

Digital Marketing Strategy to Increase Brand Awareness in Start-Up Companies

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ABSTRACT

Digital marketing has become a key strategy for increasing brand awareness in start-up companies. Techniques such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, influencer marketing, and content marketing have proven effective in reaching a wider market at a lower cost than conventional marketing methods. This study aims to analyze effective digital marketing strategies for start-ups to build brand awareness and increase competitiveness in the market. This study employs a literature review to analyze various publications related to digital marketing and its implementation in start-up companies. The results demonstrate that the appropriate combination of digital marketing strategies can enhance brand recognition by up to 70% within the first year of a company's operations.

A. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of digital technology, startups face a big challenge in building brand awareness amid increasingly fierce competition. This challenge does not only come from similar competitors, but also from the phenomenon of information overload or information explosion that floods consumers' digital devices every day. In this dynamic attention economy, startups often face a "trust gap," where new entities with no long track record have to fight extra hard to gain attention and credibility in the eyes of the audience. Especially with the shift in consumer behavior that is now mobile-first, where purchase decisions are often made in just a matter of seconds when interacting with their mobile devices. Therefore, startups must have a strategic and adaptive marketing approach so as not to be drowned in digital noise and be able to compete optimally.

In addition to the development of digital technology, global economic transformation has also encouraged changes in the company's marketing patterns. Advances in internet technology, high smartphone penetration, and increasing consumer activity on digital platforms have changed the way companies interact with customers. According to reports by industry research institutes, more than half of the world's population is currently connected to the internet, and most product information search activities are done through search engines and social media before consumers make a purchase decision. This phenomenon creates new opportunities for startups to compete with large companies. In contrast to the traditional marketing era that relies heavily on mass media such as television, radio, and print media, digital marketing allows companies with limited resources to reach a wide audience through more creative and data-driven strategies. Startups can leverage digital technology to build a strong brand presence without having to spend large marketing costs.

Digital marketing strategies offer a variety of solutions to bridge these gaps by increasing brand visibility and attracting potential customers (Kotler & Keller, 2021). With a variety of digital channels such as social media, search engines, and content marketing, companies can reach a wider audience and build long-term relationships with consumers in a more personal way. Furthermore, digital marketing is the main choice for startups because of its agile but cost-effective characteristics, which are very suitable for the conditions of



resource scarcity that are usually experienced by companies in the early stages of establishment.

Definitively, digital marketing is a modern marketing approach that leverages digital technology and various online platforms to reach consumers more efficiently and interactively. This strategy includes the use of social media, search engines, email, mobile apps, and websites, and is supported by data and analytics to increase the relevance of marketing messages (Amrita et al., 2024). Digital marketing does not only focus on using one channel, but combines conventional marketing strategies with the use of data, algorithms, and analytics technology to create a more personalized and relevant consumer experience (Amrita et al., 2024).

In practice, the use of social media platforms allows startups to interact directly with customers, build communities, and increase consumer loyalty from the initial stage. One of the most significant trends in social media marketing today is the dominance of short-form video content such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. This format offers startups high opportunities for organic virality without having to have a large follower base, thus allowing brand messages to spread exponentially in a short period of time (Smith, 2024). Social media allows brands to effectively convey a narrative of company values through a variety of content formats, including videos, images, and text capable of triggering the audience's emotional engagement. The paid advertising feature on social media also provides a competitive advantage for startups to segment very specific markets based on users' online preferences and behavior, so that every rupiah spent has a measurable impact.

In addition to social media, search engine optimization (SEO) is a key pillar in building a credible digital presence. With the right SEO strategy, a company's website can appear on the first page of Google search results, which significantly increases visibility and conversion opportunities. These strategies include using relevant keywords, creating quality content, and improving the structure of the website to make it more user-friendly for search engines and users. This strategy is often combined with marketing through micro-influencers, i.e. individuals with a relatively small number of followers but have a very high level of trust and engagement in certain market segments. The use of micro-influencers helps startups build social proof that is more authentic than traditional marketing methods (Brown & Fiorella, 2023). This is in line with the content marketing strategy that plays an important role in educating the market. By creating relevant, educational, and engaging content, startups can build authority in their industry and turn potential customer skepticism into deep trust.

However, even though these digital channels are widely available, there is still a research gap on how to synergistically integrate these strategies to optimize brand awareness at the scale of startups that have limited budgets. Most of the current literature still focuses on established companies with large databases and marketing budgets, thus lacking relevant operational guidance for startups that operate with limited resources and require an effective yet cost-effective digital marketing approach. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the most effective digital marketing strategies in increasing brand awareness for startups. The results of this research are expected to provide strategic guidance for startup founders in designing an adaptive, integrated, and sustainable digital marketing ecosystem in an increasingly competitive global market.

