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OPERATIONAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE SMEs

Dimitrios Baroutis

71447489

Supervisor:

Georgios Priniotakis

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Operational and techological aspects of digital marketing strategies for sustainable SMEs

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No	FULL NAME	DIGITAL SIGNATURE
1	Priniotakis Georgios	
2	Papoutsidakis Michail	
3	Drosos Christos	

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the term sustainability in the context of digital marketing, to understand organizational and technological aspects of digital marketing strategies, and to show the importance of these aspects in sustainable SMEs. Nowadays, digitalization became part of our lives and also a compulsory situation for companies. Therefore, it is important for SMEs to implement digital marketing strategies into their company plan for a sustainable and successful business. SMEs need to understand what they in addition to traditional marketing, and what are the commons. The way of thinking may seem the same but the effort that SMEs need to put in for the implementation of a digital strategy is big. A framework is needed for the strategy plan and to define the vision of SMEs within a succesful digital strategy. Moreover, SMEs need to get all the necessary knowledge for proper use of the operational and technological aspects. It's not enough to have only a digital idea but a good knowledge of consumers for creating a successful campaign. Therefore, this research aims to provide a basic knowledge of what is SMEs, digital marketing, and how sustainability can be applied to the strategy of SMEs in the term of digitalization by using operational and technological aspects properly.

Keywords: Sustainability, SMEs, digital marketing, customers, strategies, digitalization

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Αυτή η έρευνα στοχεύει να εξετάσει τον όρο βιωσιμότητα στο πλαίσιο του ψηφιακού μάρκετινγκ, να κατανοήσει τις οργανωτικές και τεχνολογικές πτυχές των στρατηγικών ψηφιακού μάρκετινγκ και να δείξει τη σημασία αυτών των πτυχών στις βιώσιμες ΜΜΕ. Σήμερα, η ψηφιοποίηση έγινε μέρος της ζωής μας και επίσης μια υποχρεωτική κατάσταση για τις εταιρείες. Ως εκ τούτου, είναι σημαντικό για τις ΜΜΕ να εφαρμόσουν στρατηγικές ψηφιακού μάρκετινγκ στο εταιρικό τους σχέδιο για μια βιώσιμη και επιτυχημένη επιχείρηση. Οι ΜΜΕ πρέπει να κατανοήσουν τι πρέπει να κάνουν διαφορετικό από το παραδοσιακό μάρκετινγκ και ποια είναι τα κοινά τους στοιχεία. Ο τρόπος σκέψης μπορεί να φαίνεται ίδιος αλλά η προσπάθεια που πρέπει να καταβάλουν οι ΜΜΕ για την εφαρμογή μιας ψηφιακής στρατηγικής είναι μεγάλη. Απαιτείται ένα πλαίσιο για το σχέδιο στρατηγικής και για τον καθορισμό του οράματος των ΜΜΕ στο πλαίσιο μιας επιτυχημένης ψηφιακής στρατηγικής. Επιπλέον, οι ΜΜΕ πρέπει να αποκτήσουν όλες τις απαραίτητες γνώσεις για τη σωστή χρήση των λειτουργικών και τεχνολογικών πτυχών. Δεν αρκεί να υπάρχει μόνο μια ψηφιακή ιδέα αλλά μια καλή γνώση των καταναλωτών για τη δημιουργία μιας επιτυχημένης καμπάνιας. Ως εκ τούτου, αυτή η έρευνα στοχεύει να παράσχει βασική γνώση για το τι είναι οι ΜΜΕ, το ψηφιακό μάρκετινγκ και πώς η βιωσιμότητα μπορεί να εφαρμοστεί στη στρατηγική των ΜΜΕ με τους όρους της ψηφιοποίησης, χρησιμοποιώντας σωστά τις λειτουργικές και τεχνολογικές πτυχές.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Βιωσιμότητα, ΜΜΕ, ψηφιακό μάρκετινγκ, πελάτες, στρατηγικές, ψηφιοποίηση

SYMBOLS & ABBREVIATIONS

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AIS: Applied information systems

LT Tags: Alternative Tags

CRMS: Customer relationship manager systems

EU: European Union

FB: Facebook

HTML: HyperText Markup Language

ML: Machine Learning

ROI: Return on investment

SEM: Search Engine Marketing

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

SERP: Search Engine Results Page

SMEs: Small and Mid-size Enterprises

TBL: Triple Bottom Line

URL: Uniform Resource Locator

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1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can be defined as diverse group of businesses operating in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, service and trade. [1]. The term enterprise contains different sector combinations that contribute to the creation of the conditions necessary to meet the needs in the economic context [2].

Some of the SMEs are dynamic and innovative. On the other hand, some others are maintaining their small sizes [1]. The importance of SMEs and their contribution to the economy are known around the world, and their role in the economic development is known by the countries, regardless of whether they are developed or developing [3].

Many companies were launched as SMEs in the beginning; therefore, the SMEs represent the original framework of companies. As a large scale for economy, SMEs can be considered as the first steps of new ideas [4].
Depending on the law that was in force until January 1996, enterprises were considered as SMEs when the total number of people do not exceed the 500. Table 1 represents the types of SMEs within different number of employees. Micro-enterprises consist of 1 to 9 employees, while Small-Enterprises 10 to 99 employees and Medium-Enterprises 100 to 499 employees.

Enterprises	Employees
Micro-Enterprises	1-9 employees
Small-Enterprises	10-99 employees
Medium-Enterprises	100-499 employees

Table 9. Number of Employees of Different Types of Enterprises

Until January 1996, only criterion to define a company as SMEs was the number of employees working in that company. This situation has changed in 1996 with the European Commision law.

Nowadays, the number of employees is not only criterion to define the type of enterprises. There are three more criteria which are the annual turnover of the enterprise, the total assets in the rest of the business and the degree of independence of the company or the ownership over it [5].

A very important point to mention is that nowadays in the European Union, small and medium-sized enterprises cover at least 98% of the existing companies, thus covering more than 65 million jobs resulting in SMEs having up to 66% job coverage across the EU, analytics by division of enterprises. Table 2 indicates the job coverage statistics within the employment rates in a relation to enterprises [6]. Micro-Enterprises have the highest employment rate with a 34% of employment within the EU. Small-Enterprises have a 19% Employment and Medium-Enterprises have 13%.

Enterprises	Employment Within the EU (%)
Micro-Enterprises	34%
Small-Enterprises	19%
Medium-Enterprises	13%

Table 10. Employment rates (%) within the EU in a relation to enterprises

2. <u>SUSTAINABILITY IN SMES</u>

According to Carter and Rogers (2008), sustainability can be defined as "Strategic, transparent integration and achievement of an organization's social, environmental, and economic goals in the systematic coordination of key inter-organizational business processes for improving the long-term economic performance of the individual company and its supply chains." [7]. Definition of sustainability is universal; however, frameworks of sustainability can differ with the type of the industry, industry size and some other factors. Integration of sustainability in SMEs should be welcomed and optimized to achieve the best results within the framework.

