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Marketing Decision Making for SMEs in the Information
Technology Industry of India.

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Abstract

The growing preference among companies for digital technology has accelerated the expansion of India's IT industry. This has led to the establishment of several IT SMEs. Understanding the marketing decision-making process in these SMEs was found to be lacking in the literature. These SMEs typically employ an informal approach to marketing. This study investigates the factors that influence the decision-making processes of marketing-related activities in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within the Information Technology industry in an effort to close this gap by presenting a systematic framework for marketing decision-making in SMEs. It investigates the barriers and complexities faced by SMEs in the marketing decision-making process. It evaluates the differences between large organisations and SMEs with respect to marketing activities, marketing approaches, marketing channels, and most significantly, the placement of marketing as an important business process for both.

Adopting an elaborate qualitative approach, evidence for this study has been collected through in-depth interviews of SME owner-managers and marketing decision-makers within the IT industry of India. The research reveals a significant relationship between a firm's business orientation, the use of various marketing channels, and its readiness for digital transformation. According to the study's findings, the owner manager's perspective on the relevant aspects greatly influences all of these other factors, and all together reflect in their marketing strategies.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	7
1.1 Background of study:	7
1.2 Gaps in Literature	8
1.3 Research Justification and Rationale	8
1.4 Overall Aim of the Study	9
1.5 Research Questions:	9
1.6 Research Methods for the Present Study	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review:	11
2.1) Introduction:	11
2.2) Small and Medium Enterprises	11
2.3) Decision-making process in an organisation:	12
2.4) Role of the Owner-Manager	13
2.5) Goal-based marketing in SMEs	14
2.6) Use of Marketing channels:	15
2.7) Digital Transformation:	16
2.8) Summary	17
Chapter 3: Methodology:	19
3.1) Introduction.	19
3.2) Research aim and objective:	19
3.3) Research Philosophy and Design	20
3.4) Research philosophies	20
3.5) Research approach	21
3.6) Research Strategy:	21
3.7) Research method	23
3.8) Population	23
3.9) Analysing qualitative data.	24
3.10) Ethical issues	24
3.11) Limitation to Research	25
Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings:	26
4.1) Introduction:	26
4.2) Business orientation:	26
4.3) Marketing channels	29
4.4) Digital transformations	31
Chapter 5: Discussions:	34
5.1) Introduction	34

5.2) Business Orientation.....	34
5.3) Marketing channels.....	36
5.4) Digital transformation:	39
Chapter 6: Conclusion:	41
6.1) Conclusion.....	41
6.2) Recommendations for future scope	41
References.....	43

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of study:

SMEs form an important part of any country's economy as they drive a country's economic growth in smaller geographic areas and help in the creation of several job opportunities in those areas (Liberto, 2020). Establishing an SME is relatively easy as it enters the market with minimal resources and on a very small scale. However, thriving as an SME in the market is difficult as it faces fierce competition externally from similar sized organisations as also from large organisations. An SME also has to face internal challenges pertaining to resistance from owners, restrictions due to resources and lower risk appetite to undertake progressive initiatives (Gilmore, et. al., 2018). However, over the years, SMEs have evolved from establishing their presence in conventional brick and mortar shops to being omnipresent in the digital space (Rituparna Basu, 2021).

With the world being more and more inclined towards digitalisation and with the enhanced use of digital technology in day-to-day business operations, one particular sector of the economy has flourished in recent times namely the Information Technology or the IT sector (Simon Philbin, et. al., 2022). The opportunities in the IT sector have increased exponentially and hence several IT specialists, consultants and developers have been highly motivated to set up their own small-scaled enterprise and provide services to clients based on their expertise.

1.1.1) IT sector in India:

India hosts the second largest number of SMEs in the world. (Digital Marketing Blog - DSIM, 2017). With a market share of 55% in the global IT sourcing business, it has become a leader in providing skilled IT professionals to the world and has been the prime location for large organisations to outsource their IT related operations. Indian IT firms have their delivery centres in major countries of the world which are diversified across several services such as BFSI, telecom and retail. According to www.ibef.org, (2022), the IT services exports are expected to reach around US\$1 trillion by 2030.

The rapid growth and the abundant availability of opportunities in the IT sector, has put SMEs in the IT sector under a lot of pressure to capture the potential market share like the other large organisations such as Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro and Infosys. SMEs in the IT sector have a competitive advantage over large organisations due to ease in customisation of products, cost leadership, efficient implementation and relationship management. However, they often lack the ability of being able to communicate these competencies to their potential customers and the general public due to poor marketing strategies (Gátia, 2019). Their decision-making

practices around marketing activities are influenced by a number of factors that shall be stated in detail in the further chapters of this study.

A study of marketing and decision-making practices of SMEs has already been done. These studies reflect a generalised framework for all industries in SMEs (Franco, M. et al. 2014; Sheilagh Mary Resnick et al., 2016; Merrilees, B, et. al., 1999; Reijonen, H. 2010). This framework shows the importance of business orientation or the mission/ vision of the firm which dictates the decision-making process, impact of digitalisation and digital transformation within SMEs and the use of the internet for marketing. Consequently, the inter-relation of these factors in the decision-making process of marketing activities and strategies would be the basis of our study.

1.2 Gaps in Literature

There is currently a gap in literature regarding the concepts of marketing decision making process of SMEs. SMEs form a very vital part of any country's economy (Liberto, 2021). Therefore, understanding how decision-making works in SMEs is crucial to developing theories that support the efficient operation of small firms, which in turn benefits the economy. Research in the decision-making process of companies is hugely focused on companies with big turnovers, but with resource and other constraints this research cannot be applied for SMEs (Audrey Gilmore, 2018). This research has stayed with the generalization that all industries follow the same or comparable ideas or techniques when it comes to SMEs. Hence, in order to discuss decision-making processes in particular industries within SMEs, extensive study is needed.

In the recent years, digitalisation or digital transformation has accumulated multiple meanings. Knowing how to use technology to one's advantage has become increasingly important as the world becomes more technologically advanced. Businesses in the current era have been more receptive to these technologies. This has also resulted in a large potential for growth in the IT industry. Therefore, examining the evolution of technology acceptability can aid in the development of marketing tactics.

1.3 Research Justification and Rationale

Due to the resources available, there is still a significant difference between the business potential of SMEs and other larger organizations (Dilber Ulas, 2019). The enormous gap between SMEs and larger businesses has been shown to be narrowed in part by the usage of the internet (Nabeel Rehman, 2021). This study will concentrate on how effective digital marketing has proved to be for SMEs in the IT industry and how much more effective it may be. There has been minimal study into the usage of the internet and digital marketing in SMEs. However, no study has been discovered that especially targets SMEs in the IT business.

1.4 Overall Aim of the Study

As previously mentioned, there seem to be gaps in the literature about marketing decision making in specific SMEs sectors. The aim of this research is to close these gaps and gather information to discover a more thorough knowledge of marketing tactics used by SMEs in the IT industry. Since SMEs in the IT industries are B2B, which means that their customers are other SMEs or enterprises, this industry has a large impact on other SMEs. Due to the world's growing reliance on technology and its tendency toward digitization, this has gained in relevance. The study goal will be achieved by responding to the research questions given below since these concerns have not yet been studied in prior literature.

1.5 Research Questions:

The research questions were formed to gain insights from the participants on the three main factors that influence marketing decision-making.

1. How does business orientation of the firm influence marketing decision-making?
 - a. How important is marketing decision making as a means of expanding your business?
 - b. What influences the marketing decision making, the market or the products?
 - c. How is the owner managers perspective influential in marketing decision making?
 - i. How has their influence changed in the company over the years?
2. Which marketing channels have proved to be most effective?
 - a. What are the factors that proved the effectiveness of your marketing strategy?
 - b. How is the owner managers perspective influential in marketing decision making?
 - c. How has digital marketing changed your approach for marketing decision making?
 - d. Which digital marketing alternatives have helped you achieve better results?
 - e. Apart from digital marketing, what other marketing strategies have proven successful for your business?
 - f. How has your previous marketing strategy helped you to achieve that goal?
3. What is your understanding of digital transformation?
 - a. How is the owner managers perspective influential in marketing decision making?
 - b. How important is digital transformation according to you in this age of business?
 - c. To what extent is it important to enhance the value of your products to your clients for better marketing decision making?

1.6 Research Methods for the Present Study

The overall study goals, philosophy, approach, strategy, data collection techniques, and sample choices are described in the methodology chapter using Saunders' (2015) Research Onion. An in-depth qualitative analysis approach is chosen to be used by conducting unstructured interviews with interviewees, using open-ended questions to let the subjective responses be gathered from the interviewees, in order to be consistent with our literature and to collect information about the personal and market behaviour that act as the influencing factors for marketing decision making. With this method, the researcher will be able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' subjective viewpoints. Because they will be able to voice their thoughts more freely, this is crucial for a better understanding of the target participants (Berg, 1988). Due to the pragmatic character of the study technique, the subjective viewpoints of the respondents will be taken into account in relation to the practical application in everyday life. a close examination of their beliefs to determine the significance, relevance, and applicability of their viewpoints to the real world (Sandy Q. Qu, 2011). This is only achievable with the use of loosely or unstructured in-depth interviews, where the responses to the previous questions serve as the basis for the subsequent questions. These follow-up questions would vary from participant to participant since they allow the researcher to learn more about the subject at hand while also giving us a better grasp of the participants' perspectives and how they are formed (Alf H. Walle, A., 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review:

2.1) Introduction:

This literature review aims to construct a better understanding of the current literature associated with the area of the research question. The research examined factors influencing marketing decision making for IT industry SMEs based in India. Additionally, this study also focuses on the increase in influence of technology in today's age of business and the potential opportunities it brings to IT sector SMEs. Finally, this study also aims to navigate through the advantages of digital marketing for these SMEs.