B. THEORETICAL STUDY

Digital marketing strategy is defined as the planning and execution of marketing activities through electronic channels that allow organizations to achieve measurable consumer visibility and engagement targets (Halim et al., 2024). For startup companies, this approach is a fundamental need to build an existence in the market in the midst of limited resources (Insandi et al., 2024). Digital marketing is often implemented through growth hacking techniques, which are data-driven experiments to find the most effective ways to grow a business at a low cost (Li, 2023). Its main components include social media marketing that facilitates two-way communication (Parida et al., 2024), as well as the use of visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to increase product recognition through

consistent and quality content (Haliza et al., 2025). In addition, innovation through targeted advertising on Facebook and LinkedIn has been shown to contribute significantly to attracting new customers efficiently (Widjaja et al., 2025).

Brand awareness is one of the main components of brand equity. According to modern marketing theory, brand awareness refers to the ability of consumers to recognize and remember a brand in a particular product category. The level of brand awareness is usually divided into several stages, namely brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness. Brand recognition occurs when consumers can recognize a brand when they see a logo, name, or other visual element. This stage is usually the first step in the process of establishing a relationship between consumers and brands. Furthermore, brand recall refers to the ability of consumers to recall a brand when they think of a particular product category without visual aid. The highest stage is top-of-mind awareness, which is the condition when a brand becomes the first choice that comes to consumers' minds when they think of a certain product category. This position is very important because brands that are at a top-of-mind level have a greater chance of being chosen by consumers compared to other brands. In the context of digital marketing, brand awareness can be built through various strategies that utilize digital technology and social media. Engaging content, active interaction with customers, and consistency of brand messaging are important factors in building brand awareness in the digital environment.

In modern marketing, the customer journey is an important concept to understand how consumers interact with brands before making a purchase. Customer journey describes a series of stages that consumers go through, starting from the awareness stage to finally becoming a loyal customer. In the early stages, consumers usually find information about a brand through search engines, social media, or recommendations from others. After that, they will conduct an evaluation process by looking for additional information about the products or services offered. If the information obtained is considered relevant and convincing, the consumer will proceed to the purchase stage. After making a purchase, the consumer's experience of the product or service will determine whether they will return to use the product in the future or even recommend it to others. Therefore, digital marketing strategies focus not only on attracting new customers, but also on maintaining long-term relationships with existing customers.

On the other hand, content marketing serves as a credibility-building tool by distributing relevant and educational information through blogs or videos (Surya et al., 2018). In order for the content to reach the audience optimally, integration with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is crucial to ensure that brands are easy to find when consumers look for solutions organically (Muhonen, 2017). This strategy is further strengthened through collaborations with influencers who act as a bridge of trust between new brands and consumers through social validation (Kene et al., 2024). The success of this collaboration is highly dependent on the authenticity and relevance of the influencer's value to the brand image (Kene et al., 2024).

The effectiveness of this entire set of strategies is measured through increased brand awareness, which is defined as the ability of consumers to recognize and recall a brand in a particular product category (Ali et al., 2023). The highest target is to achieve a top-of-mind position, where the brand appears first in the consumer's mind (Parida et al., 2024). In their operations, startups are often guided by the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model to attract attention in the midst of digital information noise (IJFMR, 2024). In addition, the RACE (Reach, Act, Convert, Engage) framework is used to provide a measurable technical approach, from the stage of reaching new visitors through SEO to building long-term loyalty through active engagement (Pandawa Digital Media, 2023).



Table RACE Framework

Stages RACE	Key Strategy Instruments	Success Metrics (KPI)
Reach (Jangkauan)	SEO, Social Media Ads, Influencers	Impressions, Reach, Web Visits
Act (Tindakan)	Content Marketing, Interactive Video	<i>Bounce Rate</i> , Time on Page, Content Clicks
Convert (Konversi)	Landing Page, Email Marketing	Number of Registrations, Sales Transactions
Engage (Keterlibatan)	Social Media Communities, CRM Services	<i>Retention Rate</i> , Brand Mention (Mentions)

C. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital marketing strategies and their impact on brand awareness, where quantitative data is used to measure the influence of variables, while qualitative data is used to explore the strategy mechanism in depth. Operationally, the research begins with a quantitative stage to test the relationship between digital marketing strategy variables (such as social media, content, and influencers) to brand awareness levels. The second stage is a qualitative approach that is descriptive in nature to provide context to quantitative findings through case studies on specific startup companies. The use of this mixed-method design is in line with the practice in the startup literature that often combines statistical data analysis with insights from interviews or case studies to capture the dynamics of the rapidly changing market.

