

**Social Media for Business Growth: Why Small – Medium Enterprises Should Leverage
The Use Of Social Media**

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Abstract

The use of social media drastically grown over the years with billions of people now actively using social media platforms every hour. In today's social media driven environment, it is essential for small – medium enterprises (SMEs') to understand the strategies behind using social media to grow their business. The purpose of this study acquire knowledge on leveraging social media for business growth: strategies and impacts for small – medium enterprises (SMEs). The research will further analyse how the utilisation of social media marketing can have a substantial effect on the growth and success of SME's. The use of social media has grown drastically over the years, with billions of people using social media platforms every hour. Today many small - medium businesses are joining social media but don't have an in depth understanding of how to use social media as a key marketing tool by having a strategy in place. Upon doing some research into this topic and being a business owner myself I was able to conclude many small-medium scale business owners tend to not have a deep understanding of why they should use social media and what they can gain from using it. My research will focus on defining what social media is in business terms, this includes a further analysis of strategies SMB's can use, and the effectiveness of using these strategies. This study will apply an ethnographic research approach, and the aim of my research is to further explore why small and medium sized businesses should leverage using social media to scale their business. As a small-medium enterprise owner myself, who launched my business through social media platforms and have since used it as a key tool to further grow my clientele, market my products and services etc. I didn't have much information on how to effectively utilize social media as a key marketing tool and I didn't know how much of an impact using social media could have as although research has been conducted on social media marketing in general, there is a limited studies the deeply explore its application and impact within the SME sector. This has given me a drive to further explore this topic in hopes that SME's will have better knowledge on how to harness the power of social media leading to sustained business growth and success.

1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential tool for communication, marketing and business growth. The increase in social media usage over the years provides both opportunities and

challenges for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). With billions of active users from all parts of the world using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn there's a greater need for SMEs to take advantage of these networks to drive business growth however, many SMEs struggle to effectively leverage social media due to a lack of understanding of how to effectively use social media as a marketing tool. This gap in knowledge and application can often lead to missing out on opportunities for customer engagement, growth in sales, brand building which could be detrimental in a highly competitive marketplace. The aim of this study is to investigate Why Small – Medium Enterprises Should Leverage the Use of Social Media. The research will specifically focus the following objectives: 1.) To assess the effectiveness of different social media platforms for SMEs 2.) To analyse how social media is improving customer engagement for SMEs 3.) To assess if social media can contribute to business growth. Determining the impacts of social media usage on business performance of SMEs, including customer engagement and brand awareness the objectives are crucial in highlighting the necessity of social media strategies and its implications for business development. The research will provide insight into effective social media strategies and offer practical recommendations for SMEs to maximise their social media efforts.

This study is significant for several reasons, the main one being its potential to empower SMEs with the knowledge and tools needed to leverage social media effectively. By having a clear understanding as to why social media is essential and how it impacts business performance. SMEs can go on to use more strategic approaches leading to continuous growth and competitive advantage in their market. The research will contribute to existing literature by providing a detailed exploration of the intersection between social media and SME growth.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the Diffusions of Innovations (DOI) Theory by Rogers Everett. (Rogers, 1983) stated “The diffusion of information is a social process in which subjectively perceived information about a new idea is communicated”, it's a special type of communication that enables people to share information with each other. The diffusion of innovations theory explains how, why and what rate new ideas and technology spread within a culture or social system. The theory is required in the study to better understand for small-medium sized enterprises should take leverage the use of social media.