Marketing is considered as one of the most important business processes for the sustainability, growth, and expansion of any organisation. The success of a company depends upon how well they have been able to create and maximise value for the customers, through their products (Silk, 2006). It can be fairly easy for larger organisations and conglomerates, however for small and medium-sized enterprises or SMEs, it can prove to be a challenging process (Gilmore, et. al., 2001). Large organisations thrive on their extremely high turnovers and generate huge profits year on year with organic growth. To fuel their capital expenditure, they can also raise huge sums of capital in the form of debts or stock exchange listing. Owing to this capital and revenue maximisation, large organisations are capable to allot higher budgets to their marketing activities. This equips them with the power of setting BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) towards their marketing activities.

Availability of capital enables them to strategically allocate sufficient amounts of human as well as monetary resources on their marketing activities to carry out effective market research and to design creative marketing campaigns. The marketing goals set by large organisations are easily distinguishable from those of small and medium enterprises as they do not have abundant resources at their disposal (Gilmore, et. al., 2001). SMEs are often unable to do conventional marketing or implement effective marketing strategies due to limitations of resources, which is inherent in all SMEs. SMEs have different priorities and objectives with respect to their marketing goals (Gilmore, et. al., 2018). Even though the majority of research studies have been done on marketing and marketing decision making for large organisations, it is still less explored for small and medium enterprises. The below concepts have been used as a basis for this research.

2.2) Small and Medium Enterprises

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are businesses that maintain revenues, assets, or a number of employees below a certain threshold. Each country has its own definition of what constitutes an SME. Some common qualification legislations around SMEs are a certain size criterion and occasionally the industry in which the enterprise operates as well (Liberto, 2020). Even though SMEs recognise the importance of marketing for business growth and sustainability, their decision-making process will be

very different than that of large organisations as these decisions are required to be made with fewer margins for errors and limited financial as well as human resources (Gilmore, et. al., 2018). Hence, it can also be said that marketing in SMEs is informal. They undertake more of a reactive marketing approach, which aims at seeking and responding to the needs as well as opportunities that arise in the market (Gátia, 2019). This also enables SMEs to be focused on communicating products through activities directed to people. Considering the above rationale, SMEs need to plan their marketing strategies by taking the below factors into account:

2.2.1) The Financial Capacity: Understanding the budget and allocating the monetary resources strategically as well as optimally, are very important for any firm (Chng D., 2015). The expenditures with respect to marketing activities can be divided into one-time costs and recurring costs. Marketing managers need to understand these expenditures and decide upon cost allocation depending on the marketing campaign that they have launched. For example, One-time costs, like the making of the advertisement for an offline marketing strategy are way higher than that of an online marketing strategy, while the running cost or reoccurring cost of an online marketing strategy is higher than for an offline marketing strategy.

2.2.2) The Target Market: For any marketing campaign, discovering the target market is the first step. A marketing strategy can be deemed successful only with the correct identification of a target market. The target market is decided to position the products (Lessmann, S. et al., 2021). Deciding a target market, helps in designing the marketing campaign and connecting better with the market (Porter, 2001).

2.2.3) The Business Platform: The business platform is a specific group of customers which an enterprise has identified to undertake their business (Porter, 2001). With the advent of internet, the fast-developing digital world has now made it possible for businesses to locate their business platform internationally and enter into e-commerce (Sjoukje PK Goldman, 2021). It is observed that some products are easily sold through e-commerce, while other products still need touch and feel experience for their sale (Rituparna Basu, 2021). To provide a better experience to the customers, firms need to first understand the psychology of their target audience and accordingly position their products in their minds. With the identification of the target market and the target audience, marketing managers will be able to design better marketing campaigns which will result in connecting to a larger target market. A firm does not need to decide on one business platform over the other. It can also be a mixture of both e-commerce platform and physical store platform.

2.3) Decision-making process in an organisation:

Today, the business environment has become increasingly dynamic and competitive. Organisations have to face challenges based on changes in the internal and external business environments. Based on the complexities of these challenges, effective decision-making is required for the smooth functioning

of an organisation which might introduce changes in the overall operations of the organisation (Smith, W, 2009). The below factors differentiate decision making processes in different organisations.:

2.3.1) Business Orientation: Strategies that arise as a result of these decision-making processes define the outline of their business orientation (Smith, W, 2009). The mission and vision of a firm defines the business orientation of an organisations and its future goals. It is also important for firms to set a fixed business orientation as it acts as a guiding factor for their decision-making. Thus, business orientation and decision-making are said to be interdependent. Every organisation needs to make strategic decisions based on their business orientation to face different complexities and challenges that arise for them (de Wit, 2020).

2.3.2) Strategic choices: Organisations often face several dilemmas while making strategic choices, namely, giving priority to their mission and vision, or having a logical/intuitive approach toward problem solving; deciding whether to develop a product with the market in perspective or with the resources available; having a synergy within the subsidiaries of an organisation or being independent of each other. Companies also face complexities while preparing for a strategy process, where they need to decide whether to deliberately devise a strategy or let it emerge; if the strategy is required to be changed, should it be a revolutionary change or an evolutionary change; should they exploit existing strategies to bring innovation or explore new one strategies. Strategy also needs to be in place to decide whether to comply with the rules set by the industry or to set new rules by choice (de Wit, 2020).

2.3.3) Competition: Competition can be termed as an external factor that influences decision-making in an organisation. Organisations need to make a choice in how to face competition, whether to be competitive or to be cooperative with their competitors. Extensive research has been done on such decision-making processes for large organisations through the use of case-studies.

A gap has been noticed for research under the same topics for decision-making processes within SMEs. As discussed earlier, with limited resources and major differences in problems faced by SMEs, the approach for decision making process for SMEs would be very different than that of larger companies.

2.4) Role of the Owner-Manager

It is clear that SMEs function in a very different way than any other large organisations. This can be attributed to a variety of factors such as dynamic business environment, organisational structure and resource limits to name a few. However, the most fundamental difference between them is the critical role that an owner-manager plays in the operations of the organisations. This is due to their apparent participation in both the ownership and management of the enterprise. As a result of this, the vision of the owner-manager is integrated within the firm (EFEOĞLU, İ.E, et.al., 2020). This vision is reflected in the decision-making process and the enterprise's features and business operations (Sheilagh Mary Resnick, et al., 2016). As an owner-manager is in charge of the decision-making process of the entire

business, the marketing plans of these firms are heavily reliant on their decisions and influence. These decisions are mainly influenced by the work style or the business approach of the owner manager (EFEOĞLU, İ.E, et.al., 2020). The decision-making process in an organisation depends largely on how an owner-manager reacts to opportunities and needs in the market, the attitude that the owner-manager possesses, the ability to take risks and their approach, be it intuitive or analytical. These attributes reflect in the marketing strategies, plans and decision-making on marketing activities. These entrepreneurial marketing activities can also prove to provide effective and visible benefits on the organisation's performance (Mario, 2014). Thus, the role of an owner-manager is critical, more-so in smaller enterprises. The influence of an owner-manager reduces proportionally to the growth of the organisation. Medium-sized organisations do not require or experience the same amount of influence that an owner-manager would have as compared to its influence in a smaller organisation. Understanding the attitudes and business styles that an owner-manager possess or adopts can heavily help to understand the thought process behind the marketing decision- making of the firm (Gátia, 2019).

2.5) Goal-based marketing in SMEs

Owing to the constraints that SMEs face, such as the inherent characteristics of the owner-manager, the dynamic business environment, and the lack of resources marketing within SMEs will almost certainly be context-specific and market-driven (Gamble et al., 2011). Hence, marketing approaches adopted by large organisations will be difficult to apply within SMEs (Sheilagh Mary Resnick, et al., 2015). In large organisations, marketing is directed towards multiple goals. These goals can have a long term or a short-term orientation depending upon the marketing objectives. An example of a long-term marketing goal could be to create a brand name, while that of a short term could be to increase revenues. These marketing goals may not result in direct sales or reflect immediately on profits; however, large organisations can still afford to channelise their capital in order to fulfil the goals. On the other hand, SMEs cannot afford to have multiple marketing goals and strategies in place. SMEs can afford to implement only those marketing strategies which would result in immediate return (Merrilees, B, et. al., 1999). Marketing for SMEs can be defined as a method of informing clients about the organisation, its products, and services in general. Small-business marketers are likewise concerned only with establishing and sustaining client relationships. The primary goal of marketing in SMEs seems to be restricted to generating revenue. An SME's survival heavily relies on sales and hence in their quest for sales, they are particularly keen on creating genuine and sincere relationships with clients. (Harrigan P., et. al., 2012). Creating and maintaining consumer relationships is ranked as the second most essential marketing task. Customer relationship creation, management, and retention are deemed critical from a strategic standpoint. It has been suggested that for SMEs to flourish, they must have a thorough understanding of core marketing ideas and tactics, such as segmentation and differentiation (Reijonen, 2010). Hence, previous research on marketing for SMEs boils down to two main streams. One stream follows the pros and cons of different marketing schemes and their effects on the customers (TODOR,