The term sustainability has become more popular day by day and has recently become one of the most important challenges in many sectors. Therefore, many SMEs around the world have integrated sustainability into their classical and digital marketing strategies, and many are in the process of integrating them [8]. SMEs in which sustainability is integrated also constitute a plus for the sustainability of economic, social and environmental systems in general. Therefore, the effects of SMEs in this context should also be considered. This means that when an enterprise adapts sustainability, that enterprise will benefit the environment and society as well as investing in long-term sustainability [9]. Except the benefits on environment and society, company's business processes will also benefit from sustainability [10].
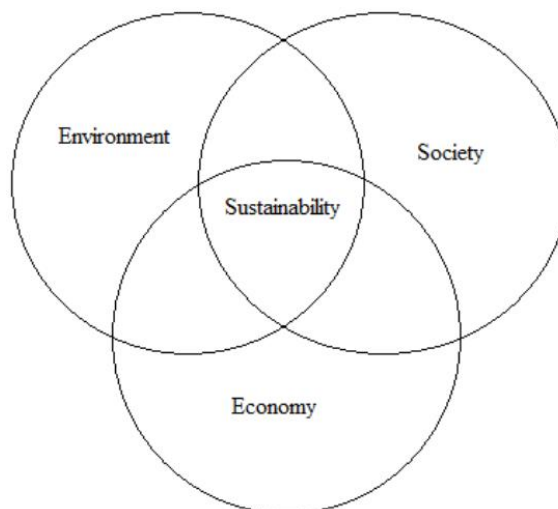

Figure 4 Triple bottom line representation

Figure 1 represents the triple bottom line (TBL) and can be considered as a broad analysis of sustainable development of the symbiotic development of environment, society and economy [11]. Purpose of TBL is that, enterprises should consider their impact on economy, society and environment in the context of sustainability. They should evaluate their performance with the outcomes of considerations on their impacts [12].

Sustainability will benefit the growth of SMEs by increasing the demand and reducing the risk of their actions. Sustainability is also important for the value of SMEs. If SMEs can prove their sustainable business, this will show that they minimized the risk associated with their business.

Incorporating sustainability principles into enterprises will allow for an improvement of reputation and the secure growth for SMEs, and will attract new customers resulting in increasing demand [13].

Nowadays, international competition and globalization is also valid for many SMEs. In this competitive environment, SMEs' brand that represents the importance of sustainability to stakeholders can enhance the value of their brands and increase profits [14]. So, the sustainability will improve the general opinion about SMEs in financial market and for the stakeholders that will result in loyalty and support [15]. Due to the lower financial resources of most of SMEs, they are less likely to invest in sustainability [16]. On the other hand, SMEs can adapt easier to change and are more versatile than larger corporations [17].

3. <u>DIGITAL MARKETING IN SMEs</u>

Digital marketing can be used as a term for interactive and target marketing of a product or services by using technologies so to be able to find the right customer and maintain to have the attention of customers [18]. Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) [19] stated the definition of digital marketing as "achieving marketing goals through the application of digital technologies". In order to achieve the best efficiency in targeting consumers through digital marketing, companies must have the best knowledge in this area.

A key feature of digital marketing is that through the use of technology there is a high level of connectivity with customers to promote both a product and a service in an economical and effective way [20]. Through digital marketing, the right monitoring of potential consumers as a result companies provide them with the best possible solution.

Another important point is that customers have the opportunity to receive all the information they need about the product or service they are interested in only through the virtual world, in this way consumers have the opportunity to decide for themselves wherever they are [21]. Even if digital marketing has a lot of common with traditional marketing and the way of thinking is coming from traditional marketing, companies need to understand there are lots of differences as well. [18].

There are several differences between digital and traditional marketing. In digital marketing communication is in two-way and channels are online. Customers are able to share, comment, search for free products or services. There are certain uses of media-channels, emails, websites. Digital marketing allows company to track every step of the customer before the purchase. On the other hand, in traditional marketing Communication is in one-way, company must come in communication with the client for the product or services. Channels are off-line, they are using phone calls, letters, newspapers. It is difficult to track how the customers came in the final step of the product or services. The differences between digital and traditional marketing in represented in the Table 3.

DIGITAL MARKETING	TRADITIONAL MARKETING
Communication in two-way	Communication in one-way
Clients are able to share, comment, search for free products or services	Company must come in communication with the client for the product or services
Channels are online	Channels are off-line
Media-channels, emails, website	Phone calls, letters, newspapers
Tracking every step of your customer before the purchase	Difficult to track how the customers came in the final step of the product or services

Table 11. Differences between digital marketing and traditional marketing

Over the years we see that digital marketing has penetrated into our lives more and more, companies have changed the way they communicate with customers. Nowadays due to the growth of social media, digital marketing is becoming more and more necessary in our lives. This condition has pushed businesses to turn to this way of communication using new business models. All this results in the creation of a digital ecosystem where companies are not only left in the present but can also build the future through it [22].

Benefits that digital marketing provide to companies are wide, the reach of people through different digital channels do not have limits. Another important benefit is the cost of building something online than with a tradition strategy. Companies always try to find the best solution in the best prices and digital marketing can help that. Additional is important to mention that every digital marketing campaign is easier to measure and track by using only digital tools, so companies can have the best results and the time to improve their campaigns [18].

Today, as a result of the increase in digital marketing demands in the digitalizing world every day, SMEs have to adapt more quickly to this rapidly changing environment. In addition, the number of consumers entering the digital world is increasing day by day, and this makes digital marketing a necessity for SMEs rather than just a development option.

SMEs need to move in the direction of adopting digital marketing strategies that makes it a click for consumers to reach the product. In order to accomplish the involvement of digital marketing strategies in SMEs, right knowledge of digital marketing strategies and learning ability of SMEs is required [23]. This results in evolution of SMEs with digital marketing strategies and getting a new business form. SMEs adopting the digital marketing, will lead to the use of social media which is a tool of advertisement of brands [9].

Brands become more creative within the appearance and communication, and get more effective with digital marketing [24]. Proper integration of digital marketing strategies into the enterprises results in an increase of customer confidence. More confident customers for an enterprise provide a bigger chance of profit [25].

4. SUSTAINABILITY IN SMES THROUGH DIGITAL MARKETING

Nowadays, digitalization became a part of daily life of the people. Businesses need to understand that digital ecosystem is not only for today but also the future. For this reason, SMEs focus on sustainability and expansion of their business model in a long term. SMEs need to compromise the needs of the today's business without harming the future generations which is the condition called sustainability. [22].

