

## Providing a Framework for Innovative Social Media Marketing Strategies

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to provide a framework for innovative social media marketing strategies to address the impacts of health crises on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

**Method:** This research is applied in nature, based on a survey-exploratory approach, and employs a qualitative methodology. The statistical population consists of experts in urban management and human resources management. Using the theoretical sampling method, interviews were conducted with 15 experts until theoretical saturation was achieved. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis.

**Findings:** The research findings resulted in a comprehensive model comprising five main themes and eighteen sub-themes. These include: driving factors (online brand communities, social listening, customer participation marketing, prosumer (producer-consumer) influencer marketing, gamification), strategic factors (increasing engagement, product/service development, increasing brand awareness, creating word-of-

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mouth advertising, increasing brand credibility), facilitating factors (brand associations, strengthening brand identity), primary outcomes (correctly understanding consumer needs and opinions, creating value for consumers), secondary outcomes (market development and new customer acquisition, sales promotion, loyalty promotion).

**Conclusion:** The study provides a practical framework to enhance SME resilience through innovative social media strategies during health crises, emphasizing key driving, strategic, and facilitating factors along with their outcomes.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Health Crises, SMEs, Innovative Strategies, Qualitative Research, Content Analysis, Brand Engagement.

## **Introduction**

The experience of recent years shows that with the intensification of the effects of COVID-19, things like social discrimination, violence (public and domestic), the impact of social distancing on citizenship rights (including freedom, privacy, and freedom of expression, religion, and community), chain Supply disruption, stock market stagnation, etc. are increasing, therefore, the global economy has also been affected (Shah & Farrow, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic has caused fundamental changes in the way businesses operate, which will have long-term consequences. Research has shown that marketing innovations can help firms survive risks (Naidoo, 2010). Marketing innovation strategies are defined as firms' commitment to use new or improved marketing methods that enable firms to use their resources to meet customer demand and create superior customer value. Strategy is recognized as a focal organizational resource in determining the company's decisions, capabilities, competitive advantages, and performance in the crisis period (Mahani & Suraiya, 2019; Azmi et al., 2020).

Svatošová (2017) emphasizes the importance of crisis, reform, and rescue strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises in times of business turmoil. Such strategies minimize the risk of bankruptcy and bad financial effects. According to Mahani and Suraiya (2019), small and medium-sized enterprises should use new marketing platforms and technologies to acquire the ability required to cope with unexpected situations. Internal strategic resources and diverse capabilities vary in different SMEs. As a result, some of these businesses can change their strategic financial and marketing approaches, while others are unable to do so. In many developing and rapidly growing economies, small and medium enterprises are considered the main source of innovation and development. This can be attributed to the fact that SMEs have so far been the biggest factor in stimulating competition, diversifying products and services, and creating flexibility in internal and external systems. In this regard, small and medium-sized companies may be regarded as the backbone of modern economies and the cause of creating many more jobs than the jobs created by large companies, which have a significant contribution to global economic growth (Azmi et al., 2020).

For over a decade, small business leaders have increased their visibility through social media marketing, thereby increasing the viability and sustainability of their businesses. Evidence shows that the more

active small businesses are in social media marketing, the more market intelligence they obtain (Atanassova & Clark, 2015). However, choosing the best social media marketing practices for small businesses is still ineffective (Lupo, 2018). Social media marketing is a strategy that involves using social media to create a bilateral exchange between customers and businesses. Adoption of social media is a relatively new trend, and adopters are usually referred to as innovators (Delerue & Cronje, 2015). Increasing the use of social media is beginning to play a major role in brand-consumer interaction (Yazdanparast et al., 2016). Social media marketing is different from digital marketing which follows the traditional marketing platform of unilateral exchanges. One of the unique aspects of social media marketing is promoting two-way or bilateral communication between businesses and consumers (Chang et al., 2015).

Economic changes in the first decade of the 21st century led to innovations in information communication technologies, including social media (Charalabidis et al., 2014). The use of social media has changed the way business leaders perform customer relationship management (Felix et al., 2016). Social media can take many forms, from microblogs to blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, wikis, podcasts, and more (Delerue & Cronje, 2015).

Online social networks are considered an ideal platform for social exchanges due to creating an opportunity to form new and continuous business-customer relationships (at a relatively low cost for businesses) and creating important social exchanges that lead to the creation of content and value. (Hamilton et al., 2016). Social media marketing has emerged as a powerful marketing channel that enables information dissemination, cohesion, and relationship development (Ananda et al., 2016).

