

ANALYSIS OF KEY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the strategies, tactics, and insights that contribute to the success of social media campaigns, with the objective of finding the transformative potential of social media as a driving force behind entrepreneurial success within the retail sector. Qualitative research methodology is used in this research, consisting of qualitative sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Several key findings regarding their social media marketing practices were yielded by the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with 15 retail entrepreneurs. They are: diverse marketing strategies, importance of authenticity and storytelling, challenges and obstacles, and metrics and measurement. The results of this research amplified the dynamic and multifaceted nature of social media marketing in the retail sector. Retail entrepreneurs face a complex challenge that leads them to use several strategies to promote their brands and engage with consumers, i.e., strategic adaptation, authenticity and engagement, resource allocation, and measurement and optimization.

Keywords: social media marketing, retail, entrepreneur, qualitative, marketing strategies, consumer engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has not only revolutionized communication but has also presented great opportunities for retail entrepreneurs to amplify their brand presence, reach wider audiences, and boost sales. Dolega et al (2021) mentions a surge in online sales (reaching 20% in the UK, where they conducted the research) and emphasizes retailers' use of social media to connect with customers, promote brands, and leverage online word-of-mouth for marketing.

The role of social media marketing for retail entrepreneurs has become a focal point of interest, as businesses navigate the complexities of the digital age to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly crowded marketplace. This heightened focus is evident even in specific sectors, like the culinary industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, as explained by Nyoko (2022)

In the era of digital connectivity, social media platforms serve as powerful tools for retail entrepreneurs to build meaningful connections with their target demographics, strengthen brand loyalty, and develop a distinct identity in the minds of consumers. Through strategic content creation, targeted advertising, and community engagement, retail entrepreneurs can leverage social media to showcase their products, tell compelling stories, and establish themselves as leaders within their respective industries. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media enables entrepreneurs to get valuable feedback and insights into consumer preferences, and then adapt their marketing strategies in real-time

to better resonate with their audience.

While many retail entrepreneurs see social media marketing as a tool to integrate sustainability, it presents its own set of challenges. They are required to be able to make strategic decisions made in dealing with uncertain situations such as during the pandemic and the post-pandemic recovery as it is today (Zahara et al. 2022).

In exploring the key aspects of social media marketing for retail entrepreneurs, this research digs into the strategies, tactics, and insights that affect successful social media campaigns, and aims to find out the transformative power of social media as a catalyst for entrepreneurial success in the retail sector. From building brand awareness to driving conversions and fostering authentic connections with consumers, social media has emerged as a cornerstone of modern marketing strategy, offering boundless opportunities for retail entrepreneurs to innovate, grow, and thrive in the digital age.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the key aspects of social media marketing for retail entrepreneurs, identify key challenges and opportunities, and explore best practices and strategies for maximizing ROI and driving sustainable growth in an increasingly digital-centric marketplace. Through a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data obtained from the selected participants, this research seeks to provide actionable recommendations and practical guidance to help retail entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of social media marketing, optimize their digital presence, and capitalize on the transformative potential of social media to achieve their business goals.

This study is limited by its focus on a small geographic area in Yogyakarta with a sample size of 15 retail entrepreneurs who primarily use Facebook and Instagram for marketing. Consequently, the findings may not be broadly generalizable beyond the specific context examined. Furthermore, the emphasis on these two platforms may overlook insights from other social media channels and emerging trends in digital marketing. Readers should interpret the findings within the context of these limitations, recognizing the need for further research to explore diverse perspectives and platforms in retail entrepreneurship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars such as Voorveld et al (2018) explored how users engagement on different social media platforms influences their interaction with ads and subsequent evaluations. Surveys with over 1,300 participants aged 13+ reveal unique engagement experiences on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, shaping their assessments of advertising. Notably, engagement with social media ads directly impacts how users evaluate both social media engagement and advertising.