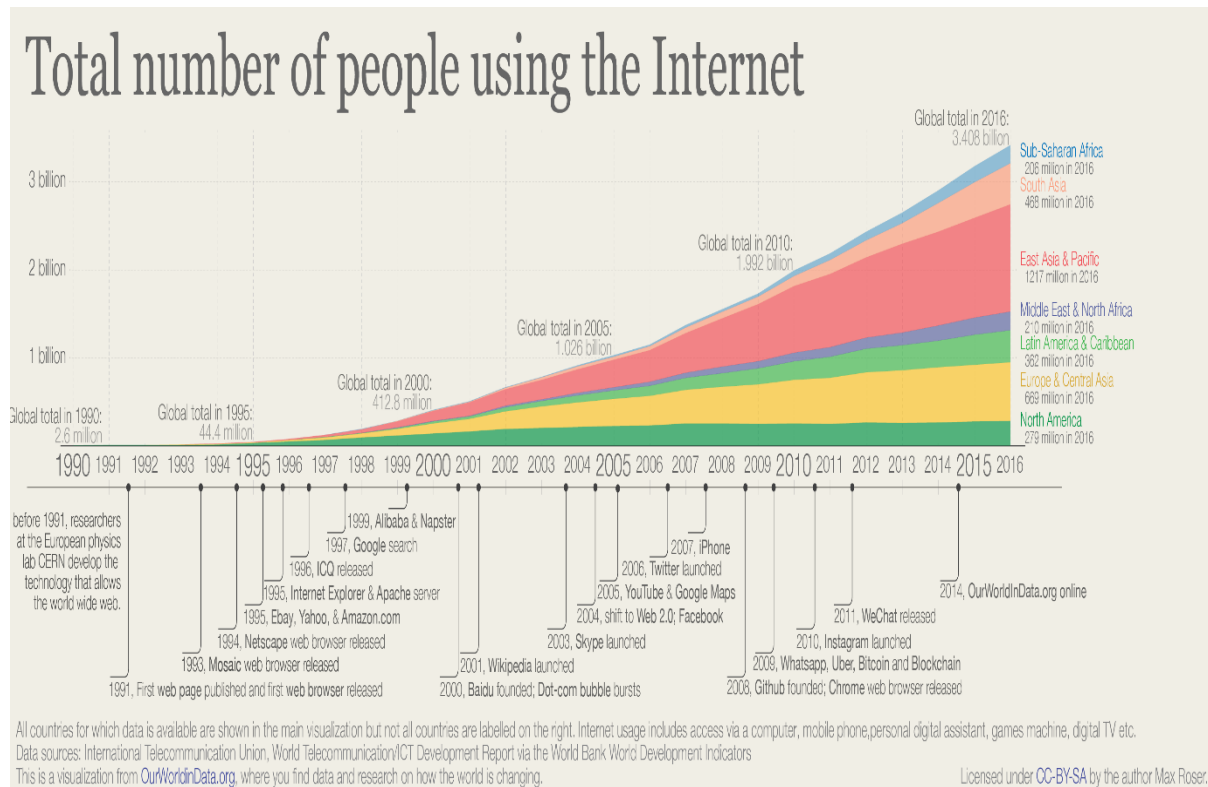
R.D. 2016), while the other discusses more on the decision-making process for any marketing team (Challagalla, et. al., 2014). All this refers to a generalised understanding of marketing plans in SMEs, yet no research has been done to understand how these might change with respect to specific industries within SMEs. Marketing decision-making and strategy for an IT company would be different to marketing decision-making and strategy for a retail company as both the industries have different products, markets, set of customers, competition, goals and objectives. Hence, a generalised understanding of marketing for both these types of industries cannot be accepted (Reijonen, 2010). No research has been conducted to understand the marketing for SMEs at such a micro level.

2.6) Use of Marketing channels:

As mentioned above, marketing activities can prove to be difficult for SMEs owing to the constraints that they are bound to face. It is very clear that SMEs cannot use the same channels of marketing that large organisations use, simply due to the scale and the financial input required for it (Sheilagh Mary Resnick, 2016). Hence there is observed to be a huge gap between the marketing channels or methods used by SMEs and large organisations. This gap has reduced drastically with the advent of the internet. With the use of the internet, information can be transferred from one side of the world to everywhere in the world (ULAS, 2019). This proves to be a cheaper and efficient way of transferring information to a large sum of people which is the primary objective of any marketing activity. Hence, innovative methods of marketing have been created to exploit the benefits and abilities of the internet. Several SMEs were able to explore the advantages of using the internet as their marketing medium (Olena Bobalo, 2018). These new methods of marketing are still being invented and have been evolving into a new age marketing medium called Digital Marketing (Porter, 2001). The Internet has revolutionised marketing processes. Organisations are rapidly adapting to the emerging trends in marketing to avoid back falls and stay in the competition. This has encouraged marketing managers within an SME to change their marketing and business approaches towards making the maximum use of the internet and utilising the various tools that internet has to offer, in their marketing activities. This enables SMEs to reduce the gap and compensate for the disadvantages of resources that it had against large organisations. In a way, the internet has enabled SMEs to market their products on the same platform that a larger organisation would do. Thus, the internet has brought both types of organisations to the same level (Nabeel Rehman, 2021). SMEs can now have access to a wider, larger audience to market their products. They can compete with larger organisations and can also take cost leadership advantage to attract customers. Digital marketing also proves to be a very cost-effective marketing channel, which can increase revenue margins for SMEs to a great extent. This new platform of marketing is getting more efficient with an increasing number of internet users (Olson, E.M. et al., 2021). The Internet also empowered organisations to familiarise their products in inaccessible areas, for example the remote areas and the rural population, whom organisations would not have otherwise pursued due to the number of resources required to reach them and the minimal returns that they generated. The use of the internet

also opens up new target audiences and segments in the market which results in a better product placement by marketing managers of any organisation.

Figure 2.1: Total number of people using the Internet.



Source: Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina (2015) - "Internet".

2.7) Digital Transformation:

Digital Transformation is a term that is widely used to define the restructuring of the business activities in the organisations with the integration of digital technologies in the daily operations. This transformation has resulted in several benefits such as increased productivity, cost savings, and innovation. Digital transformation can also be defined as the functional use of the internet in design, production, marketing, selling, presenting in a data-based management model. SMEs have to face several barriers while adopting digital transformation such as budgetary restrictions, limitations on capital investments due to high operational costs, a difficulty in understanding internet technologies, the inconvenience of the industry, data security, privacy concerns, technological developments, a lack of information regarding digital standards, ignorance of the advantages of digitisation, connection issues, and a shortage of qualified employees (Dilber Ulas, 2019).

Since the business model of SMEs is dependent upon the organisational structure, process, technological maturity of the firm along with other elements including leadership abilities, digital skills and knowledge of the owner manager, it is important to have a better understanding of these attributes before restructuring the firm for a digital transformation so that the firm can justify the cost and expense

of the digital transformation that is combined with the sustainability of the business (Simon Philbin, et. al., 2022). It is critical for SMEs to comprehend the cost-benefit analysis of digital technologies and to be aware about those technologies (Dilber Ulas, 2019). Even though the majority of the SMEs are able to understand the critical importance of the internet for business expansion and marketing, many of them still lack a smart-phone friendly website. This proves the fact that there are many SMEs which have yet not been able to take full advantage of the internet. A widely accepted fact is that traditional business models have been phased out and replaced by knowledge-based business models that are flexible, adaptable to change and have real-time answers to customer preferences (Vieira, 2019). The use of digital technologies within SMEs are mainly for general business information, client emails, online banking, bill payment, supply ordering, and tax payment. Technology-driven innovation with value creation strategies supports the process of SMEs involving customers, suppliers, and stakeholders, hence encouraging market activity. Although it is crucial to understand how shared standards and rules may assist this, it also requires trust among stakeholders through data interchange with IP protection. A better understanding of these rules and regulations, as well as their ideal configuration need more research to be done on (Philbin, et. al., 2022). SMEs need access to the crucial knowledge and skills to pursue a path toward sustainable development. Where appropriate, strategies for education and training should be developed with an emphasis on the requisite leadership abilities to satisfy this demand (Philbin, et. al., 2022).

Maintaining customer relations and achieving customer satisfaction are considered to be the main goals for any SMEs. This is mainly for customer retention that consequently helps in increasing sales. Digital technologies can help SMEs tremendously to achieve these objectives through efficient and accurate data collection, data storage and data management (Harrigan, 2012). The major objective of SMEs is not just to reach a larger audience or customer base, but also to cater to the present customers in a more individualistic manner. This is one attribute that sets SMEs apart from large organisations, who will not be able to achieve this due to their large customer base. Customisation in products is easier for SMEs and can be used as a competitive advantage against large organisations. The better SMEs are able to use this attribute to their advantage, the better the reputation of the SMEs will be. For SMEs, the traditional marketing channel - 'word of mouth' still prevails (Olena Bobalo, 2018). SMEs can take advantage of technological advancements in media and advertising to be able to perform this to its full potential.

2.8) Summary

Research has been done to understand that SMEs follow the same pattern of marketing decision-making. The marketing plans and designs are structured around a generalised understanding of marketing in SMEs (Reijonen, 2010). Hence a strong framework is required to interpret the generalised understanding of these marketing practices (Sheilagh Mary Resnick, 2016), especially with an owner-manager being in the centre of SMEs, an attempt to understand the potential of such a marketing

approach is missing. A gap can be observed between what the customers want or need from the product and how these products are marketed to them. This gap can be attributed to the inefficiency of the marketing practices.

SMEs need to have a digital transformation for better communications with their customers and information capabilities of the firm (Paul Harrigan, 2012). Although research has been done in understanding the role of IT applications in SMEs, they have been limited to the above-mentioned sectors of business. More research on understanding the role of IT in the data analysis process and its link to marketing strategies is yet to be explored. It is clear that the main goal for any SME is to have better communication with its customers, yet not enough research has been done to understand how this can be efficiently achieved through the use of IT services and digital transformation. With the fast-paced world and rapid advancements in information technology, it is essential for SMEs to undertake technological transformation (Philbina, 2022). This can be done by exploring newer internet technologies to have better communication with their customers and also for efficient information management for the SMEs, which in turn would help them undertake better business strategies and decision-making processes.