Social media and other online marketing strategies can be powerful and low-cost marketing tools that small business owners can use to have a stronger presence in business relationships. Setiowati et al., (2015) discussed organizational factors and innovation among small and medium businesses in Indonesia and found that adopting cost-effective marketing strategies on the Internet has a positive effect on marketing and improvement of business performance. The importance of small and medium enterprises reflects their ability to create wealth based on their role in creating employment. They are globally responsible for the largest private sector employment. Accordingly, the present research aims to

answer the following main question by using qualitative methodology: "What is the pattern of innovative social media marketing strategies to deal with the effects of health crises on small and medium-sized companies?"

### **Literature Review**

In the review of research literature, the first principle is to find the theoretical foundations and backgrounds related to the research topic. This requires special accuracy and meticulousness in searching and citing scientific and research articles. To access the research background, databases, and external sites such as Google Scholar, Emerald, Elsevier<sup>1</sup>, Science Direct, Springer, ProQuest, etc.; Also, domestic databases such as Noormags<sup>2</sup>, Magiran<sup>3</sup>, comprehensive humanities portal (Ensani)<sup>4</sup>, Scientific Information Database (SID)<sup>5</sup>, Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (Irandoc)<sup>6</sup>, etc. were searched. The search results showed that few studies have been done on the topic of the current research and there is an obvious research gap in the field of identification and designing elements and factors affecting the proposal of an ideal model for dynamic knowledge management in government-sponsored organizations in the country. Some related researches are mentioned below:

Bowden and Mirzaei (2021), published an article entitled "Consumer Engagement and Participation in Retailers' Communication Channels: An Investigation of Online Brand Communities and Digital Content Marketing Initiatives". This research was done in Australia. The results of this research showed that the design and production of suitable digital content can greatly strengthen the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social interaction of customers with the brand.

Bu et al., (2020), published an article entitled "Digital Content Marketing as a Catalyst in Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising in the Food Tourism Industry". This research was conducted on 707 Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> . <http://ww.elsevier.com>

<sup>2</sup> . <https://www.noormags.ir>

<sup>3</sup> . <https://www.magiran.com/>

<sup>4</sup> . <http://ensani.ir/fa>

<sup>5</sup> . <https://www.sid.ir/journal/>

<sup>6</sup> . <https://irandoc.ac.ir/>

tourists. The results showed that content entertainment, content information, and social interaction positively affect electronic word-of-mouth advertising in the social media advertising space.

Florenthal (2019), published an article entitled "Motivators of Young Consumers for the Emergence of interactive behavior with the Brand in social networks". The results of this research showed that in the space of social networks, due to some motivational factors such as brand power, presence in groups of peers, presenting themselves in the presence of others, etc., young consumers try to establish interactive behaviors toward the brand.

Hussain et al., (2018) published an article entitled "Online Information Acceptance Behavior by Consumers: Motivations and Effective Factors on Electronic Word-of-mouth Communication". The results of this research showed that electronic word-of-mouth advertising and the credibility of advertisements affect the quality of discussion and commenting and the perceived risk, also, the quality of discussion and commenting has an effect on the usefulness of information, and finally, the usefulness of information affects the acceptance of information by consumers.

Toler (2017) published an article entitled "Structural Equation Modeling of Advertising Engagement, Customer Attitude, and Engagement with Video Ads in Social Networks" based on his PhD dissertation. The results of this research showed that the effect of advertisements presented on social networks can directly affect the attitude of customers towards the brand and the attitude of customers towards the advertisement, and following this effect, the purchasing intention of customers will also be affected.

Ghorbani Dinani & Mohammadi, (2019) published an article entitled "The Effect of using social media in industrial marketing on competitive advantage and adaptive sales". The results of this research showed that various factors such as learning direction, attitude towards media use, and media use skills have an effect on the use of social media, and on the other hand, the use of social media also affects the behavior of adapting to customers and enhancement of competitive advantage collection.

Karimi and Karbasian (2019) published an article entitled "The Effect of Social Media Marketing Activities on brand valuation and Customer Response (a case study of the Airline Industry)". The results and findings of this research show that social media marketing activities affect our awareness and mental picture of the brand in question, on the

other hand, brand awareness has not had an effect on electronic word-of-mouth marketing in the airline industry, and brand image has no significant effect on electronic word-of-mouth marketing and commitment.

Hamidi and Fazeli (2017) published an article entitled "Investigating the factors affecting the Acceptance of Advertisements by Customers in social media marketing". The results of the evaluation of the reviewed articles in this field study showed that electronic word-of-mouth advertising is the most important factor affecting the acceptance of advertisements by customers in social media marketing. Given the results, suggestions can be made to improve the relationship between sellers and customers.

