




## Integration of Sustainability in Small Business Digital Marketing: A Qualitative Study

**Nasim Rahmani**  | Department of Management, North Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

**Shadan Vahabzadeh Munshi** \* | Department of Business Management, North Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

**Hormoz Mehrani**  | Department of Management, Ghazali Institute of Higher Education, Qazvin, Iran

### Abstract

This study aims to design a local model of social responsibility in digital marketing in small online retail businesses in Iran. The present research is applied in terms of purpose and a qualitative research in terms of data collection method. The statistical population in the qualitative section included 11 experts. The main tools for data collection in the field included semi-structured interviews. The grounded theory approach using MAXQDA software was adopted to analyze qualitative data and present a paradigm model. Based on the results of qualitative analysis, six categories of factors were identified including causal conditions, underlying factors, strategies, pivotal phenomena, intervening factors and consequences. Targeted marketing was identified as the main category in relation to the context. In relation to causal conditions, two main categories were identified, including moral responsibility and environmental responsibility. In relation to digital marketing as a central phenomenon of research, the indicators of giving customers the right to choose, retaining customers, providing services in accordance with

\* Corresponding Author: shadvahabzadeh@yahoo.com

**How to Cite:** Rahmani, N., Vahabzadeh Munshi, Sh., Mehrani, H. (2023). Integration of Sustainability in Small Business Digital Marketing: A Qualitative Study, *International Journal of Digital Content Management (IJDCM)*, 4(6), 287-309.

customer demands, establishing appropriate relationships and relationships with customers, and creating value for customers were identified. Commercialization strategies were identified as the main category of strategies and actions. Competitiveness of companies has been identified as the most important intervening factors; and economic development and service quality improvement were identified as the main categories of outcomes.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Small Business, Sustainability, Grounded Theory.

## **Introduction**

Digital marketing has been the dominant paradigm in marketing for the past decade. Customers now spend more time and resources on media channels such as websites, mobile apps and customer service channels. There is also a significant increase in customer conversion rates, thanks to social and digital video channels that have the highest rate of return. As a result, digital marketing has never been more important than it is today. Focus on data analysis, focus on personalization rather than a standard approach for all, support by social media marketing, interactive nature and "always on" instead of static and periodic are the most important features of digital marketing that increase the effectiveness of this form. (Bouri et al., 2021). Following the advent of information and communication technology, the physical world has extended to the virtual world, and life and social activities have expanded to the online realm. As such, digital marketing is now a growth engine for many companies in various sectors, from small businesses, large companies to financial and service institutions. In addition, digital marketing has the ability to increase revenue by 5 to 8 percent in 12 months by attracting more online traffic and interacting more effectively with consumers. Moreover, the McKinsey Group reports that some financial institutions have increased digital sales up to fivefold, while retailers can use this method to significantly increase sales (Vidal-Tomas et al., 2021).

Along with the development of digital marketing, many efforts have been made to integrate the traditional concepts of organizational management in the category of digital marketing. One of the classic and very important concepts in the management of organizations is company sustainability. Sustainable development was first defined in 1987 as "development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Most standards address sustainability issues through economic, environmental and social dimensions. One of the goals of sustainable development is to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, and it addresses the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. (Chauhan et al., 2019). The economy is becoming highly competitive and digital. Technological advances are breaking innovative perspectives on opportunities in various areas

of business and sustainability. In the context of new businesses, digital marketing must be designed and implemented in a way that uses all available digital tools to improve the company's economic growth while ensuring a healthy business without harm to society and the environment (Naoumova et al., 2021). While initially digital marketing was merely a tool to accelerate marketing activities and increase the effectiveness of these activities; the new paradigm of digital economics emphasizes that there is a significant alignment between marketing goals and community and environmental support activities (Dias et al., 2022).

Small and medium-sized businesses are recognized in most countries as important elements in socio-economic development. These businesses are especially important in creating job opportunities with low investment, regional development, organizational development of companies based on the principles of technology, product innovation and the creation of new methods (Omidi et al., 2020). Although they require less investment, these enterprises are more profitable and play an important role in creating jobs, creating a favorable environment for innovation and inventions, and increasing their exports. In many countries, these enterprises have been the main suppliers of new employment, the cradle of transformation and innovation, and the pioneer of new technologies (Mohammadian et al., 2021). While in many leading countries small and medium-sized companies have been able to use the high potential of digital marketing as a tool to gain a competitive advantage and increase their market share, the implementation of digital marketing in Iran is still in its infancy; In a way that most small business managers in Iran do not have enough knowledge about the principles and components of this form of marketing. This has prevented domestic companies from using their digital marketing capabilities to increase profitability and their market share. In this regard, the first step to improve the current situation and move towards the ideal situation is to identify and explain the various components of digital marketing in order to provide a roadmap for the implementation of digital transformation in small and medium enterprises. On the other hand, incorporating the fundamentals of sustainable integration into digital marketing will effectively improve customers' attitudes toward these companies. Providing a model of sustainable integration in digital marketing increases the awareness and improves the perception of company

