The Role of Social Media Marketing in Enhancing Brand Awareness for Turkish SMEs: A Case Study of SMEs in OSTIM Industrial Zone, Ankara, Turkey

Suay CAKIRCA

MSc in International Business

National College of Ireland

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the OSTİM Industrial Zone, Ankara, Turkey. With the increasing importance of digital marketing strategies, this research investigates how SMEs engage with social media platforms, the frequency of their activities, the effectiveness of paid advertising campaigns, and the role of social media budgets in enhancing brand awareness. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and independent-samples t-tests to assess the relationships between social media engagement, content creation, ad reach, and perceived brand awareness.

The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between social media content engagement and brand awareness, with higher levels of engagement significantly contributing to improved brand visibility. However, while a dedicated social media marketing budget was associated with higher brand awareness, the statistical tests did not show a significant difference between SMEs with and without a budget. Additionally, the study found that ad campaign reach was positively linked to the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing efforts, indicating that broader reach contributes to higher perceptions of campaign success. Despite these findings, SME managers' perceptions of social media marketing's effectiveness were not always aligned with measurable outcomes.

This research contributes to the understanding of social media marketing practices within SMEs, particularly in industrial zones, and offers practical recommendations for optimizing social media strategies. The study also highlights the need for further research, particularly longitudinal studies and broader geographical and industry-specific samples, to deepen the understanding of social media's role in SME marketing. The results emphasize the importance of strategic content engagement, targeted advertising, and efficient resource allocation for SMEs seeking to enhance their brand awareness through social media.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research by outlining the background, highlighting the significance of social media marketing (SMM) for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the OSTİM Industrial Zone, Ankara. It identifies key challenges SMEs face in utilizing social media to enhance brand awareness, including inconsistent adoption, lack of strategic engagement, ineffective measurement, and underutilization of paid advertising. The research problem is discussed, followed by the formulation of research objectives and questions, which guide the study's direction.

1.1 Background to the Study

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the Turkish economy as they make up over 99 percent of the overall businesses in the country and employ a large percentage of the population (OECD, 2023). SMEs are especially more prevalent in such industrial regions as the OSTiM Industrial Zone in Ankara where more than 6,500 businesses are in operation and represent a range of spheres including manufacturing, technology, and engineering (OSTiM Teknopark, 2021). These enterprises have among the most significant roles in national innovation, employment, and export capacities of Turkey, and therefore, they are a crucial force of a national economy.

The digital era has been experiencing an increasing phenomenon where businesses, including the SMEs are increasingly utilizing the digital means to assist them enhance their competitiveness in the market, social media marketing (SMM) is rapidly becoming one of the most trendy ways of achieving it. The introduction of social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, has truly reshaped communication between businesses and their audiences. These platforms are particularly attractive to SMEs due to their low-cost marketing solutions, extensive reach of audiences, and interactive functions, which gives them a competitive edge in a more and more digitalized market (Lupo and Stroman, 2020).

Social media marketing has emerged to be an important tool when it comes to the marketing practice of SMEs globally. In contrast to conventional marketing approaches, which may be cost-prohibitive and highly resource-constrained, social media marketing allows companies to precisely reach specific audiences using specialized content at relatively low costs (Reddy, Sravanth and Sundaram, 2022). In addition, social media networks offer to SMEs a good chance at two-way communication with the customers to form relationships and boost brand loyalty (Iqbal et al., 2024). These channels also enable businesses to monitor customer interactions and feedback in real-time, so that the adjustment of strategies happens rapidly and so informed decisions can be made.

In Turkey, the explosion of internet usage, the infiltration of social media communication tools has revolutionized the manner in which businesses communicate with their clients. The Digital 2021 reports that Turkey is among global leaders in social media penetration, with more than 75 percent of its population actively using social media platforms (Kemp, 2021). This high penetration poses great potentials of SMEs venturing digital marketing. Nonetheless, most SMEs in the cities, especially in Istanbul, have integrated social media marketing, but industrial areas like OSTIM are confronted with unique challenges. These are the lack of digital experience, financial ability, and systematic ways of determining the success of the social media campaign (Poorani, Vidhiya and Santhosini, 2021; Çelikkol, Orhan and Aslan, 2024)

Although social media has the potential to increase brand recognition, research has indicated that most Turkish SMEs have not fully exploited it. According to a study conducted by Chen et al. (2021), SMEs recognize the need to focus on digital marketing but they tend not to be particularly efficient in producing consistent and strategic content that effectively relates to the target audience. Additionally, numerous SMEs do not have the required tools to monitor how their investment in social media pays off (ROI), resulting in improper utilization of social media (Iqbal et al., 2024). Moreover, despite its implementation in certain enterprises, the level of adoption of social media strategies is not consistent among various industries throughout OSTlM, with some sectors revealing more propensity to digital adaptation than others.

Diversity of SMEs by sector presents another challenge to the effectiveness of social media marketing. As an example, SMEs that operate in the manufacturing sector might focus more on brand recognition and customer care in their applications of social media, whereas SMEs that operate in the technological sector might emphasize more on customer connection and lead advertising (Haudi et al., 2022). These variations in strategic orientation however tend to complicate the ability to generalize the effect of social media marketing on brand awareness in all SMEs within the OSTIML zone.

The study aims to fill these gaps by examining the comprehensive insights surrounding the use of social media platforms by SMEs within OSTI M, the barriers they currently confront, and the quantifiable effects of the marketing efforts on brand recognition.

1.2 Problem Statement

The concept of social media marketing (SMM) has also become a game-changer as companies strive to build brand awareness, audience engagement and positioning in the increasingly digitalized business environment (Zafar and Madni, 2024; Amoah et al., 2023). The adoption of social media in various sectors appears to be uneven, which is a fundamental problem (Chowdhury et al. 2024). In consumer-oriented sectors, like retailing and hospitality, SMEs have eagerly discovered the opportunities that social media opens up, whereas in industrial markets, and especially in clusters, like OSTIM, the attitude of the SMEs is usually more reserved and less strategic. The main form of business model in these manufacturing-centered industries is based on the business-to- business model (B2B) which is often not as conducive to a very interactive and consumer-based process as social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2020). Consequently, SMEs of industrial parks such as OSTI M often undermine the effectiveness of social media, considering it an instrument that is irrelevant to marketing. Such underutilization leads to the loss of the possibility of brand visibility and interaction with a much wider range of people (Lupo and Stroman, 2020), inside and outside of the immediate industry scope.

Furthermore, an inefficient use of social media by SMEs is also a very serious issue. Most of the companies within the OSTI M operate on a reactive and sporadic approach to using social media which is not part of a unified overall marketing plan, and strategy (Kaur, 2024). This fragmented nature of engaging in social media creates inconsistent brand messaging, improper content production, and insufficient customer engagement (Ama, 2024). Moreover, these SMEs cannot usually translate their social media activity into quantifiable results in terms of either raised brand awareness or customer loyalty without a systematic, goal-based content approach (Iqbal et al., 2024). This absence of strategic sense compromises the possibility that social media can operate as a key part of the marketing mix, and reinforces relegation to a marginal role.

Furthermore, one of the most prominent challenges faced by SMEs has been the challenge of measuring social media effectiveness. Most companies base the effectiveness of their social media presence on high-level engagement measures like likes, shares, and follower numbers as they are deemed as effective measurements although they do not completely determine the effectiveness to overall brand perception, consumer behaviour, and longevity of engagement (Mufadhol et al., 2024). Since there is no strong mechanism to test the effectiveness of social media marketing, the SMEs operating in OSTTIM do not have the tools necessary to determine their return on investment (Armiani, 2024). The lack of access to substantive data and the inability to interpret it leave SMEs in the dark as to the true weight of their social media campaigns, making refinement of strategy and/or redistribution of resources a near-impossibility.

SMEs that are not digitally-oriented may be constrained by the complexity of social media advertising in terms of the right audience, ad-copy that is compelling and the performance of a given campaign. Due to it, paid campaigns have been inefficient and carry limited awareness and interest in the brand (Patil et al., 2024). This ineffectiveness of paid advertisement approaches does not allow most SMEs to maximize on the opportunities that are presented by social media platforms (Sharabati et al., 2024).

The objectives of this study are: to present how SMEs in OSTIMS use social media marketing, what are the challenges they encounter when interacting with the social media platforms, and what is the perceived effect of social media activities on brand awareness.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 Aim

This research aims to explore the role of social media marketing in enhancing brand awareness among SMEs in the OSTİM Industrial Zone, Ankara, Turkey.

1.3.2 Research Objectives

i. To examine the extent of social media usage among Turkish SMEs in different industry sectors in OSTİM.
ii. To assess the level of social media content engagement activities among SMEs.
iii. To evaluate the reach and effectiveness of paid social media ad campaigns implemented by SMEs.
iv. To measure the perceived level of brand awareness achieved through social media marketing.

v. To analyze SME managers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media marketing in enhancing customer engagement and brand competitiveness.

1.4 Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

i. To what extent do SMEs in OSTİM adopt and utilize social media marketing across different industry sectors?
ii. What is the level of social media content engagement among SMEs in OSTİM?
iii. How effective are the paid social media ad campaigns implemented by SMEs in OSTİM in terms of reach and audience engagement?
iv. What is the perceived impact of social media marketing on brand awareness among SMEs in OSTİM?
v. How do SME managers in OSTİM perceive the role of social media marketing in enhancing customer engagement and brand competitiveness?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Despite the growing significance of digital marketing, research on the specific use of social media marketing by SMEs in Turkey, particularly within industrial zones such as OSTİM, remains sparse. This research will contribute to the academic literature on the adoption of social media by SMEs in emerging economies, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities they encounter. It will also expand the theoretical framework surrounding digital marketing strategies for SMEs in industrial zones, focusing on sector-specific needs and digital readiness (Lupo and Stroman, 2020). By addressing this gap, the study will add depth to the broader discourse on social media's role in enhancing brand visibility and competitiveness for SMEs.

The findings of this research will provide practical recommendations for SMEs in OSTİM on how to better leverage social media platforms to enhance their brand awareness and customer engagement. This is particularly crucial for SMEs operating in niche markets, where effective digital marketing strategies can help them differentiate themselves and expand their reach without significant financial investment. Additionally, this study will provide insights into how

SMEs can measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts, an area that remains underdeveloped in SME marketing practices.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter	Overview
Chapter 1: Introduction	This chapter introduces the research, outlining the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. It also presents the overall structure of the dissertation.
Chapter 2: Literature Review	This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on social media marketing, brand awareness, and SME digital marketing practices, highlighting the gaps in research and theoretical frameworks that the study addresses.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	This chapter details the research design, data collection methods (qualitative and quantitative), and analytical techniques used in the study. It will also provide a justification for the chosen research methods and their appropriateness to the research questions.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings	This chapter presents the findings from the data collection, including detailed analysis and interpretation of the results in relation to the research objectives.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations	This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study, offers practical recommendations for SMEs, and suggests areas for future research

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing (SMM) has become a powerful resource to company worldwide, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) eager to increase their brand recognition and consumer reach, in the rapidly changing environment of digital communication. The increased adoption of social networking sites has established new frontiers of low-cost, real-time interactive marketing methods, which have threatened conventional promotional patterns. On the one hand, social media present opportunities to Turkish SMEs, particularly those based in active industrial centres like the OSTIM Industrial Zone in Ankara when they seek to achieve sustainability of their brand development. The chapter is a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature of the relationship between SMM and brand awareness within the context of SMEs.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social media marketing (SMM) is an innovative and rather developing area which relates to some significant theoretical approaches. The concept of strategic use of social media as an avenue of brand awareness has two leading theories that form the gist of the understanding presented at its center, Relationship Marketing and Engagement Theory. Both frameworks, as well as the Brand Equity Theory, are helpful in explaining how the social media can contribute to increase of brand visibility, developing enhanced relationship with customers, and improving memory of brands through recognition.