### **Method**

This research is applied in terms of purpose, based on a survey-exploratory approach, and typically it is qualitative. Below, more explanations are provided regarding the methodological dimensions of this research. The statistical population of this research was a group of experts in the field of social media marketing, based on the theoretical sampling method, 15 of them were selected and subjected to in-depth interviews. It should be noted that in this research, the expert characteristics included mastery in the field of marketing management and marketing based on social networks, as well as familiarity with the marketing processes of small and medium companies. In this research, the main tool of data collection was in-depth interviews with experts. In these interviews, the focus was on innovative social media marketing strategies to deal with the effects of health crises on small and medium-sized companies. To ensure the validity of the interviews, the researcher's long-term involvement with the research environment and his continuous observations in the research environment were used, specifically earning the trust of the research subjects, learning the culture of that environment, and controlling misunderstandings caused by the interventions of the researcher or informants. Also, to ensure the reliability of the interviews, after each interview, the extraction codes were shared with the interviewee. In an attempt to ensure that the codes that the researcher deduced from the interview are consistent with the interviewee's mental state. In addition, another method of data collection in this research was content analysis of theoretical foundations. In this research, to analyze the interviews and achieve the conceptual model of the research, the method

of content analysis and open and axial coding was used.

### Findings

As mentioned in the previous sections, the data of this research was obtained from the texts related to the theoretical foundations and background of the research, as well as from the text of interviews with experts. The analysis of the content of the texts related to the theoretical foundations and background of the research led to the identification of six variables or new methods in the field of social media marketing, which are:

- Online brand communities
- Social Listening
- Customer engagement marketing
- Prosumer (Producer-Consumer)
- Influencer Marketing
- Gamification

However, in the process of analyzing the interviews, the first step was dedicated to identifying and extracting the primary concepts. Accordingly, after conducting each interview, hidden concepts were identified and noted in the interview text. Total of 15 interviews were conducted, and 86 initial concepts were identified. In the next step, the researcher tried to come up with more general categories called "sub-themes" by paying close attention to the identified concepts recognizing the similarities and differences between them, and placing the concepts in the same direction and alignment under more general categories. The result of this process was the identification of 12 sub-themes as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1. Identification of 12 sub-themes**

Sub-Themes	Concepts
Proper understanding of consumer needs and opinions	If there is no social listening today and brands have no audiences in the market, a correct understanding of the consumer's needs will not be obtained.
	Many feedbacks that we can get quickly and cheaply on social media within communities are very valuable.
	The most important thing to persuade consumers to remain loyal to FMCG products is the product mix. The consumer is so smart that he chooses and consumes what is ideal, and here is where you set in helping him get as close as possible to his ideal or most desired product.



	<p>By producing appropriate content and introducing the product on the site, the customer will look for the brand and will give feedback that one can interact with, and for which a strategy can be defined.</p> <p>The needs of a wide range of audiences can be covered.</p> <p>The good thing about these social media and virtual spaces is that the feedback on the brand status is given by the consumer.</p> <p>It is better to be flexible and produce products based on the suggestions received from consumers and their needs and wishes.</p> <p>Customers behave according to their needs and desires.</p> <p>Ask customers to comment and make suggestions about the UI, and UX of the advertising website.</p>
<p>Strengthening brand identity</p>	<p>In the social media space that we created, positive and negative comments from the customer give the brand a human personality, as if it were a living being, and if it receives criticism, it will respond.</p> <p>Gamification is aligned with the identity of the brand and its products, and technology helps to strengthen the brand.</p> <p>Our brand ambassador is a movie actress. Our sales were through B2B and those who bought from us thought that we had paid 40 billion to Golzar to advertise our products for us.</p> <p>In the application of LinkedIn, Instagram, etc., where an identity can be defined for the product brand, there is more impact than the physical space.</p> <p>In professional investments, when they choose a client, the brand itself automatically increases in value due to the choice of the client and consultant.</p> <p>You should not just rely on social media to promote and strengthen the brand; the investors should necessarily adhere to the brand identity and its loyalty all the time so that it will get full publicity and will be socially internalized.</p>
<p>Increasing brand awareness</p>	<p>Engagement and interaction can create brand awareness among customers.</p> <p>Making a video of the product and putting it on the virtual pages of famous artists, actors, and footballers will attract their followers to the product and guarantee their awareness of it.</p> <p>For the brand to be seen better, the best way on Instagram is gamification.</p> <p>In Iran Talent, a campaign was launched that asked how satisfied you are with your job, there was no talk about Iran Talent at all, and the viewer saw an image that was very similar to a game. Finally, in the last question that was put to</p>