managers about the nature and also the importance of digital marketing, and thus can improve the competitiveness of such companies. Therefore, according to the statement, the main question of the present study is; how is the local model of sustainable integration in digital marketing in small online retail businesses in Iran? More exactly, this research tries to determine the components of integration of sustainability issues in digital marketing. Due to the rarity of similar studies, in this research, the qualitative method and the collection of experts' opinions are used to answer the research question.

Regarding the use of grounded theory, the following questioned are pursued:

What are the Causal Conditions in the Integration of Sustainability in Small Business Digital Marketing?

What are the contextual factors in integrating sustainability in small business digital marketing?

What are the Intervening Conditions in the Integration of Sustainability in Small Business Digital Marketing?

What are the central phenomenon in the integration of sustainability in digital marketing of small businesses?

What are the strategies needed to integrate sustainability into small business digital marketing?

What are the implications of integrating sustainability into small business digital marketing?

### **Literature Review**

Organizational sustainability is often misunderstood to mean financial sustainability in the first place (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). Company sustainability is derived from the concepts of "sustainable development" and "three principles". The Brundland Commission report describes our shared future as sustainable development ie "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This desire to grow without harming the vision of future generations gradually became part of business philosophy (Jansen et al., 2018). In academic management circles, Elkington (1997) developed the concept of three principles that suggest that business goals are inseparable from the communities and environments in which they operate. While short-term economic gains can be pursued,

it is believed that disregard for the social and environmental impacts of these activities makes these business practices unsustainable. Measuring firm sustainability is possible through a combination of indicators that cover environmental, social, corporate and economic governance criteria. One way to assess firm sustainability is through a comprehensive performance index (Ludwig et al., 2022). According to the existing literature, the integration of firm sustainability in the company's operational and business strategies is of great importance, because firm sustainability measures act as a marketing element, provide legitimacy and positive perceptions among people in the community. Credibility Improves trade and creates a sustainable competitive advantage for ports. From this point of view, the importance of firm sustainability in various companies' tactics and strategies, including digital marketing, becomes clear (Klimek et al., 2020).

In a world where more than 170 million people regularly use social media, every working profession is expected to be familiar with at least the basics of digital marketing. To put it plainly, digital marketing is the promotion of products through the Internet or any form of electronic media. According to the Digital Marketing Institute, "Digital marketing is the use of digital channels to promote or market products and services to consumers and target businesses." (Ziyadin et al., 2019). Through marketing, a company can reach people all over the world without having to step outside its physical reach. When it comes to building your brand internationally, digital marketing is a valuable strategy for promoting your message. Campaigns can be launched easily and with little budget to cover advertising costs in many different countries. They can also target remote locations, something companies may not have been able to do in the past. Compared to other forms of advertising (such as advertising on television stations), digital marketing in the form of social media advertising is much cheaper. Digital marketing can also provide new revenue streams for businesses (Abirou et al., 2022). Digital marketing has opened the door to marketing of smaller and medium-sized companies around the world, and through its cost-effectiveness has put them in a competitive position with larger companies. For example, Facebook ads through advertising campaign tools such as "promotional posts" cost a fraction of the cost of printing brochures and can be for a specific group of people. At the same time,

companies using digital marketing will have much more access to a wider audience, potentially covering the entire world, and less paper going to landfills (Thompson et al., 2022).

To access the research background, databases and sites abroad such as Google scholar, Emerald, ScienceDirekt, Springer, Proquest, etc. as well as the Iranian counterparts such as the National Library of Iran, Nurmagz, Magiran, the comprehensive portal of humanitarian sciences, IranDoc, Allame Tabatabaee university digital library... etc. . were searched. Some of the pertinent researches carried out, are mentioned below:

Hagen et al. (2022), in a study entitled " Digital marketing activities by management partnerships", concluded that while the adoption of collective digital marketing channels is strongly influenced by the physical resources that define the shopping area itself, the frequency of updating of these channels is mostly influenced by organizational resources. According to the results of a research entitled "Analysis of using digital marketing for SMEs in Daye Lohor region, carried out by Susila et al (2022), most SMEs use digital marketing as a means to gain a competitive advantage. Krishen et al. (2021) conducted a research entitled " An extensive review of interactive digital marketing: and network analysis". In this research, they have mentioned the widespread acceptance of digital technologies and online social networks created for marketeers. By establishing various digital operating systems and information and communication ICT technology tools, organizations can compete with objective, relational and interactive marketing techniques.