A recent study by Ebinga et al., (2022) investigates the utilization of social media platforms as a marketing strategy in retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria. It aims to determine the acceptability, accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency, and preference of using social media platforms for marketing. Surveys were conducted with 100 shop owners and customers, covering various platforms including WhatsApp, imo, Google, LinkedIn, YouTube, Yahoo, Facebook, Reuters, 2go, and BBM. Findings suggest these platforms are widely accepted, efficient, effective, easily accessible, and preferred for retail marketing in the region. There was no significant difference in responses between shop owners and customers.

Lemel (2021) conducts a comprehensive review of the academic literature on measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns, noting its incompleteness compared to trade literature. While there's no consensus on which metrics are most important, research emphasizes the need to establish social media objectives early in the process. The review compares metrics across the top five social media platforms and proposes a four-step framework for evaluating campaign effectiveness.

Koivisto and Mattila (2018), in an effort to offer fresh perspectives on the realm of social media marketing within the domain of luxury fashion, delve into the realm of User-Generated Content (UGC) in the context of experiential marketing events. By focusing on how a branded exhibition can serve as a catalyst for the collaborative creation of visual content and its subsequent dissemination across social media platforms, they employ an illustrative visual frame analysis of the UGC to elucidate its dynamics and implications.

Guitierrez et al (2023) investigates the dynamics of consumer-brand interactions within the realm of social media, with a specific emphasis on the influence exerted by social media activities, attitudes towards social media advertising, and considerations of privacy on the formation of purchase intentions.

Liu, Shin, and Burns (2019) employ a dual perspective of customer engagement to scrutinize the impact of prioritizing the entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization aspects of a luxury brand's social media endeavors on customer engagement levels with brand-specific social media content.

Recent literature also explores emerging trends and innovations in social media marketing for retail entrepreneurs. Researchers like Zeng, Xing, and Jin (2023) discern and categorize various types of virtual/augmented reality-based brand experiences (referred to as VR/AR experiences) with the aim of comprehensively understanding their ramifications on the intricate dynamics of consumer-brand relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research methodology, consisting of qualitative sampling, data collection, and data analysis. This research uses purposive sampling to select a diverse group of retail entrepreneurs (subjects) who actively employ social media marketing, predominantly on Facebook and Instagram, within a defined geographic area. Several criteria are established to select the subjects.

1. **Criteria Definition:** Clear criteria were established based on industry sector, business size, years in operation, and social media activity level.
2. **Identifying Participants:** Potential participants were identified through online directories, business associations, and local networks.
3. **Outreach:** Participants were contacted via email or phone, explaining the research purpose and inviting them to participate.
4. **Screening:** A screening process was conducted to ensure selected participants met the criteria and were willing to share their social media marketing experiences.
5. **Diverse Sampling:** Efforts were made to achieve diversity in the sample, considering factors like business size, industry sector, and demographic characteristics.
6. **Informed Consent:** Informed consent was obtained from participants, explaining the research details and ensuring confidentiality.
7. **Final Selection:** Participants were finalized based on screening and diversity considerations.
8. **Confirmation and Scheduling:** Participation was confirmed, and interview appointments were scheduled at convenient times.

This research uses semi-structured interviews with the selected retail entrepreneurs. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that combines aspects of both structured and unstructured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher prepares a set of open-ended questions or topics to guide the conversation, while still allowing flexibility for the interviewer to explore emergent themes and delve deeper into specific areas of interest. In this stage, a list of questions were compiled which later will be asked to the subjects during interview stage. The questions are:

1. Can you describe your experience with social media marketing for your retail business?
2. What social media platforms do you currently use for marketing your products/services?
3. How do you determine which social media platforms are most effective for reaching your target audience?
4. What specific goals or objectives do you aim to achieve through your social media marketing efforts?
5. Can you share any successful social media campaigns or strategies you've implemented in the past?
6. What challenges have you encountered when using social media for marketing, and how have you addressed them?
7. How do you measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing efforts?
8. How do you create engaging content for your social media posts?
9. How do you maintain consistency in your branding across different social media platforms?
10. How do you interact with your audience/followers on social media, and how important is engagement to your marketing strategy?
11. Have you noticed any trends or changes in consumer behavior on social media that have impacted your marketing approach?

