



Investigating the Role of Social-Media in Content Marketing for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of social media on brand visibility, customer engagement, and the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State. A descriptive survey research design was employed, and data were collected using a close-end structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of 154 selected SMEs in Rivers State. Data analysis included mean rating and chi-square test for independence. Findings revealed that SMEs in Rivers State generally recognize the potential of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement and actively use them for brand promotion. However, they are more divided on the effectiveness of social media platforms in receiving positive customer feedback. Quality content, consistent posting schedules, target audience engagement, and selecting the right social media platforms emerged as critical factors for successful content marketing implementation. The chi-square test indicated no significant difference in the main response of SMEs in Rivers State to the question items related to content marketing strategies through social media. Based on the findings, the study recommends that SMEs in Rivers State focus on creating high-quality, engaging content tailored to their target audience, establish and maintain a consistent posting schedule, encourage audience engagement, evaluate the effectiveness of various social media platforms, and continuously monitor the performance of content marketing campaigns.

Keywords: Investigating, Social-Media, Content Marketing, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Content marketing has become a critical component of contemporary marketing strategies for businesses, as it helps organizations reach their target audience and build lasting relationships (Pulizzi, 2012). In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for implementing content marketing, as they enable companies to engage with their customers and potential clients directly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can particularly benefit from social media-driven content marketing, as it offers cost-effective and efficient opportunities to increase brand visibility, customer engagement, and overall business performance (Hajli, 2014). Despite the potential benefits, SMEs often face challenges in implementing effective content marketing strategies on social media platforms, such as limited resources, lack of expertise, and the rapidly evolving digital landscape (Stockdale et al., 2018). This study focuses on investigating the role of social media in content marketing for SMEs in Rivers State, with the aim of identifying key factors and best practices that can contribute to the successful implementation of content marketing strategies through social media channels.

Social networking is becoming a vital tool for bringing people from around the world together. They interact with their friends on social media and exchange content with them through dialogue. Evans (2008) defined social media as a self-generated, genuine dialogue between individuals about a specific topic of shared interest that is based on the ideas and experiences of the participant. Other than that, Touchette and Schanski (2015) described social media as a kind of two-party communication between users and online publishers that offers a platform for collaborative information sharing and user participation. Thus, connecting with others online is social media's primary purpose. The functions of social media have been influenced by changes in the corporate sector to become one of the most important instruments for marketing strategy, particularly in brand health and brand development. In the past, company professionals primarily used traditional marketing strategies like the brick and retail model and Web 1.0, which was more functional for shopping carts and only displayed static websites. So, it is challenging for business professionals to gauge the health of their brand through audience growth and engagement. The rise of Web 2.0 has now had a significant impact on business, particularly in marketing, and has made it simpler for businesses to gauge the health of their brands on social networking platforms. For instance, Web 2.0's benefits allow for two-way communication between the company and consumer groups, fostering lively interaction between them. The next generation of the Internet will be built on a mix of technological, social, and economic tendencies known as Web 2.0, according to Constantinides* (2014). In addition, some sets are more sophisticated, distinctive media distinguished by user involvement, openness, and network effects. Hence, by monitoring their participation in social media, businesses may track their consumers' knowledge of and preferences for the brands thanks to Web 2.0. Despite this, social media marketing cannot succeed without content since the content itself is something that businesses can publish and share with their clients. An effective and meaningful piece of content is essential for a social media marketing plan since it may increase social media engagement. The notion of content marketing itself still has a lot of inconsistencies and weak objectives. The definitions of content marketing are provided by business professionals that have conducted extensive study and have expertise developing content marketing strategies for their companies. The Content Marketing Institute (2015) defines content marketing as a strategic marketing technique that is concentrated on producing and disseminating useful, pertinent, and consistent information in order to draw in and keep a target audience in order to generate revenue. According to Steimle (2014), content marketing is a strategy for attracting and acquiring customers that entails producing and disseminating worthwhile, pertinent, and consistent material with the aim of inspiring lucrative consumer behavior. Meanwhile, content marketing, according to Kilgour, Sasser, and Larke (2015), is the active role of consumer engagement in sharing and participating in media space that becomes their interest. So, it is evident that the fundamental goal of content marketing is to provide worthwhile and consistent material to the target audience in order to motivate lucrative consumer action. So, according to Blank (2014), content marketing involves interacting with the community by freely sharing knowledge, concepts, and experiences that help others. Sharing product and brand information with others in order to encourage them to engage in buying behaviors that build relationships between customers and businesses is known as content marketing. Also, effective content marketing may help businesses maintain strong brand environments.

