

**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON SMES’ PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF PIP & NUT FROM THE UK FOOD INDUSTRY**

**Abstract**

The anticipated methodological trajectory approach involves secondary qualitative data collection. The research topic involves identification of the impact of social media on the performance of SMEs. Considering the non-quantifiable nature of the variable, the choice of method is justified for the proposed research. Thematic analysis will be recruited for analysing the findings of the study. Drawing insights from the previous works on social media marketing the present study has developed a comprehensive understanding related to literature gaps.

UK based food industry data and case study reports will be collected and analysed. Additionally social media marketing strategy related reports will be evaluated to understand the increased global and international market entries of SMEs. This will help to understand the internationalisation capacities of SMEs that becomes efficient due to social media campaigns.

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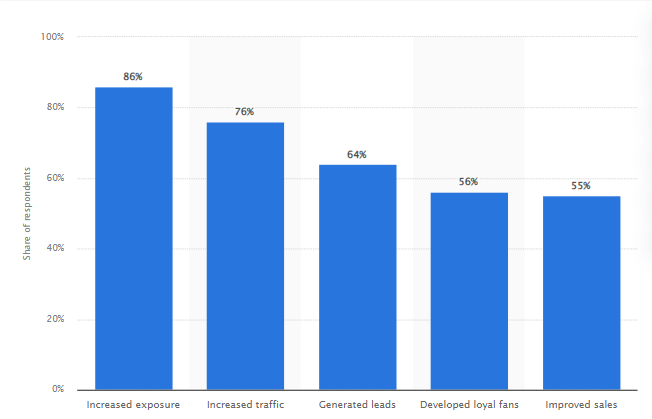
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# Section 1: Rationale

Social media marketing has emerged as a crucial component for ensuring success and wider exposure in the present data-driven digital world. The rise of Industry 4.0 technologies has further boosted social media platforms and prompted SMEs to choose social media as an effective medium to gain visibility and reach out to targeted customers. As the recent trend of social media marketing shows, social media has emerged as the most useful marketing tool for small businesses (The Economic Times, 2023). Since most of these businesses perform in direct-to-consumer setups which are projected to achieve record growth by the end of 2025, ensuring direct communication with consumers is necessary. A recent Statista study also revealed that gaining increased exposure was the major reason and a positive benefit of using social media for marketing purposes (Dencheva, 2023).  The purpose of this proposal will be to analyse the social media marketing of one such SME, based in the UK food industry, which is “Pip & Nut”. This company aims to make delicious food healthy, natural and organic through the manufacturing of nut butters and reducing the excessive use of palm oil or other harmful ingredients. Evaluating “Pip & Nut’s” operations in the UK will assist the understanding of the ways by which small and medium sized enterprises utilise social media marketing capabilities to perform in the competitive UK market.



**Figure 1: Major advantages of utilising social media for marketing**

(Source: Dencheva, 2023)

*Figure 1* highlights the number of benefits, which can be gained through the integration of social media marketing. Apart from achieving increased exposure from consumers, businesses can also increase traffic, generate leads, develop customer loyalty and increase sales (Dencheva, 2023). SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) are a crucial contributing figure in a national economy. As reported by a Statista report, there were 332.99 million SMEs worldwide in 2021 compared to 328 million SMEs in 2019(Dyvik, 2023). The consistent growth of SMEs over the year suggests that SMEs have found a strong foothold in their operating market. In fact, “National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights'' has estimated that in 2023 the number of SMEs will reach 400 million worldwide (Globalnaps.org, 2023). Although SMEs are increasing worldwide, the prevalent challenges in the highly dynamic operating market have been rising as well. “U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics” (2022) has found that 20% of small privately owned businesses fail in the first year of their business and by the end of the fifth year 50% of businesses fail. This number increases to 80% by the end of the tenth year of their businesses. Accordingly, Cox (2022) has underpinned that finding and attracting customers, increasing brand awareness and generating leads are the main reasons for SME failure.

Understanding the Industry 4.0 technologies is important in this context because it provides an idea about enhanced capacity to use social media marketing for increasing the market presence of “Pip & Nut” in the UK. According to Bai *et al.* (2020), Industry 4.0 technologies have heightened the potentials of productive efficiency and transformed organisations towards environmentally sustainable approaches. “Artificial Intelligence” (AI) and “Machine Learning” (ML) which are key components of Industry 4.0 tools help in social media marketing by providing users with the content they are interested in. Additionally, Basri (2020) argues that AI assists social media marketing of SMEs and leads to an overall increase in the customer base and thereby profitability. This is due to the fact that, Industry 4.0 tools enable AI driven social media marketing by understanding and catering to the demands of human psychology.

