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Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Shannon Springob

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses

by

Shannon Springob

MS, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 2021

BS, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 2017

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2025

Abstract

The inability of many small businesses to effectively use digital marketing is a critical challenge for small business owners. Small business owners who lack effective digital marketing strategies are at greater risk of facing failure. Grounded in the do-it-yourself (DIY) behavioral theory, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was conducted to identify, analyze, and explore the effective strategies employed by small business owners in the development and implementation of effective digital marketing campaigns. The participants included six small business owners in the United States who have used DIY digital marketing strategies within their businesses. Data were collected using semistructured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three themes: (a) development of DIY digital marketing strategies, (b) implementation approaches, and (c) metrics for assessing success. A key recommendation is that, despite challenges, DIY marketing can support professional and business growth, cost savings, and enhance brand control. Implications for positive social change that arise from these results include the potential to equip business owners with actionable insights to enhance their DIY digital marketing strategies, ultimately empowering them to navigate the digital landscape more effectively, leading to improved probability of business success.

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Dedication

Levi and Mia, this is for you—to show you that you can do hard things, even when the odds feel stacked against you. Never doubt your strength, your determination, or your ability to achieve anything you set your heart to. You inspire me every day, and I hope this journey shows you that perseverance always pays off.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Conducting do-it-yourself (DIY) digital marketing can be challenging for small business owners. These difficulties include steep learning curves, time constraints, and less effective results compared to professional efforts (Khademi-Vidra & Bujdosó, 2020; Wolf & McQuitty, 2011; Yawised et al., 2021). To improve outcomes, business owners must develop proactive, responsive, and reactive resilience (Yawised et al., 2021). This study was conducted to examine the strategies small business owners use to implement DIY digital marketing while addressing challenges to achieve growth in a competitive marketplace.

Marketing is an essential component of business success. Technological advancements have expanded opportunities for conducting marketing activities and reduced the need for professional assistance (Sharabati et al., 2024). However, business owners who choose to manage their own digital marketing must understand how to execute it effectively to achieve success.

Effective digital marketing requires strategic planning, sufficient time, resources, and an understanding of key components. Execution involves consumer targeting, quality content creation, cost management, campaign optimization, and effective channel use (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). These tasks can be demanding for entrepreneurs with limited experience or support (Son & Niehm, 2021), yet addressing these challenges is essential for small businesses to remain competitive in the digital marketplace.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some small business owners lack effective digital marketing strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study is to systematically identify, analyze, and explore the effective strategies employed by small business owners in the development and implementation of effective digital marketing campaigns. In response to this business problem, a qualitative analysis was conducted using a pragmatic inquiry, including semistructured interviews. Interview participants met the following requirements: business leader, small business owner(s) in the United States, no employees, 3-plus years in business, have experience in developing and implementing DIY digital marketing strategies (marketing conducted by the business owner and not outsourced), and utilizes Instagram as a major source of online coverage. For this study, I employed purposeful sampling and chose six participants. The data sources used are interviews and public records/documents, which include social media profiles and business websites. Within this research study, the DIY behavioral theory serves as the conceptual framework. The DIY behavioral theory was developed by Wolf and McQuitty in 2011 and further explored in 2013 (Wolf & McQuitty, 2011, 2013).

Research Question

What effective strategies do small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY behavior in digital marketing to enhance overall success and growth?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

An assumption is a causal inference accepted as true within a study without requiring direct proof or extensive analysis (Ellis & Spiegler, 2025). However, this inference must be deemed sufficiently plausible. This study includes multiple assumptions, some of which apply broadly to research and others that are specific to the topic. This study includes several assumptions, both general and specific to the topic. One assumption is that individuals can engage in DIY digital marketing effectively; however, research shows digital competence varies and is only one factor among many, such as creativity, strategy, and adaptability, that influence outcomes. Even with the same tools and knowledge, results can differ greatly. Another assumption is that findings may be generalized to a broader population of small business owners, though the limited sample size and lack of large-scale studies make this uncertain. Despite this, the study assumes its conclusions hold relevance beyond the immediate participants, recognizing that further research is needed to validate this assumption across more diverse business types and contexts.

Limitations

A limitation is a setback in the execution or design of the study. Limitations may affect study results and must be known by the audience. (Smith et al., 2022). In research, limitations are inherent, as it is impossible to gather data from every individual with experience or exposure to the study's subject. Despite these constraints, researchers strive to draw data-backed conclusions within the boundaries of their study. This study includes

several limitations. The first is the sample size. While a sample size of six can provide insights, it cannot be compared to a sample size of thousands of participants. Secondly, due to the rapidly evolving nature of technology, changes in tools and platforms may eventually impact the relevance of the findings. Lastly, time constraints and the broad scope of the topic limited the depth of certain subtopic exploration.

Transition

Section 1 of this study established the foundation of the project by outlining its problem, purpose, significance, and any relevant assumptions and limitations. It introduced key concepts related to digital marketing strategies for small business owners, with a particular focus on the growing adoption of DIY methods. Building upon this groundwork, Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of existing literature, examining both the advantages and challenges associated with DIY digital marketing strategies. Section 3 provides an overview of the chosen research methodology. Lastly, Section 4 presents the study's findings and conclusions.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This review examines the literature on DIY behavior, digital marketing, technological advancements, small business success strategies, entrepreneurial mindset, consumer engagement, and methods for measuring digital marketing effectiveness. DIY behavior, originally studied in the context of home improvement, highlights motivations such as cost savings, personal fulfillment, and skill development (Wolf & McQuitty, 2011). While these principles can extend to business activities, research exploring their application in digital marketing is limited (Emini & Merovci, 2021; Ritz et al., 2019). This gap is significant because many small business owners develop their own marketing strategies without formal training and outside assistance (Emini & Merovci, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry is to identify and analyze the strategies small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY digital marketing campaigns.

Search Strategy

The literature search for this review was conducted to identify scholarly and practical sources relevant to the DIY behavioral model, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing. Primary databases included the Walden University Library, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. Search terms were aligned with the study's core objectives and included *DIY behavioral model*, *DIY digital marketing*, *DIY entrepreneurship*, *digital marketing strategy*, *small business digital marketing*, *small*

business digital marketing struggles, and *digital marketing*. Boolean operators (e.g., AND, OR) were used to refine results and capture relevant interdisciplinary research.

Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed sources published within the last 5 years (December 2020–December 2025) to ensure current trends and practices were reflected. Older seminal works were retained to provide theoretical context for the DIY behavioral model (Wolf & McQuitty, 2011). The final literature review comprised 117 references: 107 peer-reviewed journals (91.5%), one article, three books, three conference papers, and three government websites. Of these, 117 sources (87.2%) were published within 5 years of the study’s anticipated completion date, ensuring the review reflected the current state of knowledge. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the references included.

Table 1

Reference Breakdown

Reference type	Less than 5 years	Greater than 5 years	Total	Cumulative %
Peer-reviewed journals	96	11	107	91.45%
Books	1	2	3	.03%
Dissertations	0	0	0	0
Websites and others	2	1	3	.03%
Conferences	2	1	3	.03%
Total sources	102	15	117	100%
Percentage of total	87.18%	12.82%	100%	

This search strategy provided a solid foundation for analyzing the research question: What effective strategies do small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY behavior in digital marketing to enhance success and growth? By reviewing reference lists and applying clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, the process

incorporated both foundational theories and recent advancements (Emini & Merovci, 2021; Ritz et al., 2019). While the focus remained on current knowledge, seminal works were selectively included when essential to understanding the study's core topics.

This balanced approach ensured the literature base was both contemporary and academically rigorous, revealing key strategies small business owners use to navigate digital marketing challenges. The review highlights innovative DIY tactics that drive resilience and growth, offering practical insights into how these behaviors enhance marketing effectiveness within the entrepreneurial landscape.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The findings of this study indicate that small business managers can improve digital marketing effectiveness by intentionally developing DIY skills in areas such as social media engagement, content creation, and data analysis (Emini & Merovci, 2021; Ritz et al., 2019). Identifying skill gaps through self-assessment or peer feedback enables targeted learning, whether through short courses, free online resources, or mentorship (Laradi et al., 2023). Combined with experimentation and adaptability, these efforts lead to more consistent and impactful marketing performance.

A central advantage of DIY digital marketing is control over brand messaging. By creating and monitoring their own content, owners reduce reliance on costly external firms and can adapt messaging quickly to market changes (Emini & Merovci, 2021). Affordable digital tools also support nontechnical users in producing graphics, videos, and engagement reports with minimal expense (Mulyono et al., 2025). Establishing consistent time for marketing activities is critical, as irregular posting diminishes

visibility and customer trust (Mufadhhol et al., 2024). Repurposing content across platforms extends reach, while authentic, timely updates outperform infrequent polished ones (Halwani & Cherry, 2023; Hatamleh et al., 2023). Diversifying formats and channels reduces vulnerability to shifting algorithms and ensures broader audience connection (Feitosa & Mosconi, 2022; Haenlein et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022).

Continuous learning emerged as essential. Owners who seek knowledge through peer collaboration, networking, or emerging tools such as AI are better positioned to adapt to trends (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2023). Support from government and business organizations, through low-cost training and workshops, can further enhance skills without imposing financial strain (Hadjielias et al., 2022; Lall et al., 2022).

Finally, step-by-step implementation plans that outline specific tasks, timelines, and measurable objectives help align marketing with business goals and track progress (Boufim & Barka, 2021; Ologunibi & Taiwo, 2023). Integrating DIY motivations with structured strategies enables small business owners to maintain visibility, reduce external reliance, and foster stronger customer connections. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, adaptability and consistent hands-on engagement remain key competitive advantages.

Conceptual Framework: The DIY Behavioral Model

The DIY behavior model, as introduced by Wolf and McQuitty in 2011, offers a foundational explanation for the inclination towards DIY activities among consumers, an interest initially sparked by the realm of home improvement. The DIY behavioral model unveils motivations for those inclined to undertake tasks independently, foregoing

professional services in pursuit of personal creativity and effort. The contributions of Wolf and McQuitty (2011, 2013), further expanded by Ritz and Wolf (2015) and Ritz et al. (2019), underscore the model's significance in understanding the complex decision-making processes behind these self-reliant approaches. The DIY behavior model, as described by Ritz et al. (2019), posits that individuals develop the products they consume, motivated by benefits rather than costs, including nontangible costs (2019). In the context of digital marketing, these motivations include both economic and personal factors.

Key concepts of the DIY behavior model include:

- Economic savings: Small business owners may choose to handle digital marketing themselves to save on hiring fees, ad fees, and other costs associated with outsourcing (Ritz et al., 2019).
- Personal fulfillment and skill development: Engaging in DIY digital marketing can lead to personal satisfaction, skill acquisition, and a sense of control over business activities (Ritz et al., 2019).
- Customization and social engagement: Owners can tailor marketing efforts to better align with their brand's values and engage directly with their audience (Ritz et al., 2019).

Understanding the DIY behavioral theory framework is essential for small business owners without employees to identify and address some of the factors contributing to high failure rates. By exploring how DIY strategies can be applied in the context of limited resources and capital, this study aims to shed light on innovative pathways toward resilience and growth for small businesses.

Extending DIY to Entrepreneurship

Small businesses, defined as entities with fewer than 500 employees, are a cornerstone of the U.S. economy, contributing to 48% of employment and 43.5% of the gross domestic product (Hasan et al., 2024; Sharabati et al., 2024; Thaha et al., 2021). Despite their significance, a substantial number face closure within the first 2 years of operation due to critical challenges such as a lack of capital and insufficient resources (Ritz et al., 2019). These challenges often interlink, exacerbating the difficulties small businesses encounter in maintaining sustainable operations. In response, many have adopted various strategies to navigate these obstacles, with DIY behavior emerging as a notable approach.

Propositions of the DIY behavior model suggest that while outsourcing digital marketing can lead to benefits such as increased expertise and productivity (Bhat & Khanna, 2024; Sutherland et al., 2025), it also comes with potential costs like loss of control in brand, and customer knowledge and higher expenses than DIY digital marketing (Park et al., 2011; Sutherland et al., 2025). Conversely, DIY digital marketing, although time-consuming and stressful, offers unique benefits such as economic savings and personal growth (Ritz et al., 2019).

This framework applies to my study by explaining why small business owners might choose to handle their digital marketing efforts themselves. Driven by economic gain and cost-saving considerations, owners might prefer DIY methods due to financial constraints or a deliberate desire to maintain control over their marketing strategies (Sagar, 2024; Wolf & McQuitty, 2013).

The DIY behavioral model has a broader applicability than DIY builders' kits. These same motivations can impact small business operations, driving innovation, cost efficiency, and personalized customer engagement. By exploring these underlying motivations, this study extends the application of the DIY framework, underscoring its relevance and potential benefits for entrepreneurship, especially in the context of digital marketing strategies tailored to the unique needs and resources of small businesses.

