impact profitability and operational efficiency (Sudra, 2023).

Despite the widespread use of mobile applications like Talabat, there is limited research on how SMEs in Kuwait and the broader Middle East region adopt these technologies and how adoption influences marketing performance. The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework offers a useful perspective for understanding the factors influencing the adoption of technological innovations, yet SMEs in the region are at varying stages of implementing this framework to ensure the success of their digital marketing efforts (Qashou & Saleh, 2018). Internal factors such as technology readiness and external factors like competitive pressure are critical for adoption (Alkhateri et al., 2021; Marzi et al., 2023), but the role of mobile application adoption in mediating the relationship between these factors and business performance remains underexplored.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The adoption of mobile applications in business, particularly in sectors like food and beverage delivery, has witnessed rapid growth across the globe. Among the notable applications in the Middle East is Talabat, which has revolutionized food delivery services in Kuwait and neighbouring Arab countries. The growing influence of digital platforms in facilitating food delivery services can be attributed to technological advancements, organizational readiness, and environmental factors that shape their adoption and effectiveness. However, the adoption of mobile applications in the food delivery sector has been less explored, especially in the context of SMEs in Kuwait, which makes this study particularly timely and valuable. To further understand this phenomenon, the TOE framework, which examines technological, organizational, and environmental factors, is particularly relevant to explaining the adoption of such platforms. The framework provides a clear structure to explore how these three factors interact and shape the decision-making process regarding the adoption of mobile apps in business contexts, particularly in SMEs.

Kuwait's food and beverage market is characterized by high consumer spending, cultural diversity, and a heavy reliance on imports due to limited local agriculture. With a population of approximately 4.4 million (including 3.2 million expatriates), Kuwait boasts a vibrant food culture that blends Middle Eastern, Asian, and Western influences. The foodservice sector is vital to the economy, employing over 65,000 people and operating more than 3,400 outlets. Kuwait's high per capita income (KD 10,800 in 2024) supports significant discretionary spending on food, with 17% of household income allocated to food and beverages, one of the highest rates in the GCC. The restaurant food delivery is expected to reach $519 million by 2024 with an annual growth rate of 26.3% (EsferaSoft, 2022). For SMEs in the food and beverage sector, adopting digital platforms like Talabat is essential to tap into this affluent and diverse customer base, providing a competitive edge in a fast-growing market (Market Growth Reports, 2024). Such rapid growth highlights the increasing reliance on mobile applications like Talabat for both consumers and businesses. As these technologies continue to gain traction, understanding the factors that drive their adoption becomes critical for business success, particularly in terms of profitability, which is a key concern for SMEs. This is particularly true for the food delivery sector, where adoption of mobile apps like Talabat is not just a technological shift but a significant transformation in how businesses interact with customers.

The TOE framework provides a comprehensive lens for exploring the adoption of mobile applications like Talabat. The model identifies three key factors that influence technology adoption: technological, organizational, and environmental contexts. Numerous studies have demonstrated the relevance of the TOE framework in explaining the adoption of technological innovations across different industries and regions. For example, Bany Mohammad et al. (2022) found that all three

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TOE contexts significantly influence technology adoption among employees in Jordanian organizations. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2022), studying Vietnamese firms, reported significant effects from TOE factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, top management support, and government support. These studies confirm that the TOE framework is relevant across various cultural and industrial contexts, including those similar to the Kuwaiti food and beverage sector.

Further validation of the TOE framework is provided by Li (2020), who demonstrated its applicability in Hong Kong's SMEs, showing that technical advantages, management support, and stakeholder influence positively affected technology adoption. Likewise, Hadi Putra and Santoso (2020) identified the importance of technological and organizational contexts in Indonesia, with adoption linked to managerial and operational improvements. These studies reinforce the notion that the TOE framework is a powerful tool for understanding technology adoption in diverse regions, including the Middle East.

Despite its broad application, however, there is limited research that focuses specifically on the food delivery sector and the adoption of mobile applications like Talabat. This gap is particularly noticeable in the context of SMEs in Kuwait's rapidly growing food delivery industry. Su et al. (2023) argue that SMEs must align internal resources and strategic goals to ensure the successful integration of digital tools, such as mobile applications. Strategic alignment is crucial in ensuring that applications like Talabat are effectively incorporated into business operations. This alignment is especially important for SMEs in Kuwait, where smaller businesses face resource limitations but also have significant potential for growth through technology adoption.

