

A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING TO WHAT EXTENT DIGITAL MARKETING
INFLUENCES SALES IN SMALL ENTERPRISES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING TO WHAT EXTENT DIGITAL MARKETING INFLUENCES SALES IN SMALL ENTERPRISES IN INDIA

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Visualizing a business without marketing seems unfeasible. Even before starting a business, one must conceive a marketing plan along with a business idea to effectively communicate their product to the world. Marketing is inevitable for the very existence of the business. Before spreading awareness in the target market about the product, an attempt has to be made to familiarize them with the name of the brand, which cannot be executed without marketing efforts.

The switch from traditional marketing to a completely digitized process, along with artificial intelligence, has been one of the most radical changes experienced over the past decade. There are various businesses today that use digital marketing as a tool to

attempt to reach target audiences, while some have solely established digital audiences as their target market. Businesses choose Digital marketing from various aspects based on their marketing needs. These include content marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, video marketing, search engine optimization, pay-per-click, and more. These might be used together to synergize the effects of marketing activities. The goal of undertaking this study was to observe and learn to what extent digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises.

The research method that was undertaken for conducting out this study was exploratory. Three small enterprises in India were chosen to seek an in-depth understanding and insights into how digital marketing helped them influence sales, along with their understanding and usage of artificial intelligence (AI). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a questionnaire as a broad guideline. The results showcased that all three small enterprises viewed digital marketing as an important tool for achieving marketing objectives. They adopted it even before officially launching their business. It particularly helped them in bringing leads for their business, but digital marketing did not have a direct impact on the conversion of these leads since it depended on more factors. Digital marketing surely brought them the desired awareness, credibility, and reach for their business.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this research, we aim to find out to what extent digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises in India. In the current digital landscape, small enterprises leverage digital marketing to establish their presence and attract customers. The shift towards social platforms and AI has given rise to digital marketing and is therefore becoming a fundamental tool for achieving marketing objectives. By using digital marketing, small enterprises drive traffic and boost visibility to survive in the competitive market. The research also attempts to find out the views of the selected small enterprises regarding AI and its integration in their respective businesses.

1.2 Research Problem

A research problem is a gap or challenge that the study aims to explore. It aims to understand an issue that may not be fully understood. A research problem is the foundation of a study. This section states the research problem for this study.

Digital marketing presents significant opportunities and has widespread adoption. It offers multiple benefits such as visibility and reach, but its effect on sales is not completely known. Therefore, this brings the research problem of understanding to what extent does digital marketing plays a role in influencing sales in small enterprises.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The purpose statement of the research acts as a guiding light and guides every decision in the research process. It ensures that researchers are aware of what is trying to be achieved.

It allows for shaping the research questions and hypothesis. Through the purpose decisions, such as research methodology, such as qualitative and quantitative, and research designs, such as experiments, surveys, or case studies, can be appropriately chosen.

A properly defined research purpose assists in deciding what data needs to be gathered and how it is supposed to be collected. It aids in figuring out the appropriate instruments to do so, which could be surveys, interviews, or observations. The purpose of research defines the aim and objective of undertaking the study. It clearly states the research gap that has been identified to explore. In this section, we will understand the purpose of undertaking this research.

The research purpose can aid in outlining the boundaries of the study by stating what will be covered, which is essential to manage the scope of the research. The research needs to be precise instead of being broad. This further helps to set realistic expectations regarding the achievement of the research.

An accurately articulated research purpose could make it easy for future researchers, supervisors, and reviewers to understand exactly what the study tries to evaluate and research.

In this section, we will attempt to explore the purpose of this research and the beneficiaries of this study. The section tries to clearly state and define the aim of the study to provide a complete understanding of the agenda of this research.

In today's business environment, small-sized enterprises indulge in digital marketing for various purposes. These could include enhancing brand visibility, building brand credibility, reaching out to the right target audience effectively and efficiently, and keeping in touch with the customers online.

One of the main marketing agendas for any company circles around increasing its sales and generating revenue. By spreading awareness about the business and brand, making the target audience understand their market offerings, and establishing brand credibility, businesses try to enhance their sales.

This brings us to the purpose of this research, which revolves around understanding to what extent does digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises, and what role it plays in driving sales, if it has any. The research attempts to find the existence of a direct impact of digital marketing on sales. The beneficiary of this research will be small-sized enterprises in India that indulge in digital marketing activities for achieving their marketing objectives.

Through this research, small enterprises will be able to identify whether and how much they should keep investing their time and money towards digital marketing with the intent of sales. The small-sized enterprises that solely rely on digital marketing for sales or depend on digital marketing to drive sales will be able to make an informed decision regarding their expectation from digital marketing activities for sales and conversions.

1.4 Significance of the Study

After identifying the objective of the study, it is very important to state how the study will fill the identified research gap and benefit the identified beneficiaries. This is a crucial section since this helps to articulate why the research that has been undertaken matters.

It provides a rationale reason for the problem being investigated and highlights the gap between the literature already present and the aim of the study. It aids in circling how the study can contribute by outlining the current literature and how the undertaken study will fit into the broader conversation. This will help the beneficiaries understand how the research aids them and also enables them to engage with it.

Along with this, it highlights potential implications in the real world and states how the findings can be used to solve problems, make decisions, and create positive changes.,

The study will guide small enterprises regarding what they should expect out of their digital marketing activities concerning sales and conversions. This will help in understanding whether digital marketing plays a direct role in driving sales for the company.

Further, the outcomes of the study will assist small enterprises in allocating their time and budget to digital marketing accordingly if they are relying on it for sales. The study will support in making an informed decision by shedding light on the degree of influence of digital marketing on sales.

1.5 Research Purpose and Questions

Defining the purpose of the study will assist in providing a comprehensive understanding to the reviewers, future researchers, and other parties who may read the research regarding the aim of this study, along with defining the scope and boundaries of this study to clearly understand what the research will cover and unfold. The research problem also helps to decide the research design and data collection process suitable for the aim of the research.

Further, the research problem lends credibility to the research by clearly demonstrating the thought process of the researcher and ensures the research is truly addressing the specific problem and gap identified for making the study more meaningful. The research purposes inform the formulation of specific research questions or hypotheses. These hypotheses are detailed inquiries that help to form the broader purpose.

Even though there are some perceived advantages of digital marketing adoption, there is still a gap in the existing literature regarding the impact of digital marketing on sales. The purpose clearly states the objective of this research, which revolves around understanding small-sized enterprises that depend on digital marketing to achieve their marketing objectives or solely rely on digital marketing for their sales, and measure the success of their digital marketing activities based on sales generated. This research will find out whether digital marketing has a direct impact on sales for a business.

With the help of this research, these small-sized enterprises will be able to discover what outcome they should expect out of digital marketing activities for sales and conversions, and assist in making informed decisions. The research will assist small-sized enterprises to understand whether digital marketing has a direct impact on sales. Thus, the purpose of the research question is to understand which digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises in India.

Small-sized enterprises need to make informed decisions based on data-driven insights to validate their decisions in the course of their business. The research will serve as a deep insight for small-sized enterprises during their budget allocation as well. During budget allocation towards digital marketing, small-sized enterprises will understand better through this research whether their resource allocation to digital marketing will help them yield results surrounding sales, and if they expect to evaluate their digital marketing activities based on sales generated.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Small and Medium Enterprises in India

According to the Ministry of Science and Technology, India, “small and medium enterprises' (SME) is a generic term used to describe small-scale industrial (SSI) units and medium-scale industrial units”. According to the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSME) website (<https://msme.gov.in/know-about-msme>), “those enterprises where investment in Plant and Machinery or Equipment is not more than Rs. 10 crore and Annual Turnover is not more than Rs. 50 crore are classified under small enterprises.

Whereas those enterprises where investment in Plant and Machinery or Equipment is not more than Rs. 50 crore and an Annual Turnover is not more than Rs. 250 crores are classified under medium enterprises.”

Jha and Mittal (2021) postulate that the “digitalization of Indian businesses is being driven by the increasing digitization of consumers”. This has led to the growth of new tech startups and increased data traffic. The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector is a major contributor to the Indian economy, but it is lagging in terms of digitalization.

Only a small percentage of SMEs have an online presence, even though online shopping is growing rapidly. Despite this, digitalization can have a significant positive impact on SMEs in India.

2.2 Digital Marketing

Minculete and Olar (2018) postulate that “digital marketing is a marketing process that uses electronic means and interactive technologies such as online communities, mobile communications, and messaging to establish an association between consumers and manufacturers.”

Gopee (2019) stated that “digital is becoming mainstream in organisations, making its way into every activity undertaken to influence purchases”. Similarly, the digital landscape is taking over marketing activities and reshaping their fundamentals to influence purchase intentions, all the way to the microlevel of specific purchase intention-influencing activities.

Prativindhya (2020) postulated that Digital marketing has a broad impact on consumer buying behavior. Consumers surf the internet and find the best information to compare the products, prices, specifications, and other information to optimize their buying decisions.

Sundaram and Rammohan (2021) postulate that digital marketing helps to bridge customers and brands since brands can share information regarding new launches, discounts, and offers in real-time. “It also helps to track the activities of the customers and propose to them the products of their tastes and preferences (Salehi, Mirzaei, Aghaei, and Abyari, 2012).”

Chauhan (2021) stated, “Digital marketing is innovative marketing for all kinds of businesses. Nowadays, it has come into the category of modern marketing for every business sector. Digital marketing plays a steady role in the companies’ multi-channel (MC) marketing strategy. This multi-channel medium has provided advanced models and business transactions for the IFS (International Financial System). Through digital marketing, business owners have achieved outstanding success. However, these business owners have to be highly careful while selecting the appropriate digital marketing strategy. Nowadays, online platform is widely used by organizations to boost business. This is one of the most economical and successful digital marketing techniques.”

According to Kah Boon Lim et al. (2024), “digital marketing is a powerful tool that businesses can use to reach a larger audience with a small budget.” They need to use digital marketing to target an audience since most people exist online and make online purchases today.

2.3 Channels of Digital Marketing

2.3.1 Affiliate Advertising

It is defined as a performance-based online marketing strategy. Here, businesses are given rewards to affiliates for driving sales or leads. Affiliates are often content creators who promote products or services using different tracking links.

It refers to brands paying a valuable spokesperson popular among a large audience or a specific type of audience, usually a blogger or social media influencer, to post or talk about their company so that the company can increase its circulation and become a known brand among a certain type of target market.

Whenever any customer makes a purchase through the link that belongs to an affiliate, the affiliate earns a commission. This relationship mutually benefits both businesses and the affiliates. This is a popular form of marketing among influencers these days and has led to the rise of influencers and businesses leveraging this model.

2.3.2 Content Marketing

Content marketing is advised to be part of the process of marketing and not something considered separately. For example, before developing a social media strategy, the content that needs to be displayed, talked about, and disseminated is discussed first. Search engines also reward and value businesses or websites that are putting up quality content.

A successful PR strategy also focuses on what readers care about and want to read rather than what the business is more interested in conveying. Content marketing can be regarded as a very useful tool for marketers to spread awareness about their brand, keep the audience engaged, and stay in touch. Marketers create valuable and relevant content to share on all platforms where the brand has its digital presence.

Moawad (2020) states that the algorithms by Google give high importance to high-quality content to provide consumers with the maximum relevant and accurate results possible.

Oprea and Sava (2019) state in the article that a content marketing strategy helps companies to educate their consumers about using their products or services, disseminate engaging information, and develop trust in the brand. Content quality acts as a bridge between the business and its target audience. This approach improves the relationship

with current and potential customers, increases brand awareness, boosts market visibility, enhances conversion rates, and drives business revenue.

2.3.3 Email Marketing

Electronic Direct Mail or Email marketing is one of the most used kinds of direct marketing for communicating with the audience and providing promotional information to existing and prospective customers.

It can prove to be a great technique to get customers to return to a brand. It also plays a role in reminding customers about its products and services, disseminating information about new launches and offers, and it also aids in creating targeted personalized marketing messages.

Thomas et al.(2022) stated in their article that consumers can typically become overwhelmed by overly persuasive emails and which leads to a complex and non-linear response over time, potentially wearing out. They suggest that strategic planning regarding the frequency and timing of promotional emails is vital, since it takes time to grab the attention while balancing against advertising fatigue.

Along with this, they postulate that CRM emails generally have a more significant impact than promotional emails, and alert emails are mostly ineffective for achieving desired outcomes and may just influence the click-through rate.

2.3.4 Search Engine Optimization

SEO refers to the technique of generating more traffic to a website and ensuring the website appears among the top search results on a search engine.

Search engines such as Google and Bing focus on providing high-quality search results to their users. Crawlers, utilized by search engines, collect information on everything on the Internet that can be accessed.

After formulating an information database, a search engine creates an index (a digital library of web pages) subjected to an algorithm that tries to match all of the data with a given search phrase. “The entire concept of SEO revolves around giving search engines the highest priority when returning results that are closely connected to search terms entered into a search box (Google considers over 200 factors when determining the relevance of the content)”, according to Moawad (2020).

Singh (2024) revealed that “SEO is not only a technical concept of digital marketing but is a critical pillar of success for any company”. Search engine result page is of paramount importance for businesses that aim to convert new customers and retain existing ones, since more than 70% of customers turn to search engines to discover and shop for products and services. The article revealed that SEO has an impact on organic website visitors, and it increases brand visibility.

2.3.5 Social Media Marketing

It refers to conducting marketing activities via social media platforms, such as locating potential customers, targeting products/ services, promoting the brand, and sometimes sales. Common platforms include Instagram, Meta, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, and more.

Social media is very engaging and enables everyone to express themselves. In the last decade, social media has seen a significant transformation, as seen by the rise in

several social network users. Social media marketing consists of 3 types of marketing, starting with social networking sites, which are often used for connecting with friends and family.

Apart from this, these platforms are abundantly used for exchanging knowledge, information of videos, texts, and images. Prominent examples include Meta (Facebook), Twitter, and LinkedIn. Second is image-based sites, which contain content in the form of illustrations, infographics, or images, and the focus is to grab the attention of users.

These include apps like Pinterest or Instagram. The third type involves video sharing/streaming platforms. The most popular platform for video content is YouTube. Videos are considered to be the most engaging form of content and are preferred because of the impact they make on viewers.

In an article by Gupta (2021), he states that “social media platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and others, have multiple free resources that help businesses tap into the latest advancements in the digital landscape”.

These social media websites are among the best marketing tools. They help businesses reach the right customers by running highly targeted social media ad campaigns and understanding their performance using analytics tools.

Ligaraba (2024) stated that leveraging social media can help build brand loyalty, specifically brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and a strong online presence by connecting with young adults via social media platforms.

2.3.6 Video Marketing

This revolves around creating and leveraging compelling video content to promote products or services. It proves to be a very highly engaging strategy. It captivates the audience through visual representation and sound or audio, thus creating an impactful and everlasting impression in the mind of users.

Brands use video content marketing to increase brand awareness and deepen the connection viewers form with the video. These also help in ensuring the viewers retain and remember what they see through the videos due to its impact created via visuals and sounds. These range from short-form social media clips to long videos or live streams. There is immense versatility in this type of content.

