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**Social Media Marketing Strategies:
A Multiple Case Study of Landscape Industry
Small Businesses in Alabama**

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PRESENTATION**

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Abstract

Marketing research has indicated social media use as a pivotal factor in small business success. However, the adoption of social media best practices in small businesses remains deficient. This study incorporated a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design to explore how landscape industry small business owners use social media marketing strategies to improve business viability. Results indicated that successful marketing strategies incorporated service, education, and holiday content utilizing Facebook as a primary social media tool. Results of this study might benefit small businesses to improve their long-term viability through highlighting successful applications of social media marketing strategies.

Completed Research

Problem

Small business owners use online communications parsimoniously as part of their marketing strategy despite models suggesting the importance of social media utilization in attracting new customers (Perry, 2014).

Almost 50% of all small businesses close within 5 years due, in part, to poorly executed or inadequate marketing strategies (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Perry, 2014; Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Some small business owners are ineffectively using, or not using, social media marketing strategies despite social media's marketability, resulting in decreased business viability.

The specific problem is that some landscape industry **small business owners lack strategies to adopt innovative social media** marketing strategies to help ensure business viability.

Purpose

The purpose of this **qualitative multiple-case study** is to explore how landscape industry small business owners have successfully used **social media marketing strategies** to help ensure business viability.

Significance

Business

- Increased viability of landscape small businesses in the local economy through the use of social media marketing strategies.



Social Change

- Derivative local economic improvements leading to enhanced quality of life and other improvements within the local community

Theory or Framework

Adoption Theory

- The adoption rate of innovations followed the S-shaped curve (Tarde, 1903).
- Innovation is a practice perceived as new by an individual (Rogers, 1995). The innovation does not necessarily have to be objectively new, particularly if the individual perceives the innovation as new.

Social Exchange Theory

- The exchange of social ideas in a transaction-oriented style which relied primarily on the delivery of products (Homans, 1958)
- Expanded understanding of social exchange to include the impact of larger environmental factors and the complexity of exchanges (Duane, et al. 2016).

Relevant Scholarship

Small businesses fail at an alarming rate. 54% of small businesses fail within the first 5 years of operation (Gray & Mabey, 2005; Perry, 2014; Atanassova & Clark, 2015)

Marketing is a pivotal factor in small business success (Gray & Mabey, 2005; Perry, 2014; Atanassova & Clark, 2015)

Underutilization of low-cost marketing options despite evidence suggesting benefits to small business success (Castronova & Huang, 2012)

Small businesses' adoption of social media marketing makes them a stronger market contender through acquired market intelligence (Atanassova & Clark, 2015).

The landscape industry is a large and growing field

- \$78 billion in annual revenues, with an annual growth rate of about 3.9% (IBISWorld, 2016; National Association of Landscape Professionals, 2016).

The average landscape company

- employs approximately 15 individuals
- approximately \$1 million in annual revenue
- net profit of 11% (Lawn & Landscape, 2016).

Little scholarly research documenting adoption of landscape small businesses' social media marketing and influence in generating positive market outcomes (Broekemeir et. al, 2015).

Research Question

How do landscape industry small business owners successfully use social media marketing strategies to ensure business viability?

Participants

Target Population

- Landscape industry small business owners (<50 employees) located in the Central AL. Participants were contacted through social media sites

Sample Size

- A purposeful sampling strategy was used to sample 4 landscape industry small business owners located in the Auburn, Alabama metro area, who have successfully used social media marketing.

Procedures

Semi structured interviews with initial contact made **through** potential participants social media sites or other **electronic exchange**. Once a participant agreed to participate, they were emailed consent forms, emailed an interview questionnaire which was returned to me **via Facebook Messenger** and email. Follow-up and **member checking** was conducted for participants to clarify their intended responses **ensuring reliability and validity**.

Social media website data collection from Facebook, Instagram, Company Website, and Twitter.

Analysis

Thematic analysis of interviews using Nvivo.

Content analysis of the social media sites.

Themes

Marketing Strategy Adoption

Social Media Marketing included Facebook, Website, Instagram, and Twitter. Word of mouth Marketing (WOM) often included social media. Miscellaneous marketing tools such as Yellow Book, Yellow Pages, Newspaper, and Magazines all had little to no success.

Using social exchange theory the direct alignment in customer reviews creating an online word-of-mouth movement that promotes relevance and benefit for the potential customer is evident with the adoption of a bidirectional communication exchange preferred over one-way communication (Chang et al. 2014; Csordas & Gati, 2014)

Primary Types of Social Media Used

Facebook was the primary social media tool use due to a general lack of two-way activity in company websites, Twitter, and Instagram. These findings aligned with previous research noting the importance of two-way communication in social media use (Chang et al. 2014; Csordas & Gati, 2014).

Social Media Content

Service, holiday, and educational posts created the opportunity for new and continued business-customer relationships resulting in content and value creation

Benefits and Challenges of Social Media as a Marketing Strategy

Benefits included low cost and increased visibility, while challenges included trial and error process, lack of social media skills, experience, and difficulty directing customers to sites.

Interpretation

Small business social media marketing facilitates effective business practice by enabling more extensive two-way communication at a lower cost than traditional marketing routes. Social media can be a valuable tool to add to the overall marketing strategy when matched with market usage.

While effective business practice might be to adopt social media marketing, the obstacles might be insurmountable to some who lack computer literacy or resources to create and maintain a social media presence.

Despite challenges presented, given the possibility for increased visibility and effective WOM marketing at a low cost, small businesses should attempt to incorporate some kind of resources to enable the adoption of social media marketing for social exchange at least on some level.

Limitations

Small sample size

Potential participants limited by whether they responded to social media inquiry

Limited transferability due to only using one location in Central AL

Potential researcher bias mitigated through member checking and triangulation

Recommendations

Adoption of social media marketing strategies a pivotal area to focus training efforts and literature through Small Business Administration (SBA); State and community level small business programs

Training

- Local community classes on how to develop and effectively use social media sites to promote a small business, how to use social media on a smart device, resources on how to find public computers

Literature

- Available at public small business resource locations, such as the SBA, local libraries, labor boards, and community centers

Social Change Implications

Entrepreneurship and small business activity contribute to the larger society creating financial, environmental, and social wealth (Zahra & Wright, 2015).

Continued failure rate of small businesses has prevented realizing the full benefits of social change.

If small businesses can improve their long-term viability by incorporating social media marketing strategies, then social change will come in the forms of

- an improved local economy
- improved quality of life factors

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