The researcher will be able to review the processes and factors that are influencing the use of social media marketing tool. The diffusion of information theory outlines five key stages in the adoption process which include knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. (Rogers, 1983). Knowledge brings awareness of the innovation and understanding it's functions. This is typically the first stage in the DOI, at this point the adopter is aware of the innovation but doesn't have enough information to actually make any decisions so more awareness needs to be made. Persuasion requires forming a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the innovation. Decision is the third stage that occurs at this stage the adopter will measure the advantages and disadvantages based on the information they've received to make a decision to adopt or reject the innovation. Implementation stage is when the adopter put the innovation to use and confirmation is the final stage, adopter will seek reinforcement on the decision and continue with adoption. (Rogers, 1983) (Interaction Design Foundation - IxDF, 2018). By implementing this chosen theoretical framework, the study will apply it to our research topic and examine how SME owners progress through these stages when adopting social media as marketing tool. The theory will also assist in identifying which factors can expedite or delay this process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is to acquire knowledge set a direction for the study. The literature review will critically analyse start off defining what social media is and the uses of it in business, it will then go on to further explore how social media is transforming SME, social media marketing strategies small-medium sized enterprises can use and the implications of using these strategies to their advantage alongside and ethnographic perspective.

Key Words: Social Media, Small–Medium Enterprises (SME), Social Media Marketing (SMM)

2.1 What is social media

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Tufts, n.d.). The term “social media” was coined back in 1994 by Tokyo media company “Matisse” (Jeff, 2010) Social media has been around since the 1990's and has only continued to grow and

provided people including business owners with a new way to build and maintain social networks, create relationships, share information, create and edit content and even participate in social movements; all through a virtual platform according to (Carlota Lorenzo, 2011). (Thomas Aichner, 2021) states that “social media is an umbrella term that describes a variety of online platforms including blogs, business networks, product reviews, collaborative projects, enterprise social networks (SN).” Social media provides a variety platforms for SMEs to utilise and they can be used in different ways depending on the business’ objective. Some well-known social media categories and sites include social networking platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn), Videos (YouTube, TikTok, Twitch), Microblogs (Threads, Tumblr, Pinterest) Reviews (Trustpilot, Tripadvisor, Yelp). At the time of writing Instagram had approximately 1.4 billion monthly active users (Dixon, 2024), TikTok had approximately 1.58 billion monthly users (Backlinko Team, 2024) and Facebook had approximately 3.07 billion monthly users (Shewale, 2024). As of April, the number of social media users was 5.44 billion which amounts to 67.1% of the global population (Ani Petrosyan, 2024). These statistics clearly highlight the popularity of social media which also indicate the tremendous influence these platforms hold. With the continuous increase in number of users that regularly and actively use these social media platforms small – medium business owners would be foolish to not take advantage of this and utilise the platforms to create new business opportunities. The usage of social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc.) has an impact on firms by improving customer relationships, information accessibility, and marketing (Farzana Parveen, 2017).

2.2 Uses of social media

As previously highlighted and discussed in our last section it clear that social media has drastically grown since the 1990’s billions of users actively using various platforms. This might spark a question how can one use social media? Social media can be used in different ways such as. for personal use social media allows you to communicate with peers and relatives, educate yourself on new things and be entertained on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube. On a professional level social media can be used to expand your knowledge in different fields and also professionally engage and network with other professionals in your industry. Small- medium enterprises can use social to interact with your audience, receive customer feedback and grow your brand on different platforms using

marketing techniques some of these innovative marketing techniques include Business to Consumer (B2C) marketing. (Davis, 2024) defines B2C marketing as “the approach businesses take to directly sell products and services to consumers. This method involves utilizing targeted digital campaigns, personalized communication and active social media engagement with a focus on addressing personal needs and interests to effectively drive sales.” SMEs can use social media target their audience and actively engage with consumers. Another way social media can be utilised is for business to business (B2B) marketing. (B., 2023) states “B2B social media marketing is the use of social media platforms to promote products and services to other businesses.” By SMES taking advantage of the uses of social media it provides them with an opportunity to market their products or services. As we seen in our previous section there’s billions of users actively using social media on a day-to day basis SME’s can reach these customers by leveraging the use of social media.