Mostly used along with content marketing, video marketing helps to create a long-lasting impression on the minds of the viewers. Some videos also become memorable and popular among customers due to the visuals, sound effects, and animations.

The content of the videos can range from educational, promotional, informational, entertainment, and more. The latest type of videos that have been creating trends, buzz, and are said to have a wide reach are Instagram reels and YouTube shorts. They have become increasingly popular for grabbing significant engagement numbers.

A successful video marketing strategy involves understanding the audience, formulating a clear message to communicate through the video, high-quality visuals and audio, and standing out due to the highly competitive and saturated digital marketing

landscape where most businesses are trying to make their content stand out to effectively reach the target audience.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

According to Marr (2022), AI is expected to revolutionize marketing, alongside sales, according to McKinsey. Marketers who overlook AI may miss out on its transformative potential. However, it's unlikely that marketers currently abstain from AI tools entirely.

Many commonly used marketing platforms already incorporate AI features seamlessly. These features optimize tasks like targeted advertising and personalized email content. Business AI differs from general AI, focusing on specific tasks rather than human-like cognition. AI software improves performance with more data exposure.

Haleem et al. (2022) postulate that AI technology aids marketers in identifying and forecasting trends, guiding strategic budget allocation, and selecting target audiences, enabling brands to prioritize valuable tasks over excessive spending on digital advertising. The advancement of AI machines with human-like cognitive abilities enhances user data analysis and the effectiveness of content marketing strategies.

According to an article by Deloitte (2024), AI can help in customer segmentation and establish a relationship with them by summarizing characteristics of the target audience, gathering information about customer preferences, developing distinct offers tailored to each segment within the target audience, helping to identify newer personality types, and creating personalized messages. The article states that it helps to conduct “A/B and multiple-choice tests to measure the effectiveness of AI-optimized campaigns.”

2.5 AI and SMEs

AI offers SMEs streamlined operations, enhancing efficiency and reducing errors through automation. Additionally, AI analytics provide data-driven insights, aiding smarter decision-making.

Moreover, AI optimizes costs by identifying inefficiencies and opportunities for savings. Importantly, embracing AI enables SMEs to compete effectively, fostering innovation and delivering personalized customer experiences akin to larger enterprises.

The article postulates that AI can serve small and medium enterprises in customer relationship management through AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistance, marketing, and sales by analyzing customer data and delivering target marketing campaigns, supply forecasting, demand, and managing inventory efficiently, cutting costs, and avoiding stockouts.

Siddiqui and Malviya (2022) stated that the advent of artificial intelligence in marketing is poised to become a reality by the 2020s. This innovative approach utilizes consumer data alongside cutting-edge AI technologies like machine learning to anticipate and enhance the customer experience.

Recent advancements in AI have facilitated its integration into business strategies, empowering enterprises to harness its potential. Artificial intelligence is set to revolutionize marketing efforts, streamline the customer journey, and redefine the process of attracting, nurturing, and converting prospects.

Along with the benefits AI brings, there are some limitations, too. Privacy emerges as a primary concern in the utilization of artificial intelligence. Businesses often

overlook that they are custodians not just of data, but of their customers' trust. While chatbots offer significant utility, they may pose challenges for less tech-savvy individuals.

The substantial cost associated with artificial intelligence presents a notable challenge, emphasizing the adage that quality comes at a price. Given its intricate nature, AI demands significant financial investments, not only for an initial start but also for ongoing upkeep.

Continuous updates are essential to ensure compatibility with evolving environments.

Moreover, in the event of a malfunction, the expenses involved in manufacturing further compound the overall cost.

Chintalapati and Pandey (2021) postulate that “the ability of AI to continuously learn and interpret/forecast customer buying intentions and emotions will help shape and target future marketing efforts, leading to extensive automation and personalization.”

There are debates surrounding AI, continuous/catastrophic learning, and other attributes related to human AI.

This field of study is expected to evolve exponentially. There is extensive scope to examine some of the underrated involvement of AI in traditional operating models of sales and marketing.

AI will further advance to become more intelligent, augmenting human thinking processes, and it will be increasingly humanized, eventually surpassing the creative thinking abilities of humans.

The growth of AI is poised to increase apprehensions about security, and the current privacy and personalization debate is set to widen its possibilities into weaker aspects of marketing.

Shrivastva (2024), states that Indian SMEs can capitalize on AI without significant financial strain through various means which involves Cloud-Based AI Solutions, utilize pre-trained AI models for tasks like image recognition, saving time and resources by fine-tuning them to specific needs, Low-Code/No-Code Platforms that can help develop AI applications without extensive coding knowledge using user-friendly interfaces and pre-built functionalities, solving distinct business challenges with AI, such as enhancing customer service with chatbots or optimizing marketing campaigns with analytics.

Grashof and Kopka (2022) stated that the “impact of AI on radical knowledge creation varies depending on the specific type of AI considered”. They also postulate that firm-specific characteristics play a significant role, with smaller firms benefiting more from AI techniques, whereas larger firms see greater advantages from AI applications.

Moreover, the relevance of a firm's knowledge base to AI techniques facilitates radical knowledge generation, particularly among smaller firms.

Emphasizing AI techniques, particularly for SMEs, can enhance radical knowledge creation, potentially enabling smaller firms to bridge the gap.

Consequently, managers of SMEs are encouraged to focus on developing competencies in techniques of AI rather than its applications, which typically need a broader knowledge database, more common in larger firms.

Schönberger (2023), stated that there is extensive acknowledgment of AI's importance for business processes and competitiveness, only 28% of surveyed SMEs have implemented AI solutions.

This gap between awareness and action underscores a challenge requiring further investigation. AI integration is in its early stages, measures need to be undertaken to promote AI usage. The SMEs that have already been leveraging AI, chatbots, and virtual assistants are most prevalent.

Marius Schönberger states that several complexities are associated with the integration of AI into business, which include a lack of expertise, integration challenges, privacy and security-related concerns, and the cost involved.

Marius Schönberger highlights the importance of adopting a holistic strategy that addresses both technical and organisational aspects to effectively harness the benefits of AI and tackle the associated challenges.

2.6 Role of Digital Marketing in SMEs

Podile et al. (2022) postulate that SMEs utilize e-marketing tools to attain precise marketing objectives, which involve brand awareness, generating leads, and navigating sales in their research on the Impact of Internet Marketing and Tools on Marketing Performance in SMEs, in India.

The effectiveness of e-marketing tools varies depending on the size and industry of the SME. E-marketing is not as effective for finding new employees as it is for other marketing goals.

SMEs often do not have a specific reason for adopting a particular e-marketing tool. The most effective e-marketing tools for small businesses are those that are used to create and maintain customer relationships. Postulate that SMEs utilize e-marketing tools to attain precise marketing objectives, which involve brand awareness, generating leads, and navigating sales.

Pradhan (2021) states in her research paper “Usage Of Digital Marketing By SMES A Study On Issues And Challenges Special Reference To UP East” that the top seven digital marketing tools that have been helping SMEs to promote and reach customers include: website, social media, e-mail marketing, content media, SEO, e-commerce, affiliate marketing

Jadhav (2020) postulates that digital marketing plays a role in targeting customers and conversions, it helps in building trust among the target audience. He states that SMEs derive several benefits through digital marketing, such as aiding in achieving higher revenue, providing a more cost-effective way than traditional marketing, helping to target the right customers, aiding in lead generation, real-time results

Singh (2017) in her research paper states that challenges faced by SMEs include a lack of knowledge about tech-enabled services, poor infrastructure, and insufficient funds. Inefficient regulatory frameworks and poor infrastructure give rise to the fear of data breaches and security.

The biggest security challenge arises from malware and cyberattacks. Insufficient knowledge of technological capabilities, where traditional SMEs who have been able to

develop strong business relations through offline efforts are not ready to spend money and time on digital platforms or may not have the required talent to do so.

Lack of strong governance restricts businesses from gaining improved control over finances, access to accurate data, and acquiring new customers, which aids in becoming more efficient and responsive.

Kumar (2022) states some challenges that SMEs frequently encounters lack of budget. Lack of funds is one of the most significant challenges faced by SMEs surrounding digital marketing.

Most small enterprises have a limited marketing budget and are unable to support large-scale digital marketing campaigns.

Further, they face challenges in choosing the correct social media platforms, developing a content marketing strategy, and promoting brand awareness.

According to Stokes (2000b) and Simpson and Taylor (2002), as cited in Pandaya (2012) “an important factor contributing to the success of SMEs is stated as marketing. Marketing is also one of the biggest challenges SMEs face”.

It has been seen as one of the most important business activities and is essential for the survival and growth of enterprises. Additionally, Gilmore (2001), as cited in Pandaya (2012), highlights marketing as a limitation of SMEs due to limited resources, which include financial, time, and marketing knowledge.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

A research problem is a statement that clearly states the issue or gap that is present in the existing literature. This research problem essentially addresses the aim for which the study has been undertaken and the central questions for which the researcher tries to seek an answer.

It can be described as the area of concern that is highlighted by identifying the gap between already available literature and a practical problem that's yet to be researched and further studied.

Therefore, to investigate the phenomenon, the research is undertaken. This research problem should be researchable and feasible to study. It should be specified and focused to conduct the research, and should not be too broad to manage. The scope should be well defined.

In the current digital landscape, small enterprises are increasingly adopting digital marketing channels to achieve their marketing goals. The overall objective of most marketing strategies revolves around increasing sales and generating revenue for a company.

The goals of expanding reach, spreading awareness, establishing credibility, and reaching the right audience amount to the objective of driving sales. This gives rise to our

research problem to find out whether the small enterprises adopting digital marketing to achieve their marketing objectives, which centers around increasing sales, does it have a direct impact on sales or not.

The study attempts to explore to what extent does digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises. Answering this question will help small enterprises understand what role digital marketing plays in driving sales for their company.

The research also tries to explore the understanding of AI by the three interviewed companies, since AI is used in several fields across the globe. The study attempts to decode their understanding of AI and find out whether the three small-sized selected companies use AI for their activities, and if they do, then what are the various problems and challenges they face during their integration into their company.

This study aims to shed light on the adoption and readiness of small enterprises towards adopting AI into their company's core activities or other business operations, and the challenges and obstacles faced by them to achieve this integration.

3.2 Research Purpose and Questions

The research purpose helps to define the objective of undertaking the research. It articulates the fundamental aim for embarking on research and defines the gaps that are anticipated to be filled through the research.

It directs the flow of the research and guides the study, and further helps to choose the appropriate methodologies for the research.

The purpose of this research is to understand what role small-sized enterprises should expect out of digital marketing for sales and conversions. The objective is to research whether the digital marketing practices have a direct impact on sales.

This will further help small-sized enterprises to make informed decisions regarding their digital marketing strategies and also help to understand whether and how much small-sized enterprises should invest their time and money towards digital marketing with the intent of sales.

Which brings us to the research question to understand which digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises.

The study tries to explore the understanding of AI by the three selected small-sized enterprises and whether they have integrated AI into their core activities or other business operations.

Through the research, the challenges and roadblocks, if any, experienced by the three selected small-sized enterprises are identified to understand the adoption trends of AI in small-sized enterprises.

3.3 Research Design

A Research design is an outline or comprehensive framework for conducting the research. It just doesn't entail what is going to be studied, but also how the research will be conducted to validate the findings of the research.

It includes research methodology, tools, and techniques to conduct research. It is a blueprint to conduct the research and to find out the answers to the research questions.

It helps to guide the process by specifying the research questions, which involve what will be precisely studied, the overall approach, which breaks down the quantitative methods, such as numbers and statistics, or qualitative methods, for example, understanding experiences and meanings, or mixed methods which involve both quantitative and qualitative methods.

It further entails the type of study that will be suitable for the research. There are various types of studies, such as a correlational study, which describe the relationships that exist between various identified variables. These are more observational studies. The next one is a descriptive study that attempts to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon. These involve case studies and surveys.

The next study is termed experimental, where a cause-and-effect relationship is established between variables and involves controlled groups.

The other form of study is explanatory research, where a phenomenon is explained and described to break down how it occurs and why it occurs.

Action research is another type of research that attempts to solve problems by citing steps to solve them, such as planning, observing, and reflecting.

The next type of study is exploratory research, which has been undertaken in this study. This type of research is employed to investigate an unresearched problem.

Further in the research design, the researcher specifies the population sample of the participants who are going to be studied, and sampling strategies are specified through which the participants will be selected. This helps to select a relevant population for the research, which will help to validate the findings of the research.

The data collection method involves citing how the research will be conducted and how data will be collected. These involve methods such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and current documents. The data collection method for this research was semi-structured interviews.

The next step is analyzing the data. After collecting the data, the data has to be analyzed to break down the findings of the research. These involve methods such as statistical analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. For this research, thematic analysis was conducted to understand the themes and patterns from the findings generated from the semi-structured interviews.

Ethical considerations are a very important part of conducting the research. This is important for upholding the rights of the participants and maintaining confidentiality.

A well-defined research design is crucial to bring more clarity to the research. It aids in enhancing the validity of the research and allows for consistent results. It enables to make effective use of resources like time, money, and effort.

Thus, a clear and logical research design helps in bringing credibility to the research findings

3.3.1 Exploratory Research

Exploratory research is a preliminary study. It aims to explore a particular research area where there is limited existing information or understanding.

Hallingberg et al. (2018) define exploratory studies are planned to produce evidence required to decide whether and how to proceed with a full-scale effectiveness

study. They do this by evaluating the feasibility of the intervention and/or evaluation design that the effectiveness study would use.

The purpose of exploratory research is to gain a better understanding of the subject matter. It aids in defining the problem more clearly and precisely and removes ambiguity in the research question. This type of research is flexible to undertake and not rigid. It heavily relies on in-depth procedures like interviews, case studies, and focus groups. The questions under this style of study are open-ended, which enables deep conversations and understandings to uncover unexpected insights.

It helps to generate new hypotheses to uncover potential relationships or patterns that could be further tested. It assists in spotting relevant factors that might need further investigation and establishes which areas are more important to discuss or investigate. This research also helps in developing future scopes of study.

It does the groundwork for future research to take place. In this type of research, the data collection can be recurring and iterative. There can be cycles of data collection that may involve refining the questions further to deepen the understanding.

This style of research is regarded as the first stage of a larger research. The findings of exploratory research serve as a foundation for future studies and lay the groundwork for future investigation.

Compared to other research methods, exploratory research is more cost-effective in comparison to large-scale studies and can be more budget-friendly.

This method was particularly chosen since this aligns with the objectives of the study. As the identified research gap hasn't been studied enough, there was a need to gain

a deep understanding of this research gap, and exploratory research was a more suitable methodology. This method was chosen to pursue an in-depth understanding and insights into social phenomena about how digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises in India.

