

Exploring digital marketing strategies in small-sized enterprises in Vietnam

Khanh Thi Ngoc Nguyen¹, Ngoc Thi Nhu Truong^{1*}

¹Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: ngoctn@hufi.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs) play a crucial role in determining the success of an enterprise. However, little research has been conducted on digital marketing strategies for small-sized enterprises in Vietnam. Thus, using a case-study design, the study explores marketing employees' perceptions of digital marketing strategies at a small-sized enterprise, Tan Viet Phap Development Trading Production Joint Stock Company. Four employees (two females and two males) were invited to participate in the in-depth interview. The findings show that the most effective digital marketing strategy is online PR. The participants expressed positive attitudes toward digital marketing strategies and pointed out some challenges related to these strategies. They suggested that the company should emphasize the importance of customers and planning when implementing digital marketing strategies. The study has practical implications for small-sized businesses to profit from available digital marketing strategies and consider important marketing factors to enhance their company's publicity and brand.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Digital Marketing (DM) has become a vital part of the marketing mix, with significant growth and evolution. The competition between domestic and foreign companies in a dynamic market requires domestic enterprises to equip themselves with DM skills for successful business development. These skills, including brand building and customer acquisition, are essential for overall success (Mandal & Joshi, 2017). DM is crucial for understanding, meeting, and satisfying customer needs while enhancing the company's image and trust. Satisfied customers become powerful advocates, reducing marketing costs and effectively communicating the company's image and messages (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeftang, 2017). Moreover, DM is not just about branding; it focuses on creating meaningful user experiences that drive interest and action. Unlike traditional marketing, it aims to engage users in a product's experience (Dimitrios, Ioannis, Angelos, & Nikolaos, 2023).

Cohen (2018) reported that a significant number of Fortune 500 companies, 496 out of 500, actively use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to engage with customers. This trend is also prevalent in Vietnam, where internet users have increased rapidly over the years, and platforms such as Zing Me, Yahoo, Google, and Facebook have gained popularity. The emergence of services like Uber, and Airbnb in 2015 marked the growth of the sharing economy in Vietnam. Social media advertising consistently captures a substantial portion of the country's digital advertising spending, driven by its popularity and the rise of social commerce. The Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of social networking platforms and online news channels for businesses to connect with consumers and build their brands. Due to their

accessibility and affordability, Social Media (SM) emerged as the preferred internet advertising strategy for Vietnamese businesses in 2021. In 2022, Vietnam had around 77 million SM users, with activities like product discovery and brand research ranking among the most common uses.

Many local Vietnamese companies, including traditional organizations, recognize the importance of DM for promoting and branding their businesses (H. T. Nguyen, Nguyen, et al., 2020; Vaculčíková, Tučková, & Nguyen, 2020). A strong brand can benefit companies by influencing consumer choices, boosting employee pride, providing a competitive edge, facilitating business development, and enhancing intangible assets. In the digital age, traditional communication, like print newspapers, faces challenges as readers increasingly prefer DM over small black-and-white ads (Pham, 2019). Marketers and advertisers must adopt a more opportunistic approach due to the positive impact of digital transformation on economic sustainability (Ngo, 2023).

In Vietnam, DM has seen substantial growth in just five years, with the online advertising market projected to grow at a rate of 21.5% from 2020 to 2025 (Advertising Vietnam, 2021). Companies aiming to reach customers and achieve both short-term and long-term goals must incorporate online marketing techniques into their strategies to build their brand, especially in the post-Covid-19 period (Nguyen, 2022). However, despite the popularity of digital marketing, research on its strategies, particularly for small-sized enterprises, is limited in Vietnam (e.g., Vaculčíková et al., 2020). This study focuses on Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs) used by small businesses, using Tan Viet Phap as a case study, and explores employee perceptions and suggestions for improvement. The findings serve as valuable insights for small business leaders, encouraging them to enhance their digitalization practices, utilize DM tools effectively, and replicate successful strategies. Moreover, the study suggests the importance of qualitative research alongside quantitative data collection for a comprehensive understanding of the DM landscape among small-sized businesses in Vietnam.

Based on the research objectives, there are three research questions:

1. What digital marketing strategies does Tan Viet Phap company use?
2. What are the employee's perceptions of the digital marketing strategies at Tan Viet Phap company?
3. What are the employees' suggestions for improving digital marketing strategies at Tan Viet Phap company?

