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*Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness:*  
A Study on Small Businesses

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Influence of Social Media on Brand Awareness: A Study on Small Businesses

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**Aim:** The aim of this research study is to find the influence of social media marketing in small businesses to create or increase brand awareness. Additionally, this study will analyze the role that social media platforms have in the relationship between customers and companies after they are aware of the brand.

**Methodology:** A qualitative method is used in this research study based on the hermeneutic research tradition, in the form of semi-structured interviews from ten owners from small businesses globally. We use an inductive approach in order to reach its intended goal. A thematic analysis is included to find important themes within the interviews.

**Result & Conclusions:** Through interviews with the owners and partners of small businesses, and going over previously written literature on the matter, the authors of this study have come to the conclusion that social media marketing highly influences small businesses in a positive way in creating brand awareness. Additionally, there is a better understanding of how social media helps build a strong and good relationship between a business and customers.

**Suggestions for Future Research:** There is an interest for further studies by covering more small business. It will provide a higher contribution to the research if the customers were included in the interviews or given surveys to complete. More authors should be interested in the continuance of research for businesses that are small, either product or service organizations, and even the relationship they have not only between B2C but B2B as well, and lastly if a partnership affects the decision when it comes to investment for advertisement.

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Small Businesses, Brand Awareness, Advertisements

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# 1. Introduction

In the first chapter, a background of the research study is provided, explaining the relevance of the topic. Followed by an overview of previous research made in the field through problematization, and the limitations found. Concluding with the research questions and aim of this study.

## 1.1 Background

According to Kozinets (2002), in today's world it is important for companies to have higher consumer awareness of their brand in order to be successful as there is bigger competition in the market than ever before. However, getting more attention from consumers, keeping them engaged, and creating awareness about their brand with the audience is becoming more challenging day by day. For this reason, it is becoming common for businesses to start using free or paid internet advertising; for the most part, they have begun using social media platforms as they are expected to further increase with time (Kozinets, 2002).

When it comes to small businesses, the majority of them have limited financial resources as well as limited time to expose their brand to consumers before their competition does (Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010). This makes things challenging at the moment of capturing new customers and maintaining a brand relevant in the market; since at the same time other businesses are trying to make their brand visible as well. However, posting a company's product or service on the internet and having a social media account is not enough to make the brand become known and to stand out from the rest. When creating internet advertisements, or using social media as a tool for marketing, businesses need to utilize these platforms by constantly developing content to keep up with their competitors and exceed them. Furthermore, to reach all the potential these types of advertisements have to offer, businesses also need to have clear objectives and a good strategy to go along with it (Kozinets, 2002).

In any business it is common to use marketing strategies; some companies even have a separate department that is devoted to this specific task that relates to marketing orientation (Eggers, Hatak, Kraus & Niemand, 2017). However, with the passage of time, the marketing sector developed into advanced levels in order to capture the market and to sustain businesses in the marketplace (Perry, 2014). There are many methods to obtain market value and customers with the help of marketing tools and strategies that include: paid advertisement, relationship marketing, undercover marketing, word of mouth, internet marketing, transactional marketing or

diversity marketing (Thevenot, 2007). Recently, many organisations (regardless of the business type they have) have opted to use internet marketing since its usage by consumers has increased. Everything is more accessible for everyone around the world, therefore the spread in marketing has become more effective and quicker (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat & Fabeil, 2014).

There are several kinds of internet marketing, such as: Social Media Marketing (SMM), influencer marketing, affiliate marketing, Email marketing, content marketing, search engine optimization, paid advertising and pay per click. However, social media marketing has immense usage by targeted audience (Erdoğan and Çiçek, 2012). The increased use of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn or Pinterest has changed the way people communicate over the Internet. Companies, aware that their customers are an active part of social media, have increased the interest and focus of the people in charge of the marketing department to explore them as a new marketing tool (Katona, Zubcsek, & Sarvary, 2011).

According to Hoffman & Fodor (2010), social media networks are part of integrated marketing communications with customers in the web market. With E-marketing tools, it is easier for a business to enhance the effectiveness when trying to increase brand awareness; especially in a short period of time and with low capital. Traditional marketing strategies are usually more expensive, which is not suitable for a small business since they represent a less return on investment. Castronovo & Huang (2012) argue the return on investment with social media marketing can be measured with customers' responses in web market and by considering their motivation to use social media platforms as they are engaged with the marketed brands. Furthermore, when it comes to brand awareness measurement, it was traditionally measured through online surveys and tracking studies. However, marketers now have numbers of ways to track brand awareness by measuring the responses on certain applications designed by different companies in order to gain brand exposure by using relevant contexts in the promotion (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

According to Thevenot (2007), small businesses considered their prominent presence in social media since it can help them increase brand awareness and remain in contact with their customers globally; by the usage to swift marketable social media marketing platforms to change the position in market dramatically. Furthermore, Thevenot (2007) includes the immense usage of social media marketing offers in order to capture customers increased the competition for the attention of consumers and trends of paid advertisement that forces small businesses to consider themselves to be in marketing activities strategically.

## 1.2 Problematization

Given the novelty of the phenomenon and its popularity, many companies have started using social media platforms as a marketing instrument; some even without any strategy. However, the strategic importance of using social media networks as a marketing tool does not seem clear yet because of its aforementioned novelty, and its difficulty to monetize and measure their influence on business performance. To this day, it is still not evident the relevance that internet marketing has on companies (regardless of their size) and the importance of their use to get better results creating brand awareness (Clemons, 2009). Therefore, the authors of this study help contribute to the growing but still limited study of the use of internet platforms with the focus on social media networks as a marketing tool at the moment of sharing their product or service to current or potential consumers.

According to Coviello, Brodie, & Munro (2000), large businesses have more financial resources to invest when it comes to enhancing and achieving a high level of awareness of its brand among the consumers within the competitive market. Whether is because they have been successfully operating for a long time or because they have high profits, this allows them to pay for traditional marketing channels such as television, radio, or even billboards; which tend to be expensive. Small businesses on the other hand, do not have all the necessary monetary means to spend in enormous marketing campaigns. Therefore, they face difficulty creating brand awareness if this means having to invest in highly paid advertisements, or expensive marketing strategies. Especially since, as Krake (2005) explains, most of their revenue goes to their products or services, and sales. Social media marketing, having a low cost and being effective, can be of help creating awareness of any small company's brand.

The majority of research studies previously conducted on brand awareness focus mostly in large multinational brands or even medium sized organizations, as they have higher exposure to the public (Berthon, Ewing, & Napoli, 2008). Therefore, little research has been made to analyze social media marketing and its effect on brand awareness in small businesses. For this reason, the main focus of this study is on small business using low budget marketing tools such as social media platforms in order to increase their level of brand awareness.

### 1.3 Disposition

This study starts with an introduction chapter where the selected field of study motivated with the aim and research questions are introduced. Furthermore, in chapter two a theoretical background is presented that will illustrate a pre-understanding of various theories of supported concepts of the phenomenon. The framework has been divided into sub portions in order to clarify each concept further in detail of what the concepts are (social media marketing, social media usage, social media paid advertising, brand, brand awareness, achieving brand awareness, measuring brand awareness, small business, and family business.) After summarizing the theoretical background, a theoretical model has been developed from the literature. Chapter three consists of the methodology, where its explained how the research study was conducted. Furthermore, the method is described in detail and presented with the chosen research design and method for study. A table is presented that includes basic information about the respondents of our study to provide an overview of the interviewee's business background. Chapter four consists of the empirical findings. Chapter five consists of a discussion and comparison on the empirical findings along with the theoretical background. Lastly, chapter six presents the conclusion along with the answers to the research questions and aim of the study. Furthermore, this chapter includes suggestions for further research, practical and theoretical contributions.

### 1.4 Limitation, Research Questions, and Aim

The social media networks selected to be examined in this research study are Instagram and Facebook since many small businesses use these platforms around the world as they are visible for consumers and overall easy to access. Small businesses can use these platforms for marketing purposes in order to get more customers and increase brand awareness. However, there are other different types of social media or applications that can be used that can reach a different kind of audience. Therefore, having concrete results to the influence of social media marketing in creating brand awareness would be difficult since we are limited to only these two networks.

It should be noted that small businesses may invest in other marketing options besides social media, which can represent "extra" exposure of their product or service; affecting their level of brand awareness. Additionally, the quality of the brand (whether is good or bad) is not taking into consideration either. Lastly, the number of followers that these businesses have in social media can't be taken into account; as special programs are needed to measure, out of these followers, how many have seen, clicked, and made a transaction with a business based on a post.

We address two research questions.

*RQ1: What influence does social media have in small businesses' brand awareness?*

*RQ2: How does social media influence the relationship between businesses and customers*

The purpose of this research is to explore the influence of social media marketing to enhance brand awareness. Additionally, this study will touch bases in the role that social media platforms play in the relationship between the customers and the business after they are aware of the brand. Based on the conclusions, future entrepreneurs can see if it beneficial to invest in social media marketing in order to increase their clientele and keep its current one.

## 2. Literature Review

In the second chapter, concepts and definitions in the field of marketing are presented relevant to the objective of the research study; these include social media marketing, brand, and small businesses.

### 2.1 Social Media Marketing

"Social media are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build communities by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible" as explained by Sloan & Quan-Haase (2017, p. 17). In addition, this content can be distributed through many social platforms in several kinds of forms including blogs, discussion forums, images, films, etc.

Social Media networks have become the most influential phenomenon in communication in recent decades (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In them, the interaction between a community is allowed and facilitated, which helps build trust and a "common feeling" among their members (Leimeister, Sidiras, & Krmar, 2006). It offers people new ways to build and maintain social networks, create relationships, share information, create and edit content, or even participate in social movements; all through a virtual platform (Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides, & Alarcón-del-Amo, 2011). This interaction between its members can include text, images, audio, videos or any other type of communication format (Ryan & Jones, 2009, p. 152). According to Fuchs (2008, p. 239-240), some of the most important characteristics of "virtual communities" in social media are their continuous voluntary interaction between its members, their shared interests and topics, the existence of formal and informal conventions, and the global dimension and speed with which relationships develop.

Currently, social media platforms are considered of great importance, both for individuals and for companies; since they help maintain existing social ties and encourage the development of new connections between users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These platforms have become an interactive medium that allows the development of direct and personalized communication between the company and clients as well; without geographical or temporary limitations. In addition, social media networks make possible different types of interactions with customers; such as advertising and information, presales, order configuration, purchases, after-sales services, etc (Kim, & Ko, 2012). As the direction of communication between the company and customers

is bidirectional, businesses can take advantage of these social media marketing tools to build relationships with their clients in a more direct, effective, and controllable way (Sashi, 2012).