Three small enterprises in India were chosen that utilised digital marketing, and personal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Before the interview, a questionnaire was prepared as a guideline for the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire is shared in Appendix B

Each interview was audio recorded, including answers as accurately as possible. Two or three days before the interview, the participants were provided with a list of questions to have an idea of what the interview will hold or broadly cover. Two out of three interviews were carried out face-to-face, while one was conducted over the telephone. After the interview, a transcript was prepared immediately.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is used to identify and generate patterns formed from the data. Boyatzis (1998) states that “thematic analysis is a process to be used with qualitative information for analysis. Thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit code. This may be a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related, or something in between these two forms.”

The process of thematic analysis begins with immersing oneself in the data and becoming familiar with it. It involves reading and re-reading the data and gathering a deeper understanding. Initial ideas, notes, and observations are jotted down to ensure the

familiarization process is duly executed. If the recordings of the data are made via audio or video recording, then those are converted into transcripts that will help with immersion and accuracy.

The next step involves labelling and allotting codes to the ideas jotted in the first step. These codes can be descriptive and interpretive. The coding and labelling aids in being deeply thorough with the data, leaving no pointer unnoticed.

Further themes are searched through the initially developed codes. Connections and similarities, and patterns among the codes. Grouping these codes helps to form broader themes. Visual representation between codes and potential themes can be useful and is done during this stage.

The themes are then reviewed to ensure the entire data is covered and all relevant pointers are duly incorporated. This is followed by defining and naming the themes. This requires articulation of themes and clearly defining their scope. Compelling names for each identified theme are essential to deliver their true essence. Any main theme is broken down into sub-themes to present the most appropriate explanations of the themes and patterns.

The last step is to write the report with proper narratives and evidence to support the themes and patterns.

3.4 Population and Sample

The population is the target group of individuals or companies who are being studied during the research. It is a set of elements that share common characteristics that are relevant to the research. Here, there are three small-sized enterprises chosen from India that use digital marketing.

Various sampling methods can be undertaken. The first one is purposive sampling. Here, the participants are selected on their specific knowledge, experience, and expertise, which are relevant to the topic under research. This allows us to target experts and have unique perspectives on the problem. These can have variations, such as expert sampling, where people with recognized expertise are selected. Maximum variation sampling, where a diverse range of people is selected for a wider perspective. Typical case sampling involves selecting participants who can provide a normal experience. Extreme case sampling refers to participants who have unique experiences to understand the phenomenon, and last is critical case sampling which involves selecting a case that is particularly insightful for the research objective.

The next type of sampling is snowball sampling, which refers to selecting initial participants who match the criteria. After working with them, they are asked to further refer potential participants who can fit the requirements of the study. Thus, this creates a snowball effect. This kind of sampling is used to reach out to the population which is hard to reach and access.

The next type of sampling is quota sampling. In this, the researcher identifies a subgroup within a population and then non-randomly selects participants until each quota is filled. This can be useful if the researcher wants to represent certain characteristics.

The next type is convenience sampling, which has been used in this research. Participants under this one are selected based on their accessibility and ease of availability, along with their willingness to participate. This is quick and not expensive, making it suitable for a low-stakes gathering. The biggest advantage of this type of sampling is its cost-effectiveness. It reduces the requirement for financial resources. This makes it ideal for researchers with a limited budget. The next advantage is that it is time-efficient and speedy. The data collection is much faster since participant selection is done based on who is available readily. This is essential for researchers who have time limitations. There is an ease in implementing this. It is straightforward and doesn't require complex planning. There is an absence of complex sampling and accessibility for researchers with limited experience in sampling techniques. This helps in the formulation of hypotheses for future needs by helping to understand preliminary data and identify emerging trends. These hypotheses can be useful in future research. It is also an excellent tool for pilot testing and identifying flaws and logistical issues quickly. Sometimes convenience sampling provides access to harder to reach populations as well, which may not be identifiable through other sampling methods. There is a high response rate since participants are chosen for accessibility and willingness to participate and contribute, hence they yield higher response rates than other methods.

Table 2.1

Profile of selected small enterprises

Name of small enterprises	Subsector of small enterprises	Year of Establishment	Year of Digital Marketing Initiated	Active social media Channel
Company A	Construction	2020	2020	LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook
Company B	Advertising agency	2022	2022	LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Google Ads
Company C	Salon Services	2021	2021	Instagram, Google Ads

3.5 Participant Selection

The selection procedure for exploratory research is different. Since the objective is to gain initial insights and generate hypotheses, representing a larger population is generally not a concern.

Before selecting the participants, the problems of research should be defined to understand who would have the most relevant experience and knowledge about the phenomenon under study. The aim is to look for cases or individuals who care about information-rich. Also diverse demographic needs to be selected to gather differing perspectives.

Various sampling methods can be undertaken. The first one is purposive sampling. Here, the participants are selected on their specific knowledge, experience, and expertise, which are relevant to the topic under research. This allows us to target experts and have unique perspectives on the problem. These can have variations, such as expert sampling, where people with recognized expertise are selected. Maximum variation sampling, where a diverse range of people is selected for a wider perspective. Typical case sampling involves selecting participants who can provide a normal experience. Extreme case sampling refers to participants who have unique experiences to understand the phenomenon, and last is critical case sampling which involves selecting a case that is particularly insightful for the research objective.

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response rate since participants are chosen for accessibility and willingness to participate and contribute, hence they yield higher response rates than other methods.

The exploratory research usually involves small sample sizes, typically to gather a deeper understanding of the concept. The participation selection process is iterative in exploratory research. After selecting a particular group of people and analyzing initial data, the questions can be refined and tested on new participants to refine the findings.

Even when the design offers flexibility, defining clear criteria for participants is essential to maintain focus and ensure that the data collected is relevant to achieve the aim and objective of the research.

To summarize, the exploratory research participant selection process is driven by the search for insights and differing perspectives instead of statistical representation of data.

The participants were chosen based on their utilization of digital marketing. All three selected small-sized enterprises operate in India and use digital marketing. The research is conducted to understand to what extent does digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises in India. Therefore, only small enterprises that routinely and actively used digital marketing to achieve their marketing goals and objectives were selected for the semi-structured interviews.

Through the participants, the research aims to find out whether they see a direct impact of digital marketing on their sales, and further explore their understanding of AI and the challenges that they face.

3.6 Instrumentation

Research data can be collected using a variety of techniques. This technique is chosen based on the research question. The technique could be quantitative or qualitative. The primary data is collected by the researcher.

The first category is self-reported instruments. These could be surveys and questionnaires. A set of questions is designed to collect information from the selected population. These can be conducted over email, online, phone call, or even face-to-face. The questions could be closed-ended, where the choices are listed and the answers have to be chosen or selected. These are useful for quantitative data analysis. The questions can be opened ended which can allow the respondents to give more details; there is no standard answer. These are helpful for qualitative data analysis. The advantage lies in capturing answers for larger-scale studies, cost-effective and can gather information on opinions and behaviors.

The next type is interviews, where there is direct interaction between the researchers and respondents. In-depth conversation. These can be conducted over the phone or via video call, or face-to-face. It often consists of closed-ended questions, and the structure is predetermined. This is useful for collecting quantitative data. These interviews can be semi-structured too. There will be some questions already scripted, but there is a flexible conversation, and questions flow from within the interaction. It's often used for qualitative data. The interviews can be completely unstructured as well. There may be no questions prepared. This allows for an extremely free-flow of conversation. This can be utilized for exploring a new idea altogether. The advantage of this type of

collection is that it enables to gathering of very detailed information and insights into the perceptions, and is good for probing sensitive information too. This method can be time-consuming and sometimes expensive.

The next type of instrument is diaries and journals. During this, participants record their thoughts or experiences over a specified period. This can be useful if the researcher wants to dive deep into the daily lives of the participants and wants to do trend-watching or subjective experience. The disadvantage of this instrument is that researchers need to heavily depend on the respondents' consistency and diligence.

The next category is observational instruments. For using observation as a tool, researchers need to list the criteria for observing the behaviors. There could be a checklist, and these are called structured observation. There could be unstructured observations as well, where spontaneous observations are made about behaviors in a natural setting. This can be beneficial to gather insights into the real behaviors of the chosen participants, but the disadvantage lies in the time it requires; it's time-consuming and needs ethical considerations if the participants being observed are unaware.

The next type in this recording is photography and video recording. Here, still or moving pictures and videos are recorded of people, interactions, and processes. These can involve commentary, too. It serves as visual evidence to capture complex behaviors and allows detailed analysis. The disadvantage for this type of data collection is that it requires the consent of the people being captured, and the content is subject to misinterpretation at times.

The other category is experimental instruments. Experimental setups are organized where variables are controlled to measure outcomes. It is suitable for researchers that required to establish a cause-and-effect relationship, but the disadvantage is that this setup can be artificial too, and ethical considerations might be subject to manipulation.

The next category is group-based instruments. These include focus group discussions where discussion is facilitated between a small group of people who have shared knowledge or interest. The advantage of this type of collection process is that it enables to gathering of information about the views, perspectives, and ideas of the participants. The disadvantage here is that the discussion can sometimes be dominated by a few individuals, and the other participants may hesitate to share more openly.

The other instruments that are termed as specialized instruments are case studies, where an in-depth examination of a particular case is undertaken using various data sources. It helps to provide rich data and detailed information, but the findings may not be generalized for other cases and remain specific to that particular case under study.

There are psychological tests as well. This tool is designed to measure specific psychological structures, for example, personality or aptitude. This provides standardized data and data that can be quantified, but may not be able to capture the full complexity, and is expensive to administer.

The instrument chosen to conduct this study was an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the three small enterprises chosen in India. These semi-structured interviews help to provide a deeper understanding and insights. The questions are open-

ended, which enables a free-flow conversation that is not restricted and is flexible to uncover unexpected insights from the interview.

A questionnaire was prepared before the interview as a guideline for the semi-structured interview. Each interview was audio recorded. Two interviews were conducted in person, while one was conducted over the telephone. After the interview, a transcript was prepared immediately.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

This is a step-by-step process of gathering data and measuring the information. Further allows the researchers to address the research question. This is termed a crucial phase in the study. During this process, the variables have to be clearly defined and how they will be recorded.

The data can be collected through various processes. These include surveys or questionnaires for quantitative data collection for a large sample of the population.

The other type is interviews, for the collection of in-depth data, and is used for qualitative research.

The next type is observation, where behavior is observed. Typically employed to gather data and study the behavior of a selected population sample.

The other type is focused group discussions, where people with common interests and knowledge come together. The researchers aim to collect insights and group dynamics.

The other type of collection procedure is document analysis, where existing records are studied and used to derive the research. The next type is experiments. These are usually used for research requiring to establishment of a cause-and-effect relationship.

The data collection procedure was carried out by organising semi-structured interviews with the three selected small enterprises. Before these interactions, a questionnaire was prepared to draw an outline of all touchpoints to cover during the interaction. This questionnaire was shared with the respondents to have an overview of what the interview would comprise. Two interviews were conducted personally face-to-face, and one interview was telephonic. These interviews were audio-recorded.

3.8 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to identify and generate patterns formed from the data. Boyatzis (1998) states, “that thematic analysis is a process to be used with qualitative information for analysis. Thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit code. This may be a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related”. Thematic analysis was employed for this research to draw themes and categories based on the interviews to further analyze the answers obtained.

There are four steps involved in thematic analysis. First is familiarization. This involves studying the data and being thorough with it. Reading and re-reading the data is important to deeply understand all of its content. Initial ideas, observations, and important pointers can be jotted down to further build the analysis. Transcribing audio or

video recordings is involved in this step. The audio transcripts of the interviews conducted with the three small enterprises are present in Appendix C.

The second step in thematic analysis involves generating initial codes. Assigning labels and codes to the data can be useful to develop themes and patterns. These codes can be descriptive to summarize the content and interpretive to reflect understanding of various patterns and recurring elements.

The third step in identifying themes involves visual representation of the relationship between the several themes and codes identified. The similar ones are grouped to form categories, which are further subdivided.

The fourth step refers to reviewing themes. Here, all the themes generated are reviewed to find if they form a meaningful pattern. The ones that do not deliver a meaningful pattern are discarded. Once again, the data is read again to figure out whether the identified themes cover the entire database accurately and capture all relevant and important information and aspects of the research question. The themes are refined and adjusted if any gaps are discovered to ensure that the entire data is covered properly and effectively.

The fifth step involves defining and naming the themes. A proper definition is formed for each of the final themes, which incorporates its scope and significance. The naming of the themes has to be done clearly so that it communicates well what it means without any confusion. In case the main themes can be broken down into further sub-themes, then this is done during this stage.

The sixth step refers to writing the report. This includes writing a proper and comprehensive narrative for each theme to cover the important viewpoints of each of them. Each theme is then supported with proper evidence, from which they have been formed. A proper structure is given to themes so that they cover the data fluently and systematically, and ensure that the entire data is given proper coverage.

3.9 Research Design Limitations

Exploratory research is invaluable for understanding and diving deep into new and less-understood topics and gathering insights. However, there are a few limitations. One of the possible limitations surrounding this research design was the sample size. Since studies often involve a limited number of participants. These samples may not be chosen statistically and do not represent a large population. This is because the entire purpose of this type of research is to gather a deep understanding and insights on a topic rather than breadth. Deep knowledge can be derived using a smaller sample size.

The insights gathered may be applied to particular individuals or groups that have been studied. This makes it difficult to apply the knowledge to larger populations. The results of the study may not be generalized to a larger population and are more subject to further research. The flexibility and often unstructured nature of this research make it hard to standardize the findings, and there is a lack of a cause-and-effect relationship establishment, since the focus is on exploring an idea or topic and not on proving the causal links and causes.

Being the exploratory nature of the research, the study generates hypotheses rather than confirming. The findings may require further testing.

3.10 Conclusion

Overall, the purpose of conducting this exploratory research is to find out to what extent digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises in India.

The three participating small enterprises will be interviewed to gain insights from their digital marketing efforts and strategies to further conclude.

Convenience sampling was used to finalize the three small enterprises. Thematic analysis was useful in scripting the themes to give the thesis a structure and break down the data in a meaningful manner.

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. Before the semi-structured interviews with the three small enterprises selected in India, they were provided with the questionnaire, which served as a blueprint and guideline for the three companies to have a brief understanding of the various topics that would be covered during the conversation and the details regarding their business which will be discussed during the interaction and in the thesis

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

4.1 Themes and Categories of Digital Marketing Utilization

Based on the conducted semi-structured interviews with the selected three small-sized enterprises in India, the following themes and categories have been carved out to further analyse the results using thematic analysis.

