

Digital Marketing and Its Effect on Startups

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Abstract

Most small businesses such as startups have considerable internal limitations such as lack of access to financial capital and lack of both quality and quantity of human resources. They cannot adopt any technology before evaluating its effect on their business plan. While digital marketing has become a go-to technique for marketers to gain a competitive advantage in the 21st century, its success rate with startups has been limited. The main purpose of this study is to assess the digital marketing practices by startups and how they are using digital marketing to create brand awareness, increase consumer loyalty, and deepen customer connections. The research methodology adopted was a qualitative analysis on three selected startup businesses in India using in-depth interviews. This study provides several managerial implications for startup businesses to utilise digital marketing techniques towards achieving their marketing objectives. It will also serve as the basis for future research on the topic.

Keywords: digital marketing; digital strategy; startups, marketing strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's technological era, digital marketing is the most prevalent marketing strategy. Digital marketing for startups is beneficial for new businesses in tailoring marketing strategies to their target clients and assuring conformity with the increasing complexity of consumer behaviour (Dwivedi, 2020). Building a corporate identity is a need for startups, which require different marketing methods than established companies. Startup businesses are critical to the economy's growth, as they have been in the past. The relevance of startup businesses has grown around the world (Mingione and Abratt, 2020). To create economic growth and acquire a competitive edge, governments throughout the world have fostered and rewarded startup enterprises.

It is suggested that startup organisations focus more on digital marketing rather than traditional marketing (Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Tiago and Verissimo, 2014). This is because digital marketing helps them to recruit new customers and target existing ones more efficiently (Taiminen, 2015). Digital marketing aims at building consumer contact and engagements as well as multiple venues for the delivery of goods and services. It also aids in enhancing engagement with clients as well as

understanding their evolving expectations. As a result, startups must participate in digital platforms that help businesses to reach a wider section of people and successfully communicate with suppliers and customers. Digital marketing techniques emphasise product image, familiarity with the brand, and brand loyalty. These elements are critical for the success of every new business (Graham, 2012; Robehmed, 2013). The digital networks allow for a two-way communication which helps businesses to develop a digital relationship with their customers and become more consumer-centric, and increase consumer involvement, awareness, and value originality (Krishnaprabha, 2020). Digital marketing appears to be gaining traction because of its ability to connect new brands with customers and make advertisements more widely available. One of the primary reasons that new firms fail is an absence of a thorough digital marketing plan (Montgomery, 2018). Furthermore, in order to overcome the fear of survival, startups often keep on continuing without a “good marketing plan”. Therefore, it is inevitable for them to fail quickly (Baker and Sinkula, 2005; Querishi, 2017; Hills, 2008; Picken, 2017).

Considering the widespread agreement on the importance digital marketing strategy at the organizational level, the present study aims at investigating the digital marketing practices by Indian startups and how they are using digital marketing to create brand awareness, increase consumer loyalty, and deepen customer connections. This study provides several managerial implications for startup businesses to utilise digital marketing techniques towards achieving their marketing objectives. It will also serve as the basis for future research on the topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section we present an overview of startups, digital marketing and its techniques, and the consequences of digital marketing on startup growth in terms of brand exposure, customer awareness, and developing trust among consumers.

2.1 Startups in India

The term "startup" is growing more common, however it is sometimes misunderstood, as experts have varied meanings of the term as it's meaning has evolved with organisations ranging from local companies to huge tech firms (Dwivedi, 2020). A startup can be characterised in a variety of ways. It may be defined as a firm started by one or more entrepreneurs with the goal of producing and promoting a new product or service and is in business for less than ten years. (Dwivedi, 2020). The first and most stated feature is the firm's "newness," since it is still in its early phases of development. The "smallness" of such firms is a second factor to consider. Environmental volatility is the third factor, which emerges as buyer and profit insecurity. As a result, a startup may be defined as a new and modest firm that was established with little resources to promote innovative products.

Most startups being in their early stages, must strategically promote their brand. They should make the most of their limited resources by gaining traction through new and unusual approaches. Start-ups should concentrate on the financial aspects of marketing, such as social media marketing, email marketing, and word-of-mouth marketing (WOM), among other things. As a result, rather of focusing on the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) or 7Ps (product, price, place, promotion, process, people, and physical evidence) of conventional marketing, they must instead concentrate on the 4Is, namely, information, identification, innovation, and interaction (Graham, 2012).