In summary, Digital Marketing (DM) is crucial for establishing a strong online presence and competitiveness, with a focus on brand building, customer acquisition, and meeting customer needs. The Covid-19 pandemic underscored the significance of online channels for engaging consumers, a trend recognized by Vietnamese companies, including traditional organizations, leading to substantial growth in Vietnam's online advertising market. However, comprehensive research on Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs), particularly for small enterprises, is lacking. This study examines small businesses, using Tan Viet Phap (TVP) Company as a case study, to explore employee perceptions and recommendations for improvement. It aims to provide valuable insights for small business leaders and promote effective DMSs while emphasizing the need for qualitative studies in Vietnam. Subsequent sections detail the advantages of DMSs, types of DMSs, and factors influencing their use, and provide a brief introduction to the research site.

2. Literature review

2.1. The advantages of DMSs

Digital marketing, a virtual platform on the Internet, promotes products and connects with customers, utilizing digital technologies and devices (Mishra, 2020). DMSs, involving the Internet, digital TV, smartphones, and wireless communication, help achieve marketing objectives (Li, Zheng Li, He, Ward, & Davies, 2011). Unlike traditional marketing, DM offers clear advantages, allowing easy measurement and in-depth tracking of customer behavior on websites, enhancing future strategies (Wang et al., 2023). Marketers leverage real-time customer data and direct feedback for continuous improvement and optimization. Furthermore, DMSs enable businesses to swiftly reach local or global consumers, addressing market needs and delivering information instantly (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

DM benefits businesses of all sizes with cost-effective, wide-reaching access. Social media platforms create engagement opportunities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), supported by prior studies linking SM use to increased market share (e.g., Borway, Rizal, Khalid, Salam, & Sahimi, 2021; Srinivasan, Bajaj, & Bhanot, 2016) and enhanced brand perception (Barykin et al., 2022). It has profoundly transformed customer outreach outreach as companies balance traditional and complementary approaches to adapt to shifting consumer behavior.

Precise customer targeting across websites is made cost-effective, optimizing campaigns and providing valuable data with tools like Google Analytics, Clicky, HubSpot, Marketing Cloud by Adobe, GoSquared, Moz Moz, and Webtrends, which aid in analyzing customer engagement. A 2021 report on DM trends in Vietnam, based on a survey of 167 businesses, revealed a significant increase in DM investment, climbing from 18% in 2020 to 39% in 2021 (Advertising Vietnam, 2021). Businesses are prioritizing platforms like Facebook, Google Ads, YouTube, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), with some allocating over 50% of their digital budget to Facebook (Advertising Vietnam, 2021).

Businesses benefit from engaging with customers online, as it encourages product usage and purchases. Aligning content creation with customer information needs is essential for customer-centric business performance (Terho, Mero, Siutla, & Jaakkola, 2022). By facilitating customer interaction, participation, and feedback, companies can gather opinions, understand customer desires, and tailor products and services accordingly. Understanding customer engagement is vital, as it correlates with purchasing behavior, such as online browsing (Ha & Lennon, 2010). This interaction fosters a sense of appreciation and excitement among customers, enhancing their preference for the brand and bolstering its reputation.

In summary, DM has become a crucial platform for businesses to promote their products and connect with customers using digital technologies. Compared to traditional marketing, DM offers advantages such as better measurement and tracking of customer behavior, real-time information utilization, and the ability to reach customers locally or globally. Businesses are increasingly investing in DMSs, with SM platforms playing a significant role in customer engagement. DM is cost-effective, measurable, and enables precise targeting of customer segments. Tools like Google Analytics provide valuable data for the optimization and analysis of customer engagement. Businesses can also enhance customer interactions by creating relevant content and encouraging customer participation. Customer engagement activities have a positive impact on purchasing behavior and improve the perception of a brand.

2.2. Types of Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs)

Digital Marketing (DM) is widely adopted across various company types and sizes, with some employing multiple tactics while others have specialists for specific digital channels. The first strategy involves Search Engine Optimization (SEO), widely used in e-commerce (Saura, 2021), to elevate websites to top search engine positions, with a focus on enhancing the customer experience and user engagement (Yalçın & Köse, 2010). Another popular approach is Search Engine Marketing (SEM), which combines SEO and Pay-Per-Click (PPC) and involves investments in paid advertising through systems like Google Adwords (Matosas-López, 2021).