Table 2.2

Themes and Categories based on the interview of Small Enterprises

Themes	Categories
Early adoption of digital marketing was a shared strategy among all three companies to spread awareness and generate interest pre-launch.	Early Adoption of Digital Marketing

<p>Companies A, B, and C use social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook for multiple purposes such as awareness, visibility, and other business activities. All three companies highlight the importance of having an active social media presence to reach the target audience and enhance credibility.</p> <p>Further, they use email marketing to remain in touch with current customers and attract potential clients.</p>	<p>Digital Marketing Usage</p>
<p>Strategies employed by companies A, B, and C include posting updates on services and projects on social platforms and via email marketing and targeted campaigns for specific services. The interviews revealed that the organisation's tailors' strategies are based on customer needs and its marketing objectives.</p>	<p>Digital Marketing Strategies</p>
<p>Effectiveness for digital marketing is evaluated through qualitative feedback and quantitative results, like the number of inquiries generated.</p>	<p>Effectiveness and Evaluation</p>

<p>AI is viewed as less applicable in their respective businesses' core activities.</p> <p>They acknowledge its broader significance but report minimal direct involvement. All three companies agreed to explore AI tools for marketing needs.</p>	<p>AI Implementation</p>
<p>All three companies recognise that digital marketing has increased their visibility, credibility, and market reach. However, they believe that inquiries are split between word of mouth and digital channels. Not all leads from digital channels convert into actual sales.</p>	<p>Digital Marketing Impact</p>
<p>All three share the same challenge in ensuring all online leads get converted into actual projects. Along with this competitive market and competitors using the same strategies also posed challenges. Adoption of AI was another challenge for all three small enterprises. The opportunity for all three lies in continuing to leverage their established visibility and credibility via digital marketing and employing advanced AI tools for future marketing goals.</p>	<p>Challenges and Opportunities</p>

4.2 Early Adoption of Digital Marketing

In this section, we explore how all three businesses incorporate digital marketing before launching their companies.

Company A started digital marketing activities before its business officially began its operations. They indulged in content marketing and utilized SEO techniques for their website. They employed social media marketing through the platforms LinkedIn and Instagram to spread awareness about the upcoming services and attract business inquiries early on. These platforms were not solely used to network with the audience but also to recruit their employees.

Company B relied on digital marketing from the outset to increase brand awareness for which they used social media marketing for. They used platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, as these were integral in ensuring that the company's presence was felt both in terms of its services and its ongoing recruitment efforts.

Company C created excitement for their brand before launching it via social media platforms and later post post-launch, curated relevant content in the form of social media postings and video content for their target markets. They indulged in Google ads and Instagram paid promotions to reach out to their target audience, while paid and organic SEO techniques are undertaken to rank higher on search engines. All three companies, before beginning their operations, adopted digital marketing to spread the word about their upcoming business and gather interest and curiosity among the audience for their business.

4.3 Digital Marketing Usage

In this section, we attempt to explore the extent to which digital marketing is utilized across the three businesses.

Company A, before launching their operations, officially adopted digital marketing even before the office opened. They utilized LinkedIn for business promotion and professional networking, and platforms like Instagram and Facebook to keep up their active online presence. they incorporated email marketing to keep the current customers updated about their business accomplishments and activities while also helping potential clients understand the company's market standing.

Digital marketing is important in extending awareness and disseminating information about their services. It not only helps in reaching out to their target audience but also aids in recruiting employees, and all these can be done at a lower cost compared to other marketing techniques.

For Company B, platforms including LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook were employed to maintain their brand visibility, reach out to their potential clients, and build credibility for their business. LinkedIn was their primary platform for networking. They incorporated email marketing to keep their existing clients abreast about their business activities, and also to attract potential clients. They send customized emails to their client containing information and offers tailored to clients' needs. Besides this, company B didn't have to increase its budget for marketing while using digital marketing.

Company C incorporated digital marketing activities via Instagram promotion and Google ads from the outset to build brand awareness and entice clients. They could begin with their marketing efforts early since there was not much investment needed. Initially, they focused on paid ads and SEO, which yielded mixed results for them.

These research findings reveal that all three companies leverage digital marketing to achieve a variety of marketing objectives. Business awareness, promotion, brand visibility, and credibility are some of the objectives that digital marketing aids in achieving. Digital marketing serves as a vital tool for grabbing the interest of future clients and generating inquiries. Email marketing proves to be an effective tool in showcasing their service and projects, along with customized offers, which further enhances their reach and engagement with audiences.

The interviewed companies shared that the use of digital marketing has not been restricted to building awareness during business operations. It had been employed since its inception, when, before the launch of the business, the target audience was reached out to make them aware of the upcoming business and create a buzz.

A mix of organic and paid marketing is employed to maximize the benefits of both. Paid Google ads are used to reach more target audiences, LinkedIn is used more for networking objectives and recruitment, while Instagram and Facebook posts and paid ads are used for amplifying visibility, credibility, and reach.

The use of digital marketing differed depending on the stage of business. In the initial stages, businesses use digital marketing to create excitement and curiosity about the business and extend useful information about the business to their audiences. Over

time, the attention moved towards the promotion of specific services, endorsing customers' experiences and information regarding projects delivered.

The findings also reflect that all three companies viewed digital marketing as a less costly and low-investment effort to meet their marketing goals.

4.4 Digital Marketing Strategies

This section explores various digital marketing strategies employed by three companies

The primary strategy for Company A centers around LinkedIn marketing for client acquisition and outreach, along with professional networking. A strong and targeted social media presence was achieved through Facebook and Instagram marketing. The company incorporated a combination of paid and organic promotions on social platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and paid promotions on Google Ads and LinkedIn. Email marketing was employed to nurture current and potential clients.

Similar to company A, LinkedIn is utilized by company B as the main platform for outreach, with Facebook and Instagram used for broader visibility. Their digital strategy circles around content creation that showcases their services, new projects, and team accomplishments. They also run specific campaigns targeting potential clients and recruits.

For company C, paid advertisements through Google Ads and Instagram were the primary approach, though they struggled to achieve the desired results. Over time, they shifted towards organic content on social media, including reels and regular Instagram

posts to showcase their services and engage with the audience more personally with interactive content.

The platforms are chosen based on different marketing objectives. To establish and maintain an online presence and reach customers organically through video content or attractive visuals, Instagram and Facebook are used. These help them to remain active and in touch with their audience more personally and maintain visibility. LinkedIn is used for professional networking, client outreach, and recruitment purposes.

Different type of content is boosted through digital marketing. It involves a mix of content that is targeted to increase brand awareness and credibility, promote specific services provided by the organization, and endorse the projects delivered or customer experiences. For each of these, different types of digital marketing efforts are used. To enhance the brand presence and promote specific services, social platforms are used, while for the latter, email marketing is used to make the current and potential audience aware of the brand's achievements, and showcase existing services and new projects. These help to keep the audience abreast with the organization's activities and also nurture new clients.

4.5 Effectiveness and Evaluation

This chapter evaluates how effective digital marketing efforts are for each company.

Company A evaluated the effectiveness of its digital marketing efforts based on direct feedback from clients. When their clients came via online platforms, it served as an indicator of success. The company also receives consistent engagement on LinkedIn,

further helping them maintain an active presence in the market. While digital marketing aids them in generating inquiries, word of mouth plays a role in largely converting those inquiries into actual jobs. According to them, 50% of their clients come from social media, and 50% through references. However, more conversions come from referrals than from social media.

Company B believes the success of its digital marketing efforts is evident in the balance between word of mouth and online inquiries. There is a complementary role of social media and personal reputation in securing projects. Social media brings in inquiries, and the company is successful in converting these leads into actual projects through market standing and recommendations by existing clients.

Company C did not have a formal system to track results, but they often received positive feedback from their clients on their online presence. They initially invested in paid ads on Instagram and Google Ads to build awareness and saw limited success, but found more value in reaching customers organically on Instagram. They regularly post updates about their services and client interactions, which has helped them improve their engagement over time.

All three companies recognise the significance of digital marketing in driving engagement and inquiries. Together, these insights underline the importance of amalgamating digital marketing strategies with traditional approaches to maximise client reach and conversion rates.

4.6 AI Implementation

This chapter discusses how AI is being used in each of the companies.

Company A believes AI is a useful technology for aiding business, but its application in their services-based business is slightly limited, especially since they rely heavily on human engineers for their work. However, they still benefited from AI tools used in their marketing activities and campaign strategies. Implementation of AI in the core activities remains unidentified, and they are open to future possibilities.

Company B leverages AI through third-party platforms rather than internally developed solutions. Since they indulge in provide digital marketing services to their clients, they use AI to enhance creativity and personalization, particularly in video content creation. It aids them to develop multiple videos in no time and use different languages, making the process more efficient. It also aids them in automating processes like ad targeting and other types of content creation.

Company C has not employed AI in its business operations or marketing. They are not very enthusiastic about it, citing a preference for the human touch in business interactions, particularly in service delivery, but they remain open to potentially using AI in improving their marketing strategies in the future. The barrier to adoption of AI circles around the fact that their employees aren't very educated, and teaching them about AI and its usage in their business would be challenging, hence, they have their reservations about it.

AI plays different roles for different types of organisations depending on their nature of business and the extent of human intervention needed. AI is widely recognized

for marketing purposes by companies A and B, and company C too foresees the potential use of AI in marketing as well.

The challenge is faced for AI adoption in core business activities, like for companies A and C, since their nature of business demands a human touch, and also due to a lack of awareness of the existence of AI tools related to their field. The barrier to the adoption of AI is not only influenced by the nature of the business but also by the readiness of the organization such In the case of company C, the barrier to adoption of AI lies in its complexities of introducing AI to the workforce due to a lack of education.

The common behavior between all three companies is regarding the future integration of AI's potential remains processing across all companies, provided challenges in training the employees are addressed, and it aligns with the business core activities.

4.7 Digital Marketing Impact

This chapter assesses the impact of digital marketing on each of the businesses.

Company A has seen the impact of digital marketing in terms of both client acquisition and recruitment. They recognise the importance of social media marketing for business credibility and visibility in a competitive market. Continued efforts towards digital marketing are noted as a crucial activity to maintain the existing customer base and also to acquire new market share by keeping the audience updated about the business activities and achievements via email marketing and content marketing to build market reputation amongst existing and potential clients.

Company B sees positive early-stage results from digital marketing efforts, especially in terms of lead generation, for which they use digital marketing primarily. However, converting the leads into paying clients takes time and depends more on how the business interaction progresses. Digital marketing has contributed and helped them achieve their marketing goals, which were visibility and lead generation, and they have seen improved results. Their strategy is to focus on building a strong online presence before engaging in paid media campaigns. Hence, they prefer organic growth through content marketing and LinkedIn networking, followed by paid media efforts such as Google Ads or paid promotion on social media platforms. SEO helps to rank their ads and website better, and social media marketing and content marketing aid in targeting and engaging with the audience. They also place their attention on strengthening their lead conversion strategy, where they focus on guiding the leads towards conversion. These include their interactions with customers, where they turn their interest into sales commitment and offline reputation, which primarily helps to get sales via referrals and word of mouth.

Company C feels that their digital marketing efforts, such as Google Ads, SEO, or social media marketing, have contributed only a small percentage of sales. However, it has been a beneficial tool in bringing in inquiries and leads, along with improved visibility and establishing brand credibility and awareness. They find social media marketing a great tool for engaging with clients and potential customers, particularly through Instagram marketing.

Different digital marketing efforts play their role in building the company's profile, brand awareness, credibility, and client engagement. The impact of digital marketing is mostly indirect, in the form of engagement and bringing in inquiries rather than direct conversions.

4.8 Challenges and Opportunities

This chapter highlights the opportunities and challenges that each company faces while using digital marketing.

Company A faces challenges in differentiating its services in a highly competitive market. Since many of their competitors also make use of digital marketing for their marketing objectives, therefore limits success. Allocating higher budgets for marketing purposes didn't help them achieve all their digital marketing objectives. The implementation of AI remains unexplored as of now, and they don't view it as particularly helpful in their services-oriented business, but they are unaware of how they can leverage it for marketing needs.

Company B faces challenges in making its clients understand the dynamics of digital marketing. They struggle with their clients since they have limited knowledge and budget constraints. Due to the budget constraints, the clients experience difficulties trusting the agencies with their budget, which further produces a challenge for company B, where they often get many online leads from their digital marketing efforts, but face challenges in converting them into actual projects. Furthermore, getting the clients to invest in other aspects of digital marketing, such as website optimization, is difficult.

A major challenge for company C, similar to companies A and B, is that digital marketing helps to bring in online inquiries, but the gap between inquiries and converting them into actual sales is not bridged that well. Not all leads get converted into sales. Paid ads did generate attraction and help gain visibility, but not entirely with actual sales; hence, allocating a big budget doesn't help achieve all marketing objectives. Similar to company A, they too face the issue of competition as many other salons use similar methods to achieve marketing objectives, resulting in limited success at times. AI implementation remains tedious since the employees aren't educated enough, and educating them about AI seems difficult and complex.

It's established that all three companies faced the roadblock in converting all online leads into sales. The other common hurdle was budget allocation. Even though digital marketing proved to be a more cost-effective approach to market their businesses, increasing budgets within digital marketing activities doesn't always ensure that all objectives will be met. Implementation of AI also seems to be a challenge due to a lack of knowledge.

Company A views that their opportunity lies in continuing to leverage their active LinkedIn presence and strong email marketing efforts to continually engage with clients and potential partners. Their focus will likely remain on social media marketing to maintain their visibility and brand's credibility in a competitive field. Also, the company is open to incorporating AI in their business for digital marketing purposes if it helps them accelerate their activities and bring in more and better results compared to their existing practices.

Company B had its reservations about applying AI in their business due to the service nature of their business. However, they use AI in the marketing campaigns produced for their clients, which has resulted in better results and also helped them create more content in a shorter span. They plan to use more AI tools to provide more personalized and scalable services, especially for clients with larger campaigns. For their business operations and acquiring clients further, they plan to stick to their current digital marketing efforts and use them as a primary tool for maintaining their presence and continuing to generate leads.

Company C, after not experiencing much success with paid ads, sees the opportunity in creating more organic and authentic content that resonates with their local audience and builds long-term relationships. They plan to start a new business for pets and recognize the importance of digital marketing in meeting their marketing objectives. The goal will be to spread awareness, establish credibility and generate online leads, and urge clients to walk in with stronger call to actions.

All three companies emphasise the role of digital marketing in meeting their marketing goals and intend to continue leveraging it since it helped them achieve most of their objectives at and low cost. They plan to refine their strategies based on their past success and recognising that digital marketing is not solely a tool for driving sales. Instead, they view it as a means to target the right audience, build connections with the audience, keep clients informed about their services and accomplishments, and reach prospective clients or leads effectively.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the key points from the interviews and presents the final reflection on the role of digital marketing and AI in small enterprises.

Company A has seen a positive impact of digital marketing in both client acquisition and team building. The company remains committed to focusing on LinkedIn for networking and professional outreach and engaging in content marketing that helps them to inform their customers about their services and achievements. The role of AI remains a supportive tool in their marketing efforts, which they need to understand and explore.

Company B views that digital marketing has enhanced its credibility and client engagement. Going forward, they plan to further refine their digital marketing strategies to continue to maintain their established brand credibility and visibility and increase their conversion rates of online leads into actual business.

Company C believes digital marketing has proven valuable in raising awareness and building a customer base. Moving forward, they will employ digital marketing strategies to introduce their new business for pets and use digital marketing to meet goals such as reaching the target audience, arousing interest, brand visibility and credibility, and engagement, while considering the potential use of AI in meeting marketing objectives efficiently.

