

Challenges Encountered by Small Business Owners in Building Their Social Media Marketing Competency

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Abstract : Introductory statement: The purpose of this study is to understand how small business owners develop social media marketing competency, the challenges they encounter in doing so, and establish the social media training needs of such businesses. These challenges impact the extent to which small business owners build effective social media knowledge and, in turn, impact their ability to implement effective social media marketing into their business practices. This means small businesses are not fully able to benefit from social media, such as benefits to customer relationship management or increasing brand image, which would support the overall business operations for these businesses. This research is part one of a two-phased study. The first phase aims to establish the challenges small business owners face in building social media marketing competency and their specific training needs. Phase two will then focus in more depth on the barriers and challenges emerging from phase one. Summary of Methodology: Interviews with ten small business owners were conducted from various sectors, including fitness, tourism, food, and drinks. These businesses were located in the central belt of Scotland, which is an area with the highest population and business density in Scotland. These interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, with the purpose of being investigative and understanding the phenomena from the lived experience of the small business owners. A purposive sampling was used, where small business owners fulfilling certain criteria were approached to take part in the interviews. Key findings: The study found four ways in which small business owners develop their social media competency (informal methods, formal methods, learning through a network, and experimenting) and the various challenges they face with these methods. Further, the study established four barriers impacting the development of social media marketing competency among the interviewed small business owners. In doing so, preliminary support needs have also emerged. Concluding statement: The contribution of this study is to understand the challenges small business owners face when learning how to use social media for business purposes and identifying their training needs. This understanding can help the development of specific and tailored support. In addition, specific and tailored training can support small businesses in building competency. This supports small businesses to progress to the next stage of their development, which could be to further their digital transformation or grow their business. The insights from this study can be used to support business competitiveness and support small businesses to become more resilient. Moreover, small businesses and entrepreneurs share some similar characteristics, such as limited resources and conflicting priorities, and the findings of this study may be able to support entrepreneurs in their social media marketing strategies as well.

Keywords : small business, marketing theory and applications, social media marketing, strategic management, digital competency, digitalisation, marketing research and strategy, entrepreneurship

Conference Title : ICBEMM 2023 : International Conference on Business, Economics, Management and Marketing

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : December 11-12, 2023