Moreover, Qalati et al. (2021) identified several key technological drivers of adoption, including relative advantage, cost-effectiveness, compatibility, and interactivity, alongside organizational and environmental factors such as entrepreneurial orientation and customer engagement. These drivers are highly relevant in the context of Kuwait's fast-growing food delivery sector, where the competition is intense, and consumer demand is rapidly evolving. The effective alignment of SMEs' internal resources with external market pressures is crucial for facilitating smoother adoption of technologies like Talabat, which in turn can enhance marketing outcomes and profitability.

Several studies have highlighted the direct impact of technology adoption on business outcomes, particularly in marketing performance. Eze et al. (2019) and Justino et al. (2022) emphasized the growing importance of the TOE framework in understanding how technological innovations, such as mobile applications, impact marketing outcomes. These studies underscore how the adoption of technology can significantly improve business operations, customer satisfaction, and marketing strategies. Gakii and Maina (2019), Picoto et al. (2014), Alkhateri et al. (2021), and Sheikh et al. (2018) have similarly emphasized that the adoption of mobile applications improves SMEs' marketing strategies, customer engagement, and overall performance.

For example, mobile applications like Talabat provide SMEs with tools to enhance customer satisfaction, streamline delivery processes, and track consumer behavior, leading to improved marketing outcomes. Specifically, Talabat enables SMEs to adapt more quickly to market demands and consumer preferences, thus boosting profitability. This ability to respond more efficiently to consumer needs and preferences is particularly crucial in the fast-paced food delivery industry, where customer expectations are high.

Although studies have shown the positive effects of mobile app adoption on marketing performance, research specific to the food delivery sector and mobile apps like Talabat remains underexplored. The integration of mobile apps into business operations offers a competitive edge, enabling SMEs to improve efficiency and respond more effectively to changing customer demands. Thus, exploring how the adoption of Talabat influences marketing performance and profitability in Kuwait's food and beverage sector is the key focus of this study.

In conclusion, while existing research confirms the applicability of the TOE framework in understanding technology adoption across different industries and regions, there remains a significant

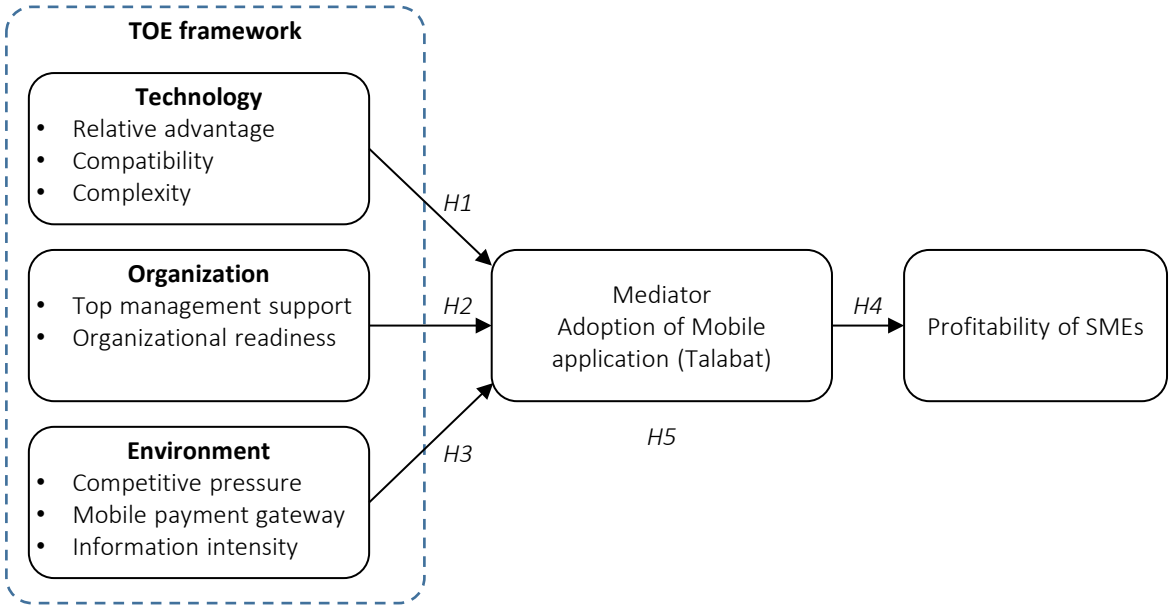

Figure 1. Study framework

gap in examining how mobile applications like Talabat influence marketing performance in the food delivery sector, especially within the context of SMEs in Kuwait.

This study aims to examine the mediating role of Talabat adoption in the relationship between the TOE framework and marketing performance, with profitability as the primary indicator of marketing success among SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector.