In this context, it becomes significant to conduct research on the link between Industry 4.0 technologies and enhanced social media marketing capabilities of “Pip & Nut” in the UK’s highly saturated market. Most small businesses do not have enough funds to launch a full-fledged marketing campaign, which further creates a challenge in increasing brand awareness (Chatterjee *et al.* 2021). According to a study by a US bank, 78% of small businesses fail due to a lack of business and marketing plans (Salesrenewal, 2023). The emergence of social media marketing has provided D2C small businesses and opportunity to launch cost-effective marketing campaigns across different social media channels. Contextually, Ali Abbasi *et al.* (2022) have identified that through the integration of social media marketing, small businesses have gained advantages in relation to exposure. The study has highlighted the ways 90% of US marketers found the shift towards social media marketing effective for generating leads. Similarly, in other countries, SMEs have been able to gain positive advantages in terms of increased sales and customers.

Accordingly, “social media” can be identified as a crucial medium for marketing as small businesses can significantly reach out to customers by launching a social media campaign. In that context, Lawal and Adejuwon (2023) have found that successful SMM on digital platforms such as Facebook and Instagram positively correlates with higher revenue growth. The aforementioned study was conducted in the context of SMEs operating in South-West Nigeria where Facebook and Instagram have bigger perceptibility among consumers compared to Twitter X (Lawal and Adejuwon, 2023). From this aspect, it is prominent that the success of the marketing campaigns launched by small businesses depends on the amount of social media perceptibility among its targeted consumers. For instance, small businesses with Gen Z targeted consumers develop marketing campaigns across social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Adobe, 2023). Additionally, the adoption of social media marketing as an effective marketing strategy is often motivated by the intention of gaining competitive advantages over competitors (Oyewobi *et al.* 2022). However, the main issues SMEs struggle with while adopting a SMM strategy are associated with insufficient resources and skills. Nonetheless, Ali Qalati *et al.* (2020) have highlighted that social media adoption can significantly help boost SME performance by playing a mediating role in terms of technology, organisation and environment. Understanding all these aspects, the research objectives of this study are as follows.

***Research Objectives***

**RO1:**To understand the role of social media marketing in the business performance of Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry

**RO2:** To explore the challenges faced while developing effective social media marketing strategies by Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry

**RO3:** To comprehend the opportunities that can be achieved by Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry**,** through the adoption of social media marketing tactics

**RO4:** To recommend effective strategies to integrate Industry 4.0 tools for enhanced social media marketing by Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry

**Research Questions:**

RQ1: What is the role of social media marketing in enhancing the business performance of Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry?

RQ2: What are the challenges faced while developing social media campaigns by Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry?

RQ3: How social media marketing campaigns can help in achieving opportunities for Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry?

RQ4:What are the best strategies to improve the social media marketing performance of Pip & Nut, an SME in the UK food industry?

# Section 2: Review of existing Knowledge

***Role of Social Media Marketing Determinants to Business Operation Growth and Success of SMEs***

Social media marketing has risen as an inseparable element of current marketing practices of all businesses regardless of their size. As viewed by Chatterjee and Kar (2020), “social media marketing” is crucial for SMEs’ success as social media marketing helps in the identification of consumer needs effortlessly. In addition to the perceived benefits of understanding consumer needs and demands, and increased sales and revenue, small businesses are also influenced by the ease of use, usefulness and “perceived compatibility” of social media marketing (Chatterjee and Kar, 2020). Additionally, the ongoing discourse on the implications of SMM on “small and medium-sized enterprises” business performance underpins cost-effectiveness as a major determinant. Similarly, the study by Chatterjee *et al.* (2021) has argued that SMEs often struggle with financial constraints, which often limit them from launching large-scale advertising campaigns. In such a context, effective social media marketing campaigns enable SMEs to market their products and services in an easier and more cost-effective manner. Hence, determinants such as cost-effectiveness, features of measuring campaign success and higher visibility from targeted consumers help in reaching business targets related to the performance.

