

Sustainability and Crisis Communication in Small Enterprises: A Qualitative Study on PU, PEOU, and Digital Marketing Adoption

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of digital marketing strategies (DMS) in small enterprise sustainability, focusing on crisis communication. Using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), it examines how perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) influence DMS adoption. A qualitative approach with 26 participants, including business owners and digital marketers, was used. Findings show that DMS enhance crisis communication through better engagement and market visibility but face challenges like budget constraints and technological barriers. User-friendly tools (PEOU) and clear benefits (PU) drive adoption, supporting sustainability. Future research should expand on these findings with larger, quantitative studies to explore diverse business contexts.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Technology Acceptance Model, PU, PEOU, Digital Marketing Strategies, Small Enterprises, Sustainability, Challenges, Benefits.

1. Introduction

Digital platforms' explosive growth has changed how companies interact with their clientele (Smith, 2021). Using email, social media, and the Internet to manage client relationships and ensure business continuity is known as digital media (Jones, 2019). Businesses in Pakistan are using digital media more and more to reach a wider audience, especially during uncertain and crisis-filled times (Ahmed et al., 2021). Websites, social media, and other platforms are essential for online businesses to interact with clients, advertise their offerings, and handle difficult market conditions (Lee & Kim, 2017).

A collection of online initiatives aimed at drawing in and keeping clients are referred to as digital marketing strategies (DMS) (Saura, 2021). Businesses now prioritize new media for marketing, advertising, and crisis communication, whereas consumers historically relied on traditional media for information (Ahmed et al., 2019). In order to sustain brand visibility and guarantee business sustainability, marketers have made a growing investment in DMS in recent years. Digital media campaigns are therefore now essential for small businesses to thrive in cutthroat markets (Kornfeld, 2009).

Business-consumer interactions have changed as a result of e-marketing, which offers an affordable means of establishing, producing, and sharing value. In Pakistan, where increasing internet accessibility has changed marketing tactics and crisis communication procedures, this change is especially pertinent (Sandhu, 2023). Small businesses depend on DMS to sustain operations, foster resilience, and maintain growth in the face of economic uncertainty and crises.

Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study looks at how small businesses use DMS to improve crisis communication and sustainability. The study investigates how adoption

of digital marketing is influenced by perceived utility (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). This study demonstrates how digital marketing supports business continuity and crisis management by concentrating on small businesses in Pakistan, specifically cake bakeries, event planning companies, and apparel brands.

In-depth interviews with consumers, digital marketing experts, and small business owners offer valuable perspectives on how DMS can help MSMEs enhance sustainability. This study provides insightful information about the function of digital marketing in crisis communication and small business sustainability. It clarifies real-world uses, obstacles, and tactics for utilizing technology to guarantee long-term business resilience in Pakistan by looking at DMS through the prisms of PU and PEOU.

Aim of the Study:

With an emphasis on the role that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) play in adoption, this study attempts to investigate how small businesses use digital marketing strategies (DMS) to improve sustainability and crisis communication. The study aims to determine the advantages and difficulties of incorporating digital tools for business growth and resilience by examining the experiences of small business owners in a range of industries.

Additionally, it looks at how DMS can improve crisis response plans, guaranteeing stable operations and efficient customer interaction. The results will give policymakers, digital marketers, and small businesses important information about how to use digital technologies for long-term success in a business environment that is becoming more digital and unpredictable.

Research Questions:

RQ1: To what extent do PU and PEOU influence the adoption of digital marketing strategies in small enterprises for sustainability and crisis communication?

RQ2: What are the key benefits of adopting digital marketing strategies in strengthening the sustainability and crisis communication of small enterprises?

RQ3: What are the primary challenges small enterprises face in adopting and utilizing digital marketing strategies for long-term sustainability and effective crisis communication?