Given the growing significance of mobile platforms in the foodservice sector, particularly in Kuwait, the increasing adoption of digital tools like Talabat presents both opportunities and challenges for SMEs in the region. As noted, Kuwait's food and beverage market is driven by high consumer spending and cultural diversity, which creates a unique environment for technological adoption in the food service industry (Market Growth Reports, 2024). However, the extent to which mobile platforms influence profitability for small and medium-sized enterprises remains an important area of investigation.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of Talabat adoption on the profitability of SMEs in the Kuwaiti food and beverage sector by focusing on various factors that may influence adoption decisions and outcomes. Based on the theoretical framework of the TOE model and prior literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Technological factors (e.g., relative advantage (H1a), compatibility (H1b), complexity (H1c) significantly influence the adoption of Talabat by SMEs.

H2: Organizational factors (e.g., top management support (H2a), organizational readiness (H2b) significantly influence the adoption of Talabat by SMEs.

H3: Environmental factors (e.g., competitive pressure (H3a), , mobile payment gateway availability (H3b), , and information intensity (H3c)) significantly influence the adoption of Talabat by SMEs.

NOTE: competitive pressure, mobile payment gateway availability, and information intensity are considered environmental factors in the TOE framework. They are external elements that influence the adoption of Talabat by SMEs, shaping decisions based on market conditions, technological infrastructure, and data needs.

H4: The adoption of the Talabat application has a significant positive effect on the profitability of the SMEs.

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H5: Talabat adoption mediates the relationship between TOE framework factors (relative advantage (H5a), compatibility (H5b), , complexity (H5c), top management support (H5d), organizational readiness (H5e), competitive pressure (H5f), mobile payment gateway (H5g), information intensity (H5h) and profitability.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature and aims to explore how mobile application adoption influences the relationship between the TOE (Technology-Organization-Environment) framework and marketing performance, with a focus on profitability as the dependent variable. The research specifically targets SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector, including businesses such as restaurants, cafes, and catering services. The study is particularly focused on SMEs defined by their capital (not exceeding 500,000 Kuwaiti Dinars, as per the Kuwait National Fund Law of 2013) to ensure a diverse range of businesses is represented in the sample.

A questionnaire was designed to collect the necessary data to test and validate the proposed framework. To ensure accuracy and cultural relevance, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and then back-translated into English using a reverse translation technique. Experts from national universities in Kuwait and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Trading and Business were consulted to confirm the questionnaire's appropriateness for SMEs in the food and beverage sector. For transparency and reproducibility, the full questionnaire is available in the appendix and can be downloaded from a public repository.

The target population for this study consists of managers and decision-makers from SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector who are actively involved in the adoption of mobile applications, such as Talabat. These participants were chosen based on their role in technology adoption and marketing strategies within their organizations.

2.1. Data collection and sample

An online questionnaire was distributed to 402 SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector via Google Forms. The survey was shared through direct outreach and professional networks to ensure that it reached the relevant respondents. The questionnaire included a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to assess the adoption of mobile applications, TOE factors, and their relationship to profitability.

Snowball sampling was employed to increase the reach of the survey, whereby respondents were encouraged to share the survey link with their professional networks, enhancing the response rate. This method is suitable for gathering data in a specific industry and population, ensuring the inclusion of key decision-makers. Of the 402 SMEs surveyed, 330 valid responses were collected, resulting in a high response rate of 82%.

2.2. Demographic and organizational profile of respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and organizational profile of respondents. In terms of gender distribution, the study shows that a higher proportion of male participants (74.24%) compared to female participants (25.76%) were involved. The gender imbalance, with a significantly higher percentage of male respondents, could reflect gender-based differences in leadership roles within SMEs in the food and beverage sector in Kuwait.

In terms of age, the highest percentage of participation involved those aged 36-45 years, with 55.76%, followed by 25-35 years, and others. This age distribution may suggest that those with more work experience are more likely to adopt mobile applications, such as Talabat, as they typically hold more decision-making authority and are more accustomed to digital transformations.

Regarding educational background, the majority of participants are holders of a Diploma/undergraduate degree with a percentage of 43.64%, followed by high school (31.52%), postgraduate (15.15%), and less than high school (9.7%). This distribution suggests that individuals with higher educational qualifications are often more adaptable to new technologies, which may facilitate mobile application adoption.

In terms of the position, the majority of participants were employees with a percentage of 46.67%,

followed by managers (31.52%), and owners (21.82%). However, the presence of managers and owners (31.52% and 21.82%, respectively) indicates that key decision-makers were also involved in the survey.

In terms of the years of work experience, the highest percentage is those with 11-15 years (31.21%), followed by more than 15 years (27.88%), 5-10 years (22.73%), and less than five years (18.18%). Respondents with more extensive work experience likely have a nuanced perspective on how technological changes (e.g., mobile application adoption) impact business profitability and operations.

