

Navigating The Hurdles: Challenges Confronting Smes In Social Media Integration For Brand Image Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

As internet usage continues to surge, social media platforms have become integral to daily life, reshaping communication, and information dissemination. This shift has prompted an increasing number of business-to-business (B2B) enterprises to adopt Social Media Marketing (SMM) as a means of engaging with their clientele. Despite this trend, there remains a dearth of comprehensive literature on the adoption of SMM among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for bolstering brand awareness. Thus, this thesis aims to address this gap by exploring and delineating the challenges encountered by SMEs in integrating social media marketing to enhance brand visibility. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study conducted four semi-structured interviews with marketing executives from three SMEs. The findings reveal a set of common challenges, including constraints related to financial and human resources, time limitations, and a lack of expertise in SMM. Additionally, SMEs grapple with issues such as ensuring customer satisfaction, selecting appropriate channels, and managing crises and negative feedback. Furthermore, individual challenges such as cultural barriers, the measurement of brand awareness, linguistic considerations, the creation of impactful content, communication hurdles, promotional expenses, and the potential need for outsourcing were also identified.

Keywords: Social media marketing (SMM), Business to business enterprises (B2B), Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Challenges.

Introduction

In the digital era of the 21st century, technology serves as the cornerstone of modern achievements. The extensive integration of social media across various business sectors has significantly transformed the business landscape. This change has the potential to revolutionize the concept of branding and its management, prompting businesses to explore innovative approaches for engaging with their customer base. The marketing environment has changed significantly in today's digitally connected world, as social media platforms have become increasingly effective instruments for customer connection and brand promotion (Alalwan, 2018). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) recognize exponentially the significance of social media platforms in promoting their brand image and connecting with their target market in today's digital world. But even with all of the potential advantages, small and medium-sized businesses face a variety of difficulties while employing social media to improve their brand image. Navigating the intricacies of a constantly changing digital ecosystem is one of the main challenges, since the quick speed of technical breakthroughs and algorithmic adjustments present formidable obstacles. In order to stay competitive in the ever-evolving social media worldwide, SMEs must set aside funds for ongoing development and modification.

Furthermore, managing the complexities of social media marketing calls for more than merely setting up profiles and sharing information. SMEs need to gain an in-depth understanding of their audience, generate message that connects to their customers, and evaluate the results of their efforts with accuracy. Strategic preparation is necessary for this, but it's also important to be prepared to try new concepts and learn from mistakes as well as accomplishments. Moreover, SMEs frequently struggle with a lack of funding and manpower (Ashley et al., 2015), which limits their capacity to put the whole social media strategy into action. The lack of funds to purchase advanced analytics tools for performance tracking or the difficulty of producing interesting material consistently in the face of conflicting demands are just two examples of how this resource limitation shows up (Ismail, 2017). Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) may also have challenges in creating a unique brand identity amidst the cacophony and disarray of social media channels, where larger rivals with more resources frequently control the discourse. To overcome these obstacles and effectively use social media for brand image enhancement, creative content development methods, strategic resource allocation, and a thorough grasp of the target audience are required.

This paper seeks to shed light on the strategies and best practices that SMEs can utilize to overcome these obstacles and fully utilize social media for their businesses. Specifically, it explores the various challenges that SMEs encounter when implementing social media marketing to increase brand awareness.

Social Media as a Brand Communication Tool

The corporate sector has seen a significant transformation as a result of social media's popularity. Social media has altered the field of brand management and required businesses to adopt a new interactive approach to client relations. Social media is nowadays has become the most reliable source for customers, as it competes with traditional mass media like radio, television, and newspapers (Bruhn et al., 2012). Facebook has been estimated to be the most widely used and frequented social network globally, ranking higher than any other social media. Additional research demonstrates that consumers favour brands that are present on social media and offer users enough material as their feedback either by mentioning their statement regarding the product used or by uploading their pictures (Kavisekera & Abeysekera, 2016).

Challenges Faced by SMEs in Social Media Usage for Brand Image

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the Indian economy, serving as key contributors to employment, industrial output, and overall GDP expansion. However, despite their importance, SMEs encounter numerous obstacles that impede their development and long-term viability.

Lack of Time and Resources

SMEs frequently struggle with having insufficient time, money, structures, and procedures to complete branding initiatives. This is a common challenge faced by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The lack of time and resources necessary to execute effective branding initiatives has always been an obstacle in the path of Branding enhancement by SMEs. Limited financial resources often constrain SMEs from investing in comprehensive branding strategies, including advertising, market research, and brand development. Additionally, SMEs typically operate with lean teams and minimal organizational structures, leaving little time and manpower to dedicate to branding efforts (Alalwan et al., 2017). Without the necessary time, money, structures, and procedures in place, SMEs find it challenging to develop and implement cohesive branding initiatives that resonate with their target audience and effectively convey their brand identity. As a result, SMEs may struggle to establish a strong brand presence in the competitive market landscape, hindering their ability to attract and retain customers.

Regulatory Compliance

For SMEs, maintaining regulatory compliance is a major obstacle to managing their brand image. For small organizations, the complex web of rules and compliance obligations can be daunting. SMEs confront challenges that might negatively affect their brand reputation, such as keeping up with the regular changes in tax regulations and managing the burdensome paperwork and compliance-related expenditures (De Vries et al., 2012). To mitigate this challenge and uphold a positive brand image, SMEs must navigate regulatory complexities effectively. Additionally, governments play a crucial role in supporting SMEs by simplifying and digitizing compliance processes, thereby reducing the administrative burden and enabling SMEs to focus more on brand-building efforts (Keller, 2008).