### 2.1.1 Social Media Usage

Companies, seeing the growth of social media usage among consumers, are starting to use them in their marketing strategy due to their low cost and their popularity. These platforms are being used to build their brand, increase awareness, measure their reputation from customer relationships (Harris & Rae, 2009), for brand management (branding) (Christodoulides, 2009), to communicate with their customers (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009). However, there are different ways to use social media in the business world. Companies can obtain data from user's natural behavior and activity. This allows the exploration of behavior patterns from friend requests, follows, likes, or tweets (Hogan, 2008). This way, it allows businesses to approach consumers quickly and directly, at a relatively low cost, and with greater efficiency than traditional marketing tools. As observed, social media platforms are not only relevant for large companies but also for SMEs, profit and non-profit organizations, or the government (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). And even though companies can measure some elements of interaction with their customers through statistics offered by social media networks or from specialized computer programs; it is still unclear whether the strategic or tactical impact is high or low. In fact, there is a consensus among marketing professionals that there is a complex problem when measuring and monetizing marketing activities in social networks (Clemons, 2009).

In this new social media universe of user-generated content, businesses play a fundamental role in it, as consumers share their enthusiasm about their favorite brand through these platforms (Hennig-Thurau, Malhotra, Frieger, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy, & Skiera, 2010), by commenting on its products and services (Chan & Ngai, 2011). Although the influence of social media marketing on business' performance remains an unknown topic, there is no doubt that they play a key role in the future of marketing (Harris & Rae, 2009). Confirming Lindgreen, Palmer, & Vanhamme (2004), who anticipated that electronic and interactive marketing, as well as network marketing, would have greater development in the upcoming years. It should be noted that not everything related to internet advertisement can be considered as positive. There can be privacy or data security problems which suggest that social networks require structural control; otherwise, their attractiveness, credibility, and content value may decrease significantly (Otto & Simon, 2008).

Despite the negative sides aforementioned about internet advertisement, Öztamur & Karakadılar (2014) emphasize their importance in online marketing since this type of advertisement has increased for small and medium businesses. They mention companies have to be present where the consumer is and carry out their marketing strategies accordingly. Now, the usage of social media has become popular among consumers, therefore, companies have to develop their strategies there in a more planned and structured way to make them more effective. Social media marketing has modified the way to attract and keep new customers; some features may include having an attractive content and environment, where the public can obtain information (Öztamur, & Karakadılar, 2014). An essential element in social media marketing is that it must be focused on the consumers; there must be an interaction between the promotional campaign and the consumers that receive it. Moreover, social media marketing represents a dramatic, but beneficial change when it comes to searching and purchasing goods and services regardless of advertising, marketing campaigns or messages; with it, customers make decisions on their own terms, relying on trusted networks to form opinions of a brand (Paquette, 2013).

As previously stated by Katona et al. (2011) it is necessary that companies have a professional presence in the main social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. whose main objective is not the sale of products and services, but their exposure to the public; creating a community of users with an emotional link with the brand (Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, & Yau, 2019). Therefore, as Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2011) implied, the main goal of social media networks for companies' brands is to convert strangers into friends, friends into customers and customers into brand evangelists. For this reason, having social media platforms have become an excellent marketing tool for businesses. After all, as advertised by many popular social media networks, creating an account would not represent any investment since they are absolutely free of cost. However, it is worth mentioning that businesses can still find paid advertising within social media networks if they wish to.

### 2.1.2 Social Media Paid Advertising

Paid advertising is “any form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor. Not only for profit organisations but also a wide range of not-for-profit organisations, professionals, and social agencies use advertising to promote their causes to various target publics” (Parment, Kotler, & Armstrong, 2016, p. 367). Colliander, & Dahlén (2011) indicate that paid publicity in social media networks are growing in investment over traditional advertising methods. Practically, the majority of social media platforms already

incorporate formulas to effectively advertise on them. Furthermore, out of all digital marketing strategies, social media publicity (Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, etc) is the only one that allows to achieve results immediately (Colliander, & Dahlén, 2011). In *Table 1*, statistics can be appreciated from two major social media platforms that are popular around the world in order to understand their global coverage according to their users and the starting prizes that each of them have for paid advertisements.

*Table 1 Statistics on Facebook and Instagram*

	<b>FACEBOOK</b>	<b>INSTAGRAM</b>
<b>Active Users</b>	Around 2.4 billion	Around 1 billion
<b>Daily Users</b>	Around 1.5 billion	Around 500 million
<b>Business Pages</b>	60 million +	25 million +
<b>% of Business investing in ads</b>	75%	69%
<b>Minimum Investment</b>	\$1 USD	\$1 USD
<b>Users Reached Through Ads</b>	Around 2 billion	Around 802 million

*Note. Adapted from statistics found by Pokrop (2019), Smith (2019), and Yu (2019)*

## 2.2 Brand

According to Kotler & Keller (2005, p.549), a brand is “name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these that identifies the markers or seller of the product or services”. According to this definition, name, sign or symbol is used to represent a business product or service from competitors of the organization as it also includes the intangible, and intangible values that are the source of reputation in the market (Kotler et al., 2005). Furthermore, a brand is separate from the service or the product as products and services can be anything that a business offers to the audience and can be change according to the demand or change in time and change in trend of market as these are for use or consume to meet the needs or wants of consumers to obtain satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2005).

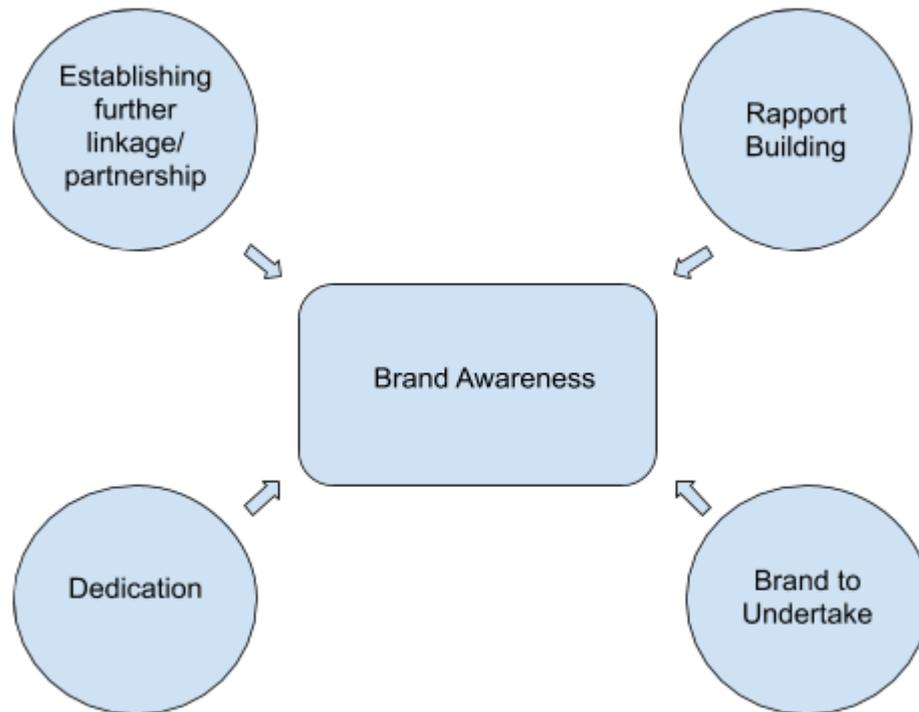
Doyle & Stern (2006) mention that brands have a different value for the business, and a different value from the product. Value of brand is important from a consumer's perspective as it helps them to get specific brand into consideration and it can be intangible since it varies depending on

a person's level of satisfaction. Good will of the brand is created and developed because of both experiences that are emotional and functional experiences of the brand which plays a vital role in consumer's purchasing behavior and decision (Doyle & Stern, 2006).

### 2.2.1 Brand Awareness

In marketing, brand awareness refers to the strength with which any brand is present in a consumer's mind (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005); it occurs when there is an association between the brand and the type of product, where the potential consumer recognizes or associates the brand as a member of a certain product category. With that, awareness can be simply from brand recognition to brand recall or just a memory of the product; being dominant, if it's the only brand remembered by the consumer (Hakala, Svensson & Vincze, 2012). Although many do not consider this concept as a source of brand value creation, Aaker (1992) states that many firms already see this dimension as important. Brand awareness has been studied extensively by many authors who recognize its benefits and repercussions for brands, focusing mainly on their measurement and taxonomy. However, there are different perspectives of this concept, but the ones that stand out the most are: its usefulness as an advertising approach (Miller & Berry, 1998), and its influence on consumer behavior (Ratneshwar & Shocker, 1991). The existence of a specific brand that offers specific kind of products and market audience must be aware of it is known as brand awareness (Kotler et al., 2005).

According to Jin & Villegas (2007), they define that brand and product have a link between them because it makes the consumer to get capacity of recognition or remembering a specific brand, only because of brand awareness that it is differentiated between a brand from others in the market. Furthermore, they talk about the importance of brand awareness in brand equity as it is an important component (Jin & Villegas, 2007). They stated further that purchasing intention and attitude towards brand is developed only through brand awareness (Aaker, 1991). Moreover, he discussed the factors that add awareness values in different ways that include establishing further linkage/ partnership, rapport building, dedication and brand to undertaker. All these factors add values when brand becomes top-of-mind among the customers (Gautam & Shrestha, 2018). In *Figure 1*, the factors that add value to brand awareness are illustrated.



*Figure 1 Adapted from Brand Awareness (Aaker, 1991. p.63)*

According to Sasmita & Mohd Suki (2015) brand association affects the brand images that are valuable for any business in the market and helps to add value in brand awareness. Moreover, establishing a link to get recognition when a new product is introduced in the market, because there are less chances for being purchased by consumers without having knowledge about the new release as without having any identity. Huang, Rong & Sarigollu (2014) argue it would be difficult for consumers to become aware of the characteristics of the product; only possible to have good recognition in the market by providing or adapting a brand switcher and creating product trials from previous experiences. This will help enhance brand awareness and an identification to a new product in order to develop relationships between them.