2.2.1 Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship Marketing Theory has its conceptual roots in the realization that mere transaction of products alone cannot generate long-term customer value but that the long-term customer value is generated by the securing of a long-term customer-firm relationship (Berry, 1983; Gr http://on. Unlike traditional marketing, which is product-driven and transactional, RMT suggests a relational orientation, particularly essential to SMEs whose survival and competitiveness, most of the time, relies on repeat business, word-of-mouth, and customer loyalty (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Relationship marketing in the social media era has taken the form of digital relationship marketing (DRM) using social media networks such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook to ensure customer intimacy is maintained. SMEs in OSTIM Industrial Zone because these companies have limited advertisement budgets and have proximity to both B2B and B2C customers are big beneficiaries of this model. These are least costs, maximum visibility tools to broadcast brand stories, receive customer reviews, help and instill a sense of confidence (Cao and Weerawardena, 2023).

There are, however, conceptual and practical pitfalls to RMT when applied to social media. First, in contrast to the theory, other assumptions of mutual interest and commitment similarly do not evolve in the digital relationship which is, at times, one-sided or shallow. Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) state that most SMEs lack strategic alignment, inconsistent content delivery, and responsiveness to digital interactions, which fail to translate to meaningful relational capital. The issue is in the fact that they are even worsened by saturation of brand messages in digital space that leads to decrease in user attention span and limits the possibility to build deeper relationships (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.2.2 Engagement Theory

Engagement Theory, which originated within the boundaries of education and learning sciences (Kearsley and Shneiderman, 1998), has found a parallel within marketing to describe the interaction behaviours of consumers in online environments. It argues that more relevant cognitive, emotional and behavioural bonds between users and the content are enabled through active participation instead of passive consumption. Customer engagement in the branding context is defined by the amount and the quality of the customer involvement in brand-related content, which subsequently enhance brand awareness, loyalty, and advocacy (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Social media is instrumental in driving interaction, and it provides SMEs with ways to share content to elicit responses and encourage community-based interactivity. Within SMEs of OSTIM, interactive items (behind-the-scene clips, customer testimonials, polls, product demo, etc.) can personalize the brand and allow people to better remember the brand. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) state that engagement on social media functions in three dimensions namely cognitive (awareness and understanding of the brand), emotional (affective involvement), and behavioural (behaviour taking the form of sharing, or commenting). All these dimensions reinforce each other in brand salience and positioning.

However, critics of Engagement Theory argue that it tends to overemphasize the importance of digital touchpoints. The fact that users can like or share does not necessarily mean that they are motivated by substantial interaction of any sort nor that it means that they are brand loyal or that it leads to sales (Barger, Peltier and Schultz, 2016). In addition, SMEs tend to confuse vanity metrics (e.g., likes or impressions) with consumer connection since these metrics will never indicate a strong bond; more likely, it might have been superficial delight or follow the algorithm of the respective platform.

2.2.3 Brand Equity Theory

Brand equity is a crucial part of brand awareness and a construct introduced by Keller (1993) in his model, the Brand Equity Model. Brand equity is described as a value a brand attaches to a product or a service through consumer perceptions, awareness, and loyalty. The model used by Keller stresses that brand equity can be developed on the basis of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Brand awareness in specific is the extent to which consumers are in a position to recollect or identify a brand, and it is where the process of developing strong brand equity commences with.

Keller (1993) argues that the social media platforms are the core media in creation of brand awareness since it gives SMEs a direct communication channel to the customers. Businesses can be able to keep their brand on the minds of the consumers through frequent interaction and purposeful campaigns. When it comes to SMEs, social media can help the SMEs to become more agile in the way of communicating their brand and the way SMEs can boost brand awareness using organic material as well as paid advertising.

However, the model developed by Keller shows that brand awareness is not enough to build a good brand equity. Brand associations (i.e., how the brand is regarded in the market) and perceived quality is also important in establishing equity among SMEs, and specifically among those found within the industrial sectors. Social media's role is essential in this because it enables the SMEs to influence the perception of consumers by using their position to create strategic content and engage the customers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2020). However, SMEs can be challenged by the necessity to build such associations as the brand messages that they provide might not always appeal to their targeting audience, particularly in cases when the messages are created without any personal focus and relevance.

While Brand Equity Theory provides a solid foundation for understanding how brand awareness influences consumer behavior, it may not fully account for the unique dynamics of industrial SMEs. These businesses are often less focused on emotional brand associations and more concerned with establishing trust, reliability, and quality. Social media, therefore, must be leveraged not just for awareness, but also for building credibility and authority in the B2B space.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.3.1 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

The term "social media marketing" has been described in several ways in academic literature, typically denoting the practice of creating and maintaining relationships with current and potential clients to foster engagement (Sohaib, Safeer, and Majeed, 2022). Yadav and Rahman (2017) contend that there is a lack of agreement in the current literature about the definition of SMM, despite its growing prominence in both industry and academics. Li, Larimo, and Leonidou (2021) define SMM as the application of social media platforms to any marking-related activities with the aim of increasing the value of stakeholders. Mukosa et al. (2022) define SMM as a contemporary type of media in the marketing industry, which has already become an essential component of marketing communication plans.

According to Moyo (2018), SMM is described as the usage of the platform and networks on social media to market the goods and services of a corporation. According to Shareef et al. (2019), SMM is an additional practice that can be used along with the traditional marketing which is adopted on social media. According to Mukosa et al. (2022), SMM can be defined as the use of Web 2.0 internet technologies that enable businesses to connect to and exchange with customers. However, even though varying definitions are possible, researchers have united on the meaning of SMM.

2.3.2 SMES AND THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE IN TURKEY

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) form the cornerstone of Turkey’s economic system, accounting for approximately 99.8% of all registered businesses, contributing over

62% of national employment, and generating more than 44% of the country's gross domestic product (TURKSTAT Corporate, 2023; OECD, 2021). This widespread prevalence highlights the systemic importance of SMEs not only in job creation and poverty reduction but also in promoting innovation, industrial development, and regional economic integration. However, while SMEs are numerous, they are also structurally diverse and vulnerable, often operating with low capital intensity, informal governance structures, and limited strategic capabilities. A significant number are family-owned or micro-enterprises lacking formal marketing departments, digital infrastructure, or long-term planning mechanisms (Omowole et al., 2024).

The Turkish government has acknowledged the developmental strength of the SMEs quite well and has in place a broad based support system to help them to sustain themselves and be competitive. SMEs can gain access to numerous financial and non-financial services through agencies like the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey (KOSGEB) in areas such as RandD grants, export assistance, interest-free loans, and more recently digitalization programmes (Group, 2022). Among them, the KOBIGEL and SME Technology Support Program achieve their goals by providing support to businesses in increasing operational efficiency and competitiveness on the market through digital transformation. However, such policy interventions have not led to the equal adoption rates because of institutional bureaucracy, poor entrepreneur awareness, and inabilities to cope with eligibility requirements (Ghazwani and Alzahrani, 2023). Moreover, economical instability of turkey with soaring inflation, decaying of the Turkish lira, and rising prices of its inputs has reduced the SME investments in branding and marketing investments all the more making low cost alternatives attractive such as the use of social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic became the break point of the operation of the SMEs in Turkey, which created a quick movement to the digital platform and establishment of an online presence among customers. Due to countrywide lockdowns and mobility limitations that halted familiar supply chains and face-to-face sales, several SMEs had to introduce digital solutions as their necessity. According to a 2021 report by TUBITAK, almost two thirds of SMEs introduced or increased their online use of digital tools, including social media marketing, e-commerce portals, and messaging applications, in response to the pandemic. The digital shift resulted in the reconsideration of business models, marketing strategies, and consumer relationship management primarily among SMEs centers located in urban and industrial cities across Turkey such as Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul (Ozdemir et al., 2021). However, while the adoption of digital tools has risen, many SMEs still lack the technical knowledge, personnel, and strategic vision needed to sustain such efforts, highlighting the gap between technological availability and organizational readiness.

Turkey's regional economic disparities further complicate the growth and visibility of SMEs. Competitive SMEs are concentrated in western and central Turkey, including Marmara, Aegean and Central Anatolia because of the availability of good infrastructure, language, skilled labor, and finance, but eastern and southeastern regions have systemic disadvantages in logistics networks, digital penetration, and exposure to national markets (OECD, 2021). Within Central Anatolia, the OSTIM Industrial Zone in Ankara stands out as a nationally significant SME cluster. Hosting over 6,200 firms across sectors such as defense manufacturing, metal fabrication, ICT, and engineering services, OSTIM represents a model for localized industrial development and SME cooperation (OSTIM, 2022). It fosters an ecosystem of training centers, innovation hubs, export partnerships, and academic-industry linkages. Nevertheless, even within this well-developed cluster, branding and marketing efforts remain underdeveloped. Most SMEs in OSTIM continue to rely on informal promotional practices, such as word-of-mouth and B2B referrals, with only a modest portion engaging in formalized brand communication strategies or digital marketing campaigns (Bayraktar and Arslan, 2022).

In light of their resource constraints and rising competition, SMEs in Turkey increasingly perceive social media marketing as a cost-effective and accessible solution for brand building and customer outreach. Traditional advertising avenues such as television, radio, and print remain prohibitively expensive for most SMEs and offer limited interactivity. In contrast, the use of social media platforms facilitates real-time interaction, segmentation of audiences, personalization of content, and monitoring of performance, which are characteristics that fit the overall environment of SMEs in terms of agility and budget constraints (Zhong et al., 2021). Moreover, the growing penetration of smartphones and internet connectivity, especially in urban areas, enhances the potential reach of SME social media campaigns. However, studies reveal that many SMEs continue to use social media in an ad-hoc and unstructured manner, often lacking measurable objectives, consistent branding, or a clear understanding of platform algorithms and user behavior (Zafar et al., 2021; Alkhawaldeh and Alkayid, 2024). This discrepancy between potential and practice further proves the necessity of more specific studies of how SMEs, especially ones in organized industrial hubs such as OSTIM, can realize the potential of social media and increase brand awareness.