Regarding the age of SMEs, the majority of SMEs are those aged 10-14 years, with a percentage of 39.70%, followed by those with more than 15 years (25.15%), and 5-9 years (21.52%). This suggests that the majority of SMEs in the food and beverage sector are well-established businesses, likely capable of engaging in technological transformations.

The number of employees of SMEs, the majority of which are those with 6-49 employees (44.24%), followed by 50-100 employees (39.09%), and 101-150 employees (16.67%). The fact that most businesses have 6-49 employees indicates that the study's respondents come from small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This group is likely to face specific challenges when adopting digital technologies, such as limited resources for training or technology infrastructure.

Table 1. Demographic and organizational profile of respondents

Characteristics	N = 330	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
25-35	123	37.27%
36-45	166	50.30%
46-55	28	8.48%
56+	13	3.94%
Educational level		
High school or below	53	16.06%
Diploma/Undergraduate	119	36.06%
Postgraduate	70	21.21%
Less than high school	88	26.67%
Position in the organization		
Employee	188	57.58%
Manager	110	33.33%
Owner	32	9.70%
Work experience (years)		
Less than 5 years	66	20.00%
5-10	84	25.45%
11-15	92	27.88%
More than 15 years	88	26.67%
Size of SME (employees)		
6-49	162	49.09%
50-100	121	36.67%
101-150	47	14.24%
Age of SMEs (years)		
5-9	55	16.67%
10-14	157	47.58%
More than 15	118	35.76%

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS and SmartPLS (version 4.0) software. To evaluate the measurement model's reliability and validity, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were also tested as per Hair et al. (2017). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in SmartPLS was employed for path analysis to examine the relationships between TOE factors, mobile application adoption, and profitability.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Measurement model evaluation

The measurement model was assessed for a number of statistical measures that establish the reliability and validity of the constructs measured in the study. These included tests of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Table 3 presents the results for all latent constructs, including factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, and AVE. All indicator loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating strong indicator reliability and suggesting that the observed variables contribute significantly to their respective latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.835 to 0.981, surpassing the acceptable minimum of 0.70. Additionally, Composite Reliability (CR) values were all above 0.90, confirming strong internal consistency among the

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Table 2. Construct reliability and validity

Construct		Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_a	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Compatibility	COMPA1	0.938	0.947	0.952	0.962	0.863
	COMPA2	0.917				
	COMPA3	0.928				
	COMPA4	0.932				
Competitive pressure	Com_Pres1	0.948	0.972	0.973	0.979	0.922
	Com_Pres2	0.974				
	Com_Pres3	0.970				
	Com_Pres4	0.950				
Complexity	COMPL1	0.720	0.858	1.166	0.900	0.753
	COMPL2	0.912				
	COMPL3	0.954				
Information intensity	Inf_Int1	0.921	0.872	0.906	0.920	0.792
	Inf_Int2	0.876				
	Inf_Int3	0.873				
Mobile payment gateway	Mob_Gate1	0.952	0.941	0.941	0.962	0.894
	Mob_Gate2	0.964				
	Mob_Gate3	0.920				
Organizational readiness	OR1	0.956	0.958	0.958	0.973	0.922
	OR2	0.970				
	OR3	0.956				
Profitability	PR1	0.913	0.943	0.947	0.956	0.813
	PR2	0.905				
	PR3	0.938				
	PR4	0.861				
	PR5	0.890				
Relative advantage	RA1	0.958	0.981	0.981	0.985	0.930
	RA2	0.963				
	RA3	0.968				
	RA4	0.969				
	RA5	0.964				
Talabat application	TA1	0.964	0.835	0.974	0.760	0.766
	TA2	0.972				
	TA3	0.964				
	TA4	0.956				
	TA5	0.847				
	TA6	0.753				
	TA7	0.744				
	TA8	0.831				
Top management support	TMS1	0.882	0.910	0.915	0.943	0.848
	TMS2	0.925				
	TMS3	0.953				

items. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs demonstrated AVE values greater than 0.50, with the majority of constructs showing AVEs significantly higher than the minimum threshold.