2.3 Social Media Marketing and its Transformation in Business.

The growth of social media has revolutionized how small - medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate. Marketing has transformed the way businesses engage with their audiences in comparison to traditional marketing methods (Semnexus, 2023)According to (Bianchi Constanza, 2015) “social media platforms enable business owners to engage directly with customers, build brand recognition and loyalty.” Before social media came to grow as big as it is today, many businesses used traditional marketing methods. Traditional marketing refers to any type of marketing that uses offline media such as newspaper ads, billboards, radio advertisements and other print ads (Intuit Mailchimp, n.d.). Due to the transformation of social media SMEs are able to use social media marketing strategies to strengthen customer relations, enhance their brand recognition and directly interact with their audience on platforms without having to spend a fortune on marketing and advertisement which is more cost effective for businesses.

2.3.1 Strengthening customer relationships

Social media has altered the way SME’s and customers interact with another. Social media enables businesses to communicate with customers in real time which is needed to form strong relationships between both parties as opposed to having to use radio and newspaper advertisement to engage with consumers. SME’s can now use different platforms to respond to customer queries, receive customer feedback and participate in meaningful conversations.

According to a study by (Choudhury Musfiq Mannan, 2014) , combining social media with customer relationship management aids a brand pay attention to consumers by listening to their opinions and considering their feedback. The transformation of social media allows SMEs to compete more effectively in the digital market sector. Engaging with customers and reviewing their feedback enables SMEs to refine their products and launch new products that align with customer demands. Social media platforms serve as a key tool for innovation and product development for SME's. A small – medium business owner may question how they can strengthen customer relationships through social media to strengthen customer relationships SME's must build trust, offer customer support, loyalty programmes. Social media enables business owners to create and share behind the scenes related content, company values and culture stories doing so makes the business more relatable.

2.3.2 Brand Awareness

Prior to the rise of social media businesses used traditional marketing methods such as poster/billboard ads, direct mails and flyers but with the power of social media allows SMEs to have consistent brand exposure to a wider audience. Brand Awareness in marketing refers to the strength with which any brand is present in a consumer's mind (Ravi Pappu, 2005) SMEs can increase brand awareness by utilising social media marketing by using actively engaging on online, posting organic content can demonstrate the brands commitment (Tuten, 2023)

2.3.3 Direct Communication

Social media enables small – medium sized enterprises to ignore traditional communication barriers and engage directly with target audience and expedites two – way communication between businesses and consumers. Glossier a beauty brand, utilised the social media platform Instagram to create a direct line of communication with its audience. By engaging with customers through post comments, interactive content and direct messages Glossier was able to build a greater community, increasing customer engagement and brand loyalty (Extol, 2024) Customer engagement is fostering and cultivating a relationship between your business and your customers (Policella, 2024). Social media provides SMEs with a platform to showcase their customer service capabilities by actively listening to customer feedback, addressing complaints and resolving issues publicly business owners can prove their dedication to improving customer satisfaction which can enhance their customer reputation and build stronger relationships.

2.4 Utilizing Social Media For SME's: Strategies and Benefits

Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, providing us with a platform to connect with friends, family and even businesses. A LinkedIn survey (Ball, 2014) stated that, social media has gone from being a luxury to a necessity in business yet 76% fail at social media. The biggest reason for the failure is not having a clear strategy and then tying it to business goals and objectives. The report identifies social media as a key marketing tool and the necessity of businesses implementing an effective social media strategy.

(Sutarwala, 2023) highlighted, businesses are now employing social media marketing (SMM) because you just can't do without it given the times. Social media marketing is when a brand or an individual utilises social media websites and platforms to promote a business or a product. It entails producing and publishing content on social media platforms to accomplish marketing and branding objectives. SMM isn't simply about promoting products. It also requires forming a connection with your audience for a greater engagement.