Kumar & Moller (2018) claim, brand familiarity motivates customers to adopt the brand products when they release something new with brand name. It is common that customers like to be familiar with the products as people have their experiences and have better knowledge about the product or service because brand knowledge and past experiences of the consumers make the brand and product well known (Kumar & Moller, 2018). It is mostly common when consumers are familiar with the product, they make decisions without knowing about other products because of their preferences (Aaker, 1991). However, commitment with brand adds value to brand equity which is also linked to brand awareness.

As Tuskej, Golob & Podnar (2013) claim, there is a relationship between brand commitment and brand values as it has a positive influence on customers to keep themselves loyal to the brand. This happens after having the awareness in the customers about the product of the company as consumers will continue to buy the product even if they do not have better knowledge about it. Because of the better awareness about the brand and its product, consumers become committed and loyal with the brand name of the company (Tuskej et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is natural in consumers' buying mentality that when it comes to purchasing a product, they consider three or four different brands as they have different experiences with them in the past. Wang & Zhang (2009) explain that customer behavior towards selecting a brand is influenced by the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction from past experiences from their point of view.

### 2.2.2 Achieving Brand Awareness

Every business wants to reach to the higher brand recognition in the market. It is important to achieve awareness of the product and the link with the brand for its consumer market when the product is newly launched by the business (Kumar & Moller, 2018). There are many ways but according to Aaker (1991), he discussed many factors that can be helpful for a brand to achieve maximum brand awareness: The most important factor in achieving better awareness about the brand is to have a different and unique slogans that represent the brand and its image to the customers as it helps them to get a clear image of the brand instantly and identification whenever they find out or read it somewhere (Till, Baack & Waterman, 2011).

According to Aaker (1991) it is important to have product differentiation from the brand class as there can be the risk of similarity in the way of communication and product feature, to avoid such conditions, it has to be unique in order to remain in the mind of the customer and not forget about the brand. Furthermore, brand associations add valuable effect on brand value because it helps to identify the difference and meaning of brand image to its potential customer (Till, et al. 2011). A brand symbol helps its potential customers to recall or remain in their minds as they can memorize the visible design of the brand because logos show the link between brand and product as it plays a vital role in developing and maintaining brand awareness (MacInnis, Shapiro, & Mani, 1991).

Moverover, the most convenient and effective way of enhancing and creating better brand awareness in the marketing to use the promotions and advertisement as it is one of the most important ways of getting awareness for a brand in the consumer market (Jalleh, Donovan, Giles-Corti & Holman, 2002). Promotional tools that organizations use to spread awareness about their

brand can gain better publicity among the consumers, because advertising influence brand equity value in a positive way (Osman & Subhani, 2010).

Sponsorship in events is another helpful way to provide, create, increase, and maintain awareness about the brand; this is an efficient and less time-consuming way to spread the awareness in specific areas (Jalleh et al., 2002). Event sponsorship plays a vital role to enhance value in brand equity (Kim, 2010). Stegemann (2006) claims this is a useful technique in order to enhance brand awareness in the market by associating the same brand with other product lines as there can many manufacturing products by the same brand name and wide range of products in the market for customers. These changes in brand extension help brand growth rapidly in the market and gain competitive advantage in the consumer market (Stegemann, 2006). Unique and different packaging plays a significant role for a brand to create and show brand image in the mind of the consumers as well (Till et al. 2011). If there is a logo or wrap of the packaging missing that represents a specific brand's name and the consumer notices it, means that the company's brand name has greater awareness in the consumer market (Aaker,1991).

It can be that there is high competition in the market so the customer may mix the brand images from different companies in their mind. It is easier to create and provide awareness about the brand in the market to its potential customers, however, it is difficult to remain in customers minds so they can recall the brand later on (Dauphinee, Doxey, Schleicher, Fortmann, & Henriksen, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for a brand to be more outstanding to get remembered by its customers (Aaker, 1991). Furthermore, advertisement strategies have influence on branding and shows involvement on brand recall of specific products (Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010).

According to Osman & Subhani (2010) a competitive advantage for a brand is to maintain a top position in the market by the continuous advertisements and promotions in order to create brand awareness, while on the other hand it also affects its brand competitive to face decrease in recall of their brands in the market. Moreover, awareness can bring fast communication and consumer engagement and the main objective for serving brand marketing in the market is to obtain awareness and brand recall for those established brands (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

### 2.2.3 Measuring Brand Awareness

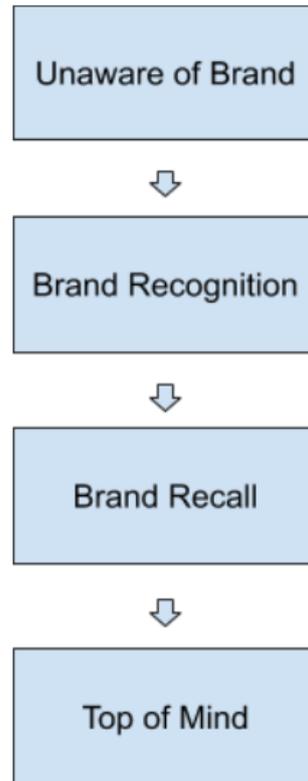
When someone talks about any product and the first brand name that comes to a consumer's mind, shows the indication of highest awareness about brand in a particular category; this represents a gain in consumer market as it is always trying to achieve such a level of awareness in the

marketplace where competition is high (Jones, 1999). A strong brand has a high effect on consumer response to the product which is affiliated with the brand and it has a positive influence on consumer's buying behavior with high preference. A good brand image is also known as a valuable asset of the business (Parment, et al., 2016, p. 231).

However, this is a level also known as first stage in awareness of brand where consumers have the ability to identify any specific brand from others (Aaker,1991). It is an initial recall when a customer can recognize and identify the name of the brand from similar companies which have the same product but different brand names and it is important from a consumer's perspective to identify the right brand when it comes to buying process (Dauphinee et al., 2013).

The measurement of brand awareness which shows the name of a brand expected by the consumer in specific product class as brand recall is important when consumers buy things on a daily basis and they decide to go for any specific brand (Walsh, Kim & Ross, 2008). Moreover, when any business places its name in the market, it gets the positive influence on brand equity which is known as brand image in the consumer market for business, these brand image enhancements affect product sales as a result of it (Walsh et al., 2008).

The stage of measurement in brand awareness that show that when a consumer keeps a brand in mind and can recall within the other brands with similar product class is considered with high rate of awareness among the consumers in the market (Dauphine et al., 2013). Moreover, many well-known brands use social media platforms such as Twitter to stay top-of-mind in consumer market online and consumers follow these brands and get daily news feed; which is a good way to keep in touch with potential customers (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). As illustrated in *Figure 2*, the different four main stages of brand awareness are shown.



*Figure 2 Levels of Brand Awareness adapted from (Aaker, 1991. p.62)*

## 2.3 Small Businesses

In today's world, small businesses are recognized as one of the main contributors to the increase in development and employment; playing an important role when it comes to global economic growth. However, in the absence of an agreement between authors of research studies, the term "small business" has been defined differently in every country according to their local needs (El-Gohary, 2010). Even though in most countries, the number of workers is often used when determining the category of small businesses, its definition may vary according to the context and other factors such as volume of sales, type of customers, etc.

For example, according to El-Gohary (2010) a business is considered small: in the United States when they have less than 100 workers or annual sales less than \$ 5 million; in the European Union when they have from 10 to 49 workers or an annual turnover less than 10 million Euros; in Australia less than 20 workers; in India the number of workers does not matter, but the total investment must be less than 10 million Indian Rupees in industrial companies and less than 1 million in service companies; or in Latin America less than 50 workers.

McCartan-Quinn & Carson (2003) and Gruber (2004) have an agreement that being new and small presents special challenges for any business. However, despite facing these difficulties, small companies also tend to be more creative and innovative than large companies. One reason that people make the decision to start a new business can arise when people do not have employment options. As Schrör (2009) indicates, new companies are generally initiated by young people (on average between 30 and 40 years old), who have new ideas and are willing to introduce innovations to the market.

Small companies have special characteristics that place them in a position of disadvantage when compared to large companies at the time of marketing. The majority face limitations in relation to: financial resources, personnel for research and analysis, time if considering that they should worry about short term results (Gilmore, Carson, & Grant, 2001) and lack of experience or knowledge to efficiently apply the marketing process (Stokes, 2000). These limitations constitute important challenges to overcome in order to succeed in the market, some of these are not exclusive to small businesses, but given their limitations, they will have greater obstacles to face them and remain in an increasingly dynamic and competitive market.

Traditional marketing practices have been based on the models developed for large organizations as shown in Coviello et al. (2000) and Hills, Hultman, & Morgan (2008). Moreover, marketing practices in small businesses differ from practices performed in large businesses, or the marketing practices presented in textbooks. However, studies by Hogarth-Scott, Watson, & Wilson (1996) and Siu & Kirby (1998) indicate that the knowledge of basic marketing principles is important for the success of small businesses; concepts such as market orientation, segmentation, positioning and competitive advantage since they are equally applicable to small and large companies. As an example, there is a general consensus regarding the positive influence of a company's market orientation on its business results, understood as the creation of market information, the spread of that information throughout the departments and the response to such information from the entire organization (Verhees & Meulenberg, 2004). This orientation reflects the extent to which companies adjust their marketing policies to market information, which leads to adapt offers to present and future needs expressed by customers and market structures.

Furthermore, studies like Martin (2009) conclude that the theories of “classic marketing” are not applicable to small businesses, which is consistent with the bibliography that supports these thoughts. Small businesses generally have a small number of customers, and limited marketing skills; this added to a lack of formal planning, makes it very difficult to use marketing techniques

such as the 4 P's, or market segmentation (Zontanos & Anderson, 2004). Some authors like Gruber (2003) or Morrish & Deacon (2009) explain that small business marketing is a relatively new area in scientific research; therefore, despite the efforts to consolidate a new paradigm, an integrated analysis is still not available, the results are fragmented, and concrete theory does not yet exist. Other authors, such as McAuley (2000), question to what extent a theory that encompasses all this phenomenon is possible or even desirable.

Marketing in small businesses is described by Gilmore et al. (2001) as "informal, randomized, spontaneous and reactive;" additionally, according to Stokes (2000), little attention is paid to planning, strategy development and analysis. Many small businesses see marketing as an "unnecessary luxury" because they tend to focus on day-to-day activities and do not have the time needed to develop and implement marketing strategies (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996). Entrepreneurs generally have a limited view of marketing (Stokes, 2000), since they are not experts on the matter (Martin, 2009). According to Zontanos & Anderson (2004), small businesses do not apply marketing, but they still survive and grow; this is because they use a relational marketing approach.