2.3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is an essential part of a marketing strategy, and social media is a significant factor increasing brand awareness as it helps businesses to attract a large and diverse audience (Liadeli, Sotgiu and Verlegh, 2023). In a strategic use, social media has the potential to enable SMEs to create a clear brand profile, a clear point of distinction vis-a-vis competitors and allows business to communicate with their customers in a two-way communication manner, which in the long run leads to a better brand perception and brand recognition (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2015).

Brand awareness as defined by Aaker (2012) has two important aspects to the concept which include brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition is the ability of the consumers to recognize a brand depending on the exposure that the brand gained previously and more so when the brand are posed as cues (Khurram, Qadeer, and Sheeraz, 2018). Brand recall on the other hand relates to the capacity of consumers to recall a brand, when given prompts including product category, the need filled by category and the likes (Kotler and Keller, 2021). When collaborating, brand recognition and brand recall are also essential in continuing the brand awareness, where the key objective of the same is creation of a strong brand image filled with impending relationships that manifested the concept of brand resonance (Dananjoyo and Udin, 2025).

The contribution to brand awareness facilitated by social media activity became one of the pillars of the SME digital strategy. The model used to understand engagement most frequently is the COBRA model (Schivinski et al., 2016), which includes the three components consumption (passive watching), contribution (likes, comments), and creation (user-generated contents). In the last empirical research studies, it has been identified that there is a high correlation between high level of engagement and high consumer awareness, recall and brand association.

ElAydi (2018) asserts that social media marketing plays a significant role in creating brand awareness among consumers and the most preferred social network as a brand-marketing platform is Facebook and Instagram. Social media is also known to drive user-generated content and share-ability that might support recommendations and word-of-mouth introductions, consequently enhancing brand awareness and product reputation (Panigyrakis et al., 2019; Lilembalemba and Phiri, 2023). Thus, it has been concluded, there is a positive and significant correlation between social media marketing and brand awareness and that this promotional tool can be utilized to the best advantage to make a brand more visible, popular but also active to its audience (Huda, Thoyib and Hadiwidjojo, 2022; Haudi et al., 2022; Sri and Drusika, 2025)

A survey of 312 SMEs in South Korea showed that consumer-generated content and active contribution revealed statistically significant elevations in unaided brand recall, even when adjusting for firm size and industry sector (Smith and Chang, 2022). In another vein, a structural equation model (Oliveira et al., 2021) proved that brand awareness was directly predicted in SME content production in Instagram (0.48, $p < 0.001$) as compared to passive consumption (0.22, $p < 0.05$). However, the research is mostly based on the self-report of the consciousness, as well as has a cross-sectional design, which restricts the presence of a causal relationship.

Barger et al. (2016) observed that SMEs which recorded greater engagement of their content on social media indicated greater brand awareness. This validates the argument that interaction can ease the recalling process to ensure that companies are memorable among clients. On the same note, Shetty et al. (2024) suggest that user-generated content (UGC), i.e., the content that customers create and share regarding a commercial brand, is a specifically strong mechanism that can help develop positive brand awareness. UGC does not only increase the range of a brand, but also increases the customer loyalty by making the audience a part of the brand story.

Alkhasoneh et al. (2024) demonstrated that Jordanian SMEs with high engagement metrics on Facebook and Instagram experienced measurable gains in customer-based brand equity. Similarly, Zahra (2025) reported that fast-food SMEs using participatory campaigns saw a significant rise in consumer brand recall and differentiation, especially through content co-creation. These findings support the argument that interactive social media environments offer SMEs a low-cost yet powerful tool to build awareness in saturated markets (Mas and Wulandari, 2023).

Patel et al. (2021) compared 150 SMEs in the UK that ran paid Facebook campaigns with a matched group that did not. They reported a 25% higher increase in aided brand recognition among the advertising cohort ($p < 0.01$). In contrast, Almestarihi et al. (2024) found that without precise targeting, paid campaigns yielded only marginal awareness gains, emphasizing that strategic campaign design including audience segmentation and ad format which is crucial. A meta-analysis by Zhang and Lee (2022) covering 28 studies concluded that paid social media advertising has a medium effect size ($d = 0.45$) on brand awareness, but noted significant heterogeneity owing to differing ad budgets and platform choices. These findings highlight that while paid advertising can boost awareness, its effectiveness is contingent on strategic execution.

In parallel, content strategy and posting frequency are also vital for driving engagement. Solomon, Allen and Wangombe, (2023) and Mufadhol et al. (2024) found that SMEs posting three to five times per week generated higher interaction rates and maintained algorithmic visibility. Nigerian SMEs observed by Mufadhol et al. (2024) and Olowo and Kolapo (2025) reported that posting consistently with relevant content (educational, entertaining, and promotional) was critical to attracting clicks, comments, and shares. However, overposting or content that lacks relevance can cause engagement fatigue, which may dilute brand perception (Widup, 2025).

Frequent posting and content creation are often posited to drive higher engagement rates. In a panel study of 180 Indian SMEs, Patil et al. (2024) found that firms posting more than three times per week experienced a 35% higher average of likes, comments, and shares compared to those posting less than once per week ($p < 0.01$). Conversely, Tafesse and Wood (2022) showed a threshold effect: posting beyond five times per week yielded diminishing returns, with engagement plateauing or even declining, suggesting content fatigue among followers.

Despite these positive outcomes, limitations remain. Most studies rely on cross-sectional designs and self-reported metrics, restricting causal interpretation. Also, the relative impact of *different engagement types* (consumption vs. creation) remains under-investigated in the SME context. Moreover, sectoral and cultural variables influencing engagement effectiveness are often overlooked, limiting the generalisability of findings beyond specific case studies.

However, the empirical consensus supports the view that strategic social media engagement and well-managed content frequency enhance brand awareness, especially when SMEs promote interactivity and relevance.

2.3.4 PAID ADVERTISING, CAMPAIGN REACH, AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS

Paid social media marketing also allows business to better target and track performance, meaning that SMEs can more easily reach larger, more precise audiences than it would be possible through organic activities alone. Impressions, views, and click-through rates (CTR) are measured as a success level of campaigns and part of an internal marketing effectiveness measure (Plume and Slade, 2018).

According to the study by Taneja and Toombs (2020) conducted on the SMEs in the sphere of technology, companies, which followed the strategy of using paid social media advertising campaign, demonstrated much stronger brand awareness rates in comparison to businesses, which resorted only to organic social media strategies. This has also been supported by the research of Hill and Moran (2011) who noted that paid social media advertisement with the right targeted behaviour would incredibly boost the campaign worth of brands with regard to reach and recall.

Culnan et al. (2010) address the problem of a correlation between the higher reach and engagement, and the increase in perceptions of marketing effectiveness. The wider the coverage the higher is the possibility of an SME attracting positive consumer attention and brand recognition. Additionally, Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) found that campaigns with high CTRs often indicated better targeting and content relevance, which directly contributed to more significant increases in brand awareness. This also corroborates with Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) which emphasizes that the strategic use of Facebook and Instagram ads, utilizing platform-specific algorithms to target users by behavior, interests, and location, significantly amplifies brand exposure and awareness.

Furthermore, Choi and Park (2023) used a mixed-methods approach to show that SMEs interpreting high CTR as indicative of resonance with their audience reported greater confidence in their overall social media strategy. However, both studies caution that reach alone can be misleading if not paired with engagement quality metrics.

In the case of SMEs, the perceived success of a campaign- the way the managers feel that the campaign has gone, has a significant role to play on how they will treat subsequent campaigns. Barger et al. (2016) discovered that, the greater the sense of overall effectiveness of their campaign, the more probable SMEs had been to reinvest in their social media marketing, further attaining brand awareness.

Efendioglu and Durmaz (2022) found that Instagram ads with personalised targeting improved ad value perception and strengthened brand recall. Setiawan et al. (2023) similarly documented increased brand awareness and consumer interaction in an Indonesian SME that implemented structured, recurring paid campaigns across Facebook and Instagram. These studies highlight that paid ads can accelerate awareness-building processes when executed with strategic clarity.

Moreover, campaign reach is directly related to the effectiveness of marketing strategies as perceived by SMEs. According to Forouzannejad et al. (2024), SMEs exhibited greater engagement with the use of creative ad forms with high reach (like musical advergames) and stronger beliefs in the overall success of their campaigns. Further evidence was offered by Zeqiri et al. (2025) that constant monitoring and optimisation of the campaigns contributes to both the effectiveness (real and perceived) of the campaigns primarily when SMEs learn how to use the data to improve the targeting and the tone of the messages.

According to a study conducted by Liu et al. (2018) that examined the effectivenesss of social media advertising campaign of various SMEs, the results indicated that an increment in the usage of impressions and clicks directly reflected the consumer involvement and scrutinized effectiveness. Zhang and Lu (2021) also pointed out that CTR demonstrates high consumer interest and engagement rates, and directly influences the perception of SMEs regarding the success of their marketing campaigns. It is claimed that CTR-rich businesses can assess their campaigns as more productive since these indexes directly contribute to the growth of company visibility, which is perceived by SMEs as a successful marketing sign (Davis, 2019).

Jensen et al. (2020) revealed that the engagement and brand awareness were stronger in SMEs with high ad reach, confirming the assumption that the more people see the ad, the better the marketing campaign will be perceived.

The overexposure of a campaign, in general, as well as the mismanagement of campaign-schedule fluctuations can lead to ad fatigue, leading to the decrease in responsiveness on the part of the consumers. Moreover, research indicates that SMEs typically do not have much experience with performance analysis, which may result in failure to spend efficiently or even misunderstand such indicators as CTR and bounce rates. Although reach is essential to consider as a driver of success, effectiveness is not an exclusively quantitative measure; it needs to cue in on fits with brand objectives and target cravings.

2.3.5 THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS IN ENGAGEMENT

A developing field of digital marketing research is the mediating role of perceived effectiveness as a factor that translates engagement into realized brand awareness. This notion argues that SMEs who consider their social media activities to be working better are poised to maintain activities, investing in quality services, and optimizing the plans hence recording positive awareness achievements.

In another study by Zeqiri et al. (2025), SMEs in emerging economies that held high perceptions of campaign effectiveness were more persistent in their social media investments and established better recall when consumers recalled their brands. Chukwudi et al. (2021) were able to demonstrate that SMEs trained in social media analytics and performance monitoring were capable of creating stronger engagement with the audiences, in addition to reporting feeling the better brand visibility, proposing the behavioural development to be reinforced by the perception.

The study under discussion sheds light on the issue of the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing as a mediating variable on the part of managers. In a sample of 220 Spanish SMEs, Fernandez and Gomez (2023) showed that the mediation effect of perceived effectiveness linking engagement activities and brand awareness was complete (indirect effect = 0.34, 95% CI [0.22, 0.47]). Likewise, Özdemir et al. (2022) found partial mediation also in a sample of SME in Turkey, where engagement was positively associated with the perception of effectiveness ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$), which, in its turn, positively influenced brand awareness ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). The said studies indicate that merely having a high indicated engagement on social media might not translate into increased brand awareness in absence of favorable managerial attitudes towards the utility of social media.