SME's may pose the question what the benefits of are having utilizing social media when they can choose to promote their business by word of mouth or on their website. The answer to this question is reach. A business wants to reach as many customers as possible. In order to maximise this, reach a business must have a presence where customers are hanging out. Increasingly they are hanging out on social networking sites (BRIAN HALLIGAN, 2010)

2.4.1 Impact

Social media allows businesses to engage and network with customers in order to build relationships and attain a better understanding of customers wants and demands, in the contemporary digital landscape small – medium enterprises (SME's) have to leverage social media to stay competitive, reach a wider audience and engage with customers. A research study was carried out by Deloitte in 2011 to investigate the impact of social media on businesses. Deloitte investigated the economic impact of Facebook in the United Kingdom and across Europe. This research found that Facebook had contributed to an overall economic impact of 2.6 billion pounds and had supported 35,200 jobs in the UK. It was also reported that Facebook had contributed to creating a total of 232,000 jobs as well as generating economic growth which estimated at 15.3 billion euro in the context of other European

countries in 2011. This study also pointed out that social media such as Facebook is valuable for small – medium businesses.

2.4.2 Strategies

Not all social media platforms are the same, they can all be used in different ways depending on what the business objectives. Efficient planning for the utilisation of social media should be applied more than just highlighting goals such as customer engagement and establishing expectations. (Donna L Hoffman, 2010) stated “the question is not whether to blog or tweet, but the objectives need to be achieved and which set of tools with their corresponding metrics can best achieve them”. For an SME to utilise social media to benefit in return they would need to identify which platforms would be best to use and then create a strategy that aligns with their objectives. This involves using strategic systematic approaches in order to leverage using social media platforms.

Choosing the best social media platform: Selecting the most effective social media platform is crucial for SME's as different platforms cater to various demographics and types of content. According to a study conducted by, (Bianchi Constanza, 2015) SMEs should align their platform choice with their target audiences' preferences and behaviours to maximize engagement. For example, if a company's goal is to sell a product or service to other companies and professionally network with other business LinkedIn would be a better suited social media platform to use for business to business (B2B) interactions in comparison to another company who's target audience is customer (B2C) a platform such as Instagram would be better suited as they can produce more visual content on this platform.

Creating a content strategy: “A social media strategy is a comprehensive plan that outlines the goals, tactics, content and actions a brand or individual intends to take to achieve a specific marketing objectives using the best social media platforms.” (bose, 2023) A clear content strategy is crucial for maintaining an online presence and interacting with followers. SME's need to organise content and schedule posts that their followers can engage with, it important for them to also come up with diverse content ideas such as videos, infographics, etc. By creating a content strategy for followers to engage with this allows SMEs to build a community online.

Influencer Marketing: The impacts of social media influencers are important aspects of SMM. Influencers are social media celebrities whom advertisers pay to promote products (Crystal, 2016) Utilising influencer marketing through social media can extend SME's reach

and credibility. Small – medium sized businesses can collaborate with influencers that have a good and relevant social media presence to promote their brand to a wider audience. Social media influencers influence potential buyers of a brand or product to assist in its marketing activities (Himmelboim Itai, 2019). Doing so can increase sales and drive more traffic to the businesses page. Daniel Wellington company is a prime example of this, the business was established in 2007 and is best known for selling watches and working with influencers for promotions through their collaborations the brand quickly gains over 3 million followers and became one of the top watch brands in the industry. “Working with social media stars has been observed to build a positive image brand, gaining more customers thus generating further sales” (Tyagi, 2017)

Analysing Performance and Strategy Adaption: Monitoring content performance is important for optimizing social media efforts. SME’s utilizing analytic tools provided by social media platforms to track necessary key metrics such as engagement performance, reach and conversion rates. Trying out posting at different times, diverse content types, and online advertisement can assist in identifying which strategies are most effective.

