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Digital Marketing and its effects on Start-up business

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Year 2020

Student thesis, master's degree (one year), Credits
Business Administration
Master Programme in Business Administration (MBA): Business Management
Master Thesis in Business Administration 15 Credits

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Examiner: Akmal Hyder

Acknowledgements:

This thesis would not have been possible without the support we received during our entire writing process. Firstly and foremost, we would like to thank our tutor and supervisor Olivia Kang who provided us with the support and feedback to improve our thesis. We would also like to thank our examiner Akmal Hyder. Further, we would also like to thank our opponents from the class who provided us with their opinions and feedback to help us improve this writing process. Furthermore, we appreciate and are thankful for the participation of all four respondents for taking the time out of their busy schedule and providing us with their great insight on our thesis topic. This thesis would have not been possible without the help of all above mentioned participants and we are greatly thankful for them.

Sweden, January 14, 2021

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to research the value and influence of digital marketing on the competitive establishment of start-up companies. The research would further explore whether digital marketing can have a substantial effect on the growth of start-ups, enhance brand recognition, gain consumer loyalty, and strengthen customer relationships. This concept has not been previously researched and the only related study we find was the correlation between social media and innovation in start-ups, which indicates that social media has a positive effect on innovation in start-up companies.

The research used a qualitative research approach in which 5 start-up firms were interviewed using a semi-structured interview as the primary data collection method. The research also used secondary data collected through peer-reviewed articles, journals, and websites.

The study concludes that digital marketing is recognized as a creative and efficient way of obtaining, sustaining, and establishing customer relationships. Online channels and platforms, such as websites, industry-specific outlets, and forums, have been identified to be the most beneficial for start-ups. It also suggests that a fresh start-up can develop substantially through digital marketing by creating brand awareness, building trust, and building consumer awareness. However, most of the start-up companies hesitate implementing digital marketing strategies at the beginning of the company's establishment.

Our findings will assist other start-ups to consider digital marketing for their marketing strategies. Recommendations for further studies are a related but perhaps more detailed study in Sweden and UAE, together with a study in a country other than Sweden and UAE.

Keywords: Start-up, digital marketing, brand awareness, building trust, consumer awareness, etc.

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1. Introduction

We reside in an environment that is continually shifting and progressing. Technological advancement takes a major part in this ever-changing world. Almost all people are linked to digital technologies in one way or another. People easily spend hours on their phones, computers and tablets. This provides a range of possibilities, specifically for businesses, to prosper from such a digital transition. Therefore, it's no wonder marketing techniques have changed drastically from newspaper and television marketing to online digital media marketing.

Digital marketing is the forefront of every marketing campaign for any company despite the scale. Currently, no one launches a company without establishing a comprehensive digital marketing plan. Digital marketing is the most prevalent method of marketing in the modern technological era (Kamal, 2016). Digital marketing for start-ups helps emerging businesses to adapt to the marketing plans and strategies for their targeted consumers, and at the same time ensuring compliance with the evolving complexity of customer behaviour (Dwivedi et al, 2020). Developing a corporate identity in the modern age is an essential strategic imperative for start-ups, which today needs distinct brand marketing techniques than conventional ones (Mingione and Abratt, 2020). Start-up companies are proving essential in the growth of the economy and in the past two decades the importance of start-up companies has increased globally (Mingione and Abratt, 2020). Governments all over the world have motivated and incentivised start-up companies to maintain a competitive advantage (Glaeser et al., 2010).

Rather than conventional marketing, it has been recommended that start-up companies emphasize on digital marketing, since digital marketing enables such companies to acquire potential consumer and more effectively target current consumers (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Digital marketing not only creates alternative platforms for the distribution of goods and services but also aims to create consumer relations and engagement. It helps to improve contact with clients, as well as understand the evolving expectations of the clients. Thus, the start-ups need to engage in online digital platforms that encourage firms to access a broader consumer and communicate with suppliers and customers effectively (Mazzarol, 2015).

Furthermore, Digital marketing practices focus on product image, brand recognition and brand loyalty (Krishnaprabha and Tarunika, 2020). These components are crucial for the growth of any start-up companies. As digital channels allow two-way connections, businesses continually aim to build a digital partnership with consumers and become collaborators with them to fuel consumer engagement and awareness as well as value creation (Krishnaprabha and Tarunika, 2020). Digital marketing seems to have the potential to bind new brands to customers and to make ads more widely accessible (Bresciani and Eppler, 2010).

1.1 Problem discussion

Every year, thousands of start-up firms with an innovative concept are striving to make their presence in the corporate world. Some of them have immediate prominence, but most of them are struggling to establish themselves. Just 51% of start-up businesses last five years or more (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012 cited in Ripsas, S. et. al., 2018). It is impossible for start-ups to compete with existing and profitable firms without adequate marketing strategy. One of the key factors why start-ups struggle is that they do not have a comprehensive digital marketing strategy (Montgomery, 2018). As per CB Insights 2019, as many as 17 percent of failed start-ups can attribute their performance to bad marketing.

We believe that the appropriate implementation of digital marketing strategies is essential to the growth of start-up companies. They can help establish effective interaction with their target audience by updating them frequently about activities and events in their business at a relatively low cost (Insight success, 2018). Start-ups may establish their brand image through digital networks by establishing quality partnerships with members of online communities (Hajli et al., 2017). As per Ruggieri et al., (2018) start-ups, operating in a range of industries, have demonstrated strong growth potential and the opportunity to generate value for their consumers by creative goods and services delivered by digital networks. This makes it the ultimate marketing platform for start-ups and small companies that do not have a significant percentage of resources or massive capital investments (Montgomery, 2018). Digital marketing is also quicker and produces more performance. (Montgomery, 2018).

1.2 Research Gap

We have chosen to research the link between digital marketing and start-up companies as this topic hasn't been researched specifically and the only similar research we found was the link between social media and innovation in start-ups, which shows a positive influence from social media on innovation in start-up companies (Zubielqui and Jones, 2020). However, the previous research lacks the application of new trends in marketing i.e. digital marketing and its benefits in start-up companies particularly in relation to brand awareness, building trust and customer engagement. Digital marketing is very important as it's the key to building the brand name and image for the start-up companies (Chaffey, 2020).

1.3 Purpose/Aim

The aim of this study is to examine whether digital marketing can significantly affect the development of start-up businesses, raise brand recognition, create customer trust and enhance customer relationships. The thesis also aims to study the importance and effects of digital marketing such as social media, emails, pay-per-click, viral marketing, etc on the successful establishment of the start-up businesses. The study further focuses on the relationship between start-up companies and digital marketing. It also seeks to recognize critical aspects in the digital marketing approach and ways to incorporate them in start-up companies.

1.4 Research question

RQ. How does digital marketing affect the growth of start-up companies in relation to brand awareness, building trust and customer engagement?

This research question covers the three important factor brand awareness, building trust and customer engagement that are crucial for the growth of the start-up companies. It also explores influence of digital marketing on such factors.

1.5 Delimitations

This research is limited to the effects of digital marketing in the context of brand awareness, trust building and customer awareness as these three factors are vital for the growth of start-up companies. The study is also limited to Swedish and UAE companies.

This research is restricted to digital online marketing and not both offline and online marketing.

1.6 Outline of thesis

The report is categorized into five chapters. The literature review and the related theories are discussed first in the theoretical framework. The second segment is the methodology, which outlines the research approach, the research design, the data collection process and the data analysis. The thesis then proceeds to address the empirical evidence in the third section, and analyses the data in the fourth section, along with the literature and theories previously discussed. Finally, the conclusion is derived from the review and results undertaken to complete the report and include more recommendations for further studies.