Startup India is a Government of India initiative under the aegis of Ministry of commerce and Industry. It was launched in 2016 aimed to tap the entrepreneurial potential of the people of India to drive sustainable economic growth and create large scale employment opportunities. Under the conditions of

this plan, entrepreneurs were eligible for a number of perks, including tax incentives, including exemption from capital gains tax, government aid with fundraising, and priority in public procurement. In 2020, India was considered among the largest startup ecosystems in the world with over 41,000 recognised startups from various parts of the country (Startup India Report, 2020).

2.2 Digital marketing

Over time, the word "digital marketing" has expanded from referring to the promotion of products and services on digital platforms to the use of digital technologies to attract consumers, cultivate consumer habits, support businesses, retain customers, and increase revenue. Therefore, digital marketing may be defined as a flexible, technology enabled framework for organisations to engage with partners and consumers in order to establish, connect, produce, and preserve value for all partners (Kannan, 2017).

The launching of internet 1.0 in 1990 ushered in a new phase of marketing known as digital marketing. Internet based marketing is the application of digital technology to attain marketing goals. Businesses and marketing managers utilise digital media marketing to recruit consumers and build brands. Utilization of media devices such as mobile phones, computers, and other devices to connect with clients via social media, websites, search engines, apps, and other ways is known as digital marketing. Digital marketing has a lot of possibilities. One of the key objectives of digital marketing is to understand how clients utilise new technologies and apply this information to the company's benefit, enabling users to communicate with potential customers more effectively (Tiago and Verissimo, 2014). Digital marketing may also be used to boost brand awareness, recruit new customers, and boost sales.

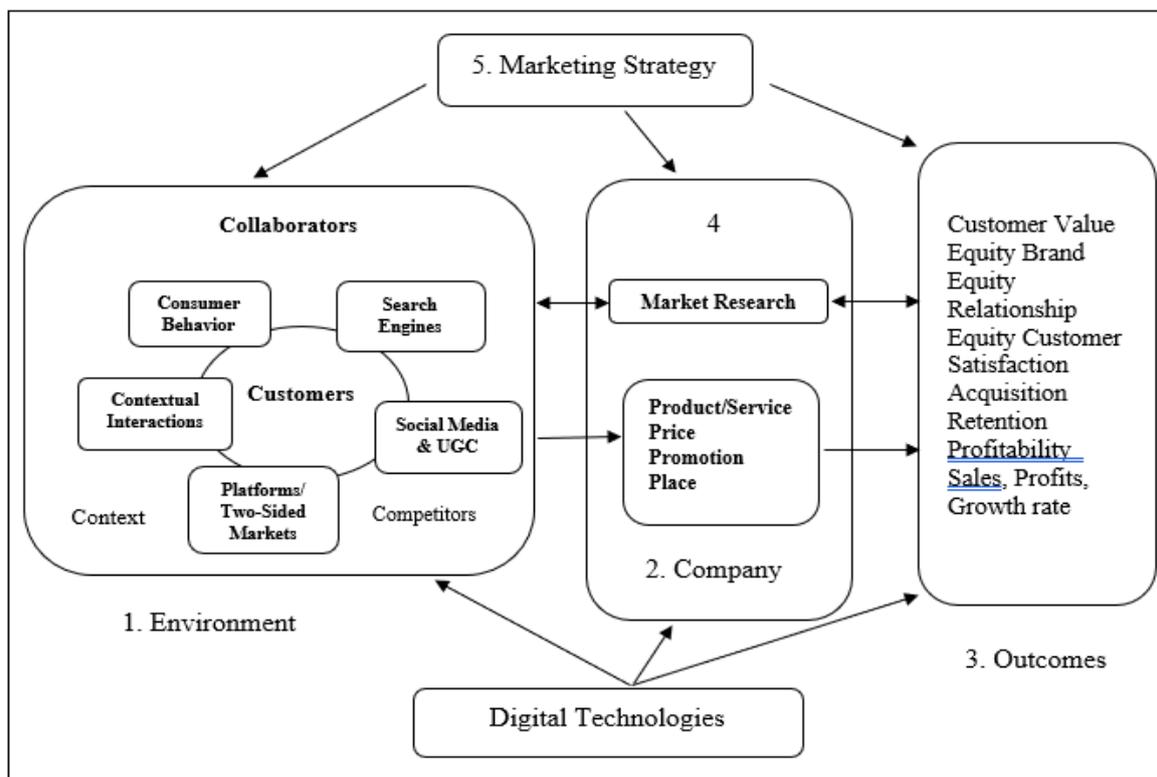


Figure 1: Influence of digital technologies in marketing strategy (Source: Kannan, 2017)

The figure above highlights the key themes of communication in the marketing process, as well as the ways in which rising digital technologies will continue their influence. This includes not just the key components of marketing strategy, but also the possible arrangements between them. The strategy also

emphasises the significance of creating roles and obligations in digital media that affect the firm internally or outside. Both the client and the firm benefit from these digital tools (Kannan, 2017). Utilization of digital media channels has expanded in marketing, allowing for better contact with customers to obtain information and input from them and expanding the target market.