New models and techniques appear to help SMEs to succeed sustainability in digital marketing. These models and techniques gather and process data from various internet information sources. These models and techniques for sustainable SMEs are digital Business models, Digital Marketing Techniques, Knowledge-Based Analysis Techniques, Social Media Analytics, Digital Behavior and Neuromarketing, Digital Behavior and Neuromarketing as it represented in the Table 4.

Model and techniques for sustainable SMEs
Digital Business Models
Digital Marketing Techniques
Knowledge-Based Analysis Techniques
Social Media Analytics
Digital Behavior and Neuromarketing
Customer Relationship Management Systems

Table 12 Model and techniques for sustainable SMEs through digital marketing

Starting with the first term (**Digital Business Models**), today thanks to the fast growth of technology, new business models appear on the internet focusing on sustainability. With the advancement of these technologies, the phrase sustainability is not connecting only with the environment but also with companies' resources and the tools that they are using through the internet [26].

Internet anymore is one of the most important tools for sustainable development. SMEs need to use this business model in their companies and be ready to sell their products and services 24/7 in every location in the world. Models like this have as a base on how customers reach and behave in this network, analyze their moves and the tools that these people are using [27]

Continuing with the second term (**Digital Marketing Techniques**), companies are using various digital marketing strategies to succeed their goals, in this digital strategies companies are using digital marketing techniques that with the help of algorithms can analyze the emotions of the customers depending on how companies are sharing their message. The point in this technique is for users to understand that SMEs are using sustainable actions [28]

The third term (**Knowledge-Based Analysis Techniques**) is about analysis techniques. User-generated content has evolved as the primary data source for analyzing files created from the social media platforms. All of these situations brought the need for SMEs to analyze different techniques for successful sustainability. Text analysis and motion analysis are some of the analysis techniques. These analysis techniques are used to help SMEs to improve their company models through digital strategies [29].

Continuing with the fourth term (**Social Media Analytics**), social media has become the ecosystem that daily users are sharing their ideas with others, engaging with like and comments. Social media analysis can help SMEs to categorize the users by the topic they are sharing and link them to the type of businesses they are making. Furthermore, they aid in determining if the e-sustainability of the strategies that corporations support has an impact on user loyalty to a brand or influences user perceptions of sustainable aspects utilized in the creation of what they are selling [26].

The fifth term (**Digital Behavior and Neuromarketing**) is about digital behavior and neuromarketing. In the world of digitalization, it is important to be able to understand the behavior between the customer and companies. In order to understand the behavior between customer and companies, neuromarketing is being used.

It is not only to understand the kind of behavior and feelings but to be able to predict how customers are thinking inside of the internet. They can use some techniques with the help of technology to be able to succeed in this. Based on the above SMEs are able to understand their potential customer and improve the communication between them, with a result of sustainable environmental strategies [30].

The last term (**Customer Relationship Management Systems**) mentions the Customer Relationship Management Systems. Applied Information Systems (AIS) are playing a significant role in CRMS. These databases are the consequences of the user activity to online promotion and social communication techniques employed by the SMEs. It's obvious the use of technologies that enables data management helps to save and preserve the resources that businesses use to analyze and download data [31].

In the last years, the term sustainability getting more vital role in the life of the businesses. Internet is everywhere and SMEs must incorporate the sustainability in every step of their digital strategies to improve theirselves. With the integration of the models and techniques above, SMEs will be able to think not only the present but also the future [22]**.**

5. OPERATIONAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The first thing to be understood is that digital marketing strategies are parts of marketing strategies. As in marketing strategies, design of the business plan is necessary for the digital strategies requiring various business processes, operational resources and substructures [32]

Before companies develop the digital strategy, they need to understand what is strategy. A strategy can be defined as a set of actions taken by an organization to accomplish long-term objectives. A bundle of measures is made up of a large number of individual measurements that are related to one another in a consistent way [33]. After companies understand the definition of a strategy, next step to accomplish is to understand what is the digital strategy.

Andre Lipsmeier et al. (2020) stated that ''A digital strategy describes the overall vision of a company in the context of digitalization, including the strategic measures to achieve it. It defines concrete, short-, medium- and long-term digitalization goals and initiatives in the context of products, services and value creation as well as for the organization and culture of a company'' [34].

In order SMEs to use digital marketing in an efficient way, SMEs need strategies within technological tools to improve their knowledge about their customers and to find the needs of customers through these strategies [35]

Before going into details about operational and technological aspects of digital marketing, basic plan of a digital strategy should be stated as a general idea of the digital marketing strategies.

In the traditional strategy, there are three established approaches. These three approaches are listed below.

- Top-Down
- Bottom-Up
- Down-Up (combination of Top-Down and Bottom-Up).

In the context of digitalization, neither top-down approach nor bottom-up approach can give a successful digital strategy. Even though it requires higher intensity, only Down-Up approach can be used for an effective digital development strategy. Down-Up approach is the combination of Top-Down and Bottom-Up approaches. In order for a successful implementation of this approach, it needs to be integrated in the corporate level with business level and functional level [36]. According to Lipsmeier, A. At al., (2020) [34] the authorized formulation for the development of digital strategies is resulted in the Figure 2.
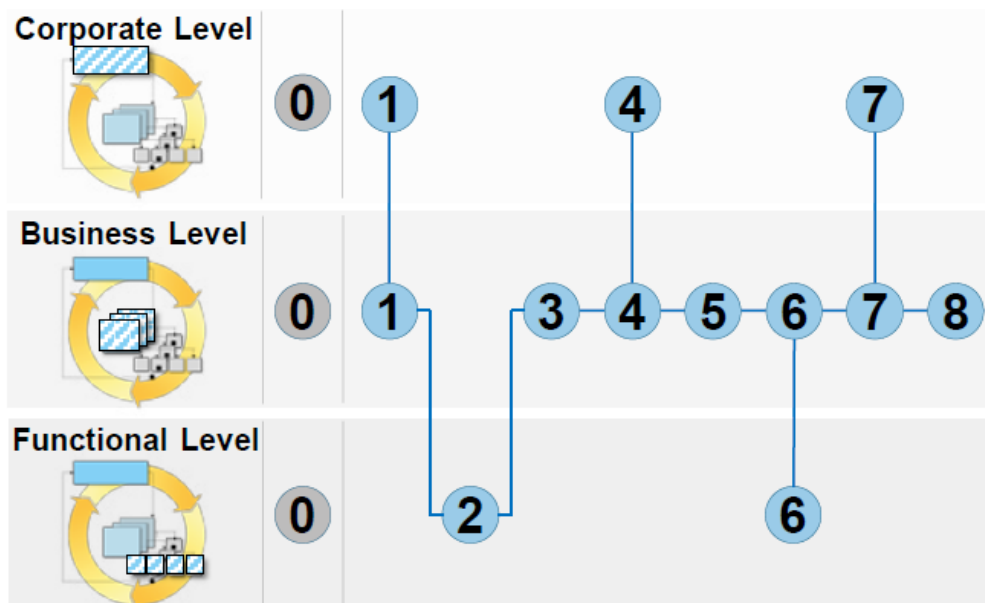
Figure 5 Down-up approach for the development of a digital strategy.