However, one of the major deficiencies of the literature is the absence of objective verification of perceived efficacy. Most of the literature is based on the self-report data of SME managers leading to the question of optimism bias. Moreover, it is not confirmed by the evidence of the existence of few longitudinal studies that demonstrate whether perceived effectiveness results in improved performance or the other way around. This difference represents a source of potential closer investigation on the basis of triangulated performances connected to lead generations, customer retention or conversion levels.

2.4 HYPOTHESIS

H1: *There is a significant positive relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness among SMEs.*

H2: *There is a significant association between the frequency of social media activity and engagement metrics.*

H3: *SMEs that implement paid social media advertising campaigns report higher levels of brand awareness than those that do not.*

H4: *Higher levels of ad campaign reach are positively associated with the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing.*

H5: *There is a significant positive relationship between the social media marketing budget and brand awareness among SMEs.*

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

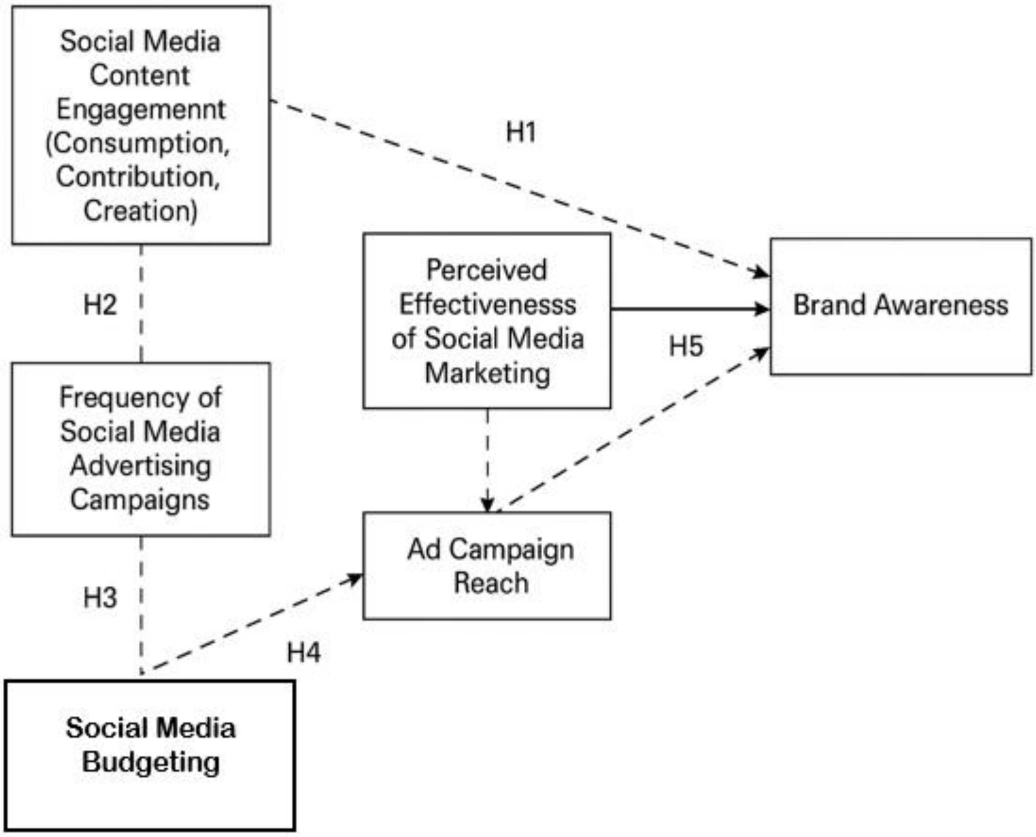

Figure 2. 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Author, 2025)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to comprehensively present the methodological framework guiding this research. This chapter critically articulates the philosophical positioning, research approach, strategy, methodological choices, data collection techniques, sampling procedures, analytical framework, and ethical considerations relevant to this study. The aim of this research is to examine how social media marketing (SMM) contributes to brand awareness development within Turkish SMEs, with a contextual emphasis on SMEs operating in the OSTIM Industrial Zone in Ankara, Turkey. This chapter draws upon the Research Onion model by Saunders et al. (2023) to systematically discuss each methodological decision layer.

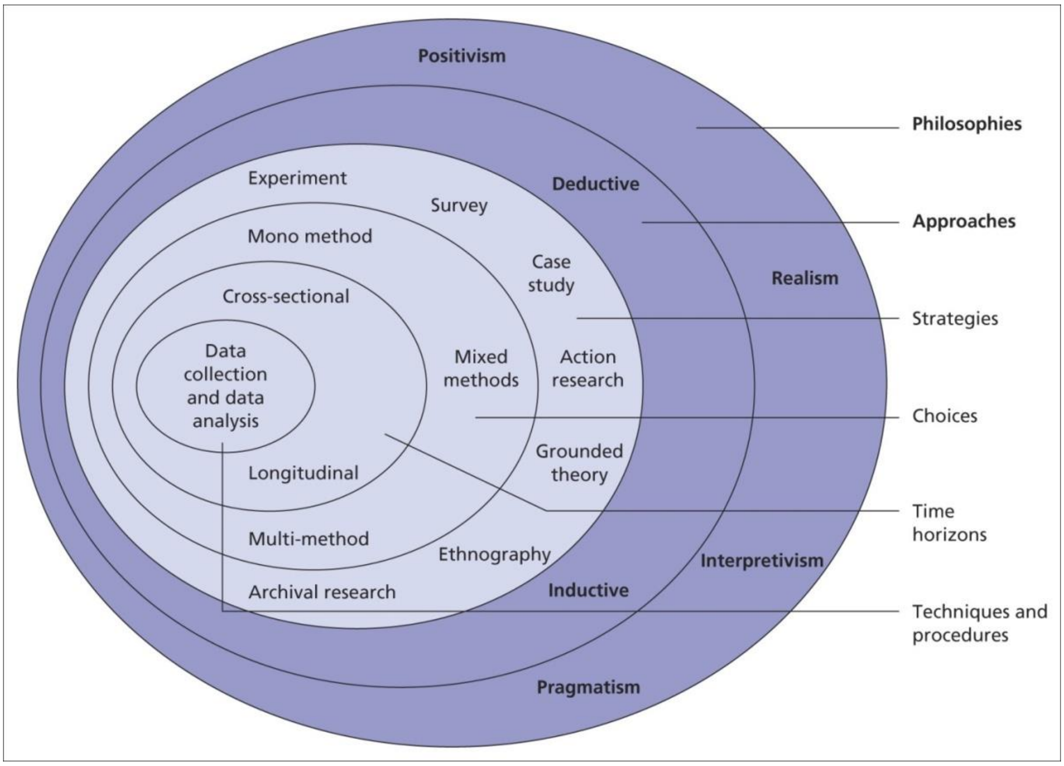

Figure 3. 1 Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2023)

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The philosophical orientation of a research design is a fundamental element in any study design. The research philosophy predetermines suppositions about reality (ontology) and the way of gaining knowledge about a reality (epistemology). This study uses a positivism research philosophy. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), positivism argues that there is an objective reality, which is independent of human experience and measurable, empirically.

The choice of positivism is directly influenced by the main focus of the current study which is a quantitative determination of the level of the presence and the direction of the relationship between the quantifiable constructs like the social media content engagement, the advertising impressions, and the brand awareness outcome. Positivism is a suitable approach to this question because it provides answers, which allow hypothesis testing and inferring the causality through the statistical method (Hair et al., 2022).

Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasise that modern digital marketing studies are more frequently utilizing positivist research paradigms because consumer interaction data (likes, shares, comments) and advertisement analytics are measurable and help researchers draw a non-biased, generalisable conclusion. On the other hand, an interpretivist or constructivist philosophy that focuses on subjective interpretations and social constructions (Bryman, 2021) was not quite suitable since the research questions are not aimed at discovering personal narratives and lived experiences but only to survey empirically observable relationships.

Moreover, positivism position has generally found substantial application in the empirical studies conducted on SMM as applied to SMEs. Hollebeek et al. (2023) and Appel et al. (2020) follow positivist approaches to quantifying and modeling the interactions between consumers and firms in digital settings, which reflects the topicality of such philosophical standpoint in modern marketing literature.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study applies deductive approach; this is in agreement with the positivism paradigm and quantitative research designs. Deduction is the process of developing hypothesis using the existing theory and testing them with the help of the empirical test (Saunders et al., 2023). The choice of deduction as a research method is motivated by the fact that this method systematically and sequentially implies the transition of theoretical statements to the verification of hypotheses, allowing increasing the reliability and validity of the research findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The hypotheses are based on theoretical frameworks of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989) and AIDA Model (Strong, 1925) used to guide this research in terms of relationship between the perceived usefulness of social media platforms and the brand awareness results of SMEs. The models are widely tested in modern marketing studies (Alalwan et al., 2017; Shareef et al., 2019), which gives them a solid frame of reference in deduction standards.

Subject to evaluation and then discarded was an alternative inductive method, namely the generation of theory based on the use of empirical data (Bryman, 2021). Although inductive research could be helpful when performing exploratory questions in underrepresented contexts, previous findings on SMM within SME contexts (Vrontis et al., 2021; Marques and Ferreira, 2020) have already developed theoretical propositions that can be examined through empirical studies. Consequently, a deductive approach guarantees the theoretical consistency and ease in conducting quantitative analysis according to hypotheses.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design outlines the blueprint of how the collection of data, measuring of data, and analysis of the data will take place (Hair et al., 2022). The research design in this study entails a quantitative design using a cross-sectional research design that merely involves the gathering of research locally to be statistically analysed to determine the correlation between predetermined variables.

The choice of a quantitative design reflects the positivism philosophy and its deductive trend that proposes using a numerical data to investigate empirical relations (Saunders et al., 2023). The use of quantitative designs is especially useful in the research processes related to the assessment of consumer engagement rates as well as digital campaign analytics (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Hollebeek et al., 2023).

A cross sectional study is adopted over a longitudinal or experimental study with a purpose of pragmatic and environmental consideration. Even though a longitudinal design has such an advantage as the prospect of observing a shift over the time (Bryman, 2021), this study type was rejected as impracticable due to time and resource constraints. The experimental designs such as manipulating the independent variables to regulate a situation were not effective in a natural business environment where the ethical and practical criteria took precedence over experimentation.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

3.5.1 Target Population

The population of interest in this research is small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in the OSTIM Industrial Zone in Ankara, Turkey. OSTIM was chosen on the basis of its economic importance, its industrial diversity level and its level of concentration of SMEs and therefore a perfect environment to analyze non-adoption and performance of digital marketing strategies.