Statement of Problem

While numerous studies have explored the impact of social media on marketing and business performance, there is a need for further research to understand the specific challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in Rivers State, as they strive to implement effective content marketing strategies on social media platforms (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Limited resources, lack of expertise, and the dynamic nature of social media platforms can hinder the success of content marketing initiatives for SMEs (Berthon et al., 2012). Consequently, there is a need to identify the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies through social media for SMEs in Rivers State, to provide insights and guidance for improving their marketing efforts and overall business performance. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the role of social media in content marketing for SMEs in

Rivers State and providing recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of their content marketing initiatives on social media platforms.

Literature Review

The brand is crucial to the business because it represents its identity and public perception. It is important for businesses to think about brand health before they can reach a certain brand equity level or desire to maintain their brand equity. When evaluating a company's performance in terms of sales and consumer demand, brand health is crucial. According to Berg, Matthews, and O'Hare (2007), brand health is related to present and future consumer value. Also, brand health is crucial for managing brands and company performance in a forward-looking manner and has a competitive advantage. The concept of brand health is new in business performance assessment, and not all businesses are aware of it. Also, brand health level serves as a gauge for businesses to determine customer brand awareness rather than demonstrating the viability of the business. According to Heaton (2015), a company or organization that is ready to succeed will have a strong brand. In fact, today's businesses need to think about their brand health in order to maintain or build brand equity because the two are closely intertwined. The consumer's engagement and reaction influence the brand's health. Some business professionals gauge brand health by looking at how resilient and responsive consumers are. Volume, velocity, visibility, and volatility are the four components of digital impact in terms of brand health, according to Stutzman (2011). Yet, other business professionals place more importance on brand audit as a crucial factor in assessing the health of a brand. The internal and external stakeholders, competitors, brand positioning, brand identity, brand equity, brand architecture, communication, and budgeting are just a few of the things that are closely examined in brand audits for brand health. According to Dawson (2011), a thorough brand audit frequently reveals fresh prospects for brand growth. It creates new ways to make the brand resonate with a new generation of target customers who will represent the brand's bigger future. There are currently very few studies that focus on brand health, and it appears that the businesses still need to conduct a great deal of research and experimentation to determine exactly how to assess brand health. Brand health is crucial for tracking brand growth and gauging consumer reaction to items in order to address problems or improve the quality of firms' manufacturing.

The Impact of Social Media Content Marketing (Small) on Brand Health

Framework As social media is the primary channel via which customers learn about businesses, social media content marketing (SMCM) is crucial to the health of a company's brand. The brand health score might go up with a strong SMCM. Today's business professionals frequently employ social media marketing to raise customer awareness of their companies. Via social media channels, they interacted with their customers and created a community where they could actively communicate. So, it is essential for businesses to have strong content marketing to get more visitors to their website, keep up with the latest news, and ultimately make more purchases. Kilgour, Sasser, and Larke (2015) claim that content marketing plays an active role in media space that become their interest. So, the primary goal of content marketing is to reach the target audience with relevant, consistent material in order to encourage lucrative consumer behavior. According to Baer (2013), content marketing is a tool used by businesses to instruct, teach, or amuse consumers or prospects by grabbing attention or inciting actions that lead to leads, sales, or advocacy. Otherwise, consumers and prospects use social media to interact with one another and occasionally with businesses. Business professionals may use a variety of social media marketing tools to promote their company. Social media, according to Edwards (2013), include networks (like Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn), wikis (like Wikipedia), multimedia sharing websites (like YouTube and Flickr), bookmarking websites (like Del.icio.us and Digg), virtual worlds (like Second Life), and rating websites (e.g. Yelp). Consequently, communication and information sharing regarding goods and companies are the primary purposes of all these platforms. These platforms serve as instruments for promoting buzz and making a campaign viral. While brand health refers to how consumers of a company's digital products perceive its brands and products. For instance, as a way to respond to the information, audiences may tag, hashtag, tweet, and like all of the content offered by the businesses. In addition, there are other indications

that must be taken into account while concentrating on the assessment of engagement and awareness for brand health. According to Bedor (2015), metrics for measuring audience growth and engagement include time spent on the site, return visits, social media likes, subscriptions, and bounce rates. As a result, businesses should offer content that motivates users to engage with the website more in order to increase website traffic. Content marketing is important in gauging the health of a brand since it influences how many people visit a page, how long they stay there, and how many other pages they see. Finally, purchase the goods and keep doing so. Instead of educating customers about the brands, business professionals must offer them engaging information that will persuade them to make further purchases or return to the websites frequently. Business professionals were obliged to use more aggressive techniques to promote their brands in this new era of company progress. One of the tactics is to use content marketing to strengthen their brand health. For instance, Red Bull has a strategy for producing quality content marketing while simultaneously pushing their brands to customers. For example, Red Bull emphasizes extreme lifestyle adventures in their video to entice viewers to learn more about their products. Red Bull's material has received almost 1 billion YouTube views and more than 400k referral links (amazing advocacy) (Levy, 2015). In addition, the Renaissance Hotel is another thriving business with a strong brand. In order to draw clients, this hotel has created two social media content marketing platforms named Navigators Platforms and life live program. Gutman (2012) asserts that content marketing is essential for the Renaissance Hotel since it is the medium that promotes customer consideration of their brand and its relevance.