These opportunities are greater for SMEs in the IT sector. These businesses are mainly B2B, whose customers are other SMEs. Over time, more and more SMEs are understanding the importance of technological advancements and the need to integrate them within their business, and hence more SMEs are wanting to adopt them (ULAS, 2019). At this point, it is the SMEs in the Information Technology industry who have the opportunity to capture and sell their products to other SMEs (Rehman, 2021). These SMEs in the IT industry would be the best fit for other SMEs since the products to offer would be within the budget. They would understand the requirements and wants of their customers better, as they are in a similar position as their customers. This calls for an effective marketing plan required for SMEs in IT industries, especially to cater to the needs of this segment. This marketing plan can provide SMEs with ideas on digital transformation and equip them with digital solutions to all their business and marketing needs, within their budget and within their restricted resources (Grewal, R., Meyer, R. and Mittal, V., 2022). It might also help these SMEs to reduce the ever-increasing gap between them and large organisations with regards to being able to place their products on the same platform and provide similar or even better services as compared to their counterparts through data storage and other data solutions for better business decision making. A substantial amount of research has been done to understand the marketing approach to specific industry sectors within SMEs. This research will help us not just to understand the marketing approach of SMEs in the information technology sector but also help us understand the marketing approach of SMEs having a B2-B business model (Vieira, 2019).

Chapter 3: Methodology:

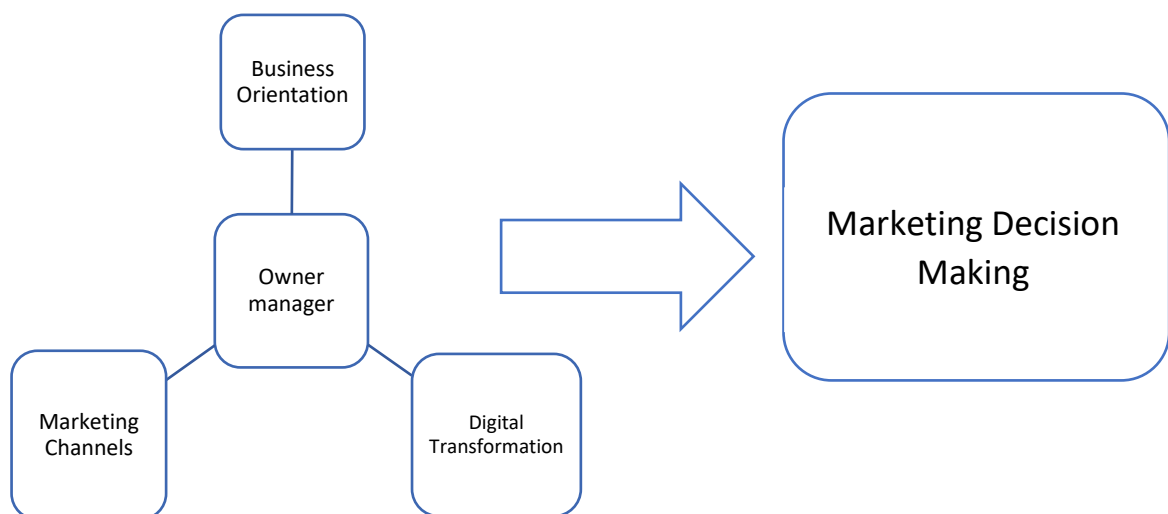
3.1) Introduction.

The research objective for this chapter will be determined based on the gap in the literature that was identified in the previous chapter. In this chapter, study objectives, philosophies, and methodologies will be chosen and defended. Based on the applicability and constraints of various research methodologies, the best-fit option will be selected. This study intends to investigate the elements affecting SMEs in the IT industry's marketing decision-making.

3.2) Research aim and objective:

The aim of this study is to identify the factors that influence the marketing decision making for SMEs in the IT sector of India. With reference to Chapter 2, it is clear that an owner-manager plays a vital role in the marketing decision-making processes of the SMEs. Hence keeping the owner-manager in the centre, the factors have been classified under three objectives which primarily influence marketing decision making processes in SMEs of the IT sector in India.

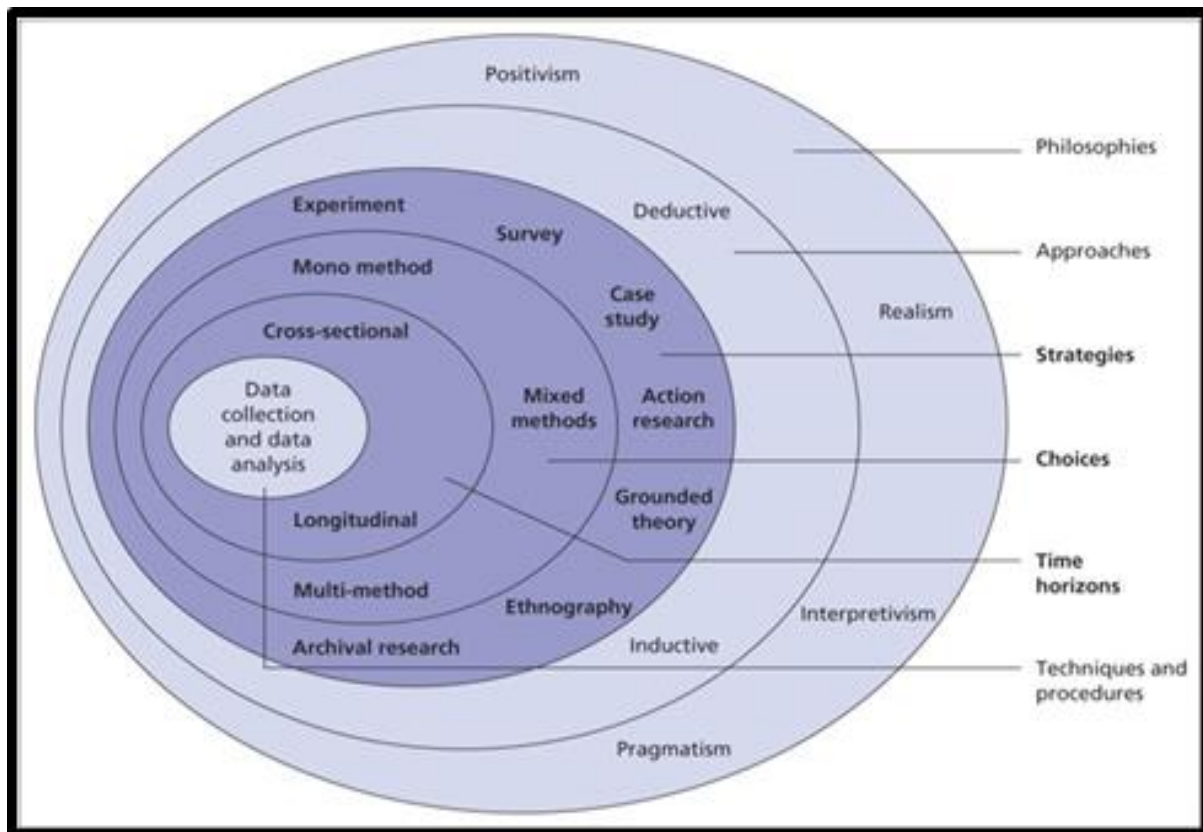
Fig 3.1: Research framework and objectives.



Research Objective 1	To investigate how SMEs' business orientation affects their marketing activities and how important marketing is to their overall company strategy.
Research Objective 2	To identify the factors that influence the choice of marketing channels used by SMEs.
Research Objective 3	To understand the acceptability and feasibility of digital transformation in SMEs.

3.3) Research Philosophy and Design

Fig 3.2: Research Onion.



Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015.

With the intention of addressing the research questions mentioned in the previous chapter, the Research Onion framework is being utilized to choose and coordinate the research technique (Saunders et. al., 2016). The layers of this structure must be approached from the outside while designing the research process. The decisions presented in this sequence must be made before moving on to data collection (Saunders et. al., 2016).

3.4) Research philosophies

When embarking on research, development of knowledge is essential, and the system of beliefs and assumptions about this development of knowledge is called “Research Philosophies” (Saunders et. al., 2016). There will be a number of types of assumptions that shall have to be made during the course of any research. According to Saunders et. al. (2016), there are three main philosophies in research alongside others which influence these assumptions. Ontology is the assumptions made about the nature of reality. They are the initial assumptions made upon what already is present. Epistemology is assumptions made about knowledge. They are assumptions made around acceptable beliefs and opinions. Axiology is the assumptions made due to the one’s own values and ethics. It is essential to understand which philosophies influence their assumptions for any research as they tend to shape the understanding of the research questions, the methods used to conduct research and analyse its findings

(Crotty 1998). Hence a better understanding of these assumptions would help to give grounds for decisions with regards to the research approach.

In line with Chapter 2, epistemology philosophy has been undertaken for this research as it will allow us to grasp the factors influencing marketing decision making in SMEs. The subjective opinions of this research will enable us to adopt the interviewee's assumptions (Rajen K. Gupta and Richa Awasthy, 2015). It is essential to understand the attributed meaning of their opinions and narratives through their individual context, experience, and specifics to develop our findings. This research aims to come up with a practical solution for marketing decision-making in SMEs, hence a pragmatic approach is undertaken for the study. A major focus will be on theories and knowledge that have proved to be effective in the problems faces, the normal practices, and its relevance in the real world (Saunders et. al., 2016). This will help us comprehend the decision-making process in SMEs as a subset of these theories in practice as well as their relevance to the problems they face.

3.5) Research approach

3.5.1) Deductive

According to Saunders (2016), research can either take a deductive or an inductive approach. The deductive method entails the further development of an existing theory, which is then subjected to extensive testing. To explain the relationship between a proven concept and a variable, the deductive approach is used. This approach would not be suitable for the current research because it seeks to anticipate, predict, and control elements as variables (Saunders, 2016). This variable used in this study would be the acceptance level of technologies.