2. Theoretical Framework:

A very useful framework for analyzing how digital marketing tactics support sustainability and crisis communication in small businesses is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM offers a structured method for comprehending how small businesses incorporate digital marketing tools—like social media platforms, email campaigns, and analytics tools—into their operations to improve resilience and long-term sustainability. It is a model that forecasts technology adoption behavior.

In this regard, the degree to which small businesses use digital marketing tactics for sustainability and efficient crisis communication depends heavily on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU measures how much people believe digital marketing tools can help with crisis management, customer engagement, and business continuity. Conversely, PEOU affects how simple it is for small businesses to use these tools without facing major financial or technical obstacles.

This study's emphasis on PU and PEOU draws attention to the critical elements that either

support or impede small businesses' adoption of digital marketing, especially during emergencies. The framework highlights the clear connection between digital tools and their capacity to improve competitive positioning, market adaptability, and crisis communication. Small businesses navigating an increasingly digital landscape must comprehend how digital marketing technologies contribute to sustainability and crisis resilience, given the dynamic and frequently unpredictable nature of small business environments.

3. Literature Review:

In their study "Digital marketing adoption of microenterprises in a technology acceptance approach," Buvar and Gati (2023) conducted research. The degree to which micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) use information technology for their operations is actually measured by the degree to which self-efficacy and the technology's ease of use influence the intention to use it.

Vujanović and Pavlović (2023) investigate how small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are managed during times of crisis, specifically focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects. The goal of the study is to pinpoint tactics and industry best practices that improve the sustainability and resilience of SMEs. The study examines earlier research and reports on SME management during crises using a thorough literature review methodology, combining case studies and empirical data to provide useful insights. According to the findings, SMEs encounter several difficulties during times of crisis, such as financial limitations, dwindling consumer demand, and supply chain interruptions.

In their study "Marketing Research Trends Using Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)," Fatmawati et al. (2024) provided an explanation. The technology acceptance model (TAM), which focuses on the factors and procedures that allow users to embrace and utilize new technology, is arguably the most widely used model in various marketing disciplines. Many marketing fields have employed PU and PEOU to take into consideration how customers feel about new goods and services. This knowledge makes it possible to create effective marketing strategies that increase the uptake and usage of their products; the more beneficial the attitude, the more useful and simple the product is perceived to be.

In their study "Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Use and Adoption of Emerging Technologies in Small Businesses," Singh (2022) provided an explanation. It's common for small businesses to be afraid and anxious about utilizing new or emerging technology. Even though everyone has access to newer technology, many of these businesses find it difficult to adapt to the times and wind up staying in the past. In actuality, some companies consciously decide against utilizing any technological innovations for conventional reasons.

In order to better understand why these businesses opt to continue using outdated practices and how technology can help them, this case study employs the phenomenological qualitative technique. These insights were obtained through in-person interviews with 30 small businesses in the Queens region of New York City. It was simpler for me to comprehend how things operate in Queens because I live there and run a small business. Because Queens is one of the most linguistically and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in New York City, I chose to conduct the study there in order to examine how and why technology is being used. In order to capture the experiences and viewpoints of all participants in their pertinent context of technology adoption with regard to social and cultural factors, motivations, and belief systems, the data collection and analysis process was structured.

"A Study of the Technology Acceptance Model for Social Media Adoption in Small & Medium Enterprises" by Iacurci (2023). Social media is incorporated into business operations by some

small businesses, but not by others. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is used in this study to identify the elements or factors that affect small and medium-sized businesses' (SMEs) adoption of social media. To investigate a number of factors that might affect SMEs' adoption of social media, an expanded version of the PU and PEOU was developed. An empirical analysis revealed a number of conclusions. It was discovered that the attitudes of SME owners or marketers toward implementing social media were significantly impacted by compatibility, perceived ease of use, and cost. These findings' ramifications for SMEs are examined.