According to O'Dwyer, Gilmore, & Carson (2009) the purpose of marketing in small businesses has been related to sales and promotion. Afterwards, Reijonen (2010) mentioned marketing for small entrepreneurs is related first to promotion and then to sales. People in charge of marketing in small businesses consider that it is associated with sales and advertising (Marcati, Guido, & Peluso, 2008), giving importance only to these elements because companies have obtained favorable results without having planned any marketing activities (Stokes, 2000). In small businesses, the lack of time and marketing knowledge makes this process not obvious, or as Stokes (2000) mentions, it's practiced even if it's called in another way. Therefore, a marketing theory of its own is still necessary for small businesses (Siu & Kirby, 1998).

### 2.3.1 Family Business

Small businesses, compared to large companies, are characterized by being less bureaucratic and more flexible. The owner is the main decision maker (Nooteboom, 1994) and the personal and business interests and objectives of managers are interconnected (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984). The scenario becomes even more complicated when the small business is of a family nature, since family policies can contradict economic rationality. Small family businesses operate as an extension of the personalities of their owners/managers in order to safeguard family ownership and control, and financial independence; however, because of this, owners-managers

often miss growth opportunities (Poutziouris, 2003). Therefore, the growth of small businesses can be driven by the interaction of three groups of key variables: (1) the resources of the owner-manager such as motivation, education, management experience, skills, age, family history; (2) the business profile: seniority, size, sector, legal form and ownership regime; and (3) strategic planning: market positioning, research and development, internationalization, financial policy, human resources policy, succession planning, etc. (Poutziouris, 2003).

On the other hand, family businesses, when compared with non-family businesses, may be different in their process of establishing strategic objectives and in the processes by which those objectives are achieved due to the importance of influence, interests and the values of the family that controls the company (Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005). However, several researchers demand studies that investigate strategic planning and implementation in family businesses, given the lack of research on generic strategies and the use of strategic marketing concepts in these types of companies. Teal, Upton, & Seaman (2003) explain that among the few studies conducted, some suggest that family businesses prefer a strategy of differentiation emphasizing quality over a strategy of low cost or diversification. This means that they pursue growth through market penetration, competitive pricing and limited product development, being less likely to introduce new products to new customers; even though innovation plays an important part in the market position of family businesses.

Miller, McLeod, & Young Ob (2001) found that managers of small family businesses claimed that one of their biggest management problems was related to the development of appropriate marketing strategies that allowed them to assess the needs and levels of satisfaction of their customers and make a correct fixation of prices. In this sense, in small businesses, resources for the creation of market information are scarce and there are usually no financial means to hire a marketing specialist. Information systems are relatively simpler in small businesses and the information is based on secondary data, or direct (formal or informal) external contacts, of owners with suppliers, customers, banking employees, etc. (Smeltzer, Fann, & Nikolaisen, 1988). The dissemination of market information is not a relevant issue in small businesses because the owner makes important decisions, however, this diffusion can increase staff motivation (Verhees et al. 2004).

## 2.4 Summary of the Theoretical Background

With this literature review we have developed a framework based on the theory that illustrates the small businesses which are based on sole or partnership with limited resources based on domestic level offering products or services in the consumer market with a normal reputation. Small businesses that use different platforms in social media marketing to promote their business' name, and increase brand awareness in the market in a very short time. Using paid and non-paid advertisement on social websites like Facebook and Instagram, affecting the brand awareness of the business. We have developed a model that shows the combinations of both variables that helps to gain brand awareness for the business.



Figure 3 Theoretical framework. Source: (Own)

## 3. Methodology

In the third chapter, the most appropriate methods for this research study are explained; from choosing a research approach, to the selection of data from articles and conducted interviews.

### 3.1 Philosophy of Research

“Business and management researchers should be in knowledge of the philosophical undertakings” (Johnson, 2006). Also, determining the philosophy of research has a considerable impact on the researcher’s actions and understandings of that which is being researched. (Johnson, 2006). On account of the non-physical nature of our topic which relates to brand awareness by using the intangible means of social media, this study is closely related to ontological idealism as compared to ontological materialism. Also, the researchers concede to the idea of interpretivism that humans consciously make choices.

### 3.2 Scientific Approach

The aim of this study is not to find a right or wrong answer, as there isn’t any; but to deeply understand the meaning of the context and see how it is interpreted by others. Therefore, this research study uses the hermeneutic approach since its purpose is to examine the further understanding of social life and the meaning of actions. Gillan (2008) notes that the hermeneutic approach is most appropriate for studies that focus on understanding the context of ideas thoroughly in actions of a group; such as in businesses. Basically, this approach is based on the meaning of humans’ beliefs and actions and the results because of it (Atkins, 1988), which is more related with our research topic; the interviews we conduct give us an explanation as to why these business owners make the decisions they do and how it has worked out for them.

### 3.3 Research Strategy

As per Andreewsky & Bourcier, (2000), there are three unique strategies that can be adopted to achieve the desired purpose of research: 1) Deductive approach, in which the research goes from the “general law to a specific case with the intention to test the developed theories”. 2) Inductive Approach, which is the antithesis of deductive approach and it proceeds from facts towards theories. 3) An abductive approach, which using which a suitable hypothesis is reached in order

to be matched against a phenomenon. This study uses an inductive approach in order to reach its intended goal by combining our findings in order to obtain a conclusion.

### 3.4 Method

The research method we have used for our study is the qualitative research method involving semi-structured interviews for data collection. The qualitative method has a linkage with the hermeneutic approach in the focus area that is relative to text and interpretive character (Kinsella, 2006). Moreover, the qualitative research method does not focus on figures or numbers; such as the quantity of anything, or things that are countable. This method focuses on describing, or defining research into the lives, personalities and experiences of people (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). Therefore, the qualitative method is suitable for our research study as the aim of the study is to understand the influence of social media in small business when creating brand awareness.

### 3.5 Process of Selecting Articles

In order to increase our knowledge of this research, at the beginning of the study, we had to choose literature related to the field of our topic about creating brand awareness of small businesses with the influence of social media marketing. In the process of searching for the appropriate aforementioned literature, specific keywords were used; for example: “Social Media Marketing”, “Small Businesses”, “Brand Awareness” and “Advertisements”. Afterwards, in order to narrow down our findings, we read the abstracts of the articles to indicate which were suitable to use. We have used 105 references in our study which were from reliable resources as academic and scientific journals. After collecting all the sources, gathering the desired data from our search process, we evaluated them with relevancy, credibility and reliability; as they came from reputable sources. Furthermore, this information was used to formulate interview questions and afterwards analyze the responses from the interviewees.

### 3.6 Interviews

The primary source of data of this research study is obtained through the responses of semi-structured interviews. Sankar & Jones (2007) emphasize that the advantages of using semi-structured interviews are many; especially when conducting a qualitative research. For instance, the interviewers are allowed to combine open-ended questions as well as close-ended questions in order to get the interviewees' stories more in-depth; this is a valuable tool for gathering

information about public views and preferences. Additionally, Barriball & While (1994) explain that the wording of the questions can be modified according to each person interviewed. To us this is a great advantage, considering the businesses selected are from different countries that speak different languages. Furthermore, we translated the interviews conducted into Punjabi and Spanish (based on the interviewee's native language); considering we are native speakers of these languages. This allowed the responses to have a higher level of validity and consistency across interviews.

Moreover, Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi (2016) state that during the interview, it is possible to improvise and create follow up questions based on the respondent's verbal and non-verbal cues; making the interview guide more flexible and versatile. In our opinion, when a study has a qualitative research method, it is useful to take expressions and mannerisms from the respondents into account in order to get a higher understanding of the information given.

All the questions in the interview guide are relevant to our research topic which are based on the literature from our study, and can be found in the Appendices section. It should be noted that before conducting the interviews, we explained and presented our area of research to the respondents so they can have a better idea of what exactly we try to achieve with their help. Furthermore, we gave them the right to remain anonymous in case they wanted; otherwise it could represent an ethical issue in research studies according to Allmark, Boote, Chambers, Clarke, McDonnell, Thompson & Tod (2009). Lastly, we assure our respondents that we will keep all the information given regarding to their businesses in confidentiality and will not be used for purposes other than the research study. Each interview conducted took on average 39 minutes to finish.

### 3.7 Selection of Respondents

We have conducted semi-structured interviews with ten people from ten different companies that have different industries, geographical location, and cultural backgrounds; the main comparable factor between them is that they are small businesses. The selected small businesses covered in this research study are from Sweden, United States, Spain, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, United Kingdom, and Pakistan. We focused to interview the owners of these companies since they handle most of the activities within their businesses. We considered this to be more helpful in order to understand their current positions, marketing strategies, and results from different points of view; especially since they have different tasks and types of business.

The business owners selected for our interviews are from our personal network we have created over the years. Meaning we made use of a comfort selection of businesses in this research study as Bryman & Bell (2017, p.205) suggest; choosing respondents for our interviews that were close at hand. Correspondingly, we eclectically pinpointed those potential interviewees that were within our geographical proximity, and if not, easy to contact via a video call conference. This selection was accomplished on account of limited time and also since such selections correspond to research projects where there is a dearth of time and costs (Lune & Berg, 2017).

### 3.8 Presentation of Respondents

In *Table 2* an overview of all interviewees can be appreciated; which includes the names of the business owners and their companies, what type of business they have, in which country they operate, and the language in which the interview was conducted. Afterwards, a brief description of each respondent is presented.