The second strategy is online advertising, a pivotal tool for informing consumers, expediting transactions, and influencing purchasing decisions (Wiktor & Sanak-Kosmowska, 2021). It offers precise customer targeting and interaction, distinguishing it from traditional media. Consumers can access information and make purchases through ads, highlighting the need for top-quality content and user-friendly website design. Online advertisers enjoy diverse targeting options, employing databases for direct marketing, and focusing on businesses, regions, or niche audiences based on consumer behavior and preferences (Golden Communication Group, 2022). Network marketers also monitor user interactions, assessing effectiveness and replacing ads when necessary (Dimitrios et al., 2023).

Email marketing, the third strategy, promotes purchases by nurturing customer relationships, building trust, and enhancing brand recognition (Christina, Fenni, & Roselina, 2019). Despite spam risks due to overuse, it remains valuable due to cost-effectiveness and eco-friendliness, supporting brand growth and sales. It also facilitates customer data management, enhances business operations, and optimizes content through open rate and link click monitoring. Automated emails streamline scheduling for various activities like seasonal sales, advertising, and events.

Another DM strategy is Public Relations (PR) provides fast adaptability in social media (Johnston, 2020). It uses media and press connections to convey product messages or influence target groups (Kumar & Patra, 2017). Online PR is essential for boosting brand visibility, fostering transparency in consumer relationships, and promoting innovation (Alsalamy & Al-Zaman, 2021). Online PR platforms include Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, online newspapers, and blogs, making it a versatile approach for brands looking to establish themselves as industry thought leaders and enhance brand credibility, innovation, leadership, and audience engagement.

Fifthly, mobile marketing leverages smartphones to connect with customers, offering personal, time- and location-sensitive information to promote products, services, and concepts. Mobile devices, like smartphones, serve multiple functions, connecting individuals with the world and the internet. Businesses use mobile media for cost-effective communication and real-time engagement with customers, regardless of their location (Kenton, 2024). The number of mobile phone users has surged to 5.16 billion, with 4.57 billion Internet users, and about 3.81 billion SM users, making it a fertile market for businesses (FPT Digital, 2019).

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a DM strategy that utilizes online platforms for mass communication (Saravanakumar & Suganthalakshmi, 2012). It targets diverse customer segments (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) and utilizes platforms such as Blogs, Facebook, and TikTok to meet customer expectations and revolutionize global marketing practices (Nadda, Dadwal, & Firdous, 2015), effectively promoting behavioral change (Kennedy, 2016). SMM and online Public Relations (PR) both emphasize consumer engagement, but they differ in their approach, activities, and frequency. SMM maintains a consistent brand voice

across platforms, fostering brand loyalty and sharing content. On the other hand, PR campaigns create excitement through periodic activities and specific messages to capture consumer attention and generate further interest.

Intense competition for brand recognition in the customer-controlled SM space has driven businesses to invest in SM (Constantinides, 2014). For Vietnamese marketers, SM usage has gained significant importance in business activities and is especially popular on platforms like Facebook for promoting products, sharing knowledge, and advertising (Ho, Nguyen, Hoang, & Hoang, 2022; Pham & Tran, 2020). Facebook is considered a prime advertising platform for entertainment and consumer services (Nguyen, Jiminez, et al., 2020).

Last but not least, the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in various services, like content creation, chatbots, and search engines, has surged, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. AI is a cutting-edge technology, encompassing solutions for complex problems, cognitive process emulation, and human intelligence replication (Enholm, Papagiannidis, Mikalef, & Krogstie, 2022). Businesses employing AI tools save time, enabling focus on other digital marketing aspects. The ongoing technological evolution of AI holds immense potential, making its integration into digital marketing advisable for fostering innovation and enhancing productivity (Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, Singh, & Suman, 2022).

In summary, DM involves various strategies like SEO, SEM, online advertising, email marketing, PR, mobile marketing, SMM, and AI. These strategies are crucial in the current digital landscape as the number of mobile and internet users increases. Vietnamese marketers favor SM marketing, especially on platforms like Facebook, for advertising and promotion.

2.3. Factors that influence the use of Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs)

Significant technological advancements, such as Internet cable television and smartphones, have greatly influenced the growth of DM (Szyjewski & Fabisiak, 2018). The rapid development of e-commerce has also provided innovative online shopping experiences. Businesses integrate Internet communication and use websites and the Internet for marketing. Electronic payment systems, including smart cards, e-wallets, and mobile payment options, have promoted e-commerce and DM opportunities.