In conclusion, all three companies acknowledge and accept the value of digital marketing and its significant role in the growth of their business. They attribute the visibility and credibility, engagement that they have achieved so far for their business to

digital marketing and realise that it has proven to be cost-effective. Investing their time and money into digital marketing is useful, but allocating higher budgets does not guarantee sales conversion. While AI is not yet a major part of their operation but they remain open to exploring its potential in marketing and customer engagement, but not continue to have their apprehension regarding its usage in their core activities.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of Results

In this chapter, we will discuss the study's results and find out how three companies have used digital marketing. The section explores themes and assesses the impact of digital marketing on engagement and the challenges and opportunities experienced by three companies. The research highlights the essential role of digital marketing in assisting businesses achieve their marketing goals, such as brand visibility, establishing credibility, and customer acquisition. The insights gathered through the research aim to provide a complete understanding of how digital marketing contributes to attaining marketing goals for the three companies.

5.2 Discussion of Early Adoption of Digital Marketing

As discussed earlier, all three companies, before officially launching their operations, incorporated digital marketing. They opted to incorporate digital marketing before commencement to attract early engagement and create an initial customer base for the business. This was done to bring excitement among the target audience and create a buzz in the market for the brand. Early adoption helps in making the target audience aware of the existence of the brand in the market. It enables the business to generate interest within the target audience and also provides them with the time to familiarize themselves with the brand, as well as gives companies the bandwidth to spot their target audience before they bring their offerings to the table.

Company A employed content marketing, SEO, and LinkedIn marketing to gather more attention from their audiences by spreading awareness and enticing early business leads and inquiries.

Company B, similar to Company A, took advantage of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram marketing to generate brand awareness and hire their employees. LinkedIn was used for professional networking, and Facebook and Instagram were a medium to connect with the target audience more informally and have conversations and interactions to keep them updated about the company's offerings and achievements and to further familiarize the target population with the brand's ideologies.

Company C undertook a mix of organic and paid digital marketing through Google Ads, Instagram promotions, and SEO to initiate pre-launch excitement and buzz to maintain engagement and enthusiasm post-launch. Seo helps to rank the website better on the search engines, which helps to attract customers towards the website and make the brand noticeable to the target market. It also lends credibility to the brand before its launch.

The outcomes suggest that before commencing official operations by all three companies, digital marketing played an instrumental role in establishing the brand, bringing early engagement, building an initial customer base, and providing credibility to the company before they brought their services to the target market. The process provides time to both parties to get acquainted with each other enough to start the trust-building process more easily and swiftly. The trust between the initial customer base and the company can facilitate sales better.

5.2 Discussion of Digital Marketing Usage

As mentioned earlier, digital marketing has proven to be an essential element in the marketing agendas of all three companies. The usage of digital marketing varied according to the stage of the business. It was used differently before the commencement of operations and after launching the business officially.

The companies opted for digital marketing before their official launch to grasp early engagement. Here, the content marketing was pointed towards brand building and explaining what the brand offers. In this step, digital marketing was used to familiarize the target audience with the brand name and make them aware of its existence.

The focus of digital marketing shifted towards service-related campaigns to shed more light on the offerings of the business. The email campaigns included accomplishments of the company and were also curated personally for targeting and re-targeting customers.

Company A incorporated LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and email marketing to reach its target as well as potential audience as well as keep its clients informed and updated about their services and other essential information about the business. As mentioned earlier, digital marketing has proven to be an essential element in the marketing agendas of all three companies. These emails sometimes included customised information and offers for customers.

Company B considered digital marketing as the foundation of its business strategy, paying attention to social media platforms to sustain visibility and credibility,

along with using email marketing to keep the audience engaged in the business by reaching out to them with relevant information and offers.

In the initial stage, company C relied on paid advertising through Google Ads and SEO techniques, but eventually shifted and altered their approach towards organic engagement on InstagramMarketing objectives such as business promotion, brand awareness, visibility, engagement, and credibility, along with aiding in lead generation and acquisition, are achieved through digital marketing by three companies.

5.4 Discussion of Digital Marketing Strategies

Each company engaged with a combination of paid and organic digital marketing strategies.

The primary strategy for Company A centers around LinkedIn marketing for client acquisition and outreach, along with professional networking. A strong and targeted social media presence was achieved through Facebook and Instagram marketing. The company incorporated a combination of paid and organic promotions on social platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and paid promotions on Google Ads and LinkedIn. Email marketing was employed to nurture current and potential clients.

Company B employed content marketing to gather the attention of their target audience to their services, projects, and team accomplishments while also running targeted campaigns for lead generation and recruitment. They incorporated email marketing similar to company A to keep their clients engaged and interested in the business.

For company C, paid advertisements through Google Ads and Instagram were the primary approach, though they struggled to achieve the desired results. Over time, they shifted towards organic content on social media, including reels and regular Instagram posts to showcase their services and engage with the audience more personally with interactive content.

5.5 Discussion of Effectiveness and Evaluation

The companies measured the success of their digital marketing activities through client inquiries, engagement metrics, and conversions.

Client feedback and inquiries generated through digital marketing efforts were the primary metrics for Company A. They discovered that word-of-mouth referrals converted more leads than digital marketing efforts.

Company B recognized the complementary role between digital marketing and traditional marketing approaches. They witnessed a balance between online inquiries and personal reputation or word-of-mouth referrals.

Company C noted that organic social media engagement was more effective than paid ads in yielding meaningful client communication. They received more inquiries from organic postings compared to the expected results from paid ads.

These findings suggest that while digital marketing plays a vital role in engagement and lead generation, conversion of these leads into actual sales often depends on factors like reputation, referrals, and offline interactions carried out by the company.

5.6 Discussion of AI Implementation

The interviewed companies had diverse levels of AI adoption in digital marketing. There was a lack of understanding on the part of companies regarding the existence of AI tools specific to their business, and hence felt AI was less applicable. Other than this, the nature of their business also stopped them from exploring AI tools since their business demanded a human touch for a better customer experience.

Company A found AI beneficial for marketing campaigns, but foresaw limited application of AI in its core activities as per their current knowledge. They were not aware if there were any AI tools available for a business like theirs.

Company B integrated AI into content creation in form of video content. They used AI for ad targeting, thus further improving the efficiency and scalability of their digital marketing efforts.

Meanwhile, company C displayed hesitation about AI incorporation due to knowledge gaps among employees and also stated the nature of its services-driven business as another reason for keeping AI away from its core activities, since the business demanded a human touch. Interpersonal relationships between the employees and customers were more important to ensure repeated sales. They had not explored AI for their marketing needs yet.

Thus, the findings suggest that while AI can enhance and boost marketing efforts, its adoption into core business operations is influenced by factors such as industry type, workforce competency and readiness, and awareness of available AI tools suitable for the business.

5.7 Discussion of Digital Marketing Impact

The impact of digital marketing differed across the three companies. Company A witnessed significant client acquisition and recruitment benefits with LinkedIn and email marketing, establishing and strengthening its credibility.

For company B, digital marketing increased overall brand awareness through targeted campaigns, social media engagements, and content marketing efforts. It has also helped in creating a pool of leads for company B, but the conversion of these leads into actual sales is influenced by factors like client trust building, the complexities of services provided, and personalized follow-ups

For company C, digital marketing assisted in improving and enhancing visibility and creating inquiries, but witnessed limited direct impact on sales.

The findings reveal that while digital marketing is essential for brand presence, lead acquisition, and helps with other marketing goals. It helps to bring early engagement and reach the target market more easily and Cost-effectively. It plays a role in bringing online leads, but it has an indirect impact on sales. The three companies commonly agreed that digital marketing facilitates online lead generation and inquiries, but not all of them got converted into real sales, thus indicating an indirect impact of digital marketing on sales.

The companies had a popular opinion that leads conversion into sales was more dependent on their internal strategies, which involve follow-ups, personalized recommendations, and retargeting strategies.

5.8 Discussion of Challenges and Opportunities

One of the common challenges faced by all three companies included their struggle to convert online leads into actual sales. They witnessed a gap between the online leads generated and the final sale numbers. Often, the leads generated were more than the actual sales. Various other factors influenced their conversion of leads into sales, such as personalized follow-ups, competition in marketing, and client trust building, to name a few.

Along with this, another roadblock identified was the budget constraints. This challenge focuses on and highlights the complexities of balancing expenditure with expected outcomes. Increasing investment does not necessarily mean proportionate success. Since the competition is high these days, many companies opt for digital marketing to reach their target audience. This makes the digital space highly competitive and creates a tough environment for small-sized companies to operate and stand out.

Company A faced challenges in distinguishing its services despite marketing investments.

Company B experienced budget constraints from its clients for fulfilling their marketing needs. Due to a lack of knowledge about digital marketing and how it operates, the clients refused to spend higher amounts.

Company C combated limited success with paid ads and transferred to organic content since paid promotion did not yield the required results after making high investments. Organic content turned out to be more effective.

The other common challenge faced by the three companies pointed out to be AI adoption in core activities. As a result of less technologically skilled workers, a lack of awareness about AI tools, and hesitation to involve AI due to the service nature of the business, AI implementation was viewed as a struggle.

Despite these challenges, businesses have significant opportunities to help them refine their digital marketing strategies. Company A identifies the growing influence of professional networking platforms and thus aims to level up its LinkedIn presence to engage more efficiently with its existing and potential target audience. Additionally, it plans to explore AI-driven marketing tools to optimize content creation and audience targeting.

Company B foresees potential in leveraging AI to develop more personalized content, ensuring a tailored approach that resonates with its customers. Apart from customized content creation, the company is also considering expanding and growing its service offering, using digital marketing as a fundamental driver to reach new markets and enhance customer engagement.

Meanwhile, company C intends to pay attention to organic content creation levels to build brand credibility and foster better connections with its existing and potential audience through high-quality, value-driven content.

Besides this, as the company begins its journey of opening a new business venture, it seeks to indulge in digital marketing efforts from the beginning, providing a strong foundation for brand growth and awareness.

Digital marketing success can be amplified by adopting a balanced approach, which involves combining organic and paid strategies, taking advantage of AI for personalization. The findings also suggest that by leveraging emerging opportunities, the companies can navigate digital marketing challenges effectively. Also, further based on performance insights, companies can refine their marketing approaches

CHAPTER VI:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

All companies that were interviewed have implemented digital marketing technology in some shape or form. Digital marketing technology has had an impact in areas including crafting and shaping brand presence, heightening brand awareness, customer engagement, communication, and relations. This research is concerned specifically with the role of digital marketing in the growth of new venture businesses, with a focus on the adoption of digital marketing, its impact, challenges, and opportunities faced by organizations that use digital marketing. By evaluating the practical application, this study articulates marketing strategies and emerging innovations and trends that help to support new and small businesses grow successfully in a fast-changing digital economy. Findings from this research suggest that, like other interviewees, the companies incorporated digital marketing in their businesses well before the commencement of business operations using LinkedIn, Meta, and Instagram to create brand awareness, generate leads, and establish credibility. Despite the differences in approaches taken by the three companies, all employed both organic and paid digital marketing strategies to foster greater engagement.

6.1.1 Implementation of Digital Marketing

The study discovers the digital marketing strategies of each interviewed company. All three companies made use of content marketing to spread useful information about their businesses via different digital marketing channels.

Company A incorporated social media marketing platforms such as LinkedIn for professional networking purposes, further supported by Facebook, Instagram to reach out to their audiences with relevant content in form of posts or videos. They utilized email marketing to reach out to current and potential audiences and engage with them

Company B focused similarly to Company A, on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram for content creation and targeted campaigns. They incorporated email marketing to reach out to their clients with information and offers specially designed for them and keep their interests high in the business.

Company C initially depended on paid advertisements but eventually shifted to organic social media marketing to produce relevant content to enhance their engagement and connect with the audience better.

Each company tailored its digital marketing strategy to align with its model of business and target audience.

6.1.2 Effectiveness of Digital Marketing

The effectiveness analysis disclosed that digital marketing successfully generated inquiries for the companies and assisted in increasing brand awareness, though the conversion rates varied due to several factors such as customer trust, lead-nurturing strategies.

Company A noticed that social media inquiries contributed to business growth. They leveraged engaging content marketing to present relevant content to audiences and targeted digital campaigns to expand their reach to potential clients and establish credibility in the industry. Despite the impact of these strategies, they observed that word-of-mouth referrals continued to be a key driver of conversions. This signified that digital marketing played a role in building brand awareness, credibility, and expanding the exposure of the brand to current and prospective clients, but purchase decisions and conversion into real sales were driven to a certain extent by the previous client's experiences, referrals, and personal recommendations. Hence, this led to Company A maintaining a hybrid approach where they focused on digital marketing for outreach and strengthening referral-based strategies for conversions.

Company B struck a balance between digitally created leads along referrals to acquire clients, thus signifying the existence of a complementary role between digital marketing and traditional marketing. They utilised digital marketing for brand building among the current and future customers while realising that converting leads into paying customers required additional trust-building measures.

Company C recognised the importance of digital marketing in fostering brand visibility, credibility, and awareness, but faced roadblocks in translating online-generated leads into actual sales. They witnessed little success with paid digital marketing efforts and therefore shifted to organic digital marketing techniques for better results.

Overall, this proved that digital marketing did aid in bringing leads for the business, but didn't guarantee the conversion of those leads into real sales. The

conversion process of leads is often governed by various other factors such as reputation, lack of trust of the customer, or need for additional touchpoints before a customer decides to make a purchase, offline interactions, which might keep the customer engaged but do not proceed with a real transaction. This further signifies that digital marketing does not have a direct impact on sales conversions.

6.1.3 Adoption of AI

The research explores the adoption and implementation of AI in the interviewed companies. The degree of adoption of AI differs in the companies.

While companies A and C believed that AI did not have any role to play in their core activities due to the dependency of their business on human interaction and a lack of awareness on their part as to how AI can be useful in conducting their overall business activities, company B integrated AI into marketing services, especially in video content creation and ad automation, they remained open to further incorporation of AI in enhancing their business.

Challenges in AI adoption for companies A and C included insufficient understanding of how AI can be involved in carrying out business activities and what the available AI tools are that suit their business. The other challenges included a lack of readiness among the workforce due to inadequate knowledge. Both companies A and C did not believe that AI could help perform their core business operations. Company C remained more apprehensive in adopting AI since their business demanded an extra personal touch to their clients, and repeated sales in the salon largely depended on interpersonal relations between clients and staff providing the services.

However, all three companies expressed their openness to exploring AI for their marketing objectives and improving their strategy.

6.1.4 Impact of Digital Marketing

The impact of digital marketing was evident in lead generation, building brand credibility, visibility, and enhancing audience engagement. Digital marketing proved to be successful, attracting inquiries and increasing visibility, credibility, and brand awareness, yet it didn't prove to have a direct influence on sales conversions. Therefore, additionally requires strategies to translate digital leads into paying customers.

Company A made use of social media platforms to develop brand credibility, recruit their employees, and use email marketing in order to keep in touch with their current audiences while disseminating information about their services to both current and potential clients. This approach helps to instill confidence among current and prospective audiences, enhancing reputation and building brand recognition.