2.5 Summary

The literature review discussed in this chapter provides us with a foundation to the overall objectives of this study which is identifying why SMEs should leverage the use of social media. The literature review highlighted how social media has grown and evolved tremendously since the 1990’s through this transformation SME’s can now use different platforms to connect with their preferred audience. With the growth of social media SME’s can also implement social media strategies. Previous studies show implementing these strategies and using social media can provide different benefits such as strengthening their customer relationships, build their brand awareness and allow them to directly communicate with their customers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter of the dissertation outlines the research design, and methods selected to explore why SMEs should leverage the use of social media specifically focusing on the utilisation of

qualitative and ethnographic approaches. Assumptions and limitations found in the study are also stated in this chapter.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach for the research design. A qualitative approach involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as personal experience, interview, observational and introspective (Denzin, 2005). A qualitative approach is better suited for investigating experiences that require detailed data and an interpretive approach. Qualitative research is guided when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a literary, flexible style of reporting is applicable. The desire for complex understanding of the issue can only be formed by talking directly with people and allowing them to tell their stories unencumbered by what we expect to find (John W. Creswell, 2013). The research will be conducted through semi-structure interviews with SME owners who actively use social media.

An ethnographic approach will also be used in this research to provide a deeper understanding of how SMEs leverage social media. (Ejimabo, 2015) implies ethnographic approach in the qualitative research design enables and assists the researcher to explain patterns and information learned. Focused ethnography is the most suitable method for the research of this topic as it enabled an examination of the collective work in the sector of small-medium enterprises. This approach allows for in-depth exploration social media usage among SMEs without the lengthy time commitment of traditional ethnography.

Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to analyse the impacts of social media utilization on the growth of small – medium sized enterprises (SMEs), with a deeper focus on how social media strategies can enhance customer engagement, brand recognition and business growth. Our research question focuses on the benefits SMEs can gain from leveraging the use of social media, the research objectives will investigate specific aspects of this broad question. The objective will be broken down into more specific research objectives:

- 1.) To assess the effectiveness of different social media platforms for SMEs

- 2.) To analyse how social media is improving customer engagement for SMEs
- 3.) To assess if social media can contribute to business growth.

Data Collection Methods

(Saunders Nk Mark, 2019) discusses biases amongst researchers and states that “a researcher may allow his or her own subjective view or disposition to get in the way of fairly and accurately recording or interpreting participants responses.” In order for this to be avoided the researcher or interviewers must be sure that “every effort is made to design a data collection effort, create instruments and conduct interviews to allow for minimal biases. (Boyce Crolyn, 2006)”. For the research data was collected through semi-structured interviews and an ethnographic diary. Interviews were conducted with 5 different participants with different backgrounds, geographical locations and industries. The chosen participants all own a small business and use social media which align with study aims. Some of the business owners selected are located in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Three out of the four interviews took place through video call as there was no possibility of conducting it in person and one of the interviews was conducted in person face to face. The semi-structured interview format allowed flexibility which enabled participants to share their experiences, strategies, detailed insights and outcomes related to their use of social media whilst still ensuring key topics that were relevant to the research question were still covered.

As an ethnographer researcher and business owner leveraging social media, I kept a record of diary to document my own personal social media strategy planning, content creation ideas, engagement metrics and feedback to assist with the research. This method provided a reflective and first-hand perspective on the application of social media strategies from my own perspective. Diary entries were being collected between January 2024- May 2024. A couple of entries from the entire diary were selected as they align with themes created from interviews conducted.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from both the interviews and the diary.

“Thematic data is a form of qualitative analysis that involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing you to index

the text into categories and there for establish a framework of thematic ideas about it” (Gibbs, 2007) (Better Evaluation, 2023). The transcript was broken up into codes each time a code was identified the researched noted down the context it was observed in. A brief description of each theme was written up at the end of the document. The transcript was reviewed again to identify codes that may have been missed on the initial reading attempt and to also review theme descriptions. Once the themes were clearly identified the themes were broken down into codes (Identified themes are available in findings and discussion section) to best provide answers to our research questions which aimed to identify why SMEs should utilise social media and the impacts of SMEs utilising social media.