2. Literature Review

This chapter discusses the literatures drawn from studies carried out previously. The references considered for the literature analysis include articles, journals and books on digital marketing, marketing strategies, start-ups, etc. This chapter will provide an overview of start-ups, digital marketing, digital marketing strategies and effects of digital marketing in growth of start-ups in context of brand awareness, building trust and consumer awareness.

2.1 Start-ups

The term Start-up is mentioned more and more but is often quite unclear (Savey, et al., 2020), as scholars have various interpretations for the term (Mazzarol, 2015). With firms spanning from local small-scale enterprises to major tech firms now identifying themselves as start-ups, the term has evolved over time (Cook. S, 2020). A start-up has various definitions. It can be defined as an entrepreneurial business established by one or more founders to produce and sell an innovative product or service (Investopedia, 2020). As per Laari-Salmela, et al., (2017) Start-up is a venture that has been in the industry for less than 10 years. As per the comprehensive literature analysis by Gruber (2004) there are few attributes of the start-ups. The first and most mentioned attribute is the "newness," the firm in the early stages of growth. The "smallness" of such businesses is a second feature. The third feature is environmental volatility, which is expressed in the instability of buyers and profits (Cited in Ergeer and Sigfridsson 2018). Hence the start-up can be defined as fresh and small business, founded to market innovative products through limited capital.

As Start-ups are recently established companies, they need to work strategically when marketing their brands. They ought to use their limited capital, using creative and unorthodox approaches to achieve momentum (Haereid and Indregård, 2015). Start-ups must emphasize the economic aspects of marketing, such as social media marketing, email, word-of - mouth (WOM), etc. Therefore, they must concentrate on 4Is: information, identification, innovation and interaction (Stokes, 2000) instead of 4 Ps (product, price, place, promotion) or 7 Ps (product, price, place, promotion, process, people and physical evidence) of traditional marketing.

2.2 Digital marketing

Over time the phrase "digital marketing" has developed from a particular term that describes the marketing of goods and services using digital platforms – to a generic term that describes the method of incorporating digital technology to attract consumers and create consumer habits, support brands, maintain customers and improve revenue (Financial Times, lexicon.ft.com cited in Kannan and Li, 2017). Hence, digital marketing can be described as an agile, technology-enabled framework by which companies work together with consumers and partners to develop, connect, generate and retain value for all stakeholders (Kannan and Li, 2017).

Digital marketing is the use of media devices such as mobiles phones, computers and other devices to reach consumers through social media, websites, search engines, applications and other methods. Digital marketing has tremendous potential. One of the key goals of digital marketing is to identify how customers use emerging technology and incorporate this insight for the advantage of the organization, enabling the user to communicate more efficiently with their potential customers (S. Teixeira et al., 2018). It is also possible to boost brand value, attract new buyers and improve sales using digital marketing. Digital marketing can be online or offline (Bala and Verma, 2018). Digital marketing is the new era of marketing that started with the launch of the internet 1.0 in 1990. Internet marketing is defined as the use of digital technologies to achieve marketing objectives (Chaffey, 2009). Digital media marketing is a powerful tool used by organisations and marketing managers to attract consumers and build brands to succeed (Fulgoni and Mörn, 2009).

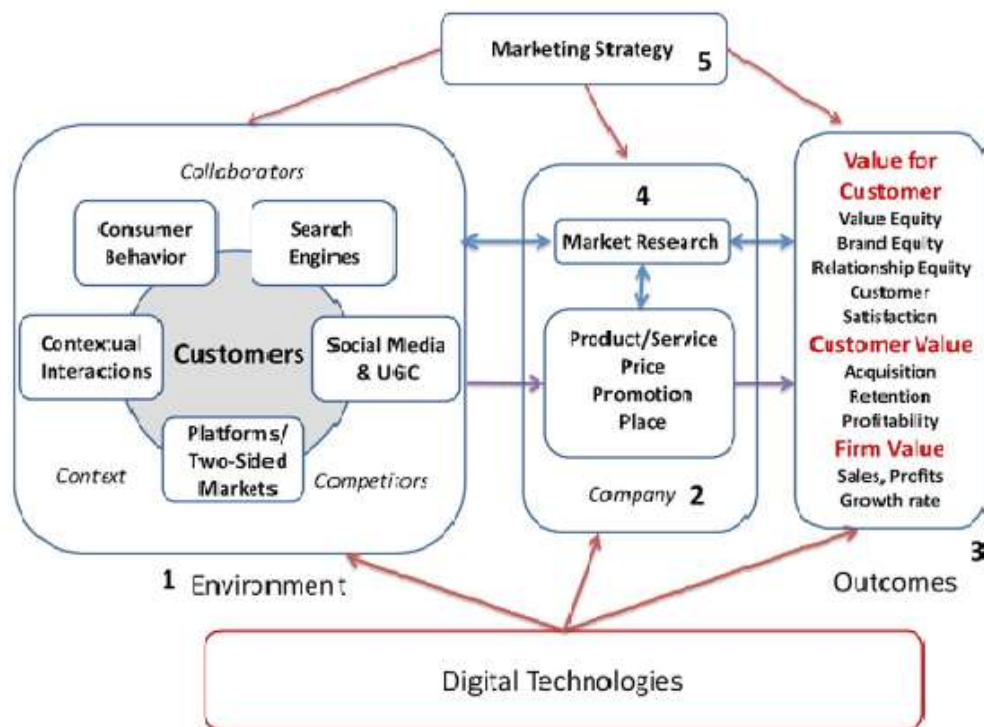


Fig. 1. The Framework for Research in Digital Marketing.

Source: Kannan and Li, 2017.

The above structure describes central themes of communication in the marketing process and techniques where emerging digital technology will continue to have a tremendous influence. It includes not only the specified components, but also the configurations between those components. The system also emphasizes the focus on clarifying roles and responsibilities in digital media that can have an internal or external effect on the organisation. These digital technologies results in improvement of customer and firm value.

The use of digital media platforms in marketing has accelerated, allowing for greater engagement with customers in order to gain information and feedback from the consumer and to extend the target market. Digital marketing has different types of marketing that are explained below:

Interactive Marketing

Interactive marketing is a method used to interact with consumers using dynamic content like layered information, personalised content, visual storytelling and two-way

interaction. Interactive marketing's goal is to make content relevant and engaging for consumers.

Personalised Content

Personalised content uses advanced technology to collect data about the consumers geographic, demographic and lifecycle information. Then the system creates profiles for each consumer which then can be used to target certain individuals to create a personalised, relatable and meaningful experience making consumers more likely to interact with the content by sharing it (Galetto, 2016).

Layered Information

Layered information is used when the advertisements aim is to educate consumers about the brand name, product or service. In this method detailed information is delivered in small increments which gives the ability for example to tell the brands story using small amounts of information delivered in a quick easy to read snippets that incrementally reveals more information to consumers who are interested. Two-way interaction is when the advertisement is given as an activity for the consumer to participate in. Two-way interaction uses interactive tools such as games, interactive videos and puzzles which provide a more powerful experience to the consumer (Galetto, 2016).

2.3 Digital marketing strategies

The increasing success of technology-integrating companies in their marketing strategy draws emphasis to the need for an in-depth analysis of digital marketing strategies (Gibson, 2018). Having a strategic move to customer-centric marketing campaigns offers companies the ability to partake in a new era of revolutionary marketing strategies that leverage digital marketing to fulfill their key marketing specifications (Gibson, 2018). In every marketing strategy, digital marketing is of substantial significance to business, irrespective of market, scale or nationality. Therefore, more than ever, corporations are compelled to leverage this method of marketing in order to stay successful, which can ultimately offer tremendous advantages at a low cost. (Patruti-Baltes, 2016).