Company B focused on digital marketing to create and nurture leads while recruiting employees like Company A.

Company C discovered that social media marketing is beneficial in enhancing engagement. However, they faced challenges in converting high engagement into paying customers. Thus, the study confirms that even though digital marketing has proven to be helpful for the three companies in achieving their marketing agendas, namely credibility, visibility, awareness, and engagement, the impact of digital marketing on immediate sales conversions remains indirect. By filtering the sales funnel and combining digital

marketing efforts with offline relationship-building strategies, companies can elevate digital marketing's complete potential for sustained business development.

6.1.5 Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Marketing

Several challenges were identified during the research. One of the most pressing challenges turned out to be high industry competition. Since digital marketing has become extremely popular for achieving marketing goals at a lesser cost compared to other tools of marketing tools, it's being widely accepted. Due to this, the businesses struggle to stand out in an increasingly saturated digital space where multiple companies are eager to grab the attention and eyeballs of the same target market, which has led to an increase in the cost of digital advertising. Businesses must put in more money to increase their reach, which has made it difficult for smaller businesses with budget constraints to compete.

Another challenge is the difficulty in converting digitally created leads into real sales and paying clients. It has been evident throughout the research that digital marketing contributed towards attracting and generating leads for the businesses, but the gap between engagement and sales exists. The prevalence of this gap can be a result of factors such as unqualified leads, hesitation on the part of customers due to a lack of trust, poor follow-up strategy. In the absence of a well-structured lead-nurturing approach, which could include personalized follow-ups, retargeting ads, and customized offers, a potentially engaged customer may not proceed to transactions, leading to lower conversion rates.

Budget constraints also pose a challenge to small enterprises, particularly since they need to balance their expenditure across multiple operations of the business. Digital marketing requires a consistent investment for content creation, paid advertisements, and keeping customers engaged. Businesses often tussle in finding out the most cost-effective channel. This risk of overspending on a low-performance campaign and underspending on high-performance ones can lead to suboptimal results.

The other concern surrounds AI integration. Due to a lack of awareness and knowledge, companies remain unfamiliar with AI-driven marketing tools. Companies A and C were both unaware of how AI could be useful in their businesses. The hesitation to incorporate AI was mainly due to the nature of the business, which was service, as it requires more personal touch, and using AI may reduce the personal touch that strengthens customer relationships. However, the willingness to explore AI tools for marketing and customer interaction purposes remained uncertain due to a lack of workforce readiness and knowledge towards AI. Despite these challenges, some opportunities exist for businesses to improve their digital marketing strategies and improve their overall impact.

Company A utilizes online networking tools such as LinkedIn and email marketing to foster relationships and establish its professionalism. The company plans to enhance its digital and email marketing strategies to promote customer relationship management and facilitate business development. Additionally, the company is willing to incorporate AI into its marketing efforts to maximize outreach.

As for Company B, they believe AI serves as a core propellant in bolstering its marketing strategies. The company's current use of AI includes content and video production. They are eager to learn how to apply AI further into the rest of their business processes.

Company C noticed that paid marketing did not yield favorable results, while organic marketing strategies performed exceptionally well. Thus, their medium-term strategy is shifted towards engagement and trust-building through organic content marketing. The company aims to create highly informative content tailored for increased customer retention alongside attracting new clients. This approach entails leveraging social media for storytelling, educational posts, and interactive content. They intend to adopt the same approach for their new pet business.

By managing the problems and opportunities for these companies, digital marketing can be enhanced for greater customer acquisition and higher client retention, and to achieve long-term viability.

6.2 Implications

Based on the findings of the study, small enterprises that seek to leverage digital marketing effectively can gain valuable insights about the role of digital marketing. Understanding how different approaches can shape customer acquisition, retention, and brand positioning can help companies improve their marketing strategies for greater efficiency. In this section, we will discuss the implications derived from this research.

6.2.1 Early Adoption of Digital Marketing

Another common strategy practiced by all three companies was to adopt digital marketing before launching their brands, before commencing actual operations. By doing so, businesses can yield benefits such as brand awareness, creating excitement in the marketing among the customers, and credibility. small enterprises should leverage social media marketing, content marketing, such as educational posts or video content, targeted email marketing campaigns, and SEO techniques or paid digital advertisements to generate interest and inquiries.

6.2.2 Continuous Digital Marketing Efforts

Marketing strategies need to be adjusted consistently due to the constantly evolving nature of the digital space and to suit different stages of business. Digital marketing is attributed as an ongoing process rather than- time effort. Hence, companies must adjust and alter their approaches according different stages their business is at, such as the initial phase requires focus on creating awareness, which can be achieved through brand storytelling, social media engagement, and content marketing. As the business gains leads, the attention should be shifted to nurturing those leads with the help of email

marketing, retargeting ads, and personalized interactions to help these leads convert into actual sales. And eventually shifting the attention to customer retention and promoting products and services.

A mix of organic and paid advertisements can be employed. Organic efforts such as SEO, content marketing help to build trust and brand recognition. Whereas paid advertisement, such as pay-per-click campaigns, influencer marketing helps to accelerate visibility in a competitive and crowded market.

6.2.3 Lead Nurturing and Conversion Strategies

It was observed in the research that all three companies faced challenges and roadblocks in converting leads generated via digital marketing into real sales. Digital marketing did aid in creating inquiries, but did not guarantee sales. It was identified that there is a need to maneuver how to translate the leads into actual sales. The research discovered that referral and word of mouth were among the other sources from which sales were derived. This signifies that a blend of digital and traditional marketing can be useful in enhancing conversion rates. Apart from these, the companies must employ other strategies such as customized email marketing targeted towards the leads generated via digital marketing, personalized follow ups with the leads to figure out at what stage of purchase decision they are to make then move to the next phase to complete the purchase and retargeted ads to improve lead conversions. At times lack of trust on the part of customers, improper follow-ups, and the reputations of businesses can become a hurdle in converting leads into sales.

6.2.4 Integrating AI for Marketing Optimization

The study revealed that not all three companies were using AI. Two out of three companies were apprehensive about including AI in their core business activities. They believed it was not appropriate for their operations since the services provided by them demanded a human and personal touch. They were not aware of what kind of AI tools existed for their type of business.

Apart from its suitability for their business, the lack of education and readiness on the part of employees was one of the obstacles to involving AI in their business. The common aspect regarding AI among the three companies was that they were open to exploring its role in meeting their marketing objectives. Company B was already using AI in creating video content and ad automation as part of their services for their clients.

small enterprises should explore AI tools for content creation, AI chatbots for customer supports which helps to provide customers solutions to their issues mostly in real time, improve targeting with the help of AI powered tools which help in analysing customer data, behavioural patterns to deliver highly targeted campaigns to the right audience and campaign performance analysis which assist in breaking down how the campaign has performed which further facilitates future campaign planning.

Similarly, small enterprises should explore other AI techniques that can enhance their core operational activities for improved results.

6.2.5 Optimized Budget and Time Allocation

Company C had realized that paid advertisements were not yielding their expected results, hence, they shifted their time and budget to producing organic content,

which performed better for them. Simply increasing expenditure on ads doesn't translate into better results. Small enterprises must examine which digital marketing channel works and is more suitable for their business. Based on this data-driven approach, they should allocate their budget and time to focus on building strategies that will aid in utilising those channels in the best way possible. They must evaluate return on investment (ROI) for each channel of digital marketing they opt for.

For budget allocation, small enterprises must prioritise high-performance channels and reduce or refine investments in underperforming channels. AI can be utilised in making budget decisions through tools like Google Smart Bidding, Facebook's Automated Ads, which help to automate ad spend based on the audience chosen and demographics. While allocating budgets, along with considering immediate result-yielding channels of digital marketing, long-term results strategies such as SEO, email marketing, and organic social content should be considered as well, since these can reduce dependency on paid advertisements over time, thus lowering marketing expenses.

6.2.6 Data-Driven Decision Making

The three interviewed companies made use of the data available to them regarding all their digital marketing activities to select which channel they should continue to invest their time, money, and efforts in the future.

Companies A and B discovered that LinkedIn was an important platform for them to establish and maintain their presence for professional networking as well as build and uphold their reputation in the market in order to continue driving sales via referrals and word-of-mouth.

Company C recognised that paid advertisements alone did not satisfy the results they expected, hence they shifted to organic content to connect with the audience better. In the current digital landscape, small enterprises must see beyond the trending formats of marketing their business digitally and adopt data-driven decision-making to maximize their results. A channel that works for one business does not necessarily guarantee it's suitable for the other. Proper tracking tools and analysis software should be setup in place to understand the campaigns and digital efforts to choose which channel they should spend money and time more compared to underperforming mediums. Tools such as Google Analytics, Facebook insights, Instagram insights, LinkedIn Analytics, and CRM dashboards assist in making more informed decisions.

These tools not only help to determine which channel is more suitable but also support in understanding which type of content performs well. After making various permutations and combinations among channel, type of content, and target audience, these tools can help spot the best mix for the company to improve and maximise the outcome.

6.2.7 Hybrid Marketing Approach

The hybrid marketing approach involves blending the best of digital marketing and traditional marketing tactics to maximise the outcomes.

It was observed in the research that all three companies recognized that some of their sales and leads were derived from word-of-mouth and referrals. To convert leads into sales, one of the components that influences this process is the reputation of the company and trust of the customer over the organisation, which are both affected to some

extent by the referrals and word-of-mouth. While digital marketing offers a vast reach and an easier medium to connect to the target audience, traditional networking methods such as face-to-face communication, referrals, and offline interactions help to build interpersonal connections and trust among the current and potential clients.

The combination of both these approaches can help small enterprises develop a well-rounded strategy for marketing to reach a larger section of audience and aid in the sustainable growth of the business. Traditional marketing can be amplified through digital strategies. Traditional marketing strategy of word- of- mouth can reach a wider audience if the reviews are posted and shared online via Google reviews or on social media handles.

Referral programmes can help provide incentives for customers who recommend a business within their network. These programmes can be promoted digitally with the support of email marketing or social media to reach a wider audience. Digital touchpoints can be added to traditional ads, such as QR codes or social media handle details, which will accelerate seamless integration of digital and traditional marketing methods.

Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) can help to follow up with leads generated digitally and through traditional methods such as word-of-mouth or referrals. Further AI-powered tools could be supportive to follow up with leads via email marketing and help to segment the leads into various categories, which will assist in retargeting ads and personalise follow-ups.

Thus, the hybrid approach can aid the small enterprises to derive benefits from the scalability and efficiency of digital marketing while leveraging trust as a result of traditional marketing efforts.

Overall, the implications of this study highlight the strategic importance of early adoption of digital marketing for small enterprises before launching their operations in order to establish brand presence and excitement before the commencement. The success in digital marketing requires continuous efforts. The businesses need to keep refining their digital strategies based on a data-driven approach that helps them to make informed decisions and allocate budgets to take advantage of the most apt mix of channels of digital marketing, type of content, and the right audience.

Integration of AI-powered tools can be beneficial for small enterprises in performing automated tasks for marketing. AI tools can be useful for content creation and establishing customer support. These can prove to be helpful in analysing data based on demographics and behavioural patterns to create highly targeted campaigns for a competitive market. With complete knowledge of the results of existing digital marketing strategies, small enterprises can make informed decisions and choices for future digital marketing plans and goals. These can be achieved with the help of data about the digital marketing efforts. Data-driven decision-making approach can be useful in improving the budget allocation. Small enterprises can leverage both traditional marketing and digital marketing to build stronger credibility and improve lead conversion rates by adapting a hybrid marketing approach.

Hence, digital marketing should be viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process by small enterprises instead of a one-time effort. Being customer-focused and responsive, small enterprises can navigate through the digital landscape more effectively and tap into opportunities for sustainable growth

6.3 Recommendations

After gathering data about the three small-sized companies that were selected for this research and understanding their perspective regarding the influence of digital marketing on sales, here are some recommendations for small enterprises in India that could be insightful based on the research findings

6.3.1 Strategic Early Adoption

The common practice undertaken by three companies was to embrace digital marketing before the commencement of their operations to create excitement for their respective businesses. This helped them spread awareness among their desired target audience regarding their business, which further facilitates early engagement.

For building a stronger foundation for brand awareness and engaging customers early, small enterprises should begin investing in digital marketing strategies even before officially launching their business operations. This allows businesses to grab the interest and attract potential customers. This can be achieved by using professional social media profiles across various platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok, depending on the business and the target audience. Pre-launch campaigns such as posters, teasers, countdowns, early discounts, and offers could be employed using these platforms

to attract early engagement and generate participation, which will accelerate the creation of a customer base when the business operations officially begin.

SEO techniques such as keyword optimization and link-building can be useful for small enterprises to rank higher in the search engine, making it easy to catch more attention before the commencement.

6.3.2 Multi-Channel Marketing Strategy

Opting for a well-balanced mix of organic and paid digital marketing strategies could be useful in maximising customer reach and engagement. Dependency on one method might limit growth possibilities. Organic engagement, such as consistent content marketing which involves videos, social media posts, blogs, and vlogs, and other forms of active social media interactions, allows businesses to remain in touch with their customers while keeping them updated with all necessary information about the products and services. These efforts aid in maintaining the interest of existing clients in the business and attract future customers without additional advertising costs.

Paid advertising methods like social media ads, influencer marketing, and pay-per-click marketing on Google Ads and social media platforms aid in amplifying the reach. They help to target specific demographics with high precision. Additionally, retargeting ads also help in reconnecting with audiences who have previously interacted with past ads.

Together, organic and paid advertising can strengthen the digital marketing outcomes and increase the reach of digital marketing efforts.

6.3.3 Improve Lead Conversion

Generating leads is not enough. There is a need for a proper structure to navigate the generated leads to convert them into actual sales.

The leads can be nurtured using personalized email marketing that assists in providing necessary and relevant information regarding exclusive offers and discounts or recommending products and services, and other valuable insights based on customer interest.

Retargeting ads assist in reminding visitors of the previously viewed products or services, increasing the possibility of conversion.

Chatbots could be used to enhance customer experience by providing instant answers to their queries.

Lead conversion demands a well-structured follow-up process using customer relationship management tools to track previous interactions, providing personalized recommendations and reminders, which could help small enterprises in ensuring a higher conversion rate and customer retention.

6.3.4 AI Integration for Efficiency

Small enterprises can take advantage of AI-powered tools to perform their core activities and improve their marketing efforts. From performing repetitive tasks to targeting the right audience efficiently and facilitating content creation, AI integration can help small enterprises in enhancing their marketing. AI chatbots are particularly useful for treating customer inquiries timely manner, recommending products, and processing orders, which can enhance their overall experience.

AI can assist in evaluating customer behavior patterns and demographics through AI predictive analytical tools to support digital marketing efforts, thus making targeting more competent for digital campaigns. Retargeting ads based on past purchases and interactions of previous visitors can be analyzed using AI-driven tools. AI content-generation tools help in producing engaging social media posts, blogs, videos, and ad copies, thus saving time and maintaining quality.

