

An empirical investigation of Social media marketing strategies for small businesses

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Abstract

The research problem addressed in this study is the limited use of social media by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to interact with consumers. The primary aim is to evaluate the impact of social media on small businesses, identify the strategies currently adopted, and explore how these platforms—such as Facebook and Twitter—can be effectively applied to enhance business performance. The study highlights the importance of understanding social media strategies in today's digital environment, where small enterprises must leverage these tools to remain competitive. A descriptive-analytical method was employed, combining theoretical examination of variables with a questionnaire-based field study to derive practical conclusions and recommendations. Findings indicate a positive relationship between the implementation of social media strategies and the growth of small businesses, demonstrating that effective use of these platforms contributes to business development. The research recommends promoting greater use of social media in business operations, encouraging further studies on its applications across different sectors, and fostering a culture that integrates social media into small business practices.

Key words- medium-sized enterprises, social media, business, platforms

Introduction

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media platforms to promote a brand or product, expand audience reach, generate leads, and ultimately increase sales and website traffic. Alongside content marketing, it forms an integral part of inbound marketing, a strategy built on attracting customers through the creation of valuable and engaging content.

However, social media marketing is not limited to simply publishing content. Effective campaigns require consistent and meaningful interaction with the target audience. The following steps outline the key elements for building a successful social media marketing strategy:

Organisations goals: Before beginning, it is essential to establish clear objectives. Whether the aim is to build brand presence, increase website traffic, or drive sales, setting goals ensures a focused and effective strategy.

Analysis of Competition: Conduct market research to understand how your industry engages on social platforms. Using industry-specific hashtags and analyzing trends helps identify influencers and leading players who can shape your approach.

Analyse competitors: Competitors serve as valuable benchmarks. By studying their posting strategies, content types, and frequency, businesses can gain insights to refine their own practices.

Create business accounts: Establishing dedicated business profiles on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube provides access to advanced features and tools tailored for businesses.

Understand your audience: Research where your target audience is most active and adapt your strategy accordingly. For instance, if your audience is more engaged on Instagram, prioritizing that platform will yield better results while maintaining a presence across major networks.

Develop engaging content: Content should be relevant, interesting, and aligned with audience preferences—ranging from blog articles and industry updates to creative visuals and interactive posts.

Plan with a social media calendar: Organization is critical for consistency. A content calendar helps track posts, maintain regular activity, and evaluate what works best over time.

Post consistently but strategically: Quality outweighs quantity. Excessive posting may lead to audience fatigue, while regular, thoughtful content builds trust and engagement.

Research Objectives

- 1) To examine how social media can be effectively applied in small business operations.
- 2) To evaluate the feasibility and practicality of using social media marketing.
- 3) To analyse the key factors that influence consumer purchase decisions on social media platforms.
- 4) To explore the challenges faced by small businesses in implementing effective social media marketing strategies.
- 5) To assess whether the costs incurred for promotion and branding through social media can be recovered.

Literature Review

Social network marketing has emerged as one of the most powerful tools for modern businesses. The rapid expansion of the Internet and its widespread reach has drawn significant research interest toward the role of social media in marketing. While extensive studies exist on its application in large organizations, research on its use as a marketing tool for small enterprises remains limited

Drucker (1991) envisioned the future economy as a “network society,” suggesting that key social and business activities would revolve around information processing. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social media sites as web-based services that allow organizations and individuals to: (1) create public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system, (2) connect with other users, and (3) view and interact with their own connections as well as those of others.

Glen (2010) emphasized the importance of understanding the specific features and benefits of each social media platform before businesses establish an online presence. Several studies have explored social network marketing in industries such as pharmaceuticals, restaurants, and construction (Kevin, 2009; Gupta & Udupa, 2011). For example, Merck became one of the first pharmaceutical companies in the United States to adopt social media marketing in 2008 by launching a Facebook page to promote its vaccine Gardasil. This was followed by

GlaxoSmithKline, which utilized YouTube to run promotional campaigns for its products (Gupta & Udupa, 2011).

Nickson (2009) traced the origins of social networks to Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), online communities designed for individuals with shared interests. The evolution of social networking further advanced with the launch of Six Degrees in 1997, the first web-based social network that enabled users to create profiles, form groups, invite friends, and connect with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Stroud, 2008).

Overall, existing literature demonstrates the transformative potential of social media marketing, but highlights the need for more focused research on its application within small businesses.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory sectoral research design. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire survey distributed to customers via social media platforms. Although the survey was shared with approximately 200 businesses, a total of 120 valid responses were obtained. In addition to primary data, secondary information was gathered from published research papers in reputed peer-reviewed journals to support the literature review and provide a strong theoretical foundation for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Statement 1. Which industry does your business operate in?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Retail	36	30.0
2	Food and beverages	68	56.7
3	Fashion and apparel	15	12.5
4	Services	1	0.8
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation

The data shows that **Food and Beverages** is the most dominant sector, accounting for **56.7% (68 respondents)** of the total responses. This indicates that more than half of the participants are engaged in or associated with food-related businesses.

The **Retail sector** follows with **30% (36 respondents)**, reflecting its significant but secondary presence compared to food and beverages. **Fashion and Apparel** contributes **12.5% (15 respondents)**, showing a moderate representation.