12. How do you integrate social media marketing with other marketing channels or strategies for your retail business?
13. Can you discuss any ethical considerations or challenges you face when using social media for marketing?
14. How do you stay updated on new features or trends in social media marketing?
15. What advice would you give to other retail entrepreneurs who are looking to improve their social media marketing efforts?

Once the interviews with the subjects have been conducted, the next stage involves processing and analyzing the qualitative data gathered from these interactions. This process is crucial for identifying patterns, themes, and insights that emerge from the participants' responses.

1. **Transcription:** The first step in data processing is transcribing the interview recordings or notes into written text. This ensures accuracy and accessibility for further analysis.
2. **Coding:** The transcribed data is then subjected to coding, where segments of text are systematically labeled with descriptive or interpretive codes. This process helps organize the data and identify recurring themes or concepts.
3. **Categorization:** Once coding is complete, the coded segments are grouped into categories based on similarities or relationships. This step further organizes the data and allows for more nuanced analysis.
4. **Theme Development:** From the categorized data, overarching themes and patterns are identified. These themes represent key findings or insights that emerge from the participants' experiences and perspectives.
5. **Interpretation:** The final stage involves interpreting the themes and drawing meaningful conclusions from the data. This may involve comparing findings with existing literature, discussing implications for theory or practice, and generating recommendations for future research or action.

By following these steps in qualitative data analysis, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the social media marketing strategies employed by retail entrepreneurs in Yogyakarta, as well as the challenges and opportunities they encounter in leveraging these platforms for business growth.

DISCUSSION

In this research, a qualitative sampling approach was utilized to ensure the selection of participants who possess relevant knowledge, expertise, and experiences pertinent to the research objectives. This approach allowed for the deliberate identification and inclusion of retail entrepreneurs actively engaged in social media marketing activities. Criteria for participant selection were established to ensure diversity and representativeness within the sample, and was based on the active involvement in retail entrepreneurship and the utilization of social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, for marketing purposes. The qualitative sampling method and the criteria for participants election are based on the documentation provided by Merriam et al (2015).

Prior to participation, potential participants were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, and confidentiality protocols. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, affirming their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's parameters. The sample size of 15 retail entrepreneurs was deemed appropriate based on the principles of qualitative research and the research objectives. This sample size allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives while ensuring feasibility and manageability in data collection and analysis.

The process of data collection via semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in a conducive and confidential environment. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate capture of responses and facilitate subsequent transcription and analysis. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to share their experiences, strategies, and insights related to social media marketing practices. The interview process allowed for flexibility and adaptability, enabling exploration of emergent themes and follow-up questions to deepen understanding and clarify responses. Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to convert spoken dialogue into written text. Transcripts were carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy and completeness, facilitating subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data.

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with 15 retail entrepreneurs yielded several key findings regarding their social media marketing practices.

- *Diverse Marketing Strategies.* Participants showed a variety of approaches to social media marketing, including curated content creation (or the process of selecting content from other sources to share on one's channel, which includes the process of searching, discovering, gathering, organizing, and presenting that content to the audiences), influencer collaborations, user-generated content campaigns, and targeted advertising efforts. Each retail entrepreneur demonstrated a unique blend of tactics tailored to their brand identity, target audience, and business objectives. This result seemed inline with the topic discussed by Evans (2019).
- *Importance of Authenticity and Storytelling.* Across interviews, authenticity emerged as a central theme in successful social media marketing efforts. Retail entrepreneurs emphasized the significance of genuine storytelling, transparent communication, and relatable content to resonate with their audience and foster meaningful connections. This aspect is also mentioned by Rodrigues (2020) in his book entitled "Brand Storytelling: Put Customers at the Heart of Your Brand Story".
- *Challenges and Obstacles.* Despite the opportunities afforded by social media platforms, participants also highlighted various challenges and obstacles encountered in their marketing endeavors. Algorithm changes, declining organic reach, content saturation, and resource constraints were cited as significant impediments to achieving desired outcomes on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Some of these aspects were also acknowledged by Flynn (2020), when she discussed about the risks inherent in utilizing social media.
- *Metrics and Measurement.* Many participants expressed challenges in effectively measuring the impact and ROI of their social media marketing efforts. While metrics such as engagement rates, reach, and conversions were commonly monitored, interpreting data and deriving actionable insights remained a persistent challenge for some entrepreneurs.