Dilami et al. (2022), in a research entitled " Evaluation of the digital marketing strategy of mineral export companies in Bushehr province" used the RACE model. The findings show that the digital marketing strategy of mineral export companies in the province is not in a good condition, and the companies fail in the 4 dimensions of this strategy, i.e. "marketing plan, reaching the target customer, interacting with the customer (turning visitors into customers) and engaging customers." And thus, have not received a suitable score. Sarvari and Qara Biglo (2021), did a research entitled " Presenting the development model of customer relationship management system with emphasis on digital marketing strategies". The results showed that seven main categories including marketing, organizational environment, infrastructure, management and planning performance,

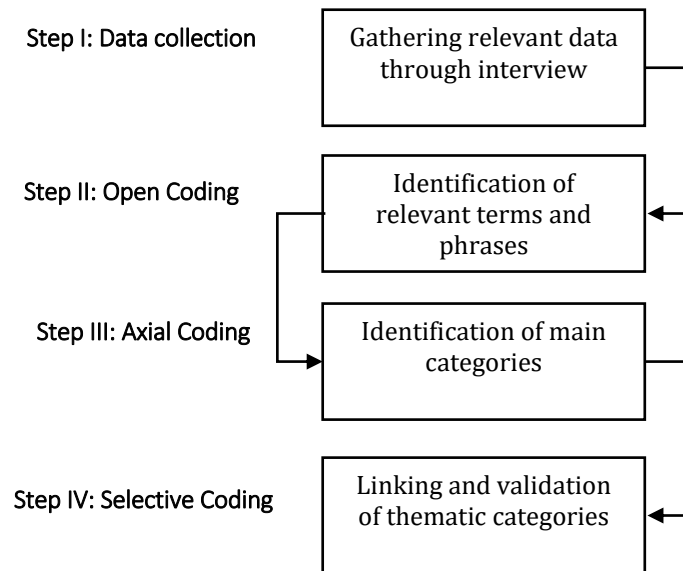
service quality, and relationship management are important for optimizing the customer relationship management system for developing digital marketing strategies. Ziyae et al. (2022) conducted a research entitled "Identifying the digital internationalization model of small and medium businesses (case study: pharmaceutical industry companies)". According to the findings of the research, the digital internationalization of small and medium businesses fell into two categories namely contextual factors and structural factors.

### **Method**

The present study is in the field of applied-developmental research. Also, as regards method and its nature, It is a descriptive survey done with a qualitative approach. In this research, the paradigm model is presented with the help of Strauss and Corbin model in the research method of data theory and based on the data collected in in-depth interviews concerning small businesses.

Data collection tools include semi-structured interviews. The statistical population of this research consists of professors of Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch in the field of marketing, managers and business experts who are fully acquainted with digital marketing topics in small and online businesses. Purposeful sampling method was used to determine the samples of this research and to determine this group of experts. The sampling method was snowball and we had 11 interviews (with 11 interviews we reached theoretical saturation). The coding of interview data in this study was done with a data-based approach specifically open coding, axial coding and selective coding.





**Figure 1. Schematic representation of research process**

All stages of qualitative analysis were performed using MAXQDA software.

### **Findings**

Analysis of qualitative findings began with open coding. This step involves categorizing the various codes into potential themes and sorting all the coded data into specified themes. Due to the high volume of information obtained in open coding, the results of this step are avoided. Then (axial coding) the components of data foundation theory were identified. Axial coding is the second stage of analysis according to foundation data processing theory. The purpose of this stage is to establish the relationship between the classes produced in the open coding stage. At this stage, by extracting duplicate codes and integrating synonymous codes, the indicators extracted from the interview texts are categorized. The relationship of other classes with the central class can be realized under six headings, which are causal conditions, central phenomena, strategies and actions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions and consequences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, from all the indicators obtained at the open

coding stage, the categories have been determined.. In short, eight main categories and 37 sub-categories were extracted as presented in table 1.