2.3.1 Key factors

Some of the popular form of digital marketing are:

Pay-per-click

Pay per click advertisement is an advertisement on the internet that is provided by search engines and social media so that when the consumer is searching for terms related to the advertisement the advertised product or service appears to the consumer. This service is charged by the number of people who click on the ad and can be targeted to a specific demographic or location (Barone, 2020).

Websites

A website is created by organisations to carry information and advertisements to the consumers. Websites influence consumers' perception about the organisation so the website must be designed using the latest software's with high quality graphics. Websites can be stored for the organisation and also be used to communicate with the consumer along with providing support (Kolesar and Galbraith, 2000).

Content Marketing

Content marketing uses all marketing formats that aims to engage consumers by the creation and sharing of content. The content is usually shared on blogs, eBooks, videos and infographics. This strategy is used to increase traffic to the websites and build the brand (Pulizzi and Barrett, 2009).

Email Marketing

Email marketing is the use of email to send advertisements to groups of consumers. Email can enhance the organisation and consumer relationship which encourages repeat business and customer loyalty. It also helps organisations gain new customers. This allows a two-way communication with consumers (Adikesavan, 2014). The problem is that email spam has grown to around 90% of the total email traffic in 2014 (Messaging, Malware and Mobile Anti-Abuse Working Group, 2014).

Social media marketing

Social media marketing is the use of online social media tools to market goods, services, information and ideas to consumers (Dahnil et al., 2014). These tools enable organisations to produce information and encourage collaborations between social media users (Dahnil

et al., 2014). It is estimated that around there are 3.6 billion users of social media globally (Number of social media users worldwide, Statista, 2020).

Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is when a business rewards people based on their performance in attracting traffic to the business using their own marketing efforts. The affiliate will market the business and bear the risk of the marketing cost. They will receive a commission on each sale. (Brown, 2009; Duffy, 2005)

Viral marketing

Viral marketing aims to exploit existing social networks to make people share product information with their friends. Some products or services are easier to advertise using viral marketing as they could be observed or advertised as part of the communication. Hotmail was one of the fastest growing company's by using this strategy. They were able to grow from nothing to 12 million users in 18 months. The reason was that every e-mail that went through contained an advertisement for the service. There are many way to increase the effectiveness to viral marketing. A study shows that repeated interaction will decrease the probability of infection. It also shows that making customers recommend the product or service by providing excessive incentives can backfire as it could ruin the credibility of the links. Recommendations and product reviews effectiveness vary depending on the type and price. Successful recommendations on religious or technical books were placed in a social context of schools, workplace or place of worship. (Jurvetson, 2000; Leskovec, Adamic and Huberman, 2007)

Blogs

A blog is a website that contains written content about a subject. Most blogs allow the readers to comment on blog post. Blogs provide many advantages where They aid your marketing strategy. Blogs can improve your presence on search engine marketing tools such as google and yahoo. They also provide a direct two-way communication method where you can directly speak with customers. They are also another channel to present your brand to the consumer (Wright, 2006).

Blogs can create a competitive differentiation as it allows the blogger to tell a story many times which aids in setting the company apart from other the competition. They also aid

in building long term personal relationships with the customer which can promote trust and aid the company to enter particular niche markets. They are a very good tool for public relations (Wright, 2006).

Some more forms of digital marketing are:

- SMS Advertisement
- Mobile Commerce Marketing
- Video Marketing
- E-Commerce Marketing

2.3.2 Implementation

Implementation of the digital marketing strategy is important for companies that wish to take advantage of the vast possibilities of the digital age provided to expand the company. The implementation of digital marketing is paramount for start-ups, provided that many of these businesses have a massive proportion of vulnerable internal characteristics, such as inaccessibility to financial capital and a shortage of skilled human resources, they must embrace technology and determine how it will influence them (Teixeira et al., 2018). When executing digital marketing plans for businesses and their offers, be utilities or material products, CEOs, and marketing officer's ought to ensure the interaction of their services are user-friendly and their online sales very simple and transparent to customers (Teixeira et al., 2018). As per Lahuerta Otero et al. (2014), there are simple rules if implemented, owners-managers can support to get the positive benefit on any investment. Also, small companies that struggle to implement Web 2.0 technology is likely to put itself at a crucial competitive disadvantage (Kim et al., 2014). Hence it is imperative for start-ups to implement digital marketing strategies for the growth of the company.

2.4 Relationship between Digital marketing and start-ups

The advancement of digital technology is a major incentive and yet an extremely dangerous challenge to start-ups (Mazzarol, 2015). The potential emerges from the willingness of Start-ups to leverage emerging technology that were historically open exclusively to big firms and to use them to thrive in international markets (Mele, 2013). But the challenge is arising with Start-ups incurring losses by not taking advantage of

resources and being less innovative in predominantly digital and online markets (Mazzarol. 2015).

Start-up companies have limited resources. Hence, they have been creative when investing in marketing strategies to reach out to the wide consumers groups. This is when digital marketing comes in handy to start-ups as it's significantly cheaper than the conventional marketing. The internet commercials can be done in a few hundred dollars whereas tv ads can cost thousands. Digital marketing platforms like social media, blogs, viral marketing can be used to reach a wide range of audience. Digital marketing helps start-ups to attract new target audiences and establish relationships with them. Digital marketing also helps engage with the potential clients using different platforms. As per HMA, (2018) some of the importance of digital marketing in start-up are:

- Boost their visibility
- Increase online conversion rates
- Reduce their marketing budget
- Generate leads
- Increase Sales
- Develop a brand awareness
- Increase online conversion rates
- Improve customer engagement
- Influence purchasing decisions
- Track their return on investment

2.5 Effects of digital marketing in start-ups

2.5.1 Growth of Company

Digital Marketing provides very strong growth prospects for small to medium-sized companies as well as new start-ups (Insight Success, 2020). Digital Media allows start-ups to get a strong portrait online and promote itself. Digital advertising is vital for start-ups today since reflecting through becomes a sort of successful business strategy (Chaffey, 2020). That is the most effective way to meet the wider public by showing the services and goods in the effective manner imaginable (Insight Success, 2020). Digital Marketing is the essence and core of start-up growth and is the simplest way to mitigate marketing expenses without limiting product and service exposure (Chaffey, 2020).

Effective awareness and adequate integration of the best digital marketing strategies and patterns has the potential to guarantee the competitive, comprehensive and profitable accomplishments of start-ups and existing companies (Insight Success, 2020). Performance of companies is depending on the conversion of created content to subscribers. The conversion rate is the most critical market performance metric. Digital marketing tends to play a crucial part in high conversion rates. That is why most entrepreneurs prefer digital marketing tools to achieve a high conversion rate (Jain, 2014; Jagongo and Kinyua, 2016). Digital marketing can entice potential consumers and enable the customer with customized interaction, expanding knowledge and sales, contributing to the development of the business (Jain, 2014; Jagongo and Kinyua, 2016). Digital marketing policy leads to new consumer acquisitions, brand development, brand awareness, ways to produce sales, improved customer experience and engagement, and a cost-effective international exposure which is essential for the growth of a company. (Insight Success, 2020).

2.5.2 Brand awareness

There's more to brands than labels and icons. They reflect the consumer 's expectations and emotions about the product and its results, so brands really live in the thoughts of the consumers (Kotler et al., 2013). Therefore, good and profitable brands have high market credibility, which means that consumers have a significant comparative impact on the brand. As per Keller 2003, brand awareness is linked to the power of a product link or memory trace as expressed in the capacity of customers to remember or identify a brand under various circumstances, and the most critical target for marketing is to build brand awareness (Bîja and Balas, 2014).