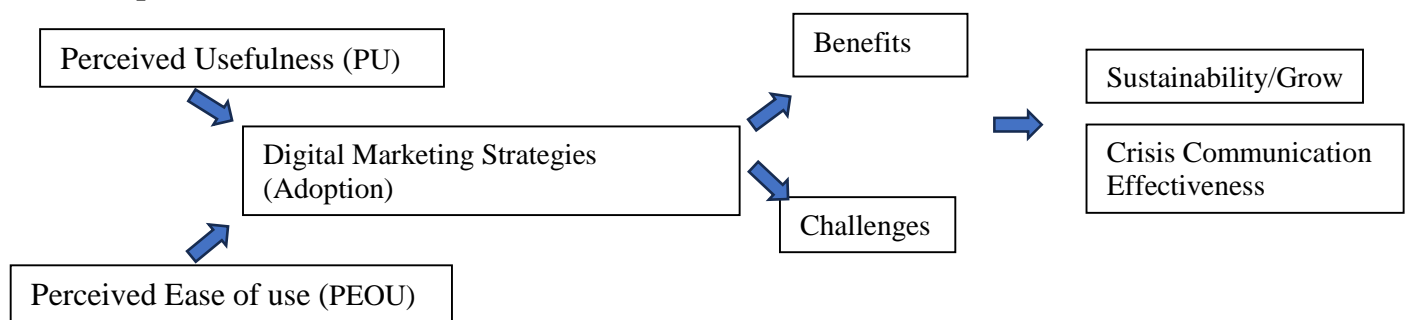
Using the Technology Acceptance Model in Online Entrepreneurship Education for New Entrepreneurs is the study conducted by Su and Li (2021). The study investigates the use of PU and PEOU in online entrepreneurship education for aspiring business owners, based on the technology acceptance model (TAM) put forth by researcher Davis. While some small businesses integrate social media into their operations, Zalando does not use it.

The technology acceptance model (TAM) is used in this study to identify variables or components associated with the difficulties small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) face when implementing social media. The extended model's goal was to comprehend the factors that influence SMEs' adoption of social media technology. Empirical analysis led to a number of conclusions. It was found that the owner or marketer of a small business's attitudes toward social media acceptance were negatively impacted by perceived compatibility, perceived ease of use, and perceived costs. These findings' effects on SMEs are described.

According to the technology acceptance model (TAM), which was first put forth by researcher Davis, the study examines the use of PU and PEOU in online entrepreneurship training for aspiring entrepreneurs. Four factors perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, classroom self-efficacy, and perceived external control are examined in relation to new entrepreneurs who also happen to be users of the online entrepreneurship education platform. Ultimately, the hypothesis that was proposed is validated.

The findings indicate that online entrepreneurship education enhances the user's perceived credibility and ease of use, which is a concern with the caliber of online entrepreneurship education for aspiring business owners.

Conceptual Framework



Relationship Between Variables:

According to this framework, PU and PEOU are important forces behind DMS adoption, which in turn affects the efficacy of crisis communication and business sustainability.

4. Research Methodology:

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in three different industries clothing, baking, and event/décor as part of a qualitative research approach. The goal was to investigate how small businesses use digital marketing strategies (DMS) to improve crisis communication and

sustainability. The study looked at the advantages of implementing DMS, the difficulties that companies encounter, and how perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) influence the adoption of digital marketing in times of crisis.

A total of 26 participants including consumers, digital marketers, small business owners, and industry reviewers were interviewed in-depth. Convenience sampling was used to choose participants in order to collect a range of viewpoints regarding the ways in which DMS supports crisis management and long-term sustainability. This method made it possible to fully comprehend the useful applications of digital marketing in managing market turbulence.

The study concentrated on small business owners who had been using digital marketing tools consistently for more than five years while running their online businesses.