According to the Figure 2, Down-Up approach consists of eight paths that every path is based on each other and distributed over the three different strategy levels (Corporate level, Business level, Functional level).

The step as indicated "1" in the Figure 2, first thing to build a digital strategy within a Down-Up approach is the development of a strategic direction in terms of digital guiding principles at corporate and business level. Digital guiding principles are based on five main elements which are the digital vision, digital mission, digital policy, digital target and digital term [37].

Digital Vision

- Companies need to define one specific vision that reflects a clear and practical goal for the future of the company.

Digital Mission

- Digital mission is the reason of company to get inside of the world of digitalization and adapt the company for new technologies in according with the digital world.

Digital Policy

- Digital Policy includes the rules and the leadership of the company and the process of the organization. It plays a vital role and it is the central value of the company in the world of digitalization.

Digital Target

- A term the specify a strategic direction and objectives of digital transformation. Digital targets are also part of digital vision and digital policy.

Digital Term

- Digital term is the definition of uniform understanding in the rules of the organization.

Regarding the Figure 2, Down-up approach for the development of a digital strategy, companies can follow these steps to have a start plan of a digital strategy with digital guiding principles. Companies and organizations can use development of a digital strategy as a tool for their digital development.

But why it is so important for companies to have a digital strategy? Companies may get good results even without a clear plan; however, they lose opportunities to find better targeting of advertisements within less budget. Regarding to Ganev, P., (2018) [38] some of the negative results when companies do not have digital strategy are:

- Spending more budget and time to find the right targeting
- Competitors getting more power in the same area
- No clear goal and optimized results
- Poor knowledge of customers

5.1.   OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

In digital marketing, operational aspects are crucial. Operational aspects of digital marketing encompass the processes and technologies necessary to enable organizations to utilize and scale the various digital channels integrated into their businesses effectively. Researches represent those operational aspects of digital marketing strategies play a vital role in promoting bottom-line growth (Edelman, D. and Heller, J., 2015)

Some models of operational aspects that companies need to follow for a successful strategy are; Learn & understand the customer, Selecting the right social media marketing channel, Focusing on Smartphone, Brand Awareness, Superior experience, Local business directory, Adoption of Machine Learning (ML) & Artificial Intelligence (AI), Investigation of competitors.

Learn & understand the customer: Every company should identify their targeted customers good. This means that analysis and monitoring of customer behavior should not stop, this will help the company not only to understand what the customer is asking at that moment but also learn to provide specific opportunities for future actions [39]. In order to succeed this important part of the plan, companies need to make research to find the truly interested customers. Moreover, important thing is to know what competitor do as research to identify common clients so the company build a clear vision on how can do it better.

Furthermore, it is not enough to understand the behavior of the customers for a company but to be ready to spot opportunites that is leading company to predict future actions. A wide range of data and tools to analyze charactheristic behaviours are needed to succeed that.

All of this results in a new thing, companies do not only need specific teams that focusing on collecting data and analyzing them but most important thing is to incorporate automated processes that do not require human intervention [39].

<u>Selecting the right social media marketing channel</u>: By selecting the right social media marketing channel companies need to learn how they can connect with their customers better. Every digital channel has a different connection with the customers, for that reason using the right is an important step to bring the clients closer and build trust between company-customer. Some of the most important channels that companies need to have, are the:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Instagram
- Tik-Tok
- YouTube

More information about what these channels are and how they can connect with the customers better will be analyzed at "Technological Aspects of Digital marketing strategies" chapter.

<u>Focusing on Smartphone</u>: Companies need to understand that every year more and more people are using their smartphones in their daily life. Research by BankMyCell, I.N.C (2021) shows that in 2021 the number of smartphone users are more than a 6.378 billion, which means that 80.63% of the world population have a smartphone [40].

By using the right tools in this strategy companies can have a real-time connection with the customers and build their trust even before clients ask for a specific product or service. Companies must focus with the same effort to mobile and desktop channels, while they are building their social media channels. Companies need to check if the webpage works the same for all channels. Some of the important things that companies forget to check for better results are stated below.

- Increasing the page speed: While companies focusing on their page speed on desktop version, most of the times they forget that having a good speed for webpage is not enough if it does not work in mobile version as well.

- Include all information: It is not enough for companies to have a stripped-back version of the desktop site. The same information that the primary version includes needs to be included and in the mobile version also. It is important for the customers using only mobile devices to find the product or the services they are interesting as the customers can find from desktop page.

- Right sizes: It is important to thing about the general design from the text to the bottom of the site must be at the size that mobile devices can define.

Brand Awareness: Companies cannot be successful without having a strong brand awareness. Nowadays, customers choose their favorite brands due to the vision and consciousness of the brand. Even when a customer is ready to buy a product, they check the brand awareness before purchasing. As a result of this, companies build their brands strongly in accordance with a good vision to compete with other brands [41]. That means, higher level of brand awareness may result in purchase even the brand is not the first choice of the customers [42].

A lot of companies and specific SMEs are using the social media to increase brand equity [9]. It doesn't matter so much the size or the budget of the company but to be creative and know how to use the technology right to promote the brand and build trust to the customers [24]. Important mention is that if the company has built a successful brand awareness the product or the service that they provide have a good reputation in the market and is acceptable by the customers [43].

When customers are satisfied with the purchase, they build a great memory of the brand [44]. Without brand awareness, customers can not communicate with the specific brand which may results in the situation that no transaction will occur. Most of the time, customers are feeling confident in a brand that

they know and make easier purchase many times from the same company. It should be reminded that the most of customers around the world do purchase only from famous brands in the market [45]. For companies to successfully pass to the next step in their sales and be able to increase their prices, they need the brand loyalty of their customers [46].

Customers normally are defined in two types, the emotional and the behavioral customers. The difference between these types is that emotional customers are building not only trust to the brand but also the feeling of the emotion when they buy something. The behavioral ones build only trust between them and the brand [47]. By using brand awareness in the strategy plan, companies can succeed to build a relation they need with both of these types and increase their customers.

