Article

The Role of Market Complexity, Skills and Perceived Usefulness on the Marketing Support Services

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Abstract - This study aims to examine the relationships between managing market complexity, skills, and frequency of usage of marketing support services. The research was conducted through a structural equation modeling using data from 67 SMEs that operate in Malaysia. To analyze and interpret the result, a measurement model and a structural model were utilized for the main constructs – managing market complexity, skills, perceived usefulness, and the usage of marketing support services. This study found that owners, who are facing difficulties in managing their businesses, which are focused on market complexity, are more frequent users of the marketing support services. In terms of skills, SMEs with longer experience are lesser users of the marketing support services. The results from the moderator analysis failed to validate that perceived usefulness affects the relationship between managing market complexity and the frequency of usage as well as skills. The results of this study can prove to SMEs that frequent use of marketing support services can help in dealing with market complexity. The role of perceived usefulness should not be sidelined by service providers as it may have a negative impact in the long run. The findings will be of interest to researchers, policy makers, and service providers.

Keywords: Marketing support services, perceived usefulness, market complexity, SMEs

1. Introduction

Business support services have long been provided by the government, especially to support Bumiputera enterprises (Aslam, 2000; Hakimin, 2010; Moha Asri, 1999). These support services were established to provide additional resources for small and medium firms to grow (Aslam, 2000). However, the issue that these services, especially those provided by the government are under-utilized remains unresolved. Frequency of usage is a critical issue, as a number of studies suggests that it has a significant positive relationship with a firm's performance (Berry, Sweeting, & Goto, 2006; Johnson, Webber, & Thomas, 2007; Wren & Storey, 2002). Most business support and advisory researches have examined the usage of the services among SMEs from the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective. Based on the RBV, support programs are considered one of the distinct resources that assists SMEs in overcoming

their operational weaknesses. Studies on business support and advisory have listed a number of factors that influences the usage of these services. Factors that contribute to the unfavorable usage of the services are bureaucracy, unsatisfactory services, and a lack of awareness about the services among SMEs (Boter & Lundstrom, 2006; Dyer & Ross, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Lewis, Massey, Ashby, Coetzer, & Harris, 2007; Mole, Hart, Roper, & Saal, 2009). Low usage of the support services leads to low performance. Studies suggest that to increase the usage, the service providers need to review the terms and procedures, and assess the capability of the service providers in delivering effective services (Berry et al., 2006; Hjalmarson & Johansson, 2003; Jay & Schaper, 2003; Salleh & Ndubisi, 2006).

Previous studies analyzing the antecedents of the usage of the services can be categorized into three groups: demographic factors (size, location, sector, experience, and length of business); psychological factors (awareness, need of achievement, growth orientation, and trust, among others); and external forces (environment dynamism, competitive intensity, market complexity, and culture). However, one important construct has received very little attention in the context of the RBV theory in determining the frequency of usage of the services. This construct is perceived usefulness (PU), commonly used in the Technology Acceptance Model. PU is defined as the extent to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance his/her job performance (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). For the purpose of this study, technology refers to the marketing support services. Thus, this study presumes that no matter how effective or ineffective the services are, the acceptance of SMEs and the usage of the services depend on how SMEs perceive the services. Hence, this study posits that PU will moderate the relationship between the independent constructs, which are managing marketing complexity, owners' skill, and the frequency of usage of the marketing support services. Given the importance of perceived usefulness as a construct in business support and advisory research, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives: (a) to investigate the direct effects of managing marketing complexity and owners skills on the frequency of usage of the marketing support services offered by the government; (b) to investigate the moderating influence of PU in the relationship between managing marketing complexity and the frequency of usage of the marketing support services offered by the government; and (c) to investigate the moderating influence of PU in the relationship between owners' skills and the frequency of usage of the marketing support services offered by the government.

2. Literature Review

The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the complexity of marketing decision-making and skills on the usage of marketing support services. The secondary objective of this study is to investigate the moderating effect of PU on the relationship between independent constructs and the usage of the marketing business support services. The development of the theory used in this study is based on RBV that argues that the availability of resources and managerial capacity will determine the success in sustaining competitive advantages (Barney, 1991). Marketing support is one of the resources available for firms to exploit, and skills represent managerial capacity. RBV further posits that firms that possess valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable resources (VRIN) and have organizational capabilities (the skill and knowledge to use the resources) are more likely to succeed (Barney, 1991; Leiblein, 2011). By exploiting the RBV theory in marketing support

services, this study aims to assist SMEs in achieving their objective, which is to gain profit and growth.