**Table 1- Main and sub-categories of research**

<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>The main category</b>
Giving customers the right to choose	Digital marketing
Customer retention	
Providing services in accordance with customer requirements	
Establishment of proper communication and relationships with customers	
Creation of value for customers	
Reduction of raw material consumption	environmental function
Optimal use of social media	
Green Advertising	
Increase of productivity and resource management	Social Performance
Benevolent marketing	
Planning and prioritizing activities	
Fair pricing	
Paying attention to the rights of stakeholders	
Establishment of targeted relationships with customers	
Creating common interests of the customer and the business	
Identification of customer needs	
Interacting directly with customers	
Interaction with customers	Commercialization strategies
Reduction of time as far as possible	
Systematic flexibility	
Use of new information technologies and digital media	
Promoting digital trust	Competitiveness of businesses
Diverse choices and new images in digital world	
Recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of competitors	
Attractive vision for the brand	
Analysis of consumption curve	
Advertising in due course	Quality of service delivery and development
Recognizing purchase decision process	
Improvement of interaction	
Decrease of dissatisfaction risk	
Increase of website visit	

Subcategory	The main category
Recognition of customer satisfaction	Economic performance
Selecting the good with regard to discount	
Increase and improvement of digital businesses	
Entrepreneurship and livelihood improvement	
Creating added value and sustainability	
Achieving the goals of domestic production	

Based on the results of secondary coding of the research, indicators of establishing targeted relationships with customers, creating common interests of customers and businesses, identifying customer needs, interacting directly with customers, interacting with customers as a basic category in designing digital marketing social responsibility model in small businesses and online retail jobs were selected.

Based on the results of secondary coding of the research, indicators of reducing raw material consumption, optimal use of social media, green advertising, increasing productivity and resource management, benevolent marketing, planning and prioritization of activities, fair pricing, stakeholder rights as causal conditions in model design and digital marketing social responsibility were selected in small online retail businesses.

Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the indicators of granting customers the right to choose, customer retention, providing services in accordance with customer demands, establishing appropriate relationships with customers, creating value for customers as a central phenomenon in designing social marketing social responsibility model in small online retail businesses were selected.

Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the indicators of time reduction, system flexibility, the use of new information and digital media technologies, the promotion of digital trust, the acquisition of data and the implementation of the measures are included in the design. The digital marketing social responsibility model in small online retail businesses was selected.

Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the indicator of recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, was selected as the category of intervening conditions in the design of digital marketing social responsibility model in small online retail businesses.

Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the

indicators of improvement of customers votes, entrepreneurship and livelihood improvement, creating added and sustainable value, achieving the goals of domestic production were selected as the category of outcomes in designing the social responsibility model of digital marketing in small online retail businesses.

In Grounded theory, data integration is of great importance. In the research process, after collecting data, and analyzing and interpreting them, it is time to present the model, in conclusion and summary of the research. In the first step, by examining the current situation, the obtained data is classified into 6 main categories. According to professors and experts, of all the indicators obtained from the qualitative data analysis of the interviews, 37 indicators have been used to design a local model for the integration of sustainability in digital marketing in small online retail businesses in Iran.

The following figure shows the paradigm model of sustainable integration in digital marketing in small online retail businesses in Iran.

### **Contextual conditions**

Contextual conditions are the conditions under which strategies and actions are used to manage the phenomenon. Based on the results of secondary coding of the research, indicators of creating targeted relationships with customers, creating common interests of customers and businesses, identifying customer needs, interacting directly with customers, interacting with customers were identified as contextual conditions.

### **Causal conditions**

Causal conditions are categories related to conditions affecting the central category. Causal conditions are events that create situations, topics and issues related to the phenomenon and to some extent describe why and how people and groups engage in this phenomenon. In fact, causal conditions mean the events that affect this phenomenon and lead to its occurrence. Based on the results of secondary coding of the research, indicators of reducing raw material consumption, optimal use of social media, green advertising, increasing productivity and resource management, benevolent marketing, planning and prioritization of activities, fair pricing, and stakeholder rights were identified as causal conditions.

**Central phenomenon**

Central phenomenon is a conceptual form of a phenomenon that is the basis of the research process. Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the indicators of granting customers the right to choose, customer retention, providing services in accordance with customer demands, establishing appropriate relationships with customers, and creating value for customers were identified as a central phenomenon.