Regarding discriminant validity, Henseler et al. (2015) suggested that discriminant validity can be evaluated by means of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). An HTMT value below 0.90 shows that constructs are distinct. In this study, all HTMT values were below the threshold (Table 3), which means that the constructs are distinct enough from each other and, therefore, valid for the measurement of the variables. The SRMR value for the model was 0.080, which is within the acceptable range of < 0.08 (Hussain et al., 2018). Additionally, the Chi-square value was 7,342.539, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.712, indicating that the model fits the data well.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for constructs of the study

	Compatibility	Competitive pressure	Complexity	Information intensity	Mobile payment gateway	Organizational readiness	Profitability	Relative advantage	Talabat application	Top management support
Compatibility	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Competitive pressure	0.700	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Complexity	0.039	0.055	0.868	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Information intensity	0.662	0.867	0.057	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mobile payment gateway	0.598	0.862	0.069	0.900	–	–	–	–	–	–
Organizational readiness	0.813	0.751	0.083	0.685	0.715	–	–	–	–	–
Pofitability	0.523	0.615	0.037	0.605	0.572	0.633	–	–	–	–
Relative advantage	0.746	0.832	0.061	0.758	0.779	0.881	0.622	–	–	–
Talabat application	0.606	0.638	0.027	0.632	0.564	0.634	0.563	0.647	–	–
Top management support	0.830	0.779	0.048	0.698	0.726	0.811	0.621	0.864	0.665	–

3.2. Hypotheses testing

The next step involved testing the hypotheses outlined in the study using PLS-SEM. The hypotheses tested the relationships between various TOE framework factors, the mediating role of Talabat application adoption, and profitability in SMEs. Table 4 presents the results of the structural model path analysis, which includes both unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients (β), along with the corresponding standard errors (SE) and p-values, all computed using SmartPLS.

Hypothesis *H1a*, which hypothesized a positive relationship between relative advantage and the Talabat application, is supported by the results (β = 0.186, t = 2.386, p = 0.017). This suggests that the perceived advantages of using the application significantly encourage its adoption.

Hypothesis *H1b*, which predicted a positive relationship between compatibility and the Talabat application, was not supported. The analysis shows a non-significant relationship (β = 0.043, t = 0.662, p = 0.508), indicating that compatibility does not significantly influence the adoption of the application.

Hypothesis *H1c*, which posited that complexity would negatively impact the Talabat application, was also not supported. The results show a non-significant negative effect (β = –0.029, t = 0.850, p = 0.395), suggesting that perceived complexity does not hinder adoption.

In contrast, top management support, as hypothesized in Hypothesis *H2a*, shows a significant positive effect on the Talabat application (β = 0.272, t = 3.272, p = 0.001), indicating that strong leadership and organizational support are crucial for the adoption of the application.

Hypothesis *H2b*, which examined the role of organizational readiness, found a marginally significant positive relationship with the Talabat application (β = 0.131, t = 1.872, p = 0.061). Although the effect is less pronounced, it suggests that organizational readiness plays a role in encouraging the adoption of the application.

Hypothesis *H3a*, which suggested that competitive pressure would positively affect the Talabat application, is supported by the results (β = 0.224, t = 3.533, p < 0.001). This indicates that increased competitive pressure drives the use of the application.

Hypothesis *H3b*, which predicted a positive effect of the mobile payment gateway on the Talabat application, is confirmed by the data (β = 0.195, t =

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Table 4. Path analysis

Relationships	ß	Standard deviation (STDEV)	t-statistics	p-values
H1a: Relative advantage → Talabat application	0.186	0.078	2.386	0.017
H1b: Compatibility → Talabat application	0.043	0.065	0.662	0.508
H1c: Complexity → Talabat application	–0.029	0.034	0.850	0.395
H2a: Top management support → Talabat application	0.272	0.083	3.272	0.001
H2b: Organizational readiness → Talabat application	0.131	0.070	1.872	0.061
H3a: Competitive pressure → Talabat application	0.224	0.064	3.533	0.000
H3b: Mobile payment gateway → Talabat application	0.195	0.067	2.915	0.004
H3c: Information intensity → Talabat application	0.298	0.061	4.873	0.000
H4: Talabat application → Profitability	0.516	0.072	7.208	0.000

2.915, p = 0.004). This shows that the availability of mobile payment options significantly influences the adoption of the application.

Hypothesis *H3c*, which proposed that information intensity would have a positive effect on the Talabat application, is strongly supported (β = 0.298, t = 4.873, p < 0.001). This result highlights the importance of information richness in driving the use of the application.

Lastly, Hypothesis *H4*, which hypothesized that the Talabat application would positively affect profitability, is also supported (β = 0.516, t = 7.208, p < 0.001). This finding indicates that the adoption and use of the application directly contribute to increased profitability.

Overall, these results provide strong support for several of the proposed hypotheses, particularly those related to top management support, competitive pressure, information intensity, and the mobile payment gateway. However, the lack of support for compatibility and complexity suggests that these factors may not be as influential in the context of the Talabat application.