	<p>the audience, it was suggested that if you are unhappy, go to Iran Talent. Here is a very important point. What we were driving at was for the audience to hear our brand's name and learn about it, and sure enough this was achieved.</p> <p>The target audience of any brand is usually people who do not buy randomly but know what they are looking for</p> <p>Etching the brand name in the customer's mind is very important.</p>
Increasing in interaction	<p>Customers interact and communicate with each other in social media and virtual space regarding brand advertisements.</p> <p>Even for adults, the use of games is very effective and encourages more engagement between people and the brand.</p> <p>There is an interaction between investors and customers, this is the most important feature of the interactive digital world that media audiences have.</p> <p>For our brand, we usually give a survey form to our customers every year, so that they can fill it out and tell us about the brand's strong and weak points.</p> <p>The first ones usually do not produce any results for the brand and the only conceivable result is that they increase the engagement of posts and pages.</p> <p>Cyberspace is a place where you can easily express your opinion and you can easily compete and show what you like. The interaction is very high.</p> <p>Respect is a manifestation of interaction and comes about in line with interaction.</p> <p>The interaction between customers is effective in the proximity of the brand to the customer.</p>
Creation of word-of-mouth advertising	<p>This method is very positive, meaning that people are eager to do word-of-mouth advertising for the organization.</p> <p>In business, word-of-mouth advertising can be used in different ways by different people and different tastes.</p>
Increasing in Brand Credibility	<p>Brand reputation has been earned with difficulty and you have to work hard to maintain it.</p> <p>Credibility in any business will be the foundation of the brand.</p>
Sales Promotion	<p>All activities have a common goal and that is to increase sales.</p> <p>We get the customer to buy our product, which means sales will increase.</p> <p>Many times, the customer goes to the feedback given by other customers and is persuaded and reaches the purchase stage.</p> <p>We create brand awareness, and sales will increase</p>

	automatically.
	Customer affinity marketing leads to a share of sales.
	Based on the period following the Internet advertisement, they measure the sales to determine the revenue generation.
Market Development and Attracting new Customers	Each of the customers can incorporate other customers into the corpus of the organization.
	In the case of creating a channel in social media, the customer himself can discuss our marketing and attract customers.
	Tag your friend on social media. This perse has caused a wave, that is to say, people with a request tag their names and by creating their accounts they can create marketing and this makes the followers of these people attracted to the product.
	The customer acts as a marketer and attracts customers.
Promotion of Loyalty	Making a consumer loyal, calls for the process of advertising on social media.
	By producing the right content, the customer can be expected to remain loyal to the brand.
	The customer must face the product and the brand and see its effect to become loyal to that product.
Creating Value for the Consumer	Brand awareness creates value for the consumer and renders them satisfied with the content of advertisements.
	The first goal of product presentation should be to create value for the customer.
	The customer pays for the value obtained as a result of using the product.
Brand Associations	Brand associations are considered a lever.
	Brand associations play an important role in brand durability and strength.
Product/Service Development	It is better to generate a new product or service in terms of new information technologies.
	In digital marketing, we develop products and services based on customer feedback.
	At the same time as we were making products and presenting them to the market, we also received feedback from customers so that we could develop products and services.