**Strategies and actions**

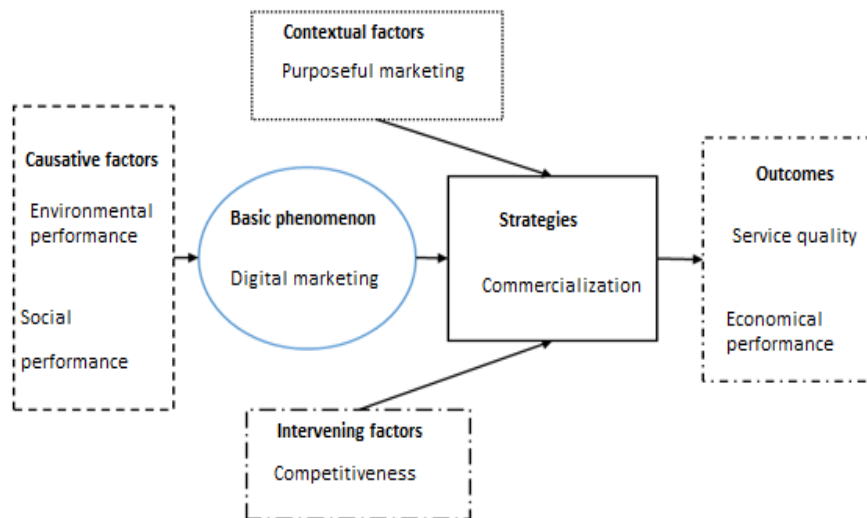
They denote specific actions or interactions that result from the focal phenomenon. Strategies and actions are plans and actions that help to design the model. Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, the indicators of time and time reduction, system flexibility, the use of new information and digital media technologies, the promotion of digital trust, the acquisition of data and the implementation of the measures were determined as the main strategies.

**Intervening conditions**

Intervening conditions are broad and general conditions such as culture, space, etc., which act as facilitators or limiters of strategies. These conditions facilitate and accelerate the implementation of strategies and cause delays as an obstacle. In this research, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, was selected as the category of intervening conditions in the design of digital marketing social responsibility model in small online retail businesses.

**Consequences (outcomes)**

The outcomes include tangible and intangible effective outputs that are created as a result of the design of the place brand model based on the sense of belonging to the brand in the society, and the outputs are the results of employing strategies. Based on the results of the secondary coding of the research, improvement of customers votes, entrepreneurship and livelihood improvement, creating added and sustainable value, achieving the goals of domestic production were selected as the category of outcomes in designing the social responsibility model of digital marketing in small online retail businesses.



**Figure 1. Paradigm model of digital marketing sustainability in small businesses**

### Discussion and conclusion

This study aims to integrate sustainability in digital marketing of small businesses. Based on the research findings, dimensions and components of sustainable digital marketing model in small online retail businesses in six categories of factors include contextual factors, causal conditions, pivotal phenomena, strategies and actions. , Intervening factors and consequences were identified.

The emergence of a phenomenon (here, the sustainability of digital marketing), requires that the necessary platform for its emergence be provided; this category is called context factors in grounded theory. In fact, the background conditions provide the path for the realization of the desired phenomenon. In relation to contextual contexts, targeted marketing was identified as the main category including indicators such as establishing targeted relationships with customers, creating common customer and business interests, identifying customer needs, interacting directly with customers, and interacting with customers. Target market is a group of customers in the available market of a business in which a business targets its marketing efforts and resources. The target market is a subset of the entire market of a product or service. The target market usually consists of consumers who exhibit similar characteristics (such as age,

location, income, or lifestyle) and are more likely to buy a business's market offerings or are likely to be the most profitable segment for business services (Sido et al., 2020). Once the target markets are identified, the business typically adjusts the marketing mix to suit the needs and expectations of the target. This may include doing more consumer research to gain in-depth insights into typical consumer motivations, shopping habits, and media usage patterns. Choosing the right target market is one of the final steps in the market segmentation process. The choice of target market strongly depends on the judgment of the marketer, after conducting basic research to identify the sectors that have the most potential for business (Shalton et al., 2018). Our results are in accordance with those reported by Dias et al (2022) who accentuated the necessity for purposeful marketing.

In relation to causal conditions, two main categories including social performance and environmental performance were identified. As it is clear from its name, causal factors represent all the factors that affect the occurrence of the desired phenomenon. The results of this research show that the orientation of the company's actions in line with environmental performance and social performance are causal factors in the integration of sustainability in digital marketing. These findings show the importance of the organization's commitment to factors other than profitability, such as supporting society and the environment; an issue that has been mentioned by other authors (Jansen et al, 2018; Klimek et al, 2020). The result is in accordance with findings reported by Vidal-Tomas et al (2021) who maintained that firms may enjoy customers' engagement through environmental orientation.