6.3.5 Enhance Performance Measurement

For utilizing time and money efficiently, small enterprises need to make data-driven decisions. These data-driven decisions can help to refine strategies and provide an overview of areas where improvement is needed.

Digital marketing efforts, along with customer or user behavior, can be understood and monitored by businesses by using CRM systems, social media insights, and Google Analytics.

Businesses can gain a deeper understanding of demographics in real-time can be achieved by breaking down insights using AI-powered tools.

Additionally, these insights provide tools to aid in understanding which digital marketing efforts are working for the business and are most effective, which areas lack efforts, and whether they should continue investing their resources further in that particular mode of digital marketing.

By consistently monitoring performance data assist small enterprises can make informed choices and decisions.

6.3.6 Cost-Effective Budget Allocation

Instead of increasing digital marketing budgets randomly, small enterprises should allocate budgets according to the performance data of their various campaigns. A/B testing of campaigns helps find out those campaigns and ads that are highly converting and the content that is bringing more engagement. Customer behavior analysis allows businesses to understand purchase patterns and tailor their campaigns better.

Rather than increasing and spreading the budget across various low-impact campaigns and channels, small enterprises should focus on high-performance channels and campaigns to generate more leads and drive traffic.

6.3.7 Combination of Traditional and Digital Marketing

While digital marketing is a dominant tool to amplify the reach and spread awareness about the business, small enterprises should not overlook traditional marketing techniques since they too contribute to building trust and credibility among the target audience. Referral programs encourage satisfied clients to put in their word and recommend the business to potential clients. Seeking the advantage of word-of-mouth remains one of the most effective ways of acquiring clients. Similarly, community engagement opportunities are also beneficial in engaging with prospective clients.

A hybrid marketing approach where digital efforts combine with traditional relationship-building methods can strengthen outcomes for small enterprises, thereby building a well-rounded marketing strategy that improves credibility, trust, and customer acquisition.

These strategies further help small enterprises to attract new clients as well as retain existing ones, ensuring long-term growth and sustainability in a competitive market.

For future possibilities of study, the findings of this research provide the groundwork for future studies by potential researchers. The findings can be developed further, and the researchers can expand the scope of interviews to include more samples across various industries, which can further improve the generalizability of the results.

Another aspect that the researchers can explore is the various consultants available in India that might help small enterprises to streamline their digital marketing activities. The problems faced by small enterprises in the implementation of digital marketing centered around high competition, where it was difficult for the three selected small enterprises to compete in the highly competitive digital space since nowadays most of the companies are going digital and using digital marketing for achieving their marketing goals, it was tough for the small enterprises to differentiate themselves in the digital space and stand out.

The other problem centered around budget allocation, where they faced issues in allocating budgets and deciding how much budget should be allocated to digital marketing. The researchers could identify the various consultants available in India who could help small enterprises to get through these challenges. These consultant agencies can be very useful in solving their key problems and increasing the adoption of digital marketing in their business, and using it to its full potential. The researchers can find out

the agencies available for various types of enterprises, industry-specific, and even task-specific.

Further, the affordability of these agencies can be explored for small enterprises. The point of view of small-sized enterprises can be studied to understand what they think of seeking help from a consultant agency rather than doing it in-house. Researchers can further explore the insights of this study and strengthen it.

Researchers can attempt to find more hurdles faced by small enterprises by widening the scope of research and studying more companies to analyze what more challenges could be solved for small enterprises regarding digital marketing. Larger-sized companies, such as medium-sized enterprises, could also be studied to determine whether sales in those organizations with bigger digital marketing budgets affect sales and whether it has a direct impact on sales.

The researchers can explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the digital marketing landscape for small enterprises. They can examine the feasibility of the adoption of specific AI-driven tools for various types of businesses or industries, which can be suitable in aiding in improving digital marketing efforts for small enterprises.

The researchers can also provide task-specific AI tools recommendations to small enterprises to integrate into their business. One of the challenges faced by the three small-sized companies was a lack of knowledge as to the availability of AI tools specific to their business. Researching business-specific and industry-specific AI tools could prove to be extremely beneficial in educating small enterprises to enable AI integration into core business activities to maximize output.

Further specific AI tools to streamline digital marketing activities can also be beneficial to small enterprises to keep evolving their digital marketing strategies and efforts.

The other challenges with the adoption of AI were a lack of readiness on the part of the workforce due to a lack of knowledge. Researchers can study various techniques and methods to impart AI education to small enterprise employees readily, to make them AI savvy, and remove the hesitation in adopting AI quickly.

The small-sized enterprises can be provided with recommendations about the companies or agencies that can aid them in making their workforce comfortable and familiar with AI tools for their business and marketing. Each business requires different AI tools and operates in a different environment. Companies imparting AI education specific to their business can be suggested to make the workforce AI-ready.

The other areas for future research lie in one of the challenges faced commonly by all three selected small enterprises. The three companies faced the same issue of converting online leads generated with the help of digital marketing activities into actual sales. Due to this hurdle, it was proven that digital marketing did not have a direct impact on sales, but was the first step towards generating sales by creating an online pool of inquiries and leads. During the research, it was discovered that the conversion of these leads into actual sales largely depended on internal factors in a company, namely, follow-up strategies, CRM, lead-nurturing activities, and offline interactions with the leads to change them from interested customers to actual buyers.

The researchers could study these strategies, which can help small enterprises convert the leads generated via digital marketing into real sales. They research which tools or methods should be included in the internal offline process of managing the inquiries within the organization to ensure digital marketing-generated leads are fully utilized. Through a hybrid marketing approach, the researchers can guide small-sized enterprises as to how they can make use of traditional marketing combined with digital marketing to maximize the results of online-generated leads and increase their conversion rates.

By extending the research to a wider section and exploring advancements and suitability of AI and AI-powered tools, future studies could contribute towards building a robust framework for small enterprises to navigate through the digital marketing space.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Study Title

The research aims to understand what role small and medium-sized enterprises should expect from digital marketing in terms of sales and conversions. This brings us to the research question of which digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises.

Research Supervisor

Dr. Maria Joseph Xavier

Swiss School of Business and Management

Purpose of the Study

The research aims to understand what role small and medium-sized enterprises should expect from digital marketing in terms of sales and conversions. This brings us to the research question of which digital marketing influences sales in small enterprises

Participant Requirements

To participate, the enterprise must:

- Be a small-sized enterprise
- Should be using digital marketing

What to Expect

- The semi-structured interview does not have a time restriction

Questions will cover:

- Understanding what the business is about
- Digital tools and platforms used
- Effectiveness of digital marketing efforts
- Impact of digital marketing
- Understanding their knowledge about AI and its use in the business
- Challenges and opportunities

Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary.

You may:

- Choose not to participate
- Skip any questions
- Request data removal before publication

Risks and Benefits

Potential Risks

- Minimal risks, such as mild discomfort reflecting on challenges
- Possible sensitivity around business performance questions

Benefits

- Contribute to understanding the effectiveness of digital marketing in small enterprises on sales and conversions
- Help improve support for small enterprises

- Identify challenges and opportunities with digital marketing for small enterprises

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Data Security: Interview responses are accessible only to the research team.
- Anonymity: No personally identifiable information will appear in publications.
- Data Retention: Data will be kept for 5 years after study completion, then all personally identifiable information will be deleted.
- Data Usage: Used only for academic research (e.g., publications, dissertation) and handled per GDPR and relevant regulations.
- Minimization: Only necessary data will be collected.

Collection of Contact Information

Contact information (e.g., email address) is not required for the interview, which remains anonymous.

This information:

- Will be stored apart from survey responses
- Used only for purposes you consent to
- Deleted after 5 years or when the purpose is fulfilled (whichever is sooner)
- You may withdraw consent for its use anytime (see below).

Networking Option

If you opt into networking, you'll be invited to a secure platform to connect with other participants who also opt in. Your contact information won't be shared without your explicit consent.

Your Rights

- Withdrawal: Exit the study or request data deletion (including contact information) anytime before publication by emailing [researcher's email].
- Access: Request access to your data by contacting [researcher's email].

Compensation

- Participation is unpaid.
- You may opt to receive a summary of findings.

Contact Information

- Research questions: [Your institutional email]
- Participant rights: [IRB/Ethics Committee contact]
- Technical support: [Technical support contact]
- Ethics Approval: Approved by the Swiss School of Business and Management Ethics Committee ([Approval number/reference]).

Consent Declaration

By proceeding, you confirm:

- You've read and understood this information

- You meet the participant requirements
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You understand your rights
- You consent to data collection and use as described
- You are at least 18 years old
- You know you can withdraw anytime
- If opting into additional activities, you agree to provide contact information as outlined

Do you consent to participate?

- Yes, I consent and agree to the terms
- No, I do not wish to participate

(If No, the survey ends)

Optional Additional Consent

Would you like to:

Be contacted for follow-up research?

- Yes
- No

Have your anonymized data archived for future research?

- Yes
- No

Be contacted about related studies?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Join networking opportunities with other participants?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If “Yes” to 1, 3, or 4, please provide your email:

Email: _____

(This will be collected separately and not linked to your survey responses unless specified for follow-up purposes.)

Date: [Automated timestamp]

Please save or print this form for your records.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

The following are the questions provided to the three selected small-sized enterprises. these served as a guide and blueprint for the selected three small enterprises to understand what the conversation would cover.

1. Organization Name:

2. Respondent's Occupation:

3. Overview of the Organization:

4. Sector Classification of the Organization:

5. Business Size Categorization:

- Small Enterprise
- Medium Enterprise

6. Digital Marketing Adoption:

- Is digital marketing utilized by your organization?
- If yes, what is the duration of implementation?

7. Objectives of Digital Marketing Engagement:

8. Evaluation of Digital Marketing Effectiveness:

- Has digital marketing proven beneficial for the intended purposes?

9. Challenges Encountered in Digital Marketing Implementation:

10. Types of Digital Marketing Activities Employed:

- Examples include Social Media, Content Marketing, Video Marketing, Email Marketing, etc.

11. Effectiveness Assessment of Digital Marketing Activities:

12. Impact of Digital Marketing on Annual Sales:

- Do you believe digital marketing activities have contributed to an increase in annual sales?

13. Understanding and Utilization of AI in Marketing or Other Organizational Functions:

- What is your understanding of AI? Do you think it's helpful in any manner for your business?

- Do you currently use AI in any of your activities? If not, then why not?

14. Barriers to AI Adoption:

- If AI is not utilized, what are the deterrents?

15. Challenges Faced in AI Implementation:

- For organizations employing AI, are there any obstacles encountered during implementation?

APPENDIX C
TRANSCRIPTS OF THE AUDIO RECORDING

There was an attempt made to transcribe all the audio recordings with the three selected small enterprises as accurately as possible.

Company A

Hi Vanshika hi Tarina

so I'll be interviewing you today for my PhD thesis so let's begin okay could you please tell me the name of your organisation

it's e-brique Pvt Ltd

alright and what is your occupation I am the managing director and the founder alright can you give us a view of your organisation what it is about and since how long have you been operating yeah sure so in December this year we're going to complete four years and my company is basically an agency where we provide or design and detailing services for steel structures so we have a group of engineers who are doing the work here alright so I assume you are in the service sector yeah it's a service sector okay and what is your categorisation of business in terms is it a small enterprises medium or large

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Enterprise or a small enterprise okay so do you utilise digital marketing in your organisation yes we do we require digital marketing for many reasons our HR uses it and then we also use it for promotion purposes okay and since how long have you been implementing since the beginning actually and actually two weeks before we even started operating in the office just to spread the word and you start getting business enquiries in

advance alright and what has been your objective of utilising social media digital marketing what is the purpose for which you have been utilising and are you getting the desired results for the purpose yeah actually because I think since the growing digital marketing age that is there right now so all of my

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Customer base I think 90% or more of them are there on social media so it really helps you know spreading the word and making the brand awareness and then also social media has been a great help in hiring the right candidates so overall yes it helps both with business and the team building so which platform of social media do you think is more preferable or has been more useful for you mostly it's LinkedIn but then also we have active profiles on Facebook and Instagram but most of the work and in always it's LinkedIn that's my useful so your Facebook and Instagram pages are more for your social presence yeah it's there for the social presence so that we have we have a company's presence there also okay and how do you evaluate your effectiveness for all the digital marketing efforts do you have

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Any system that helps you evaluate whether you achieve the results or just how do you basically view the whatever results you're getting how do we view them and how do you find out or come to the conclusion that it has worked for you or it hasn't worked for you so maybe being from the advertising background education wise so I actually take over the digital marketing for my company myself and I think that when we do get the result that we are hoping for when we actually do the marketing for a specific reason and when

we get those results so we know that it has been effective so there is no exact way of knowing how we have received those enquiries but I'm sure like since with my experience I've heard my clients telling me that I've seen a presence online and then it definitely

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It is a good feedback so do you think that digital marketing has helped you in increasing your business over the years yes for sure alright and do you have any campaign driven advertising or it's a general advertisements of your business and what you do so mostly it's a general one but any started we had you know specific campaigns going on for specific services that we provide and sometimes when we have a specific team that has like we have to plan if the team is going to have less work in the next couple of weeks and we start promoting the service of that particular team more on social media but other otherwise general so when you are using digital marketing what is your primary reason what is your first first reason of you know choosing social media marketing and you know you you probably are looking for perspective clients or you are probably

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Just looking for awareness so what is your primary goal since I think all people are so active on social media so having a active social media presence is very important to make your clients feel that your company is alive and it's active and it's updated as per today's time so I think in always it's just beneficial overall because it's it connects with the potential customer base okay so somewhere it is also leading to credibility of your organisation yeah that's true if you keep if you have an active online presence that then

that just justify that your companies act when you know your transforming your company in a better way okay and what type of digital marketing do you employ for example you do content marketing video marketing email marketing

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Or it's just social media marketing why you putting a posts regarding your company services so out of these it's two so we also do good email marketing we have a great database for like most of the potential client age and internationally so we do constant email marketing and then we also put up posts on social media that could be small reels or just normal posts or mentioning our services or just showing our recent works okay so whenever you have a new client with you do you feel that client is coming or maximum of your clients are coming more through word of mouth or through your digital presence or through some other way so if you talk about enquiries then we I think that will be a 50-50 percent that we do get 50% of our clients for

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On reference basis basically and 50% form social media but when we talk about turning of those enquiries into actual jobs that's mostly from word of mouth and less from social media okay alright moving on next question what is your understanding of AI if I understand it could be useful in today's time since I think everybody is using it now but in my specific field of business there is not much use because we are a service-based companies and I have ingenious under me who are you know great and genius in the working all day but there is nothing really much to do with AI so my ideas in my knowledge of AI in this concept is not really too much so for you the barrier to adoption

of AI is that you feel it's not use

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Full in the business that you're in yeah but otherwise I think it's not useful from my business but otherwise as a general concept is I think it is really really useful in today's world however thought of implementing AI for your marketing efforts so we actually have a marketing agency that's working for us but since we have a very transparent or relationship of working they actually use AI and it we have actually like many ideas that came from AI so I would suggest indirectly but yes we do use AI in our marketing strategies and do you think you can use AI in any other function in your business no actually there is no other possible feature in our business where we could implement AI but I am hoping in the new future there would be something useful for us alright okay thank you so much for your time