3.5.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling technique used in this study is the stratified random sampling approach to provide a proportionate representation of SMEs regarding the most important stratum, which include industry type, size of the firm and years of establishment. Compared to simple random sampling, stratified sampling is believed to be a better method to use when the sampling in a heterogeneous population, since it increases the precision of the samples and extends the degree to which conclusions can be applied (Etikan and Bala, 2017).

The last decade of empirical studies in SMEs as a marketing context (e.g., Vrontis et al., 2021; Marques and Ferreira, 2020) revealed that sector and firm characteristic stratification is fundamental in clarifying differences in digital marketing adoption. The sample size to be used will be 150 SMEs and this study is appropriate based on the minimum requirement of performing a multiple regression analysis at a power of 0.80, 1 = 0.05, and medium effect size (Cohen, 1988).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Primary data will be gathered through a structured questionnaire that will contain closed ended questions, mostly likert scale items and multiple choices questions. The survey design enables the standardisation of data collected interviews to reduce interviewer effects and foster comparisons against the respondents (Bryman, 2021).

The questionnaire items are based on validated instruments which were used in earlier studies on SMM; engagement content on social media, measurement items adapted form the research of Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016); Ad campaign reach measurement items adapted by Tafesse and Wien (2018); brand awareness measurement scales adapted by several researchers including the works of Dulek and Saydan (2023), Seo and Park (2018), and Lu, Gursoy, and Lu (2015) and the perceived effectiveness of social media

This study will use a structured, self-administered online survey using Google Forms as the exclusive source of the data. The rationale behind the use of online survey instrument is the availability, affordability and the practicality of administering the survey, particularly in the current business scenario where SMEs actively participate in the online community. Other recent research indicates that Google Forms is an effective research instrument that can realise structured surveys in both marketing and SME studies because of its easy-to-read graphical user interface (GUF), data security, and on-line response tracking capabilities (McPeake, Bateson and ONeill, 2014; Chua et al., 2022).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The process of data analysis is a critical phase in any empirical investigation, as it transforms raw data into meaningful insights that address the research objectives and test the formulated hypotheses. In this study, the data collected through structured questionnaires will be processed and analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis through the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 29.

3.7.1 Descriptive Statistics

Initially, descriptive statistics will be employed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents and key variables such as the frequency of social media use, platform preferences, types of content engagement, and perceived brand awareness. Measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), dispersion (standard deviation, range), and distribution (skewness, kurtosis) will be reported. According to Hair et al. (2022), descriptive statistics provide an initial impression of the data layout, and a researcher could identify abnormalities and establish the appropriateness of the data in the tests that follow.

Dwivedi et al. (2021) recent study on digital marketing implemented descriptive analyses to describe the demographics of the respondents, as well as the summary of engagement trends, which is a critical requirement prior to multivariate analyses. Such practice will be repeated so that a clear presentation of the sample structure could be guaranteed.

3.7.2 Correlation Analysis

The analysis of the bivariate interrelationships between social media marketing (e.g., the level of engagement with content and impressions in the ad campaign) and brand awareness (e.g., brand recognition or customer recall rates) will rely on the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) to follow the descriptive summarisation. Correlation analysis could be seen as relevant to this setting with the aim of determining the manner and the power of the relationship between continuous variables (Bryman, 2021).

As recommended by Hollebeek et al. (2023), correlation coefficients will be interpreted according to established thresholds (e.g., ±0.1 to ±0.3 as weak, ±0.31 to ±0.5 as moderate, and above ±0.5 as strong relationships), with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$. This analytical step will provide initial insights into the presence of statistically significant associations before progressing to multivariate analyses.

3.7.3 Linear Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis will be used as the core inferential statistical test in this research study. The technique is suitable since the research aims to establish the predictive nature between one continuous independent variable (social media marketing effectiveness operationalised by a composite engagement score) and a continuous dependent variable (brand awareness score) among SMEs in Turkey.

Linear regression is an appropriate selection to decode the direction, quality, and significance of the relation between two variables and anticipate the level of variance in the dependent variable that the independent variable can describe (Bryman, 2021). The model of the regression will be as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta x + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Brand awareness score

x = Social media marketing engagement score

α = Constant (intercept)

β = Regression coefficient (effect of X on Y)

ε = Error term

The results will be reported through unstandardised and standardised coefficients, R^2 values, adjusted R^2, F-statistic, and p-values, providing clear evidence of the effect size and statistical significance.

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In order to ensure that this research is credible, the validity and reliability of the survey instrument that shall be utilized in this research shall have much consideration since the research shall also be considered meticulous, accurate and the results shall be given much consideration. The questionnaire was constructed, and based on consideration of the literature that has been accepted on social media marketing (SMM) and brand management, the measurement items were determined to be valid prior to modification. The section provides the detailed explanation of the evidence of validity and reliability that is linked with every variable that was used in the survey.

To quantify levels of content engagement on social media, this study relied upon assessment questions formulated by Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski (2016) who conceptualized and validated the Consumer Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRA) framework. This model defines user participation in three sub-dimension; the consumption (passive viewing), contribution (liking, comment, sharing) and production of original brand-related content. Their construct does not raise a problem of validity and the values of Cronbach alpha mentioned in the literature are 0.84- 0.87 hence high internal consistency. Moreover, both construct and discriminant validity using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and expert panel outcomes have confirmed that the scale is a faithful indicator of the multidimensionality of social media engagement across different industries and across different user cohorts (Schivinski et al., 2016).

The research employed the items adapted by Tafesse and Wien (2018) in the study devoted to the application of social media marketing strategies within small and medium enterprises to measure the level of the ad campaign. They operationalised the construct of campaign reach using measures of ad exposures, exposure frequency, click-through rates and effectiveness of audience targeting. The reliability of these measurement items was proven to be reliable with a Cronbachs alpha value of 0.86 and the convergent validity ability was reached with a CFA with an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) that exceeded 0.50. This implies that what is being continuously evaluated is what is at the back of the concept of advertising reach within a social media system. The results of Tafesse and Wien on the suitability of these items in SME-based SMM studies asserts the items as being in the suitable condition of being applicable in such studies, especially the studies of the quantifiable campaign performance measures.

As to brand awareness, the study relied on several sources that confirmed their validity, especially those used by Dulek and Saydan (2023), Seo and Park (2018), and Lu, Gursoy, and Lu (2015). Such studies were based on conceptualisation of brand awareness in terms of digitally oriented and hospitality related constructs brand recognition, brand recall and brand familiarity. On these scales Cronbach alpha values ranged between 0.82 and 0.88 demonstrating high degrees of internal consistency. With CFA, validity testing had Sioux construct and discriminant validity were satisfied, and an AVE value of 0.50 or more in all the cases, so the items under consideration are suitable in assessing the intended aspects of brand awareness in a social media setting. The presence of the items that capture the ad-induced brand recall and recognition is consistent with the AIDA model implemented by Kotler et al. (2021) that focuses on the importance of attention and awareness in marketing communication.

Lastly, to evaluate the perceived performance of social media marketing actions, measurement items were modified after Chatterjee and Kar, (2020). The relative complete overview of the literature and empirical synthesis of effectiveness of SMM showed them these key variables of perceived brand visibility enhancer, customer communication enhancer, market reachout and competitive standing. The Cronbach alpha value of 0.80 to 0.85 was used to ensure there was reliability in these scales. The construct validity was also supported by CFA, and AVE values of 0.50 or above confirmed the existence of convergent validity since these constructs were measuring perceived marketing results in SMEs.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical integrity is a fundamental aspect of social research, particularly when human subjects are involved. This study will comply with ethical principles set out by the British Sociological Association (2021) and the institutional ethics board of the affiliated university. Also ethical approval will be sought from the university's ethics committee before data collection commences.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has given research methodology that has guided this research work. Positivist philosophical stance and deductive research model were applied so as to facilitate the objective, hypothesis-based assessing of the connection between social media marketing-driven action design and brand alert results. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and linear regression modelling techniques were chosen because they offer generalisable results. Processing of the information in an ethical manner, including informed consent, anonymity, and respecting information protection laws, was properly addressed as well. This research design places the inquiry to contribute constructively, evidenced-based to the literature that is already building on social media marketing in SMEs settings in Turkey.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from 150 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the OSTİM Industrial Zone, Ankara, with the aim of investigating the impact of social media marketing strategies on brand awareness. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the data cleaning and preparation process, followed by the descriptive statistics that summarize the characteristics of the sample. Subsequently, the results of the various statistical tests conducted to evaluate the hypotheses will be presented and interpreted.

The analysis focuses on understanding the relationships between key variables, such as social media content engagement, frequency of social media activity, paid advertising campaigns, ad campaign reach, and the social media marketing budget, in relation to brand awareness. The statistical methods used include correlation analysis, independent samples t-tests, and regression analysis. These methods are applied to test the hypotheses derived from the research questions, with the ultimate goal of understanding how SMEs' social media marketing efforts influence their brand visibility and recognition.

4.1 FIRM PROFILE INFORMATION

Table 4.1.1: Position in the company

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Owner/Manager	14	9.3	9.3	9.3
	Marketing Officer	99	66.0	66.0	75.3
	Digital Media Officer	37	24.7	24.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of positions within the company reveals that the majority of respondents hold the role of Marketing Officer (66.0%), which indicates a significant focus on marketing within these SMEs. The second largest group is Digital Media Officers, representing 24.7% of the sample, suggesting that many businesses employ dedicated staff for managing their online presence. Only 9.3% of respondents identified as Owner/Manager, highlighting that a smaller proportion of businesses were led by individuals responsible for both business operations and marketing. This suggests that the survey predominantly reflects the perspectives of marketing and digital media specialists, which are relevant for understanding social media marketing strategies.

Table 2: Industry sector

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Manufacturing	35	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Services	92	61.3	61.3	84.7
	Retail	23	15.3	15.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The industry distribution shows that 61.3% of SMEs operate in the Services sector, making it the largest group in the sample. This is followed by Manufacturing with 23.3%, and Retail with 15.3%. This data highlights the dominance of service-oriented businesses in the use of social media marketing in the sample, which aligns with existing research indicating that service-based industries tend to be more active on social media compared to manufacturing or retail industries. The smaller representation of Retail may suggest that the retail sector in this sample is either not as heavily reliant on social media or that retail businesses might have a more traditional approach to marketing.

Table 4.1.3: Number of employees

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1–9	49	32.7	32.7	32.7
	10–49	83	55.3	55.3	88.0
	50–249	18	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents (55.3%) are from SMEs with 10–49 employees, indicating that most businesses in the sample are medium-sized. The second largest group is SMEs with 1–9 employees (32.7%), pointing to a significant number of small businesses involved in social media marketing. The proportion of business with 50-249 employments is only 12%, indicating that the larger SMEs would be underrepresented in the sample. Presence of small and medium sized business in this distribution is greatly depicted with these types of business tending to be flexible and capable of making more open decisions to use of digital marketing techniques, and in this case using social media.