Identified indicators of causal conditions include reducing raw material consumption, optimal use of social media, green advertising, increasing productivity and resource management, benevolent marketing, planning and prioritizing activities, fair pricing, and paying attention to stakeholder rights. In relation to social performance, it should be noted that in order to perform tasks with the highest efficiency and effectiveness and thus achieve goals, in addition to complying with organizational rules, they need a set of ethical guidelines that help them in this regard. Creating coordination will facilitate their movement towards the desired situation. Observance of business ethics and social responsibility by increasing the legitimacy of the organization's actions, profitability and improving the

competitive advantage contribute to the success of the organization (Pourghasemi et al., 2017). Our results are in line with those reported by Chauhan et al (2019) who highlighted the use of social media as an effective tool for digital marketing. The rapid rise of environmental problems threatens all Bashiri communities. The source of these environmental problems can be attributed to the growth patterns of modern societies. Increasing consumer demand may lead to a degradation of the environment. However, the severity of environmental degradation can be dangerous for the quality of modern societies. After the increase of environmental catastrophes as a result of reckless business activities and careless attitudes of human beings, business organizations turned to environmental performance. In marketing activities, great attention should be paid to environmental performance in order to preserve the environment and improve the reputation of the organization (Rezaei Sufi et al., 2021).

In relation to digital marketing as a central phenomenon of research, the indicators of giving customers the right to choose, retaining customers, providing services in accordance with customer demands, establishing appropriate relationships and relationships with customers, and creating value for customers were identified. Accordingly, it becomes clear that the relationship with the customer is the pivotal or central phenomenon in the field of digital marketing (Koob, 2020). Our results match those of Naoumova et al (2021) and Dias et al (2022) who emphasized the role of relationships with customers. Although the volume of customer interactions has increased dramatically in recent years, a conceptual social contract still connects companies to their customers' desire to provide quality products and impeccable customer service that links the two throughout the customer's lifetime. As a result of customer engagement, there have been numerous industrial initiatives over the past few years that have promoted concepts focusing on business strategies and approaches to maintain acceptable, if not exceptional, levels. These concepts are often broadly combined using the term "customer-centric" (Gilboa et al, 2019). Customer orientation includes ideas, approaches, strategies and tactics that have evolved over time in line with customer orientation initiatives in various industries. All of these initiatives have a key concept in common: Focusing operations on the company's customers as a way to increase customer loyalty, reduce losses, and increase revenue, thereby providing superior



products and services to the customer community (Bean et al., 2021).

In relation to strategies and actions, indicators of time reduction and downtime, system flexibility, use of new information and digital media technologies, promotion of digital trust, data generation, and uptake were identified. In recent years, businesses in almost every industry have taken many initiatives to discover new digital technologies and take advantage of them. This often involves changes in key business operations that affect products and processes, as well as organizational structures and management concepts. Companies need to develop management practices to manage these complex changes (Crasswell et al., 2021). An important approach is to develop a digital transformation strategy that serves as a key concept for integrating the overall coordination, prioritization, and implementation of digital transformation in a company. The exploitation and integration of digital technologies often affect large sections of companies and even beyond their borders by affecting products, business process sales channels and supply chains. The potential benefits of digitization are numerous, including increased sales or productivity, value-added innovation, as well as innovative forms of customer engagement, and more. As a result, entire business models can be transformed or replaced. Given this wide range and its implications, digital transformation strategies seek to coordinate and prioritize many independent issues in the digital realm. Digital transformation strategies to influence the characteristics of the company in their domain, influence other business strategies and must be aligned with them (Chan et al., 2020). Our results regarding digital strategies are in accordance with those reported by Mohammadian et al (2021).

The competitiveness of companies has been identified as the most important intervening factor and indicator amidst indicators such as recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, measuring the size of competitors, analyzing the results of 2 and 3 zones, and publishing data on zones and zones. Evidence and cognition were identified in this regard. Increasing the mobility of competitors is one of the factors that prevent the full effectiveness of digital marketing in the organization; the reason for this is quite clear: just as we use digital marketing to drive our sales, so do our competitors (Doi et al., 2020). On the other hand, aligning marketing activities with the company's internal actions and effective employee participation in

digital marketing activities are also key requirements for success in the field of digital marketing. Half of the companies are facing internal resistance, especially from older workers, to create digital jobs and to digitize processes. More than a third of companies believe that digital employees are reluctant to work in their industry. In the financial industry, payroll plays the most attractive role in the hiring process. 43% of financial sector organizations also plan to increase digital talent pay over the next three years. Examining the collection of reports on the future trends of human capital in the digital age shows that the field of human capital has a strategic role in the digitization of the organization. Accordingly, the structure and functions of the human capital unit need to be reconsidered and the emerging capabilities of digital technologies such as mobile phones, cloud computing, data analysis and artificial intelligence should be used to bring about change in the field of human capital (Jiluba et al., 2019).