The extension of the DIY framework into the domain of entrepreneurship, as explored by Ritz and Wolf (2015), Ritz et al., (2019), and anticipated in future research (Sagar, 2024), presents a valuable adaptation for small businesses striving to navigate economic challenges. In contrast to traditional consumers, whose DIY endeavors are often fueled by personal interests or hobbies, entrepreneurs are increasingly embracing DIY approaches to sustain critical operations amidst financial constraints. This shift towards DIY strategies is not only a testament to the necessity of cost efficiency and customization for small businesses but also resonates with the original motivations identified by Wolf and McQuitty (2011, 2013). Recent events, such as the financial strains imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing economic pressures, have underscored the urgency for small businesses to explore all avenues for cost reduction and outreach to remain sustainable (Bai et al., 2021; Hadjielias et al., 2022; Redjekl, 2021). In this context, the DIY framework emerges as a strategic tool for entrepreneurs, offering pathways to maintain operational viability and adaptability by leveraging self-reliance and innovation. This adaptation aligns with the foundational elements of Wolf and McQuitty's model, illustrating how the principles of DIY behavior can be effectively

harnessed to support entrepreneurial success and resilience in the face of economic challenges.

Comparison Insights From Watson and Shove

The research by Watson and Shove (2008) offers critical insights into the universal applicability of the DIY behavior model, which they argue extends well beyond the realm of traditional building projects to various fields, including entrepreneurship. They assert that the fundamental motivations for engaging in DIY activities, such as economic benefits, customization, and craftsmanship, are not confined to home improvement but are relevant across diverse contexts. These universal motivations align closely with those identified by Wolf and McQuitty (2011, 2013), who highlight factors like the lack of product availability, the desire for community engagement, and the pursuit of uniqueness as key drivers of DIY behavior. Olanrewaju et al. (2020), further explain that certain DIY behaviors are enabled due to a lack of funds to hire an expert, a lack of expertise in their area, a lack of helpful participants, ease of access to knowledge, and fear of competitors. The convergence of perspectives underscores the broad applicability of the DIY model and enriches our understanding of its significance in entrepreneurship. By integrating these insights, we can see how the DIY behavior model not only addresses specific consumer needs but also offers valuable strategies for entrepreneurs seeking to innovate and customize their offerings in a competitive market.

Strategic Implications for Small Businesses

The synthesis of Mulhuijzen and De Jong's (2023) analysis of resource availability with the perspectives of Watson and Shove (2008), along with Wolf and

McQuitty (2011, 2013), underscores the versatility of DIY behavior as a strategic tool for small businesses. Consistently, across these studies, DIY approaches are shown to offer benefits such as cost savings, customization, and a sense of accomplishment. These benefits align with the motivations identified by Wolf and McQuitty (2011, 2013) and Watson and Shove (2008), indicating a universal applicability of DIY principles. Small businesses stand to gain from embracing DIY strategies, as they can leverage these approaches to achieve specific outcomes like control and enjoyment. Importantly, the synthesis suggests that DIY is not merely an alternative but can be a deliberate and strategic choice for small businesses, especially those with sufficient resources, to attain their goals effectively. By integrating these insights, small businesses can develop tailored DIY strategies that capitalize on their resource capabilities, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and resilience in the marketplace.

Role of Resource Constraints in Entrepreneurial Behavior

Adequate resources are essential for smooth business operations. While all businesses may face temporary constraints, prolonged limitations can hinder performance and even lead to failure. To maintain progress, leaders must find ways to navigate these challenges effectively.

The relationship between resources and DIY activities is multifaceted. Mulhuijzen and De Jong (2023) suggest that those with more resources gain greater benefits from DIY efforts. For small businesses, this means access to financial or human resources can strengthen DIY digital marketing by offering more control and a sense of achievement. However, DIY marketing still carries costs, such as paid ads or professional mentoring,

which can complement the approach (Lall et al., 2022). This shows DIY digital marketing is not equally beneficial for all but can be more effective when resources are available.

Solopreneurs, who make up most U.S. small businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2023), manage nearly all operations alone (Hasyim & Bakri, 2023). Outsourcing can help, but many businesses lack funds to hire support (Setkute & Dibb, 2022). As a result, they juggle multiple roles, straining limited time and energy (Bhat & Khanna, 2024). This double-edged sword forces entrepreneurs to complete vital tasks for survival while stretching resources thin. Still, many organizations adapt and persevere despite the pressure.

Marketing in Business—Traditional Versus Digital Marketing

Digital marketing encompasses the use of digital technologies to execute marketing activities for products or services and to establish a brand image (Angel Rosario et al., 2022; Boufim & Barka, 2021; Khoa, 2023; Li et al., 2022; Tahir et al., 2024; Tahmina Khanom, 2023). Digital marketing is predominantly conducted on the internet, utilizing various digital mediums such as computers, smartphones, tablets, and other digital platforms (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Ologunibi & Taiwo, 2023; Redjekl, 2021; Singh Bist et al., 2022). Digital marketing endeavors aim to provide customers with valuable information, facilitating their discovery of products and services that align with their needs (Li et al., 2022; Redjekl, 2021). Research indicates that a combination of digital and traditional marketing methods is essential for effectively meeting customer demands (Ologunibi & Taiwo, 2023; Sudarmiatin & Hidayati, 2023). Traditional

marketing channels, including billboards, television commercials, and print ads, remain integral components of marketing strategies (Li et al., 2022; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023; Tahmina Khanom, 2023).

There are three options when conducting digital marketing activities. Some businesses may outsource digital marketing activities (Bhat & Khanna, 2024; Ritz & Wolf, 2015; Ritz et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2025). This means that an outside agency is conducting all marketing activities, including ad management and social media marketing (Khoa, 2023). The second option is to have an in-house marketing team (Sutherland et al., 2025). This team works for the company that they are promoting. Lastly, the DIY approach is where the business owner conducts the activity themselves, without outside assistance (Ritz & Wolf, 2015; Ritz et al., 2019). However, this does not mean that they cannot get guidance from research conducted on the internet or in books to figure out how to conduct these operations. In-house marketing teams are the costliest, followed by outsourcing, and DIY (Bhat & Khanna, 2024).

The businesses that are conducting DIY digital marketing are normally small and have limited resources. According to (Khoa, 2023), smaller firms often lack the extensive resources needed to conduct comprehensive digital marketing campaigns. However, digital marketing is considered an affordable solution for these small businesses, allowing them to reach their target audience without the high costs associated with traditional marketing methods (Gao et al., 2023; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023; Son & Niehm, 2021).

Digital Literacy and Skills Development in DIY Marketing

Digital literacy and skills development are crucial aspects of successful DIY digital marketing endeavors, especially considering that only 41% of businesses perceive their digital marketing efforts as effective (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). Given the complexity of tasks involved in digital marketing, mastering the requisite knowledge and skills is imperative, particularly for individuals who must learn on the job (Sharabati et al., 2024). The use of digital marketing in small businesses is still limited due to challenges in technological literacy (Gao et al., 2023; Redjekl, 2021). This challenge is a reality for many small business owners, especially when technologies are changing so quickly (Sharabati et al., 2024).

Effectively conducting digital marketing activities entails more than merely executing tasks. It requires a deep understanding of various concepts and strategies inherent in digital marketing plans (Hokmabadi et al., 2024). These strategies encompass elements such as strategic planning, goal setting, and data analytics (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023; Rizvanović et al., 2023). A successful digital marketing plan is characterized by its ability to generate a positive return on investment (ROI). Achieving this entails not only implementing the plan but also comprehending and interpreting the data analytics to assess the effectiveness of marketing activities and adjust strategies accordingly to optimize ROI (Rizvanović et al., 2023).

Importance of Digital Literacy

The importance of digital literacy for DIY marketing cannot be overstated. Digital literacy encompasses a broad range of skills and knowledge essential for effectively

utilizing digital technology (Apasrawirote et al., 2022; Orrensalo et al., 2024). While some individuals may possess a higher level of digital literacy than others, navigating the multitude of devices, software, and websites available can still be overwhelming, even for the most tech-savvy individuals (Orrensalo et al., 2024).

Many small businesses that conduct DIY digital marketing often have limited resources, necessitating that the owners be tech-savvy (Khoa, 2023). For business owners engaging in DIY digital marketing, being tech-savvy is a prerequisite. Business owners must be willing to invest time and effort into continually enhancing their digital literacy skills, staying abreast of the latest devices, software, and online platforms relevant to marketing activities. To enhance their digital literacy, business owners can partake in self-taught learning through digital channels (Sudarmiatin & Hidayati, 2023).

Maintaining a high digital literacy is underscored by the rapid technology evolution that has revolutionized the way firms and customers interact (Apasrawirote et al., 2022; Dubbelink et al., 2021; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). Over the past decade, the explosion of new digital platforms, channels, and devices has made it essential for marketers to leverage these tools effectively to connect with audiences. Therefore, small business owners must be adept at navigating this complex and ever-changing digital landscape (Grewal et al., 2025).

Moreover, possessing strong research abilities is vital, enabling business owners to seek out the information necessary for success independently. Unlike larger enterprises with dedicated support systems, small business owners must be self-sufficient in their digital literacy journey, taking full responsibility for their learning and adaptation in the

ever-evolving digital landscape (Orrensalo et al., 2024). Utilizing social media has been a tool for many entrepreneurs in their business journeys to seek information on how to run their businesses. This is done through following other entrepreneurs' profiles, asking questions, and actively searching and gathering (Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

Resources and Strategies for Skill Development

To develop skills in the digital landscape, entrepreneurs must increase their information-seeking behavior (Orrensalo et al., 2024). This behavior is how unknown information is discovered. Small business owners have access to a multitude of resources and strategies for skill development related to digital marketing. To acquire marketing skills, entrepreneurs can enroll in courses specifically designed to enhance their knowledge and proficiency. Some notable resources to learn these skills include Google Certificates, and YouTube tutorials (Ceh et al., 2023; Cowley et al., 2021; Pires et al., 2022). YouTube is one of the most accessible resources due to being zero cost to the viewer (Ceh et al., 2023). Additionally, adopting effective strategies is crucial for skill enhancement. Engaging in continuous learning through various mediums tailored to individual preferences is paramount. Practical application of acquired skills through consistent practice is equally essential for mastery. Seeking feedback from mentors and collaborating with like-minded entrepreneurs can provide invaluable insights and guidance (Lall et al., 2022). Importantly, initiating contact with potential mentors is often necessary for establishing mentoring relationships, underscoring the proactive approach required for skill development and mentorship acquisition.

Learning Curves in Digital Marketing

Digital marketing learning curves present challenges for businesses, particularly in understanding and applying data analytics to assess ROI and optimize strategies (Rizvanović et al., 2023). Many struggle to interpret complex data, quantify engagement, and link investment to satisfactory returns, with some achieving only limited ROI. Adapting to evolving technologies presents another challenge, one shaped by an individual's level of digital nativity and prior exposure to technology. Generational differences play a role, with Generation X often facing steeper learning curves than Generations Y and Z. However, rapid technological advancements mean that individuals from any generation can encounter challenges (Coklar & Tatli, 2021; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). Overcoming these barriers requires resilience and persistence. Strategies such as setting SMART goals and reframing failure as an opportunity for growth can support steady progress, making digital marketing learning curves manageable and ultimately rewarding (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023).

Digital Marketing Tools and Platforms for Small Businesses

A wide array of technological tools and platforms is available to enhance business visibility and support digital marketing efforts. However, it is crucial to select tools that align with the specific needs and objectives of the business. Not all tools may be suitable for every business, and it is essential to assess which ones will provide the most significant benefits.

Understanding the target audience and demographics is paramount when choosing the appropriate tools and platforms for digital marketing initiatives (Ologunbe & Taiwo,

2023). Tailoring the selection to resonate with the preferences and behaviors of the target audience ensures that marketing efforts are effectively reaching and engaging the intended demographic. By carefully evaluating the available options and considering the characteristics of the target audience, businesses can make informed decisions about which technological tools and platforms will best support their digital marketing strategies.

Overview of Accessible Tools

Digital marketing tools come in various forms and serve different purposes. They include analytics and data insights, search engine optimization, content marketing, social media management, email marketing, pay-per-click advertising, inbound marketing, online public relations, marketing automation, design and multimedia, and customer relationship management (Angel Rosario et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023; Rizvanović et al., 2023). Businesses can utilize technology to implement some or all of these digital marketing tools.

Social Media Platforms in DIY Marketing

Social media is mass media communication conducted over the internet. Users of social media platforms share information, ideas, messages, and content (Dubbelink et al., 2021). Social media platforms are digital technologies available in the form of apps and websites, offering users digital environments for exchanging content and information (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Faruk et al., 2021; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Each platform serves a distinct purpose and caters to a specific audience. Some businesses maintain multiple social media accounts to expand their outreach. Among the most widely used platforms

are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and LinkedIn (Faruk et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2023; Tahmina Khanom, 2023; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). As of 2022, Facebook boasted 2.74 billion users, YouTube had 2.29 billion, Instagram reached 1.22 billion, and TikTok had 689 million users (Tahmina Khanom, 2023).