Digital media marketing is very important for building brand awareness. Digital marketing, made possible by digital technology, creates awareness through innovative consumer experiences and connections with consumers (Kannan and Li, 2017). A powerful online brand can be created by integrating the network and marketing placement (Teixeira et al., 2018). Marketing across digital media is known for its revolutionary effect on businesses and for its profound influence on brand-consumer associations, as it facilitates connections with consumers at any time and everywhere (Makrides, A. et al., 2020). Digital marketing platforms such as social media marketing helps start-up

companies raise brand value by networking, interaction, and community development (Karamian et al., 2015) By implementing digital marketing, the campaign to support start-up companies' brand is feasible in a most influential manner (Insight Success, 2020). Digital marketing can enable brand names to have a massive effect on customers. As per Bhati and Verma (2018), attempts to create brands have to be matched with the evolving technology and create a framework for designing and implementing digital brand image. Start-ups can use Digital Marketing to develop associations with existing buyers, to influence their personal perspective of the brand, to share their own awareness and to communicate from and to potential clients (Krishnaprabha and Tarunika, 2020).

2.5.3 Building trust

Trust is the desire to depend on an exchange associate on which one believes (Moorman, et al., 1993). As per Berry 1995, trust is an integral aspect of a productive partnership. Trust is significantly connected to the partnership attributes, in fact, trust is directly associated with the tendency to stay (Ruyter et al., 2001). Therefore, it is essential for start-up companies to build trust among their customers in order to make them stay loyal with the brand. While purchasing the product, brand trust is an essential component in consumer practices as it generates long-term perseverance just as the partnerships amongst parties involved are enhanced (Liu et al., 2012). When consumers have a brand trust, reiteration purchase behaviour can be created, causing the brand to commit, and it is possible to establish the bond between brands and customers (Enehasse and Sağlam, 2020). Therefore, building consumer trust is crucial to the sustainability of start-up company.

Digital marketing can build consumer trust. Brand trust is highly affected by computerized communication channels and brand trust has an effect on the buying decision (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Digital marketing enables start-up companies to remain in contact with customers on a regular basis that fosters relationships with customers and builds trust. Akhtar et al., (2016) suggests that embracing digital marketing activity allows start-up companies to achieve significant benefits and boost the competitiveness of entities. They further believe that start-up companies should increase their investment on exhibiting through web-based networking channels. Digital media platforms like social media platforms make it possible to get in frequent contact with

customers more than ever before. Consumers can now follow the activities of businesses across new digital platforms and provide feedback. This two-way interaction can potentially generate trust in customers. Start-ups should also follow security and privacy measures to build brand trust among the consumers. As per Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006) cited in Kannan and Li, 2017 one of their crucial outcomes was that consumers yielded higher trust to the essence of websites with privacy/security safety and customization in their presumed personal values.

2.5.4 Customer engagement

Businesses and researchers continually understand the value of delivering a good customer service and an engaged customer network, so that optimizing customer satisfaction and interaction is a core priority for marketers (Grewal et al., 2017). Customer engagement requires the strength of the individual's presence and interest in the company's service and events conducted by either the client or the company (Vivek et al., 2012). There are a variety of subjects relating to consumer engagement, such as the interpersonal connection between the company and its clients, customer service, and the sharing of awareness amongst consumers via digital technologies (Raeisi and Lingjie, 2017).

Digital marketing is a transformative platform that enables full consumer experience from the product information to consumer assistance. Digital marketing uses a range of knowledge, customer engagement, combined with structured resources, to evaluate consumer preferences and their behaviour, which allow us to identify new patterns, to consider new possibilities and to obtain predictions into the future (Insight Success, 2020). Digital marketing draws consumers and encourages them to engage with the brand through digital channels (Yasmin et al, 2015). Also digital marketing is valuable for both start-up companies and customers, and it affects company revenues (Yasmin et al, 2015). The engagement of consumers in start-ups product and service on numerous forums offers customers to rank business services according to their extent of familiarity. The positive reviews offered by the happy buyer generates new consumers and to improve the conversion rate. (Insight Success, 2020). Digital marketing offers a forum to communicate actively with each other by building two-way connectivity between brands and consumers. This further boost customer engagement and brand communication.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

The goal of the concepts discussed in literature review is to pursue the intention of the report, which emphasizes on exploring digital marketing strategies and resources that support start-up companies in order to compete with already established businesses and at the same time, to expand successfully. Therefore, first of all it was crucial to recognise what the start-up was and to discuss the most significant characteristics. Secondly, the principles of digital marketing as well as digital marketing strategies have been explored in order to address the research objectives that was to study the importance and effects of digital marketing on the successful establishment of the start-up businesses. This also demonstrated the relationship between start-ups and digital marketing, and why start-ups should incorporate digital marketing. As the research further concentrated on how digital marketing platforms could be implemented, it also involved consideration of policies and more importantly, digital marketing strategies. Since the aim of this thesis is to examine whether digital marketing can significantly affect the development of start - up businesses, raise brand recognition, create customer trust, and enhance customer relationships. This literature review present an outline of how start-ups can develop effectively by integrating digital marketing in the sense of brand awareness, trust building and consumer awareness.

For successful establishment and growth of start-up companies, digital marketing can be incorporated to help in brand awareness, trust building and consumer awareness. Digital Marketing is the essence and core of start-up growth and is the simplest way to mitigate marketing expenses without limiting product and service exposure (Chaffey, 2020). It enables start-ups to be in contact with the consumers regularly, receive feedbacks to build brand's identity as well as quality of the products. A powerful online brand can be created by integrating the network and marketing placement (Teixeira et al., 2018) which can improve brand trust as well as effect on the buying decision (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Digital marketing draws consumers and encourages them to engage with the brand through digital channels (Yasmin et al, 2015). Also digital marketing is valuable for both start-up companies and customers, and it affects company revenues (Yasmin et al, 2015).

3. Methodology

This part of chapter is set out on how the data was obtained in an attempt to optimise the document. It provides a research methodology where the core concept of the article is illustrated. The data collection then reveals the entire procedure of the interviews performed. The entire chapter will include in-depth information on the content and approaches used in this paper to enhance the entire report.

3.1 Research approach

3.1.1 Inductive Method

To conduct our research, we will be using an inductive research method as we started our study with the findings of the previous study and at the end of our research process, we will present our study findings. We are also using qualitative research methods for the study as inductive methodology explores its use in qualitative analysis, where researchers begin with their findings and hypotheses and recommend, at the end of the analysis process, what findings they generate (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Further we opted for inductive analysis as includes the exploration for trends via observation and the creation of interpretations – theories – for these trends by a sequence of hypotheses (Bernard, 2011). No ideas or assumptions contribute to inductive experiments at the start of the assessment, and the researcher is allowed to modify the course of the analysis after the development of the research phase (Business Research Methodology, 2020).

3.1.2 Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is an exploratory study in which researchers use terminology to present explanations, viewpoints and motives for examination. Qualitative analysis deepens the dilemma and aims to refine theories or concepts. (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Common techniques of qualitative data collection used in business studies include interviews, focus groups, assessment and action analysis. In comparison, grounded theory and record analysis can also be used as a data collection tool in qualitative research. (Business Research Methodology,2020)

This report will implement the qualitative research method, where the response will be represented by descriptions and the results will be evaluated in detail. This approach was selected because, during the interviews, supplementary questions were addressed in order to accomplish or enhance the analytical results. Also, a semi-structured approach has been used, which also suggests that the article meets qualitative methods.

3.2 Data collection method

Data collection is a method of collecting and evaluating analysing measures of the variables in a structured way that helps one to answer specified testing questions, test theories and analyse findings (Kabir, 2016).

3.2.1 Primary data collection: Interview

Interviewing includes answering questions and obtaining responses from the research participants. Interviews can be either individual, face-to - face interviews or group face-to - face interviews. (Kabir, 2016). Interviews can be conducted either in person, via telephone or using various apps like Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. For this thesis we conducted interview via Zoom and Google meet using semi-structured method.