However, previous studies show that government back-up support services were not well received and utilized by SMEs (Abdul Aziz & Faoziah, 2009; Berry et al., 2006; Khairudin, 2002; Salleh & Ndubisi, 2006; Wren & Storey, 2002). Factors that contribute to this phenomenon include bureaucracy, unsatisfactory services, size, location, environmental dynamism, flexibility, perception, awareness, owner growth orientation, competitive intensity, strategy, and need for achievement. These factors affect the frequency of usage of the services. The focus of this study is the frequency of usage as there is a positive relationship between frequency of usage and its impact on a firm's performance. In other words, firms that frequently use the services perform better than the firms that do not use the services. Thus, based on previous studies and the RBV theory, this study aims to test the relationship between the two constructs (complexity and skill) and the frequency of usage, as well as the moderating effect of PU on this relationship. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework for this study. This study examines the relationships between managing market complexity, skills, and the frequency of usage of the marketing support services. Tests were conducted to examine the role of PU as a moderator between these relationships. It is important to study the role of PU since perception plays a significant role in the usage of services (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000).

2.1 Marketing support services

Marketing is one of the operational functions within firms. Studies found that marketing plays a critical role in business (Narver & Slater, 1990). One might argue that without proper marketing plans, a business may run into problems (Palmer, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2005). A number of studies found that a lack of marketing skills can hinder the growth of an SME (Carson & Gilmore, 2000; Lussier & Halabi, 2010). Firms may raise capital and funds for production or services using state-of-the art technology and equipment. However, firms can only generate income and gain profit when they successfully sell products. Selling products in a challenging business environment needs proper and effective marketing activities (Kotler, Hoon Ang, Meng Leong, & Tiong Tan, 1999; Walsh & Lipinski, 2009).

Lack of marketing skills among SMEs remains a critical issue since SMEs are faced with a variety of challenges (Walsh & Lipinski, 2009). Khairudin (2007)[1] posits that problems in marketing is a critical issue faced by local SMEs. Thus, to address this issue, the government has provided support services to assist SMEs, aimed to overcome these weaknesses.

2.2 Managing marketing complexity

Marketing is not only about selling products. The core concepts of marketing range from the identification of needs and wants, to offering products, creating values, making transactions, and networking with customers, markets, marketers, and prospects (Kotler, Armstrong, & Cunningham, 2005). With the world undergoing radical economic transformations, SMEs now face new challenges. While the condition of the global economy may create new opportunities, SMEs must also face stiff global competition. Thus, SMEs must manage their businesses properly and make sound decisions when it comes to marketing.

SMEs, regardless of their size, manage their operations and marketing activities and make important decisions on a daily basis. Some of the decisions that need to be made are related to routine activities, and this requires less effort. Nevertheless, on some occasions, SMEs need to make decisions on non-routine activities, and the process can become complicated as most of the time, SMEs do not have the necessary experience needed to make them (Dyer & Ross, 2008). The decision-making process becomes complex when it involves a number of variables that expose SMEs to a great deal of uncertainty (Dyer & Ross, 2008). To overcome this situation, SMEs need external interventions in the form of advice and support in order to ensure that the right decisions are made.

According to Johnson et al. (2007), the market situation may influence an SME's propensity to seek external support. SMEs that operate within the local market may require minimum support, as internal resources are sufficient to assist them in making sound decisions. However, SMEs with a more diverse and broader market require a higher level of knowledge and skill. This is because larger markets are more complex than local markets. Internal resources may not be sufficient to support operations. In this situation, SMEs are more inclined to seek external support. Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between complex marketing decision-making and the frequency of usage of the services.