In terms of outcomes, quality of service delivery and development and economic performance were identified as the main categories. In this regard, indicators such as improving customers' attitude, improving livelihood, creating sustainable and added value and achieving the goals of domestic production were identified. The brand experience arises from the set of interactions between the customer and a brand, a company or part of an organization. Brand experience includes emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses stimulated by brand-related generators such as design, identity, packaging, communication, and the environment in which the brand is presented (Kim et al., 2019). Many marketing experts believe that understanding how consumers experience the brand is critical to developing product and service marketing strategies; because brand experience can be used to predict consumer behavior. The experience of a brand can be gained either directly or indirectly. The direct consumer experience arises from physical contact with a product and is an indirect experience resulting from advertising or marketing communications. Brand experience can be short-term or long-term and positive or negative. Brand experience is thought of as the impact, feeling, cognition and behavioral response and is expressed by brand-related stimuli and part of the brand identity and design, packaging, communication and environment (Koob, 2021). On the other hand, customer satisfaction is considered as a major consequence of digital

marketing, which is an effective factor in increasing loyalty, preventing losses, preventing sales decline, and also as the main guarantee of sustainable profitability of the company (Gang et al., 2020).

In relation to the underlying factors, it is recommended that company managers consider establishing purposeful relationships with customers as an important goal in their business. In this regard, company managers can purchase commercially available CRM software at the market and implement it in their company.

In relation to causal conditions, the first suggestion is for small and medium-sized companies to create social media pages introducing their environmental and social activities. The advantage of this method is that, firstly, there is no special cost for small companies, and on the other hand, companies can use these pages to improve their image among customers.

The first strategy proposal is the use of new information technologies and digital media. In this regard, it is recommended that small companies use content marketing methods and personalization of advertising messages to have a greater impact on the target market. Accurate description of products and providing information in full detail increases the desire of customers to buy the product.

In relation to the intervening conditions, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the competitors, measuring the dimensions of the hubs, analyzing the data from 5 zones and, publishing the data in zones and identifying them are raised as the main suggestions.

Based on the results obtained in relation to the "consequences" suggestions such as improving customers votes, increase and improvement of digital businesses, entrepreneurship and livelihood improvement, create added and sustainable value and achieve the goals of domestic production.

Based on the results obtained in this research, some recommendations are provided as follows:

It is recommended that small and medium-sized companies use the targeted marketing method to focus on certain market segments.

It is recommended to develop and implement internal regulations in companies to reduce the consumption of raw materials and energy.

It is suggested that Iranian companies follow the methods of small and medium-sized global companies with a good performance in environmental performance.

It is recommended to use the necessary training for employees to improve "green behavior."

It is recommended to use environmentally friendly materials and materials that are less dangerous in the supply of raw materials.

**Disclosure statement**

The authors declare that the results of this research are obtained from original data. Moreover, there is no conflict of interest.

**Acknowledgment**

The authors also thank the esteemed President of the Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch and all the esteemed professors who participated in the interview and welcomed it.