3.3. Mediation analysis

In mediation analysis, the significance of the indirect effect is crucial for supporting the mediating hypotheses of a study. In the present study, the Talabat application exhibited a significant mediating effect in several relationships, demonstrating its role as a mediator between various independent factors and profitability.

Hypothesis *H5a* examined the mediation of relative advantage → Talabat application → profitability. The results showed a significant indirect effect (ß = 0.096, t = 2.213, p = 0.027). The confidence interval ([0.015, 0.184]) does not include zero, confirming that the Talabat application mediates the relationship between relative advantage and profitability. These results indicated that the perceived advantages of using the application significantly mediate its impact on profitability.

Hypothesis *H5b* explored the mediation of compatibility → Talabat application → profitability. However, this relationship was not significant (ß = 0.022, t = 0.642, p = 0.521), with the confidence interval ([-0.043, 0.093]) crossing zero, suggesting that compatibility does not significantly mediate the relationship between compatibility and profitability.

Hypothesis *H5c* tested the mediation of complexity → Talabat application → profitability, and the results revealed no significant indirect effect (ß = -0.015, t = 0.840, p = 0.401) with the confidence interval ([–0.048, 0.020]) containing zero, indicating no significant mediation effect.

Hypothesis *H5d* posited that top management support → Talabat application → profitability would show a significant mediating effect. The results supported this hypothesis (ß = 0.140, t = 3.261, p = 0.001), with the confidence interval ([0.059, 0.228]) not crossing zero. This suggests that top management support significantly mediates the relationship between management support and profitability. These results highlighted the crucial role of top management support in driving the adoption of the Talabat Application and its subsequent impact on profitability.

Hypothesis *H5e* examined organizational readiness → Talabat application → profitability. The results showed a marginally significant indirect

effect (ß = 0.068, t = 1.827, p = 0.068) with the confidence interval ([-0.005, 0.142]) approaching zero, suggesting that while organizational readiness may influence the Talabat application, its mediating effect on profitability is weak and less conclusive.

Hypothesis *H5f* tested the mediation of competitive pressure → Talabat application → profitability. The results showed a significant indirect effect (ß = 0.116, t = 3.119, p = 0.002), indicating that competitive pressure positively influences the adoption of the Talabat application, which in turn enhances profitability. The confidence interval ([0.048, 0.192]) reported not containing zero, confirming that competitive pressure mediates the relationship between environmental pressure and profitability.

Hypothesis *H5g* explored the mediation of the mobile payment gateway → Talabat application → profitability. This relationship was also significant (ß = 0.101, t = 2.750, p = 0.006), with the confidence interval ([0.033, 0.176]) not crossing zero. This shows that the presence of mobile payment options significantly mediates the relationship between the Talabat application and profitability.

Hypothesis *H5h* investigated the mediation of information intensity → Talabat application → profitability. The results revealed a strongly significant indirect effect (ß = 0.154, t = 4.152, p < 0.001), with the confidence interval ([0.087, 0.231]) excluding zero. This indicates that the richness of information available through the Talabat application plays a substantial role in improving profitability.

In summary, the Talabat application served as a significant mediator in the relationships between several TOE factors and profitability, particularly for relative advantage, top management support, competitive pressure, mobile payment gateway, and information intensity. The results indicated that compatibility, complexity, and organizational readiness did not show significant mediating effects, suggesting that these factors are less influential in driving the application's impact on profitability.

4. DISCUSSION

A key finding of this study is the significant influence of relative advantage on Talabat adoption and profitability. This aligns with the broader literature on the theory of innovation diffusion (Rogers, 2003) and technology adoption models (Oliveira et al., 2014), which highlight that the perceived benefit of a technology is a critical driver of its adoption. Our findings confirm that SMEs were likely to adopt the Talabat mobile platform when perceived to be clearly advantageous, thus enhancing financial returns. This result echoes the work of Naushad and Sulphey (2020), who found that technology adoption by SMEs was primarily built on the perceived relative advantage of such technologies over traditional methods. Moreover, the positive relationship between relative advantage and profitability supports the notion that adoption, driven by perceived benefits, contributes to improved business performance, as suggested by Rogers (2003). This aligns with findings by Mechman et al. (2021), who observed that e-marketing positively impacted SME performance in Iraq, further reinforcing the importance of the perceived benefits of technology adoption.