The digital marketing industry has seen drastic growth post COVID-19 pandemic both globally and in India. The rapid increase in internet users in India is a big contributor for this growth. In 2022, India has the second largest numbers of internet users in the world. By 2023, there will be almost 666 million active Internet users in India and more than 5.3 billion globally¹. This shows that a significant number of individuals are turning to online channels.

2.3 Digital marketing strategies

The increased success of businesses that include technology into their marketing strategy emphasises the need of doing a thorough assessment of digital marketing methods. Companies that make a strategic shift to customer centric marketing campaigns may reap the benefits of a new era of inventive marketing techniques that utilise digital marketing to meet their primary marketing requirements (Robehmed, 2013). Regardless of market size, scale, or country, digital marketing is an important part of any marketing strategy. As a result, businesses are more motivated than ever to adopt this type of marketing to stay successful, which may deliver significant benefits at a low cost (Montgomery, 2018).

2.3.1 Key factors

Digital marketing includes campaigns such as pay-per-click, website, email marketing, content marketing, social media marketing, affiliate marketing, blogs and viral marketing. A brief description of the function of various kinds of campaigns is provided in Table 1.

<i>Pay-per-click</i>	To display the promoted product or service to the user when they search for phrases related to the advertisement.
<i>Websites</i>	Companies to deliver information and marketing to their customers create.
<i>Content Marketing</i>	All marketing forms aiming at engaging clients via the development and dissemination of information are referred to as content marketing. Content is often distributed through blogs, eBooks, movies, and infographics.
<i>Email marketing</i>	It is the practise of distributing advertisements via email to groups of individuals.
<i>Social media marketing</i>	Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms online to promote products, services, ideas, and information to individuals.
<i>Affiliate Marketing</i>	When a corporation compensates people based on their success in bringing in consumers through their own marketing efforts, this is known as affiliate marketing.
<i>Viral marketing</i>	Utilizing contemporary social networks, viral marketing encourages the sharing of product information among peers.
<i>Blogs</i>	A blog is a website with written content on a certain topic.

Table 1: Forms of digital marketing campaigns

¹ <https://www.statista.com/topics/9327/digital-marketing-in-india/>, accessed on 12th March 2022.

2.3.2 Implementation

Businesses that wish to expand need to have a digital marketing strategy. Given that many businesses have a lot of internal vulnerabilities, such as a lack of financial capital and qualified people resources, digital marketing is crucial. They must embrace technology and examine the impact it will have on individuals they serve. While implementing digital marketing strategies for businesses and their commodities, whether utilities or tangible objects, CEOs and marketing officers should ensure that their services' interface is user-friendly, and that their online sales are clear and transparent to clients. According to various researchers, there are several basic criteria that, if followed, can assist owners-managers generate a good return on any investment. Furthermore, small firms who fail to adopt Web 2.0 technologies will undoubtedly slip behind their competition. As a result, in order to build their enterprises, start-ups must employ digital marketing tactics.

2.4 Influence of digital marketing on startups

For start-ups, digital technology innovation is both a fantastic motivator and a potentially dangerous issue. The potential comes from start-ups' ambition to leverage developing technology that was previously exclusively available to established enterprises to flourish in global marketplaces. However, in largely digital and online marketplaces, there is an issue with start-ups losing money by not using resources and being less imaginative (Montgomery, 2018).

Small enterprises are limited in their resources. As a result, they have had to be creative with their marketing strategies in order to reach a wide spectrum of customers. This is where digital marketing, which is substantially cheaper than traditional marketing, comes into play, comes in handy for start-ups. Internet advertising can be developed for a few hundred dollars; however, television advertising may cost thousands. Digital marketing channels such as social media, blogs, and viral marketing are examples of channels that may be used to reach a large audience. Digital marketing can help start-ups find new target groups and create relationships with them. According to research, some of the advantages of digital marketing for start-ups include- i) increase in visibility, ii) reduction in their marketing budget, iii) generation of leads, iv) increase in sales, v) increase in brand awareness and, vi) improvement in customer engagement (Krishnaprabha, 2020).

2.5 Effects of digital marketing on startups

2.5.1 Growth of Company

Digital marketing may be tremendously advantageous for small and medium-sized businesses as well as new ventures. Digital media can help startups establish a strong online presence and promote themselves. Digital advertising has grown into a form of effective business strategy, and it is now important for businesses. This is the most effective way to reach the audience by exhibiting services and products in the most efficient manner. Digital marketing is at the core of startup success, and it's the most cost-effective way to decrease marketing expenditures while maintaining product and service visibility (Chaffey, 2020).