3.5.2) Inductive

On the other hand, the inductive approach starts with the development of a new theory based on no prior analysis. The inductive approach investigates a topic and looks for themes and trends that can be used to build a conceptual framework (Saunders, 2016). In this case, the theory follows the data. This study will take an inductive approach in order to develop a theory based on the conceptual framework of digital marketing. The inductive approach is best suited for this study, which seeks to identify common themes by comparing previous work. An inductive approach to research also permits to take a more flexible approach (Saunders, 2016). Inductive also encourages a subjective conversation between interviewees and allows for different points of view, which strengthens our ability to accept our interviewees' subjective assumptions.

3.6) Research Strategy:

According to Saunders (2016), utilising a pragmatic philosophy combined with an inductive approach by using a qualitative research method in conjunction with small samples allows for better data collecting than larger quantitative samples. Case studies, interviews, and ethnographies are just a few

examples of qualitative research methods that may be used to learn more about how the adoption of technology has fuelled the success of digital marketing initiatives (Alf H. Walle, A., 2015; Saunders, 2015). Due to the capability of gaining the interviewees' perspectives and ideas on a particular aspect of digital marketing, in-depth interviews turned out to be the most practical choice. This would not have been possible if information had been acquired through case studies or ethnographies. The researcher should be aware of the phenomena of "groupthink," which is a psychological driver for a broad group agreement and the suppression of different ideas or viewpoints inside a group. A focus group may have been an appropriate choice to conduct this research (Janis, 1972). Because of this, there is a chance that group members won't express their opposing opinions or engage in critical thought about concepts or issues.

3.6.1) In-depth interviews:

In-depth interviews will be used as a tool to inspect the deep understanding of the general area of this research. This entails that the interviews will be informal and would not follow a fixed pattern of written down questions or structure (Saunders, 2016). For a better understanding of the research topic and data collection questions will be asked to guide the course of the interview. These questions would emerge from the conversations with the interviewee, rather than a set of pre-prepared questions (Saunders, 2016). This can help to probe the interviewee more to get a better understanding of the attributed meaning of their answers (Berg, 1988). In the present case, this understanding relates to the marketing approach taken by SMEs, the factors influencing marketing decision-making, the use of digital channels and its overall effectiveness on marketing and business orientation. These are the theme of topics around which the course of the interview has taken place. In these interview, the interviewees have had the opportunity to express themselves freely about the topic (Saunders, 2016). This free expression of their understanding on the topic developed by their individual experience forms the base of the data collected in our research.

3.6.1.1) Reliability of data.

The lack of standardisation in these interviews can lead to concern with regards to the reliability of the data that has been collected. This can be compensated by using a cross sectional approach to conduct interviews (Perry, M. H. a. C., 2000). This is done to ensure that the market / economic variables are within the same timeline. This is essential as subjective opinions as well as efforts of marketing might change with respect to these variables.

3.6.1.2) Validity of data.

The other major concern while conducting qualitative research is the validity of the data collected, due to the suspicion that we are not right (Perry, M. H. a. C., 2000). In qualitative

research, the validity of the research is the main aim (Sandy Q. Qu, 2011). To verify the validity of the research, following steps were taken:

- Bits of memories or inaccurate notes were not included in the research, rather the whole interview as one was considered. This is done to avoid the use of missing or inaccurate information, which can lead to inappropriate and or incomplete conclusions.
- Open-ended questions were used to give space to the interviewees so that they can express their own opinion. Such questions were used to avoid imposition of interviewer's own opinions or interpretations on the interviewees which would obligate them to answer in a certain fashion.
- To make sure no vague theories are deduced from the research, subjective opinions of different interviews are kept in mind. The research is done to understand the subjective opinions of different interviewees, which reflect their own understanding about marketing along with the personal experience they have gathered over the years. Hence, each interviewee's opinions are considered independently and not cumulatively.

3.7) Research method

According to Saunders (2016), many research methodologies may be utilized based on the sort of study being done and the limitations, such as time and resources, that are present. Mono method refers to the application of a single research methodology, employing interviews for qualitative or data collection, collecting quantitative data through surveys and questionnaires. In-depth interviews are employed as the sole technique of data collection in this study's qualitative approach. This is due to time and budget restrictions. Multi or mixed-method research is another way. This requires using a variety of qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two research methodologies (Saunders, 2016). Due to lack of time and resources, these procedures were not applied in this study.

3.8) Population

Population sample refers to the assessment of a small group of people who act as a representative of a larger group of people. The process of choosing these groups or samples is called sampling. Sampling is crucial in research since trying to survey the entire population would be a huge undertaking (Saunders, 2009). Another benefit of sampling is that it is a faster and less expensive approach to gather reliable data than a census.

There are two sorts of sampling strategies: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Saunders, 2016). While non-probability sampling includes the researcher directly selecting individuals, it cannot precisely reflect a population; nonetheless, the participants picked are best suited for the issue under investigation. Using probability sampling ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being picked at random (Greener, 2008). For this study, non-probability sampling was used since it is most suited for use with qualitative research (Saunders, 2016).

In-depth interviews with key informants were employed in this case study. The key informant approach is conducting in-depth interviews with important corporate informants who are business executives or have expertise in particular areas in order to learn more about their perspectives on the current research topic (Walle, 2015). These interviews will be done with the owner managers or the marketing decision makers of the SMEs in this example, where we strive to study the marketing decision making inside SMEs (Cormac McGratha, 2019).

3.9) Analysing qualitative data.

Seven participants were interviewed via Google Meet calls, which fit their busy schedules and free time. All of the participants had to be from India because the study's focus is on SMEs with offices there, hence the interviews had to be conducted online. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was organized in advance based on the availability of the interviewees for the entire month of August 2022. The inquiries will be open-ended so that each may be fully explored (Quinlan, 2011). It will be modelled to have a non-judgmental body language toward the participant. To avoid giving a biased response, the researcher won't make any unfavourable or too favourable assumptions or judgments about a subject. Ensuring that every attempt was made to guarantee that there are unbiased and unprejudiced insights would be crucial (Alf H. Walle, A., 2015). To guarantee authenticity and accurate results, the researcher will record all interviews, take notes, and then transcribe the discussions. The fact that the talks were being recorded and that they would be deleted after the research was disclosed to all participants.

The analysis of the data gathered comes after the interviews are done and transcribed. Several analytical techniques that concentrate on finding patterns or themes within the study might be used to do this (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These techniques include thematic analysis and content analysis, which aid in locating common themes or patterns in the collected data (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). For this study, a theme analysis approach was used since it enables the investigation of vast, disorganized data. Thematic analysis looks for patterns in data that has been gathered by subject matter experts. In the transcripts, the codes emerge in one of three ways: through the interviewee's statements, labels the researcher applies to a set of data, or terms that are often seen in prior work (Saunders et al., 2016). To ensure in-depth inquiry into the topics discovered, a thematic question guide was employed throughout interviews. The following topics have been identified: Marketing in SMEs, Owner Manager Role, Marketing Mediums, and Digital Transformation.

3.10) Ethical issues

The 'Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants' published by the National College of Ireland has been followed by the researcher throughout the research study. The data that has been collected by with the conduction of in-depth interviews was solely used for determining the findings of this dissertation. The researcher has maintained confidentiality to respect

the privacy of all the participants. Furthermore, participants were given the freedom to withdraw their participation at any time.

3.11) Limitation to Research.

The extent of the data gathering has been constrained by the research's time restrictions, which prevents it from considering a recommendation for a large-scale study. Due to the limited scale of relevant data, the likelihood of sampling error has therefore emerged as a strategic barrier for research users to make strategic judgments (Hague et al. 2017). Additionally, a longitudinal research study has not been undertaken owing to financial and time constraints, which prevents the research study from choosing a large data region to gather research data (King and Horrocks, 2016). For instance, gathering primary data from a small sample of randomly selected individuals is insufficient to adequately describe the elements influencing marketing decision-making for SMEs in the Indian IT sector.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings:

4.1) Introduction:

This chapter summarises the research findings from all the interviews that were conducted for data collection. The findings are characterised into five themes, each of which elaborate on the objectives that have been outlined in the previous chapters. All the participants have varied years of experience in the IT industry and hence shared different insights and opinions. Some opinions overlapped amongst all the participants which reflected a certain trend in marketing decision-making of SMEs.

Participants	Position	Age of business (in Years)	Size of business	No. of directors
Participant 1	Marketing Manager	34	Medium	2
Participant 2	Marketing Manager	42	Medium	2
Participant 3	Director	39	Small	6
Participant 4	Director	3	Small	1
Participant 5	Director	21	Medium	3
Participant 6	Marketing Manager	36	Medium	2
Participant 7	Marketing consultant	2	Small	1

The participants are between the ages of 32 and 45. All of them have at least 8 years of SMEs-related experience. The development of the business suggests that switching from conventional offline marketing to internet marketing is necessary. Size indicates small businesses to have a turnover of Rs 5 Cr–Rs 50 Cr to mid businesses to have a turnover of Rs 50 Cr- Rs250 Cr (SME Chamber of India, 2019)

4.2) Business orientation:

As mentioned in Chapter 2, business orientation is defined by the mission and vision of an organisation. All the participants agreed on the need of a mission and vision that must be set for the basis of business orientation.

Participant 2 while sharing the experience of his firm which did not have a set business orientation said, *“There was no set mission or vision, which means there was no set business orientation. It felt like the firm was working aimlessly. This is also reflected in your marketing plans.”*

Participant 2 asserted that without a fixed business orientation, the entire organisation had misalignment in their work, the expectations that owner-managers had from them and the

company's mission. There was randomness in the functioning of the organisation which also reflected in their marketing strategies.