Consumer psychology and behavior have evolved significantly with digital technology, leading to changes in consumer preferences, trust, and information sources. Consumers now rely more on online reviews and peer feedback, and their digital literacy has grown, affecting purchasing patterns (Yang, Markoczy, & Qi, 2007). In addition, planning and legal factors play crucial roles in digital marketing's success. Effective planning schemes are essential for the impact of marketing campaigns. Legal regulations on information security and intellectual property protection are critical elements for building trust and ensuring a stable and efficient digital marketing environment.

While DM offers significant advantages to businesses, its adoption has been limited among small-sized and traditional organizations in Vietnam, primarily due to factors like a lack of IT knowledge among local business owners (Vaculčíková et al., 2020). Small businesses are prompted to embrace online marketing when they are technologically ready (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2023). Privacy concerns, where customers are cautious about sharing personal information, also play a role (Srinivasan et al., 2016). In such cases, customers seek optimal information technology techniques to ensure secure transactions and may trust larger enterprises more than smaller ones. Security and the company's reputation are crucial factors positively influencing customer trust (Tran & Nguyen, 2022).

In summary, technological advancements, e-commerce, and electronic payment systems have propelled digital marketing's growth. Changes in consumer behavior, reliance on online sources and reviews, and factors like planning and the legal system influence the effectiveness of DM. However, small-sized and traditional businesses in Vietnam face adoption challenges due to limited IT knowledge, privacy concerns, and customer trust.

2.4. Brief introduction about the research site

The research was conducted at Tan Viet Phap (TVP) Company, a small-sized development and trading production joint stock company established in 2015. TVP specializes in producing high-quality powdered milk for children and the elderly, using advanced techniques and sourcing raw materials from the Fonterra Group in New Zealand and the DSM Group in Switzerland. They are dedicated to providing the best milk products to Vietnamese households and had a sales office in Ho Chi Minh City since 2015. The company comprises four departments with 23 workers and a young and committed senior management team.

At TVP, the Marketing Department plays a vital role in market analysis, product testing, promotion, and branding, structured into three teams: Planning, Content, and Technical. The Planning Team handles market research, strategic planning, and communication strategies. The Content Team deals with content creation, encompassing Facebook and website articles, SEO, SEM, video editing, and graphic design. The Technical Team manages technical aspects like Facebook Ads, Google Ads, SEO optimization, and website enhancement. TVP is committed to quality, innovation, and customer-centricity to excel in the competitive dairy market. Their vision is to be a top powdered milk manufacturer in Vietnam, symbolizing trust and quality. They emphasize the importance of online marketing in the digital age. Research and development of marketing strategies, especially online marketing, are essential to stay competitive.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of information technology and e-commerce, research and development of marketing strategies, especially online marketing, are essential for businesses to progress and enhance their standing. While many businesses aspire to build their brand and boost product consumption, achieving these goals is challenging. Developing an effective online marketing strategy requires thorough scientific research and investigation. This chapter's literature review offers an overview of digital marketing and highlights the factors influencing the adoption of online marketing technology by businesses. It also briefly outlines how TVP utilizes online marketing strategies to promote its dairy products.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Four outstanding employees from TVP's Marketing Department in Ho Chi Minh City were interviewed. They were chosen based on their excellent performance, long-term experience, and a minimum of one year in the marketing field. The participants included two females (aged 22 and 33) and two males (aged 28 and 26). Confidentiality was maintained, and all participants signed informed consent forms. Their experience in TVP's DM department ranged from one to seven years. Demographic details are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

Participants' pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Years of working experience at Tan Viet Phap	Roles and responsibilities in the marketing department
Ho	Female	22	1.5	Data Analyst: data analysis, report writing, examining brand and social issues, and presenting data using tables, charts, maps, and other suitable formats.
Ca	Male	28	5	Content Staff: creating articles, photo design and editing, video editing, monitoring content marketing metrics, analyzing performance, and researching customer insights to enhance effectiveness.
Gia	Female	33	7	The SEO staff: executing the SEO process, evaluating keywords, conducting website audits, and assessing competitor strategies.
Huy	Male	26	3.5	Designer: handling customer inquiries, staying updated on market trends, creating logos and visual content, and maintaining the company's brand image and recognition.