The capacity to assure startups and existing organisations' competitive, comprehensive, and lucrative success depends on effective knowledge and integration of the finest digital marketing strategies (Insight Success, 2020). A company's performance is determined on its ability to convert created material into subscribers. The most crucial metric of market performance is the conversion rate. Digital marketing is frequently blamed for high conversion rates. Most entrepreneurs employ digital marketing

solutions to get a high conversion rate. Potential clients may be enticed by digital marketing, which provides them with personalised interactions, resulting in increased knowledge and sales, as well as contributing to the company's growth. A digital marketing campaign can result in new consumer acquisitions, brand development, brand awareness, new avenues for sales generation, enhanced customer experience and engagement, and cost-effective global exposure.

2.5.2 Brand awareness

Labels and emblems are not the only things that make up a brand. They express the customer's expectations and thoughts about the product and its results, helping brands to truly live in the minds of their consumers. As a result, market trust in excellent and successful brands is high, meaning that customers have a big comparative influence on the brand. Brand awareness is the most significant marketing aim, according to research, since it is tied to the power of a product connection or memory trace as represented in customers' capacity to recall or recognise a brand under a variety of settings.

Digital media marketing is required to raise brand recognition. Through unique consumer experiences and interactions, digital marketing, enabled by digital technology, improves customer awareness (Kannan, 2017). A substantial online brand may be developed by combining network and marketing placement. Because it allows companies to engage with customers at any time and from any location, digital marketing is well-known for its revolutionary influence on businesses and substantial impact on brand-consumer connections. Digital marketing tools like social media marketing help start-up businesses increase their brand value by promoting networking, engagement, and community growth. Using digital marketing, a campaign to aid start-up enterprises' branding may be done in a very powerful method (Insight Success, 2020). Because of internet marketing, brand names may have a significant influence on customers. Initiatives to build brands must be matched with developing technology, according to research, and a framework for defining and executing digital brand image must be built. Digital marketing may help startups create relationships with current consumers, shape their own opinions of the brand, offer their own knowledge, and communicate with and from prospective customers (Krishnaprabha, 2020).

2.5.3 Building trust

Trust is defined as the urge to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has faith. Trust, according to research is a necessary component of a successful cooperation. The features of a partnership are highly tied to trust; in fact, trust is directly linked to the desire to stay together. As a result, it is vital for new firms to build trust with their consumers in order to maintain brand loyalty. Brand trust is a crucial aspect to consider when purchasing a product since it creates long-term commitment and develops connections between the parties involved. When customers have faith in a brand, the brand will commit, and a relationship between firms and customers will develop. As a result, establishing consumer trust is critical to a start-up's long-term viability.

Digital marketing may help to build consumer trust. Computerised communication channels influence brand trust, which influences purchasing decisions. Start-up enterprises may use digital marketing to remain in touch with clients on a regular basis, which develops client relationships and fosters trust. Embracing digital marketing activity, according to research helps start-up businesses to earn significant benefits and improve their competitiveness. They also feel that new enterprises should put more effort into promoting themselves through web-based networking networks. Social media platforms, for example, make it simpler than ever to engage with clients daily through digital media platforms.

Consumers may now use new digital channels to track firms' activity and make feedback. Because of this two-way engagement, customers may establish trust. Consumers will be more likely to trust a brand if it adheres to security and privacy requirements. Consumers placed a higher value on the essence of websites in terms of privacy, customization, and personalization (Kannan, 2017).

2.5.4 Customer engagement

Marketers describe customer engagement as "the strength of an individual's presence and interest in the business's service and events done by either the client or the firm." Businesses and researchers are increasingly conscious of the necessity of delivering outstanding customer service and keeping a loyal client base, therefore boosting consumer satisfaction and interaction is a major issue for marketers. Consumer engagement encompasses a wide variety of themes, such as the human interaction between a firm and its customers, customer service, and the use of digital technology to promote awareness among consumers. Digital marketing is a game-changing platform that offers a whole consumer experience, including product information and customer service.