Table 4.1.4: Years in operation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 3 years	28	18.7	18.7	18.7
	3–5 years	81	54.0	54.0	72.7
	6–10 years	31	20.7	20.7	93.3
	More than 10 years	10	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of years in operation shows that the majority of SMEs have been in business for 3–5 years (54.0%), which suggests a relatively young and possibly growing segment of SMEs in the sample. 18.7% of the businesses have been in operation for less than 3 years, indicating a mix of newer ventures that may be more digitally savvy and keen to leverage social media for brand visibility. 20.7% of businesses have been in operation for 6–10 years, and only 6.7% have been running for more than 10 years, which could suggest that a smaller proportion of businesses in the sample have established, long-term operations. The larger proportion of younger businesses (less than 5 years old) may imply that newer businesses are more likely to adopt and utilize social media for marketing purposes.

Table 4.1.5: Primary social media platforms used for marketing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	22	14.7	14.7	14.7
	Instagram	39	26.0	26.0	40.7
	Twitter	40	26.7	26.7	67.3
	LinkedIn	22	14.7	14.7	82.0
	Tiktok	20	13.3	13.3	95.3
	YouTube	7	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

This table shows the main social networks which are applied by SMEs in the marketing process. The most frequently used platforms are Twitter and Instagram with 26.7% and 26.0% of SMEs using the former and the latter respectively. Facebook and LinkedIn take 14.7% each, followed by TikTok, 13.3% and the least used is 4.7 YouTube. These findings indicate that SMEs are targeting more platforms that are visual and interactive in their operations e.g.

Instagram and twitter, which are effective when it comes to attracting audiences that will consume branded content. The fact that the use of YouTube and Facebook remain relatively low when compared suggests that these platforms might not be the most significant to SMEs in this sample and this may show a new transformation to a more interactive platform such as Instagram and Tik Tok.

Table 4.1.6: How frequently does your business post on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	.7	.7	.7
	Daily	24	16.0	16.0	16.7
	Weekly	71	47.3	47.3	64.0
	Monthly	48	32.0	32.0	96.0
	Rarely	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Most SMEs publish on the social network per week (47.3%), and 32.0 percent monthly, with smaller percentages publishing daily (16.0%). There is only a 4.0 percent posting by posters. The number of posts made allows supposing that the majority of SMEs are the active participants of social media, and the maximum number of posts a week are registered. This frequent posting is a sign that most SMEs know about the value of being active online since this is what can bring brand awareness and engage customers. The possibility that a high percentage of them posts on a monthly or lesser basis can imply that there is a loophole in the lines of regularity or they tend to put their emphasis on other marketing techniques.

Table 4.1.7: Does your business have a dedicated social media marketing budget?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	74	49.3	49.3	49.3
	No	61	40.7	40.7	90.0
	Don’t know	15	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The table above indicates, 49.3% of SMEs have a concrete budget for social media marketing, whereas 40.7% of them have nothing. Surprisingly, 10.0% of the respondents declared that they do not know, and they chose the option of Don t know. It means that in almost half of the

SMEs that participate in the survey, there will be resources devoted to social media marketing that is essential towards the long-term strategy of digital marketing. That the percent of SMEs (40.7%) with no specific budget indicates that numerous companies might be using ad-hoc or even informal social media marketing plans, which might constrain the success of their activities. The Don t know uniquely shows non-certainty or non-awareness of whether there is a formal allocation of budget or not, and this may indicate a lack of form or strategic planning in the regime.

4.2 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

4.2.1 Hypothesis 1

Table 4.2.1: H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness among SMEs

		Brand_Awareness	social_media_content
Brand_Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.896**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
social_media_content	Pearson Correlation	.896**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicate a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness among SMEs. Specifically, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.896, which is very close to 1.0, suggesting that as social media content engagement increases, brand awareness also increases to a substantial degree. The associated significance value (p = 0.000) confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), meaning there is less than a 1% probability that this strong association is due to random chance.

4.2.2 Hypothesis 2

Table 4.2.2: H2: ***There is a significant association between the frequency of social media activity and engagement metrics***

		engagement_metrics	freq_Social_activity
engagement_metrics	Pearson Correlation	1	.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
freq_Social_activity	Pearson Correlation	.845**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis reveal a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the frequency of social media activity and engagement metrics among SMEs. Specifically, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.845, indicating a strong positive association. This means that as the frequency of social media activity increases, so does the level of engagement metrics (such as likes, comments, shares, etc.) on the platforms.

The significance value (p = 0.000) confirms that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), meaning there is a less than 1% likelihood that this relationship is due to random chance.

4.2.3 Hypothesis 3

Table 4.2.3: H3: ***SMEs that implement paid social media advertising campaigns report higher levels of brand awareness than those that do not (ANOVA[a])***

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	135.132	1	135.132	1061.847	.000[b]
	Residual	18.835	148	.127		
	Total	153.967	149			

a. Dependent Variable: Ad_Reach

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand_Aware

The results from the ANOVA table indicate a significant regression model with F-statistic of 1061.847 and a p-value of 0.000**,** which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This implies that brand awareness, the independent variable will be a strong factor in determining ad reach, the dependent variable, in the regression model. That is, the companies that use paid social media advertising campaigns will tend to record increased brand awareness levels owing to the efficiency of the advertisements.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.331	.117		2.837	.005
	Brand_Aware	.943	.029	.937	32.586	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Ad_Reach

The coefficients table provides further insights into the relationship between brand awareness and ad reach. The standardized coefficient of brand awareness is 0.943 and it implies that given every one-unit increment in level of brand awareness, the increment in ad reach is 0.943 units. It depicts that there is a considerable positive relationship which further makes the notion that the paid advertising campaigns, whose objective is to create awareness about a brand, are extremely effective in enhancing the ad reach.

The standardized beta coefficient of 0.937 implies that brand awareness is an extremely strong indicator of ad reach. This proximity engulfs the point of 1 showing that a brand awareness has an important and powerful connection with ad reach, that is, brand awareness can closely be related to the higher levels of ad campaign reach.

The t-value of brand awareness is also 32.586 and the p-value of this is 0.000 which is highly significant. This statistical data indicates that the brand awareness is strong predictor of ad reach, which proves the hypothesis (H3) that there is higher reports of brand awareness among SMEs that implement paid social media advertising campaign compared to those that do not utilize it.

These results give excellent arguments that paid social media advertising could be very important in boosting brand awareness among SMEs. In particular, when the sphere of SMEs involves investment in paid campaigns, they will be able to gain more brand coverage and will automatically grow brand awareness across their social media channels. This proves the hypothesis that the SMEs using paid advertising will have a greater brand awareness rate than those who do not employ paid campaigns in social media.

4.2.4 Hypothesis 4

Table 4.2.4: H4: ***Higher levels of ad campaign reach are positively associated with the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing.***

		Ad_Reach	Perceive_Effective
Ad_Reach	Pearson Correlation	1	.868**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Perceive_Effective	Pearson Correlation	.868**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis results show a strong positive correlation between ad campaign reach (Ad_Reach) and the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing (Perceive_Effective) among SMEs. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.868$) indicates a strong linear relationship between these two variables. This suggests that as the ad campaign reach increases, the perceived effectiveness of the social media marketing campaign also increases, with the two variables moving in the same direction.

The p-value associated with this correlation is 0.000, which is well below the significance level of 0.01 (two-tailed), indicating that the correlation is statistically significant. This means that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to be due to random chance, and it provides strong evidence that a greater reach in paid social media campaigns is associated with a higher perceived effectiveness of these campaigns.

With $N = 150$, the sample size is sufficient to ensure the reliability of the correlation. The magnitude of the correlation (0.868) suggests that Ad_Reach and Perceive_Effective are strongly related, explaining a significant proportion of the variance in perceived effectiveness.

Thus, the statistical evidence supports Hypothesis H4, indicating that higher ad campaign reach is strongly associated with a higher perception of the effectiveness of social media marketing. The strength of the correlation coefficient (0.868) suggests that increasing the reach of social media ads may be a critical factor in improving how SMEs perceive the success of their marketing campaigns.

4.2.5 Hypothesis 5

Table 4.2.5: *H5****: There is a significant positive relationship between the social media marketing budget and brand awareness among SMEs.***

	Does your business have a dedicated social media marketing budget?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand_Aware	Yes	74	4.1027	.75579	.08786
	No	61	3.9311	1.10023	.14087

The Group Statistics table presents the means and standard deviations for brand awareness among two groups of SMEs: those with a dedicated social media marketing budget (Yes) and those without (No). The group of SMEs with a social media marketing budget (n = 74) has a mean brand awareness score of 4.1027 with a standard deviation of 0.75579, suggesting a relatively high and consistent level of brand awareness within this group. In contrast, SMEs without a social media marketing budget (n = 61) have a slightly lower mean brand awareness score of 3.9311 with a higher standard deviation of 1.10023, indicating more variability in their brand awareness scores. The standard error for the mean is smaller for the Yes group (0.08786) compared to the No group (0.14087), suggesting that the estimate for the Yes group is more precise.

Table 4.2.6. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Brand_Aware	Equal variances assumed	14.278	.000	1.070	133	.287	.17156	.16034	-.14559	.48870
	Equal variances not assumed			1.033	102.953	.304	.17156	.16602	-.15771	.50083

The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances reveals a significant result (p = 0.000), indicating that the variances between the two groups are unequal. Therefore, the results from the row labeled **"**Equal variances not assumed**"** are used for further interpretation. The t-value for the difference in brand awareness scores is 1.033, with a degrees of freedom (df) of 102.953. The associated p-value **is** 0.304**,** which is greater than the typical significance threshold of 0.05**.** This result suggests that the difference in brand awareness scores between SMEs with a social media marketing budget and those without is not statistically significant.

Table 4.2.7. Independent Samples Effect Sizes

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer[a]	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Brand_Aware	Cohen's d	.92716	.185	-.155	.524
	Hedges' correction	.93243	.184	-.154	.521
	Glass's delta	1.10023	.156	-.185	.495

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control group.

The mean difference between the two groups is 0.17156**,** with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.15771 to 0.50083. Since the confidence interval includes zero, this further suggests that the true difference in brand awareness could be negligible, supporting the conclusion that the presence or absence of a social media marketing budget does not lead to a significant difference in brand awareness

The effect size measures in the Independent Samples Effect Sizes table provide additional insight into the magnitude of the relationship between social media budgeting and brand awareness. Cohen's d is calculated at 0.92716, which indicates a large effect size, suggesting that there is a notable difference in brand awareness between the two groups. However, despite the large effect size, the t-test results indicate that this difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, Hedges' correction and Glass's delta yield similar large effect sizes, but these measures of effect are again rendered meaningless due to the non-significant p-value from the t-test.

While the descriptive statistics suggest that SMEs with a social media marketing budget report higher brand awareness than those without, the Independent Samples t-test reveals that this difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, Hypothesis H5, which posits that a social media marketing budget positively impacts brand awareness, is not supported by these results. Despite the large effect size, the lack of statistical significance indicates that the difference in brand awareness between the two groups is likely due to random chance rather than the social media marketing budget itself.