However, our study found that complexity, often emphasized in the adoption literature (Venkatesh et al., 2003), did not significantly af-

Table 5. Mediation analysis

Hypothesis	Path	ß	SD	T	p	BI	
						2.50%	97.50%
H5a	Relative advantage → Talabat application → profitability	0.096	0.043	2.213	0.027	0.015	0.184
H5b	Compatibility → Talabat application → profitability	0.022	0.035	0.642	0.521	–0.043	0.093
H5c	Complexity → Talabat application → profitability	–0.015	0.018	0.840	0.401	–0.048	0.020
H5d	Top management support → Talabat application → profitability	0.140	0.043	3.261	0.001	0.059	0.228
H5e	Organizational readiness → Talabat application → profitability	0.068	0.037	1.827	0.068	–0.005	0.142
H5f	Competitive pressure → Talabat application → profitability	0.116	0.037	3.119	0.002	0.048	0.192
H5g	Mobile payment gateway → Talabat application → profitability	0.101	0.037	2.750	0.006	0.176	0.033
H5h	Information intensity → Talabat application → profitability	0.154	0.037	4.152	0.000	0.087	0.231

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fect the adoption of Talabat. This contrasts with previous research, such as Oliveira et al. (2014), which found that perceived ease of use was a major predictor of adoption. Similarly, Marzi et al. (2023) found that high perceived adoption costs and adoption complexity levels negatively influence the adoption of two-sided platforms for sourcing processes in SMEs. The lack of a significant effect of complexity in our study could be that SMEs in Kuwait, particularly those in the food and beverage sector, might find mobile applications relatively straightforward to implement, or the platforms might be designed to be more user-friendly, reducing the impact of perceived complexity. This suggests that in specific contexts, especially when platforms are designed with simplicity in mind, the complexity barrier may be less critical.

Another important factor is top management support, which was found to have a significant impact on both adoption and profitability. This finding supports prior research, including studies by Jayeola et al. (2022) and Soomro et al. (2025), who identified that top management support is a key enabler of successful technology adoption. Our results suggest that when top management supports technological initiatives, SMEs are more likely to adopt digital tools like Talabat, ultimately driving better financial performance. This is consistent with the findings of Fan et al. (2021), who found that top management support, through the adoption of social media applications, positively influenced SME performance in Pakistan. Moreover, Hussain et al. (2020) and Alkhateri et al. (2021) emphasized that top management plays a crucial role in the successful adoption of e-marketing systems and their mediating role in improving business outcomes.

In contrast, organizational readiness had only a marginally significant effect on adoption and profitability in our study. While previous research has emphasized the importance of readiness in technology adoption (Eze et al., 2019), our findings suggest that readiness alone is not sufficient to guarantee successful adoption. This nuance adds to the literature by suggesting that organizational readiness must be coupled with strategic intent and leadership commitment to fully leverage technological adoption. This finding is in line with Su et al. (2023), who emphasize that organizational readiness is not just a necessary condition but also a booster and enabler for the successful integration of new technologies and strategies. Our study further suggests that readiness, although important, is less influential without top management support to guide and direct the adoption process.

Competitive pressure emerged as a significant driver of profitability through Talabat adoption, aligning with prior studies that show external pressures can drive SMEs to adopt digital technologies. For example, Zaini and Poernamawati (2020) found that competitive pressures often drive SMEs to adopt technology to maintain their competitive edge. Similarly, Gao et al. (2023) observed that e-commerce adoption positively influenced the performance of Chinese SMEs in competitive markets. Our findings further reinforce these results by showing that both competitive pressure and the need for information in the marketplace motivate SMEs to adopt platforms like Talabat, which ultimately leads to better financial performance.

Moreover, the availability of a mobile payment gateway was found to significantly mediate the relationship between Talabat adoption and profitability. This result aligns with Lansita et al. (2024), who identified the importance of integrated payment systems in the digital transformation of businesses. The ability to offer secure and efficient payment systems is a critical enabler of the success of mobile applications in business operations, further underscoring the importance of technological infrastructure in supporting profitability.

Finally, information intensity was found to significantly influence profitability through Talabat adoption. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Rehman et al. (2022) and Alkhateri et al. (2021), who found that businesses operating in information-intensive environments are more likely to adopt digital technologies to enhance performance. In the context of SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector, the demand for real-time customer data, market trends, and insights into consumer be-

haviour plays a crucial role in driving the adoption of Talabat and, in turn, improving business outcomes.

In summary, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the mediating role of technology adoption in linking TOE factors to business outcomes, particularly profitability. Our findings reinforce the idea that the adoption of mobile applications like Talabat serves as a critical intermediary in the relationship between technological, organizational, and environmental factors and marketing performance. This research extends the work of Alkhateri et al. (2021) and Sheikh et al. (2018), who identified similar mediating roles for electronic marketing systems in other contexts, by highlighting the specific impact of mobile applications in the food and beverage industry in Kuwait. This study provides valuable insights into how SMEs can strategically use mobile applications to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape and improve profitability.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the relationship between TOE factors and marketing performance, specifically profitability, through the mediating role of Talabat adoption among SMEs in Kuwait's food and beverage sector.