The results of this research underlined the dynamic and multifaceted nature of social media marketing in the retail sector. Retail entrepreneurs face a complex landscape characterized by both opportunities and challenges in leveraging social media platforms to promote their brands and engage with consumers. They are:

- *Strategic Adaptation.* The findings highlight the importance of strategic adaptation and innovation in response to evolving trends and algorithmic changes on social media platforms. Retail entrepreneurs must remain agile and responsive to shifts in consumer preferences, platform algorithms, and competitive dynamics to maintain relevance and effectiveness in their marketing efforts.
- *Authenticity and Engagement.* The emphasis on authenticity and storytelling reflects a broader trend in consumer preferences for genuine, relatable brand interactions. Retail entrepreneurs can differentiate themselves and foster deeper connections with consumers by prioritizing authenticity, transparency, and community engagement in their social media marketing strategies.
- *Resource Allocation.* Resource constraints emerged as a common challenge among participants, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises with limited budgets and manpower. Effective resource allocation and prioritization are crucial for maximizing the impact of social media marketing initiatives and achieving sustainable growth in the retail sector.
- *Measurement and Optimization.* The findings emphasize the importance of robust measurement and optimization practices in evaluating the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts. Retail entrepreneurs must leverage data analytics, experimentation, and continuous improvement to refine their strategies, optimize performance, and drive meaningful results in an increasingly competitive digital landscape.

In conclusion, the insights gleaned from the interviews offer valuable guidance for retail entrepreneurs seeking to navigate the complexities of social media marketing and harness its full potential for business success. By embracing authenticity, strategic adaptation, and data-driven decision-making, retail entrepreneurs can build stronger brand identities, cultivate loyal customer relationships, and thrive in the dynamic landscape of digital commerce.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of social media marketing practices among retail entrepreneurs has provided valuable insights into the dynamic landscape of digital commerce. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, we have uncovered diverse strategies, experiences, and challenges encountered by retail entrepreneurs in leveraging social media platforms for marketing purposes. The emergence of themes such as authenticity, storytelling, and resource constraints underscores the complex interplay between creativity, technology, and business acumen in navigating the digital realm. Furthermore, our analysis has highlighted the importance of strategic adaptation, data-driven decision-making, and continuous innovation in achieving sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the ever-evolving social media landscape. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of social media marketing dynamics within the retail sector and offer valuable insights for entrepreneurs, marketers, and researchers alike.

Recommendations for Further Research

Building upon the insights gained from this study, several options for further research can be summarized as follows:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track the evolution of social media marketing practices among retail entrepreneurs over time. Examining trends, patterns, and shifts in strategies can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of digital commerce.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Explore cross-cultural variations in social media marketing strategies and consumer behaviors among retail entrepreneurs operating in different regions or cultural contexts. Comparative studies can shed light on the influence of cultural norms, values, and preferences on marketing practices.
- **Quantitative Analysis:** Supplement qualitative findings with quantitative analysis to quantify the impact of social media marketing efforts on key performance metrics such as brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales conversion. Quantitative studies can provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of specific marketing strategies.
- **Innovative Technologies:** Investigate the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality in reshaping social media marketing practices within the retail sector. Exploring the adoption and impact of innovative technologies can offer insights into future trends and opportunities.
- **Consumer Behavior Studies:** Deepen understanding of consumer behavior and decision-making processes in the context of social media marketing. Research focusing on consumer motivations, preferences, and responses to different marketing stimuli can inform more targeted and effective marketing strategies.
- **Sustainability and Ethics:** Explore the intersection of sustainability, ethics, and social media marketing in the retail sector. Investigate the role of sustainability initiatives, corporate social responsibility efforts, and ethical considerations in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior.

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