Before we conducted our interviews, we first searched for start-up companies in Sweden using google to get the relevant result. Then through the displayed result, we chose the website with top 100 start-up companies in Sweden. This website provided us with a company website link and information. Using the provided link we searched for contact email addresses. Once we obtained the email address, we emailed each company interview request along with the company letter with University of Gavle's letterhead. We email approximately 50 companies requesting for the interview. We also contacted few start-up companies in U.A.E. Out of these contacted companies 10 responded to our email but only 5 companies were available for the interview.

Once we received replies from the company, we then arranged the appropriate time and date for the interview using Google meet as it was not possible to conduct the interview face to face due to Covid-19 pandemic. We then interviewed 5 companies for our study.

The first company (Company A), whose company name cannot be identified due to the company's privacy concern, operates in the gaming and data sector. It is an internet start-up developing a website about video games for consumers and companies within the video game industry. It was established in 2015. It was a small scaled company situated in Vastra Gotalands Ian, Sweden. The company is similar to Wikipedia but for the games. Their website provides all the details regarding the games and users can search, comment, add gaming details using the user login account. After a few years of operation, the company was bought by one of the gaming giant company. The interviewed company has 10 employees, however the giant company has more than 140 employees. We interviewed two employees, manager of business leader and manager of product design of the company. (For more details on the company and respondent please see table 1 below).

The second company, (Company B) operates in the education sector and is a small-scale company as well. It was founded in 2017 by Cenk Ozbakir. The company is situated in Stockholm, Sweden. Company B is a reference collection and bibliography creation tool for people who value simplicity, privacy and speed. The company has 5 employees and the work is remote based. The company makes it easier for students, academics and writers to use reference in their work. We interviewed the founder of the company Cenk for our study. (For more details on the company and respondent please see table 1 below).

The third company, (Company C) sells customized maps and posters all over the world. The company provides the technology to let customers choose from any place in the world and design their own unique map prints. Their biggest clients are from Asia, Europe and America. The company was founded in 2014. It is situated in Stockholm, Sweden. The company has 14 employees and is a small enterprise. We interviewed Henrik Enstrom, head of marketing for our study. (For more details on the company and respondent please see table 1 below).

The fourth company (Company D), whose company name cannot be identified due to the company's privacy concern, operates in the health care sector (Dental clinic). The company was founded in 2019. It is situated in Dubai, UAE. It has 4 employees. We interviewed CEO of the company for our study. (For more details on the company and respondent please see table 1 below).

The fifth company (Company E), whose company name cannot be identified due to the company's privacy concern, operates in the service provider sector. It is a laundromat company. The company was founded in 2019. It is situated in Sharjah, UAE. It has 6 employees. We interviewed CEO of the company for our study. (For more details on the company and respondent please see table 1 below).

A semi-structured interview approach was used to perform this research. This approach was deemed appropriate for the research as it encourages respondents to convey their perspectives and feel free to exchange details without being constrained. The questions in this analysis have been designed and addressed to the interviewees in a particular order to steer the stream of the interviews. The interview questions were related to research questions. The interview design contained 18 open-ended questions, enabling the participant to respond in depth. First part of the questionnaires were general questions regarding the information of the company. The general questions consisted of 6 questions. The second part of the questions were related to the digital marketing relevant to our research. During the interview process, further concerns have been posed in order to gain more precise answers or to understand better the answers of the participants. The interviews were 45 min-1h long, which were registered and transcribed with the respondent's permission. (See interview questions in Appendix).

3.3 Ethical considerations

This is important to consider the ethical aspect when preparing the research. This report considered four ethical aspects mentioned by Bryman and Bell (2011) whether there is harm to participants, whether there is lack of informed consent, whether there is an invasion of privacy, and whether deception is involved. The interview was recorded with the informed consent of the respondent. There was no harm to the participants during the interview process. Respondents have been given the option of withholding information if they conflict with their privacy. There was no deceit involved throughout the interview process.

3.4 Respondent Validation

Respondent confirmation is usually utilized in qualitative studies, where the key goal is to guarantee that there is a clear correlation among the results and the perception of the

research subjects (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In other words, it means a method in which researchers demonstrate who the test subjects are and offer a summary of them.

Table 1: Overall picture of the respondents of the interview and their role in the company.

SN	Company	Sector	Position	Duration	Interview conduction
1	Company A	Gaming/Data	Business leader & Product manager	58 min	Via Google Meet
2	Company B	Educational	CEO/Founder	60 min	Via Google Meet
3	Company C	Product & Services	Marketing Manager	60 min	Via Google Meet
4	Company D	Healthcare	CEO/Founder	60 min	Via Zoom
5	Company E	Service	CEO/Founder	60 min	Via Zoom

The reason for choosing above employees and CEO of the company for the interview as these people were key part of the company with all the reverent company details. They were also responsible for making decisions regarding the company brand identity, development of the company and their promotions. They were directly or indirectly involved in the digital marketing process of the company as well.

3.5 Data analysis

In regard to this study, the secondary information has been gathered, empiric data has been obtained and correlated with theoretical results. This is a methodological method that tests and analyses how the evidence gathered, and the hypothesis complement each other in order to address the study questions. Through collecting the related literature, the paper introduces, and analyses core definitions focused on how scholars interpret and recognize the term. Around the same time, empiric evidence was collected by undertaking interviews from start-up companies. By doing so, the thesis can evaluate the interaction, credibility, and relevance of the findings.

For the analysis of the primary data, a content analysis method has been used. This research method is used to recognize patterns in recorded communications by categorizing or coding the texts and then analyse the results. This research method can be used with both qualitative and quantitative methods. The transcribed interview was categorised using keywords such as start-ups, digital marketing, digital marketing strategies, etc. then they were evaluated with the gathered theories, while the relation between the two was acknowledged.

3.6 Reliability

The reliability relies on the accuracy of the results (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This can be accomplished by testing the accuracy of the outcomes over time, across multiple observers and across parts of the analysis itself (Middleton, 2020).

Three seminars were arranged for this report, where the examiner provided advice and recommendations before the final deadline. At the same time, the supervisor regularly reviewed and debated the quality of the thesis. In order to obtain and enhance reliability, a literature review from Literatures such as Krishnaprabha and Tarunika, 2020, Mingione and Abratt, 2020, Enehasse and Sağlam, 2020, Akula, 2015, Savey et al. 2020, Teixeira et al. 2018, Bala and Verma, 2018, etc. were undertaken which helped to establish and format the related questions for the interviews. Subsequently, throughout interviews, conversations were documented by a mobile phone. Subsequently, the data were transcribed in order to enhance accuracy and to avoid errors. Therefore, by employing more than one person to assist the data analysis and to have continuous consultations, the reliability of this thesis is expected to improve.

3.7 Validity

Validity is associated with the credibility of the outcomes of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In order to enhance relevance, the theoretical framework must be compared to the analytical observations by establishing the essential literature-based questionnaires (Saunders et al, 2009).

This thesis utilizes the literatures such as Krishnaprabha and Tarunika, 2020, Mingione and Abratt, 2020, Enehasse and Sağlam, 2020, Akula, 2015, Savey et al. 2020, Teixeira et al. 2018, Bala and Verma, 2018, etc. to prepare the interview questionnaires. The thesis has also been validated by researching the issue of using digital marketing for the development of start-ups. As a result, all five businesses had a common issue in the report. This was inspired by the research of start-up firms.

4. Empirical findings

This section of the thesis will present the data collected from the interview. The interviews were performed with 6 experts, each of them have practical expertise in start-ups or are involved in start-ups.

4.1 Relationship between start-ups and digital marketing

Digital marketing is crucial for the success of the start-up says the marketing manager of Company C. He adds

“The company has solely relied on digital marketing from the start and has never done any traditional marketing as the digital marketing is cheap and has global reach”.