Best Practices for Tool Selection and Use

Selecting and utilizing digital marketing technologies effectively requires a strategic approach. Businesses should begin by clarifying their mission, identifying their target audience, defining their desired brand image, and articulating their message clearly. While there are numerous digital marketing channels available, it is essential to prioritize those that align with the organization's goals and resources. Given the time-consuming nature of managing multiple technologies, it may not be feasible for businesses to utilize all options effectively. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize technologies that offer the best ROI for the organization's specific objectives (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). These technologies include social media platforms, websites, and integrated tools that enable seamless shopping experiences, product visualization, personalized recommendations, and targeted advertisements (Dyrka et al., 2025).

DIY Digital Marketing: Benefits and Strategic Value

In today's business environment, digital marketing is essential due to the widespread use of the internet and technology (Mdoe Amiri et al., 2022; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023; Redjekl, 2021). With individuals spending significant time online, particularly on social media, businesses must meet consumers where they are (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Faruk et al., 2021; Tahmina Khanom, 2023). Consumers rely on the internet

for research, reviews, and recommendations when making purchasing decisions (Kamkankaew et al., 2022). Even passive users are exposed to targeted ads through algorithms, giving businesses opportunities to build awareness and engagement (Boufim & Barka, 2021; Li et al., 2022). Businesses that fail to adopt digital marketing risk missing valuable prospects.

Technological advancements have expanded outreach beyond local communities, allowing small businesses to sell products and services globally (Apasrawirote et al., 2022; Emini & Merovci, 2021; Katare et al., 2021). Online sales now complement traditional in-person transactions, while digital platforms facilitate rapid information sharing and customer feedback through reviews, polls, and surveys (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Khoa, 2023). Unlike traditional advertising, digital marketing enables precise targeting of specific demographics, maximizing the relevance and impact of marketing spend (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). Its cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and trackability make it particularly valuable for small businesses (Li et al., 2022; Mandviwalla & Flanagan, 2021; Sharabati et al., 2024). The accessibility of the internet and social platforms further democratizes marketing knowledge, making DIY approaches both feasible and necessary for small businesses to establish and sustain an online presence (Tahmina Khanom, 2023).

Measuring the Effectiveness of DIY Digital Marketing

A business must have a comprehensive marketing strategy that encompasses various crucial components (Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). This strategy typically involves identifying target audiences, selecting appropriate technological channels, and

distributing content and campaigns through social media and other digital means. Additionally, activities such as journey mapping, goal setting, developing SWOT and cost-benefit analysis, and situational assessment are integral parts of a digital marketing strategy (Sharabati et al., 2024). When implementing a DIY digital marketing strategy, businesses may follow similar steps to those outsourcing digital marketing or having an in-house marketing team. However, there are distinct differences between businesses utilizing DIY behaviors and those that do not. These differences may manifest in the level of expertise, the resources available, the degree of customization, and the agility in adapting to evolving market trends.

Key Performance Indicators and Metrics

Key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics serve as essential tools for evaluating the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts (Boufim & Barka, 2021). These metrics encompass various aspects such as website traffic, conversion rates, click-through rates, engagement levels, and ROI (Ologunbebi & Taiwo, 2023). Organizations may prioritize certain KPIs based on their specific goals and objectives. However, it is crucial to note that while these indicators provide valuable insights into profitability, they may not capture the full spectrum of business success, which can vary depending on the nature of the enterprise.

Tools and Techniques for Tracking

Similarly, tools and techniques for tracking marketing effectiveness encompass a range of software, analytics platforms, and methodologies aimed at monitoring and analyzing digital marketing performance (Ologunbebi & Taiwo, 2023; Rizvanović et al.,

2023). These tools may include website analytics platforms, social media monitoring tools, email marketing software, and customer relationship management systems, among others (Rizvanović et al., 2023). Each tool offers unique functionalities and capabilities tailored to different aspects of marketing effectiveness assessment.

Challenges in Measurement

While digital marketing provides real-time data and insights, it does not come without challenges. The data generated by the internet and social media platforms regarding platform statistics are essential for success (Moon & Iacobucci, 2022; Nanda & Kumar, 2021; Saura et al., 2023). However, when people do not understand these data, it becomes a challenge (Moon & Iacobucci, 2022; Nanda & Kumar, 2021). Understanding and interpreting metrics such as click-through rates, conversion rates, and engagement metrics can be complex for business owners, especially those new to digital marketing (Malesev & Cherry, 2021). Additionally, the sheer volume of data available can be overwhelming, making it difficult to focus on the most relevant metrics for evaluating campaign success. Furthermore, changes in algorithms and data privacy regulations can also impact the accuracy and availability of data, adding another layer of complexity to measuring digital marketing effectiveness.

Limitations and Evolving Challenges in DIY Digital Marketing

While digital marketing presents numerous challenges and limitations, DIY digital marketing introduces a distinct set of hurdles for small business owners. These often stem from time and resource constraints, with solopreneurs carrying the full weight of marketing responsibilities alongside daily operations. Financial and workforce

limitations compound these challenges, leaving many business owners stretched thin and struggling to sustain visibility in competitive markets. Some of these obstacles can be addressed with persistence and learning, while others require more strategic solutions or outside support to overcome.

There are only so many hours in a day, and business owners wearing the marketing hat alongside their traditional responsibilities may find themselves stretched thin. Balancing marketing efforts with core business functions like manufacturing, supply management, and financial tasks can lead to burnout and decreased productivity (Hasyim & Bakri, 2023). Additionally, resource limitations, such as workforce and financial constraints, pose significant challenges (Sharabati et al., 2024). While DIY digital marketing may seem cost-effective compared to outsourcing, it still requires investment. Lack of adequate resources can hinder the execution of effective marketing campaigns, resulting in limited growth and performance outcomes (Gao et al., 2023; Setkute & Dibb, 2022).

Complexity of the Digital Marketing Landscape

The digital realm offers businesses an unprecedented global reach, presenting both opportunities and challenges. As Hokmabadi et al. (2024) note, this expansive reach means that businesses are now competing not just locally but on a global scale. Unlike in the past, where competition was primarily local, the advent of technology has intensified competition worldwide. With countless advertisements vying for attention, standing out amidst the noise has become increasingly difficult. Organizations with substantial financial resources often dominate the digital space because they can afford to invest in

extensive advertising campaigns, making visibility a challenge for smaller players.

However, even without major financial resources, businesses must utilize technology and create an online presence to stand up against other competitors.

Keeping Pace with Trends and Platforms

Creating content that aligns with trending topics can have a profound impact on a business's operations. Social media trends are constantly evolving, requiring businesses to stay abreast of the latest developments to maximize their visibility among potential customers. Trending content on social media platforms increases exposure, as algorithms prioritize such content for wider distribution (Akon et al., 2025). Leveraging trending templates, songs, sounds, or scripts can significantly boost a business's visibility, leading to heightened brand awareness and, ultimately, increased profits.

Adapting to Changing Algorithms and Content Norms

An algorithm is a computer program process designed to solve problems or perform tasks (Milli et al., 2025). In digital marketing, algorithms determine which content users see by tailoring posts and videos to their preferences. Because these algorithms are controlled by social media platforms and frequently updated, businesses often struggle to understand how they work, which affects visibility and reach (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Metzler & Garcia, 2024; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). This complexity makes it difficult for small businesses to fully leverage them, sometimes limiting their ability to optimize their online presence (Masta & Kaushiva, 2024).

To improve visibility, marketers commonly use high-volume, trending keywords and tags, particularly in short-form video content on platforms like TikTok and

Instagram, where trends drive engagement (Haenlein et al., 2020; Unni & Weinstein, 2021). However, because algorithms and trends constantly evolve, businesses must remain flexible and adapt their strategies. Repeating the same tactics over time is ineffective but staying dynamic and responsive can sustain relevance and foster growth.

Synthesis of Perspectives

The literature review has shown that there is a correlation between digital content marketing and digital marketing success, and effective and quality content increases customer trust as well as business profitability and digital marketing success (Shlash Mohammad, 2022). The synthesis of various scholarly perspectives reveals that the DIY behavior model's relevance extends well beyond mere consumer activities, effectively encompassing entrepreneurial efforts as well. The underlying motivations and anticipated outcomes, though somewhat adapted, demonstrate a striking consistency, underscoring the model's robustness and adaptability across different contexts. This consistency suggests that small businesses can effectively utilize the DIY model to navigate the intricacies of tasks such as digital marketing. However, these businesses must assess their resource capabilities thoroughly to fully leverage the potential benefits of a DIY approach. By adapting and applying the DIY behavior model within an entrepreneurial framework, we can deepen our understanding of the dynamics of DIY activities and derive actionable insights that are highly relevant to business practices. This approach not only reinforces the model's versatility but also provides a practical roadmap for small businesses aiming to optimize their operations through self-reliance and ingenuity.

Gaps in the Literature

This study was conducted to address a critical gap by exploring how entrepreneurs, particularly solopreneurs and those in small partnerships, adopt DIY methods to enhance their digital marketing efforts and drive overall business growth. By focusing on the development and application of DIY digital marketing strategies, the research aims to identify effective practices that support the success and sustainability of small businesses without the need for external marketing professionals. A thorough review of existing literature provides the methodological foundation for investigating the central research question: *What effective strategies do small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY behavior in digital marketing to enhance overall success and growth?*

Although studies such as those by Ritz and Wolf (2015), Ritz et al. (2019), and Emini and Merovci (2021) have begun to explore the impact of DIY behaviors on business practices, their application within digital marketing remains limited. This study builds upon foundational work, including Wolf and McQuitty's (2011) identification of DIY behavior trends emerging from builder's kits and home improvement movements, which reflect a broader cultural shift toward self-reliance.

While digital marketing itself is a widely studied topic, much of the existing research focuses on larger organizations or fails to distinguish findings by business size. As a result, conclusions from these studies may not accurately reflect the unique challenges and resource limitations faced by small businesses. Given that business size

influences nearly every operational aspect, this study emphasizes the need for research specifically tailored to the context of small-scale entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Digital marketing is crucial for running a successful business in the 21st century. However, the approach to digital marketing can vary depending on the business. Small businesses often adopt a DIY approach to their digital marketing efforts, taking advantage of numerous resources available to learn the necessary skills. Given the high failure rates among new businesses, it is essential to utilize every possible strategy for success (Carrasco Ramirez, 2022). Leveraging technology and social media for digital marketing is a smart approach. Business owners, both new and experienced, should capitalize on the affordable or free tools and knowledge that technology provides to enhance their marketing efforts.

Transition

Section 2 provided an extensive review of the literature, focusing on DIY behavioral theory, motivations behind DIY approaches, traditional versus digital marketing, the impact of technology on business, and the challenges small businesses face when implementing DIY digital marketing. Section 3 will outline the chosen research methodology. Section 4 presents the findings of the research study along with any conclusions.

Section 3: Research Methodology

This section outlines the qualitative research methodology used to examine how small business owners develop and implement DIY digital marketing strategies. The methods involved semistructured interviews, offering both guided structure and flexibility for participants to share their unique insights. The analysis followed a thematic framework, with multiple coding rounds conducted to ensure accuracy and uncover recurring patterns and themes. Ultimately, the learning from this process revealed core themes and subthemes that shaped the study's overall findings.

Project Ethics

My role as the researcher was to ethically gather data, ensure participants understood the study's purpose and criteria, remain aware of and actively avoid personal bias, and analyze the data objectively. As a small business owner, I had a personal connection to the research topic, which provided valuable insight into the challenges faced by similar entrepreneurs and informed the development of relevant interview questions. However, this relationship also required heightened awareness of potential bias to ensure the integrity and objectivity of the study.

I used the Belmont Report as the framework to ensure that ethical principles were followed during the research study. This included the requirements that (a) individuals are treated as autonomous agents and that persons with diminished autonomy are protected, (b) persons are not harmed and possible benefits are maximized while harms are minimized, and (c) all people are treated with justice and equally (Office of the Secretary, 1979). Ensuring participant protection was paramount, with informed consent

requiring that individuals understood the study's purpose, risks, and benefits before voluntarily agreeing to participate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025). Once involved in the study, I prioritized participants' confidentiality and privacy by securing data with password protection and using pseudonyms (e.g., P-1, P-2, P-3). I committed to transparency about the nature and intentions of the research, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage without fear of penalty by notifying me in writing. I also took steps to minimize any possible physical or psychological harm (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025). Special care was taken when considering vulnerable populations, such as children, prisoners, or individuals with impaired decision-making, which often necessitates additional consent or heightened precautions. To estimate participant age via social media, I reviewed publicly available images on participants' profiles and confirmed eligibility directly with them. The eligibility criteria included being a solo business owner or co-owner located in the United States, operating without employees, personally managing their own digital marketing without outsourcing, and using Instagram as a marketing platform. Participants were aware that there would be no incentives for participation.