In digital marketing, we employ a combination of knowledge, customer engagement, and organised resources to assess consumer preferences and behaviour, enabling us to uncover new trends, evaluate new opportunities, and make predictions for the future. Customers are attracted to digital marketing because it allows them to interact with the company through digital channels. Both new firms and their consumers benefit from digital marketing, and it has an influence on income. Customers are able to evaluate a company's services based on their understanding of them when they participate in a variety of forums discussing new products and services. The delighted customer's good feedback attracts new consumers and enhances the conversion rate. Digital marketing creates a platform for active communication by fostering two-way contact between businesses and customers. This improves customer involvement and brand communication even further (Insight Success, 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the process of data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research methodology

Qualitative research is a type of exploratory research in which researchers use vocabulary to explain their findings, views, and motivations. Qualitative analysis, which aims to develop ideas or conceptions, exacerbates the problem. Popular qualitative data collection techniques in business research include in-depth interviews, focus groups, assessment, and action analysis. However, grounded theory and record analysis can be employed as data collection procedures in qualitative research. (Business Research Methodology, 2020).

In this study, a qualitative research technique was employed, in which responses were presented through descriptions and the results were thoroughly examined. Supplementary questions were asked throughout the interviews to round out or improve the analytical data.

3.2 Data collection method

Data collection is the process of acquiring and analysing measurements of variables in order to answer particular testing questions, test hypotheses, and analyse results.

In-depth interview technique was used to collect the primary data for meeting the objectives of the study. The interviewing procedure included answering questions and obtaining replies from research participants in an iterative manner. A semi-structured technique to conduct interviews using online platform was used.

The present study uses multiple case study method, this is an impactful approach for theory development. It permits a thorough investigation and enables the investigator to maintain the holistic and significant qualities of actual events. A multiple stage iterative approach was used for case selection. In the first stage, 24 startups working in India were shortlisted. These were selected from academic publications and articles. Out of these three startup firms were selected based on the delineation of domain wherein criteria for case selection were set. The selected startups met the criteria; i) Operating for more than 3 years, ii) recorded a profit and iii) minimum valuation of USD 1 billion. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using online meeting platforms with senior management or founders of the company. A broad discussion guide was used for the same (Table 2). Each interview was recorded after seeking prior permission for about sixty minutes and the responses were later transcribed for analysis. The data mining and visualisation software NVIVO7 was used to manage the data.

<i>Questions</i>
What role has digital marketing played in the growth of your company?
What advantages and obstacles do startup firms encounter while using digital marketing techniques?
Do you believe that digital marketing is crucial for startups? Why or why not?
Which marketing tools are the most useful for new businesses? How would you put these into practise at a startup?
What are the most important aspects of digital marketing's success in attracting and maintaining company customers?
Which digital platforms does your organisation presently use? (LinkedIn, Facebook etc.) Which platforms are the best suitable for new businesses?
How do you think digital marketing can assist new businesses in expanding, in the context of brand awareness, consumer awareness, and developing trust?

Table 2: Discussion guide

3.2.1 Case descriptions

Meesho- In India, social commerce has been thriving. It is anticipated that the number of social commerce users would surpass 228 million by the end of 2022². In December 2015, two graduates from Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, founded a social commerce platform called Meesho, which means "my shop." The company is headquartered in Bangalore, India. Their mission is to democratise commerce make it accessible to all. The Indian retail industry is dominated by the unorganised sector³. Meesho's primary users are sellers who did not own shops but sold their products through social

² <https://www.livemint.com/industry/retail/social-commerce-users-to-touch-228-mn-by-22-11637947003576.html>, accessed on 18th July 2022

³ <https://www.statista.com/topics/8208/retail-in-india/>, accessed on 18th July, 2022

networks. The company capitalised on this opportunity and enabled social sellers to monetise their networks by providing supply, logistics and payments infrastructure. It is a business platform that is being used by more than 2.5 million people for reselling (Crunchbase, 2022). Meesho has been able to raise around 1.1 billion dollar over various rounds of investment since its inception. In 2019, Facebook invested in Meesho, making it India's first start-up to receive a large funding from the company (Sugermint, 2020).

Groww- It was founded in 2016 by four former Flipkart employees, with the purpose of making investment easy for young people. The company is based out of Bangalore and its parent company is Next Billion Technology Private Limited. It is a fintech start-up which aims to offer services particularly to the younger population, who are more technologically oriented⁴. The aim of Groww is to enable responsible access to financial services to customers in India. It is a web-based financial platform that enables direct mutual fund and stock investments. The company has created a platform for mutual fund direct access. Clients invest in mutual funds with ease because to Groww's technology, which makes investing simple, accessible, transparent, and paperless (Rehman, 2021). Their services are centered on the convenience and needs of their customers⁵. Groww, has been able to raise more than three hundred ninety million dollar in funding through various funding rounds⁶. The company plans to increase future investment in technology infrastructure and widen its reach to under penetrated regions.