3.2. Data collection procedure

The study was conducted at TVP's marketing office from September 09 to November 12, 2022. Four employees were interviewed individually, each lasting 15 - 20 minutes and covering ten questions. The first part gathered personal information, while the second part focused on DM strategy usage, effectiveness perceptions, and improvement suggestions. These questions aimed to answer the research questions regarding TVP's DM strategy usage, employees' perceptions, and suggestions for improvement. Relying on internal employees for recommendations is valuable due to their deep understanding of the company and its customers.

3.3. Research data analysis

Recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Inductive content analysis, utilizing iterative coding, was employed for data analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Codes were developed by the researcher based on the dataset during coding and refined through document and transcript comparisons (Creswell, 2007). The analysis followed these steps: dataset familiarization, identifying larger meaning units, developing subcategories and detailed codes, refining subcategories, synthesizing them, and interpreting complete categories (Vears & Gillam, 2022). The process is detailed in the table below.

Table 2

Steps of data analysis

Steps	Activity
Step 1: Initial reading of text data	The researchers thoroughly reviewed and understood the gathered data, including its themes and content.
Step 2: Identify specific text segments related to objectives	The researchers identified relevant segments connected with the research objectives.
Step 3: Label the segments of text to create categories	The researchers coded the text, identifying segments to be placed into emerging categories.
Step 4: Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	The researchers reduced overlapped codes and removed redundant codes or categories to create a small number of categories.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. DMSs Tan Viet Phap company uses

The findings from the interview indicate that DMSs serve as the foundation for the promotion and execution of the company's marketing plans. Four respondents confirmed that they used many DMSs, such as SEO, SEM, email marketing, content marketing, Online PR, and mobile marketing. However, SEO, SEM, and Online PR strategies are the most frequently used.

With smart uses and functions, DMSs like SEO, email marketing, and content marketing always bring me convenience when using them. (Ms. Ho)

SEM, SEO, Online PR. (Mr. Ca)

I often use these DMSs: Mobile marketing, Email marketing, SEO, and SEM... as a means to be able to solve digital problems faster and more efficiently. (Ms. Gia)

Online PR, SEO, SEM (Mr. Huy)

Participants explained the implementation of these strategies in detail. Ms. Ho, for instance, described using Google Keywords Planner and Google Trends to find popular keywords. After selecting keywords, they reviewed and analyzed the website's structure to optimize SEO. This included evaluating the rankings of dairy-related keywords on search engine result pages, assessing the likelihood of achieving top positions, and examining website content and internal links.

The company first researched and analyzed keywords related to the dairy products of TVP company, for example, "Powdered milk using production technology from New Zealand"...Then Google Keywords Planner and Google Trends are used to analyze and select searchable keywords for the website. When having content, the next thing is to check and analyze the website because a good web structure makes SEO effective. Then we review the ranking of the company's dairy-related keywords on the search engine page and evaluate how likely it is to top, website content, and internal links. (Ms. Ho)

Ms. Ho also mentioned customer-focused content creation and on-page optimization to improve search engine friendliness such as creating appropriate tags for headings and product images and optimizing page loading speed. She stressed the importance of building links in articles to engage consumers and that the website undergoes regular monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment, taking into account factors like changing keyword rankings, website traffic, and error resolution.

Build content for the website that answers the questions that customers need to find... Next, on-page optimization makes the website more search engine friendly by creating tags for the opening, product images..., page loading speed. Building links in articles from one website to another leads to links back and forth to make consumers learn and be more curious about the company's dairy products... After completing the website, the last step is to check, monitor, and evaluate its effectiveness. (Ms. Ho)

Another employee, Mr. Ca discussed SEM, highlighting the use of specific targets and PPC advertising with Google Ads to improve Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) rankings. Relevant keywords, like "Healthy New Zealand Technology Milk Powder," are essential. He also noted that SEM results may not be immediate, necessitating ongoing observation and evaluation.

The marketing team first needs to set a clear target for the company's main product line, ...which makes consumers find our brand ad on a SERP...The company chooses the most

popular PPC today with a high number of users on the Google Ads platform...To have a successful PPC, we must search for keywords suitable for dairy products in this PPC campaign, for example, "Healthy New Zealand Technology Milk Powder" ...After completion, it takes some time to observe and evaluate because the effectiveness of SEM is not immediate. (Mr. Ca)

Regarding online PR, Ms. Gia discussed TVP's utilization of this strategy primarily through popular social networking platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. The company creates engaging content through review articles or video blogs to promote its dairy products. To effectively reach potential customers through online PR, TVP has chosen to collaborate with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in the nutrition and milk industry. This collaboration involves additional investment, prompting the company to conduct careful surveys and evaluations of each completed campaign to monitor its effectiveness and better understand the audience's needs.