## References

- Abirou, M., & Abghour, N. (2022). A Review of Blockchain and the Benefits for Digital Marketing-Related Applications of Blockchain Integration. *Advances on Smart and Soft Computing*, 355-365.
- Bouri, E., Saeed, T., Vo, X. V., & Roubaud, D. (2021). Quantile connectedness in the cryptocurrency market. *Journal of International Financial Markets, Institutions and Money*, 71, 101302.
- Chan, H. W. (2020). When do values promote pro-environmental behaviors? Multilevel evidence on the self-expression hypothesis. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 71, 101361.
- Chauhan, U., Garg, R., & Chhikara, R. (2019). Corporate Social Responsibility and Digital Marketing. In *Handbook of Research on Digital Marketing Innovations in Social Entrepreneurship and Solidarity Economics* (pp. 293-309). IGI Global.
- Dias, G. P., & Silva, M. (2022). Revealing performance factors for supply chain sustainability: a systematic literature review from a social capital perspective. *Brazilian Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 19(1), 1-18.
- Dilami, Z., Hosseini, S., Ahmadi, H. (2021). Evaluation of the digital marketing Strategy of the Bushehr Province Mining export Companies using RACE model. *Journal of International Business Administration*, 4(2), 21-41.
- Gilboa, S., Seger-Guttmann, T. & Mimran, O. (2019). The unique role of relationship marketing in small businesses' customer experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 51: 152–164.
- Hagen, D., Risselada, A., Spierings, B., Weltevreden, J. W. J., & Atzema, O. (2022). Digital marketing activities by Dutch place management partnerships: A resource-based view. *Cities*, 123, 103548.
- Jansen, M., Van tulder, R. and Afrianto, R. (2018), "Exploring the conditions for inclusive port development: the case of Indonesia", *Maritime Policy and Management*, Vol. 45 No. 7, pp. 924-943.
- Kim, M. J., & Hall, C. M. (2019). A hedonic motivation model in virtual reality tourism: Comparing visitors and non-visitors. *International Journal of Information Management*, 46, 236-249.
- Klimek, H., Michalska-Szajer, A., & Dąbrowski, J. (2020). Corporate social responsibility of the Ports of Szczecin and Świnoujście. *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Morskiej w Szczecinie*.
- Koob, C. (2021). Determinants of content marketing effectiveness: Conceptual framework and empirical findings from a managerial perspective. *PloS one*, 16(4), e0249457.
- Krishen, A. S., Dwivedi, Y. K., Bindu, N., & Kumar, K. S. (2021). A broad overview of interactive digital marketing: A bibliometric network

- analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 131, 183-195.
- Mohammadian Mahmoudi Tabar, M., sotoodeh, S., Boudlaie, H. (2021). Identifying the effective factors of innovative marketing in SMEs in the IT industry. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, 14(1), 81-98.
- Naoumova, I., & Katrichis, J. (2021). A Corporate Social Responsibility View on Digital Disruption in Marketing. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Corporate Sustainability in the Digital Era* (pp. 543-560). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Omidi, N., mohammadi, E., pourashraf, Y., khalili, K. (2020). Developing a Small and Medium Enterprise Development in Rurals Ilam Province. *Journal of Studies of Human Settlements Planning*, 15(2), 595-612.
- Rezaei soufi, M., Khodsparast, S., mohamadi, S. (2021). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility Measures on Brand Love for Sport Teams. *Sports Marketing Studies*, 2(3), 123-152.
- Sarvari, H; Qora Biglo, Hossein (2021), presentation of the development model of customer relationship management system with emphasis on digital marketing strategies (case study of Tabriz travel companies), modern researches in entrepreneurship management and business development, 4(3), 329 – 348
- Susila, E., Yulianti, L., & Pratminingsih, S. A. (2022). Analysis of Digital Marketing Utilization for MSMEs in Dayeuhluhur District. *Central Asia And The Caucasus*, 23(1).
- Thompson, J. D., & Weldon, J. (2022). Digital Marketing. In *Content Production for Digital Media* (pp. 35-46). Springer, Singapore.
- Vidal-Tomás, D. (2021). The entry and exit dynamics of the cryptocurrency market. *Research in International Business and Finance*, 58, 101504.
- Ziyadin, S., Suieubayeva, S., & Utegenova, A. (2019, April). Digital transformation in business. In *International Scientific Conference “Digital Transformation of the Economy: Challenges, Trends, New Opportunities”* (pp. 408-415). Springer, Cham
- Ziyae, B., Rezvani, M., Dara, M. (2022). Identifying the Digital Internationalization Pattern of Small and Medium Businesses (Case Study: Pharmaceutical Industry Companies). *Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, 14(4), 676-695.

## Appendix 1. Author's Profile Guide

### A Sample Profile of Faculty Members:

Academic Rank (Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Full Professor), Department, Faculty, University, City, Country.

Example: Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology Dept., Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

### A Sample of Student Profile:

The Student of (Bachelor, Master, Ph.D.), Field of Study, University, City, Country.

Example: M.Sc. Student in Educational Psychology, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

### A Sample of Profile for Individuals and Freelance Researchers:

Degree (Bachelor, Master, Ph.D.), Field of Study, University, City, Country / Organization or Workplace, City, Country.

Example: Master of Educational Psychology, Allameh Tabataba'i University / Education Department, Tehran, Iran.

---

**How to Cite:** Rahmani, N., Vahabzadeh Munshi, Sh., Mehrani, H. (2023). Integration of Sustainability in Small Business Digital Marketing: A Qualitative Study, *International Journal of Digital Content Management (IJDCM)*, 4(6), 287-309.

DOI: 10.22054/dcm.2022.68361.1107



International Journal of Digital Content Management (IJDCM) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