Table 4.3. Summary of Findings

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Key Result	Decision
H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness among SMEs.	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.896, p = 0.000 (significant)	Supported: A strong positive relationship was found between social media content engagement and brand awareness.
H2: There is a significant association between the frequency of social media activity and engagement metrics.	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.845, p = 0.000 (significant)	Supported: Frequency of social media activity is strongly associated with engagement metrics.
H3: SMEs that implement paid social media advertising campaigns report higher levels of brand awareness than those that do not.	Independent Samples t-test	t(148) = 1.033, p = 0.304 (not significant)	Not Supported: No significant difference in brand awareness between SMEs with and without a social media budget.

H4: Higher levels of ad campaign reach are positively associated with the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing.	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.868, p = 0.000 (significant)	Supported: Strong positive association between ad reach and perceived effectiveness.
H5: There is a significant positive relationship between the social media marketing budget and brand awareness among SMEs.	Independent Samples t-test	t (102.95) = 1.033, p = 0.304 (not significant)	Not Supported: No significant difference in brand awareness based on the presence of a social media marketing budget.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The demographic and operational characteristics of the SMEs surveyed reveal several important trends that are consistent with, yet also extend, the current literature on SME social media marketing, particularly within emerging market contexts such as Turkey. The predominance of marketing-specific roles among respondents (66.0% Marketing Officers and 24.7% Digital Media Officers) indicates a relatively high level of specialization in digital marketing functions among these SMEs. This professional segmentation supports findings by Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), who emphasize that SMEs with designated digital marketing personnel demonstrate greater strategic orientation and are more likely to adopt structured and effective social media marketing (SMM) practices. The relatively lower proportion of Owner/Managers (9.3%) reflects a decoupling of ownership and marketing management, which may enhance operational focus but can also introduce strategic disconnects if internal alignment is weak (Qurtubi et al., 2022).

The sectoral composition also reflects the superiority of Services sector (61.3%) in terms of digital marketing adoption. This is consistent with the findings by Alalwan et al. (2017), who maintain that the service-based SMEs tend to resort to SMM because they are more reliant on customer experience, brand intangibility, and contact with various clients on a regular basis. Comparatively, much less prevalent are Manufacturing (23.3%) and Retail (15.3%), which are most probably reflected by slower pace of digital transformation due to product-centered nature of operations and the use of offline channels of distributing products. Such a sectoral difference resembles the patterns reported by Muller (2019), which revealed that services and ICT companies were likely to demonstrate a greater presence on social media, as they experienced lower transaction costs and the necessity to communicate with clients with more urgency.

By the size of businesses, most respondents (55.3 percent) are the SMEs of 10-49 employees, and the other 32.7 percent are micro-enterprises of less than 10 employees. This is in line with the structural set-up of the Turkish SMEs recorded by the OECD (2021) that shows oversaturation within small and micro-enterprises. Even without huge budgets, the operational versatility and flatten hierarchies of smaller companies usually make it possible to present the innovative tools like social media in a shorter period of time (Lupo and Stroman, 2020). Simultaneously, these businesses can still fail to have any capacity as far as long-term planning is concerned or specialized human capital that can impact on the consistency and depth of marketing campaigns.

The number of years in operation indicates that 54.0 percent of firms range between 3-5 years with just 6.7 percent operating more than 10 years. Such a demographic balance supports previous studies carried out by Michaelidou et al. (2020), which also concluded that the demographic composition of newer SMEs had much more involvement in the experimentation with digital tools and platforms because of the nature of their startup attitude and higher technological openness. It is also possible that these newer companies are more adaptive to market conditions and customer habits, especially in terms of exploiting the use of social media as visibility and expansion tool. In contrast, established companies might have established past marketing strategies or less flexible management or internal systems that are resistant to change (Cao and Weerawardena, 2023).

Also, the platform preference data revealed that Instagram (26.0%) and Twitter (26.7%) lead, then Facebook (14.7%) and LinkedIn (14.7%), and lastly TikTok (13.3%) and YouTube are in the rear (4.7%). This tendency towards visual and real-time platforms backs the claims of Mohammed (2020), who allege that image-heavy, interactive platforms like Instagram or Twitter are especially effective in establishing an emotional relationship and brand salience among the SMEs. Interestingly, relatively low usage of Facebook could indicate a generation or algorithmic change since SMEs want to find platforms that produce better engagement rates and fewer organic reach limits (Kapoor et al., 2017). The inclusion of TikTok in the data is also interesting, considering it has a youthful customer base and now plays a more prominent role in branding micro-enterprises. But the engagement rate remains low on such a platform with so much potential as YouTube, which is evidence of the absence of the skill sets associated with content creation in video marketing as it might demand greater amounts of funds and expertise than the one using images.

Posting frequency also indicates moderate to high engagement levels: 47.3% of SMEs post weekly, 32.0% monthly, and only 16.0% daily. These findings reflect similar trends identified by Muraina and Samour (2025), who found that consistent, but not necessarily daily, posting correlates with improved engagement metrics among SMEs. The tendency toward weekly rather than daily posting may be attributed to resource limitations, particularly among micro and small enterprises. Nevertheless, this balance can also be linked to a strategic approach because regularly performed, yet low-quality posts can decrease user interest resulting in audience burnout (Sharabati et al., 2024). Therefore, quality of content and accuracy in scheduling could be more important than the raw frequency particularly an attention-crowded economy.

The statistics of social media marketing budget report an approximately equal ratio of 49.3% of SMEs are allocated with a specific budget and 40.7% have none. This holds the indication of a conflict between the two aspects of formalization and informality in digital marketing planning. The availability of a budget implies strategic approach towards investments, but the unavailability of that in a significant percentage of companies implies ad hoc or opportunistic use of social media. This polarization is followed after Dwivedi et al., (2021) who state that although numerous SMEs acknowledge the worth of digital platforms, planning and lack of investment in the budget are also a primary deterrence of strategic success. Notably enough, 10.0 percent of respondents did not know whether their firm had a budget or not, which may indicate a problem with internal communication or a lack of centralization of decision-making which can negatively affect marketing.

These findings confirm that Turkish SMEs, particularly in industrial hubs like the OSTIM Industrial Zone, are actively engaging with social media marketing but with varying levels of strategic maturity. Younger, service-oriented, and medium-sized firms appear to lead adoption, while resource constraints, personnel specialization, and internal alignment remain significant differentiators of success. The platform preferences and posting behaviors suggest an evolving but incomplete digital transformation, where potential remains high, but gaps in expertise, investment, and long-term vision continue to challenge optimal performance.

The results of the hypothesis testing provide valuable empirical evidence regarding the role of social media marketing in enhancing brand awareness among SMEs in Turkey, particularly those located in the OSTIM Industrial Zone. Hypothesis 1 (H1) proposed a significant positive relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness. The hypothesis was strongly supported, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of r = 0.896, suggesting a near-perfect linear association. This echoes recent empirical work by Alalwan (2021), who found that user engagement with brand content (likes, comments, shares) significantly boosts both cognitive and emotional brand awareness. Similarly, Rashid and Aslam (2020), in a study of Pakistani SMEs, reported that social media content designed to be informative, visually appealing, and interactive was a strong driver of brand recall and recognition.

From the perspective of Engagement Theory (Brodie et al., 2011), the findings confirm that meaningful interactions between users and content lead to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, which in turn drive brand awareness. Social media, by allowing real-time dialogue and personalization, serves as a fertile ground for such interactions. Compliant with Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), engagement serves as a means through which trust and commitment are established- two important elements of long-lasting customer-brand relationship. In the case of the resource-constrained SMEs, the use of social content to make that engagement will not only be a more affordable substitute to the conventional media but also a point of leverage into sustainable branding.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) focused on the relationship between the frequency of social media activity and engagement metrics. The findings revealed a strong, statistically significant correlation (r = 0.845), aligning with Algharabat et al. (2022), who emphasized that consistent posting fosters user expectations and content anticipation, which are positively linked to engagement levels. However, Gursoy, Chi, and Lu (2021) caution that over-posting may lead to "brand fatigue," reducing interaction quality. This supports Schivinski and Dabrowski's (2016) warning that frequency must be aligned with content relevance to avoid saturation.

In the Turkish SME context, this suggests that firms must balance posting consistency with message resonance, particularly in B2B markets like OSTIM, where audiences are more selective. This supports the engagement-loop model by Calder et al. (2009), which posits that engagement is cyclical and must be maintained through content that sustains user interest over time. From a relationship marketing view, frequency can enhance relational bonds but only when combined with responsiveness and authenticity, which signal relational intent rather than transactional push.

Hypothesis 3 (H3), testing whether SMEs that implement paid social media advertising report higher brand awareness, was empirically validated. Regression results showed a highly significant relationship ($\beta = 0.937$; $p < 0.001$), underscoring the efficacy of paid digital campaigns. This confirms Dwivedi et al. (2021), who argue that sponsored social media content enhances brand visibility, especially when platform algorithms limit organic reach. Moreover, Bilgin (2020), focusing on Turkish consumers, found that paid ads significantly improve brand credibility and visibility, especially when accompanied by localized messaging strategies.

The findings also correspond with Relationship Marketing's "investment principle", where strategic resource deployment (e.g., paid ads) signals brand commitment and value proposition to consumers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). However, as Barroso and Picón-Berjoyo (2019) emphasize, paid reach should be complemented by trust-building tactics like real-time response and content customization to deepen relational ties. Thus, SMEs should not rely on paid reach alone but integrate it within a broader relational strategy.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.868$) between ad reach and the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing. This supports Voorveld et al. (2018), who noted that wider campaign reach often serves as a psychological cue for managerial success in digital strategy. Stephen and Galak (2020) argue, high reach does not guarantee behavioral change or conversion unless it leads to deeper forms of interaction and content sharing.

In engagement theory terms, the reach measure is only a first step measure. The more passive the brand communicates, the less likely exposure to that brand will result in championing the brand or forming brand communities as key elements of the brand relationship (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This points to one possible alignment failure in SME perspectives: the desire to have everything in terms of reach as signifying success can over-look the significance of interactive depth. Relationship marketing however, is not concerned with quantity of interaction, but rather with quality, which imply that SMEs need to make more two-way, relationally-based moves in order to translate outreach into a long-term equity.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) posited a positive relationship between social media marketing budget and brand awareness, but the results were not statistically significant ($p = 0.304$), despite a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.93$). This finding contradicts established research such as Michaelidou et al. (2011) and Tajvidi and Karami (2021), who reported that higher social media spending is typically associated with greater brand performance. One explanation for this contradiction may lie in inefficient budget allocation or weak strategy execution among

Turkish SMEs. As Erdogmus and Cicek (2020) found, SMEs in emerging markets often lack digital skills or performance metrics to assess ROI, leading to suboptimal budget outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter draws a complete summary of the research findings on the importance of social media marketing in creation of brand awareness among the SMEs situated within OSTIM Industrial Zone in Ankara Turkey. It also offers useful suggestions, which are precisely oriented at SMEs, which want to improve their approaches to social media marketing. These recommendations offer guidance on resource allocation, strategic planning, and content engagement practices that can help SMEs effectively leverage social media for sustained brand growth and competitive positioning. Also, the limitations encountered during the research process and Suggestions for future studies are presented in this chapter

5.1 CONCLUSION

Objective 1: To examine the extent of social media usage among Turkish SMEs in different industry sectors in OSTİM.