Online PR is used by approaching social networking platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, with content that can be a review article about the company's dairy products or a video blog. Most of the companies initially built their channels and pages, but the amount of interaction did not reach many customers. Thus, the company contacted many KOLs related to nutrition and milk...The company always surveys and evaluates each mission more meticulously and rigorously to monitor the effectiveness to understand the audience and customer needs. (Ms. Gia)

In short, participants mentioned that TVP employed a variety of DMSs. This finding is consistent with the reports from previous studies about the popularity of DM in e-commerce, such as SEO (e.g., Saura, 2021), SEM (e.g., Abou Nabout, 2015), online advertising (e.g., Wiktor & Sanak-Kosmowska, 2021), email marketing (e.g., Christina et al., 2019), online PR (e.g., Alsalami & Al-Zaman, 2021), and mobile marketing (e.g., Kenton, 2024). The small-sized enterprise, TVP seems to favor online PR over other types of DMSs.

4.2. Employees' Perceptions of Tan Viet Phap Company's Digital Marketing Strategies (DMSs)

Effective

The participants expressed their positive perceptions of the effectiveness of DMSs based on their specific experiences and examples. They shared instances where these strategies have yielded successful outcomes for the company. The participants clarified that the DMSs currently being implemented by the company are well-suited because they have been thoroughly tested and proven effective before their application.

I feel all strategies currently used are very good and clear. (Ms. Ho)

When applied, a specific strategy has to undergo screening and experimentation. I feel these currently used strategies are most suitable. (Ms. Gia)

The participants highlighted the effectiveness of DMSs, with Ms. Ho noting improved website visibility through SEO, leading to higher organic traffic and conversions. The participants emphasized that online PR played a crucial role in generating benefits for the company by attracting attention, building the brand image, and connecting with customers effectively. Ms. Gia explained that its benefits regarding customer interaction and brand awareness are significant. As a result, online PR remains consistently incorporated into Tan Viet Phap's DM efforts.

I feel the most realistic is online PR. (Mr. Ca)

Online PR is very effective. It attracts attention and builds brand image. (Ms. Gia)

I think online PR is effective because most of the customers who come to us are connected and contacted. (Mr. Huy)

The effect online PR brings is quite good in interacting and approaching customers very well to create brand awareness, so until now online PR is still utilized. (Ms. Gia)

Challenging

While the participants recognized the benefits of digital marketing, they also discussed the challenges associated with its implementation. Limited internet access for certain customer segments, particularly the elderly, was identified as a challenge in reaching and targeting these customers effectively. The participants suggested that relying solely on DM might not be sufficient to reach this specific group, and additional strategies, such as traditional marketing methods, could be considered.

It is limited access to the Internet for many customers, especially the elderly, who do not learn to use the Internet. Thus, if we use DM one hundred percent for our marketing campaigns, we cannot reach these customers. (Ms. Gia)

Gaining customers' trust was another challenge raised by the participants. They highlighted the importance of building credibility and addressing customer concerns to establish trust in the online marketplace.

Making customers feel secure to use products online is challenging. (Mr. Ca)

Another challenge mentioned by one participant, Ms. Gia is related to performing a comprehensive evaluation of the expenses linked to online PR. Ms. Gia explained that even though the company is small or medium-sized, it is crucial to conduct a thorough assessment of the costs associated with utilizing an online PR strategy.

Although this is only a small and medium-sized business, the use of online PR methods needs a more thorough assessment of the costs that the company has to spend. (Ms. Gia)

Accurately measuring the success of DM campaigns was also discussed as a challenge. The participants highlighted common errors observed in the application of digital marketing, such as a lack of planning among marketing employees, including excessive messages in publications, and occasional content duplication from other websites.

Sometimes, the use of DMSs has not been carefully and effectively planned and lacks a clear goal on what the business wants to achieve. (Mr. Huy)

I think putting too many messages into the article. (Ms. Hong)

We can easily see that copying content is quite dense nowadays. (Mr. Ca)

An additional challenge involves neglecting to educate customers and failing to offer them sufficient information and solutions for the products. Ms. Gia mentioned that the company's enthusiasm for marketing sometimes causes them to forget the importance of educating customers.