Ethical Considerations

When research ethics is being conducted it is crucial that the research isn’t conducted in a way that could be deceitful or harmful to anyone that may be involved knowingly or unknowingly (Fonseca, 2023). Whilst conducting this research I familiarised myself and the participants with all ethical procedures. Before any interviews could take place interviews all participants were informed details on the research topic and an ethics participant consent form with guidelines was sent to each person to be signed off. All participants signed the forms before interviews began the forms when the stored on a safe USB flash drive stick that only I have access to. During the interviews audio had to be recorded, although this was stated in the participant consent form that each person signed prior to starting the recordings I notified each person of this again and asked verbal consent could be given again, they each individually agreed to allow the meeting to be recorded. Once the interviews were transcribed all scripts were also saved to the USB hard drive. Participants were made aware if they don’t understand anything or would prefer to not answer a question or resign from taking part in the research they could inform me at any point. I did these extra measures despite them already being aware and notified just to remind them in case anyone had a change of mind or perhaps forgot. I ensured I personally followed all ethical guidelines that were applicable to myself, and these were all discusses with my dissertation supervisor.

Assumptions

The assumptions deep rooted in this research include:

1. Participant uses social media to share content.
2. Participant will be honest their response.
3. Participant will answer to the best of their ability.
4. Participants will not answer the interview questions they don't understand
5. A sufficient amount of data will be collected for research validation and analysis.

Limitations

Limitations in a study highlight potential weaknesses that may influence outcomes and conclusions of research (Ross PT, 2019). Limitations considered in this research include:

1. The participant chosen are based in Ireland and the United Kingdom which may not represent SMEs in other countries or regions with different cultural, economic and technological backgrounds limiting geographic scope.
2. Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research. Ensuring the privacy of business owners participating in research and their strategic information could limit the depth of information shared during interviews and diaries.

Chapter 4: Findings Analysis & Discussions

The purpose of this chapter is to show an analysis of and discuss the main findings that were identified during the interviews with business owners and in the ethnographic diaries conducted as part of this study. This section will reveal each theme and any relevant/ significant direct quotations from the interviewees with the aim of addressing the research objectives and its correlation with the background studied in the literature review

Objectives	Themes
1.) To assess the effectiveness of different social media platforms for SMEs	1.) Reach Wider Audience
2.) To analyse how social media is improving customer engagement for SMEs	2.) Customer Engagement
3.) To assess if social media can contribute to business growth.	3.) Business Growth

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4.1 Reach Wider Audience

The interviews were conducted with four participants for the data collection process, Four out of four participants agreed that using social media enabled them to reach a wider audience.

R1: “We launched our business on Instagram first and during covid began to use TikTok. We ere getting lots of attraction so decided to start documenting the journey as we were growing because said they loved watching our journey. TikTok helped us go global, we’ve sold to over 54 countries across the world and it’s thanks to TikTok.

R2: “In my first year I really struggled, I was always posting online but I didn’t know what my audience wanted. When I realised, I had to change my structure, I came up with a strategy to post engaging content targeting my desired audience, I then started to see the growth some of my posts would go viral people and I started getting order from different countries around the world”.

R3: “When I started using social media, I used Instagram and TikTok, but I didn’t have any strategy I’d just post here and there. When I started positing consistently and strategically my engagement and followers started to go up especially on TikTok.

Interviewee asked R3 how her engagement increased impact her business. R3 stated “It really helped me build my clientele the more people that saw my posts I noticed more people wanted to book in.”

R4: “I started writing down content strategies and I’d post consistently; at one point I was posting 10 times in a day. The more I did this some of my posts would go viral and using TikTok helped me reach even more people because anyone can see your posts. I remember I posted a video, and I got 1,500 followers in one night”

The findings from this theme based on all respondents show that social media enables small-medium businesses to reach a wider audience. These findings align with (Tuten, 2023) having an online and active social media presence can increase brand awareness as it allows brands to reach a broader audience. Participants were asked which social media platforms they use the most and they all said Instagram and TikTok they all found these two platforms to be the most popular worldwide. Participants believe leveraging the use of social media platforms helps promote their business, increase their brand awareness and gain exposure to a wider audience. (Kaplan Andreas, 2010) emphasised that social media provides a platform for SMES to share content and interact with audiences pertaining to brand recognition. Increased brand awareness by utilizing social media suggests that small-medium enterprises should implement an effective social media strategy to create engaging content, incorporating targeted advertising such as influences marketing and actively engage with their target audience. The findings based on this theme recommends SMEs to distribute resources towards social media marketing to further enhance their market presence and competitive edge

4.2 Customer Engagement

Following from the discussion social media enabling reaching a wider and global audience participants were asked how social media has impacted their customer engagement.