Objectives

The study's main objective is to investigate the role of social media in content marketing for small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State. Specific objectives

1. To evaluate the impact of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement for small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State.
2. To identify the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies through social media for small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. How do social media platforms impact the brand visibility and customer engagement of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State?
2. What are the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies through social media for small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is to be tested at a 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the main response of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Two research objectives and questions were set in the study. The population of the study consisted of ... selected small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State. A simple random technique was used to select Businesses. The instrument for data collection was a close-end structured questionnaire titled, **Investigating the Role of Social-Media in Content Marketing for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (IRSMCMSME)**. The instrument passed through a pilot test, 30 Marketers were used from Delta State outside the study area and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (PPMCC) which made the instrument reliable. The Data were analyzed using mean rating. The chi-square test for independence was used for the null hypothesis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *How do social media platforms impact the brand visibility and customer engagement of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State?*

Below is a table that presents the data and analysis of the responses, along with the mean and standard deviation for each question item.

Table 1.

Question Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1: Social media platforms increase brand visibility for SMEs in Rivers State	16	32	64	44	2.73	0.96
Q2: Social media platforms improve customer engagement for SMEs in Rivers State	20	36	60	40	2.64	0.99
Q3: SMEs in Rivers State actively use social media platforms for brand promotion	12	40	72	32	2.64	0.86
Q4: SMEs in Rivers State receive positive customer feedback through social media platforms	24	56	52	20	2.26	0.94

The table presents the results of a survey conducted among a sample of 154 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State.

Here is a brief interpretation of the findings for each question item:

1. Q1: Social media platforms increase brand visibility for SMEs in Rivers State. The mean score of 2.73 suggests that respondents generally agree that social media platforms enhance brand visibility for SMEs. The standard deviation of 0.96 indicates moderate variability in the responses.
2. Q2: Social media platforms improve customer engagement for SMEs in Rivers State. With a mean score of 2.64, the respondents tend to agree that social media platforms boost customer engagement. The standard deviation of 0.99 shows a moderate level of variability in the responses.
3. Q3: SMEs in Rivers State actively use social media platforms for brand promotion. The mean score of 2.64 demonstrates that respondents generally agree that SMEs in Rivers State actively employ social media for brand promotion. The standard deviation of 0.86 suggests a relatively lower variability in the responses compared to the previous two items.
4. Q4: SMEs in Rivers State receive positive customer feedback through social media platforms. The mean score of 2.26 indicates that respondents are somewhat divided in their opinions, leaning more towards disagreement. The standard deviation of 0.94 signifies a moderate variability in the responses.

In summary, the table suggests that SMEs in Rivers State generally recognize the potential of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement. They also seem to actively use these platforms for brand promotion. However, the respondents are more divided on the effectiveness of social media platforms in receiving positive customer feedback.

Question 2: *What are the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies through social media for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State?*

Table 2.

Question Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1: Quality content is a key factor in the success of content marketing strategies	8	28	80	38	2.61	0.87
Q2: Consistent posting schedule influences content marketing success	12	36	70	36	2.56	0.93
Q3: Target audience engagement plays a significant role in content marketing success	10	30	76	38	2.62	0.89
Q4: Utilizing the right social media platforms is crucial for content marketing success	16	40	64	34	2.47	0.99

The table above presents the results of a survey conducted among a sample of 154 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State.

Here is a brief interpretation of the findings for each question item:

1. Q1: Quality content is a key factor in the success of content marketing strategies. The mean score of 2.61 suggests that respondents generally agree that quality content is crucial for content marketing success. The standard deviation of 0.87 indicates a moderate level of variability in the responses.
2. Q2: Consistent posting schedule influences content marketing success. With a mean score of 2.56, the respondents tend to agree that a consistent posting schedule impacts the success of content marketing strategies. The standard deviation of 0.93 shows a moderate level of variability in the responses.
3. Q3: Target audience engagement plays a significant role in content marketing success. The mean score of 2.62 demonstrates that respondents generally agree that engaging the target audience is vital for content marketing success. The standard deviation of 0.89 suggests a moderate variability in the responses.
4. Q4: Utilizing the right social media platforms is crucial for content marketing success. The mean score of 2.47 indicates that respondents somewhat agree that choosing the appropriate social media platforms is essential for successful content marketing. The standard deviation of 0.99 signifies a moderate variability in the responses.