Integrity was nonnegotiable in this study. I was bound to honesty in data collection and presentation, avoiding any fabrication or misrepresentation. This included remaining vigilant about my personal biases and ensuring they did not influence the study (Mehta, 2025; Zahle, 2024). I sought and obtained ethical approval through the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure participant rights were upheld (Walden University, 2023). The IRB approval number for this study was 10-29-24-

1131957. I also employed member checking as a critical ethical practice to safeguard the authenticity and trustworthiness of participants' contributions. This process involved returning preliminary findings or interpreted data to participants, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or challenge how their inputs were understood and represented (Ahmed, 2024). This step ensured that the data were accurate and faithful to participants' intended meanings while upholding respect for their integrity and autonomy. I also provided participants the option to receive study results, closing the loop on their contributions. Above all, I recognized and respected cultural and social sensitivities. Through these measures, I ensured that participants' dignity, rights, and well-being remained central throughout the research process.

Nature of the Project

In this qualitative research project, I employed a pragmatic methodology to delve deeply into the behaviors and strategies of small business owners engaged in digital marketing techniques. This methodology emphasizes practical solutions and in-depth exploration, aligning perfectly with the objectives of my study (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). By adopting a qualitative methodology, I was able to generate rich, nonnumeric data that capture the experiences, thoughts, and backgrounds of individuals, providing unattainable insights through quantitative methods (Kandel, 2020). Integrating a pragmatic inquiry design ensures that my research provides practical insights, assisting small business owners in optimizing their digital marketing strategies.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The research population included small business owners in the United States. Participants were required to meet the following criteria. The criteria included being a business leader, being a small business owner(s) in the United States, having no employees, having 3-plus years in business, having experience in developing and implementing DIY digital marketing strategies, and that they utilize Instagram as a major source of online coverage. Participants were recruited using different online platforms to include Facebook, Instagram, Etsy, and LinkedIn. This recruiting technique allowed participants to be screened prior to interviewing them. Their business platforms were also used to ensure alignment of the study and qualifications. Once screened, potential applicants were messaged through direct messages on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, or Etsy. Some applicants reached out directly if they themselves were interested. These applicants found the research through public platforms like Facebook Groups. The study involved six participants as its sample size. According to Patton (2002), such a sample size can be managed efficiently by the researcher. In qualitative case studies, a smaller sample is often preferred to ensure an in-depth exploration and thorough analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Patton, 2002). Even with limited participants, the study can yield significant conclusions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The sampling strategy employed is purposeful sampling, which focuses on choosing information-rich cases—those that provide abundant, valuable data (Patton, 2002). This method was selected for its ability to provide profound insights and a deep understanding instead of broader generalizations (Patton, 2002; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). The specific, purposeful sampling method was

typical case sampling. Typical case sampling utilizes knowledgeable participants who describe what is typical within the program (Patton, 1990). In my research, the program would encompass small business owners who utilize DIY digital marketing techniques within their businesses. Some small business owners may not yet fully understand the intricacies of their operations, including the adoption of technology (Aithal et al., 2022). Therefore, engaging with business owners who have been operational for at least 3 years and have effectively integrated digital marketing into their strategies is vital.

Data Collection Activities

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is the process of gathering useful information that will then be used to answer the research question(s) and fulfill study objectives (Mazhar et al., 2021). The instrument used during the data collection process was a questionnaire comprising a set of semistructured interview questions. This process allowed for a set of predetermined questions, along with the flexibility to explore topics in greater depth as they arose. I used different software after the first three interviews due to ease of access, use, and quality. The first three interviews were captured and transcribed using Rev transcription software. The last three interviews were captured and transcribed using Zoom. Once transcribed, I used Dedoose software for data management, excerpting, and coding the data. The semistructured interview technique collected essential details, ethical considerations and preliminaries, interviewee introduction and business description, interview questions and probing questions, and post-interview reflection and documentation. The semistructured interview technique form was used during interviews to ensure consistency and

uniformity across all participant interviews. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument and process by conducting a transcript review with all participants and methodological triangulation.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique involved interviews with single or dual small business owners. The interviews were audio recorded. After the interviews were complete, they were transcribed using speech recognition software (Liu et al., 2023). The first three interviews were transcribed with Rev software, while the last three were transcribed using Zoom. This was due to cost and quality. Once the transcription software was used, I conducted a transcript review with all participants to ensure the software had been transcribed correctly (Point & Baruch, 2023). By engaging in this step, participants could review and reflect upon the material, ensuring that the content was accurate (Lloyd et al., 2024). The interview protocol consisted of an introduction, gaining consent a second time, explaining confidentiality of information, and interview questions (Shoozan & Mohamad, 2024). This protocol can be found in the Appendix. The Walden IRB ensures that all research conducted at Walden University aligns with the institution's ethical guidelines and adheres to the regulations set forth by the U.S. federal government (Walden University, 2023). I used transcript review after the interviews were transcribed to ensure accurate data interpretation. (Liu et al., 2023; Point & Baruch, 2023; Rowlands, 2021).

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself by sharing your name and briefly describing the type of business you operate.
2. To understand your digital marketing practices better, please share your current digital marketing expenditure.
3. Which digital marketing channels do you use frequently to promote your business?
4. Please describe how you use DIY approaches or outsource to professionals for your digital marketing needs.
5. What factors influenced your decision to adopt a DIY approach in digital marketing?
6. How do you define success for your business, and how do you think your DIY digital marketing efforts have contributed to this?
7. Please share specific instances where your DIY digital marketing initiatives directly influenced customer engagement, acquisition, or retention.
8. What challenges or obstacles related to implementing DIY digital marketing strategies have you overcome?
9. How do you measure the effectiveness of your DIY digital marketing campaigns?
10. What changes have you observed in your business's growth trajectory since incorporating DIY digital marketing techniques?
11. Please discuss any learning curves or skill development you have encountered while implementing DIY digital marketing.

12. What role does digital marketing play in shaping your business's brand identity and online presence?
13. What advice would you give to other small business owners considering adopting a DIY approach in digital marketing?
14. In retrospect, what adjustments would you consider if you changed your approach to DIY digital marketing?
15. How do you ensure your DIY digital marketing strategies align with your business goals and objectives?
16. Do you have any additional information to share regarding DIY digital marketing and your experiences?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Dedoose software was used to manage the data by storing interview transcripts and facilitating the coding and theme identification process. Voice recordings and transcripts were labeled with participant ID numbers to maintain confidentiality. Interview protocols were printed for notetaking during each interview, allowing for immediate documentation of observations. These handwritten notes were later transferred to Word documents and used alongside the transcripts during coding in Dedoose to enhance the accuracy and depth of the analysis. All digital files were stored on a password-protected hard drive and backed up using OneDrive. The original paper copies were securely destroyed, and all data will be permanently deleted after 5 years.

A priori coding was applied based on the research question, interview guide, and relevant literature (Saldaña, 2021). Thematic analysis guided the coding and

interpretation process, involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within the qualitative data (Coates et al., 2021). Methodological triangulation was employed to ensure the credibility of the findings by using multiple methods to validate the results (Ahmed, 2024). The key themes were developed through the coding process and aligned with the existing literature reviewed. Following data collection, additional recent literature was reviewed to identify any new findings that may have been previously overlooked or that further supported the initial research. These key themes were then analyzed in both the updated literature and the conceptual framework to ensure consistency, relevance, and depth in interpreting the data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in research is the consistency and stability of the research results (Fodouop Kouam, 2024). This means that a verification process was conducted to ensure research results are accurate, without bias, and replicable. To reinforce the research's reliability, the dependability process was meticulously addressed through multiple levels of review. The dependability process is the process that a researcher conducts so that others can reproduce the study or check the findings (Ahmed, 2024). The dependability of the study also allows other researchers to expand or incorporate the findings into another work. Reliability was ensured using a multiple-step process. Before interviews took place, expert validation of the interview questions was conducted by the chair and committee. An interview protocol was also used during the interview process. This ensured that each participant was asked the same interview questions. Transcript review

was a crucial part of this process. After transcribing the interviews, I thoroughly examined the transcripts to ensure they accurately represent the original audio recordings. This detailed examination involved listening to the recordings and cross-checking them against the transcripts for accuracy. Member checking was conducted after both the interview and coding process. The transcripts and themes found in each interview were checked by the participants to ensure data interpretation.

Through this comprehensive approach—combining expert validation of the interview questions, member checking, and transcript review- the research aims to uphold a high standard of dependability, enhancing the overall trustworthiness and integrity of the research outcomes.

Validity

Validity is the accuracy of research interpretations. Research findings of high validity are of high quality and rigor (Fodouop Kouam, 2024). Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation all play a role in determining the validity of the research and its findings.

Credibility

Credibility is the trustworthiness of the researcher and the results of the study (Hanimann et al., 2023). To ensure credibility in the interview process, I utilized an interview protocol. The interview protocol is shown in the Appendix. Participant transcript review was conducted once the interviews were transcribed. There were no issues brought up by participants during the participant transcript review. Member checking was also conducted after the coding process to ensure the themes aligned with the

participants' interpretation of the questions. Lastly, triangulation was used to validate findings through multiple data sources and approaches (Ahmed, 2024).

Transferability

Transferability in research is the ability to transfer the findings to similar situations (Ahmed, 2024). Transferability was maintained throughout the research study by providing thick descriptions and sampling strategies in detail. I comprehensively described the research environment, participants, and methodologies for transferability. This detailed approach allows readers and future researchers to gauge the relevance of my findings to their specific scenarios. I clearly outline the scope of the study, including participant demographics and the settings involved. To support replication and further research, the raw data, tools, and techniques are accessible to others (Makel et al., 2022).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability to objectively and impartially present the research findings (Ahmed, 2024). For confirmability, triangulation was used to maintain the objectivity of the findings. Probing during interviews was also conducted. This was done by asking follow-up questions to participants' interview responses. By the conclusion of the interview process, data reached saturation.

Data Saturation

Data saturation happens when no new knowledge or themes emerge from the data. Data saturation indicates a robust foundation in the knowledge already gathered and that further exploration is unlikely to yield additional insights. (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). To guarantee data saturation, using a semistructured interview technique, I

conducted in-depth interviews, consistently analyzing data for recurring themes, and set an initial interview target. However, I was flexible: If I observed a need for more redundancy in participant responses, I considered increasing the number of interviews. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand.

Transition and Summary

Section 3 provided the research design, including ethical considerations, population and sampling methods, data collection procedures, and strategies for ensuring reliability and validity. In summary, the study employed a qualitative thematic analysis. Semistructured interviews were conducted with six participants. To ensure reliability and validity, transcript review, member checking, and triangulation were used. Section 4 will present the findings from the semistructured interviews, along with an analysis of specific digital marketing platforms to enhance the reader's understanding of how small business owners conduct digital marketing activities. The section will conclude with recommendations for future action.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to systematically identify, analyze, and explore the effective strategies employed by small business owners in the development and implementation of DIY digital marketing campaigns. The central research question guiding this study was: What effective strategies do small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY behavior in digital marketing to enhance overall success and growth?

The findings of the study revealed a range of practical and strategic behaviors that small business owners adopt to manage their digital marketing efforts independently. These strategies aligned closely with the motivations outlined in the DIY behavioral theory and were shaped by both internal capacities and external business needs.

Three primary themes emerged from the data: (a) development of DIY digital marketing strategies, (b) implementation strategies for DIY digital marketing, and (c) measuring effectiveness and defining success. These findings confirm and extend the knowledge presented in the literature review.

Cost savings, control over brand identity, and confidence in one's ability to manage digital marketing independently were among the most common motivators for DIY behavior. Additional motivations included prior knowledge or a willingness to learn new skills, as well as the ability to create personalized customer engagement and deliver high-quality service directly. These findings align with the key motivational dimensions

of DIY behavioral theory: economic savings, personal fulfillment, skill development, customization, and social engagement (Ritz et al., 2019; Wolf & McQuitty, 2011, 2013).

Table 2

Participant Categorization

Participant	Business type	Years of experience
P-1	Business owner, online and in person (product focused)	4
P-2	Business owner, online and in person (service focused)	4
P-3	Business owner, in person (service focused)	5
P-4	Business owner, online (service focused)	5
P-5	Business owner, online (product and service focused)	16
P-6	Business owner, online (service focused)	6

Theme 1: Development of DIY Digital Marketing Strategies

Digital marketing exemplifies innovation orientation by enabling businesses to adopt new technologies and strategies to expand their market reach. All participants agreed that digital marketing and maintaining an online presence helped them reach a wider audience and increase their potential customer or client base (P-1, November 16, 2024; P-2, November 21, 2024; P-3, November 23, 2024; P-4, April 19, 2025; P-5, April 29, 2025; P-6, May 19, 2025). This was true for both local service-based businesses and those seeking national visibility through online sales. This finding is supported by Grewal et al. (2025), who noted that one advantage of digital marketing over traditional marketing is its ability to reach a broad, global audience. While one participant expressed confidence that their business could continue operating without social media by relying on in-person events like markets (P-1), this view differed from other participants who felt

a digital presence was essential for long-term growth and profitability (P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6).

Theme 1, development of DIY digital marketing strategies, begins with how small business owners start using digital marketing. A frequent starting point for small business owners was to experiment with organic tactics rather than paid advertising. Prior research highlights the effectiveness of organic capabilities, such as posting, interaction, and monitoring, for brand outcomes (Laradi et al., 2023) and stresses engagement as central to social media strategy (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Reflecting this view, P-4 explained that paid advertisements are not always necessary, emphasizing that organic content is what connects with consumers.