Demographic Details of Respondents

Sr. No	Name	Qualification	Type of Business
1	Mr. A	Masters in English	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
2	Ms. B	BS MC	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
3	Mr. C	B. A	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
4	Ms. D	B. Com	Décor/Event Management (Small Enterprise owners)
5	Ms. E	Bs Physics	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
6	Ms. F	B.com	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
7	Mr. G	MBA	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
8	Mr. H	MS Sociology	Décor/Event Management (Small Enterprise owners)
9	Mr. I	MBA	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
10	Ms. J	BS-Mass Communication	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
11	Ms. K	Master fine Arts	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
12	Mr. L	Bs Nutrition	Décor/Event Management (Small Enterprise owners)
13	Ms. M	Intermediate	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
14	Mr. N	MPhil journalism	Décor/Event Management (Small Enterprise owners)

15	Mr. O	MPhil Administration	Décor/Event Management (Small Enterprise owners)
16	Ms. P	B. A	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
17	Mr. Q	Fashion Designing	Clothing (Small Enterprise owners)
18	Ms. R	BBA	Baking (Small Enterprise owners)
19	Ms. S	B. A	Baking (Consumers)
20	Mr. T	MS in Computer Science	Clothing (Consumers)
21	Ms. U	BSC	Décor/Event Management (Consumers)
22	Mr. V	Matric	Clothing (Consumers)
23	Ms. W	M.A	Décor/Event Management (Consumers)
24	Mr. X	BBA	We Pro Marketing (Digital Marketers/ Reviewers)
25	Ms. Y	MS Marketing	Digi Tech (Digital Marketers/ Reviewers)
26	Mr. Z	MBA	Quick Business Help (Digital Marketers/ Reviewers)

5. Results and Discussion

The results show the main patterns, advantages, and difficulties small businesses encounter when incorporating digital marketing for sustained success.

RQ1: To what extent do PU and PEOU influence the adoption of digital marketing strategies in small enterprises for sustainability and crisis communication?

Theme 1: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Business Growth

Small businesses' adoption of digital marketing strategies (DMS) is significantly influenced by perceived usefulness (PU). Perceiving these strategies as crucial for revenue generation, brand awareness, and customer acquisition increases the likelihood that business owners will integrate DMS (Saura et al., 2021).

Mr. Q emphasized the significance of content marketing by saying, *"We can connect with audiences around the world through content by sharing information about our business, goods,*

and services and by developing a recognizable brand. Content marketing improves our brand visibility with little work because it is accessible and helpful.” In a similar vein, Mr. G underlined that “Content is essential to marketing; it forms the basis of all other tactics. It is a vital tool for small businesses because of how well it can reach and interact with consumers.”

Another essential element in fostering company expansion is analytics. Mr. L said, *“Web analytics offers useful insights that support strategic decision-making, but advanced tools may be necessary for expanding marketing efforts.”* Similarly, Mr. Q suggested, *“It is strongly advised to install Facebook Pixel for Google Analytics and Facebook Analytics on every webpage. These tools are useful for comprehending customer interactions and website traffic, which increases the efficacy of data-driven marketing strategies.”*

Additionally, SEO plays a key role in increasing company visibility. Mr. L said, *“Search engine optimization (SEO) is a vital tool for companies looking to increase organic traffic to their websites via search engines like Google and Microsoft Bing. SEO is very advantageous for small businesses since it increases visibility and improves digital presence.”* In their research, Mandal and Joshi (2017) bolster this viewpoint.

Another tactic that helps businesses expand is email marketing. Mr. H claims that *“email marketing is a long-term tactic that promotes client engagement and loyalty, but it does not produce results right away like SEO does.”* Email marketing has a lot of potential for business growth because it is highly targeted and reasonably priced. Brand engagement and visibility are further enhanced by video marketing. Ms. S stated, *“Video marketing, especially on YouTube, allows businesses to produce powerful content. Videos play a major role in the success of digital marketing since they engage audiences more effectively than text-based content.”*

Theme 2: Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Adoption Willingness

The willingness of small businesses to implement digital marketing strategies is greatly influenced by how simple these tools are to use. Entrepreneurs who lack technical expertise are more likely to use marketing tools that are easy to use.