Superior experience: One reason why customers stop purchasing is the bad experience they had. Companies need to take the experience they provide to the customer seriously. Companies must track every step that a customer do from the first step till the last. In addition to the products and services quality, various functions across the organization also is an important thing to be considered. These functions start from how they will start communicating with the customers, how they will sell the product-service, a strong support for the needs of customers and delivery of the product. This is the most essential but at the same time important steps for succeed superior experience, beside this there are also some more critical functions as well like order management and fulfillment. By this the experiences of these support systems are very influential how a customer perceives a brand's ability to satisfy expectations. Some good examples to understand these methods are some companies that for example are specializing in the sale of makeup and face café, or car industries or even textile industries that they provide to the customers to try the product before they buy it, have first experience with the product and the brand and build some trust and in the same time with the technologies methods companies track the customer and understand the needs of them better. This has resulted not only in providing the best customer experience, but also in adjusting the spending campaign for more profits [39]

Local business directory: A simple but also important strategy that companies, and more specifically SMEs, is the digital local business directory. Digital local business directories provide simple data about companies such as location, operating hours, contact information and images of the company.

By doing this strategy, companies can easily increase the traffic in their website and find new potential customers. Furthermore, it gives visibility for the company's industry, resulting in a unique but vital service with local business directory making it easier for the customers to find them. Most important thing about local business directories is that businesses and especially SMEs can use this strategy at zero cost without a starting budget, not like various expensive advertisements [48]. Some of the most popular free local business directories are Google, Google map, Business Bureau, Yahoo Local, Yelp, Bing, Facebook, Moz and stated in the Table 5 below.

F.L.B.D.
Google
Google Map
Business Bureau
Yahoo Local
Yelp
Bing
Facebook
Moz

Table 13 Famous local business directories

Adoption of Machine Learning (ML) & Artificial Intelligent (AI): One of the most positive things about digital marketing is measurability. The internet contains a huge amount of data that can be used for marketing analysis. These analytical results are used in the digital marketing to analyze the current situation and predict the future conditions. All of these analytics tools succeed thanks to the use of machine learning technologies [49]. By using Machine Learning (ML) techniques, companies can improve their strategy and operate decisions.

Digitalization makes the data-based mechanisms to be used to bring successful results in companies and increase the chances effectively. With the help of the machine learning and artificial intelligence, companies can be prepared better and save hours or weeks or even a year by analyzing the data individually. ML & AI are technologies that open the door to the new world where machines teaching and make life easier for the people [50].

Machine learning is a technology that allows a computer or system to learn and improve itself by acquiring new skills based on existing examples. This technology can perform various tasks such as analyzing data and formulating predictions. Its widespread adoption in the marketing industry and has a huge potential to be used in decision-making and marketing strategies.

Digital marketing is sometimes seen as a catch-all word for tactics implemented via the use of numerous digital platforms and approaches. The various tools used in digital marketing include search engine marketing, social media marketing, and market research [51]. One of the most critical factors that digital marketing experts need to consider is the level of data that they collect. They may utilize this data to make the decision-making system better and increase the success of their marketing activities with the aid of machine learning.

The numerous analytical tools on the market may be integrated into the planning. Such as execution, and assessment of a digital marketing campaign. The particular tools used are determined by company needs. Some of the most famous analytic tools are "Google Analytics, Google Data Studio, Google AdWords, Facebook Ads Manager, Facebook Insights, Exponea, Zoomsphere Kontentino, Hotjar, StreamingFrog, Mailchimp" which are using Machine Learning. These analytic tools are represented in Table 6.

Analytics Tools
Google Analytics
Google Data Studio
Google AdWords
Facebook Ads Manager
Facebook Insights
Exponea
Zoomsphere
Kontentino
Hotjar
StreamingFrog
Mailchimp
Internal data

Table 14 Analytic Tools within machine learning

Investigation of competitors: One of the most crucial operation aspects in digital marketing is the examination of competitors, and to achieve this companies need to have one framework to follow. This framework of digital marketing is based on traditional marketing, the general idea and the main characters of investigation of competitors coming from there. First of all, this framework needs two tasks to be completely:

- Competitor identification: Companies are classified based on key commonalities.
- Competitor analysis: Competitors are compared based on different important aspects

The goal for the first task is to help companies to recognize the competitive threats and categorize the sorts of competition, besides the goal for the second task is to help companies in determining the comparative capabilities of their competitors' strengths and shortcomings [52].

Regarding Peteraf, M.A. and Bergen, M.E. (2003) [53] companies to be able to succeed the first task competitor identification must classify the competitive set , regarding this companies need to follow the figure below that in the one axis have the market commonality which competitors sort based on how well they meet comparable client demands and in another axis have the resource similarity that competitors sort depending on how comparable their resource founding is in terms of the sort of makeup.
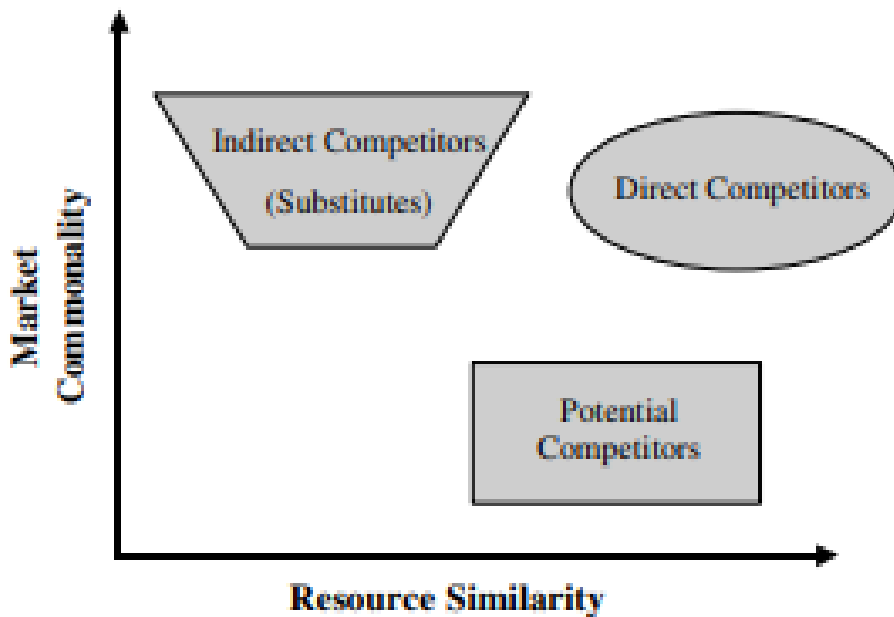

Figure 6 Mapping of competitor terrain

These two terms in the Figure 3 classify the competitive landscape from the perspective of a focused company. So according to the above competitors are divided into three categories,

- Direct Competitors
- Inderect Competitors
- Potential Competitors

These three categories can help companies to understand the type of the competitors better and identify opportunities for future actions. Moreover, it acts as a reminder to corporations to keep watch of not only their competitors' actions in product markets, but also their activity in factor markets.