To keep Pace with Technological Advancement

The adoption of technology presents a significant challenge for SMEs in managing their brand image. As rapid technological advancements reshape the business landscape, SMEs face the risk of being left behind if they fail to embrace digitalization. The ability to leverage technology effectively is essential for enhancing brand image and staying competitive in the market. However, SMEs often encounter obstacles such as limited access to affordable technology solutions, inadequate training, and insufficient support in technology adoption (Chung, 2013). Addressing these challenges is vital to ensure that SMEs can harness the power of technology to strengthen their brand image and remain relevant in today's digital age.

Poor Infrastructure

Infrastructure deficiencies pose a substantial challenge for SMEs in managing their brand image. Particularly in rural areas, inadequate infrastructure, including poor roads, unreliable electricity supply, and limited internet connectivity, significantly hampers SME operations (Hollebeek et al., 2014). These limitations not only impede the efficient functioning of SMEs but also impact their ability to deliver products and services effectively, potentially tarnishing their brand reputation. To address this challenge and uphold a positive brand image, there is a pressing need for investment in infrastructure development. By improving infrastructure, especially in rural areas, SMEs can enhance their operational efficiency and customer service, thereby strengthening their brand image and competitiveness in the market.

Effective Risk Management

Effective risk management presents a notable challenge for SMEs in maintaining their brand image. SMEs are inherently vulnerable to a range of risks, including economic downturns, supply chain disruptions, and cybersecurity threats. Failure to address these risks can lead to reputational damage and erode trust among customers and stakeholders (Chakraborty et al., 2017). Therefore, SMEs require assistance in developing robust risk management strategies and accessing insurance

products tailored to their specific needs. By proactively managing risks and safeguarding their operations, SMEs can enhance their brand image and demonstrate reliability and resilience to their customers and stakeholders.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints pose a significant challenge for businesses looking to leverage social media effectively. Establishing a strong presence on social media often requires investment in various areas such as content creation, advertising, and social media management tools (Krake, 2005). However, limited financial resources may restrict the ability of businesses, particularly SMEs, to allocate sufficient funds towards these efforts. As a result, they may struggle to compete with larger competitors or fully realize the potential benefits of social media marketing.

Technological Challenges

Utilizing social media for brand marketing presents major technological challenges for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Budgetary constraints and labour shortages prevent companies from investing in cutting-edge equipment and highly skilled workers. Significant obstacles also arise from a lack of internal knowledge in social media marketing tactics, platform selection, content production, and data analytics. The issues are further compounded by the need to ensure cybersecurity, integrate social media activities with other systems, adjust to ever changing algorithms, and compete with larger brands. To overcome these challenges and successfully manage the complexities of social media marketing, one must engage in strategic planning, allocate resources, continue to study, and possibly collaborate with outside specialists.

Competing with Larger Competitors

Competing with larger competitors poses a significant challenge for SMEs in maintaining their brand image. SMEs often face intense competition from established companies with greater resources and brand recognition. This can make it challenging for SMEs to differentiate themselves and carve out a distinct identity in the market. As a result, SMEs may struggle to convey their value proposition effectively and build brand loyalty among consumers (Arli, 2017). Overcoming this challenge requires SMEs to leverage their unique strengths, such as agility, personalized customer service, and innovation, to differentiate themselves from larger competitors. By effectively communicating their brand values and delivering exceptional customer experiences, SMEs can enhance their brand image and compete more effectively in the marketplace.

Suggestions

- By Investing in Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to improve the website's organic search ranking and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) for paid search advertising. These strategies can increase visibility and drive traffic to the SME's website.
- Entrepreneurs should prioritize strengthening their company's brand by ensuring that both the brand and product concept are distinctive, relevant, and appealing to consumers. This involves crafting a unique identity that sets the brand apart from competitors, aligning the product offerings with consumer needs and desires, and consistently delivering on brand promises to build trust and loyalty. By focusing on differentiation, relevance, and appeal, entrepreneurs can effectively position their brand in the market, attract and retain customers, and drive long-term success and growth.
- By Employing instruments such as interviews and surveys to gather in-depth information can provide SMEs valuable insights into the psychological characteristics, behaviors, and demographics of its audience.
- Collaborations and partnerships can help SMEs to expand their reach and resources without incurring substantial costs. By partnering with complementary businesses, SMEs can co-create marketing campaigns and share customer bases.
- SMEs may involve prioritizing cost-effective strategies, such as organic content creation, maximizing free social media features.
- Additionally, by exploring alternative financing options or seeking partnerships with influencers or other businesses can help SMEs to mitigate financial barriers and unlock the opportunities that social media platforms offer for brand promotion and engagement.

Conclusion

Although the problems faced by SMEs in India in context of brand promotion of companies through social media platform are complex, but these difficulties are not formidable. These challenges may be solved by cooperation between the government, banking institutions, trade associations, and SMEs themselves. India may enable its small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector to achieve remarkable achievements and play a noteworthy role in the financial development of the nation by fostering an atmosphere that prioritizes expansion, creativity, and durability. However, more research is needed to be done in this field in future to analyze the means to mitigate these challenges which SMEs faces.

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