Every product description, social media post, and advertisement we produce is a type of content, which makes it crucial to the overall digital strategy, said Ms. D. *“Even small businesses with limited resources can effectively use it because it is simple to implement.”* Ms. S continued in reference to analytics. *“Small businesses can easily incorporate analytics tools into their operations due to their intuitive nature”.* In a similar vein, Ms. Y underlined that *“Web analytics ought to be just as significant as any other business performance indicator. Even small businesses with limited resources can use these tools because many of them require little technical knowledge.”*

Additionally, SEO is known for being simple to use. According to Ms. B, *“SEO can be customized to meet particular needs, whether through niche SEO, which concentrates on niche markets, or local SEO, which targets geographic areas. Even companies with little experience can incorporate SEO strategies because they are simple to use.”* Mr. X went on to say, *“Both local SEO and niche SEO are very successful, but the decision between them depends on business objectives. SEO is a workable option for small businesses wishing to increase their online visibility because it is simple to scale and user-friendly.”*

The ease of use of email marketing increases its uptake. Ms. D stated, *"Especially for companies with an online presence, incorporating email marketing into daily operations is neither costly nor difficult. Many email marketing platforms provide easy-to-use automation tools, so small businesses can use them without a lot of technical expertise."*

Video marketing is also simple to use. *"With video consumption at an all-time high, YouTube is a great platform for sharing promotional content,"* Mr. V asserted. Small businesses can readily utilize video creation tools due to their accessibility and ease of use.

Theme 3: Technology Acceptance and Decision-Making

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), entrepreneurs are more likely to use digital marketing tools if they believe they are useful and simple to use (Davis, 1989). Small businesses frequently depend on accessible and affordable marketing techniques to stay competitive in rapidly changing digital environments.

According to Mr. N, *"SEO entails optimizing websites with quality content, guest blogging, relevant keywords, and site performance improvements. It is a crucial digital marketing tactic because of its capacity to raise search engine rankings."* According to Ms. J's personal experience, *"Your website's content will expand along with your business and offerings. Although it takes constant work to compete for high-ranking keywords on Google, SEO is still a useful tool for companies at any stage because it is simple to comprehend and use."*

"Email marketing is an economical and effective way to incorporate digital marketing into an overall business strategy," Mr. G underlined. Because of its indirect strategy, it fits in perfectly with current marketing initiatives. Ms. U emphasized the power of video marketing by saying, *"YouTube videos that are optimized for search engines can help increase organic reach."* Because of its simplicity, even companies without extensive marketing experience can use it. Ms. R stressed that *"mastering video marketing techniques can enhance one's ability to create content for various digital platforms."* Videos offer a captivating means of educating consumers and enhancing brand legitimacy.

Theme 04: Impact of PU & PEOU on Crisis Communication

Digital marketing tools offer small businesses flexible and effective crisis communication solutions. Businesses need strategies to sustain operations and preserve customer relationships during economic downturns or disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

"Since content marketing is accessible and helpful, it improves our brand presence with little effort, enabling us to maintain customer connections even in times of crisis," Mr. Q observed. Similarly, Mr. G said, *"When traditional marketing avenues are unavailable, content marketing helps small businesses maintain visibility and trust."* *"Optimizing email lists without coming across as spammy can significantly increase revenue,"* Ms. Y proposed. Marketing is a valuable tool for customer retention, particularly during difficult times, because of its capacity to segment audiences and personalize messages.

As a crisis communication tool, Mr. C suggested video marketing: *"Creating interesting and educational videos improves brand awareness and customer interaction."* Video content is essential for increasing marketing efficacy in times of crisis because it appeals to a wide audience. *"Videos used in Facebook ads, for instance, have proven to be highly effective,"* Ms. W continued.

Businesses can increase their reach and draw in new audiences by experimenting with YouTube ads through Google Ads if they intend to use videos in their content strategy. This will help them stay afloat in times of crisis.

RQ2: What are the key benefits of adopting digital marketing strategies in strengthening the sustainability and crisis communication of small enterprises?