The other two companies also rely on digital marketing and have never used traditional marketing. Company A uses digital marketing to find out the target audience for their gaming industry. The respondent explained how digital media is useful for deciding who to target and using it as a platform to reach out individually rather than to have a large reach. Company A has also acquired new business proposals, hired new employees and increased network using the digital platforms. Although the company A and Company B use few and specific digital marketing platforms, those platforms have provided them with loyal customers.

Company C supplies their product to the customers worldwide, hence the digital marketing has provided them with the platform where they can reach the global customers. They further stated that the advantages are that in a really small period, you will reach out to a range of customers. You also figure out types of advertisements perfect for your consumer target audience. Same goes to the other companies as well. All the companies have their own websites through which they reach their global customers and communicate with them as well.

Company D had used digital marketing to attract customers and inform them about their services. It made it easier for them to have direct contact with customers using digital marketing tools. A lot of people fear going to the dentist because they thought that it would be painful. Digital marketing aided them to inform customers about the latest

equipment and techniques they use in the clinic as well as it helped attract customers to the clinic.

Company E had a strategy of using digital marketing tools to attract and make it easier for customers to use their services. They relied on digital marketing to attract customers as it was the best method for them due to the covid-19 national lockdown. The data they gathered showed an increase use of digital services during the lockdown. Their service was offered using a mobile phone app that could be downloaded on the customers phone which allowed the business to have a cheap, direct and effective method for the business to market their services to the customers.

Table: 2

Company	Use of digital marketing tools
Company A	Moderate
Company B	Moderate
Company C	Very High
Company D	Very High
Company E	Very High

4.2 Digital marketing strategies in start-ups

Company C explains how the company monitors their digital marketing activities and implements them on a regular basis. The company has also hired more marketing employees in the past 2 years. Company D focused on posting content on social media which was a very success strategy for them. Company E's strategy was based on creating the mobile phone app and market the business through affiliates. On the other hand, other respondents described how their businesses do not have a digital marketing strategy in place and the companies have not been promoted by any medium. Since it finds few social media networks to be really relevant for identifying and connecting with people as well as allowing the company to attract consumers, the respondent felt it could be a plan. Similarly, Company A has described the digital marketing approach as a daunting task due to time constraints and lack of human resources. This claim was also a result of the lack of capital which in turn led company A to believe that everyone in the business

should be interested in digital marketing activities. The respondent clarified how it is difficult to handle the job on its own. Meanwhile, Company B states that if he would start-up a new company today, he could definitely consider a digital marketing strategy.

Table: 3

Company	Use of digital marketing strategy
Company A	No
Company B	No
Company C	Yes
Company D	Yes
Company E	Yes

4.2.1 Key factors

All the respondents use different forms of digital marketing tools and platforms. Some of the most used marketing platforms by these companies are:

Pay per click

Company A used a pay per click marketing platform at the start of the business which generated some revenue initially but had to stop as in later stages, the company did not receive any benefits from them. Other respondents never used this marketing platform.

Content marketing

All the respondents used this marketing platform but only Company C are continually on this platform. Company C uses professional employees to handle their content marketing. They argue that content marketing is useful if the company can produce right content. Company D created health tips content on social media which helped them build an audience base that they used to market the dental clinic. Another respondent describes this platform as time consuming.

Email marketing

Email marketing is the most popular marketing platform used by all the companies to connect with the consumer on a regular basis. In fact, company A uses scheduled email

marketing every 3 to 6 days to connect with the consumer and says it is the most effective way to get across and have communication with them.

Social media marketing

Social media marketing is also another marketing platform used by all the company. However, Company C is most dependent on these social media and also addresses this as a problem. Hence, they are planning a strategy to break away from being solely dependent on this platform. Company A is also highly dependent on one social media platform that is called discord. Both company A and Company B believe that other social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, etc were not beneficial for their company and would only recommend them to customer-based products rather than gaming and educational products. Company D was depended on using Instagram and Tik-tok to post their content and market their clinic which was highly successful for them.

Search engine marketing (SEM)

SEM was highly recommended by both Company A, Company C, Company D and Company E. They added that this platform has helped the company to be found among the customers. On the contrary, Company B did not find this marketing platform very beneficial.

Websites

Website is the primary marketing platform for the company. All respondents agree that the website was a highly essential and important marketing platform for their company. They rated the website 10 out of 10 and highly recommended them to all.

Table 4: Score for each factor out of 10

Key Factors	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E
Pay-Per-Click	5	Never used	3	3	2
Content Marketing	4	5	7	6	6
Email Marketing	9	8	8	7	7
Social media Marketing	8	7	9	9	8
Search Engine Marketing	9	7	9	8.5	8
Websites	10	10	10	10	10

4.2.2 Implementation

Implementation of digital marketing is fairly easy and anyone with basic technical knowledge can do it says the marketing manager of Company C. He adds that the company has implemented such marketing techniques in different platforms and has been successful as well. Additionally, he stresses that the content should be the main focus while implementing the marketing strategies and techniques. Using right content is the main key to influence the consumers. Company D's CEO said that they required to learn how to implement digital marketing, but they were able to acquire the skills by learning from online sources. Company E needed to employ a mobile app developer to create the app for them. The other two companies have also implemented digital marketing techniques however they find it time consuming and also find some marketing platforms expensive.

4.3 Effects of digital marketing on growth of start-ups

When it comes to the core attributes of business success, it is vital to strengthen relationships, trust and satisfaction with the client (All respondents).

4.3.1 Brand awareness

Branding is very important for the start-up, says company A. All the respondents agree that digital marketing helps build brand awareness within the consumer. Increasing brand awareness was the key factor why respondents were using digital marketing. All respondents reported that they are using digital media in the light of brand recognition. However, when attempting to raise visibility, various start-ups used various social media platforms. For example, Company A uses Discord and Google the most, similarly Company B uses Twitch and Instagram. Company C is the only respondent that uses all the digital media platforms to raise brand awareness. Company C explained that they regularly update and post content on social media. He further claimed that they were evident on the digital channel with the correct consumer audiences. Their businesses are also aiming to build an interest in online by sharing content specific to their customer audiences in order to raise the awareness of their companies. Company D said that they were extremely successful in building brand awareness using the content they post on Instagram and tik-tok. Company E used affiliates to start building brand awareness and then continued to raise awareness through the app downloaded on the customer's phone.

“We regularly post, share contents on different social media platforms to promote our brand. It is very effective and efficient to connect and communicate with our audience using these platforms and we are active in all the digital platforms.” says Marketing manager of Company C.

Overall, building brand awareness is the key factor for using digital marketing platforms for the start-up companies. Such platforms not only help companies be visible to the consumers but also recognize the target audience for the company. These companies use different platforms to promote their brands and they are especially advantageous when published on industry-specific channels.

4.3.2 Building trust

Consumer trust can be built using right content in digital marketing. Company D had great success in building trust using the content they posted on social media. The right content helps connect with the consumer emotionally says marketing manager of Company C. They further believe that digital marketing can be cost efficient and that it is very useful for consumers to build trust. Furthermore, he states that the company constantly upgrades and updates their website designs and security to be able to connect with the consumer and build brand trust. All the respondents communicate on a regular basis with their customers getting reviews and feedback for the products, which has helped build trust among the consumers. Company A emphasises that the consumers retained using discord platform has not only helped them get new customers but also build trust and gain loyal customers. Similarly, Company B's motto is to value consumer privacy and take it very seriously. The respondent also states,

“our company has the values like consumer privacy which have connected us with the consumer very well and have helped us build consumer trust for the company. Customers trust our company knowing that we will not sell their personal data like most of the big companies”.

To summarize, digital marketing platforms can help companies connect with the customers on an emotional level when used appropriate content. Companies regularly need to update and upgrade their contents and security measures to promote the trust. This is not only beneficial to acquire new customers but also retain them.