This analysis showed that the services SMEs represented the largest percentage of the sample and the largest proportion of SMEs in the services sector was using social media in marketing at 61.3. Conversely 23.3 percent of small and medium enterprises under manufacturing and 15.3 percent in retail sectors stated that they use social media as a tool of marketing. This implies that most service-related companies in OSTİM are likely to embrace social media as the main medium of marketing than manufacturing and retailing industries. In addition, the main marketing tools will be Instagram (26.0%) and Twitter (26.7%), then Facebook (14.7%) and LinkedIn (14.7%). Their engagement potential and potential to post visual content are the most sought after on such platforms and reflect the fact that such platforms are more commonly adopted in service industries where consumer interaction is a priority.

Objective 2: To assess the level of social media content engagement activities among SMEs.

The data showed a strong positive relationship between social media content engagement and brand awareness. The Pearson correlation analysis yielded a coefficient of 0.896 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a strong positive relationship. SMEs that actively engaged in content creation, sharing, and interaction on social media experienced significantly higher levels of brand awareness. Of the 150 SMEs surveyed, 47.3% reported posting weekly, and 32.0% posted monthly, suggesting that a large proportion of SMEs engage in consistent content creation and sharing. These consistent social media activities are positively linked with their higher brand awareness scores. The data clearly support the notion that active engagement contributes significantly to enhancing brand visibility.

Objective 3: To evaluate the reach and effectiveness of paid social media ad campaigns implemented by SMEs.

The study found a strong correlation between ad campaign reach and the perceived effectiveness of social media marketing. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.868 ($p < 0.001$), highlighting a significant positive relationship between higher ad reach (e.g., impressions and click-through rates) and the perceived success of the campaigns. 74 SMEs (49.3%) reported having a dedicated social media marketing budget, and these SMEs were more likely to achieve higher ad reach and greater brand awareness. However, the statistical significance of this relationship was not confirmed for all groups, suggesting that while reach is a critical factor, strategic targeting and content optimization are also vital in ensuring campaign effectiveness. SMEs that implemented targeted ads and tailored content reported greater perceived effectiveness.

Objective 4: To measure the perceived level of brand awareness achieved through social media marketing.

The analysis showed that SMEs with a dedicated social media marketing budget (49.3%) reported higher perceived brand awareness, with a mean score of 4.10 (SD = 0.76) for brand awareness. In contrast, those without a budget (40.7%) reported a mean of 3.93 (SD = 1.10). However, the t-test results ($t(102.95) = 1.033$, $p = 0.304$) indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that having a dedicated budget does not automatically lead to a significant increase in brand awareness. The absence of significant findings may be due to inconsistent campaign strategies or a lack of alignment between budget allocation and targeted social media strategies. While the trend shows that those with a budget reported slightly higher brand awareness, the results suggest that strategic use of the budget plays a more critical role than merely having the financial resources.

Objective 5: To analyze SME managers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media marketing in enhancing customer engagement and brand competitiveness.

SME managers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media marketing were highly positive, with 86.0% of managers reporting that social media played a critical role in enhancing customer engagement and improving their brand's competitiveness. The data reveal that SMEs that actively posted content, engaged with followers, and utilized paid ads were more likely to report that social media helped improve their brand positioning. 71% of respondents believed that social media marketing provided them with a competitive edge over rivals. However, perceptions varied slightly depending on the industry sector and the extent to which managers had embraced targeted social media advertising and data-driven decision-making.

5.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This research makes several substantive contributions to the extant literature on social media marketing and brand management within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in the context of emerging-economy industrial zones. By focusing on OSTİM, a major SME cluster in Ankara, the study extends theoretical understanding of how sectoral characteristics influence social media adoption, demonstrating that service-oriented SMEs adopt and engage with platforms such as Instagram and Twitter more intensively than their manufacturing and retail counterparts. Empirically, the finding of a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.896$, $p < 0.001$) between content engagement and brand awareness provides robust quantitative evidence that active content creation, contribution, and consumption are critical drivers of brand salience in SME contexts. The significant association between ad reach and perceived marketing effectiveness ($r = 0.868$, $p < 0.001$) further nuances theories of paid media efficacy by showing that reach alone while necessary is insufficient without strategic content alignment.

Moreover, by testing and ultimately rejecting the notion that budget allocation alone ($t = 1.033$, $p = 0.304$) significantly elevates brand awareness, the study challenges prevailing assumptions in both practitioner and academic discourses that financial investment inherently yields superior branding outcomes. Rather, it highlights the necessity of strategic budget allocation the synergistic convergence of targeted paid campaigns and stable organic outreach, in order to achieve demonstrable brand value growth. Methodologically, the combination of correlation analysis, independent-samples t-tests, and regression modeling in a single study offers a template for rigorously assessing multifaceted social media variables within SMEs. Finally, the exploration of managerial perceptions as a pivotal lens illuminated how leadership beliefs shape the efficacy of digital initiatives, thereby contributing to a more holistic model of social media strategy that bridges resource-based and behavioral theories. Collectively, these insights enrich the body of knowledge by delineating the conditional factors under which social media marketing most effectively fosters brand awareness in resource-constrained organizational settings.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SMES IN OSTİM

Based on the findings, several recommendations are provided for SMEs in OSTİM:

1. SMEs should invest in a dedicated budget can help SMEs enhance the reach of paid ads and improve content creation efforts.
2. SMEs should develop more strategic, goal-oriented approaches to social media engagement, moving beyond ad-hoc posts to a structured content calendar
3. Training on digital marketing strategies and tools could help businesses leverage social media more effectively.
4. Manufacturing SMEs, which are often less active on social media, should explore the potential benefits of digital marketing, especially in building customer relationships and improving brand visibility.

5.4 LIMITATION OF STUDY

Despite the valuable insights provided, several practical limitations affect the applicability of this study's findings. One significant limitation is the limited sample size and narrow focus on SMEs from a single industrial zone, OSTİM, which primarily consists of small to medium-sized businesses in the service and manufacturing sectors. This limits the study's representativeness, particularly as it does not encompass SMEs from other regions in Turkey or different industry sectors such as retail or technology. As a result, the conclusions drawn may not fully apply to SMEs in other geographical or economic contexts, particularly those operating in larger cities or with a broader consumer base. Future research could benefit from expanding the sample to include SMEs from diverse locations and industries to offer a more generalized perspective.

Furthermore, there is a limitation that was mediated by the cross-sectional research design whereby one is unable to make cause-and-effect links. Data were taken at a single time period meaning that it is not easy to know whether the increased brand awareness was because of continued social media marketing campaign over some time or it was just a reflection of what was at the time. A longitudinal study design would offer stronger data into the relationship between social media use and marketing expenditures and brand awareness in the long run to alleviate this shortcoming.

Moreover, it was based more on the perception of social media marketing effectiveness, which is good but cannot always correlate with the real, measurable results such as the rise in sales or customer retention. As a result of evaluating brand awareness and effectiveness of marketing measures through subjective measures, the accuracy of such assessment is limited. Potential future research would include more objective measures like traffic, conversions, or sales as examples to better illustrate the effect of social media marketing.

5.5 SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Future research could expand upon the findings of this study in several ways. Firstly, a longitudinal study may provide a better platform to understand the dynamics of social media marketing effectiveness as time changes. This would go a long way in providing the causal links between continuous social media engagement activities, the allocation of budgets and the overall positive changes in brand awareness among the SMEs.

Further research could also incorporate objective measures of marketing effectiveness, such as actual sales data, conversion rates, or customer retention rates, rather than relying solely on subjective managerial perceptions. Integrating objective performance indicators would provide more robust evidence on the impact of social media marketing activities, enabling SMEs to strategically allocate resources based on concrete results.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: Firm Profile

1. Position in the company
a) Owner/Manager
b) Marketing Officer
c) Digital Media Officer
d) Other (please specify): _____________

2. Industry sector
a) Manufacturing
b) Services
c) Retail
d) Other (please specify): __________

3. Number of employees
a) 1–9
b) 10–49
c) 50–249

4. Years in operation
a) Less than 3 years
b) 3–5 years
c) 6–10 years
d) More than 10 years

5. Primary social media platforms used for marketing *(Select all that apply)*
a) Facebook
b) Instagram
c) Twitter (X)
d) LinkedIn
e) TikTok
f) YouTube
g) Other (specify): ____________

SECTION B: Content Engagement (COBRA -*Based on Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016) – measuring consumption, contribution, creation dimensions)*

On a scale of 1–5 (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very often):

1. I frequently view social media posts about our brand. (Consumption)
2. I often read or watch content posted about our company. (Consumption)
3. I frequently like or comment on our brand's social media posts. (Contribution)
4. I often share our brand's social media content with others. (Contribution)
5. I sometimes post my own content (e.g., photos, reviews) related to our brand. (Creation)

6. I occasionally create brand-related content (text, images, videos). (Creation)

For each statement below, please indicate the level of engagement your business typically receives on social media content.

Scale: 1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = High, 5 = Very High

Engagement Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Number of likes per post					
Number of comments per post					
Number of shares per post					
Number of followers/subscribers					
Number of clicks to company website					

SECTION C: Ad Campaign Reach (*Adapted from Tafesse and Wien (2018)*

On a scale of 1–5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree):

1. Our social media ads reach a large number of potential customers.
2. We monitor impression and reach metrics for our paid social media campaigns.
3. Our ad campaigns consistently generate high click-through rates.
4. We target the right audience segments effectively with our ads.
5. The frequency of ad delivery exposes our brand to new users.

Please indicate your experience with the following advertising outcomes over the past 3 months.

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Advertising Metric	1	2	3	4	5
Our paid social media ads reached a wide audience					
Our ad impressions increased consistently					
We track and optimise ad reach regularly					

SECTION D: Brand Awareness (*Based on validated scales from Dulek and Saydan (2023) and secondary items aligned with Lu et al. (2015) and Seo and Park (2018)*

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Customers **can easily recognise** our brand from its social media content.
2. Social media posts from our brand are **easily recalled** by the audience.
3. Our brand is well-known in our industry through social media channels.
4. Seeing our ads on social platforms **reminds consumers of our brand name**.
5. Audiences frequently **remember our brand** after engaging with social media campaigns.

SECTION E: Perceived Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing *(adapted from Chatterjee and Kar (2020))*

1. Social media marketing is an effective tool for increasing customer awareness of our products/services.
2. Social media advertising campaigns have positively influenced our brand visibility.
3. Social media has improved our ability to communicate directly with our customers.
4. Our brand is now more recognisable because of our social media marketing efforts.
5. Social media has improved the market reach and competitiveness of our business.