Theme 5: Enhanced Market Reach and Customer Engagement

Through channels like social media, email marketing, and content marketing, digital marketing helps small businesses increase their market reach and improve customer engagement. Businesses can develop focused campaigns that raise brand awareness and sustain consumer interest even in uncertain times by utilizing data-driven insights.

"Data-driven digital marketing enables precise audience targeting and personalized campaigns, resulting in higher engagement and improved conversion rates," Mr. Z underlined. According to Ms. D, "Businesses can improve customer relationships and guarantee long-term sustainability by refining marketing strategies through the analysis of digital interactions." Ms. U emphasized, "Businesses can optimize marketing plans and ensure adaptability during crises by continuously analyzing customer data." Mr. G went on to say, "Continuous assessment and improvement of digital campaigns aid in coordinating marketing tactics with client demands and corporate goals, promoting adaptability."

According to Ullah et al. (2023), digital marketing can improve customer engagement and brand visibility, especially in disruptive times.

Theme 6: Cost-Effectiveness and Resource Efficiency

Small businesses can optimize their financial resources and execute successful marketing strategies thanks to the affordability of digital marketing tools. When businesses need to strategically manage their budgets during economic downturns, this cost-efficiency is especially advantageous.

According to Mr. H, "Content marketing is an effective strategy for long-term sustainability because it generates a greater number of potential leads at a significantly lower cost than traditional marketing." "Digital marketing's financial efficiency allows businesses to allocate resources effectively, ensuring maximum impact with minimal costs," Mr. I said. According to Mr. O, "Even in times of financial instability, customized digital advertising solutions offer businesses cost-effective options that align with their budget constraints." "Real-time analytics enable businesses to make data-driven financial decisions, instantly modify strategies, and optimize return on investment (ROI)," Ms. Y underlined.

According to Saura et al. (2020), digital marketing helps companies stay sustainable by providing flexible and affordable solutions that can be adjusted to market changes.

Theme 7: Resilience and Crisis Management

Digital marketing helps companies to maintain client relationships, uphold brand credibility, and effectively handle crises during disruptive times. Real-time communication with customers guarantees ongoing engagement and their trust.

As Mr. L put it, *"Every digital interaction offers valuable insights into customer behavior, helping businesses maintain engagement during crises and refine their strategies."* *"Having access to real-time analytics enables businesses to make dynamic adjustments to their messaging and marketing efforts, guaranteeing relevance in a rapidly evolving environment,"* Ms. K stated. In order to ensure resilience in unpredictable times, Ms. F clarified, *"Digital marketing strategies help businesses track consumer trends and adapt their approaches accordingly."*

"Data-driven insights enable businesses to continuously optimize their marketing efforts, guaranteeing that every campaign outperforms the previous one," Mr. Q underlined. Additionally, Ms. Y stated, *"Customized digital marketing improves sales conversions, builds brand loyalty, and strengthens customer relationships, especially during difficult times."*

Buvár & Gáti (2023) assert that using data analytics in digital marketing improves decision-making and helps companies successfully manage market uncertainty.

Theme 8: Competitive Advantage and Long-Term Growth

Data-driven decision-making and search engine optimization (SEO) are two digital marketing tactics that give small businesses a competitive edge. These tactics promote long-term growth and company expansion in addition to increasing online visibility.

In competitive markets, Mr. Z emphasized, *"SEO and targeted advertising increase brand exposure, allowing businesses to attract and retain customers."* *"Businesses can improve their content strategies to increase brand authority and credibility over time by using digital analytics,"* said Ms. D. Mr. G underlined that *"by keeping businesses in line with changing consumer expectations, continuous improvement of digital marketing strategies ensures long-term growth."* Ms. U stated, *"A data-driven approach ensures that marketing efforts remain relevant and effective in changing market conditions by enabling small enterprises to remain adaptable."*

Businesses can gain a sustainable competitive edge by utilizing digital marketing strategies, which will enable them to prosper over time and handle crises with ease.