The perceived complexity of digital marketing often discourages business owners from starting or investing sustained effort. However, having a sustained effort is what gains traction in being seen by consumers (Haenlein et al., 2020; Halwani & Cherry, 2023; Li et al., 2022; Mufadhhol et al., 2024). Several participants highlighted the importance of treating marketing as a core business activity rather than an afterthought (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-6).

Participants consistently expressed regret about not starting digital marketing sooner. P-2 shared, “I wish I had taken it a little bit more seriously from the get-go.” Others echoed similar sentiments, including P-1, who noted, “One of the biggest things I wish I had done was...when COVID first started, I wish I had just jumped on TikTok.” Some believed that early engagement with digital platforms would have improved their confidence and skills. P-2 and P-3 specifically noted that had they taken digital marketing

seriously from the beginning, their businesses would have likely experienced faster growth.

Participants noted that building a professional digital presence does not require a large marketing budget or a dedicated team (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). They emphasized, however, that consistent effort is crucial for achieving long-term results. Success depends on treating digital marketing as an integral part of business operations rather than a secondary task. This perspective aligns with findings in the literature (Mufadhhol et al., 2024).

Subtheme 1.1: Getting Started with DIY Digital Marketing

For many small business owners, developing an online presence for the first time can feel overwhelming and intimidating, especially for those without a personal or business background in digital spaces (Orrensalo et al., 2024; P-1). Despite this initial discomfort, participants emphasized the importance of simply getting started. Most participants began their digital marketing efforts using Facebook, as indicated by the earliest posts available on their platforms. Given that Instagram is owned by the same company, many naturally adopted it as a secondary platform (P-3, P-5).

Participants noted that choosing the right platform is critical, as each social media channel serves a different demographic and distributes content in unique ways (P-2, P-5). This finding supports Ologunbe and Taiwo's (2023) research on social media channel distribution. All business owners in the study maintained at least a website, a Facebook page, and an Instagram account, with some also utilizing additional platforms.

In addition to selecting platforms, participants highlighted the importance of defining and maintaining a consistent digital brand. While most businesses have a mission, vision, and logo, their digital brand is represented through the visual and narrative elements shared online, such as images, videos, captions, and overall tone. Ensuring that this brand aligns with the business's identity was viewed as essential for effective digital marketing (P-6).

Subtheme 1.2: Evaluating DIY Marketing and Outsourcing

Participants consistently emphasized that one of the primary benefits of DIY digital marketing is the ability to maintain control over brand identity while directly engaging with customers. This approach allowed them to create authentic connections with their audiences (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). Emini and Merovci's (2021) research aligns with this insight, emphasizing that maintaining an authentic brand identity is crucial, particularly when communicating directly with customers. Cost-effectiveness was another major advantage. Many participants explained that managing marketing in-house was more financially sustainable than outsourcing, and even those with the means to pay for professional services often preferred to do it themselves to preserve control and capture content in real time (P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5).

Figure 1*Reasons for Conducting DIY Digital Marketing Activities*

Despite these benefits, participants acknowledged that DIY marketing demands significant time and effort (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). The literature supports this finding, emphasizing that digital marketing cannot succeed without dedicated time and effort (Setkute & Dibb, 2022). Some participants reported spending up to 8 hours per day on digital marketing tasks (P-2, P-5), while others pointed to steep learning curves with analytics and platform use (P-3, P-5). However, confidence in their ability to learn new skills and prior experiences in business or education often helped them manage these challenges (P-2, P-4, P-6).

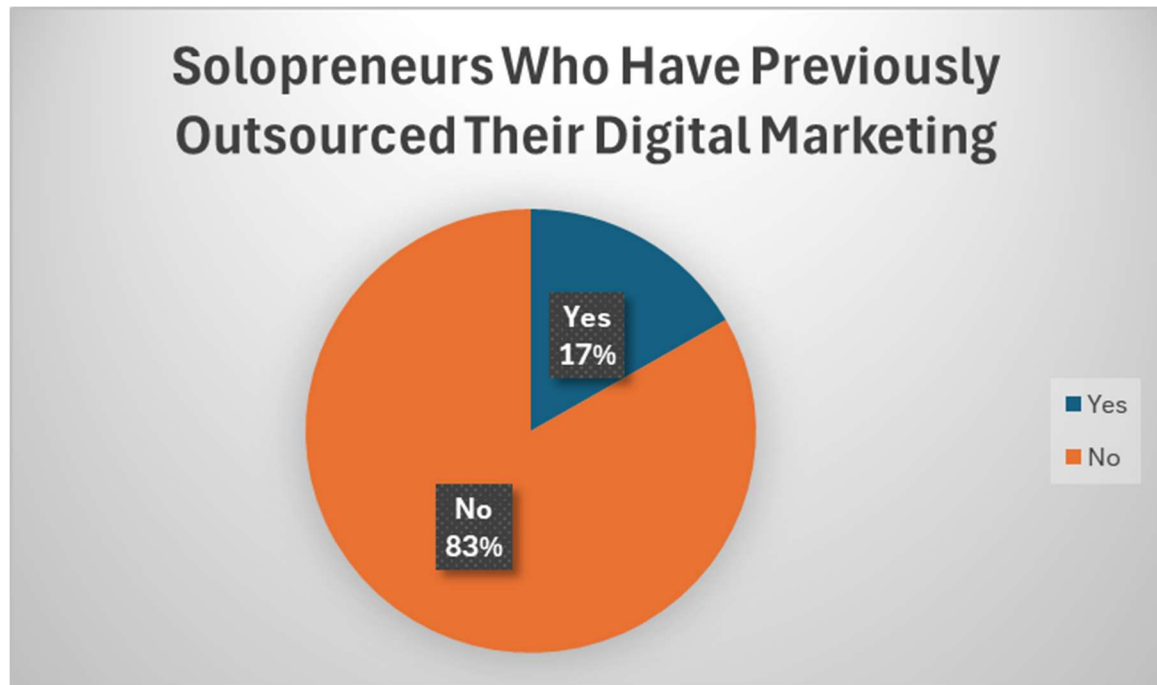
When considering outsourcing, participants identified both potential advantages and drawbacks. On the positive side, outsourcing could free up time and provide access to specialized expertise. Yet, these benefits were frequently outweighed by concerns about cost, authenticity, and ROI. For example, P-2 described hiring both hourly and salaried professionals to manage digital activities, only to find little to no measurable impact on business growth. They explained that outsourced posts felt disconnected from

their brand voice and caused a drop in customer engagement, concluding it had been “a waste of money and time.”

Most participants reported that they had never outsourced digital marketing, citing three main reasons. The first was cost: outsourcing was viewed as financially unfeasible and difficult to justify compared to what they could do themselves (P-1, P-3, P-5). The second was control: participants worried that outsourcing could misrepresent their values, reduce consistency, or weaken direct customer connections (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). As P-5 explained, many valuable marketing opportunities, such as process videos or “day in the life” moments, occur spontaneously, and “you can’t have a marketing person in your space 8 hours a day every day.” These findings align with the literature, citing that cost savings and maintaining strong customer relationships are benefits of DIY digital marketing (Setkute & Dibb, 2022). The third reason was skill-based: while some had formal training in marketing (P-4, P-6), others relied on self-guided learning (P-2). In either case, participants felt capable of handling their own marketing effectively, demonstrating a strong sense of digital marketing self-efficacy.

Figure 2

Outsourced Digital Marketing Previously



Overall, participants viewed DIY digital marketing as both feasible and advantageous. While outsourcing offered potential time savings, the risks of high cost, reduced authenticity, and weak ROI discouraged most from pursuing it (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). The findings mirror the literature by suggesting that small business owners often prioritize affordability, autonomy, and brand authenticity, making DIY marketing the preferred approach despite its challenges (Park et al., 2011; Sutherland et al., 2025).

Theme 2: Implementation Strategies for DIY Digital Marketing

Participants described a wide range of strategies used to implement their DIY digital marketing activities. While individual approaches varied, there were notable similarities across participants in how they selected tools, engaged audiences, and

executed campaigns. In addition to these strategies, participants also reflected on the challenges they encountered and the learning curves they navigated as they developed their marketing practices.

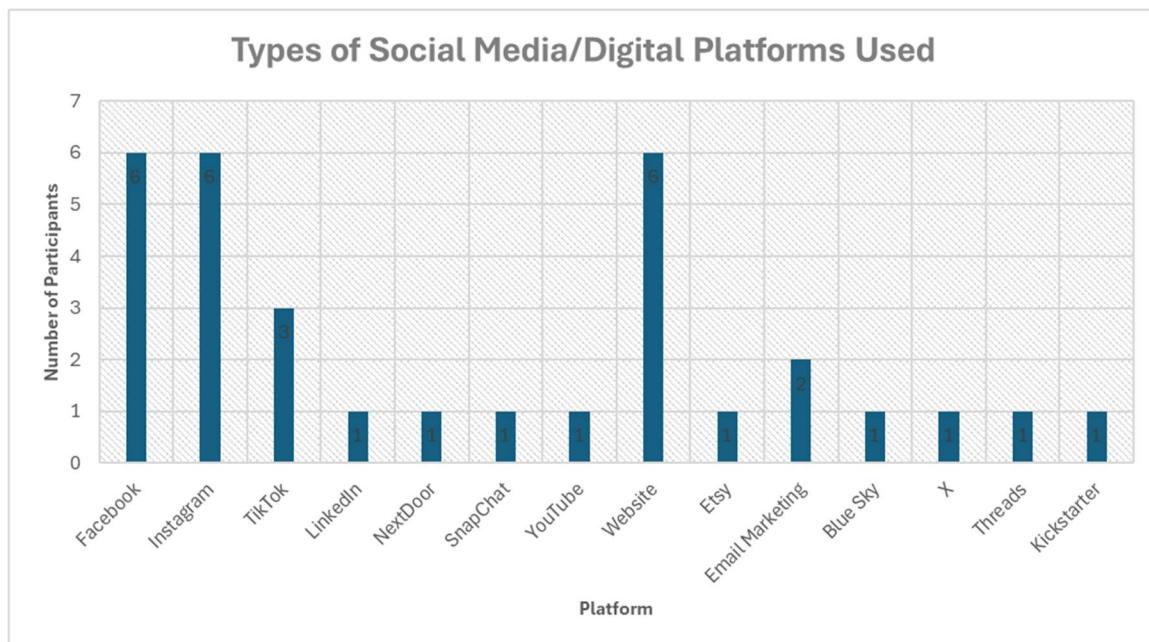
Subtheme 2.1: Choosing the Right Tools

Digital marketing often requires the use of multiple platforms to maximize reach and engagement (Faruk et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2023; Tahmina Khanom, 2023; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021; Weidig et al., 2024). As P-2 stated, “Yes, it’s [multiple platforms] a requirement.” Participants emphasized that building a strong online presence depends on maintaining both relevance and consistency across different platforms rather than relying on just one. P-4 noted, “You have to reach people where they are... everybody’s not on Facebook.”

There were several activities identified for maintaining a broad online presence, including the ability to cross-post content, connect with diverse audiences, and ensure continuity if one platform experiences issues (P-2, P-4). The integration between Facebook and Instagram, both operated by Meta, was described as particularly useful for efficiency (P-2, P-4). Cross-posting between platforms is a strategy highlighted in the research of both Halwani and Cherry (2023) and Ruita et al. (2025). However, this same integration also introduced risk because technical disruptions on one platform could affect the other (P-2). To balance these advantages and risks, participants diversified their online presence across multiple channels. Additional channels used included TikTok, LinkedIn, NextDoor, SnapChat, YouTube, Etsy, email marketing, BlueSky, X (formerly Twitter), Threads, and Kickstarter (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6).

Figure 3

Types of Social Media/Digital Platforms Used



While participants agreed that using multiple platforms was important, they also emphasized the need for balance. P-3 explained that managing too many channels could quickly become overwhelming. Similarly, P-6 cautioned against leaving accounts inactive, advising, “You don’t want to spread yourself too thin, and if you’re not comfortable on a platform, don’t have something that just stays empty... because then, if someone comes across it... that’s not gonna yield anything.” This lack of activity could even come across negatively for the business.