A competitor identification task is a type of evaluation that involves identifying firms based on the characteristics and competitive advantage of their competitors. This section's restriction is that it cannot be used to rank and order the threats posed by competing firms. Here comes the second task 'Competitor analysis', which can be utilized to evaluate the capabilities of two competitors and to predict which one will be the stronger competitor [52]. For the second task companies need to include as a criterion the Resource Equivalance. The extent to which a particular rival possesses strategic assets capable of serving the same consumer demands as the focus business is defined as resource equivalency.

When two organizations have high resource equivalence, they are almost comparable in their ability to meet the same consumer demands. So resourse equivalance is devided in high and low and with the three competitor categories companies be able to analysis by determining the relative strength of several sorts of rivals to a focused company. Depend on the first stage, companies analyze the competitors with the help of the framework in Figure 4 to find which companies have high or low equivalence to their company.

	Low Resource Equivalence	High Resource Equivalance
Direct Competitors		
Potential Competitors		
Inderect Competitors		

Table 15 A Framework for Competitor

By following this framework of two stages companies will able to analyze their competitors better and find new opportunities and be ready to compete. Moreover, they can plan clearly and with a well-designed digital strategy companies can be ready to face every obstacle that a competitor can put [54].

5.2TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The digital transition is ongoing, as is the demise of traditional offline enterprises. If a company is not represented on the internet, it is forced to exit the market. As a result of this condition, the issue of selecting the most appropriate and successful instruments for individualized interaction between sellers and customers exists. The increasing technological aspects demanded by digital marketing are the outcome of constant developments in the field of information systems, and they are a driver toward improved efficiency [55].

Companies, in order to develop successfully their strategies, will need to define some new technological aspects in digital marketing. Some models of this technological aspects that companies need to follow for a successful strategy are; search engine marketing (SEM), search engine optimization (SEO), pay per click (PPC), email marketing, social media marketing, content marketing,

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): First of all, companies need to understand the meaning and using of search engines. The programs that offer interconnections between a web and a user are named search engines. When a user inputs a word or a phrase to the search engine, software compares this input and gives informations from several websites. Green, D. (2000) [56] defines a website engine as "a database that contains massive amounts of data about websites".

Around of 80 percent of the users using the search engine to obtain any information from the web. The strategy that companies need to follow through is the use of search engine to bring potential customers inside their webpages so they will increase the sales and the brand aweness. The search engine businesses that produce the most web searches according to Flosi, S.L. (2011) [57] are represented in the percentage table below.
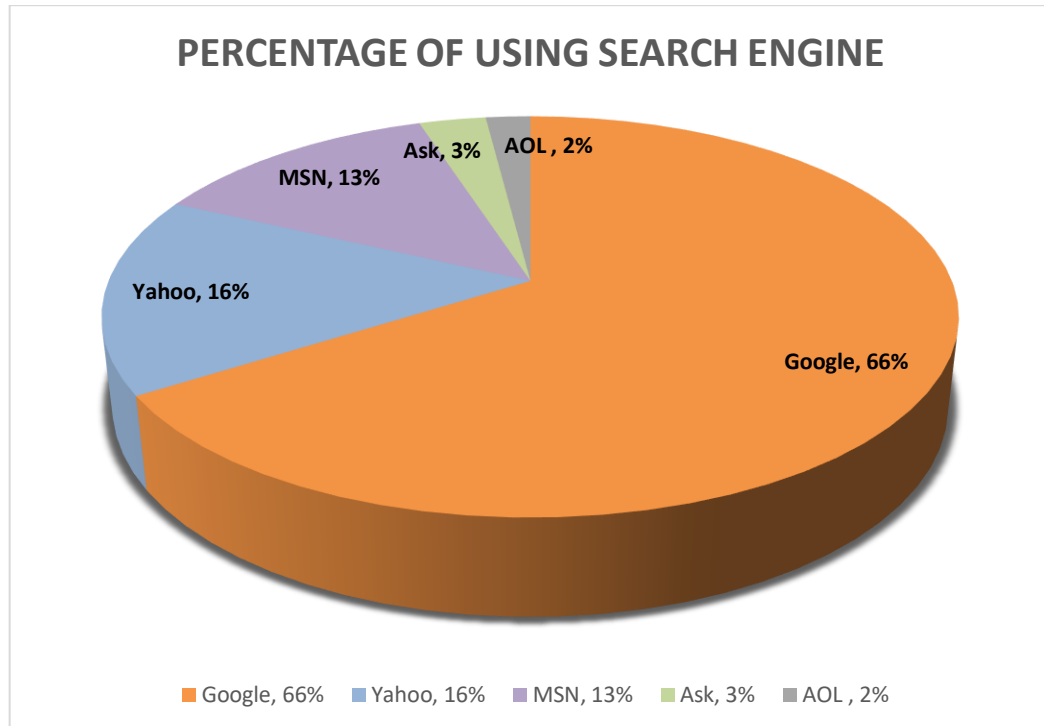
PERCENTAGE OF USING SEARCH ENGINE

Ask, 3%   AOL , 2%

MSN, 13%

Yahoo, 16%

Google, 66%

■ Google, 66%   ■ Yahoo, 16%   ■ MSN, 13%   ■ Ask, 3%   ■ AOL , 2%

Figure 4 Percentage of using search engine

Companies after they have one good general knowledge of what is search engine, they can use the technological aspects of SEMs for a plan of a strategy for a variety of activities. Search engine marketing has a purpose to promote the websites by making them more visible to the customers through search engine pages. The domination of online advertising pages is coming from search engine marketing. According to Shin ad al, (2013) [58] search engine marketing is the faster growing type of online advertisements.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Search Engine Optimization is a technique for determining the best keyword for a website based on data analysis and marketing research [59]. Companies need to have a piece of basic knowledge to operate and choose the keywords to improve their website ranking. For any company that is getting into digitalization, it's important to be ranked highly with search engines [60]. The target of companies using search engine optimization is to increase the traffic to their websites so they can bring more potential customers and increase their sales [61].

Several strategies are available to achieve the visibility target, and almost all of them are a result of the way algorithms work. Each term depends on how often it appears in the search engine, it increasing the competitiveness.

First step that companies need to follow for SEO is to develop a list of keywords or phrases. Second step is to get their website as soon as possible into the search engine index and the third step is to manipulate the components that appear on the page to attract more customers to the webpage [62].

Companies need to use the steps mentioned above in order to be successful and follow specific operations in their strategy [63]. Header tags: When companies build a website, they have the option to use meta-data. This meta-data is invisible to the browser but effecting later in the use of SEO. One of these meta tags and the most important is the HeaderTags. Normally in the website pages, the designer can affect six levels of heading data, the first one H1 is the most important. Regarding to Motwani, et al. (2002) [64] the more important the header is, the most significal role it plays in a search engine to a given web page. Furthermore, HTML is a language that designers of the website have the option to make the header in the measures it needs to be and develop the text size and boldness.