RQ3: What are the primary challenges small enterprises face in adopting and utilizing digital marketing strategies for long-term sustainability and effective crisis communication?

The use of digital marketing by small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) for crisis communication and long-term sustainability presents a number of difficulties. Although digital tools present opportunities for market expansion and cost-effective solutions, their effective implementation is hampered by a number of strategic, technological, and financial obstacles. In a

rapidly changing digital landscape, SMEs must address these issues if they want to stay resilient and competitive.

Theme 9: Financial and Resource Constraints

Adopting digital marketing strategies is significantly hampered for SMEs by budgetary constraints and a shortage of qualified staff. Businesses frequently lack the funds necessary to hire marketing experts, invest in cutting-edge digital tools, and launch successful campaigns.

Mr. C underlined that *"SMEs frequently struggle to allocate sufficient resources, despite the growing demand for digital marketing expertise."* According to Ms. R, *"Talent retention is a major challenge in digital marketing roles due to high turnover caused by inadequate pay."* *"SMEs face challenges in executing large-scale digital campaigns or competing with bigger brands due to limited budgets,"* Ms. F explained. *"SMEs should offer competitive salaries, health benefits, and long-term career growth opportunities to retain skilled personnel,"* Mr. Z recommended. Iacurci (2023)

Theme 10: Technological Barriers and Digital Literacy

The adoption of digital tools is difficult for many SMEs because they lack the technical expertise and training necessary. Businesses find it difficult to use analytics, optimize campaigns, or effectively manage digital platforms if they lack the necessary digital literacy.

Ms. E said, *"SEO is a powerful tool for SMEs to expand, but it requires careful keyword optimization and technical expertise."* According to Ms. D, *"PPC advertising can produce rapid results, but it requires specialized knowledge in budget planning, audience targeting, and auction management."* *"Social media marketing has a lot of potential, but it requires a strategic content plan and ongoing audience engagement,"* Mr. X clarified. *"SMEs frequently struggle to integrate the right digital tools into their operations due to a lack of proper training and execution skills,"* Ms. Y emphasized.

Theme 11: Resistance to Change and Traditional Mindsets

Another significant obstacle for SMEs is a reluctance to abandon traditional marketing strategies and embrace digital trends. Many entrepreneurs are reluctant to adopt new marketing strategies, particularly those who have been in business for a long time.

"Businesses need to go beyond copying their rivals and create their own data-driven digital strategies," Mr. A emphasized. Because they are unsure of the long-term advantages of digital marketing, many SMEs are hesitant to invest in it, according to Ms. K. According to Ms. F, *"businesses that resist change risk falling behind competitors in an evolving digital landscape."* (Saura and others, 2020). *"Businesses that prioritize customer engagement and embrace digital transformation are more likely to succeed in the long run,"* Mr. I continued. Smith (2021).

Theme 12: Security, Privacy, and Data Protection Issues

Concerns about data protection and cybersecurity threats have increased as SMEs depend more and more on digital platforms. Digital security is crucial because financial fraud, data breaches, and cyberattacks can have disastrous consequences for small businesses.

"Data theft is a significant challenge, and digital marketing presents both opportunities

and risks," Mr. H cautioned. In 2024, Fatmawati et al. "Cyberattacks on business websites can result in stolen data and financial losses, affecting operations," Ms. F said, expressing concern. As Ms. S noted, "SMEs frequently struggle due to limited resources, while large corporations may recover from cyberattacks." Ms. D underlined that "SMEs must adopt cybersecurity measures like two-factor authentication and regular security updates to protect customer data and business assets." "Purchasing digital security tools is crucial for safeguarding company websites against possible threats," Mr. I said. (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009)

Theme 13: Measuring Effectiveness and ROI of Digital Marketing

For SMEs, evaluating the results of digital marketing initiatives and making data-driven changes continue to be major challenges. Businesses may find it difficult to optimize their strategies and defend marketing expenditures in the absence of appropriate measurement tools.