The findings indicate that Talabat adoption significantly mediates the influence of central TOE factors, such as relative advantage, top management support, competitive pressure, information intensity, and the availability of a mobile payment gateway, on profitability outcomes. Notably, the study found that internal factors related to the complexity of adoption were less influential than market-driven factors, suggesting that external forces like market competition and the demand for real-time information play a more prominent role in driving adoption decisions.

The results underline that SMEs in Kuwait are more likely to benefit from mobile application adoption when they perceive clear advantages, such as operational efficiency and secure payment systems, and when top management provides strong support. These findings suggest that SME owners and managers should focus on leveraging external drivers like competitive pressure and technological infrastructure (e.g., mobile payment systems) to enhance adoption and maximize profitability. Additionally, policymakers should focus on initiatives that increase digital readiness and facilitate mobile application adoption, helping SMEs stay competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace.

In conclusion, the adoption of mobile platforms like Talabat presents a significant opportunity for Kuwaiti SMEs to improve their profitability, operational efficiency, and competitiveness. Future research should examine the long-term impacts of mobile application adoption on SME performance across various industries and regions, and qualitative studies could further explore the perceptions of SME owners and managers regarding the adoption process and its strategic implications.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Variables of study and their corresponding

Variable	Items	Reference
Top Management Support	Our top management is likely to invest funds in the applications of e-marketing	Wang et al. (2016)
	Our top management is willing to take risks of involved in the implementation of e-marketing	
	Our top management is interested in using applications of e-marketing to gain competitive advantages	
Organizational Readiness	We have sufficient financial resources in our organization to adopt and implementing e-marketing	Justino et al. (2022)
	We have the technical skills and resources necessary for e-marketing implementation	
	Our organization has good, qualified and skilled marketing staff	
Relative Advantage	Using e-marketing would help increase our market share	Wang et al. (2016), Picoto et al. (2014)
	Using e-marketing would ultimately help reduce our overall operating costs	
	Using e-e-marketing would help to serve our customers better	
	The adoption of e-marketing would help speed up the sales process	
	Using e-marketing would increase the value of our brand	
Compatibility	E-marketing is compatible with our organization's selling and procurement processes	Picoto et al. (2014), Wang et al. (2016)
	E-marketing is compatible with existing distribution channels	
	E-marketing is compatible with our organization's existing information infrastructure	
	E-marketing is consistent with our organization's existing practice	
Complexity	I believe that using e-marketing applications/tools is complex to implement	Picoto et al. (2014), Wang et al. (2016)
	I believe that using an e-marketing application for conducting my business is difficult	
	Dealing with e-marketing tools (Internet, email, smart mobile phones,...) requires me mental effort	
Competitive Pressure	Our organization faced competitive pressure to implement e-marketing	Wang et al. (2016), Picoto et al. (2014)
	Our competitors who implemented e-marketing early enough have gained a competitive advantage	
	The ICT influences the competition in organization food industry	
Mobile Payment Gateway	The availability of a secure digital payment system for wireless financial transactions and privacy is essential for our marketing business	Justino et al. (2022)
	The availability of secure digital payment options (credit cards, smart cards, debit cards, and electronic cash) is essential for our marketing business	Wang et al. (2016)
	The availability of organizations operating as payment gateways for providers of online payment methods is essential for our marketing business	
Information Intensity	Customers require a lot of information before purchasing products and services in the food/beverage industry	Wang et al. (2016)
	Products and services in our business industry are complex and hard to understand	
	The booking process in the food/beverage industry is generally complex	
Talabat Adoption	Our organization adopts Talabat to communicate with our customers	Sheikh et al. (2018)
	Our organization adopts Talabat to support the organization's traditional commercial activities (pricing and customer services)	
	Our organization adopts Talabat to speed up the commercial transactions (selling products and accepting payment)	
	Our organization has a computerized customer database to update the customers with new products and services	
	Our organization integrated Talabat with all marketing processes	
	Our organization integrated the marketing plans of Talabat into the overall business plan	
	Our organization adopted Talabat to enhance interactions with third parties	
	Our organization possesses good experience in adopting Talabat, which enhances the marketing performance	
Profitability	There is an increase in our organization's profitability	Budiono and Efrata (2019), Perényi and Yukhanaev (2016), Helgesen et al. (2018)
	My organization, in the past five years, has shown higher profitability than its competitors	
	My organization's profitability is associated with potential plans	
	My organization's profitability has increased in the past and future	
	Customers' purchases improved the organization's profitability in the past five years	