- Image filename: When a company upload a file in their website images, video or a sound file, search engines can not understand the type of the file. Companies need to provide the right explanation of this types of files in a text. For example, when one potential customer is searching one image, the images that appears in the search engine contains some keyword in the text of the image that customers have typed [65].
- Image alternative tags: When the graphics are not working, alternative tags are coming to replace the image by displaying text. Moreover, an important mention is that only text components on a webpage may be read by automated crawlers, multimedia elements cannot be read by crawlers. This is the reason why alternative tags are so important for the description of the graphics. By using ALT tags, website designer allows the customers to have faster speed on the web by turning off the

graphics. But the most important reason for the ALT tags is that they are helping people who have a visual impairment to use the website and understand everything inside of this, this happening by voice output screen reader [66].

- Metadata: The informations that a webpage provides through HyperText Markup Language (HTML). They do it with the meta tags. Even if these meta tags do not seem in any of the web pages, it can be read when a customer types specific words in the search engines. All of this process is called metadata [67].

By following the operation that mentioned above, companies will be able to have better results. According to a research of behavior study, 91 percent of users eventually examine results only on the first three pages, and 67 percent of searchers only look at the first page of search results. All of this research indicates that if a website does not appear on the first search engine results page (SERP), just one-third of visitors will click on additional sites [65].

Pay per click (PPC): Pay-per-click systems are those that show adverts on search result pages. PPC was created as a way for search engines to generate cash. PPC is named like this because is a type of advertising that companies getting charged by search engines every time an internet user is clicking on these ads. Every keyword that companies use for the campaign have a different competition rating depending on how popular it is, as popular is the specific keyword that companies use more and expensive is [68]. Companies can use PPC method to increase the sales through many platfroms. For example, in Google creating these types of ads doing it in Google AdWords, in Facebook doing it in FB Manager account, in Yahoo doing it in Yahoo search marketing etc.

Furthermore, companies need to have a budget to start with PPC campaigns. For this reason, they need to be sure before they create a campaign and be prepared to spend this amount of money to show their product or services. Companies use phrases or keywords that are specific for the campaign. They plan so a customer when typing this phrase can see this advertising in the search engine. When a user enters this search phrase the search engine will

display for the company lead it in the URL that the creator defines [69]. Firms need to be prepared to pay search engines whenever a customer is clicking on this link that they define for their web. The business can get successful within a specialized employment to manage PPC method and campaigns.

Email marketing: The term email-marketing means that companies are able to deliver a commercial message to a bulk of people through electronic mail for a lot of different reasons. Some of this reason is to sale their product or services, build trust between customer and the company. To find new potential customers, promote an advertising campaign, etc.

Bawn, Z.L. and Nath, R.P.D. (2014) mentions that email marketing provides four significant benefits:

- The budget is so lower compared to another marketing plans
- Communication with customers is more often thanks to the advance of fast emails without a lot of work.
- Testing different variety of campaigns to find the best type for the customers,
- Sending emails, that would attract the attention of customer, can provide an advertising with one button that has as a result of new potential customers for free [70].

Reasearches done by S Jenkins (2009) [71] shows that when companies invest a dollar for email marketing campaign, they take back more than 43 dollars. Moreover, two over three of marketers define that email marketing deliver a good Return on Investment (ROI) and almost ten percent of companies were able to achive the half of the sales only by using this type of marketing (ROI).

Even though email marketing seems as the best solution for the approach for customer, companies need to launch campaigns by targeting audience that is closer to the interest they create. Email marketing provides a successful campaign, by avoiding to send a bulk of email which may end up in spam folder.

Using email marketing, a successful campaign can be achieved, but it is critical to avoid the bulk email messages that may go to the spam folders.

By using this strategy, companies are able to collect data and learn the customer better, and are able to optimize their campaign and they don't need important knowledge to learn how email marketing works. Only creative and with basic knowledge. Email softwares are making the life of companies easier and help them to create campaigns in the time [72], some of the most popular email marketing tools are Mailchimp, ActiveCampaing, MailerLite, Hubspot, Moosend, Drip, Sendy, Klaviyo, Getresponse. These email marketing tools are represented in the Table 8.

Email Marketing Tools
Mailchimp
ActiveCampaing
MailerLite
Hubspot
Moosend
Drip
Sendy
Klaviyo
Getresponse

Table 16 Email marketing tools

Social media marketing: By thinking of the term social media, users usually think the most famous ones: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, etc. However, there are thousands of social media existing. Customers use social media, wherever they are at any time.

According to Kemp, S., (2015) [73] in first of 2015 almost 45 percent of the population was active on the internet. More than 80 percent of this 45 percent of the population was using social media. Surprisingly, almost the same percentage of the mobile users was online with a mobile device. Since the social media is available with mobile phones, users can be everywhere and they don't need to carry a desktop with them but have only a mobile phone. The important reason that companies need to get inside of the world of social media is that they can engage with customers in real-time. Companies that

connect with the customers and have a real-time relation can increase their brand awareness and sales.

Companies need be online 24/7 to be able to catch up with the customers. Customers' requirements are rapidly increasing and to win their interest companies must be prepared to answer their questions.

Which approach does company need to follow to be successful in social media? Companies first need to start with putting a goal, they need to find the best channel depending on their niche. They need to know the language and the time to be online to react with the customers.

It's not enough to create just a social media channel but is also important to follow all the things mentioned above. The social media accounts and regular presence are something that firms need to have, to be consistent with the brand. If the business can understand and apply the things above, they will discover opportunities that will make them increase their profit [74].

Content marketing: Content marketing can be defined as the administration process in which a company identifies, analyzes and satisfies needs of the client in order to earn more profit through the usage of digital content with the help of digital social channels [75].

Companies are interconnected with the customers in the market, the key of content marketing is to share useful content with the target audience. Nowadays, customers are aware, they can filter the content information whether it is good or not and find it whether companies try to trully engage with them or want to fool them [76].

As mentioned in the social media marketing, the customers expect to be answered 24/7. Companies need to be ready to engage with them in any time. Content manager of the company can prepare stories and posts which is enough to keep the interaction alive between customers and the company.