2.3 Skills

The RBV suggests that the size and age of a firm can influence a firm's propensity to seek external advice. Smaller firms are said to face bigger issues that include funding problems compared to bigger firms that require more external intervention from third parties. Newer firms face other issues, such as limited marketing coverage and limited resources for promotional activities. This might lead to operational problems that can in turn affect a firm's survival. Studies on business support reveal that there is a negative relationship between the size and age of firms with the frequency of seeking external advice (Johnson et al., 2007). This means that the bigger the size of the firm, the less likely the firm will seek advice, as bigger firms have stronger management teams and are capable of employing skilled employees. On the other hand, the age of firms also has a negative relationship with the frequency of seeking external support. This is due to the fact that older firms have more experience and knowledge, and are thus more skillful compared to newer firms. Based on these results and arguments, this study examines skill as a construct measured in relation to SMEs' frequency of usage of marketing support services offered by the government. Thus, this study suggests that:

H2: There is a negative relationship between the skills possessed by owners of SMEs and the frequency of the usage of the services.

1.4 Perceived Usefulness

PU is a construct in the TAM defined as the extent to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance her/his job performance (Davis, 1989). Past studies show

that PU has a strong influence on a user's decision to use or not to use a technology introduced. According to Koufaris (2002), PU has a strong influence on the intention of potential internet shoppers.

For the purpose of this study, PU refers to the degree that SMEs believe the use of marketing support services would enhance their firms' performance. In general, in order to acquire the services provided by the government, applicants must go through a lengthy process involving a lot of bureaucratic procedures. This gives a negative impression to owners of SMEs who are actually interested in acquiring the services. Based on these arguments, this study suggests that PU is one of the constructs that can influence SMEs in using the marketing support services offered by the government. Therefore, this study posits that:

H3: The effect of managing marketing complexity on the frequency of the usage of marketing support services is moderated by PU.

H4: The effect of an owner's skills on the frequency of the usage of marketing support services is moderated by PU.

3. Methodology

3.1 Respondents

The sample consists of 67 SMEs that operate in Kelantan, Malaysia. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 73 respondents who participated in SME seminars conducted by a financial development institution in June 2012. Six questionnaires were considered invalid as more than 10% of the questions were left unanswered. A total of 69.1% of the respondents were male and 30.9% were female. The majority of the respondents obtained secondary school level certificates, 30.9% obtained first-degree qualifications and 16.2% attended primary school. 72.1% of the respondents were involved in services activities whilst 27.9% worked in the manufacturing sector. Most of the firms involved (55.9%) had been in operation for less than five years. All of them were small and micro sized enterprises. The demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information

Demographic	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Business experience			*Gender*		
<5 y	38	55.9	Male	47	69.1
> 5 y	30	44.1	Female	21	30.9
Level of Education			*Sector*		
Primary school	11	16.2	Services	49	72.1
Secondary school	36	52.9	Manufacturing	19	27.9
Degree	21	30.9			

3.2 Measurement

3.2.1 Managing marketing complexity

Managing marketing complexity is comprised of seven items: (1) having a broad range of products/services; (2) having a large number of customers; (3) selling to numerous market segments; (4) having broad geographical markets; (5) managing numerous distribution channels; (6) having innovative marketing techniques; and (7) developing innovative products and services, which are adapted from Dyer (2008). The measurement utilizes a five-point Likert-scale that starts from 1 (to indicate not significant at all) to 5 (to indicate extremely significant).

3.2.2 Skills

Skills are measured by the number of years a business has been in operation. The number of years that an SME has been in operation reflects the amount of experience gained by the owners of the SMEs and represents their level of skill, as suggested by Dyer and Ross (2008). Owners with greater experience in managing businesses are less likely to seek external advice if they face difficulties in managing marketing issues compared to owners with less experience. Thus, skill has a negative relationship with the frequency of usage of marketing support services.

3.2.3 Perceived Usefulness

The method of measuring PU was adapted from Venkatesh and Morris (2000). Respondents had to respond to the following four items: (1) Using the marketing support services improves my firm's performance; (2) Using the marketing support services increases my firm's productivity; (3) Using the services enhances my effectiveness in managing the firm's activities; and (4) I find the services to be useful in my job. All items were measured using a 5 point Likert-scale, from 1 (to indicate Strongly Disagree) to 5 (to indicate Strongly Agree).