Pristyn Care- It is a healthcare company, founded in 2018, with the aim to simplify the surgery journey process for the patient and attendant, by offering assistance and care at each step of the process⁷. Pristyn Care is trying to bridge the gap between demand and supply within the healthcare sector by matching the latent capacity of infrastructure with the demand for reliable services from patients. They provide help to patients from the time the patient is looking for the correct doctor, booking the appointment, diagnosis procedure and results, insurance related paper work, hospital travel for surgery and admission-discharge. Their business grew over time by acquiring new clinics, hospitals, and physicians. In 2022, they are present over 40 locations throughout India, with a network of over 100 clinics, 700 partner hospitals, and 300 in-house super-specialty specialists. Pristyn Care follows a hybrid model where the company not only sets up its own clinics but utilises third party hospital infrastructure to provide surgeries across various specialisations⁸. In 2021, the company registered a huge growth in its operating revenue which stood at INR 96 crores in FY21⁹.

3.3 Ethical considerations

This research investigated four ethical issues: participant injury, violation of privacy, and deception. Individuals were not harmed throughout the interview procedure. Respondents had the option of concealing information. To the best of our knowledge, there was no dishonesty displayed at any point during the interview process.

3.4 Data analysis

⁴ <https://techcrunch.com/2021/10/24/india-groww-valued-at-3-billion-in-251-million-funding/>, accessed on 12th July 2022

⁵ <https://groww.in/about-us>, accessed on 12th July 2022

⁶ n.d

⁷ <https://www.pristyncare.com/>, accessed on 12th July 2022

⁸ <https://entrackr.com/2022/05/healthcare-unicorn-pristyn-cares-scale-surges-close-to-4x-in-fy21/>, accessed on 12th July 2022

⁹ n.d

This study involved the collection of secondary data, the extraction of empirical data, and the correlation of theoretical outcomes. This is a methodological technique that investigates and assesses how the data gathered and the hypothesis interact to answer the study's questions. The study gives and analyses basic definitions of the term based on how academics perceive and recognise it. Simultaneously, empirical evidence was acquired by conducting in-depth interviews of senior management and founders of startup firms. Therefore, the study may evaluate how the findings interact, their reliability and relevance.

3.4.1 Reliability and validity

The accuracy of the outcomes influences the level of trustworthiness. This may be accomplished by evaluating the results' accuracy across time, across several observers, and for different components of the analysis. To acquire and improve dependability, a literature study was undertaken using references such as Krishnaprabha (2020), Mingione and Abratt (2020), Bezovski (2015), Fairchild (2014) and Glaeser (2010) among others.

The validity of the findings of the study contribute to its credibility. To boost relevance, the theoretical framework must be compared with the analytical data by developing questionnaires based on the relevant literature. This study utilises contributions from Krishnaprabha (2020), Mingione and Abratt (2020), Kannan (2017) and Karamian (2015) to develop interview questions.

4. Findings and discussion

Based on the findings of the in-depth interviews, we propose the antecedents and consequence framework for creating digital marketing strategy by startups (Figure 2).

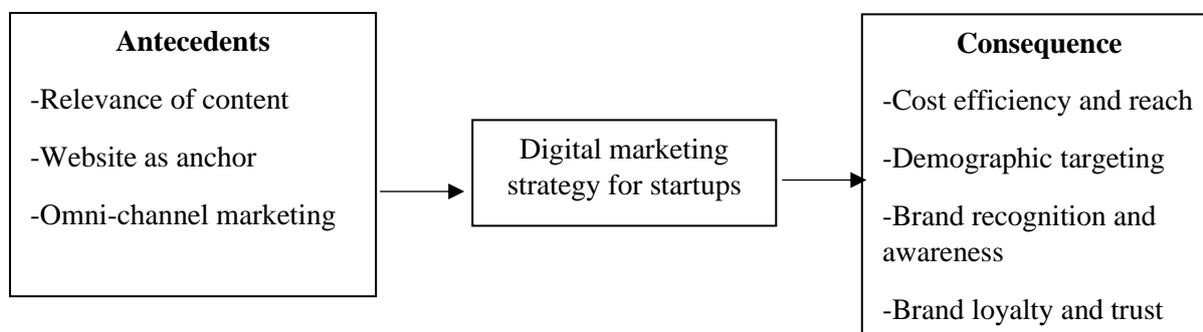


Figure 2: Antecedents-consequence framework for creating digital marketing strategy by startups (Source: Authors)

4.1 Antecedent-consequence framework

Relevance of content- The interviews revealed that creating and using relevant content was the backbone to engage with the target audience. This is especially critical for startup firms that are in the early stages of creating brand relevance (Halligan and Shah, 2006). All the senior representatives of the three companies strongly emphasised on the importance of content marketing to manage customer relationships. For example, Pristyn Care claimed that their content sharing approach on social media largely contributed to their success in digital marketing. This agrees with literature which highlights that the content presented by new businesses needs to be relevant, it will help towards building durable relationship with customers (Olker, 2014).