***Challenges faced by SMEs in adopting social media marketing (SMM) in the food industry of UK***

Digital marketing has been increasingly used as a promotional tool in the recent past. According to Statista (2023) reports, nearly 72% of marketing experts in the UK devote the majority of their budgets to online and social media marketing activities. Given such high rates of investments in social media marketing strategies, higher budgets in this direction can be devoted by larger companies. However, as per 2019-2020 survey results, merely 29% of small and medium sized enterprises in the UK used social media marketing tactics to boost the brand image (Statista, 2024). Having limited budgets, SMEs operating in the UK possess low capacity to diversify funds for social media marketing and these acts as a major challenge for them in gaining high brand awareness. In sharp contrast, Eid *et al.* (2020) argue that, “Business 2 Business” (B2B) SMEs in the UK face numerous challenges in terms of adoption of social media marketing tools and thereby encounter issues while developing business collaborations and partnerships. As a result, SMEs in the UK face restrictions while evolving novel business models and value creation activities. Moreover, the food based small sized companies in the UK fail to develop effective social media strategy due to regulatory and legal compliance issues (NI Business Info, 2024).

Small and medium businesses often face challenges in successfully adopting social media marketing practices. The study by Effendi *et al.* (2020) traced the adoption of SMM in SMEs during the pandemic and found SMEs, which were affected by the pandemic, have higher awareness of social media marketing. Nonetheless, these firms struggle with a lack of resources as well as skill gaps. On the contrary, the study by Pervin and Sarker (2021) on Bangladeshi SMEs has found that SMEs operating in the BD market face challenges in terms of resource management, skilled workforce and insufficient technological knowledge. These are the factors, which significantly affect the social media marketing adoption among SMEs in the Bangladeshi market. On the other hand, Amoah and Jibril (2020) have argued that financial constraints, lack of access to the Internet as well as insufficient managerial skills have affected the adoption of social media marketing for SMEs. Considering the identified challenges in the literature, it is evident that skill shortage and insufficient technological knowledge are the prevalent reasons and barriers for perceived challenges.

***Opportunities achieved by SMEs through social media marketing adoption***

The adoption of social media marketing brings forth several opportunities for all businesses regardless of their size. Small and medium enterprises can seek new target markets and identify consumer needs through the successful adoption of social media marketing strategies. Understanding the links between Industry 4.0 technologies and social media marketing will enrich this proposal by offering insights into the ways SMEs based in the food industry of the UK can make use of innovative tools to increase their market share.

**Environmental Factors**

**Organizational Factors**

Less carbon emissions

Sustainable

Increased interaction with consumers

Increased sales and revenues

Utilization of Industry 4.0

Adoption of social media marketing

Competitive Industry



**Figure 2: Conceptual model of the research**

(Source: Influenced by Ali *et al.* 2022)

The above figure highlights an interconnected model of “social media marketing” by SMEs. Describing the above model Ritz *et al.* (2019) have compared TAM and DIY models of social media marketing adoption. This study found that apart from the perceived benefits of technology, Social media marketing adoption is also motivated by a sense of control, perceived economic benefits and perceived lack of availability. Based on these benefits small D2C businesses can maintain an effective interaction with their customers, which further helps them in gaining economic benefits. Additionally, Nurfarida *et al.* (2021) have found that the adoption of SMM helps in improving customer-company orientation, which further helps in enhancing interaction, identification of needs of consumers, and developing a loyal customer base.

Industry 4.0 technologies such as ML and AI possess the ability to improve future competencies of firms and enable them to reach out to a wide variety of customers. In support of the previous argument, Capatina *et al.* (2020) contend that AI based software can analyse the preferences of the customer base by assessing the sentiments and subsequently evolve approaches for triggering the purchasing intentions of customers. “Pip & Nut” being a small sized food company in the UK can gain opportunities of greater consumer share by using AI technologies. On the other hand, Dwivedi *et al.* (2021) argue that, customer engagement and customer journeys are significantly improved through social media marketing because specific strategies can be devised to target the customers based on their individual preferences. Thus, “Pip & Nut” undertaking social media marketing techniques can effectively promote its healthy and organic butter and other food supplements. This would help “Pip & Nut” to gain greater brand awareness and reach out to a wide range of customers easily.

***Recommended strategies to improve social media marketing performance for SMEs***

The growing scholarly literature on social media marketing adoption for SMEs has recommended several strategies to improve business performance. The study by Rozak *et al.* (2021) has highlighted that enhancing the digital skills of the workforce is an effective way to achieve organisational digital agility and business performance. On the other hand, Cheng and Shiu (2019) have recommended the utilisation of social CRM in the enhancement of customer involvement with the offerings of the business. Social CRM is the process of integrating customer-facing services, processes and technologies with social media applications to engage consumers in collaborative interactions. Other prevalent recommendations for the enhancement of social media marketing performance include harnessing the power of live videos through TikTok, Facebook and Instagram reels and YouTube shorts, utilising relevant hash tags, user-generated content and optimisation of visual content.