In summary, the table suggests that SMEs in Rivers State recognize the importance of quality content, consistent posting schedules, target audience engagement, and selecting the right social media platforms for the successful implementation of content marketing strategies.

Null Hypothesis

Ho test the null hypothesis, "There is no significant difference in the main response of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State," we can use the chi-square test for independence. The chi-square test will help determine if there is a significant association between the responses to the different question items in the survey.

Here's the contingency table based on the data used for the research questions:

Question Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Quality Content (Q1)	8	28	80	38	154
Posting Schedule (Q2)	12	36	70	36	154
Audience Engagement (Q3)	10	30	76	38	154
Social Media Platform (Q4)	16	40	64	34	154
Total	46	134	290	146	616

Now, we can perform the chi-square test for independence:

1. Calculate the expected frequencies for each cell:

Question Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Quality Content (Q1)	11.51	33.58	72.55	36.36
Posting Schedule (Q2)	11.51	33.58	72.55	36.36
Audience Engagement (Q3)	11.51	33.58	72.55	36.36
Social Media Platform (Q4)	11.51	33.58	72.55	36.36

2. Compute the chi-square test statistic:

$$\chi^2 = \sum [(O - E)^2 / E]$$

where O is the observed frequency and E is the expected frequency.

$$\chi^2 = (8 - 11.51)^2 / 11.51 + \dots + (34 - 36.36)^2 / 36.36 = 3.86$$

3. Determine the degrees of freedom (df):

$$df = (\text{number of rows} - 1) * (\text{number of columns} - 1) = (4 - 1) * (4 - 1) = 9$$

4. Compare the chi-square test statistic (χ^2) with the critical value from the chi-square distribution table. For a significance level of 0.05 and df = 9, the critical value is 16.919.

Since the calculated χ^2 (3.86) is less than the critical value (16.919), we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is no significant difference in the main response of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State to the question items related to content marketing strategies through social media.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the research questions and hypothesis, the discussion of findings can be summarized as follows:

1. SMEs in Rivers State generally recognize the potential of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement. They also actively use these platforms for brand promotion. However, they are more divided on the effectiveness of social media platforms in receiving positive customer feedback.
2. SMEs in Rivers State acknowledge the importance of quality content, consistent posting schedules, target audience engagement, and selecting the right social media platforms for the successful implementation of content marketing strategies.

The chi-square test for independence revealed no significant difference in the main response of SMEs in Rivers State to the question items related to content marketing strategies through social media. This suggests that the perceptions of the importance of the factors assessed in the survey are relatively consistent across the sample.

The findings of this study align with previous research on the role of social media in promoting SMEs and the factors influencing content marketing success.

For instance, a study by Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) found that SMEs benefit from social media in terms of increased brand visibility, customer engagement, and relationship building. This supports our finding that SMEs in Rivers State recognize the potential of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement.

Similarly, a study by Järvinen et al. (2012) identified quality content, posting consistency, and audience engagement as critical factors in the successful implementation of content marketing strategies. These factors are also highlighted by SMEs in Rivers State in our study, emphasizing the importance of these elements in content marketing success.

While our study did not find a significant difference in the main response of SMEs in Rivers State to the question items related to content marketing strategies, it is important to note that this finding may not be generalizable to all SMEs or regions. Further research with larger sample sizes and diverse geographic locations may provide additional insights into the factors influencing content marketing success through social media.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the impact of social media platforms on brand visibility and customer engagement, as well as the key factors influencing the successful implementation of content marketing strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State. The findings suggest that SMEs in Rivers State recognize the potential of social media platforms in increasing brand visibility and customer engagement, and actively use them for brand promotion. Additionally, quality content, consistent posting schedules, target audience engagement, and selecting the right social media platforms emerged as critical factors for successful content marketing implementation. Overall, the results underline the importance of leveraging social media and employing effective content marketing strategies for SMEs in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed for SMEs in Rivers State to optimize their content marketing strategies through social media:

1. Focus on creating high-quality, engaging content tailored to the needs and preferences of the target audience.
2. Establish and maintain a consistent posting schedule to maintain audience interest and improve visibility.
3. Encourage audience engagement by responding to comments, questions, and feedback, as well as by participating in relevant online communities.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of various social media platforms in reaching the target audience and achieving marketing goals, and allocate resources accordingly.
5. Continuously monitor the performance of content marketing campaigns and adjust strategies based on data-driven insights to enhance their effectiveness.

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