R1: “We engaged with our customers mostly using social media, On Instagram we post on our stories doing Q&As to see what type of content and products peoples want and like we’ve built such a big community from engaging on Instagram”

Participant 3 also mentioned “we’ve started to get into email marketing to engage with customers, but we mainly use Instagram and TikTok to interact.

R4: “I do lives and story Q&A’s, when I’m releasing new products and stuff, I do polls to get customers opinions and feedback. I like to hear what my clients are thinking”

R1: “I ask for feedback, like if a customer buys a product, I ask them for feedback. I also respond to comments under posts”

R2: “I’ve grown a community on Instagram, and I engage with them through my stories. I also have a close friends Instagram story for my regulars where I share exclusive posts and offers with them”

Participants responses showcase that SMEs leveraging social media can enhance customer engagement. This indicates that social media doesn’t just serve as a key marketing tool but also a method to directly interact and grow relationships with current and future customers. Being able to engage with customers enables SMEs to receive feedback and respond to customer queries.

4.3 Business Growth

Participants were asked if using social media impacted their business growth. All participants stated using social media has contributed to the growth of their business and they’ve had positive and successful impacts.

R4: “My online courses have done so well, the only way I promoted them was posting videos online I planned lots of content before releasing it by the time I brought it out it was very successful. Recently, I posted a random video of me applying short lashes and within a few days all my stock sold out and now I have so many people messaging asking when it is coming back.”

R1: “We wanted to bring out a hair product for men and planned to make it a limited edition because we didn’t know how well it would do since we usually only target women. I recorded a video using it on my grandad and it blew. The video got more than 2 million views, and we launched it at Christmas time, and everything sold out it was a huge successful campaign because now it’s not a limited-edition product we fully stock it”

R1 also mentioned the took a risk bringing out the product “because we didn’t have much male followers, we realised there was a gap in market but didn’t know how to test the market

but from that one post it changed everything now we're working on more products for men's."

R2: "I would say my whole business growth is dedicated to social media, like TikTok, Instagram they've played a big part in growing my brand. I don't think I would've been able to grow my brand to where it is without social media at all.

Similarly to R2 answer R3: stated "social media has helped my brand reach a wider audience, my clients are constantly telling me I found your page of my TikTok or Instagram explore and then I booked. My business wouldn't have grown as much if I didn't use social media.

Additionally, participants were asked what advice would they give to a business owner that has just started using social media and has no idea what to do? R2, R3 and R4 has similar responses and said be consistent. R2 added "Be consistent and keep posting you never know what will blow. The more you post people will see your posts and your audience will continue to grow. R1 mentioned "Have a strategy, know who you're targeting, what's your goal. Having a strategy would really help."

From these responses, we can see participants who are all small-medium business owners feel using social media contributes to business growth.

Findings from the participants response reveal the SMEs were successfully able to achieve business growth by leveraging the use of social media. This growth can also be connected to other factors such as enhanced customer interactions and increased brand recognition. The successful use of social media can be applied to our theoretical framework, the diffusions of innovation by (Rogers, 1983) has five stages knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. Participants responses suggest highlight the importance of having a social media strategy to achieve business growth by using social media. R3 had mentioned when she first started using social media, she didn't use any social media strategy but once she gained more knowledge and implemented a strategy alongside posting consistently, she began to see customer engagement increase. All participants made a strategic decision to invest time and resources into social media marketing. This involved creating content and interacting with customers which lead to an increase in customer engagement, reaching a bigger audience and achieving successful business objectives which contribute to their business growth. This reflects the successful diffusion of social media as an innovation within the SME community.