Participant 7: *“Business orientation aligns the goal for a firm, and marketing is a medium to achieve that.”*

Participant 7 stated that the unique business orientation of an organisation determines the goal for every firm. He further added that marketing is a medium to achieve the goals set by the unique business orientation of an organisation for the convergence in operations of the organisation.

Participant 4: *“With a set mission in mind, our business orientation is to be the best at what we do. This sets the basis of our marketing strategy.”*

Participant 4 offered his support to the above statements by adding that business orientation determines the internal culture of an organisation and the association of this culture with their products. This becomes a basis of the marketing strategy as organisations can reflect their business orientation through the marketing strategies.

4.2.1) Role of owner-manager in defining the business orientation:

Participant 2: *“The growth with the increase in efforts of marketing can be seen exponentially with the new director in office.”*

Participant 2 shared several viewpoints from an employee perspective. This participant supported the fact that the presence, interference, authority and power vested in an owner-manager can lead to changes in an organisation's approach and perspectives towards marketing. As a result of this, the organisation (where this participant worked) increased their marketing activities manifold. This participant along with Participant 3 and 5 further added that, the business orientation of the organisation also relies heavily on the owner-manager, or the director of the organisation and it changed with a change in the Director.

Participant 1: *“Marketing was his baby, and that reflected in our business orientation.”*

Participant 1 suggested that owner-managers who place marketing at the heart of their business activities are always very ambitious about their marketing initiatives and strategies. This shall reflect in their business orientation as well. They shall invest more time into designing influential marketing campaigns and allocate more resources to implement the same.

4.2.2) Marketing decision making:

Participant 1: *“Marketing is the frontline of any company.; marketing is the key for driving your business; if you fail in marketing your product effectively you miss an opportunity to inform the world about you as a brand.”*

Participant 1 establishes an opinion that marketing can prove to be a highly effective communication tool for SMEs to inform the world about their product and business. The participant further adds that ‘A business can do everything right, but if it fails at marketing, everything else goes in vain.’

Participant 2: *“Successful marketing strategy is one that ends up creating leads on its own.”*

Participant 2 suggested that with successful implementation of a marketing strategy, it starts generating organic leads for any organisation.

Through the interviews, it was evident that all the participants acknowledged the need for and importance of strategic marketing decision making. However, there were some arguments that were observed pertaining to the differences in goals and challenges. Participants 1, 3 and 6 declared that their goals revolved around increasing sales immediately but were not much concerned about the number of leads that would be generated in the long term through their marketing campaigns. However, Participants 2, 4 and 7 understood marketing as a tool for generating more leads in the long term which would potentially increase their sales in the future.

Participant 3: *“For a smaller company like ours, sales is what we thrive on. Anything and everything revolve around sales.”*

Participant 3 made an upfront statement that their marketing decision-making revolves only around increasing the number of sales for their organisation. His organisation placed marketing as an important medium to increase sales and only focused on those aspects of marketing which would create exponential growth in sales for the organisation.

Participant 4: *“Sales and marketing are related, but not the same. Marketing is a tool of generating leads and sales is a means of revenue generation. They do complement each other, but they are not the same.”*

Participant 4 made a highly analytical statement by highlighting the difference between sales and marketing. He explained that there is a difference in outcome generated by both the activities. Sales produces an outcome of revenue generation and marketing produces an outcome of lead generation. Both of these activities are complementary to each other; however, they should not be considered

synonymous as both produce different results for an organisation. The participant further added that more often than not, marketing leads to sales.

4.3) Marketing channels

All the participants hinted at a varied mix of marketing channels that they use for their organisation. Participants 1, 3 and 4 suggested that their marketing channels are chosen based on their products and target audience. Participants 2 and 5 suggested that the decision of marketing channels also depends on the marketplace or the business platform that organisations use for carrying out their business.

Participant 6: *“Word of mouth marketing is the easiest marketing technique; it provides maximum results with minimal effort and resources.”*

Participant 3: *“Word of mouth marketing not just is an effective way of increasing sales, but also allows for good communication with the customers. Both of which are vital for small firms like ours.”*

Participant 6 confessed that for SMEs, the first priority for capital allocation is developing and designing the product. Achieving economies of scale is very difficult for SMEs as their production is limited owing to a narrow market size. Participant 3 acknowledged this fact and added that this strategy works well not only for increasing sales but also for building a good rapport with the customers.

Participant 1: *“Digital marketing has been the next big step as a marketing channel for SMEs”.*

Participant 1 indicated that SMEs have to be updated with the trends prevalent in the market to stay in the competition. Being ‘PhyGital’ is one such trend where an organisation has to ensure that it maintains its reputation both on the physical platforms as well as the digital platforms.

Participant 5: *“Digital platforms have enabled us to market on the same platform as a giant like TCS does.”*

Participant 5 depicted a positive opinion on digital marketing and the effects of marketing through digital platforms. He brought in an interesting perspective about SMEs getting an equal opportunity to market their products on digital platforms on the same scale as large organisations. Participant 5 further informed that large organisations like TCS are not their direct competitors, but marketing at the same level as them allows SMEs to display their potential of customer service and customisation abilities and a much cheaper cost.

4.3.1) Role of owner-manager:

Participant 3: *“Traditional ways of business and ignorance to change are challenges we face while transitioning to digital marketing.”*

Participant 3 discussed the challenges of switching to digital marketing in his organisation. He has experienced resistance from his Directors for this transition. He opined that the older generation usually disapproves of potential change and hence expansion in his organisation is totally dependent on word-of-mouth marketing. Participant 3 confessed that he struggled to bring change in his organisation as other directors were against him.

Participant 5: “Previous director’s *mastery in one sector, restricted growth of business through marketing.*”

Participant 5 experienced this in his organisation. The previous director in her organisation had some expertise in technical skills such as coding and software development. This organisation depended on word-of-mouth marketing and other marketing methods such as brochures, setting stalls in exhibitions, etc. Hence marketing was never given importance. When she joined the organisation as a director, her objective was to grow the business through marketing practices. She introduced digital marketing and social media presence of the organisation. Interestingly, participant 1 did not face this challenge, as the director of the firm himself was very keen in introducing newer marketing schemes and digital marketing was one of them.

4.3.2) Marketing decision making:

Participant 7: “*Digital marketing has helped in transforming other conventional forms of marketing as well.*”

It was noticed that participant 4 and participant 7 did not face the challenge of the change in marketing methods from non-digital to digital. Their organisations were relatively new, and they initiated their business digital marketing strategies itself. Participants 1 and 5 argued that for their organisations, transition was easy, as it started with converting existing marketing tools into digital ways. For example, brochures were replaced by e- brochures and the practice of sharing visiting cards was replaced by sharing company websites, LinkedIn profiles or other social media links. These participants viewed digital marketing as a new form of marketing in addition to the current marketing ways rather than a complete transition from the traditional channels.

Participants 1 and 5 shared that they integrated digital marketing since 2008 and 2010 respectively as they saw the rapid increase in the user base of the Internet and mobile phones. They wanted to adapt to the changes and trends, irrespective of their business and marketing goals. They were adventurous and inquisitive to know the consequences of digital marketing channels. Participant 2 saw slow acceptance of digital forms of marketing earlier but have observed many changes in his organisation in the past 6 months, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the entire industry had to mandatorily shift to online means of doing business to comply with the lockdown regulations. Due to the same reason, Participant 3 had

to resort to social media and change their marketing strategy which they previously did not accept or consider worthwhile.

Participant 4 introduced a perspective of choosing the marketing channel by evaluating the cost inputs. Citing differences in the cost of marketing,

Participant 4: *“If we talk about return on investments for a digital ad campaign, the cost to lead and lead to conversion rate is quicker and incurs a cost figure of only Rs. 123 per lead as compared to Rs. 900 per lead for above the line marketing (marketing through mass media promotion to reach a larger audience).”*

Participant 6: *“People work on digital platforms for marketing as misguided missiles; posting regularly on social media does not necessarily mean digital marketing; Since it is so easy, people misunderstand the meaning of digital marketing and digital presence; A structured way of digital marketing is as important as marketing in other channels; lack of understanding is a curse for digital marketing.”*

With regards to wrongful decision-making due to lack of knowledge, Participant 6 strongly expressed his views and shared his experiences of seeing people misusing digital marketing channels and wrongly interpreting them as a medium for only growing digital presence. He used the metaphor of ‘misguided missiles’ to depict the unreasonable exploitation of digital platforms that is being done due to misinterpretation of the concept of digital marketing.

Participant 3: *“We are satisfied with the current ways of business, we are not looking for expansion hence digital forms of marketing is not what we require, still there is a minimal change towards digital forms.”*

Participant 3 brought in a perspective that the decision of choosing digital marketing and transitioning to digital transformation depended on the purpose and objective of the marketing strategy that is formulated by the decision makers.

4.4) Digital transformations

All the participants expressed their approval of the growing need for digital transformation in SMEs.

Participant 2: *“Very critical. From customer perspective and from supplier perspective, due to the speed, people are expecting quicker communication now, which has become a norm. If you are not equipped and adaptable, it is difficult to survive in business.”*

Participant 6: *“It has become a norm; acceptance level has increased which has increased criteria for business.”*

Participant 2 supports this statement and mentioned that the acceptance of digital transformation has also led to increase in sales. This has hence given ample opportunities to IT companies be it technical or technological support or consultation due to which businesses are actively looking forward to changing and transforming themselves using technologies.

Participant 4: *“Transformation means Non-reversible; pen paper thing, old ways of marketing are not coming back anyhow; It's just going to improve, innovate and reach to another level.”*

Participant 4 further contributes to express the capabilities of digital transformation by mentioning that it is an irreversible process. Once organisations start adopting and adapting to digital transformation, there is no going back for them. It will only keep on evolving. Some advantages of digital transformation include data-based insights, enhanced customer satisfaction and superior quality of user experience as well as employee excellence.