*Table 2 Information of Respondents (Own)*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Name of Owner</b>	<b>Interview Language</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Type of Business</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Interview Time</b>
R1	Samuel Joannou	English	Greek ConcertStatus	Event Planner	USA	47 minutes
R2	Margarita Iturralde	Spanish	Casa Tovar	Restaurant	Ecuador	39 minutes
R3	Julianne Rodriguez	Spanish	Citrea	Dessert Shop	Dominican Republic	43 minutes
R4	Yeray Fabio	Spanish	Spain BarberShop	Barbershop	USA	38 minutes
R5	Estefany Tomas	English	EsTeven Mrktng	Marketing Firm	USA & Dominican Republic	23 minutes
R6	Waqar Salim	English	We Do Supercars	Car Rentals	United Kingdom	38 minutes
R7	Shaheen Saleem	English	Metroflex Gym	Gym	United Kingdom	35 minutes
R8	Hassan Khalid	English	Cosmos	E-commerce	Sweden	40 minutes
R9	Adeel Yonus	Punjabi	AirAid Travels Pvt	Service Industry	Pakistan	44 minutes
R10	Ronald Jackson	Spanish	Mellowjac	DJ	USA & Spain	41 minutes

### 3.9 Analysis

As Menter, Eliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Lowden (2011) mentions that data analysis is the most important part of the research process after data collection, irrespective of the qualitative or quantitative nature of the study. As a result, the authors of this study put special focus to this area. Also, Yin (2009) has pointed out that data analysis is the most underdeveloped part of a research study. To avoid that from happening, we made sure that this portion of research is thoroughly developed. Since our research study is based on the qualitative research method and a hermeneutic research approach, we decided to adapt a thematic analysis from the responses that we collected from our interviews. We believe a thematic analysis technique is the most suitable to use in our empirical finding section from this research; especially considering that it is a common technique used for qualitative research mainly focusing on interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We initiated the thematic analysis by transcribing the recorded interview's responses and reading them thoroughly; translating to English the ones that needed since they had a different language. Afterwards, we located common themes and words in order to have clarity between the similarities and differences of these businesses for our empirical data. Furthermore, once the most important facts were identified, we compared the information from the empirical section to the theories found in the literature review in order to finalize the analysis that helped us to come up with a conclusion for the aim of this research study. Lastly, we read thoroughly the interviews to find codes in order to get different themes in our responses, by doing so we will use the theme to generate a heading which will cover these codes and themes as a whole as the reader can see in *Table 3*. We will use these headings in our empirical and analysis chapter to make it easier for the reader to understand.

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Headings</b>
Micro-company Services Local Products Facilitate Physical products Sole ventures Family business Partners Self-employed Number of employees Business duration	Nature of business  Small business identification  Type of business	Nature of small businesses & their identification.
Name Logo Service strategies Centre Physical need Customer care Quality Guarantee Standard Material Familiar Consumption Recognition Reputation Attraction Digital Competition Market Offers Promotions Surveys Gifts Activities specialized	Brand recognition  Unique properties of brand  Role of promoting business brand  Role of marketing channel	Role of marketing on enhancing brand awareness.
Facebook Instagram Online ads Online promotions Pages Communication Feedback Recommendation Accounts Social media Audience Return Paid ads Unpaid ads Responses Networks Impact Marketing strategy Campaigns Objectives Successful Awareness Customers Target market	Use of online promotions  Social network role in enhancing brand awareness  Influence on brand image  Positive brand image	Influence of social media marketing between business and customers.

*Table 3 Thematic analysis. Source (Own)*

### 3.10 Quality Criteria

Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich (2008) explain that in order to make a statement of the quality, certain criteria encompassing relevance, rigor and credibility are used; considering reliability and validity to be similar criteria used in a qualitative research.

We have presented the theoretical and practical implications in the conclusion of this research study to attain the criteria of relevancy; in line with Kitto et al. (2008) who notes that to establish relevance, researchers should show and prove in which way the study is useful and relevant to the context of the phenomenon studied.

Additionally, in tune with Kitto et al. (2008) remarks, that the credibility criteria is attained through well-presented and well-meant findings; in this case we did the best possible by presenting our findings in a legible and clear manner, therefore we believe this criterion is covered.

Lastly, in order to instill the rigor criteria, it is required that the interviewee perceives a transparent description of both ethical and political angles of the research as Kitto et al. (2008) suggests. For this reason, we made sure the respondents were aware that our research follows a single purpose allowing no room for political bias or any other type of objectives. We also abide by the ethical aspects by leaving it at our respondent's discretion if they wished to remain anonymous.

## 4. Empirical Findings

In the fourth chapter, we present our empirical findings according to the main themes studied in this research. We show the most important statements from the respondents after they were compared between one another. Additionally, at the end of each section, the reader can find in *Table 4, 5, and 6* a summary of the findings according to the themes.

### 4.1 Nature of Small Businesses & their Identification

When the 10 small companies interviewed were asked to speak about their business and what it was about, respondents R1, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9 and R10 offered online or physical services for their clients; meanwhile R2 and R3 offered a product.

Respondents R5 and R8 offer their professional services online, since they do not have a local establishment where a client can walk in. Both of these small businesses are hired by third party companies in order to obtain help in their marketing department. One operates in the USA and Dominican Republic (R5) and the other one in Sweden (R8). However, there is a difference between these two small businesses besides their geographical location. R5 focuses in the advertising of their clients' company whether it is a product, or a service offered. As R5 mentioned:

*“we pretty much are an advertising agency; we take over their advertising department with the goal to add value to their business. We manage their social media accounts, we design their web page, email marketing; depends on the clients' budget really, we can design and print flyers, brochures or business cards too; even get outdoor advertising like a billboard if they wanted.”*

Whereas R8 focuses in e-commerce from companies that only sell products, either physical or digital. Companies hire R8 so he can successfully sell their products through their platform. As he explained during the interview: *“My business is about digital marketing. It all depends on the clients' product. We are dealing with physical products like wrist watches; plus, digital products such as e-books or video courses.”*

Respondents R4 being a barbershop in the USA; R7 a gym owner in the United Kingdom; and R10 being a musician in the USA and Spain, offered their professional services to direct physical customers. It should be noted that while R4 and R7 have their own physical establishment in their respective countries; customers have to go there in order to acquire their service. As opposed to

R10, who stated that his business “*provided DJ and music production services to private events and numerous clubs*”; considering he works in two countries, he needs to travel back and forth between Europe and America in order to reach their clients and work in their events.

Respondents R1 being an event planner in the USA; R6 being a car rental office in the United Kingdom; and R9 being an owner of a travel agency in Pakistan, offer services as well. They also represent third party companies that hire their business in order for customers to contact them. However, their final transaction is the client getting a physical or digital product (purchased or rented). For example: when a Greek concert will happen, they hire R1’s business to be in charge of selling their physical or digital tickets, give out promotions, or free merchandise from that specific event. R6 is in charge of hire of sports and performance vehicles (luxury cars) such as a “*Lamborghini, Ferrari, or Rolls Royce*” as expressed by this respondent. They can be either for personal use or for any type of occasion or any ceremony. R6 provides their vehicles to clients for a specific amount of time; people rent a car such as a “*McLaren P12 for special occasions like proms, weddings, birthdays, etc*” as R6 stated. R9 on the other hand, being a travel agency, they provide their ticketing service for different airlines based on the customer’s destination. Additionally, they work with hotels all over the world, as they sell touristic packages as well.

When it comes to small businesses that offer products, only respondents R2 being a newly open cafeteria in a small city in Ecuador; and R3 being a dessert shop in Dominican Republic, fill this category. As R2 mentions, they sell “*several types of coffee, different types of sandwiches, Ecuadorian desserts, etc.*” And although R3 does not have a physical local establishment, she stated “*her orders are upon request*” which include “*small pastry orders such as brownies, cookies, or donuts; to big orders such as cakes for special events like weddings or birthday parties.*”

When asked about the ownership of the business, respondents R3, R4, R5, R6, and R8 expressed they had sole proprietorship of the company. However, R1, R2, R7, R9, and R10 had a partnership with other people; meaning they were the co-owners of the business. The interviewees R1, R2 and R7 informed they had a partnership with one close friend respectively. Meanwhile, R10 had a partnership with his wife; being the co-owner of the business. In R9’s case, it was different; this respondent informed us that his travel agency is a “*private limited company owned and run by his family only. It is a family business!*”.

It is worth mentioning that all of these businesses had less than 10 workers including the owners. With the highest number, R9 having 8 employees; and R3 with the lowest number as she is the

only person in her business. Lastly, when asked about the time of operation, almost all of these businesses had 5 years or less running; R2 being established 8 months ago was the youngest business. However, again R9 being different than the other companies interviewed, said “*since 1983 we have been running this business*”; making it the oldest business with 36 years open.

Table 4 Overview of the “businesses’ background” from interview responses (Own)

Topic	Findings of Respondents
Product or Service Offered	80% offer a Service; 20% offer a Product
Owner or Partnership	50 % are sole owners of their business 30% have partnerships with a friend 20% have partnership with family
Employees	Average of 4.2 employees
Time of Operation	9 respondents who have around the same time of existence, have an average of 2 years and 10 months; while R9 being the only one with 36 years

## 4.2 Role of Marketing on Enhancing Brand Awareness

Although the respondents have different types of small companies that operate in different parts of the world, when asked how they identified their brand they all had the same answer; their name. Additionally, the interviewees described certain characteristics from their business that makes them recognizable among their competition; but most importantly, by their clients.

R4, R7, and R10 had very similar statements; they said customers recognized their business by “*their name, their logo, and the quality of their service*” which distinguishes them from similar companies. Other respondents expressed their business has unique qualities that their local competition didn’t. For example, R2 stated they are “*the only cafeteria in the city that uses handmade product; from our bread to our processed meat.*” Similarly, R3 mentioned her pastries are only made “*with local and fresh products, made at home completely from scratch after the order is placed.*” R6 also had a distinctive feature, since they “*are the only car rental business that provides all kinds of sports and performance vehicles in our city.*” While R8 doesn’t provide a service, he does sell products that “*are not available for purchasing in online platforms other than his own.*”

On the other hand, R1 and R9, stands out by the level of trustworthiness and loyalty their customers have towards their brand. R1 claimed: *“we are the most well-known GREEK event service platform for Americans/Greeks. We have a very strong reputation; we offer phone support and we are always here for our customers.”* R9 because of the time they have been open for business as they state: *“We are the pioneer to start this business in 1983 and until now we have gained a strong goodwill amongst our market.”*

When asked about their strategies to gain brand awareness, all of these businesses have different methods according to their responses. For instance, R1 always offers a couple of giveaways per show, which allows people a chance to win free admission; *“this helps us promote our show across different avenues we may not have reached ourselves.”* R10 offers free giveaways too, but from his own merchandise. Whereas R2 has exclusive deals on two selected days in the week; *“every Tuesday we offer 50% off sandwiches and Thursdays free coffee with the purchase of something to eat.”* by doing this type of promotions they help create awareness among customers. Meanwhile, according to R3, in order to have a better understanding of customers’ needs, she conducts a survey among the customers after they receive their order to see if *“what the customer is receiving is the desired product the expected.”* Sometimes if the order is too *“we add a small gift as a courtesy for our loyal customer”* R3 added.