Subtheme 2.2: Key Marketing Tactics-Effective Strategies for Engagement and Growth

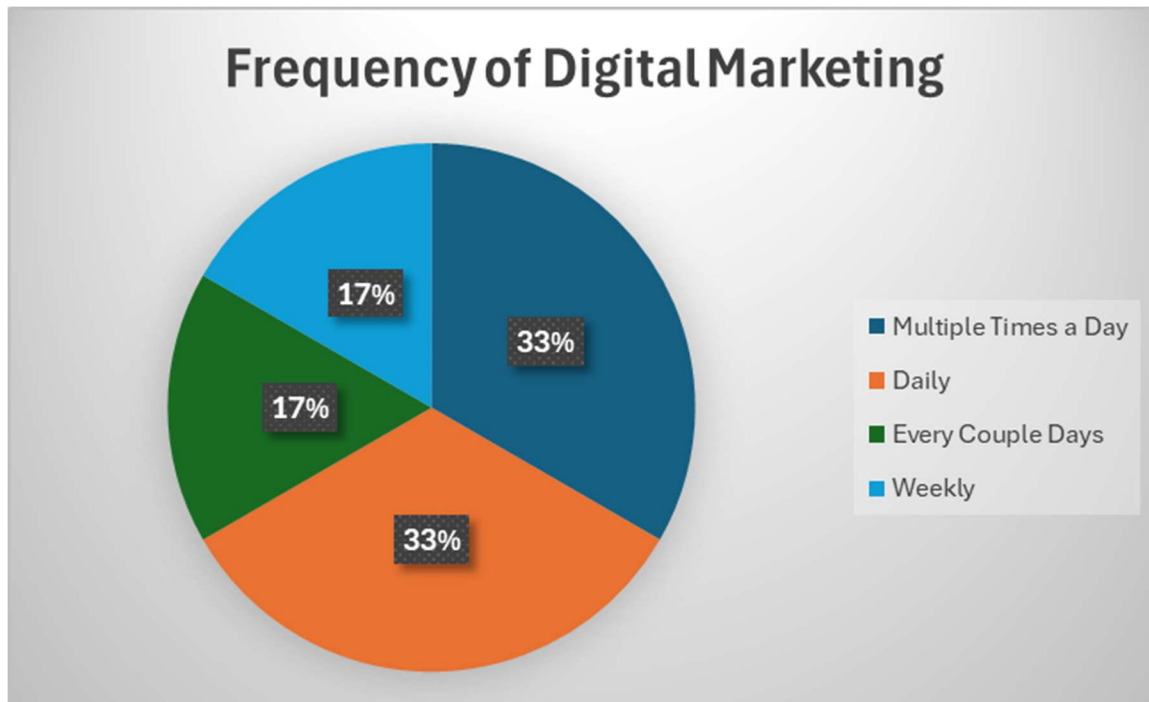
Participants identified a variety of strategies that contributed to effective digital marketing and business growth. These strategies were not limited to posting content but included maintaining consistent engagement, the use of supporting digital tools, and the

process of ongoing learning and adaptation. Collectively, these approaches reflect how participants sought not only to establish an online presence but also to sustain it and strengthen it over time.

Posting and Engagement Tactics. Successful digital marketing requires more than just creating content; it involves consistent interaction with followers.

Recommended practices included posting frequently, reusing content across platforms, and engaging with comments and messages (P-2). This type of engagement extends to participating in community posts and Facebook groups to increase visibility and build trust.

P-3 emphasized the evolving role of word-of-mouth in the digital age, explaining that referrals often happen online now rather than through in-person conversations. Online reviews, customer photos, and social media recommendations were identified as powerful tools for building credibility (P-3). This supports the findings of Dubbelink et al. (2021), Kamkankaew et al. (2022), and Khoa (2023), all of whom observed that reviews, recommendations, and referrals are key ways in which customers share their experiences with businesses. A single Google or Facebook review has the potential to reach a wide audience, making digital word-of-mouth a major driver of visibility. To maximize the benefits of these reviews, up-to-date social media channels and websites must be available, ensuring that positive feedback can be linked directly to business pages or easily found through searches.

Figure 4*Frequency of Digital Marketing*

Participants reported adopting varied approaches to posting frequency. While some preferred daily content, others limited their activity to weekly posts (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). No consensus emerged regarding an optimal posting frequency, and participants agreed that further research is needed to clarify how posting schedules may influence engagement and revenue outcomes. Several participants nevertheless believed that greater time investment on digital platforms generally produced stronger results (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4). As P-4 explained, “I might post right now... a hundred people are gonna post after I post it. Now my message is gone... and it doesn’t go to everybody’s feed when you post it.” This perspective suggests that posting more frequently may help

sustain visibility and maintain a stronger digital presence, a finding consistent with recent literature (Halwani & Cherry, 2023; Mufadhhol et al., 2024).

To save time, participants often repurposed content across platforms. For example, a video originally made for TikTok could be saved and reused on Instagram or Facebook. This allowed for broader visibility without duplicating effort (P-2, P-5, P-6). Some participants scheduled content in advance, using platform-specific tools or third-party programs.

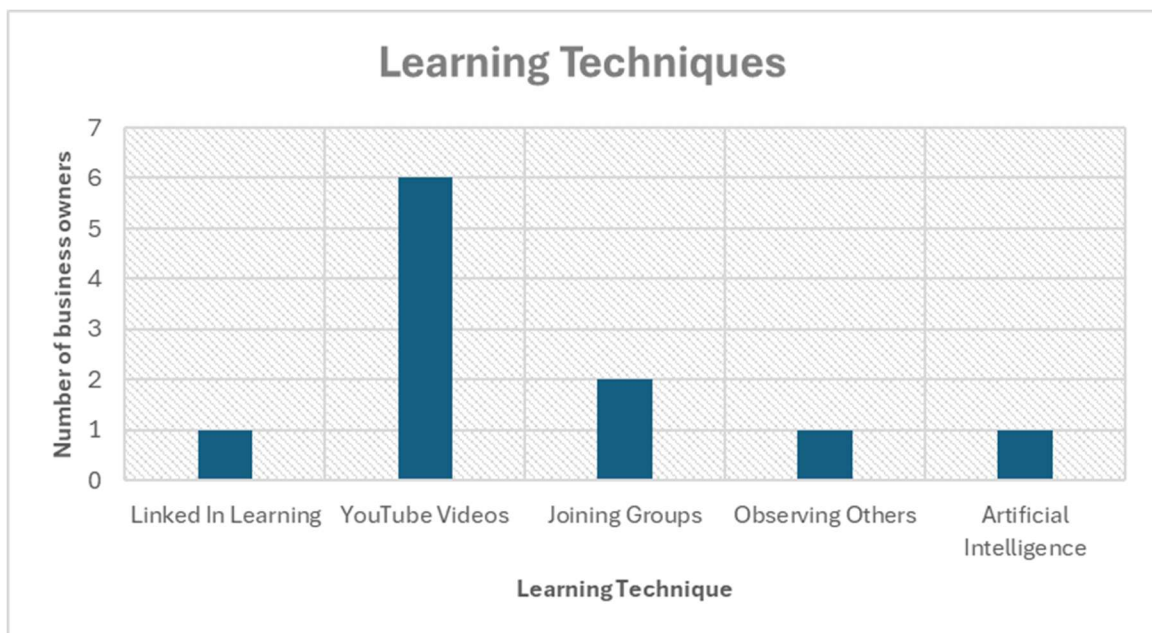
Tool and Software Use. Participants noted the importance of having basic knowledge of tools that support content creation and scheduling. Canva was frequently mentioned as a preferred tool for creating visual content, though some reported limited effectiveness when using its built-in scheduling feature. P-2 explained that while Canva is useful for design, Meta's native scheduling tool (Meta Business Suite) (Ruita et al., 2025) generated better results and visibility. Other tools mentioned included photo and video editing software (like Capcut) and AI tools (ChatGPT, hashtag generators) for generating captions and hashtags (P-1, P-2, P-4, P-6). These tools helped streamline content creation and reduce the manual workload of marketing. These findings align with recent literature highlighting how small business owners can leverage AI to enhance efficiency and gain a competitive advantage across various business activities (Mulyono et al., 2025).

Learning and Adaptability. Participants consistently emphasized that DIY marketing requires adaptability and a willingness to learn. To overcome technical challenges and acquire new skills, all relied on YouTube tutorials (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5,

P-6; Pires et al., 2022). Online communities, such as Facebook groups and Social Curator, also served as valuable learning environments (P-2, P-6). These spaces allow business owners to ask questions, share successes, and learn from peers without the need for formal training. Although some participants suggested paid courses, freely shared advice and peer guidance were viewed as more valuable and accessible. As P-5 explained, learning directly from others with similar experiences helped build confidence and improve marketing outcomes. This process reflects a form of autodidacticism, in which participants took ownership of their learning through self-directed exploration of online resources. The literature supports these findings, noting that both free and paid courses, online resources, and mentorship opportunities can help bridge knowledge gaps for small business owners (Laradi et al., 2023).

Figure 5

Learning Techniques Used



Subtheme 2.3: Overcoming Hurdles, Common Challenges and How Business Owners Navigate Them

Participants identified a range of challenges that impacted their success in implementing digital marketing strategies. While some obstacles were manageable and eventually addressed, others remained ongoing concerns. These challenges ranged from learning digital tools to broader operational issues that affected their overall capacity.

A widely shared challenge, both by the participants and in the literature, was understanding social media algorithms (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Metzler & Garcia, 2024; Ologunbe & Taiwo, 2023). Participants explained that algorithms frequently change and lack transparency, making it difficult to predict what content will be shown to their audience (P-1, P-3, P-5). This created a steep learning curve and often led to frustration when posts received limited engagement without a clear cause.

Disorganization was another obstacle, particularly in the early stages of developing a digital marketing routine. P-3 noted that failing to plan content or allocate time specifically for marketing tasks led to inconsistency and missed opportunities. Participants who implemented structured workflows or batch content creation reported improved consistency and reduced stress.

Time management was also a critical challenge. Many participants initially posted sporadically throughout the day without clear planning. P-3 shared that adopting a more strategic approach to scheduling improved their marketing outcomes. Allocating dedicated time to marketing tasks was seen as essential for success (P-2, P-3, P-4).

In addition to internal challenges, some participants faced external limitations, such as unreliable internet access or temporary platform glitches (P-3). P-1 discussed issues related to bot activity on social media posts, such as automated or spam-like comments, which detracted from the business's credibility and required extra time to monitor and remove. These extra steps took away time from other important tasks. Such challenges required resilient adaptation, as participants emphasized the importance of persistence and developing workarounds in the face of factors beyond their controls.

Figure 6

Hurdles Encountered by Business Owners

Hurdles
Trying to Keep Up With Posting
Technology Changes So Quickly
New Trends Happen Rapidly
Technical Issues
Shyness/Social Anxiety
Applying Quicker Processes from Initiation to Payment
Bot Spam

Theme 3: Measuring Effectiveness and Defining Success

Participants shared insights on how they assessed the outcomes of their DIY digital marketing efforts and how they defined success in their businesses. While formal marketing analytics were not consistently used, participants demonstrated an ongoing effort to evaluate what was working, refine their approach, and stay aligned with their goals.

Subtheme 3.1: What Success Looks Like

Success, as defined by participants, is subjective and multifaceted. While all small business owners strive to remain operational and avoid failure, their interpretations of success extend beyond basic survival. Although generating income is essential for sustainability, especially during challenging periods, participants also described additional factors that shaped their understanding of what it means to be successful.

Several participants identified financial gain as the primary metric for success, emphasizing revenue growth and profit as their main indicators (P-3, P-5). However, others expressed broader definitions. These included business growth, increased brand recognition, personal visibility, customer engagement, and consistently meeting sales or transaction goals (P-1, P-2, P-4, P-6). For some, maintaining strong relationships with customers and building a recognizable online presence were just as important as income (P-1, P-2, P-3).

It is worth noting that while “positive revenue” was frequently cited, its exact meaning varied. Some participants focused on profitability, while others were content with covering costs or maintaining consistent cash flow. These differences underscore that success in small business ownership is not universally defined but shaped by individual goals, circumstances, and values.

Figure 7*What Business Success Looks Like*

What Business Success Looks Like						
	Increased /Steady Sales	Engagement	Positive Financial Gain	Personal Visibility/Brand Awareness	Business Growth	Client Relationships
P1	X	X				
P2			X			X
P3			X			X
P4				X		
P5			X			
P6			X		X	

Subtheme 3.2: Tracking Progress-Methods for Assessing the Effectiveness of Digital Marketing

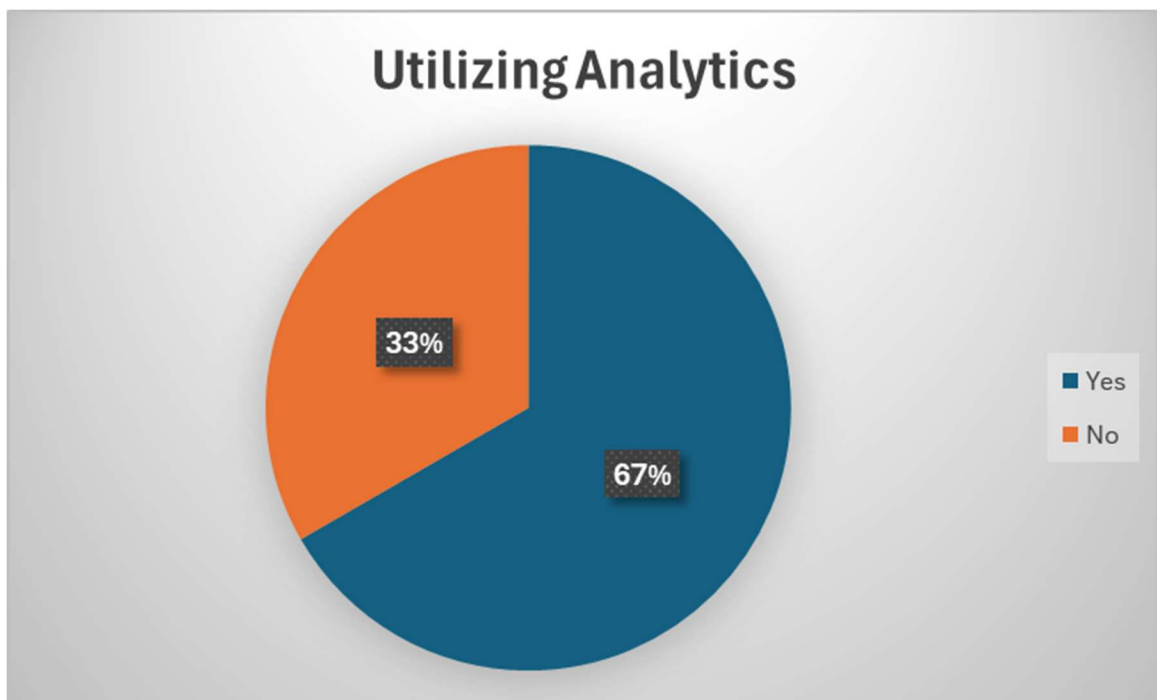
Participants used a variety of methods to evaluate the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies. While social media and website analytics were common tools, they were not the sole indicators of success. Business owners assessed their efforts using a mix of metrics, including follower growth, post views, online recognition, revenue trends, and direct customer engagement.