Finally, **Services** represent only **0.8% (1 respondent)**, indicating a very minimal share in the sample.

Overall, the findings highlight that the majority of responses are concentrated in food and beverage activities, while other sectors such as services remain underrepresented.

Statement 2: How long has your business been operational?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Less than 1 year	11	9.2
2	1–3 years	18	15.0
3	3–5 years	43	35.8
4	More than 5 years	49	40.8
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Most businesses have been operational for more than five years (40.8%), while 35.8% have been running for 3–5 years. Additionally, 15% have been active for 1–3 years, and 9.2% are less than a year old.

Statement 3: Which social media platforms do you use for your business?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Facebook	35	29.2
2	Instagram	44	36.7
3	Twitter	22	18.3
4	LinkedIn	19	15.8
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Instagram is the most used platform (36.7%), followed by Facebook (29.2%), Twitter (18.3%), and LinkedIn (15.8%).

Statement 4: How often do you post content on social media?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Daily	14	11.7
2	2–3 times a week	16	13.3
3	Weekly	46	38.3
4	Occasionally	44	36.7
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Most businesses post weekly (38.3%), while 36.7% post occasionally. Only 13.3% post 2–3 times a week, and 11.7% update daily.

Statement 5: Who manages your social media accounts?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	In-house team	22	18.3
2	Freelancer/agency	18	15.0
3	Self-managed	80	66.7
4	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Most businesses (66.7%) manage their accounts themselves, while 18.3% use an in-house team and 15% outsource to freelancers/agencies.

Statement 6: What type of content do you primarily share?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Product/service promotion	27	22.5
2	Educational/informative	32	26.7
3	Customer testimonials	15	12.5
4	Behind-the-scenes content	22	18.3
5	Other	24	20.0
6	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Businesses mainly share educational/informative posts (26.7%), followed by product promotions (22.5%). Other content includes behind-the-scenes posts (18.3%), customer testimonials (12.5%), and miscellaneous (20%).

Statement 7: Have you observed an increase in sales since using social media marketing?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	25	20.8
2	No	49	40.8
3	Not sure	46	38.4
4	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Only 20.8% of businesses have seen an increase in sales, while 40.8% have not. About 38.4% are unsure of the impact.

Statement 8: If yes, by what percentage have your sales increased?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Less than 10%	15	12.5
2	10–25%	54	45.0
3	26–50%	36	30.0
4	More than 50%	15	12.5
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: A large share (87.5%) reported sales increases due to social media marketing, with most (45%) citing a 10–25% growth.

Statement 9: Which platform has contributed most to your sales growth?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Facebook	34	28.3
2	Instagram	46	38.3
3	Twitter	22	18.3
4	LinkedIn	18	15.0
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Instagram drives the highest sales growth (38.3%), followed by Facebook (28.3%), Twitter (18.3%), and LinkedIn (15%).

Statement 10: What challenges do you face in using social media marketing?

S.no	Response	Frequency	Percent
1	Lack of time	10	8.3
2	Insufficient budget	14	11.7
3	Low engagement	25	20.8
4	Difficulty in content	39	32.5
5	Other	32	26.7
6	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Content creation is the biggest challenge (32.5%), followed by other issues (26.7%) and low engagement (20.8%). Budget limits (11.7%) and lack of time (8.3%) are also concerns.

Statement 11: Do you plan to increase your social media budget next year?

S.no Response Frequency Percent

1	Yes	34	28.3
2	No	40	33.3
3	Not sure	46	38.4
4	Total	120	100

Interpretation: 38.4% are unsure about increasing their budget, 28.3% plan to increase it, while 33.3% do not.

Statement 12: How effective do you think social media marketing is?

S.no Response Frequency Percent

1	Extremely effective	51	42.5
2	Moderately effective	34	28.3
3	Slightly effective	30	25.0
4	Not effective	5	4.2
5	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Most (42.5%) believe social media marketing is extremely effective, 28.3% say moderately, 25% slightly, while 4.2% feel it is not effective.

Statement 13: Would you consider hiring a professional/agency?

S.no Response Frequency Percent

1	Yes	61	50.8
2	No	32	26.7
3	Maybe	27	22.5
4	Total	120	100

Interpretation: Half (50.8%) of businesses would consider hiring an agency, while 26.7% would not, and 22.5% are undecided.

Conclusion

Social media marketing has emerged as a vital tool for small businesses aiming to expand their reach, enhance brand awareness, and increase sales. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn offer cost-effective and highly targeted marketing opportunities that were

once accessible mainly to large corporations. Through these platforms, small businesses can directly interact with customers, build trust, and nurture long-term relationships that drive sustainable growth.

The findings of this study reveal that businesses adopting social media marketing have seen notable improvements in visibility, customer engagement, and conversion rates. Although challenges such as changing algorithms, resource limitations, and content development persist, the advantages of social media marketing significantly outweigh these obstacles. Approaches like influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and data-driven strategies have proven effective in boosting sales and strengthening customer loyalty.

For small businesses to remain competitive in the digital era, they must continually adapt their social media strategies, stay aligned with industry trends, and utilize analytics to refine their campaigns. By embracing a flexible and evolving approach, small businesses can secure a competitive edge, foster meaningful customer connections, and achieve sustained profitability.

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