Although the prevalent literature on SME social media marketing has identified determinants, critical success factors, opportunities and challenges, the literature does not provide ample evidence of how social media marketing affects the business operations of SMEs. Additionally, the study has found no too little discussion on a comprehensive framework of social media marketing that can help small and medium-sized businesses in addressing challenges related to skill gaps and insufficient technological knowledge. Hence, the present study attempts to address these challenges and gaps by proposing a comprehensive framework or understanding for social media adoption for SMEs.

# Section 3: Research approach and methodology

## Theoretical and methodological engagement

The anticipated study is going to rely on interpretivism research philosophy. Interpretivism is a notion about knowledge development, which is based on the assumption that knowledge cannot exist independently of a researcher’s subjective interpretation. In this research, interpretivism will help the researcher interpret the elements of the existing literature on the concerned topic. In contrast to positivism, interpretivism recognises the importance of subjectivity in interpreting the elements of the research. Therefore, interpretivism will also allow the researcher to reflect on the disseminated knowledge and therefore, facilitate knowledge synthesis. The choice of research philosophy is, therefore, justified in this case. The ontological choice of the proposed research, similarly, is based on constructivism/subjectivism. Constructivism holds that social phenomena gain their shape from subjective perception and subsequent actions of social actors (Dudovskiy, 2024). In the proposed research, subjectivism has been selected as it supports the incorporation of subjective viewpoints. Essentially, to understand the role of social media marketing in SMEs’ performance, it is important to review different perspectives. Therefore, the involvement of subjective perception is inevitable in this case, which justifies the ontological choice of the researchers. Epistemology deals with the preferred source of knowledge (Ejnavarzala, 2019). In this case, authoritarian knowledge will be taken into consideration, which involves gathering information from existing sources like books, research papers, newspaper articles and so on.

As far as the research approach is concerned, the anticipated research is going to follow a deductive research approach. Deductive research involves setting assumptions in the initial part of the research and then testing those assumptions through data collection and analysis. The primary assumption in this research is that social media marketing exerts a positive impact on the performance of SMEs. This assumption is going to be tested through the process of data collection and subsequent analysis of the data. Therefore, the choice of deductive research approach is justified in this case.

## Case study selection

The topic of the research requires the researchers to investigate the effectiveness of social media marketing in the performance of SMEs. This research will be focusing on the market performance of Pip & Nut, which operates in the UK food industry and will provide important insights into the strategies that can be incorporated to enhance brand awareness and performance through social media marketing. Therefore, the research is going to rely on a range of case studies and peer-reviewed journal articles. A set of “inclusion and exclusion criteria” will facilitate the process of case study selection for the anticipated study. The following table demonstrates the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria based on which articles will either be selected or rejected for the proposed research. The case study selection for this topic will be emphasising on the real life examples and case studies of the SMEs operating in the UK food industry. This will improve the research by highlighting the mechanisms that the SMEs in the UK food industry can adopt to deploy a robust social media-marketing tactic.

| **Inclusion Criteria** | **Exclusion Criteria** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Articles published between 2020 and 2024 that are relevant to the SMEs in the UK food industry will be selected for the proposed research. | 1. Doctoral dissertations and thesis will be excluded from research. |
| 1. Only peer-reviewed journals and trusted third-party websites relating to social media marketing will be used as sources of knowledge. | 2. Articles, which are published in other languages than English and not related to social media marketing, will be excluded. |
| 1. Both empirical evidence and case study analyses will be included in the research. | 3. Articles that have self-reported outcomes will be excluded from the research. |

**Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

(Source: Self-developed)

## Methods

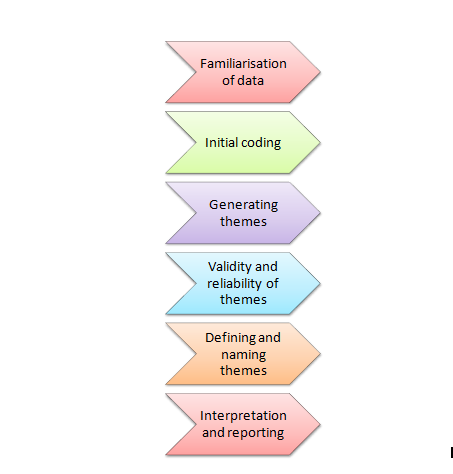
There are two categories of data collection, such as, “primary data collection” and “secondary data collection”. In the proposed research, the researchers will use a secondary data collection protocol. In contrast to primary data collection, secondary data collection relies on existing research. Some benefits of secondary data collection include time and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, another key advantage of secondary data collection is it provides a ground for further knowledge development, which is necessary in this case. Considering the research topic, secondary data collection would allow the researcher to understand different antecedents regarding how the integration of SMM influences SMEs’ performance in the end.