4.4 Ethnographic Diaries

An ethnographic diary was created during this research which kept notes of detailed observations and reflections on SMEs 'use of social media offering an in-depth perspective on how the researcher utilised social media and business growth.

Diary Entry: January 19th, 2024, I created content posts for both my Instagram and TikTok accounts. I used the analytics from my TikTok platform to see which times would be best to post. Using the analytics and reviewing previous posts enabled me to see when I posted in the

past and the content performed well what times roughly did, I receive the most engagement. 7pm seemed the best time so I posted on both platforms at that time on both platforms. I monitored the engagement on both platforms over a period of a week and noticed that my TikTok post received a good engagement over 3,000 views and 284 likes but my Instagram reel only gained roughly 2,000 views and 137 likes. Upon reviewing my metrics analytics, I realised that they're not the same for both platforms. Although between 7pm=8pm was the best time to post on my TikTok on Instagram my analytics revealed posting between 11am-12pm I usually receive the most engagement. This highlighted a key point that it's important for SMEs to understand different platforms provide different results in terms of using analytics to monitor content performance.

Diary Entry 18th March 2024: I put up an Instagram story announcing to followers I was going to be launching a wig collection and wanted their opinions on what types of units they would like to see in the collection. A question-and-answer box was posted for people to leave some comments. I received over 100 different responses. The engagement with customers not only made them feel valued but it also provided me with more ideas on things I could implement directly from customers' demand. This diary entry highlights customer engagement on social media. By involving customers in the decision-making process, it allows me to build more loyalty and a stronger community with followers which is essential to maintain a high level of customer engagement and customer satisfaction. The reason for using analytics is it helps provide an insight on how each customer engages with posts. For instance, although the post didn't perform as well on Instagram on TikTok customers engaged very well and like the day in a life content post. So, posting this style of content on TikTok rather than Instagram is more beneficial for me.

Diary Entry 14th March 2024: On the week ending 14th May I had 19 clients between Monday – Sunday 14th. Out of the 19 clients 12 of them were new clients that had never booked a service with me before. Each new client was asked during their appointment how did they come across my business, 2 out of 12 clients stated a friend referred them and 10 out of the 12 clients mentioned they came across my page through social media. This diary entry points out posting content on social media and having an online presence can in fact help SMEs reach a wider audience and grow business clientele.

Additional Diary Notes: Posting consistently can impact engagement positively and more negatively. For two weeks in April, I had to take time off working and was not posting on any social media platforms during this time I noticed engagement along with booking decreased. When I started posting content and talking with client through stories, responding to DM's I noticed the engagement picked back up and people started booking more increasing revenue. So, it's important for SME's to continuously make an effort to be active online.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to pose the question why SMEs should leverage the use of social media. Our research shows how using social media as a marketing strategy can be beneficial to SME's growth in different aspects from the observations its evident using social media will assist SME's target and reach a wider audience, interact with customers, increase brand recognition overall contributing to their business growth. TikTok and Instagram were the most used platforms for SMEs in this research and they're known for connecting with

people so small-medium sized enterprises should use them to their advantage to market their product or services. Our study concludes SMEs should leverage the use of social media. It is evident that SME's using social media can benefit in many different ways.

Recommendations

The study was conducted using a qualitative and ethnographic approach for future studies using an alternative research approach such as quantitative and conducting surveys may assist this research and provide a scientific insight to the field when exploring why SMEs should leverage the use of social media. A limitation on this study was interview participants were based in Ireland and the United Kingdom which may not represent SMEs in other countries or regions with different cultural, economic and technological backgrounds limiting geographic scope so to future research on this topic exploring different countries and cultures such as the United States, Australia may reduce the limitations on the study.

For a small-medium sized enterprise leveraging the use of social media for business growth we recommend incorporating a social media marketing strategy to enable them to utilize social media more effectively and receive s more positive outcome in terms of growth.

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