3.2.4 Frequency of usage of marketing support services

To measure the frequency of usage of the services, respondents were asked to give ratings on the usage of the services. Respondents were asked to respond to these four items: (1) Researching local and international market; (2) Identifying customers' needs and wants; (3) Improving commercial competencies; and (4) Participating in national trade fares. The ratings were given based on a five-point Likert-Scale, from 1 (to indicate Never) to 5 (to indicate Very Often).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Measurement Model Results

The measurement model is used to test the reliability and validity of items that represent the constructs. Two tests were conducted, a reliability test and a validity test. The reliability test

was used to confirm the consistency of the instruments, while the validity test was carried out to examine the extent to which the instruments measured the concepts they were supposed to measure (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Sekaran, 2006). By using the PLS algorithm loading and cross loading of the items, measurements were obtained as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Outer model loadings and cross loadings

	Complexity	Usage	PU	Skill
C1	**0.832**	0.399	0.293	0.041
C2	**0.831**	0.272	0.130	0.021
C3	**0.847**	0.310	0.389	-0.137
C4	**0.821**	0.266	0.284	-0.071
C5	**0.759**	0.169	0.305	-0.142
C6	**0.871**	0.296	0.357	-0.099
C7	**0.771**	0.325	0.305	-0.114
M1	0.287	**0.898**	0.363	-0.288
M2	0.325	**0.903**	0.429	-0.323
M3	0.386	**0.926**	0.427	-0.272
M4	0.332	**0.873**	0.337	-0.247
PU1	0.403	0.394	**0.861**	-0.205
PU2	0.329	0.419	**0.902**	-0.160
PU3	0.237	0.363	**0.805**	-0.247
PU4	0.194	0.228	**0.760**	-0.069
Skills	-0.077	-0.315	-0.214	**1.000**

Note: Bold values are loadings for items that are above the recommended value of 0.7.

All item loadings are above 0.7 and loaded highly on that construct and loaded lower on the other construct, which thus signifies construct validity (Hair et al., 2011). In the presence of a higher correlation between constructs, the model may face multicollinearity problems, and thus, the model needs to be re-evaluated (Henseler, Christian, & Sinkovics, 2009)[32]. The results of this study show that no constructs share similar measures, thus the measurements are conceptually distinct (Chin, 2010).

4.1.1 Reliability test

The internal consistency of the measurement items is determined by examining the composite reliability (CR) coefficient (Chin, 2010; Hair, et al., 2011).

Table 3. Result of the reliability test

Construct	Measurement items	Composite Reliability	Loading range	Number of items
Complexity	C1 to C7	0.935	0.759-0.871	7
Usage	M1 to M4	0.945	0.873-0.926	4
PU	PU1 to PU4	0.924	0.760 - 0.902	4
Skills	Skill	1.000	1	1

All CR coefficients are above 0.9, which is above the cut-off value of 0.6 as suggested by Henseler et al. (2009). The results confirm the reliability of the items used in this study.

4.1.2 Construct validity

Construct validity shows that the measurements fit the theory for which the test is designed. Two tests were performed to access construct validity, i.e. convergent validity and discriminant validity.

(i) Convergent validity

The convergent validity test is conducted to test whether items used to measure the constructs are in agreement. As suggested by Hair et al. (2011), factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) are calculated. The results show that all factor loadings are above 0.7; CR is also above the threshold of 0.6, and AVE exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 4: Result of the measurement model

Model Construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE[b]
Complexity	C1	0.832	0.935	0.672
	C2	0.831		
	C3	0.847		
	C4	0.821		
	C5	0.759		
	C6	0.871		
	C7	0.771		
Usage	M1	0.898	0.945	0.810
	M2	0.903		
	M3	0.926		
	M4	0.873		
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.861	0.901	0.695
	PU2	0.902		
	PU3	0.805		
	PU4	0.760		
Skill	Skills	1.000	1.000	1.000

[a] Composite reliability (CR) = (square of summation of the factor loadings)/(square of summation of the factor loadings) +{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)} [b] Average variance extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}.

(ii) Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity shows the degree to which items differentiate among constructs by examining correlations between the measures of potentially overlapping constructs. Items should load more strongly on their own constructs and the average variance shared between each construct and other constructs (Compeau, Higgins, & Huff, 1999; Fornell & Lacker, 1981).

Table 5. Discriminant validity of the constructs

	1	2	3	4
Complexity	0.672			
PU	0.130	0.695		
Skill	0.006	0.046	1.000	
Usage	0.138	0.189	0.099	0.810

Note: Diagonals (in bold) represent the average variance extracted while the other entries represent the squared correlations.