4.4.1) Role of owner manager:

Participant 6: *“Technologies have always been an important part for him and looking at technologies not as change but as opportunity to improve.”*

Participant 6 hinted at his director’s progressive approach towards technology wherein he perceived the use of technology as an opportunity to improve and not as a change. Similar opinions were given by participants 1, 2 and 7.

Participant 2: *“New director brought the use of new technologies along with him.”*

Supporting the above statements, Participant 2 evidently hinted that a change in director brought a change in mindset of the entire organisation. Participant 5 who is a director herself, agrees as she introduced changes in her organisation in a similar fashion.

Participant 3: *“We believe that technologies take us away from our customers. It has proved to be difficult to maintain the same level of relations with the customers as we used to.”*

4.4.2) Marketing decision making:

All the participants agreed that both digital acceptance and digital marketing have caused an increase in the lead generation.

Participant 6: *“As an IT company, the main objective is to change the way of working to make it more efficient.”*

Participant 4: *“Digitalising activities that were previously repetitive in nature allows employees to invest more time for decision-making in important matters.”*

Participant 6 remarked that IT companies constantly strive to optimise processes and software to make business processes of their clients easier. The same applies to their own organisations. Digital transformation eases the operations of an organisation, which coincidentally is also the objective of every IT company - to make the way of working more efficient. Participant 4 highlighted that several activities in business are redundant and require repeated manual efforts.

Chapter 5: Discussions:

5.1) Introduction

This chapter summarises the previous chapter and relates the findings to the concepts introduced in Chapter 2. The interviews presented arguments and facts pertaining to the below concepts. It was interesting to know some discrete opinions of all the participants with regards to decision-making in marketing activities. The analysis of interviews has led to some insights, which will be covered in this chapter.

5.2) Business Orientation

It is found that the prominence of business orientation in an SME is such that every decision pertaining to marketing is taken with that being in the epicentre. Business orientation set by the owner-manager gives a direction to the employees to set a specific goal that aligns with their vision and channelises their efforts into the right path to achieve the desired results. Once the goal is decided, SMEs can brainstorm on strategies to achieve the goal. Marketing is one such medium that can help SMEs to achieve that specific goal. It is an integral part of the strategy that is devised to communicate the internal attributes of the firm namely the mission, vision, values and culture that reflect the business orientation to the customers as consumption patterns of customers have gradually started shifting to purchasing products with a purpose. All the participants of the interview unanimously agreed that business orientation is a vital attribute that affects marketing decision-making in an organisation as it sets the path for designing marketing campaigns, reflecting the organisation's vision and aligning the different business activities towards the same goal. This provides evidence to support the work of Smith W. (2009)

5.2.1) Role of the owner-manager in defining business orientation:

Some participants suggested that they noticed several changes in their organisation, every time a new owner-manager was appointed. This implies that a lot of decision-making power is vested into the leaders and the leaders extensively use this power in influencing the organisation to change its decisions or orient the decisions in a certain direction. A leader comes with a vision or a business orientation in mind and his leadership aims at imbibing this vision within the employees. A leader will motivate his employees to align their objectives and their efforts towards making this vision a reality. Hence, the responsibility of decision-making is conferred heavily on leadership or owner-manager. They are by default perceived to have the power and authority of taking important decisions for the business. Employees generally tend to conform to owner-manager when it comes to decision-making. This complements the work of Franco, M. et al. (2014).

Owner-manager can introduce numerous changes in the business orientation or strategies in order to achieve the desired results or to introduce a repair mechanism. It is comparatively easier for owner-

managers to introduce changes in their approaches, business operations and decisions in SMEs, given their smaller scale. SMEs are more flexible and can adapt to changes quicker than large organisations.

Due to the power vested in an owner-manager in SMEs, it is entirely at their discretion, if they want to invest their resources in marketing activities or allocate them in other operations. Some might place marketing at the heart of business whereas some might believe in organic growth and give less attention to marketing. Either way, an organisation and its employees would extensively depend on the owner-manager for marketing decision making. Some owner-managers have a different degree of inclination of placing marketing within the core business strategy. This inclination also greatly affects marketing decision-making in organisations. The closer the inclination, the more integrated marketing will be within the business strategy. This aligns with the work of (EFEOĞLU, İ.E, et.al., 2020), (Gátia, 2019), (Mario, 2014).

5.2.2) Marketing decision making:

Marketing can help create transparency about the product and the business in the markets. Transparency builds trust. Hence, marketing ultimately helps in building a sense of trust between the organisation and customers. This results in boosting sales for an organisation. Furthermore, marketing can also help an organisation to remain relevant in this dynamic and highly competitive business world. An SME faces fierce competition from its counterparts as well as large organisations. When an SME is established, its newness would attract customers for a while, however, gradually with new organisations being set up, an SME might find it difficult to sustain its newness and retain its market share. The work of Sheilagh Mary Resnick, (2016) affirms that the Word-of-Mouth strategy is the most traditional and effective channel of marketing for SMEs, yet, if an SME loses its novelty and fails to retain the buzz, this strategy will fail and will be deemed irrelevant. Marketing helps to sustain a company's reputation by keeping the company in talks and creating awareness about the company periodically so that it is not enveloped by new entrants. As mentioned in the work of Harrigan P., et. al., (2012), SMEs rely heavily on maintaining relationships with their customers.

This objective can be fulfilled successfully through marketing as it can help SMEs to maintain connections with their customers even when they do not have any new product or service to show them (www.kake.com, n.d.). The opinions of several participants converged on this statement which suggested that marketing is the only means of expanding business. If the communication through marketing reaches the correct target market and target audience, marketing can prove to work as an effective expansionary strategy. Hence, as stated in the work of Porter (2004), marketing decision-making should aim to achieve effective communication and sow the seeds of expansion.

Marketing can also lead to organic growth. The studies by Chng D. (2015), Gilmore, et. al., (2018) and Gattia, (2019) state that SMEs are restricted to innovate their marketing strategies due to the lack of resources. Owner-managers can thus design a marketing campaign in such a way that it creates a strong impact with the launch and then generates leads automatically through Word-of-mouth. Thus the decision-making process must be strategic. In the decision-making process, owner-managers must weigh the probable consequences of their marketing strategies and the supposed impact that they can create to deliver an impactful campaign which is capable of generating leads on its own.

The dependency of SMEs on marketing and the impact that it shall create also affects decision-making in an organisation. Organisations formulate marketing strategies to increase sales or to increase lead generation. Thus, some organisations tend to make result-oriented decisions. This generally happens when firms consider sales and marketing synonymous to each other. Organisations who focus on marketing for increasing sales have a short-term orientation towards increasing revenue. These organisations focus on only those strategies that have a higher lead to sale conversion rate. This approach proves advantageous for increasing sales in the near future but the drawback to this approach is that it ignores the possibility of expanding the reach and increasing lead generation.

However, some participants propounded that sales can be evaluated as an outcome of the marketing campaigns and hence it can influence marketing decision-making. They further suggested that marketing decision-making should not be done by considering 'Sales' as a desired result and a mere means of calculating the effectiveness of the marketing strategy. Instead, marketing decision-making should be such that it works towards reaching the target market, carrying out product placement, pursuing customer awareness and finally generating higher leads. This partially contradicts with the work of Sheilagh Mary Resnick, et al., 2015 and Merrilees, B, et. al., 1999 claiming that all SMEs have the same marketing goal and strategy.

5.3) Marketing channels

Through the interviews, it was deduced that, if the target audience lies in the age group of 20-40 years, they would rely heavily on social-media marketing and digital marketing channels to reach more people. On the other hand, for age groups of 40 and above, marketing can be effective through printed media and word-of-mouth. This has also been highlighted and discussed in previous studies by Rituparna Basu and Neena Sondhi (2021).

For example: In Mumbai, which is the financial capital of India, one can find '*Bazaars*' in every area. Bazaars are a marketplace where several small, scaled traders and owner-managers of small and medium scaled goods and service providers set up their businesses. These *bazaars* were formed several years ago. The shop owners in a *bazaar* inherit the shops from their ancestors. They are usually middle-aged (the younger generation in Mumbai prefers to establish independent stores). *Bazaars* are like a small business hub for them where everybody knows each other very well. In some areas, bazaars are

dedicated to a specific business segment like Electronics, Spices, Jewellery, etc. In such hubs, marketing through word-of-mouth is a common and a very efficient practice. Customers and shop owners establish a near-personal relationship due to their frequent interactions for several years (Digital Marketing Blog - DSIM, 2017). As mentioned in Chapter 2, SMEs thrive on customer relationships and hence focus more on maintaining close relations with their customers. Due to their smaller scale, they work very efficiently within a small community or network of businesses like in the bazaars. All the participants hinted that there are several factors that affect the choice of marketing channels but maintained that fact that word-of-mouth marketing is the most efficient and successful marketing channel. This finding is also supported in the studies of Vieira, V.A. et al. (2019) and Harrigan, P., et.al., (2012).

It is ascertained that SMEs do not prefer spending on marketing activities and that they usually rely on word-of-mouth marketing channels as this channel requires little to nil investment. Owner-managers can strategically create a buzz for themselves and attract customers which is very easy as word spreads fast in a community and faster if it is a smaller one. Thus, in true sense for SME marketers, Word-of-mouth requires minimal efforts and generates maximum results. This strategy works on information exchange which imbibes a sense of trust from both the buyer and seller sides. They can get to know each other better and create value for each other by maintaining good relations. There was no evidence found in the literature to support these arguments.

It was also discovered that through digital marketing platforms, SMEs were able to market their products on the same platform as large organisations. This enabled them to communicate their core competencies of cost leadership and hassle-free customisation of products to the customer and create more awareness for themselves. With the advent of Information Communication Technology, Data Analytics, Business Analytics, Visual graphics and the Internet, it has been possible for organisations to enhance their innovation and marketing capacities to captivate more audiences. Digital marketing is most certainly the next big step in marketing for SMEs. These findings are backed by the views from the study that was done by ULAS, (2019).