Moreover, other respondents provide security to customers in order to reassure them about their business policies which causes to build trust. R6 explained: *“we have 1 of only 2 fully comprehensive self-drive insurance policies in the West Midlands to protect our customers”*; this gives their business a competitive advantage and awareness. R8 on the other hand, has a policy that gives cash back in case the product doesn’t meet the client’s expectations; *“exclusiveness in terms of availability as the product offered by our business are not available online and 100% cash back guarantee.”*

Furthermore, R9 has a different way of gaining competitive advantage; by portraying a positive awareness about their brand. R9 stated: *“we have established a charity system for poor and needy people in order to support them.”* Additionally, they claim that their business *“provides 24/7, 365 days, services to clients.”* R7 also has the same strategy for their business which reflects to their unique properties. According to R7 they organize events which is a good step to spread awareness about their brand as she stated: *“to gain awareness we hold annual charity events and regular competitions and share a love for the sport of bodybuilding and strength. We sponsor athletes and professionals and provide them with branded clothing.”*

Lastly, when the respondents were asked about other types of advertisements apart from Social Media, 80% invest in *Business Cards* which include their social media accounts; with the exception of R6 and R8. In fact, R8 expressed he does not have any other channel for advertising his brand. Additionally, apart from business cards, R1, R6, R7, and R9 claim to use other mediums to expose their brand which are low cost paid advertisements such as email blasts, flyers, t-shirts, or newspaper ads. However, only interviewee R9 uses higher cost paid advertisement channels: *“we use other mediums of advertising in shape of business cards, newspapers, special magazines, local tv channels and billboards and we also have a Facebook page where we engage customers with our exclusive offers and feedback.”*

*Table 5 Overview of the “businesses’ brand” from interview responses (Own)*

Topic	Findings of Respondents
What is their brand	All respondents believe their brand is their name
Brand Recognition	Customers recognize their business by their name, logo, and quality of their service. Others are recognized by their unique qualities and products. Some are the only businesses that offer their type of service. These businesses try to stand out by the level of trustworthiness and loyalty from clients
Differentiation from Competition	Respondents had different methods as they have different types of businesses. These include free giveaways, discounts or special offers on certain days of the week, satisfaction surveys, positive portrayal of their brand, good customer service and the feeling of security among the customers
Channels to gain Brand Awareness Apart from Social Media	80% have business cards; except R6 and R8. Additionally, 40% use low cost paid ads like email blasts, flyers, t-shirts, or newspaper ads. 10% uses high cost paid ads like special magazine ads, tv ads, and billboards

### 4.3 Influence of Social Media between Business and Customers

#### Social Media Platforms Used

The responses from the interviews conducted to the small businesses’ owners seem to have one thing in common; they all use at least one of the major and most popular social media networks for their business. Apparently, the respondents found Instagram to be the most useful social media platform as they are all active users; and Facebook being the second most used considering only 7 respondents have it.

All of these companies seem to have the same feeling about the usage of social media. For instance, R3 expresses:

*“I use them (social media platforms) since it is easier to connect with customers, interact with different types of people, of all ages or different backgrounds. I’ve had many customers who contact us through my accounts and place their orders, or even recommend my business to their friends; which highly helps me expand my clients’ list.”*

The companies that informed us that they use Instagram and Facebook equally are R1, R3, R6, R7, and R10; which represent half of the interviewees. It is worth mentioning that these five businesses only have these two social media networks, except for R1. Although Facebook and Instagram are the most used platforms for R1, from time to time he also uses Snapchat, LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Twitter. When the respondents were asked about why they choose these two platforms, we could see that R7 and R10 had similar thoughts with their statements: *“these two are the most popular and are free to use. They also allow us to reach a bigger audience with them”* (R7); and *“we use them to promote the brand .... with them we reach more people and gain more exposure”* (R10).

R2 mentioned that even though her business has an Instagram account, WhatsApp is the social media platform that she uses on a daily basis by constantly posting picture status. R5 on the other hand uses Instagram and LinkedIn. When R4 was being interviewed, based on his tone of voice and expressions we could understand he was convinced that *“Instagram was the most used social media network”* because it allowed him *“to post pictures and videos of his work instantly”*; for this reason this is the only social media account he has.

The last two interviewees, R8 and R9, said the only platform their business currently uses is Facebook. When asked the reason why only this network, they both had similar statements. R8 thought that it is *“highly targeted to help us find the right audience for our products ... until now, Facebook is the most convenient way to hit the right audience as it has billions of users.”* Moreover, R9 believed that their *“target market has more accessibility towards Facebook which makes it easier to capture and gain the maximum awareness among the customers online.”* However, despite these two respondents’ positive opinions about Facebook, they assured us that their businesses were planning to have an Instagram account in the near future.

### Paid Social Media Ads

Recently, social media networks have come up with the option to advertise other people’s brands within their platforms by charging a fee. Therefore, we asked our interviewees if they have decided to invest in this type of ads in order to get more exposure. With the exception of R2, R4, and R5,

70% of the respondents expressed they actually have paid either Facebook or Instagram for publicity. R2 explains they don't have the budget for this kind of advertisement; while R4 similarly explained: *"there is no budget since it is a small establishment and the profits have another purpose."* R5 simply expressed that for her own business she doesn't use, but for the companies she represents she does; *"depending on how much they are willing to invest."*

However, the respondents that answered positively about social media ads had different statements and different outcomes after this investment. For example, R1 said he pays *"from 50-100 USD per show, which seems to work but it can always be better."* R3 on the other hand, said she used both platforms for paid ads and they give her *"excellent results; in these ads we announce when we will have offers and promotions."* Similarly, R7 claimed *"during quiet periods, we will do an offer and use the paid advertisement."* Meanwhile R6 only uses them to promote their service itself. Furthermore, R8 and R9 claimed to use paid ads from Facebook only which were successful for both of them. According to R8: *"Our return on investment has been mixed. 60 % of our campaigns are successful from Facebook paid ads."* While R9 said: *"we use Facebook paid advertising and it showed its response within 6 months."* Lastly, R10 did not mention how he used the ads and what were his results, he just mentioned: *"we mostly use Instagram and Facebook ads. We have used Google ones in the past, but they were not as effective."*

### Market Position with a Social Media Marketing Strategy

Another topic discussed with the respondents was their social media marketing strategy and how it has helped them position themselves within the market. 80% of the interviewees said it helped them, 10% said no, and with R5 we didn't get to ask this question. R1 and R2 noticed the improvements and considered to have a better market position now. R1 stated that *"even though there is still room for improvement, we are well positioned since our followers have grown."* Whereas respondent R2 claims a similar response; even though they are located in a small town. The respondents that were highly satisfied with their social media marketing strategy as it helped them gain a better market position were R3, R6, R7, R8, R9, and R10, who accepted the effectiveness of using social media. R3 explains: *"We identify ourselves as a micro-company which over time has set several goals, starting from these you can say yes, since we have met all our objectives."* Moreover, other respondents stated: *"Social Media has proved to be a very valuable tool we use for marketing"* (R6), or *"it has been very effective in bringing in new and old clients"* (R7).

Meanwhile R8 and R9 felt an increase of brand awareness and the attention of more clients with higher results based on their statements; *“we are getting more clients, customers using free marketing methods”* (R8) and *“social media marketing strategy helped us to capture better market position in sense of better awareness among the customers”* (R9). Lastly, R10 appreciated the result of using social media marketing because it helped their business to enhance a better market position as he explained: *“We have gained our spot in the industry thanks to social media campaigns and paid ads.”*

### Spread a Positive Image of Brand

One goal for every business to achieve is to spread a positive image of their brand. Our respondents explained they used different methods when doing so; even if it's through social media. For instance, R1, R2, R6, R7, and R8 use Facebook and Instagram by posting content, sharing photos of products, and success stories through which customers get influenced to have a positive perception of their brand. R1 stated: *“We post funny content daily, not just when there are events.”* R2 on the other hand says *“Posting pictures of our products and customers' testimonies”* helps her create a positive image of her brand. Meanwhile R7 and R8 mentioned different ways of spreading a positive image of their brand. According to R7 who is a gym owner: *“We share success stories; this motivates others to look after themselves and approach us for professional advice.”* R8 uses a strategy to give back to old customers who purchased products from them in the past. He stated: *“We advertise flash Sales using Social media Ads on special events to spread a good will image. Also, we retarget the audience who have visited certain pages on our product's website to warm them up using discounted offers”* (R8).

Differently, R3, R4, and R10 believe customer satisfaction and self-confidence of their product does a better job at spreading a positive image of their businesses. These respondents trust the quality of the service or product they offer does a better job at this. These businesses stated: *“We work under the concept of making products with love because in the same way customers perceive it, there is no greater satisfaction than doing something you like, fill your soul and put all your effort into it”* (R3). *“Our music is made to make everyone enjoy and have a good time. We try to volunteer in many local places to help others in need and spread awareness of current issues.”* (R10). And lastly, R4 only mentions: *“positivity in the sense that we are a good business and have good products.”*

However, other respondents have been focusing on switching their customer's attention to their business' website (which is in the process of development) to make it easier for clients. *“We are*

*currently working on our website which will bring us more customers” (R6). Similarly, R9 stated: “We are also working on making our own website to make it easier for our customer to get better packages according to their needs.” It should be noted that we did not get a chance to ask R5 about this topic.*

### Spread the Word through Social Media

Convincing customers to “spread the word” about their brand over social media has been an achievable goal for all the small businesses interviewed. According to the respondents, they all had the same method; however, some executed it differently. For example, R1 and R2 claim that sharing posts bring more incoming positive responses from customers. They stated: *“from shared posts or content, we have become a strong virtual community” (R1) and “new clients come from shared posts” (R2).* Moreover, R3, R4, R6, R8, R9 and R10 admitted convincing clients using social media by showing their business’ online pages and how they can explore more through their platforms; also, by sending feedback on comments or posts.