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No worries thank you so much

Company B

Hi Shaan hello Tarina okay so could you tell us the name of your organisation first okay it is media Limited okay and what is your occupation in the business this my company found it very recently in January and we are into service business it is advertising service and we offer and the size of your business is right now operating on our small skill because we are just few months old but speaking to a couple of bigger clients and I'm very confident that we are going to be somebody in sometime definitely definitely okay so how do you use digital marketing to reach to your clan so right now we are using our own page and since

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So then that company profile we are doing a lot of marketing and then we are reaching out to industry and our clients advertisers and our delivery partners so it's basically via LinkedIn that you are trying to reach LinkedIn generation and we do it for an international we want to do some services like SU and buying for international clients so for that we're doing okay so has the medium been proven beneficial to you to get the client Google is very recent activity and we are still looking you know what is the

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From Google but it is available platform moving to be a very good platform for us because the same we are able to connect with the audience with PPB advertisers we want to reach out to and at the same time with you and thrice posting on LinkedIn we can show what you're doing to our so you are using LinkedIn since the very beginning it is the three months ago okay so whenever you post any anything on LinkedIn are you putting some

money on it or you let it organically grow it is mix at times most of the time it is already connected with so many people in this industry but at times we do so when we talk about getting

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Getting the business so you know maybe have you seen a have you seen an increase in the business that you're getting in the last 34 months since you have started maybe in the first one month the kind of business or the kind of leads you had compared to what you have today when you are relatively 6 to 7 months old us same time we get delivery or strategy enquiries so what would be the conversion order you get and them becoming your clients how would you okay so bigger bigger pages the time is approximately six months because generally these are multiple agencies

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Then we to research about the client accommodation come with a very detailed presentation about our services at what we propose him about them be and it takes longer 3 to 6 months so since we are eight months into the business so it is too early I would say to say that but the kind of queries at least those are giving us those post or those promotions are giving us so you feel satisfied enough with the amount of time you spending on digital marketing for your business you feel you are getting those results exactly so do you think in future you could have another platform other than LinkedIn and Google ads going more more

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You looking for similar audiences this is one and then I don't think so that apart from

these platform for us this industry making emotion and it is not making sense to advertise so you feel that in your business the better handle or the better audience you want to reach out to is going to be present on LinkedIn it makes sense that those conversations are going on your present okay so what challenges do you face when you are promoting yourself via the platform that you just mentioned

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We are busy or unbusy content creation that who is going to come up with the relevant also then that agency of that person should understand our business model very well so if it is advertising business or a business then a person value into these categories can come with content and more than doing a paid promotion I think coming up with relevant content making if you is good then you promote and reach out to the wider audience then it is a good equation and new business if your content is not good you're just doing the promotion it will not give you so have ever felt that you know probably you ever had a problem reaching out to people via pushing media you thought you know there could be a better way

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To reach out or you thought that social media was more cost-effective to reach out so why did you specifically choose only the social sector to launch yourself specifically in LinkedIn industry so before going for a face-to-face meeting people generally check your profile they want to understand your credentials they look at your website and they look at your ear where you all before so that is why I found that in my industry it is making biggest lake crossing everything and giving everything where they are searching for the

understanding in a very short spend of what we can offer so have you ever used if I am first may ask that what is your understanding of AI in general

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Because I'm into so I understand that okay it is more creativity than coming up with you for example we are doing an experiment with the client it's he is a political leader he and we be shot one video for that person and then what we doing that we are doing multiple videos with reading multiple videos using AI in multiple languages and in a personal life that person is confessing to sending messages WhatsApp to his people saying taking the name that I am busy and I am going to be a leader and then this is my manifesto this is on the creative on platform

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Clients they generally look for other objectives there you know we need one type of target audience it will look for local that is and if some campaign is working within then automatically it puts more budgets into that can be all the smart practising because of air so you feel that it helps and creativity and to accelerate your efforts it helps with that so do you use AI for yourself to reach to clients do you think you need it small business to do business product

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When is the suggest of lines for those products so you basically feel that you will need it to work for other line for your own region out your audience you feel it's not that helpful and budget platform itself indirectly directly go to AI set up to do that but you know the services or things are using the platforms are using themselves that AI so have you ever

felt that you have a value probably understanding how the AI was working have you ever felt any challenge in understanding E you know the technologies use for your clients also have you ever felt I think application

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Okay we cannot imagine or partner partner is using it then we think okay I can be like that okay so do you think in future if you have some other third party who wants to come and explain about AI usage do you think you would want to outsource that or you would you think that you can be in the course of time learn it yourself depending it depends it can be both if it is a very large scaring you coming up our own product investment right now my advertisers are asking for that I will do a collaboration I use a third-party as of now but if my child is ready to invest in a product then we can do that so as of now you feel

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Everything will change when you know you when you have more time in the business and more investments coming up over money coming up at the moment you feel whatever you can do yourself you want to do it on your own that's when you feel more comfortable doing it right now that way moving onto what you do for your clients so what kind of what is the size of the organisation that you are working with companies to us just what are your marketing objectives and so sometimes in a bigger clients with a very difficult objective and we have those solutions available because of experience and we are servicing them and basic clients come with basic kind of requirements only

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Create a ecosystem so how much time do you give your clients to expect from you any results or what's the what's the period when you start calculating the effectiveness of camping for different products it is different it is project project participate project platform platform we speak to them we start working on them and would like a fucking project so you think the range can be from one month to one year

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That's the kind of range that this business demands okay and it was kind of us alright so what do you think do you face any sort of challenges or you think that you know when you working for a small enterprise or a small organisation what challenges do you face with them and what challenges do they when they come to you they say that they're not able to do it themselves and that's why they coming to you they don't have the necessary knowledge or equipments that's why they're coming to you or they generally come with the mindset that they want to outsource this so I think all three reasons number one being that you because they are small team they want to invest in their business only want

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Second ecosystem so additional marketing there are couple of things that you have to take care of and all those work each other so for small set ups hiring a team different experts for different to take care of different parts of addition becomes different so that is why they go to agencies when these ages become one stop and what challenges do you face when you are dealing with the small or medium enterprises your clients basically small client of yours what is the major or a common challenge face with most of them challenges not enough knowledge of they don't have that knowledge knowledge of

marketing mostly and they have

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They want to judge their agency and judge their campaign performance that part becomes difficult because if you want to educate them about you how does this work at times it feel that agency is trying to do that too on more money from them so that trust sector and this limited knowledge of the N plus the third point is biggest ratio very transparent so it works against the against this domain itself because everything is very transparent so they won't reserve very instant patience from our clients to give time or invest time in a project and additional marketing project which is with which line become difficult so have you ever felt that a finance it was an issue that you know you probably wanted that sort of a money

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Put on a campaign or from their end you felt that you be with the finance that they that's causing some kind of a hurdle in boosting those campaigns or doing something because marketing requires money also apart from whatever the platforms will do so have you felt that this is meeting always lot lot of research we do all those analysis on different different channels where they present presents and after this full when they go and come with the proposal say that this is the among you should be invested with the kind of results you're looking at then suddenly they come up with a very crazy budget saying we do not have those deep pockets so why don't you start with this always happens

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The second day is that since as I mentioned additional a couple of things work together so

you can't start a media campaign till your site website will be the landing page landing page is not good enough then a person at work done by media to bring that person to your website is wasted because the person will land and then just drop off from here because he's not interested going to new page very difficult to understand all the aspects and then how come all these elements should work in tendon with each other to come up with result so that is very difficult part which explain to the client my client is the woman say that we are doing media part but your resume is not good then either we want to take that project Are

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So do you are doing the right activities you doing Facebook marketing Instagram LinkedIn SCO for your clients so which one do you think works the most in in the digital aspect and social media marketing and which one works less or do they all depend on the kind of product of the service that you are working for and which one of those you feel is actually worth spending some money a new client who is just starting the marketing practices we always suggest that it is hygiene and you work on two things first which is like you have a good online presence in the sense that you don't have a social media it's okay but first you have a good website or you are the client is into app

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And then followed by a good SCO because organic generation of organic it is a very long term process so you start the moment or website is ready you start with you then come soon there are different steps and you go step-by-step first you create your presence then you start driving traffic to your address then and in that also also one way doing it

another way is doing by a paid media so obviously want to do it organically first which is SCO then you start you start your paid media camps and paid camps will not work good if you want website is not good on your SU is not good your cost will be on higher side if SUO is not please please so all these are all I think they should work together but as a very limited budget

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But still wants to start into the sea with compos allotment conventional businesses who was right there all the tools like Facebook insta all these things they come in and their performance largely depends on these two things that you just said the SCO and the website what suggest if you have to ever compare Facebook Instagram LinkedIn so do you think you can just

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Randomly say one perform better than the other or you feel that again depends on the product again depends on their basic online you know things just so there is no one here winner winner if it is Instagram then it is creating your BTC brand and that too if your ticket items of your product is on lower side or we can cancel services also and but it will be very difficult to do so so and similarly it depends broadly speaking Mehta Google

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Both for me to me to see while me and insta more towards me to see right why do we see insta but the budget budget is on a lower side maximum so there is a platform that we say we suggest that there is always a platform we decide basis the product basically the audience so when you are doing all the services your client so what is the main goal

usually is it just the presence is it they want sales what is the main goal for which they want to start digital present they want to be there whenever there is a

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A good news is going on or there you expect a lot of traction in terms of conversations and that positive side so they want to be present on those sides while you see a lot of skin care brand to see coming up their focus mostly towards words how do you measure the effectiveness of a campaign that you run I mean if for examples if a client comes to that we want to increase our sales so how do you measure from the start listening after going through the brief and then suggest we will go on this platform if it is let's see then we talk in those terms only and before they before they execute the plans we tell them that this is how what you can expect and then

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Them that this is plan versus performance while during the tenure of the campaign and if it is and if only then obviously alright so coming to AI now like you mentioned you use AI tools for your client so if to name a few what would be those tools and what do you use them for they have this building and right now they are managing a very big football brand community and it is a 63 million football fans across Manchester club okay so I am speaking to a couple of my clients day going to use it for their community building example community community

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Cricket fans commerce commerce to customise everyone coming up with a very massive campaign when they need let's save hundred people to start the campaign and some 365

days planning it can be cut short to just one 10th of that by using this so this is what we were discussing about that election campaign interview interview interview shot political leader leader for a day for his conversing on digit medium and then via AI to be created some hundreds of videos in different different languages and it was also personalised addressing to that person going to receive the message they are different so many different application so you keep on adapting new

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Vacations as in the client there is not like we use only these you can use more and however more innovations that come always do collaboration with them who can manage and help you with so just for knowledge because you've been giving us some insights about businesses that you handle so currently currently how many projects are you handling so that we know that we've been discussing you have you have given us insights about these many companies so for that purpose so I think around 15 to 20 projects okay alright age as one person of us inside about all these companies the challenges you face and different demands that come

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Experience yeah agency age alright so I think that is quite good for us to go thank you so much for your time

Company C

Hi Diya hi so could you tell us the name of your organisation and a little bit about what you do it is a small scale of grooming salon and it's located in South Delhi and I provide services in this case which is in hair for a lot of hair treatment and then make up and what we do since how long have you been running your salon I had taken entire ownership about 2 1/2 years only

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Only for investment purpose since I found interest in it I have taken full ownership and that what would be the size of your organisation would it be small or Indian so have you for your salon purposes plaster order us to reach any new time we had to use a lot of this in the beginning so what I did was I impact someone to do all this and we started with a little bit of optimisation and paid ads on Google as well

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On Instagram how long have you been investing or doing marketing so let's say about three years now if I miss your main goal marketing was to establish a presence to let people know about your work about your salon and you also wanted to drive some is that right so the first motive is awareness you know that something called flash actually exist and that opening up and number one on the latest stages when we had a client to promote specific services

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Alright so if you have to set up analyse that we have got maximum client so what would be the same was a difficult for you or was it worth of mouse or anything else 18 to 20 that's not my name so about the goals that you had in mind before and so you feel that they have been fulfil so what I do right now is quite I think they were not used people from apps apps specifically

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People come here to book appointment lot of people and stuff like that profile just like any other basic SCO that was not giving me enough traction at all in fact like the entire amount I was spending on that so many others do the same so who goes on top that was not working out at all then I just relied on the basic food content getting all candid or sometimes when I knew that I posted it a bit that I invested money on Instagram besides that little bit of socialisation quite basic now but when I used to invest a lot I think it was not

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So you felt that it was not working for you because there was a lot of competition or what is that you think it is not working so much I think a small business allocating marketing if you want to reach that kind of traction you require a lot of budget wrong with that amount I was investing in order with that is all a small size at the time so if you if you have to say that maybe initially when you were spending a lot of money for your marketing digital marketing did you feel it was contributing enough to annual since

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Because I want to answer this properly when I use this targeting I started booting for that a lot of queries so I did get a lot of questions but materialising them into actual job being done and actual seems to increase that she was a little less but I think that's not what physical marking guarantee guarantee office so if I right now like you said you are 18 to 20% of the sales you feel coming from digital so today do you think do you think the digital aspect of your marketing is driving any sales or now is it just you have got your clients so they deleted sales

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I have an order with teachers and then my specific segments that don't do well properly like me that when I use it it has helped it a little bit not as that was so if I have to talk about artificial intelligence so what do you think artificial intelligence is artificial intelligence a lot of blow less manpower but I personally don't like it I like the human touch more so I don't have much idea about intelligence because I'm kind of scared of the idea office I

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Just because we were doing everything ourselves and everything you can use it to your business will be useful actually I'm not quite sure but I'm really open to learning about it like how it can help it grow if there would be any barrier to adoption what would you think allow me a moment so there would be any barrier to adoption towards AI in future what would you think it would be fine if you know if you if someone tells you these are the ways it will help you you still feel you do it or you feel that no you would lose that

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Touch actually okay probably the only barrier would be that in my business most of the staff most of the people work the workforce is educated right so put them to adapt to it let's teach them something that you know basically artificial intelligence will help them for their own sales for flashes entire sales I think that could be the only barrier human fall in this field is not educated coming to marketing when you felt that you wanted to outsource that did you feel that you felt the need to outsource because you were not fully aware of how it would operate or you wanted to dedicate that to somebody

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You could focus on other aspects of your business building I could not focus on the digital part of it to be physically present on floor so that is out one of my staff members was already trained so we had to know our sources anymore and I just became an in-house activity and I could look over it much more today it was it is completely taken care of by so we have to talk about the current business scenario for plus so you think that you would want to if you want to increase your sales or if you looking for plus the new wing that you're starting for pets

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Do you think you would again want to spend on digital marketing again is going to be added next to it and when I want to completely started from scratch I need that to be there from the beginning I'll be investing in the meeting as an informed consumer not earlier when I know I was just kind of blind firing so I'm much more informed now since

activities in-house I will be investing for the new business but as a much more informed consumer thank you so much

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