Qualitative data has been considered for the proposed research. Contrary to quantitative research that relies on numerical data, qualitative research depends on non-numeric data. Since, the chosen research topic involves gauging SMEs’ performance, which is a non-quantifiable variable; the choice of qualitative data is justified. However, a key limitation of qualitative research is that it is subject to vary as per the subjective interpretation of researchers. Therefore, a risk of bias is prominent in the case of qualitative research. In order to overcome this limitation, the researchers will include different perspectives, which, in turn, will help minimise the associated bias, thereby increasing the generalisability of the findings.

A non-probability sampling method will be considered for this research and 12 articles will be selected as a sample size. This means that the researcher will use their subjective judgement while selecting the subjects for the research. The search process will be conducted with the help of Boolean Search technique. Boolean search technique is a method of conducting literature search whereby relevant keywords and phrases are combined using Boolean operators, such as AND and OR (Scells *et al.,* 2020). Using the Boolean search technique, the time taken to navigate the relevant research articles will be curtailed largely. As a result, more time can be allocated to the thorough analysis of the gathered data. Some eminent databases, such as MDPI, Research Gate, and Google Scholar will be used to retrieve the most relevant research articles. The use of these databases will help in retrieving authentic information.

## Data analysis

The proposed research is going to rely on secondary/qualitative data. Therefore, the collected data will be analysed using qualitative data analysis methods. In the anticipated research, a thematic analysis of the data will be considered. As mentioned by Peel (2020), thematic analysis is an effective method of analysing qualitative data. The thematic analysis involves searching for common patterns in the collected data and organising these observations into specific themes. These themes emerge from specific patterns of data collected from the secondary research. After organising the collected data under specific themes, the data will be analysed. The first in thematic analysis is the identification of repetitive patterns in the data. These patterns can be any important or interesting information exhibited by the collected articles. Thereafter, certain codes are created from the collected data after which these codes are arranged under different themes. The researcher will refer to the stepwise method of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke. The steps are illustrated in the following figure.



**Figure 3: Braun and Clarke thematic analysis**

(Source: Inspired by Braun *et al.,* 2022)

# Section 4: Research management

The fairness of the research study would be maintained by strictly adhering to the ethical guidelines of research proposed by the University. The study proposes to follow the research methods approved by the university in the time of ethics form. Additionally, the study does not follow a primary research method and integrates secondary qualitative research. Since the study does not integrate primary research, there is no possibility of sensitive data leakage and harm to participants. Instead, the study will collect all the information from relevant research findings postulated by the previous works in this field. Concurrently, all secondary data sources will be properly cited and given credit in the bibliography section of the study as per the “Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988” (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). As social media marketing is an emergent and constantly evolving phenomenon, the present research would stick to effective inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed English articles produced after 2019 will be considered for the research. This would help the researcher to produce results applicable to current shifts and trends in social media marketing.

Furthermore, this updated result would further help the stakeholders (e.g., SMEs) to develop a comprehensive social media marketing strategy. Nonetheless, secondary qualitative research often faces the potential risk of bias, which affects the quality of the results. Olabode *et al.* (2019) have warned about the possibility of biases in secondary sources as well. Accordingly, the researcher of the present study will present a critical analysis of each insight and develop an argumentative approach to the study. In terms of data storage and management, the study will follow Braun & Clarke’s framework of thematic analysis. Appropriately, several thematic codes such as “social media marketing impact”, and “opportunities associated with social media marketing for SMEs” will be developed and saved as different folders in an encrypted password-protected device. Gathered insights and articles will be stored in respective folders of the device. Additionally, the device would be protected from data loss with the integration of the DLP feature. Each chapter will be drafted and sent to the supervisor for further improvement. These processes of research management will ensure the research is on the right and ethical track and the results generated are effective.

***Timetable***

|  | **Week 1** | **Week 2** | **Week 3** | **Week 4** | **Week 5** | **Week 6** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic Selection** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Gathering background information** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Literature Review** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Proposed Methodology** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Data collection and Analysis** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Conclusion** |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Figure 4: Proposed timetable**

(Source: Self-created)

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