For instance, R3 explains: *“this usually happens (customer gets convinced) when they consume our products, but in the same way with advertisements, offers, among other things.”* R4 claimed: *“we let customers know that we have social networks so that they can see our work from our posts, and perhaps they can share so other people can also see what we do.”* In addition, R6 believes that feedback is helpful to gain a better position as he stated: *“Yes, by leaving reviews and positive feedback, with sharing posts we have gained strong position.”*

R8, R9 and R10 had similar opinions about convincing customers to share their content. They stated: *“we sometimes use some tactics to convince them to spread the word. We have retweet and ‘Share’ buttons on Facebook available on our sales pages to encourage them” (R8).* R9 said: *“we convince our loyal customers to spread our pages in their social accounts to get better and amazing services and they also promote through their personal contacts.”* Lastly, R10 expressed: *“our music gets shared from profile to profile indirectly as well without anybody asking. We have a lot of loyal listeners.”* Furthermore, R7 only claims about convincing the target customers on specific events organized as she explained: *“If we have a competition, we will ask people to share the post to gain entry.”*

### Effects of Social Media in their Business

Social Media Marketing has had the same effect in all the businesses interviewed as they claim they have sensed a positive outcome after they started using these platforms; with the exception

of R4 who stated: *“Honestly, social networks have caused very little impact on our business. “Word-of-mouth” has been much more effective for us.”* It should be noted that the respondents had different timeframes when it came to see these positive results from using social media networks. For R1 it took 3-4 months; for R2 after 15 days; for R3 after 2 weeks; for R6 after 1 year; and for R7 after 6 months.

R5, R8, R9, and R10 did not mention to us the specific time it took them to start seeing results. However, they did explain how using these platforms had impacted their business. For example, R9 claimed: *“It improved our sales and helped to gain better brand awareness in the market and followers increases when we use online paid advertisements through social media marketing on facebook.”* Moreover, R9 highlighted the importance in his statement as he said *“Without Social media marketing our Business would be dead. Social Media marketing has definitely increased our sales, brand awareness and customers.”* Similarly, R10 stated:

*“When Mellowjac started, the brand only had 6-9 people following him and it was mostly family and close friends. Since we created the different social media platforms, Mellowjac has conquered the heart of more than 5,000 people. We have definitely increased our brand awareness, monthly number of listeners and followers across all platforms including Spotify and SoundCloud, not just social media”*

### Customer Relationship through Social Media

Lastly, the respondents were asked about the relationship with their customers and the interactions they had with them through social media. All interviewees had similar responses about their engagement with their clients. They respond to private direct messages and comments; whether it positive or negative feedback, or general information about their business. However, R4 focuses only in direct messages; as he stated: *“I don't usually respond to comments.”*

On the other hand, R8, R9, and R10 mentioned additional ways of interacting with their audience and providing answers to their inquiries. For example, R10 stated: *“We do live videos and we let fans ask questions and request songs or things that they would love to see Mellowjac doing in the future ... I also try to respond to private messages and meet with fans during performances.”* R9 claimed: *“we usually interact on helplines and facebook account page to give our customers reply and responses as feedback.”* Likewise, R8 mentioned: *“Emailing them (customers) regularly about offers, free info. replying them on their Facebook, Email and comments. Our relationship*

*is satisfactory so far. But, since customers are the lifeline of any Business, hence we keep on adding more care, understanding of their needs.”*

*Table 6 Overview of “Businesses’ Social Media Marketing” from interview responses (Own)*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Social Media Platforms Used	100% of respondents use Instagram; 70% of respondents use Facebook as well. All the interviewees found these two social media networks to be the most popular worldwide. Few of the respondents had other platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Twitter. Respondents believe that social media networks help promote their brand, gain exposure, get more customers and create brand awareness
Paid Social Media Advertisement	70% use social media paid ads to gain exposure within the networks; except R2 & R4 (because of low budget) and R5. The majority didn’t mention what results they had; just 30% had excellent results
Market Position with a Social Media Marketing Strategy	80% of the interviewees said it helped them, 10% said no, and with R5 we didn’t get to ask this question. Respondents that said it did, explained they have gained more followers, achieved their objectives, keep old clients, and greater brand awareness
Spread a Positive Image of Brand	5 respondents use Facebook and Instagram to spread a positive image of their brand by either posting interactive content, sharing photos of products, and success stories or feedback from past clients. 3 respondents spread a positive image based on the quality of their product or service. Additionally, 2 respondents are in the process of creating a webpage which they claim will help with their image
Spread the Word through Social Media	All respondents have succeeded in convincing their clients to spread the word about their brand. Some by posts shared by their current customers, they attract their network; therefore, increase their followers. Others by the quality of their products or services, they use their platforms to show the clients, therefore causing them to share their content. Leaving feedback or comments on their posts is also another way to spread their word by allowing people to see what other clients have to say about their brand
Effects of Social Media Marketing in their Business	80% of respondents had a positive outcome using social media platforms when creating brand awareness as their customers and ‘followers’ increased. These interviewees started noticing the results at different time ranges; from 15 days to 1 year
Customer Relationship through Social Media	Interviewees had similar responses about their engagement with their clients. They respond to private direct messages and comments; whether it positive or negative feedback, or general information about their business

## 5. Analysis

In the fifth chapter, the literature review is compared to the empirical findings based on the main themes of this research study. After having a clear view of their connection and how they relate or differ from each other, the information is analyzed.

### 5.1 Nature of Small Businesses & their Identification

At the beginning of our research, we decided to look for a specific definition for the theme “small business” to help us identify which factors determine which companies fall under this category. However, to our surprise, we couldn’t find any particular one. El-Gohary (2010) explained that even though the term "small business" is defined differently in every country according to the volume of sales or the type of customers; the number of employees is most often used when determining the size of a business.

Based on the information given by El-Gohary (2010), a company is considered small in the United States when they have less than 100 workers; which applied to the four businesses interviewed in the US. In the European Union if they have less than 49 workers; which also applied to the interviewees located in Sweden, the UK, and Spain. When it comes to Latin America, a company is small if it has no more than 50 workers; therefore, the respondents from Ecuador and Dominican Republic fall under this category as well. However, in South Asian countries the size of a company is not determined by the number of employees but by their total investment; so for this reason, we couldn’t determine if Pakistan fell under this category, since the interviewees were not asked about their financial transactions.

Based on previous research studies by McCartan-Quinn & Carson (2003), Gruber (2004), and later on Schrör (2009), they all coincide that small new businesses tend to be more creative and innovative than large companies. Furthermore, these authors agree that small businesses managed by young entrepreneurs tend to have more creative and new ideas to launch into the market. Schrör (2009) added that small companies are usually created by people under 40 years of age. These statements were supported by our interview findings. Even though the respondents were not asked about their age due to politeness, as mentioned before, these business owners are from our personal network; therefore, we know for a fact that they all are under 35 years; with the exception of R2 and R9. Additionally, in order to stand out from their local competition and be more innovative in

the market, all of the respondents assured us that their business has certain characteristics, unique services or products, or even special promotions to offer customers on a regular basis.

In fact, 70% of the respondents mentioned at some point of the interview that their business is frequently offering giveaways, discounts, or promotions in an attempt to attract more clients. This confirms the statements of O'Dwyer, Gilmore, & Carson (2009) and Reijonen (2010) who claim that the main purpose of marketing for small company owners is associated to promotions and sales. The next 10%, which was interviewee (R4), said he can't have any type of discounts or promotions since the prices are already established and all the employees need to charge the same amount. Lastly, the remaining 20% of respondents were professional marketers who owned a small marketing firm that represents third party companies. Although their own business doesn't have any special promotions, the companies they represent do; therefore, these professional marketers are constantly giving publicity about those companies' products, services, and offers. Confirming (Marcati, Guido, & Peluso, 2008) who explained that people in charge of the marketing department for a business consider that the purpose of marketing is related to advertising and sales.

Just as Stokes (2000) and (Martin, 2009) describe small business owners, the majority of the interviewees have a limited view when it comes to marketing; while others lack experience or knowledge on the matter. In addition, Stokes (2000) also suggests that new entrepreneurs tend to pay little attention to planning, developing, and analyzing a marketing strategy; therefore, not applying efficiently the marketing process, which can be a disadvantage for a business. However, other authors disagree with those statements as well as our findings from the interviews conducted.

Studies done by Hogarth-Scott et al., (1996), Siu & Kirby (1998), as well as Verhees & Meulenbergh (2004), indicate that the understanding of basic marketing concepts is important for the success of any small business. Furthermore, Zontanos & Anderson (2004) show that as long as a small business uses a relational marketing approach, they will survive and grow. This information was corroborated by our findings, since 80% of the respondent's companies are 3 years or older; meaning they have remained in the market all this time. In addition, 100% of the respondents expressed one way or another that their main priority is their customers as they are always trying to interact with them. Moreover, all of the respondents had clear perspective as what their marketing orientation was, since they are always adjusting the way they operate in order to

comply with the customer requests, which lead to adapt their promotions according to the client's needs.

Many small companies see marketing as an “unnecessary luxury” (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996), and others simply face financial limitations as their main concern is about short term issues (Gilmore et al., 2001). Which most of the respondents agree, since some said that they don't use any type of advertisement other than social media since it's free and the income they get tends to go to other aspects of the business that were more important. For this reason, we disagree with McAuley (2000) who states that a marketing theory targeted specifically to small businesses is not desirable. Small businesses should have the same opportunities to implement a proper marketing strategy that is affordable yet effective.

## 5.2 Role of Marketing on Enhancing Brand Awareness

As Kotler & Keller (2005) stated, a brand is a sign, name, and design are the combinations that represent the markers and seller of the product or any service. The statement was supported by all respondents. They all mentioned they were able to represent their business brand as an identification to their customers as a separate entity from their competitors in the market by having a separate and unique logo, sign, or design for their business. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents have mentioned they are recognised in the market because of their unique product or service that makes them different, which means brand enhance value because of experience of customers over products or services, brand itself doesn't have value. This confirms the statement of Doyle & Stern (2006) who claim that good will of the brand is created and developed because of both experiences that are emotional and functional experiences of the brand. but the next 10% of interviewees (R10) mentioned, they are recognised by their logo and name. Which confirms Kotler & keller (2005) who claim that a brand is separate from the service and product as it can be anything that a business offers to its audience.

Hakala, Svensson & Vincze (2012) state that awareness can be gained from brand recognition to brand recall or a memory of the product being dominant in consumer's mind. This statement was supported by all interviewees as all of them highlighted the different tactics to gain awareness and remain in the consumer's minds by doing exclusive events, special promotions, or giveaways from time to time as it is effective. Moreover, this statement also confirms Miller & Berry (1998) who state that it is usefulness as an advertising approach as it influence on consumer behaviors. Jin & Villegas (2007) mentioned the importance of brand awareness as brand and product have a linkage

between each other as it helps consumers get a capacity of recognition or remembering a specific brand which differentiates them from others in the market. The majority of the respondents spoke about the unique properties that they provide to make their brand different in the competition and to gain brand awareness. Moreover, R7 added that with the help of events and competitions it has become easy to gain the attention of market towards their brand and product since everyone supports such activities.