According to the findings, 67% of participants reported using platform analytics to some extent, while 33% did not engage with analytics at all. However, even among those who used these tools, the depth of analysis varied greatly. Some relied on basic metrics such as views or engagement, while others tried to interpret more detailed performance data. Despite the usefulness of analytics, participants pointed out limitations. In some cases, content that received high engagement did not lead to purchases, and some unexpected posts performed better than planned. Others mentioned

that they found analytics dashboards hard to interpret and often confusing. This issue is not unique to this study, as previous research has also highlighted the difficulties many users face when attempting to analyze and apply digital marketing analytics (Rizvanović et al., 2023).

Figure 8

Utilizing Analytics



For many participants, simpler metrics, such as follower count, customer inquiries, or number of transactions, were more tangible indicators of marketing success. These immediate forms of feedback were often more meaningful than abstract performance charts or algorithmic scores. Ultimately, participants emphasized that assessing effectiveness requires a combination of data, personal observation, and business outcomes. P-5 described a time when they went viral on Instagram, resulting in thousands

of sales. However, attempts to replicate the success of that video (through style and analytical data) were unsuccessful, and they were unsure why. They could not determine what made the algorithm promote that video, highlighting the unpredictable nature of social media visibility.

Subtheme 3.3: Lessons Learned-Advice and Insights for Other Small Business Owners

Research participants shared advice for small business owners considering or currently implementing DIY digital marketing. Their insights emphasized the importance of time management, simplicity, organization, and adaptability. These themes highlight the practical wisdom gained through firsthand experience and illustrate how participants translated challenges into actionable lessons for sustaining digital marketing efforts.

Prioritizing Time and Effort. Participants consistently emphasized that successful digital marketing requires dedicated time and effort. For many, this meant adjusting their schedules, such as waking up early, working during weekends, or batching content creation for the upcoming week (P-2, P-3, P-4, P-6). Balancing marketing responsibilities with family life and other tasks presented challenges, but participants found that establishing consistent, scheduled time for digital marketing tasks made them more effective (P-3).

Start Simple and Be Flexible. Participants advised simplifying the process to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Several noted that they managed their digital marketing entirely from their smartphones, demonstrating that success does not require complex tools or professional setups (P-2). As P-3 shared, the key is to begin, even imperfectly, rather than waiting until everything is perfect. Many felt that digital marketing skills

could be developed iteratively through hands-on experience and trial and error. Through this process of experimentation, participants engage in experiential knowledge accumulation, learning from both successes and setbacks to refine their marketing approaches.

Stay Organized and Adaptable. To stay organized, participants recommended planning content in advance and developing systems tailored to the needs of their businesses (P-2, P-3). P-1 advised that frequent posting should not be feared. If time and energy allow for more content, business owners should seize the opportunity. Several participants also encouraged others to manage expectations and remain open to experimenting with new tactics. As digital platforms evolve, so must the strategies used to reach customers. Embracing flexibility and continuous learning was identified as essential for long-term marketing success.

Figure 9

Advice from Research Participants

Advice From Research Participants
Fake It Till You Make It
Grab Inspiration From Others
Keep Going
Be Curious
Build Relationships With Other Entrepreneurs
Take Marketing Seriously
Don't Give Up If You Become Frustrated
The Work You Put In Now You May Not See Results Until Six Months From Now
Use AI To Your Advantage
Take the Time To Market Yourself

Overall Findings

The findings align with DIY behavioral theory, which highlights motivations such as economic benefit, control, customization, and craftsmanship (Watson & Shove, 2008; Wolf & McQuitty, 2011, 2013). Participants reflected these motivations through cost savings, creative control, and personal fulfillment in hands-on marketing (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). Their hesitation to outsource supports recent studies showing that misinterpreted brand identity can undermine authenticity and customer trust (Bhat & Khanna, 2024; Sutherland et al., 2025). Participants' preference for organic marketing aligns with research noting that maintaining an active online presence helps small businesses demonstrate accessibility and responsiveness, thereby strengthening customer relationships (Mufadhhol et al., 2024; Weidig et al., 2024). Collectively, these insights extend the theory by illustrating that solopreneurs pursue DIY marketing not only to save money but also to preserve brand authenticity and enhance customer engagement.

Small business owners developed marketing approaches centered on authenticity, prudence, and creative control. This confirms earlier evidence that DIY behavior is motivated by both economic and personal rewards (Wolf & McQuitty, 2011, 2013) and extends newer studies indicating that outsourcing can weaken brand coherence through misaligned messaging (Bhat & Khanna, 2024; Sutherland et al., 2025). Participants' intent to "keep their voice" reflects the control and competence dimensions of DIY behavioral theory, suggesting that digital marketing serves not only as a business function but as an act of self-representation.

In implementing their strategies, participants favored organic, nonpaid methods such as consistent posting, storytelling, and direct engagement with customers. These behaviors align with prior findings that frequency, content quality, and interaction foster stronger engagement and brand awareness (Mufadhhol et al., 2024; Saura et al., 2023; Weidig et al., 2024). Their avoidance of paid advertising also reflects a practical response to limited financial resources and uncertainty regarding ROI. Viewed through the DIY behavioral lens, this choice represents a deliberate trade-off prioritizing mastery and autonomy over delegation.

Participants evaluated marketing success using tangible, behavior-based outcomes such as engagement, inquiries, and sales rather than formal analytics. This corroborates evidence that micro-enterprises commonly rely on simplified metrics tied to observable customer activity (Hasan et al., 2024; Yendra et al., 2024). Their iterative learning and adaptation mirror entrepreneurial information-seeking patterns described by Orrensalo et al. (2024) and support resilience research linking continuous skill development to effective digital transformation (Hokmabadi et al., 2024). From the perspective of DIY behavioral theory, these patterns enforce competence-building. This continuous refinement of skills is a key factor in achieving sustainable marketing outcomes.

Across themes, this study confirms the persistence of classic DIY motivations while extending current understanding of how solopreneurs apply them in modern digital contexts. The study substantiates the perceived threat of losing one's brand voice through outsourcing. This may be as influential as cost in shaping marketing choices. Overall, the findings position DIY digital marketing as both an economic and identity-driven practice

consistent with the core principles of DIY behavioral theory: control, competence, and customization.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The findings of this study provide important contributions to business practice and actionable recommendations for organizational leaders. This section discusses how the results can inform professional practice by addressing skill gaps, strengthening brand authenticity, and promoting sustainable digital marketing strategies. The discussion is organized into several key areas, including relevance to business practice, implications for small business owners, the essential time commitment, the need for continuous learning, and broader applications for organizations and institutions. Together, these insights provide a roadmap for business leaders seeking to enhance marketing effectiveness and strengthen long-term organizational growth.

Implications for Professional Practice

This research offers direct implications for business and organizational leaders seeking to improve professional practice in digital marketing. The purpose of the research was to identify, analyze, and explore the effective strategies that small business owners employ in developing and implementing DIY digital marketing campaigns. The study addressed the applied business problem that while small business owners frequently engage in DIY digital marketing due to limited resources, little guidance exists on the specific strategies that contribute to consistent, effective outcomes. By filling this gap, the research offers a foundation of knowledge that business leaders can use to improve practice, strengthen marketing outcomes, and ultimately enhance business growth.

Relevance to Professional Business Practice

For business and organizational leaders, the relevance of these findings lies in their ability to guide decision-making, capacity building, and resource allocation. The findings underscore that small business owners are not simply motivated by financial constraints but are also driven by authenticity and the desire to maintain control over their brand identity. Understanding this motivation allows leaders to approach digital marketing, not merely as a cost-saving measure, but as a strategic tool that connects the business to its customers in meaningful ways. By applying these findings, leaders can cultivate marketing practices that are authentic, customer-focused, and sustainable, rather than transactional or reactive.

Identifying and Addressing Skill Gaps

A key implication for practice is the importance of identifying and addressing skill gaps within small business marketing. The findings highlight that business leaders frequently lack confidence or competence in areas such as social media engagement, content creation, and data analysis (Malesu & Syrovátka, 2025; Setkute & Dibb, 2022; Thaha et al., 2021). Leaders can strengthen their professional practice by first conducting an honest assessment of their current marketing capabilities (Laradi et al., 2023). Tools such as self-reflection, customer feedback, and peer evaluation can help identify where improvements and education are needed (Anseel & Sherf, 2025; Lim, 2025). Once identified, business leaders can pursue targeted training opportunities such as online courses, mentorship programs, or workshops designed specifically for small business owners.

Investing time and sometimes money in professional development equips leaders with the knowledge needed to operate more independently in digital spaces (Malesu & Syrovátka, 2025). Affordable and accessible tools such as Canva for design, CapCut for video editing, and analytics platforms built into social media networks can help owners translate learning into action (Ekowati et al., 2024). By mastering these tools and pairing them with an understanding of marketing strategy, leaders can create professional, engaging, and effective campaigns without outsourcing. This improves professional practice by building capacity internally, reducing reliance on outside firms, and maintaining brand authenticity.

Maintaining Control Over Brand Messaging

The study also emphasizes the importance of maintaining control over brand messaging, which has significant implications for professional practice (Malesu & Syrovátka, 2025). Outsourcing marketing activity to outside sources can dilute the brand's authentic voice because external professionals may not fully capture the owner's vision or identity (Sutherland et al., 2025). By building DIY marketing skills, business leaders can ensure their messaging reflects their values and resonates with customers on a personal level. This not only strengthens the brand but also fosters trust and loyalty among target audiences.

For business leaders, this finding suggests that improved practice requires balancing efficiency with authenticity (Kothari et al., 2025; Migkos et al., 2025; Pan et al., 2024). While outsourcing can save time, maintaining a core level of involvement in digital marketing ensures that the voice of the business remains genuine and aligned with

its mission. Business owners can improve their practice by developing personal guidelines for content, tone, and engagement, ensuring that their marketing consistently reflects their brand values and authentic identity.

The Essential Commitment of Time

A central implication for professional practice is the recognition that DIY digital marketing requires substantial, ongoing time investment (Sharabati et al., 2024). The study's findings make clear that business owners cannot expect to succeed in digital marketing if it is treated as an afterthought or occasional task (Mufadhhol et al., 2024). Rather, consistent time must be allocated for planning, developing, scheduling, and posting content, as well as for engaging with online audiences (Yuniarti et al., 2024). This is not something that can be worked around or fit into spare moments; it requires intentional scheduling and prioritization (George, 2025).

Leaders must accept that digital marketing is an essential business function, equal in importance to financial management or customer service, and can take just as much time as the primary business operations of manufacturing or conducting services (Dwivedi et al., 2021). To improve practice, business owners should set aside dedicated time daily for priority activities, like marketing (George, 2025). This includes separate blocks of time for content creation, audience engagement, analysis, and ongoing learning (Lopes & Casais, 2022). Without this commitment, leaders risk inconsistency, low visibility, and missed opportunities to connect with customers (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2010; Whang & Lee, 2025). By treating digital marketing as a disciplined and recurring

responsibility, leaders can establish patterns of consistency that strengthen brand presence and customer trust (Mufadhol et al., 2024).

The Role of Continuous Learning

Another significant implication for practice is the need for continuous learning (Olazo, 2022). The field of digital marketing evolves rapidly, with new platforms, algorithms, and tools emerging at a pace that requires ongoing adaptation (Sanbella et al., 2024). Business leaders must understand that learning in this field is never complete. Instead, professional practice is strengthened by cultivating a mindset of curiosity and openness to change.