Table 5 indicates that all the squared correlations for each construct are less than the average variance extracted, confirming adequate discriminant validity. As discriminant validity is also used to test for common method variance, there is no indicator of common method variance with none of the loadings recorded at 0.9 and above (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Lee, 2003).

4.2 Structural Model Results

The second stage in a PLS analysis is to generate a structural model and to conduct the hypothesis testing. First, the significances between the constructs are identified by calculating the path coefficient (β) and t-statistic. To get the *t* value, a bootstrapping procedure is performed using 5000 samples (Henseler & Fassot, 2010), with 68 cases per sample. The results of the path coefficient, *t* value, and tests for the hypotheses are presented in Table 6. Figure 2 provides the graphical representation of the path analysis results.

Table 6. Path coefficient and hypothesis testing

Relationship	Path coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	Hypotheses Supported
Complexity -> Usage	0.349	0.103	3.399***	YES
Skill -> Usage	-0.287	0.110	2.612***	YES

Significant at p> 0.10*, p >0.05**, p > 0.01***

The results in Table 6 clearly show that all the hypotheses are supported. Thus, the study finds that all relationships are significant and positively influence the usage of marketing support services. The r^2 value of usage of marketing support services is 0.220. This shows that 22.0% of the variance of usage of the services can be explained by the complexity of marketing decision, perceived usefulness of the services, and the skill of the entrepreneurs. r^2 value is considered moderate according to Chin (2010). For the hypothesis testing, all independent variables are found to be a significant predictor of the usage of marketing support services, with managing marketing complexity as positively related ($t = 3.399$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, skill has a significant relationship with the usage of marketing decisions ($t = 2.612$, $p < 0.01$) but the two are negatively correlated. This shows that the higher the skill, the less likely SMEs will seek marketing support services (B = -0.287). Managing marketing complexity is found to be the most influential predictor of the usage of marketing support services.

4.2.1 Moderating effect of Perceived Usefulness

This study applied a product-indicator approach for moderation analysis to detect the moderation effect of PU on the relationships between managing marketing complexity, skill, and the frequency of usage of marketing support services (Henseler & Fassot, 2010). A three-step hierarchical regression was performed to examine the significance of the moderator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Firstly, the effect of the independent variables (managing marketing complexity and skill) on the dependent variables (frequency of usage of marketing support services) was estimated. Secondly, the relationship of the moderator variable (PU) and dependent variables was measured to establish evidence of the significant direct impact on the dependent variable. Lastly, the interaction terms of moderator variable and independent variables were entered and measured to get the r^2, which may indicate the explanation of the variance. To determine the significant increase of r^2, the effect size was calculated as suggested by Cohen (1988). The results show that there is a significant relationship between managing marketing complexity, skill, and frequency of usage.

In step 2, the direct impact of PU on the frequency of usage was measured. The results show that there is a significant relationship between the PU and the frequency of usage ($t= 2.048$, $p < 0.05$). The relationships between predictors and criterion variables also show the same results. To examine the moderating effect of PU on the relationship, the predictors and moderator were multiplied to create an interaction construct to predict continuance interaction (Henseler & Fassot, 2010). In this case, managing marketing complexity consisted of seven items and PU, four items. Thus, interaction construct represents twenty-eight items (7 x 4). On the other hand, another interaction is between skill and PU, which comprises of four items (1 x 4). The AVE and CR for the interactions are above the minimum cut-off value as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: R square value

Step	Variables	R square	CR	AVE
1	Complexity -> Usage	0.220	0.935	0.672
	Skill -> Usage		1.000	1.000
2	Complexity -> Usage	0.294	0.935	0.672
	PU -> Usage		0.901	0.695
	Skill -> Usage		1.000	1.000
3	Complexity -> Usage	0.332	0.935	0.672
	Complexity * PU -> Usage		0.970	0.540
	PU -> Usage		0.901	0.695
	Skill -> Usage		1.000	1.000
	Skill * PU -> Usage		0.851	0.594

The results of the moderation analysis show that PU does not significantly moderate the relationship between managing market complexity and the frequency of usage. The interaction effect is not substantial (1.055 for managing market complexity and 0.503 for skill). Thus, the hypotheses are not supported. The hierarchical regression results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Hierarchical Regression Result

Variables	Standardized t-value			Hypothesis
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Complexity -> Usage	3.373	1.960	2.187	
Skill -> Usage	2.687	2.297	1.903	
PU -> Usage		2.230	1.774	
Complexity * PU -> Usage			1.055	Not supported
Skill * PU -> Usage			0.503	Not supported
R square	0.220	0.294	0.332	

However, tests on size effect indicates the presence of a moderating effect (f^2) of 0.168, which is considered moderate (Henseler, et al., 2009). Statistically, H4 and H5 are rejected. In spite of this, the moderator's role should not be neglected even if the interaction is small (Henseler et al., 2009).