There is a mistake that we usually don't pay attention. We are so passionate about marketing that we forget to educate customers. (Ms. Gia)

Overall, the participants had a positive perception regarding the effectiveness of DMSs based on their specific experiences. They mentioned many benefits of DMSs, congruent with the literature, such as promoting products and services (e.g., Mishra, 2020) and tracking customer behaviors (e.g., Wang et al., 2023), and connecting with customers (e.g., Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, Rizvanović, Zutshi, Grilo, & Nodehi, 2023), and centering on customers (e.g., Terho et al., 2022). The participants also discussed challenges in implementing digital marketing, e.g., limited internet access for certain customer segments. Previously Vaculčíková et al. (2020) pointed out a common reason for the hesitation of small-sized Vietnamese businesses in adopting online marketing is the lack of IT knowledge among Vietnamese owners. Thus, it seems that technology readiness is not only an issue that local business owners face but also a challenge for some customer segments. However, technology readiness plays a crucial role in motivating businesses to engage in online marketing practices (P. H. Nguyen et al., 2023).

Additionally, the need to gain customers' trust was identified as a challenge. This result was congruent with Srinivasan et al.'s (2016) report that privacy concerns contribute to the reluctance of customers to trust small companies with their personal information, leading them to have more confidence in larger enterprises. Privacy concerns were also the reason for the lack of the use of DMSs in many local Vietnamese businesses (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Other challenges involve accurately measuring marketing campaign success and evaluating the costs associated with online PR. The participants also mentioned other challenges caused by a lack of planning, excessive messages in publications, content duplication, and failure to educate customers.

4.3. Tan Viet Phap employees' suggestions for improving digital marketing

Participants stressed the importance of customer-centric DMSs in building trust and ensuring security and information transparency. Suggested solutions include providing clear and transparent information, prioritizing data privacy and security, and offering reliable customer support. By implementing these strategies, the company can build customer trust and ensure that customers feel secure and well-informed about the products.

I think we should focus on target customers. (Ms. Hong)

We should take care of customers, and keep their information secure ... It not only protects consumers but also keeps essential business data. (Mr. Ca)

Some participants underscored the need for a comprehensive marketing plan, ongoing evaluation of goals and strategies, a strong company image, and customer connections. They stressed the importance of thorough market study, analysis, and accurate planning for marketing efficiency.

When launching a new campaign, we must have a detailed plan... We must constantly evaluate tactics for a better and more effective marketing strategy. (Ms. Gia)

I think we should build a solid company image and create a relationship channel with customers, then carefully study the current market, analyze and plan correctly to achieve high efficiency... We must accurately measure if the company achieves its goal when launching a campaign. (Mr. Huy)

Besides, Ms. Gia noted that the company's marketing enthusiasm can overshadow the importance of educating customers. To succeed, it is crucial to provide customers with the necessary product information and solutions.

We are so passionate about marketing that we forget to educate customers...To succeed in marketing, we must provide them with the information and solutions they need for our products. (Ms. Gia)

Overall, the study found that TVP Company employs several DMSs, notably SEO, SEM, online PR, email marketing, content marketing, and mobile marketing. SEO, SEM, and online PR are the most common strategies used. Participants explained their implementation, such as keyword research and collaborating with KOLs for online PR. They viewed these strategies as effective for improving website visibility and customer engagement, as well as enhancing the company's brand image. Challenges in implementing DM were also identified, including limited internet access, building customer trust, measuring campaign success, cost evaluation for online PR, lack of planning, excessive messaging, content duplication, and inadequate customer education. Participants recommended customer-centric strategies focused on security, comprehensive product information, and reliable customer support. They emphasized building strong customer relationships, a comprehensive marketing plan, continuous evaluation, and image investment. Clear and transparent information, data privacy, and customer education were emphasized to foster trust and ensure customers feel secure and informed. In conclusion, participants recognized DMSs' effectiveness but stressed addressing challenges and adopting customer-centric approaches to enhance TVP's DM efforts.

5. Implications

To increase the effectiveness of a marketing campaign, TVP company needs to focus on the four steps: analysis, goal setting, planning, measuring, and adjusting. In terms of analysis, the company can follow the model commonly used in customer research, 5W1H, to ask such questions as Who is the decision maker for using DMSs? What information are online customers interested in? Why do online customers want to use the service or product? When do online customers need the product? Where do customers navigate in the online environment to buy a product? How does the DM strategy help the customer decide to buy the products?