5.3.1) Role of owner manager for Marketing channels

As stated by Gilmore, et. al., (2018), SMEs have less margin for errors. Hence, some owner-managers of SMEs are usually risk averse as they do not have enough provisions to cover for the probable losses that may arise after undertaking risky alternatives which makes them less open to change and experimentation. They like to resort to traditional tried and tested methods to avoid any losses. Owner-managers who belong to older age groups usually have less faith in technology. First of all, they find it difficult to operate. Secondly, they fear that using technology and digital marketing channels will eliminate confidentiality of their business and data. If the owner-managers do not believe in marketing through digital channels, the employees would not be able to resort to any technological intervention in

their business operations, even if they are quicker, more accurate and more efficient. These owner-managers were found to often rely on their own competencies and capacities to carry out their business. They make use of their experience and expertise to increase sales and expand their business.

This proves that the role of owner-manager, their expertise and experience, their knowledge, belief and opinions set the culture of an organisation which does not change till a new one is brought in. They possess the capability to drive the organisation's marketing initiatives in their own way. These findings align with the previous studies done by EFEOĞLU, İ.E, et.al., (2020), Gátia, (2019) and Mario, (2014).

5.3.2) Marketing Decision-Making:

Marketing decision-making entails accurate and effective outcomes if decision makers are well-versed with the different marketing concepts and their appropriate usage. Using digital channels inappropriately would destroy the purpose and results of digital marketing. Lack of knowledge about digital marketing, results in poor implementation and hence, negligible returns. In digital marketing, new techniques and tools are developed very quickly. It is very important to have a complete understanding of these ever-changing algorithms, and to determine their relevance and use to the organisation in fulfilling its marketing objectives. When organisations learn the right digital marketing tools and effectively implement the relevant ones, it can prove to be extremely beneficial for SMEs.

Additionally, it was noticed that organisations often outsource their digital marketing to external marketing agencies. This is due to the relative newness of the concept and the lack of knowledge as well as expertise within the organisations. Moreover, outsourcing marketing activities can also help businesses to focus on their core business objectives. This makes a huge difference for SMEs with resource constraints (Gilmore, et. al., 2018) and (Gamble et al., 2011)

It was noticed that some owner-managers classified their marketing channels based on their business goals. They characterised digital marketing as only a means of expansion and confirmed that they would move towards social media only when they will have a need to generate more leads for business. They were more than satisfied with their current sales as their existing customers contributed to revenue maximisation. All the participants except participant 3 agreed to that statement that digital marketing must be used in addition to traditional or offline methods of marketing. This complements the work done by Nabeel Rehman (2021).

Digital marketing is a holistic concept that consists of several channels within itself. It is not only about posting regularly on social media. Marketeers need to have an appropriate understanding of digital marketing and design a structured way to practise the same. A lack of understanding of this concept proves to be a curse for digital marketing. The audiences might grow tired of seeing the repeated advertisements and campaigns, repetitive posts will mar the attractiveness element and irate the

audiences, audiences will slowly lose interest in digital campaigns and hence digital marketing may gradually turn out to be ineffective. These can be the ill effects of misusing or misinterpreting digital marketing. Hence decision-makers must try to gain as much knowledge as possible about the different marketing channels, the most effective way of using them and the means of evaluating their impact while making a choice on marketing channels. These findings harmonise with the work done by Porter, 2001, ULAS, 2019, Rituparna Basu (2021) and Goldman, S.P. et al. (2021)

5.4) Digital transformation:

Digital transformation has led to greater efficiency, accuracy and growth of organisations. It has now become a norm. It was fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic where organisations were tested on how quickly they can transition the entire operations from manual to digital. Adaptability is the most important requirement for digital transformation. Organisations can integrate technology but need to show adaptability for transitioning their operations. Making a tech-friendly organisation, educating the employees, being cautious about the associated risks must also be pondered upon by organisations. Since digital transformation has become a norm, organisations now expect greater speed in doing business and if any organisation fails to do so, they are deemed incompetent. The importance and the use of technologies in business has increased drastically and thus the acceptability rate of digital transformation has increased. This is also reflected from the studies published by Rituparna Basu and Neena Sondhi (2021) Rehman, N. et al. (2021)

5.4.1) Role of owner manager:

The adoption of digital transformation depends solely on the owner-manager's outlook towards technology and its integration in the organisation. Their perspectives and their intended use of technology drives the transition from traditional to digital methods in the organisation. An owner-manager who is enthusiastic about digitalisation and its integration in business must be well-informed about the different types of technologies that are available in the market and out of them which ones are the most relevant for his/her organisation. If the owner-manager of an SME develops a progressive outlook towards technological transformation, its adoption shall be quicker and greatly impactful.

Ideologies of owner-managers can restrict them to bring changes in their organisation. Some owner-managers who are comfortable with using the traditional methods of marketing opined that technology shall take their customers away from them. They thrive on physical interpersonal interactions. They feel that virtual interactions do not hold the essence of building and maintaining a relationship. In a virtual meeting, a customer would not be as interactive or interested in doing business as he would in a physical meeting. Owner-managers find it difficult to interpret the needs of customers through an online

meeting. Thus, ideologies of owner-managers can pose a barrier for adoption of digital transformation in an SME.

The studies done by (EFEOĞLU, İ.E, et.al., 2020), and (Mario, 2014) discuss the impact of the attributes of the owner-managers. The findings from this study are congruent with their study as it discusses the same impact with regards to change and acceptability of new technologies.

5.4.2) Marketing decision-making:

Digital transformation positively impacts marketing decision-making as it helps in accurate data analysis of the source of leads and their conversion rates. This helps in bridging the gap between customer needs and deliverables of the product. It also helps in scoping opportunities and targeting the correct market for the sale of goods and services.

Adopting digital transformation can eliminate redundancies and allow decision-makers to invest more time in worthwhile discussions. In the marketing decision-making process as well, more often than not, owner-managers resort to manual extraction of data and manual synthesis of information which kills time and does not produce optimum results. Organisations can digitalise such tasks to improve the overall quality of the marketing decision-making process and draw the best possible decisions.

The increase in acceptability of digital transformation has provided IT SMEs with greater opportunities. More and more customers are becoming aware of the need of technologies. They are resorting to IT companies for digitalising their business process. With the increase in need for IT within businesses, it has become easier for IT SMEs to formulate marketing strategies to create value for their products through them.

Chapter 6: Conclusion:

6.1) Conclusion:

The post COVID-19 pandemic period has proven to be a boom for the IT sector in India. The work culture that had to be mandatorily followed due to the pandemic has further increased the acceptability of digitalisation. The growing digitalisation of business processes and the increase in use of digital technology has created several opportunities for IT industries in India, both domestically and internationally. Realising the scope of these opportunities and the dependency of the world on India for IT, several IT professionals have now founded their own small and medium enterprises. This has given birth to fierce competition within the industry. The major barrier that these SMEs face in achieving business growth is the resource limitations. SMEs cannot implement marketing strategies on the same scale as large organisations due to their restricted resource capacities. Hence, with limited budgets, marketing decision-making for SMEs must be strategic and productive enough to reach the masses. This study aims to help SME entrepreneurs in sustaining their ventures by presenting a framework for designing productive marketing strategies and conducting strategic marketing decision-making.

The framework suggests that marketing decision-making in SMEs is primarily influenced by three factors. The first factor is the business orientation of an organisation which refers to the mission, vision and values of the organisation. The second factor is the choice of an appropriate mix of marketing channels that results in productive marketing which helps in achieving the goals and objectives of an organisation. The third factor is the integration of technologies for digital marketing to facilitate digital transformation of the organisation. The outlook of an SME's owner-manager plays a significant role in determining the effects of the above factors in marketing decision-making of an SME.

This study thus helps owner-managers to take effectual decisions based on these factors. It also explores the relationship between business orientation, use of marketing channels and digital transformation, with respect to the role of owner-manager and its effects on marketing decision-making, which was unexplored in previous research studies. Through the findings of this study, the research objectives of investigating the effects of business orientation on marketing, identifying the factors that influence the choice of marketing channels, and understanding the acceptability and feasibility of digital transformation in SMEs by considering the role of owner-manager within SMEs have been successfully achieved.

6.2) Recommendations for future scope:

As mentioned in the previous chapters, SMEs have to face several barriers in order to thrive in the business, face competition and achieve growth. With little to no barriers to entry, the competition level in the IT sector in India is very high. Hence SMEs develop a risk averse profile where their preferences of doing business are associated more towards tried and tested methods. SMEs highly value their

existing customers and constantly strive to retain them. Customer satisfaction is the most critical aspect for SMEs, so much so that they prefer to cater to existing customers to hold their market share rather than look for newer customers in an attempt to expand the market share. Retaining this market share would be a bigger challenge for these SMEs in future with the increase in competition. This study does not consider the difficulties that arise due to high competition. Hence a further study of marketing decision-making during competitive times would complement the current research.

Another recommendation for future scope of research in this subject would be to address the knowledge gap of the customers of the IT sector, owing to the limited technical and technological literacy. Currently, one can observe a vast difference between the technical language that IT professional use and the business language that their clients understand. This issue of understanding widens the gap between the actual information shared by IT professionals and the information that is perceived and interpreted by the clients. A future study can replicate this research with the same objectives but can collate primary data by selecting customers of IT firms as the research subjects. This would shed more light on comprehending the expectations of customers from IT SMEs and lead to a better decision-making process for them along with building a stronger relationship between both the parties such that they understand each other's needs and capabilities. This shall ultimately result in optimum value creation and growth in business for both the parties.

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