Website as anchor- All the cases emphasised on the significance of their company's website as a main component of the digital marketing strategy. The senior manager from Groww mentioned that their website is core to all digital marketing activities. An excerpt from the interview is shared below-

“...we realised that a good website reflects what your brand is to the audience. All other elements of digital marketing should be designed to direct guests to your website, then you need to convert them effectively.”

The respondents also emphasised on the need to define key metrics to measure the cost per acquisition. They mentioned that most startups focus on increasing their reach in terms of views and visitors, which may not be sufficient for success. It was recommended to pay attention to the entire customer funnel to successfully leverage digital media.

Omni-channel marketing- Omni-channel marketing is a method for simultaneously conducting sustainable brand communication and maintaining consumer satisfaction across multiple media (Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016; Fairchild, 2014; Li et al., 2015). The interviews revealed that due to the brand’s presence across channels, the customers are able to engage on their own terms leading to better customer experience. An excerpt from the interview is shared below-

“...omni-channel marketing takes a customer centric view of digital marketing strategy. It gives the customers an opportunity to interact with brands on innumerable channels from blogs to social media. It provides a more consistent experience.”

All the companies studied use several channels to market their brands, and they highlighted that they are especially successful when they utilise business-specific channels. For instance, Meesho has an online application for both Android and IOS devices. During the interviews the company representatives were asked about their experience with the various forms of digital marketing, their responses have been summarised and presented in Table 3 below.

<i>Pay-per-click</i>	All three companies utilise a pay-per-click marketing platform that provides some money, but they are considering abandoning it since they are not seeing major results.
<i>Websites</i>	Each company has its own website, which it uses to connect with and reach out to its customers
<i>Content Marketing</i>	All the respondents employed this marketing tool. Groww's content marketing is managed by a team of professionals. They emphasise on high-quality content. Pristyn Care used social media to share health tips, which helped them build an audience to sell their services too.
<i>Email marketing</i>	This is the most widely used marketing tool and is used by all organisations to communicate with their consumers on a regular basis. For instance, Meesho engages clients with planned email marketing every few days. They find it the most effective form of communication.
<i>Social media marketing</i>	All the companies use social media marketing on various platforms. However, Pristyn Care relies extensively on social media and considers this a risk. As a result, they're working on a plan to wean themselves off on a few platforms. They also use Instagram to promote content and offer their services, which has proven to be very profitable. Meesho and Groww are primarily reliant on social media

	sites like Facebook and Instagram because the most of their consumers use them.
<i>Search Engine Marketing (SEM)</i>	SEM was highly recommended by all three companies. This platform has also benefited their business in terms of getting found by clients.

Table 3: Summary of experience using various forms of digital marketing (*Source: company representatives*)

Cost efficiency and reach- The analysis of the interviews revealed that one of the major consequences of using digital marketing techniques by startups was the ability to a more targeted set of audience at minimum cost and speed. For instance, a senior manager from Groww admitted to never use traditional marketing as digital marketing is inexpensive and provides better reach. Marketing activities such as, social media, content marketing, blogs etc. can used in a method that efficiently reaches and converts targeted market segments into paying clients. It was also emphasised that while the focus on reach is necessary for startups but it’s not sufficient. An excerpt from the interview conducted is shared below-

“...imagine if your website has got more than double the traffic than your competition but if the conversion of the hits is less than half of your competitors, it will lead to wastage and lower returns”

Demography targeting- Modern marketing strategies are geared to utilise the internet's potential and reach a more specific audience. The interview revealed that many times startups invest in digital marketing tools such as social media because of its popularity. Most company representatives agreed that the selection of a digital media platform should be based on the business aim and intended audience, as opposed to the medium's popularity. For example, social media may be more beneficial for large firms, whereas search engine marketing (SEM) may be more suitable for a startup whose major purpose is lead creation. It was also pointed out that startups need to deliberately focus on early adopters to expedite the diffusion of innovation. An excerpt of the interview has been shared below-

“...a lot of digital platforms such as, Twitter, Facebook, Google etc. are realising this and are coming up with more advertiser friendly products that allow smaller businesses to target early adopters in the market with high efficiency.”