5. Conclusion

This study found that owners who are facing difficulties in managing their business with focus on market complexity are more frequent users of the marketing support services. In other words, the more complex the market is, the more SMEs seek external advice. The complexity, which is represented by the diversity of market and products, pricing issues, and competition, leads SMEs to find ways to resolve the issue by looking for government assistance via support services. This shows that SMEs are now becoming aware of the availability of the services and their importance to their operations. In term of skills, as earlier predicted, SMEs with longer experience are lesser users of the marketing support services. The obvious reason might be that they are well equipped with market information and have had experience in dealing with operational issues, and there is no issue of mismatch between the SME's needs and what is offered by the providers. These results are a sign of the imperative use of the marketing services for newly set-up enterprises, which in this study are firms that have been in operation for less than five years. For the most part, newly set-up firms have a lack of experience, face funding difficulties, possess an incompetent workforce, and have limited networking and marketing access. The presence of marketing support is one of the most important tools to overcome these limitations.

Generally, this study verifies that the support services provided by the government are significant to SMEs' operations. The results demonstrate that the services are very likely able to overcome the complexities faced by SMEs. Though this study did not measure the impact on performance, there are studies that reveal that the frequency of usage does have a significant positive impact on a firm's performance. Entrepreneurs who are normally risk takers and proactive, seek external advice and support as a means to gain information to improve performance. The significant result of the study provides evidence that SMEs with a more complex market are frequent users of the services, suggesting that the usage of the services positively affects their firms' performance.

The results also reflect that the content in the services offered by the government agencies are still highly relevant to SMEs' operations. However, this study did not measure the competence

level of the service providers as well as the effectiveness of the services. The level of usage has shed some light on the usefulness of the services to SMEs' daily marketing activities.

The results from the moderator analysis failed to validate that PU affects the relationship between managing market complexity and the frequency of usage as well as skill. In other words, SMEs that face complexities would go for external marketing support regardless of the perception of those services. The desire to solve the problems outweighs the negative perception of the government support services. On the other hand, PU also failed to moderate the relationship between skill and the usage of the services. Higher skilled SMEs are not keen to seek advice, although they have a positive perception of the services' impact on their firms' performance. This also applies to lower skilled SMEs. Lack of skill requires SMEs to look for external assistance. Again, the bad perception would not hinder them from seeking assistance from marketing support agencies.

However, the effect size results indicate that there are moderate effects of PU on the relationship although they are not significant. Thus, though PU does not statistically affect the relationship, its presence cannot be simply ignored. PU may not give an impact in short periods, but it does in the long-term. SMEs that have unfavorable experiences will disseminate the information among other SMEs, and in the long run, this will affect the usage of the services. The risk is that there are services offered by certain agencies that become idle due to bad perception. Therefore, the government must build a positive perception of their services among SMEs in order to attract more SMEs to acquire the services. This can be done by improving the quality of their services in terms of speed of delivery and more friendly terms and conditions, as these two factors dominate the reason for low utilization of the government's business support services.

To conclude, this study has shed some light on the usage of the government's business support services. SMEs with market complexity are inclined towards usage of the support services. This implies that there is a positive relationship between managing market complexity and the frequency of usage. However, owners' skill negatively influences the frequency of usage, and this indicates that less skilled SMEs use the services more frequently than higher skilled SMEs. Tests on PU as a moderator failed to prove a significant effect on the predictor-criterion variables relationship, but service providers should not ignore these constructs, as there is a moderate effect, although it is not significant. The results of this study can prove to SMEs that frequent use of marketing support services can help in dealing with market complexity. The role of PU should not be sidelined by service providers as it may have a negative impact in the long run.

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