Regarding goal-setting, there are two main communication objectives: branding and conveying sales information. Branding may enhance the conversion rate, but for small businesses like TVP, it is not a short-term priority, as customer-centricity is their primary focus. Instead, TVP should categorize customers by their technological awareness, age, and needs, tailoring marketing plans accordingly. Traditional marketing channels like TV commercials and face-to-face marketing can be used for Gen X customers less familiar with digital platforms. For Gen Y customers, surveys can gather data on their preferred information sources, mobile apps, social media channels, and contact methods with marketers.

In DM planning, the key factor often revolves around human resources. In another sense, employee involvement is vital in adapting to changing business environments and meeting customer needs. Investing in a skilled marketing personnel system is, therefore, the most cost-effective solution. Involving experienced employees in the same market and product category yields more efficient Facebook ad campaigns. In addition, to address challenges such as high advertising costs and the need for paid DM tools, a well-structured, strategic task delegation plan is essential for optimizing performance and achieving success.

During the final stage of the marketing process, which involves measuring and adjusting, the company must evaluate the effectiveness of its marketing communications. This can be achieved by selecting relevant metrics that enable the company to optimize its investment and reduce costs. In essence, paying attention to key measurement and adjustment

indicators, such as sales figures derived from digital channels, becomes essential. By closely monitoring these indicators, the company can assess the impact of its marketing efforts, make necessary adjustments, and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently to maximize returns on investment.

In today's fiercely competitive environment, businesses must constantly strive to improve their operations and enhance their reputations among consumers. Businesses must also seize opportunities presented by DMtools. However, many of the implemented campaigns still have limitations, such as insufficient human resources, underinvestment in websites, low customer interaction on fan pages, and so on. Therefore, the company must exert tremendous efforts to apply, innovate, and develop DMSs. They should also re-evaluate their current DM activities based on customer and user feedback. Finally, the company must devise multiple development strategies to keep up with the industry trend.

The findings suggest that to implement an effective DM plan, small-sized businesses must ensure their marketing staff is well-qualified and knowledgeable about DM tools and the market. Company directors should support employee training, teamwork, and online marketing skills to boost marketing efficiency. Encouraging employees to participate in charitable programs can also enhance the company's public image. Besides, addressing DM implementation challenges and heeding customer feedback is vital for success and maintaining a strong brand image. More importantly, TVP's continued brand development in the Vietnamese market hinges on setting clear goals and directions.

6. Conclusion, limitations, and suggestions for further research

Thanks to the vast proliferation of various DMSs, small businesses are gradually replacing traditional marketing channels with digital tools. However, DMSs have not been fully explored for small-sized enterprises in Vietnam. The study explores TVP employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of DMSs and contributes valuable insights to the field. Positive experiences illustrate the potential of DMSs in product promotion, brand enhancement, customer engagement, and sales. This understanding informs other businesses about the benefits of adopting DMSs and encourages investment in these approaches. Identified challenges, including limited internet access, trust-building, accurate measurement of campaign success, and cost optimization in online PR, provide valuable insights for overcoming obstacles in DM practices. Suggestions for addressing these challenges, such as prioritizing customer-centric strategies and building strong customer relationships, are offered. The study also enriches the literature on DMSs in SMEs, validating commonly used strategies like SEO, SEM, and online PR, emphasizing the importance of customer-centric approaches and continuous tactical evaluation. In short, the study not only benefits TVP Company, offering practical insights into DMSs, identifying challenges, and suggesting areas for improvement but can also help businesses optimize their DM efforts, boost competitiveness, and achieve marketing goals in the digital era.

Due to the small number of participants, the results may not be generalized for all Vietnamese small-sized enterprises. Thus, future studies should include more participants from marketing employee experts, businesses, and regular customers. Longitudinal studies can also offer insights into the long-term impact of DMSs at TVP Company by tracking strategy evolution and assessing sustainability. Comparing TVP's DMSs with industry peers helps identify best practices and benchmark performance. Understanding customer perceptions through surveys, interviews, or focus groups can provide insights for refining strategies based on customer preferences and needs. Exploring the impact of employee training on the effectiveness

of DMSs is valuable. It helps assess employees' knowledge and skills and their connection to campaign success, emphasizing the importance of continuous training and upskilling.

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