The findings suggest that leaders who dedicate time to expanding their knowledge—whether by engaging with industry peers, participating in online communities, taking paid courses, or consuming free educational content on platforms such as YouTube—are better equipped to keep pace with technological advancements (Sharabati et al., 2024; Yendra et al., 2024). Remaining informed about new trends, such as artificial intelligence applications in marketing, can provide small businesses with competitive advantages (Kothari et al., 2025; Sanbella et al., 2024; Yendra et al., 2024). Leaders should not view learning as optional but as a core component of their professional practice (Yendra et al., 2024). By embedding learning into their weekly routines, they ensure that their strategies remain relevant and effective in an ever-changing digital environment.

Developing Step-by-Step Implementation Plans

Improved professional practice also requires the integration of step-by-step implementation plans. The findings indicate that small business owners benefit from creating structured, actionable plans that align marketing activities with broader organizational goals (Yendra et al., 2024). Leaders can improve their practice by defining clear objectives, such as increasing website traffic, growing social media engagement, or improving lead conversion rates, and by breaking these objectives into measurable tasks.

These implementation plans should include timelines, designated responsibilities, and metrics for evaluating success. For example, a business might set quarterly goals for follower growth or monthly targets for customer engagement. By monitoring progress against these benchmarks, leaders can identify what works, refine what does not, determine what new information needs to be obtained to perform better, and remain accountable to their goals (Rahman et al., 2024). This systematic approach strengthens professional practice by transforming digital marketing from an ad hoc activity into a strategic function that drives measurable outcomes.

Conclusion of Professional Practice Implications

In summary, the findings of this study provide actionable insights for business and organizational leaders seeking to improve professional practice in digital marketing. The results highlight the importance of authenticity, the need for skill development in core marketing areas, and the value of maintaining control over brand messaging. They also emphasize that successful DIY digital marketing requires substantial time commitment and a mindset of continuous learning.

Leaders can improve their practice by investing in training, adopting affordable and accessible tools, developing structured implementation plans, and embedding ongoing education into their routines. These strategies not only enhance marketing effectiveness but also contribute to financial sustainability, customer trust, and long-term business growth. As digital platforms continue to evolve, leaders who apply these findings will be best positioned to remain competitive, adaptable, and connected to their customers. In this way, the study's findings provide a roadmap for advancing professional practice in small business marketing and beyond.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this doctoral study have the potential to contribute significantly to positive social change by influencing business owners, in turn influencing communities, organizations, industries, and the research-scholar community. The findings from this study have several important implications for social change. At the individual level, the results offer actionable strategies for small business owners to enhance their digital marketing efforts through the effective application of DIY behaviors. For many entrepreneurs, particularly those with limited financial resources, the ability to develop and implement digital marketing campaigns without relying heavily on external agencies can increase economic resilience, reduce operational costs, and enable greater control over brand messaging. This increased autonomy may empower small business owners to compete more effectively in local and global markets, thereby fostering economic stability for themselves and their families.

Strengthening DIY digital marketing skills may also help small business owners avoid one of the most common causes of business failure: insufficient revenue to sustain operations (Malesu & Syrovátka, 2025; Priya & Swetha, 2025). Many small businesses close due to a lack of funding or because they operate for extended periods without generating substantial profit. By improving their ability to attract and retain customers through consistent, strategic digital marketing, owners can increase sales volume and brand recognition, which in turn enhances cash flow stability. A stronger online presence helps potential customers discover the business, increase opportunities for repeat purchases, and gain referrals (Kothari et al., 2025). This can be done whether the business operates locally, nationally, or worldwide and provides services or products. Over time, this visibility can reduce financial vulnerability and create a more secure foundation for long-term business survival (Migkos et al., 2025).

From a community perspective, the widespread adoption of effective DIY digital marketing practices has the potential to contribute to local economic growth and community revitalization. By increasing visibility and customer engagement, the marketing strategies outlined in this study could help small businesses expand their customer base, resulting in greater demand for locally sourced goods and services. This, in turn, can strengthen local supply chains, support complementary businesses, and stimulate entrepreneurial activity within the community (Malesu & Syrovátka, 2025)

With greater demand comes an increased need for employees, which directly contributes to economic stability and growth. This not only sustains current positions within a company but can also create additional opportunities as businesses expand to

meet customer needs. Small businesses, play a vital role as they are a major source of employment in the United States (U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2023). Employment can take the form of in-person roles filled by local citizens, strengthening community ties, or remote positions that broaden access to work opportunities on a national scale. Both pathways generate income, reduce unemployment, and foster resilience in local and national economies. In this way, the growth of small business employment supports stronger communities and promotes upward mobility, making it a powerful driver of social change.

The implications also extend to organizational leaders within the marketing and technology sectors. The insights from this study can help marketing firms and consultants better understand the needs and preferences of small business clients who opt for DIY approaches. Instead of viewing DIY marketers solely as competitors, agencies could develop hybrid service models that provide targeted support, training, and resources for business owners who wish to retain control over certain aspects of their marketing. Technology companies, particularly those developing digital tools, platforms, and AI applications, could integrate user feedback from DIY marketers to design more intuitive, affordable, and accessible solutions tailored to nonspecialist users.

At the institutional level, these findings have relevance for business development organizations, chambers of commerce, and government agencies tasked with supporting entrepreneurship. By incorporating the study's recommendations into training programs, mentorship initiatives, and grant-funded marketing assistance, institutions could help level the playing field for small business owners in underserved or rural communities.

These interventions may be especially impactful for minority-owned, women-owned, and veteran-owned businesses that historically face systemic barriers to accessing capital and professional marketing expertise. Programs informed by this research could help reduce inequities in business visibility, enabling a more diverse range of entrepreneurs to succeed.

Culturally, the study's emphasis on self-reliance, adaptability, and continuous learning aligns with broader societal shifts toward lifelong learning and digital literacy. As digital platforms continue to dominate consumer engagement, the ability to market effectively online is becoming a baseline skill for entrepreneurs. By promoting a culture of proactive skill development and openness to emerging technologies, these findings may influence not only how business owners operate but also how communities value and support entrepreneurship as a driver of cultural and economic vitality.

For the research-scholar community, this study contributes to the relatively underexplored intersection of DIY behavioral theory and digital marketing strategy. The results underscore the importance of examining not only the motivations behind DIY behavior but also the practical steps required to translate that motivation into measurable outcomes. Future researchers can build on these findings by exploring DIY digital marketing in specific industries, geographic regions, or demographic groups, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of how self-directed marketing practices influence business success across contexts. Additionally, the study highlights the need for ongoing inquiry into how rapidly evolving technologies—such as AI-powered design tools,

automated analytics platforms, and immersive virtual reality marketing—may reshape the nature and effectiveness of DIY marketing strategies.

Ultimately, the implications of this study suggest that empowering small business owners with the skills to manage their own digital marketing can reduce reliance on outside agencies and redirect resources into job creation, product development, and community growth. These social implications extend from the smallest unit—the individual entrepreneur—through local communities and all the way to the national economy, demonstrating how small business sustainability can foster both grassroots resilience and broader economic strength.

Recommendations for Further Research

This pragmatic qualitative inquiry study explores the strategies employed by small business owners in developing and implementing DIY behavior in digital marketing. The findings gave valuable insights into practical strategies for small business owners. Nevertheless, the study had certain limitations. These limitations include a small sample size, the understanding that changes in technology will happen, including tools and platforms, and there were time constraints leading to a limited depth on certain subtopics.

First, to address the limitation of a small sample size, future research should incorporate both a broader recruitment strategy and a methodological shift to deepen the understanding of effective digital marketing strategies for small business owners. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse participant pool and include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies. Organizations such as the SBA or

local government agencies, with their established reputations and broad networks, are well-positioned to lead these efforts. Their involvement could attract a broader group of small business owners, thereby enhancing the generalizability and applicability of the findings to varied real-world business contexts. Additionally, transitioning from qualitative methods to quantitative approaches, such as large-scale surveys, would enable the collection of more extensive data on digital marketing behaviors. This methodological shift could reveal statistically significant trends and correlations, offering actionable insights that can be translated into training programs, toolkits, or policy initiatives to improve small business marketing outcomes.

Second, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technology may affect the long-term relevance of the findings. As tools, platforms, and user behaviors continue to shift, strategies that are effective today may become outdated shortly. The only way to address this limitation is for future researchers to remain abreast of ongoing developments in the digital marketing landscape and to conduct research on a continual basis. Ongoing studies can help explain any emerging differences in strategy or behavior caused by technological advancements, ensuring that the body of knowledge remains current and applicable to real-world small business contexts. Additionally, the impact of emerging technologies, particularly AI, warrants further exploration. By analyzing how AI tools are being implemented and their impact on engagement, efficiency, and growth. Researchers can help develop evidence-based best practices that small businesses can realistically adopt.

Lastly, to address the limitation caused by time constraints that restricted the depth of analysis, future research should examine in greater detail the subtopics that were only briefly explored in this study. One such area is the role of paid digital marketing. While this study, and much of the existing literature focus primarily on organic strategies, paid advertisements offer another level of opportunity for small businesses to reach target audiences. Understanding how to strategically invest in paid ads to maximize ROI is critical for businesses with limited marketing budgets. Future studies should explore how small businesses approach paid advertising, the platforms they use, and the cost-effectiveness of different ad strategies to ensure small business owners can make informed, financially sound decisions in their marketing efforts.

Altogether, these future research directions can bridge the gap between theory and practice by offering small business owners practical, data-driven strategies that support stronger digital marketing outcomes and long-term growth.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify, analyze, and explore the effective strategies small business owners employ when developing and implementing DIY digital marketing campaigns. The findings revealed that while cost savings remain an important factor, participants consistently emphasized the need to maintain creative and strategic control over how their business is presented to the public (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). This need for authenticity manifested in careful content curation, direct customer engagement, and adaptability in messaging to reflect evolving business goals.

Ultimately, the driving force behind small business adoption of DIY digital marketing is not merely financial constraint, but the pursuit of authenticity (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6). Owners prioritize maintaining control over their brand narrative to ensure alignment with their core values and identity (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-5). This finding challenges the prevailing assumption that budget limitations are the primary motivator and underscores the importance of resources and strategies that support authenticity-driven marketing efforts.

By addressing the gap in the literature regarding how DIY behavioral theory applies to digital marketing, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the motivations and practices of small business owners in an increasingly digital economy. The research demonstrates that effective DIY digital marketing requires more than technical skill; it involves aligning marketing activities with the owner's personal and professional identity, building trust with target audiences, and sustaining consistent visibility across multiple platforms.

While authenticity and cost savings are central motivations, the findings also make clear that success in DIY digital marketing demands a significant investment of time, persistence, and skill development. Small business owners must be willing to commit to consistent posting, active engagement with their online audience, and ongoing learning in areas such as content creation, platform algorithms, analytics, and emerging tools like artificial intelligence. This requires grit, adaptability, and a readiness to navigate the many facets of digital marketing in a constantly changing landscape.

As digital platforms continue to evolve, small businesses that blend authenticity, financial prudence, and a disciplined, informed approach to marketing will be best positioned to remain competitive, adapt to change, and strengthen their connection with customers. In this way, the principles uncovered in this study provide both a roadmap for practice and a foundation for continued research in the field.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Small Business Digital Marketing Adoption Interview Protocol

Business Name: _____

Business Owner(s): _____

Interviewer: Shannon Springob

Good morning [participant]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As a review, this interview will be used as research for my Doctor of Business Administration study. The topic of the study is “To what extent does the adoption of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) behavior in digital marketing impact small businesses overall success and growth?”

I want to reiterate that this study is voluntary and that your consent can be revoked at any point. Do you still consent to participating in this study?

To facilitate our note-taking, I would like to audiotape our conversations today. Only researchers on the project will have access to the tapes, which will be destroyed after five years. This is the required amount of time that study documentation must be kept in guidance with the Walden University research policy.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, I may need to interrupt to ensure we cover all topics.

I will now begin our interview questions.

1. Please introduce yourself by sharing your name and briefly describing the type of business you operate.

2. To better understand your digital marketing practices, please share your current digital marketing expenditure.
3. Which digital marketing channels do you find yourself using frequently to promote your business?
4. Please describe how you use DIY approaches or outsource to professionals for your digital marketing needs.
5. What factors influenced your decision to adopt a DIY approach in digital marketing?
6. How do you define success for your business, and how do you think your DIY digital marketing efforts have contributed to this?
7. Please share specific instances where your DIY digital marketing initiatives directly influenced customer engagement, acquisition, or retention.
8. What challenges or obstacles related to implementing DIY digital marketing strategies have you overcome?
9. How do you measure the effectiveness of your DIY digital marketing campaigns?
10. What changes have you observed in your business's growth trajectory since incorporating DIY digital marketing techniques?
11. Please discuss any learning curves or skill development you have encountered while implementing DIY digital marketing.
12. What role does digital marketing play in shaping your business's brand identity and online presence?
13. What advice would you give to other small business owners considering adopting a DIY approach in digital marketing?

14. In retrospect, what adjustments would you consider if you were to change your approach to DIY digital marketing?

15. How do you ensure your DIY digital marketing strategies align with your business goals and objectives?

This concludes our interview questions. Thank you again for your time and for agreeing to participate in the interview.