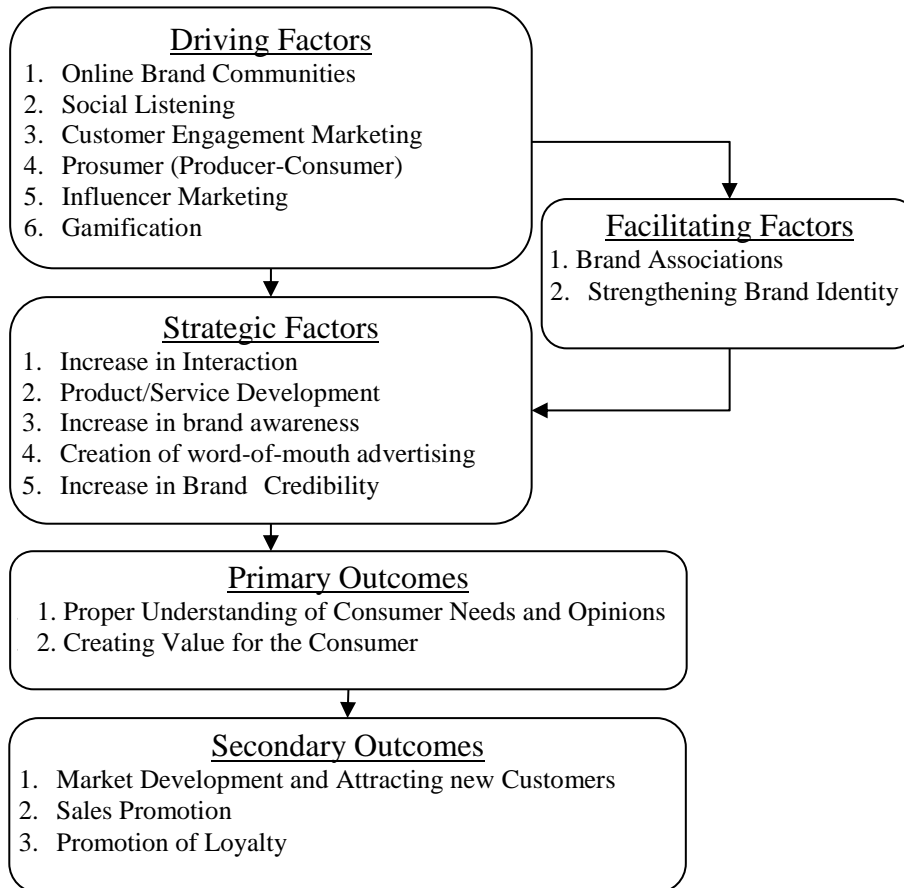
At this stage, we tried to create more general categories called "main themes" by paying close attention to the identified sub-themes and recognizing their similarities and differences as can be seen in Table 2:

**Table 2. Identification of main themes**

Main themes	Sub-themes
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Driving Factors	Online brand communities
	social listening
	Customer engagement marketing
	Prosumer (producer-consumer)
	Influencer Marketing
Secondary Outcomes	Gamification
	Market development and attracting new customers
	Sales promotion
Facilitating Factors	Promote loyalty
	Brand associations
Primary Outcomes	Strengthening brand identity
	Proper understanding of consumer needs and opinions
Strategic Factors	Creating value for the consumer
	Increase of interaction
	Product/service development
	Increase of brand awareness
	Creation of word-of-mouth advertising
	Increase of brand credibility

Based on the actions taken in the previous stages and the identification of sub- and main themes, as well as considering the intuitive perception of the researcher regarding the main themes and their place in the framework of innovative social media marketing strategies to deal with the effects of health crises on small and medium-sized companies, the proposed research model was drawn as presented in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. Proposed research framework**

As it is clear in the proposed model of the research, the driving factors act as the main driving force of the model and provide the reasons for the formation of strategic factors. In this way, facilitating factors also make strategies come about and be implemented in better conditions. The result of the implementation of strategic factors, in the first step, will determine the initial consequences, and subsequently, it will form the final consequences of the model.

### **Conclusion**

The first part of this framework is dedicated to driving factors. These factors act as a lever and primary driving force. These drivers include online brand communities, social listening, customer engagement marketing, prosumer (producer-consumer), influencer marketing, and

gamification. The second part of the proposed research framework is dedicated to strategic factors. These factors are strategies that help to increase the effectiveness of social media marketing for small and medium enterprises and include increasing engagement, product/service development, increasing brand awareness, creating word-of-mouth advertising, and increasing brand credibility. According to the proposed framework, the third part is dedicated to the facilitating factors that play the role of mediator between driving factors and strategic factors and make the strategy come about in a more appropriate context. These facilitating factors include brand associations and strengthening brand identity. The next part of the proposed research framework is the primary consequences of innovative social media marketing strategies to deal with the effects of health crises on small and medium-sized companies, which show that the correct design and implementation of the above-mentioned strategies, initially lead to the proper understanding of consumer needs and opinions and create value.

In addition, based on the last part of the proposed research framework and as secondary outcomes, it is clear that the design and implementation of innovative social media marketing strategies to deal with the effects of health crises on small and medium-sized companies can have three important outcomes including market development, attraction of new customers, increase of sales, and increase of loyalty. These results are consistent with the results of research conducted by Azmi et al., (2020), Mahani and Suraiya (2019), Lupo (2018), Svatošová (2017), and Hamilton et al., (2016).

According to the experiences gained in this research, future researchers are recommended to test the model resulting from this research in a large community using quantitative approaches such as structural equation modeling. Also, it is suggested to future researchers that they use other methods such as the Delphi method, meta-analysis, meta-composition, etc. for the modeling phase, so that, one of the practical limitations of this research, which was the time-consuming phase of conducting interviews, will be resolved. In addition, future researchers are recommended to carry out similar research in small and medium-sized companies in other industries of the country so that we can gradually see the design of local Iranian models instead of generally foreign models in the field of innovative social media marketing strategies.

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