4.3.3 Customer engagement

Impacting and engaging consumers have also been heavily stressed as to why the start-ups in our study use digital marketing. Including brand recognition, all respondents reported that digital media marketing is used to affect and engage consumers through a range of activities. All the respondents agree that digital marketing has improved customer engagement in the company and has enabled the company to communicate directly with the customers. The company relies heavily on the feedback of the customers says the respondent of the Company C. He further added that the quality of their product also improved due to the regular reviews and feedback of the consumer. Also, due to the

regular customer engagement the company has grown 80% in the past 2 years. Company E was able to encourage customer engagement by adding an affiliate program and a feedback feature inside the mobile phone app. Company A has also agreed that the company has grown significantly using platforms such as LinkedIn and discord which were free. They further added that the company has received new business proposals, investors and loyal customers via such digital platforms. They also add,

“We use discord platform which is free to use as a primary source of our communication with our customers. This platform not only helps us grow as a company but also acquire new and loyal customers. We also use this platform to hire new employees for the company. We also use LinkedIn, which is a bit expensive, but it has helped us acquire new business proposals and contacts.”

In summary, respondents were often seen using digital platforms for their marketing, to outline, affect and engage consumers. Respondents employ different digital tools to impact and engage consumers as they use to create brand awareness. Such digital platforms not only benefited companies to engage consumers but also get feedback on products and also help the company grow.

5. Findings/ Data analysis

This chapter addresses the relation between the Empirical Findings and the Theoretical Framework. The primary objective of this chapter is to improve the thesis by addressing the key concepts in order to address the research question.

5.1 Relationship between Start-ups and digital marketing

As per Ndubisi and Natarajan (2016), creating a consumer network is crucial for start-up companies to survive the industry. The empiric data of the present study also supported this argument, as all respondents believed that establishing a relationship with customers is a key element, particularly for start-ups. Hänninen and Karjalainen (2017) articulated that interaction has transformed its process into a two-way communication in which data and opinions are shared. As per (Killian & McManus, 2015) Modern online networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. are employed to assess and measure engagement networks that allows businesses to attract and maintain consumers when establishing relationships with them. This is evident in our empirical data as well since all our respondents are actively engaged in several social media platforms as well as digital marketing platforms.

As per Mazzarol (2015), the digital platform provides new companies the opportunity to access a global market that has not been available before and at a price that is no longer exorbitant. Similarly the marketing manager of Company C states that digital marketing is vital to the survival of the start-up, and their business focuses entirely on digital marketing tools and platforms, since digital marketing is inexpensive and has worldwide range.

5.2 Digital marketing strategies in start-ups

Only one of the respondents Company C had implemented digital marketing strategies and considered it imperative for the success of the start-up companies. The other two respondents ignored a digital marketing strategy, they described that they were difficult due to a shortage of capital, such as time consuming (company A) and also some of the marketing platforms as expensive (Both company A and Company B). They also believe that most of the popular SEO, SEM and social media ads were expensive but there were few platforms that were free and effective such as Discord and Twitch. However, utmost

of the researchers deemed Digital marketing mostly to be cost-effective, as it can be implemented in a number of low-cost ways such as Search Engine Optimization, email marketing, social media and digital networks (Foroudi et al., 2017; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Budac, 2016; Sedera et al., 2016). Also, Company A and Company B weren't willing to invest in the digital marketing strategy. However as per Eid and El-Gohary (2013), the founder must be willing to invest in technologies and build a robust digital marketing strategy that is incorporated into their pre-and post-sales marketing activities. This could well expand its emphasis to incorporate the utilization of Web 2.0 and social media, creating two-way and three-way connections with consumers and companies that can help create powerful CRM channels and improve customer satisfaction (Mazzarol. T, 2015). In addition, according to Smith (2012) digital media platforms are still employed to acquire and retain consumers.

5.2.1 Implementation of digital marketing strategies

Lahuerta Otero et al. (2014) has demonstrated, there are simple rules that, if implemented, owners-managers will be supported to get the positive benefit on any investment they make. All our respondents have implemented digital marketing techniques in their companies. Furthermore, Company C implies that the primary emphasis should be on content when executing marketing strategies and techniques. The use of the right content is the secret to customer influence. The company also emphasises on advantages of digital marketing for start-ups and implies it's easy to use and anyone with basic technical knowledge can be able to implement them. Similarly, Kim et al. (2014) indicate that any small company that struggles to implement Web 2.0 technology is likely to put itself at a crucial competitive disadvantage. Commercial research carried out by Accenture (2014) cited in Savey et al., (2020) a worldwide survey of 6,000 people highlights a rising transition of customers towards smartphones and tablets. Small and medium-sized businesses that do not make the full utilization of emerging technologies can face being undermined. However the implementation and use of digital technologies such as Web 2.0 social media and blogs is beyond the scope of even the newest of businesses (Mazzarol. T, 2015).

5.3 Effects of digital marketing in growth of start-ups

Digital marketing has immense effect on the growth of start-ups. Digital marketing can attract potential consumers and enable customers to interact with each other in a customized way, increase knowledge and sales, and contribute to business development (Jain, 2014; Jagongo and Kinyua, 2016). Digital marketing policy leads to new acquisitions of consumers, the development of brands, awareness of brands, ways of producing sales, improved customer experience and commitment, and a cost-effective international exposure that is essential for the growth of the company (Insight Success, 2020).

5.3.1 Brand awareness

Various literature researches such as Kannan and Li, 2017, Makrides, et al., 2020, Karamian et al., 2015, etc have proved that digital marketing effectively improves brand awareness. Digital marketing, utilization of digital media, generates awareness through creative customer experience and consumer interactions (Kannan and Li, 2017). Marketing through digital technologies is recognised for its potential effects on companies and its fundamental impact on brand-consumer relationships, as it promotes interactions between customers at all times and everywhere (Makrides, et al., 2020). Further, Digital marketing tools, such as social media marketing, enable businesses to develop brand awareness through networking, engagement, and community growth (Karamian et al., 2015).

As per S. Teixeira et al., (2018) a powerful online brand can be created by integrating the network and marketing placement. Karamian et al., (2015) published a report on "Do Social Media Marketing Activities Increase Brand Equity?" "And believes that social media marketing helps companies raise brand value by networking, interaction, and community development. Similarly, Bhati and Verma (2018) conducted a research on "Online Brand Building: Lessons from Top Brands" which describes the aspects of digital brand building on the basis of a literature review and a mini case study. It considers that attempts to create brands have to be matched with the evolving technology and creates a framework for designing and implementing digital brand image. Additionally, Yuvaraj and Indumathi (2018) conducted an "Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Building" report. The research contributes to the understanding of digital marketing on the branding of a specific brand. The study offers an understanding of relevant digital marketing

platforms, such as e-mail marketing, SEO, mobile marketing, blogging, affiliate marketing, etc., and its effect on the growth of brands by consumers to establish the link within digital marketing and brand building.

Similarly, all interviewees agree that digital marketing provides a pivotal role in building brand image among customers and is imperative for start-ups. Increased brand recognition was indeed a key factor in why respondents were using digital marketing. Company C also confirmed that they frequently monitor and share content on social media to increase consumer awareness of the brand.

5.3.2 Building trust

In literature, as per Schivinski and Dabrowski, (2016) brand trust is highly affected by computerized communication channels and their research results revealed that brand trust had an effect on the buying decision. Similarly Akhtar et al., (2016) suggested that there is a positive association involving digital marketing and the purchaser's buying intention. It reiterated that as companies increase their investment on exhibiting through web-based networking channels, the advantages of the companies have also increased. Embracing digital marketing activity allows companies to achieve significant benefits and boost the competitiveness of entities. Also, as per Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006) cited in Kannan and Li, 2017 one of their crucial outcomes was that consumers yielded higher trust to the essence of websites with privacy/security safety and customization in their presumed personal values.