"A lot of SMEs are unable to monitor and assess the success of their marketing strategies," Mr. A said. According to Ms. K, "SMEs frequently lack access to sophisticated analytics tools, despite the fact that analyzing market trends and audience engagement is essential." (Sandhu, 2023) According to Ms. F, "long-term sustainability depends on knowing which marketing channels yield the highest return on investment." "Businesses can improve customer engagement and refine their marketing campaigns by utilizing data analytics," Mr. I continued.

6. Conclusion, Limitation and Recommendation:

This study emphasizes how important perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are to small business adoption of digital marketing tactics. Owners of businesses understand that digital marketing tools not only help their companies grow, but also make adoption easier, encourage well-informed choices, and improve crisis communication. Future studies should look at how PU and PEOU adjust to new developments and changing market conditions as digital technologies continue to advance, further bolstering SMEs in an increasingly digital economy. Small business sustainability and crisis communication are greatly enhanced by the use of digital marketing techniques. Businesses can increase their market reach, apply economical marketing strategies, and strengthen their crisis-resilience by utilizing digital tools. Furthermore, SMEs can react proactively to shifting market conditions thanks to data-driven insights, which guarantee stability and competitiveness over the long run.

Despite the benefits of digital marketing, small businesses still face a number of significant obstacles, such as limited funding, technological hurdles, change aversion, security threats, and trouble calculating return on investment. Maximizing the efficacy of digital marketing requires addressing these challenges through strategic planning and capacity building. SMEs can increase operational effectiveness, fortify crisis communication plans, and attain long-term sustainability in a changing business environment by developing their digital capabilities.

It is important to recognize the various limitations of this study. First, because it concentrates on a particular subset of small businesses, its conclusions might not be as broadly applicable to companies in other sectors or geographical areas. To improve applicability, future research should look at a wider variety of SMEs in various industries. Furthermore, the study uses a qualitative methodology, offering detailed insights but lacking statistical support for the relationship between perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) and the adoption of digital marketing. Future research using quantitative techniques would support and broaden these conclusions. The quick development of digital marketing technologies is another drawback that could compromise this study's long-term applicability. To monitor how SMEs

adjust to new digital trends over time, a longitudinal approach is advised.

Furthermore, although the study concentrates on internal issues like budgetary limitations and technological hurdles, it does not fully take into consideration external factors that affect the adoption of digital marketing, such as governmental regulations, shifts in the economy, and competitive pressures. These external dynamics should be incorporated into future studies for a more thorough examination. Furthermore, because participant perceptions might not always coincide with objective performance outcomes, the use of self-reported data raises the possibility of bias. By combining qualitative insights with digital marketing analytics and customer engagement metrics, future research could improve validity.

A number of strategic recommendations are put forth in order to address these issues and improve the adoption of digital marketing among SMEs. Prioritizing digital literacy and training initiatives will help small businesses better understand and use digital tools, which will result in more successful marketing campaigns. In order to overcome financial and resource limitations, policymakers and industry stakeholders should endeavor to create reasonably priced digital marketing solutions specifically designed for SMEs.

Governments and business development organizations can also be extremely helpful in encouraging SMEs to incorporate digital marketing into their operations by offering grants, financial incentives, and advisory services. In order to reduce cybersecurity risks, SMEs should prioritize security and data protection by putting best practices like encryption, multi-factor authentication, and frequent security audits into place.

SMEs should use key performance indicators (KPIs) and performance measurement tools to evaluate their marketing campaigns, optimize them, and increase return on investment in order to guarantee the efficient use of digital marketing strategies. Finally, future studies should examine how new technologies like automation, blockchain, and artificial intelligence are influencing the PU and PEOU of digital marketing tools. In an increasingly digitalized world, SMEs can improve their digital marketing skills, fortify crisis communication, and attain long-term business sustainability by tackling these constraints and putting these strategic recommendations into practice.

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