There are six things that companies need to implement for successful content marketing [77]. These are the localization, personalization, emotions, diversification of approach, co-creation and trsut and ethical and honesty.

| Localization |
| Personalization |
| Emotions |
| Diversification of Approach |
| Co-creation and Trust |
| Ethical and honesty |
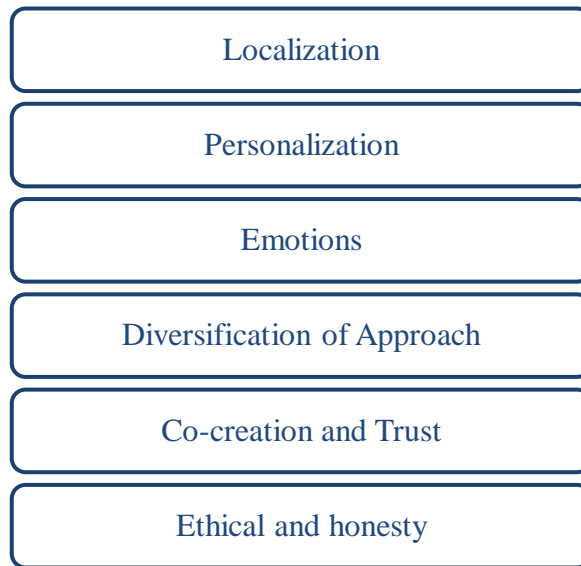
Starting with the first term (**Localization**), content localization is so important for content marketing. Companies can not use the same strategies in different countries, every country has its own culture and traditions. Therefore, companies need to create content in line with the interest of each country and language [78].

Second term (**Personalization**) indicates that, customers expect to have personalized experiences. Some type of customers wants to feel that they are important and they belong to somewhere [79]. Companies need to create personalized content for these different types. By doing this, they are winning several customers and increasing the brand trust between them.

The third thing (**Emotions**) companies need to implement for successful content marketing is the emotion. In order to get a viral post, companies need to have a huge engagement. There are two determinants for a post to get viral, one is the positivity of the message that needs to pass the audience, and the other one is the amount of emotion it carries [80].

The fourth term (**Diversification of approach**) mentions the diversification of approach. The customers are losing their interests to the brand when they see the similar posts or advertisements of the company. Companies need to be creative and to catch the attention of the customers. Company needs to adopt varied routine to accomplish diversification of approach [81].

The fifth term (**Co-creation nd trust**) is the co-creator and trust. Customers are participating with companies and creating a kind of partnership. Companies are not only increasing the value of a new product but also developing trust between the customer and them. This method does not only bring new potential customers to the company, but also provides maintenance to the existing customers [82].

The last term (**Ethical and honesty**) is about ethics and honesty. In nowadays world, nothing can be hidden in social media especially when something is used for a cheating purpose. Companies can not win a customer by using lies [83]. It needs to be sure that users are having a clear view of the policy rules of companies. Only by telling the truth, companies can move on to the next step and build trust between them.

Companies by following these six terms in the content marketing strategy can lead customers to buy their product or their services. Companies do not achieve only the sales but also the trust of the customers. As a result, it is important to have loyal clients that promote the company by spreading their satisfaction of the brand [84].

6. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

This study aimed to identify Operational and Technological Aspects of Digital Marketing Strategies for Sustainable SMEs. To begin with, society needs to understand the importance of SMEs. SMEs are giving the opportunity to the people to develop new skills and support the future industry of their country. By this, it is easier for people to apply for a job at SMEs without having large experience which is requested by larger enterprises. This results in the decrease of the unemployment of the country. With the decline of unemployment, people then have available budget to spend it on their own interests. As a result, the country can maintain a sustainable economy. Moreover, all these ideas inspire the people to start their own SME.

Furthermore, people have the opportunity in SMEs to communicate, share new ideas, and evolve all together as colleagues. In contrast to SMEs, it is hard to interact with the co-workers in big companies due to the workload.

In the same way, SMEs are depending on the opportunities of the market but also the risks that they need to take for the promotion of their product or services. They are in a position to make the decisions fast and find a common solution with their partners, beside the big companies that a fast decision will bring big risks in their businesses. One of the most important benefits of SMEs is that they are able to communicate with their customers in the real-time with a result to detect possible mistakes. The owners of the small businesses are able to control and improve their companies by watching with their own possible mistakes. Moreover, because of the digitalization, the promotion of the company is becoming easier and with the right digital strategy are able with small budget to improve and bring sustainability to their firms.

However, the world of digitalization is not easy for SMEs. The money that can be afforded to invest are limited, the dynamic to bring a lot of customers at the same time in their company is difficult, the trust and the brand awareness is demanding more effort and budget to invest. Customers are able with one click to choose the competitor and the deals that SMEs needs to agree with their suppliers are taking more time due to the dynamic of the nature of companies.

All of these are obstacles that SMEs need to solve in the world of digitalization, with the right plan and digital strategy including the operational and technological aspects are able to succeed sustainability to their companies.

As an outcome of the research, SMEs need to be sure about their target before following a framework for their digital marketing strategy. It is important to focus on the goals that they can and want to achieve and to learn which audience they need to target. Moreover, they need to be ready to invest even a small amount of money in specific digital strategies to increase their brand awareness. One of the most difficult challenges that they need to face is that they need to make their brand famous and trustable to the customers. Most of the time, costumers do not buy a product or service just because it is cheap, they give big attention to the brand and in the quality and if SMEs are able to win the trust of them, then they will be closer to success.

The technological tools and digital operational methods help companies to evolve and bring them one step closer to sustainability. But it's not enough this, every operational and technological aspect needs its own strategy and knowledge. An important thing to mention is that whatever digital strategy SMEs are following, needs to be done with the mindset to improve themself and not harm their competitor. For example, an investigation of the competitors should be done in this way that SMEs are able to learn their competitors' weaknesses and try to improve their enterprise and not try to fight with their competitors.

Without a deep knowledge of every technological tool which mentioned above, companies may not achieve success. SMEs need to understand where they can use these aspects effectively and have complete knowledge of every one of them. For example, SMEs by doing just a PPC campaign the only thing that will happen is to lose money. They need to plan each campaign with a target and do research before they publish the campaign online. It's not easy for SMEs to bring results if they don't have a clear vision in what they want to succeed, another example its the email marketing, by sending bulk emails to the customers will not take their attention.

Every email needs to give a purpose, it needs to take the attention of the costumers. An empty content email will not bring a result but also will end up in spam emails with a harmful result both for the company and for the environment.

SMEs needs to pay a serious attention to social media and content marketing, by creating an account to different social media without knowing the purpose of every channel will not increase their sales. SMEs need to know the users and the potential that every digital channel can bring to the audients whom interesting. SMEs need to forget the old times. Digitalization gives the opportunity to make their companies internationally recognized, selling not only to the customer of the neighborhood but make the company borderless. Furthermore, it gives the opportunity to build strong brand awareness with different kinds of operational methodologies and technological aspects with a low budget and huge return. The new era has arrived and with the right knowledge and proper use of digital marketing, SMEs will be able to achieve success and build a sustainable enterprise.

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