Brand recognition and awareness- Most businesses, especially startups face the challenge of product branding, where the customer is at the core (Bezhovski, 2015; Rancati et al., 2015). All the interviewees agreed that brand recognition and awareness is the first crucial step towards nurturing a sustainable relationship with the customers based on trust, sincerity and loyalty. Various inbound marketing tools such as content marketing, podcasts and blogs can be used to increase the brand value of a business. It was also revealed that brand recognition is the primary objective of digital marketing, Meesho utilised YouTube and Google platforms along with affiliate marketing while Groww uses Instagram extensively to achieve high brand recognition. Startup businesses use digital platforms to not only increase their visibility among customers, but also to determine their target audience.

Brand loyalty and trust- The right content in digital marketing may assist to develop customer trust. For instance, Groww has achieved a lot of success creating trust with their social media content. The right content may help you connect with your consumers on an emotional level. They also feel that digital marketing is both cost-effective and useful to customers when it comes to trust development. All the company representatives emphasised that the company's website designs, and security are refreshed and updated on a regular basis in order to connect with customers and develop brand credibility. All the respondents mentioned that they maintain regular communication with their customers to gather product evaluations and feedback. This has also helped in building consumer trust. Researchers also agree to

subscribing to create organic traffic and establish an emotional connect with customers to convert them into brand fans, which in turn increases brand loyalty (Nelson-Field et al., 2012). The responses received during the interviews also pointed to the same direction. An excerpt of a responses shared during the interview is shared below-

“...a happy customer plays a big role in increasing the reputation of the company. Viral marketing enables them to share a good experience with the brand. It takes seconds to reach huge followers by a hashtag or a tweet. This can be utilised for a two-way communication.”

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of this study is to assess the digital marketing practices by startups and how they are using digital marketing to create brand awareness, increase consumer loyalty, and deepen customer connections. According to this study, due to their limited resources, young enterprises may profit substantially from digital marketing. However, startups must be creative when evaluating marketing strategies to compete with established businesses. It is critical to build and maintain client connections, trust, and satisfaction in the early stages of a business. The study presents an antecedent- consequence framework for creating digital marketing strategy by startups. It emphasises that customers can emotionally connect with the brand when proper content is used in a marketing campaign. This further helps in the developing the company's brand identity and acquiring customer trust. The study also found that brand recognition, customer contact, and brand awareness were the most important reasons for startups to employ digital marketing.

The main limitation of the study is the sample number as only three cases are examined though in-depth interviews were conducted with startup companies in diverse fields. To generalise the results of future investigations, it is recommended to expand the sample size. The antecedent-consequence framework can be verified and validated empirically in future research.

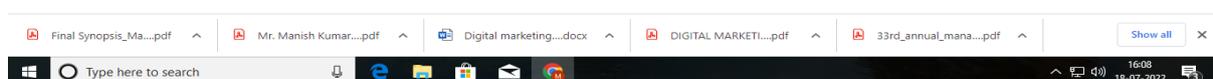
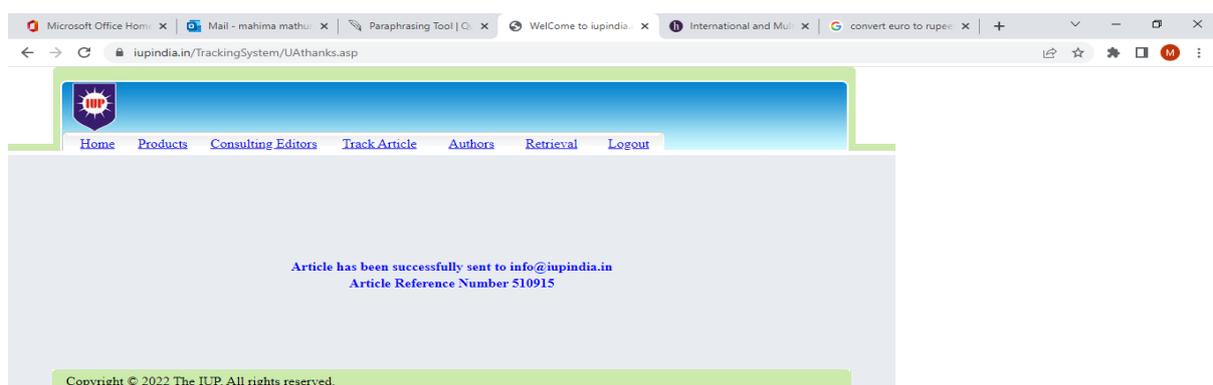
Digital marketing has tremendous potential for contributing towards the success of startups in India. An effective media plan can increase brand recognition and brand loyalty. We hope the findings of the study enable startups utilise digital marketing techniques towards achieving their marketing objectives.

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Submitted on 18th July 2022