Huang, Rong & Sarigollu (2014) state that for good recognition and awareness about characteristics of the products, free trials should be provided. 40% of the respondents supports the statement by providing free access to avail trials in different ways to give awareness about the product qualities. Moreover, Kumar & Moller (2018) mentioned how brand familiarity motivates customers to adopt the brand products. All respondents supported those statements with positive responses whenever they use a strategy to provide awareness about their brand product. In addition, Tuskej, Golob & Podnar (2013) suggested that brand commitment and brand values have a positive influence to keep customers loyal to the brand. The statement was supported by all respondents as they keep their customers up to date by spreading awareness about the brand and their products.

Furthermore, as all respondents highlighted the activities they conduct in order to reach higher brand awareness in the market by different ways, Kumar & Moller (2018) mentioned it is important to achieve awareness among the consumer market to gain higher brand recognition. In addition, Till, Baack & Waterman (2011) explained how achieving better awareness about brand is to have a different and unique slogan that show their image to consumers. The respondents supported this statement by highlighting about how having a unique logo or slogan, helps them be recognized by their customers in the market among their competition.

It is argued by Jalleh, Donovan, Giles-Corti & Holman (2002) how convenient and effective it is when it comes to enhance and create brand awareness for a brand in the market by using marketing promotions and advertisements. 80% of the interviewees supported this statement as they mentioned in their responses that using marketing promotions showed a positive influence to their brand and gained a better brand awareness in return. Only 20% of respondents could not say they supported this as one of them doesn't use any advertisement other than free because of lower budget and the other did not get anything in return as they have no time to engage in them. In addition, Kim (2010) and Jalleh et al. (2002) argue that having sponsorships in events is an effective way to gain and maintain brand awareness. However, only four of the respondents (R6,

R7, R9 and R10) mentioned it as one of the strategies they use in order to gain and maintain their brand awareness through different event sponsorships. Instead, the rest of the respondents mentioned to use other platforms for such exercise.

Osman & Subhani (2010) state that to get a competitive advantage to maintain in a top position in the market is by doing continuous advertisements and promotions to keep the consumer aware of brand. The majority of the respondents supported the statement as they keep their brand on advertisements and promotions continuously except one respondent (R4) that doesn't have a budget for paid advertisements. Lastly, Weinberg & Pehlivan (2011) state that many well-known brands use social media as a platform to stay top-of-mind in online consumer market. The statement was highly supported by all of the respondents as they all use social media platforms to spread awareness about the brand in online consumer market.

### 5.3 Influence of Social Media between Business and Customers

The authors Boyd & Ellison (2007), Leimeister, Sidiras, & Krcmar (2006), Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides, & Alarcón-del-Amo (2011), and Fuchs (2008) concluded that individuals and companies considered the great importance of social media platforms as it helps maintaining social ties and in developing new connections between users. This goes in line with all of the respondents' answers who claimed and considered the use of social media platforms as it is a fast and effective way to create relationships with consumers and creating brand awareness as well. All of the interviewees supported this statement as all of them were engaged in social media networks. Additionally, they all strongly believed that with the usage of these platforms, they can make strangers into friends, friends into customers and customers into brand evangelists.

Moreover, Kim & Ko (2012) mention how social media networks make possible ways of interaction with customers in advertising, information, presale, after sales services. All of the interviewees agree on seeing the growth of business by using social media as their marketing strategy due to its flexibility and low cost. Which is relatable with the statements by Harris & Rae (2009), Christodoulides (2009), Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury (2009) who claimed and agree that social media shows higher growth as time passes and it is being used to create and increase brand awareness among the customers.

As in previous research literature, it is observed that social media platforms are not only for large size companies but also for Small-Medium and non-profit organizations as it is stated by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010). Majority of the respondents expressed their positive opinion which supports

this statement. Our findings also show that small businesses are highly involved in using or engaging in social media platform as it highly influences their business performance and also in creating brand awareness among the consumer market.

Moreover, Otto & Simon (2008) state that not everything related to social media marketing can be considered as positive as there can be privacy problems which may require structural control. This statement differs from the respondent's opinion as they consider social media as a positive tool for their business and none of them experienced such privacy problems. Further, Öztamur & Karakadılar (2014) mention how social media marketing emphasizes the importance of small business since these platforms have become popular among consumers. Additionally, how small businesses are more focused towards developing strategies to make them more effective. All of the respondents of the study motivated the statement by expressing the effectiveness of using social media marketing and it has improved the performance of these small business in different ways to improve the brand image.

Colliander & Dahlén, 2011) argue how the majority of social media platforms are growing in investment over traditional advertising methods as social media is being considered as part of a business marketing strategy. Social Media advertisements (such as Facebook Ads, Instagram and Twitter) are the only platforms which allow to achieve instant results. All of the respondents in the study highlighted how these platforms were effective for their business in a time period from 15 days to 1 year; where they could see the returns in sense of improving brand awareness, and an increase in consumers.

## 6. Conclusion

In the sixth chapter, the aim and the research questions are being answered, some limitations encountered, as well as a practical contribution addressed to small businesses. Lastly, suggestions for future research are presented.

### 6.1 Answering Research Questions

Through interviews with the owners and partners of small businesses, and going over previously written literature on the matter, the authors of this study have come to the conclusion that social media marketing highly influences small businesses in creating brand awareness. All of the respondents interviewed use this marketing tool to their advantage. Whether is simply by having a social media account or investing in paid advertisements within social media, these small businesses have gained a high benefit in terms of good brand awareness among the consumer market. The majority of the interviewees (if not all) expressed having noticed an increase in sales, an improvement in business performance, and definitely an increase in customers attention. All participants claimed to have either a Facebook or Instagram account, if not both. Some of them also used other strategies to get awareness like organizing events, weekly discounts, special offers, or even free giveaways. It should be noted that when these small businesses had these particular strategies, they were all announced through their social media platforms as they had greater exposure and awareness.

Additionally, we got a better understanding of how social media influences the relationship between a business and customers. All of the respondents explained that they are always trying to connect and interact with their clients whether is through private messages or comments; some even gave their customers support via telephone or email. These small businesses highlighted the significance of doing this, since they say it gives their clients a sense of trustworthiness, importance, and familiarity with their company as it increases their interaction and communication with their customers in a positive way; which goes in line with what the literature review says. Therefore, we can say the aim of this research study was achieved since we found a positive influence of using social media platforms in order to increase brand awareness and build a strong and good relationship with customers.

## 6.2 Contribution to the Field of Research

### 6.2.1 Theoretical contribution

This study has contributed and confirmed to the literature marketing research, in the context of creating brand awareness for small businesses. Based on our findings as we can see these highlight that social media marketing actually influences businesses' exposure in a better way than other advertising methods. Moreover, our findings also show the usage of free advertisement based on pages in social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are influential in engaging customers and keep them aware of brand products online at any time. It shows most of the small businesses mainly focus on only social media marketing tools as it provides effective results in less time, is less expensive than other methods, and it has a higher number of people it can reach globally. Further, we have added that brand is not the only factor that consumers think of, but the product itself sometimes has more value that contributes to the brand image; in the sense of having unique properties of business products that they offer to a target market.

### 6.2.2 Practical Implication

This study has arisen better implications for upcoming future entrepreneurs that highly focus on social media platforms as it shows effective results that are highly influential to the brand image. Furthermore, it is less time consuming and low cost as it has a variety of paid advertisements where you can decide the amount of money you wish to invest. Otherwise having a free account and doing self-promotion like posting or keeping up to date your online platform with current trends is a helpful way to increase the number of followers and customers in the long run and creating brand awareness in the way. Moreover, based on our findings, it shows that paid advertisements are highly beneficial in the sense of capturing more customers and retaining them to maintain a high position in the consumer's mind since they are most likely to pop up in people's stories; as they will have a higher priority to be seen by the public. Lastly, it is easier and faster to interact with customers, therefore increasing the relationship between company and client as their trustworthiness grows.

## 6.3 Limitations

In this study, 10 interviews were conducted to small business owners, therefore we only obtained their point of view when it comes to creating brand awareness and building effective relationships with customers. However, we would have liked to also interview clients to see if they agree with

their point of view or if they have different opinions on the matter. Also, the research done and the responses obtained were specifically related to small businesses; but it would have been also interesting to find material on large companies as well to see if they have different strategies or if they use social media differently. Additionally, since this research was focused on any type of small business, regardless if it was a product or a service company, we don't have a concise answer as to which social media platform is better for which type of organization.

## 6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has many aspects that need to be covered in the subject of social media marketing and brand awareness for small business. There is a high interest for further studies by covering a higher number of small business. We believe that it would provide a better contribution to this subject if the customers were included in the research study by conducting interviews or surveys on them; by including customers it will help to clear out any doubt and have a better perception about brand awareness and how social media actually captured their intentions. Doing so will increase the value in the empirical findings, and gain a truthful and detailed theme that covers both customers and business perspective.

Moreover, this research has opened more doors for future studies, for example, how social media marketing affects the relationship not only between B2C but B2B as well. The best and most used platforms depending the type of organization it is (product or service). Even the influence that a family or friends' partnership may have at the moment of making major decisions for the company, as the amount of money invested in advertisements. It is for sure that more authors should be interested in the continuance of research of small businesses and social media marketing, since the main focus has been mostly for large enterprises only.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions

#### **Business Background**

**Q1:** What is your business about, what products or services do you offer?

**Q2:** Are you the only owner of this business, or you have partners?

**Q3:** How many employees does your business have?

**Q4:** How long has your company existed, and where does it operate?

#### **What is their brand, and how do they bring awareness?**

**Q5:** What do you think is your brand?

**Q6:** How can people recognize your brand? What makes it different than similar businesses?

**Q7:** What unique properties of your business do you provide to make your brand different from your competition and gain brand awareness?

**Q8:** Do you have any other type of advertisements? If yes, do you include your social media account in order to gain brand awareness?

#### **Company's Social Media Marketing**

**Q9:** Do you use any social media platform as a tool to promote your brand name? If so, which one do you use and why?

**Q10:** Do you use paid online advertisements within social media? if yes, what response do you get? If not, why not?

**Q11:** Do you think that your social media marketing strategy has captured enough market position with the usage of social media?

**Q12:** How is your plan to spread a positive image of your brand through social media?

**Q13:** You think you convince your customers to spread the word through social media?

**Q14:** In all honesty, has social media marketing affected your business in a positive way?

**Q15:** How do you interact with the customers and how is your relationship with them in social media?