The respondent from Company C believes that consumer trust can be created to connect with the right information in digital marketing. Communication using the right content allows us to connect emotionally with the user and help build trust. They are actively connected with their customers using digital platforms to get reviews and suggestions on the goods that have helped create trust and gain loyal consumers. The respondents from Company B and Company C also update and upgrade their company website's design and security policy which is the primary source of marketing platforms to build trust among the consumer.

5.3.3 Customer engagement

As per Insight Success (2020), Digital marketing utilizes a depth of information, customer engagement, integrated with organized resources, to assess consumer behavior and their attitude, enabling us to generate potential styles, to perceive new opportunities and to make predictions for the future. Similarly, Yasmin et al., (2015) conducted a study on “Effectiveness of Digital Marketing in the Challenging Age: An Empirical Study”. This study identifies different forms of digital marketing, its efficacy and its effects on the performance of the business. It demonstrates that digital marketing draws consumers and encourages them to engage with the brand through digital channels. This report also reflects on the value of digital media for both companies and customers, and on the effect of digital marketing on company revenues. Also, the quality of goods and services can be improved by the implementation of digital marketing, which has been supported in the study by Krishnaprabha and Tarunika (2020) in reference to perceived quality.

Our respondents believe that digital marketing has improved customer engagement in the company and has enabled the company to communicate directly with the customers. The company C relies heavily on the feedback of the customers which has helped to improve the quality of their product. Also, due to the regular customer engagement the company has grown 80% in the past 2 years for Company C. Similarly, company A also agrees that the company has grown significantly using platforms such as LinkedIn and discord which were free and also the company has received new business proposals, investors and loyal customers via such digital platforms.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to research the value and influence of digital marketing on the competitive establishment and development of start-up companies. The research is based on the relationship between start-ups and digital marketing. The study further explored whether digital marketing can have a major effect on the growth of start-ups, improve brand awareness, gain customer loyalty and enhance customer relationships.

This research demonstrates that most start-up companies do not perceive digital marketing strategy when implementing their business plan. They are often reluctant to invest in such marketing. However, it has a huge effect on business growth and that it is necessary for start-ups to be involved in the digital media market. Blogs, content, articles and videos are the most productive for start-ups, particularly when published on industry-specific channels.

To answer our research question “how digital marketing affects the growth of start-up business”? Digital marketing can have a significant impact on start-up companies. Start-up companies have limited resources; hence they have to be creative while making marketing plans to compete with already existing companies. Digital marketing can play a crucial role in the growth of the start-up companies. Start-up companies can use digital marketing platforms to advertise their products effectively, efficiently and most of the platforms are free of cost. When it comes to the core attributes of business success, it is vital to strengthen relationships, trust and satisfaction with the client. Digital marketing enables start-ups to promote two-way communication using right content with their consumers and has a global reach. Implementing right content in the marketing plan helps consumers to connect with the brand emotionally. Digital marketing also promotes the companies to build the brand identity and build trust among the consumers which is imperative for the success of any company. The start-up companies can communicate, get reviews and feedback regarding their products that can improve the quality of the products and services that eventually lead to building trust and brand awareness among the consumers. Building trust, brand awareness, consumer loyalty and awareness is crucial for the growth and success of the start-ups. The start-up companies can also acquire new investors, business partners, recruit skilled employees, acquire new and retain customers using digital marketing platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, discord, Instagram, content, etc.

The findings of this thesis indicates that that start-ups do not have clear digital marketing strategy. They believe it is time consuming and tricky, despite the fact that they see the importance and usefulness of digital marketing in their growth. The study also finds that brand recognition, customer involvement and awareness were the most emphasized reasons for the use of digital marketing by the start-ups. We also found that the influence of digital marketing has the power to attract and retain consumers. It also has positive effects on the consumer loyalty. Start-up companies can also build positive brand image with the help of digital marketing. Digital marketing has enormous and positive effect on the success of the start-up company.

As internet connectivity and usage are rising exponentially across the world, the usage of digital customers worldwide continues to rise every year. In 2019 e-commerce revenues crossed US\$3.5 trillion worldwide and according to the fresh projections, e-commerce demand will increase even more in the future (Statista Research Department, 2020). Hence, it is imperative for start-up companies to exploit such resources for their growth and compete with already existing companies.

6.1 Managerial implication

This research indicates management ramifications based on the results that start-up companies could use. This study provides start-ups with an overview of how valuable digital marketing is to companies and, more importantly, how it can impact company growth. In addition, this research will provide start-ups the concept of implementing digital marketing into business strategies that can be adopted and incorporated by start-ups.

The findings of the study indicate that organization should include employees in the activity and allow them to display their digital skills. The approach can also involve the identification of target markets and channels. Since resources are scarce, it is important for start-ups to select the right forum, where the scope is broad, and it is easy to generate interactions. Content of marketing can also be communicated and illustrated by the expertise and talents of the organization, as it implicitly promotes the performance of the firm.

6.2 Theoretical implication

This research leads to the broadening of information about how digital marketing is contributing to the development of start-up companies in the sense of growing brand awareness, building trust and consumer awareness. The subject of digital marketing and its relevance has been thoroughly researched. However, research into the effects of digital marketing on the growth of start-up companies is limited. This research is consistent with previous findings that have demonstrated the value of digital marketing. That being said, the cost efficacy of digital marketing, as reported in prior findings, is not adequately confirmed by the results of this report.

This paper further seeks to contribute to research by highlighting the significant impact of digital marketing on building brand awareness and customer loyalty utilizing various digital channels and content.

6.3 Limitation and Future research

The primary results were based on small scaled start-up companies in Sweden and UAE with a limited number of respondents, which may therefore have different results. Also, only five interviews have been undertaken, which is inadequate to achieve a wide representation and draw any conclusions. Due to small number of interviews (data), it is hard to make generalizations that would apply to all start up but this study shows tendencies of start-up that we have interviewed.

Future research in this area is highly recommended. The future researchers can collect data from more start-up companies both small and large scaled companies and interview both founders and marketing managers to gather the data. Another suggestion is to carry out a similar analysis in more countries within similar industry. This can provide more accurate results and broader perspective for the research.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

General questions:

- What is the company specialized in? Sector/activity?
- How long has the company been established for?
- How many employees are there in the company?
- What is the company's target market?
- In which sectors are the customers operating in?
- What is your occupation or role in the company?

Digital marketing:

- In what ways has digital marketing affected the company?
- Are there digital marketing strategies your company uses? (e.g. Inbound marketing, social media marketing, content marketing)
- What benefits and challenges start-up companies face in digital marketing?
- Which kind of digital media channels are used in your company?
- Why do you think digital marketing is important for start-ups? What kind of role has digital marketing played in the establishment and success of the company? (Exposure, reach, networking etc.)
- Which digital platforms are currently used for your company? (LinkedIn, Facebook etc.) Which platforms are most applicable for start-up companies?
- How have these platforms utilized to interact and engage with the customers?
- Which tools are most applicable for start-up companies? How would you implement them in start-ups?
- Which are the critical factors of digital marketing effectiveness on acquiring and retaining business customers?
- What is the relationship between start-ups and digital marketing?
- How can digital marketing help companies to grow? In the context of brand awareness, building trust and customer awareness.
- Can you rate the digital marketing platforms from 1 – 10, 10 being highest

SEM (Search Engine Marketing)

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

PPC (Pay-per-click)
SMM (Social Media Marketing)
Content Marketing
Email Marketing
Influencer / Affiliate Marketing
Viral Marketing
Radio Advertising
Television Advertising
Mobile Advertising