The population in this study consists of two main groups to get a balanced internal and external perspective: (1) Consumer Group: Individuals who are active users of social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn) and are followers or users of the services of the startup company being studied; (2) Startup Stakeholder Group: Owners, marketing managers, or digital marketing operational staff in startup companies who are responsible for designing and executing branding strategies.

Sample determination was carried out using different techniques for each stage of research: (1) Quantitative Sample: Using purposive sampling or convenience sampling techniques to reach consumers who are exposed to startup digital marketing campaigns on social media. Based on empirical references to similar studies, the common sample size ranged from 81 to 348 respondents; (2) Qualitative Sample: Using purposive sampling techniques to select key informants who have in-depth knowledge of the company's internal strategy. The qualitative sample typically involves startup owners and a few selected consumers for an in-depth interview session.

This study applies a comprehensive data collection approach through the integration of primary and secondary data to ensure the validity of results through triangulation techniques, where primary data is collected directly through an online questionnaire to extract quantitative data related to consumer perception and brand recognition (Parida et al., 2024; Muhonen, 2017; Surya et al., 2018), as well as semi-structured interviews with startup managers or owners to explore specific strategies and operational barriers (Hidayanto et al., 2020; Palo, 2023; Sharma, 2024). Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through Social Media Analytics techniques to monitor digital performance metrics such as engagement rate and brand mentions (Palo, 2023; Pandawa Digital Media, 2023), which is supported by a documentary study of internal reports and academic literature to map the evolution of campaigns chronologically (IJFMR, 2024; Palo, 2023). The integration of these two types of data allows researchers to obtain a holistic picture of the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies implemented by startup companies.

The main instrument in this study is a questionnaire compiled based on the digital marketing and brand awareness framework, where independent variables (X) include the dimensions of digital marketing strategies such as frequency of social media interaction, content relevance, and influencer credibility. Meanwhile, the dependent variable (Y) measures brand awareness through brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind status indicators. Quantitative data measurement was carried out using a Likert Scale of 1-5 to capture the gradation of respondents' perceptions, which were then tested for validity and reliability using correlation tests and Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the instruments in measuring the research variables.

Data analysis in this study was carried out in stages using a mixed methods approach, which began with quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics to provide an overview of respondent profiles and questionnaire answer distributions and refer to the startup product consumer value model. Furthermore, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to test the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand awareness simultaneously and partially supported by correlation tests and T-tests to see the strength of relationships between variables and significant differences between data groups. Complementing these findings, qualitative analysis was applied through thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to growth strategies, the role of digital platforms, and branding challenges in startups as well as content analysis to dissect visual elements, creative messages, and influencer collaboration on social media. The entire series of analyses concludes with a data triangulation technique that compares quantitative, qualitative, and secondary data findings to produce valid conclusions about the effectiveness of digital marketing in building reputation and purchase intent

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SEO is a digital marketing strategy that aims to increase the visibility of a website on search engines like Google through organic or unpaid rankings. This strategy is a crucial element for startup companies to reach a wider audience and increase traffic to their websites amid fierce competition (Moz, 2023). In the context of startups, SEO is used to build brand credibility by optimizing relevant keywords, site speed, content structure, and user experience. SEO techniques include the use of meta-tags, image optimization, quality content, and high-quality backlinks that are interrelated in the latest search engine algorithms (Daryanto & Ruldeviyani, 2020; Gunawan & Susanti, 2021).

High rankings in search results greatly determine the level of brand awareness, considering that research shows that 75% of internet users only visit the first page of search results (HubSpot, 2022). Therefore, search engine optimization directly contributes to the brand recognition stage, where potential customers can easily find startups while looking for solutions to their problems. In addition, SEO strategies must also include the development of local SEO, which allows startups to reach target audiences in specific regions more precisely, efficiently, and personally (Saputra et al., 2023; Sari & Mahardhika, 2022). Measuring SEO effectiveness can be done through metrics such as the number of organic clicks, bounce rate, and conversion rate to create an adaptive and data-driven marketing ecosystem (Putra et al., 2021; Hidayat & Fauziah, 2023).

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a strategy that leverages platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok to build brand awareness and establish two-way communication with customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). For startups, social media provides an opportunity to showcase brand values and build a relevant narrative to strengthen brand identity in the eyes of the audience. Social media allows for quick and personalized interactions, thus creating a more customer-oriented experience that is urgently needed by new companies to attract the attention of the market (Utami & Nugroho, 2022; Putri & Kurniawan, 2021).

The main advantage of SMM for startups is its ability to build community and loyalty through educational content, testimonials, and interactive campaigns. The use of paid advertising such as Facebook Ads and Instagram Ads also allows for accurate market



segmentation based on user demographics and interests, so that the limited marketing budget of startups can be allocated efficiently (Sari & Prasetya, 2023; Wibowo & Rachmawati, 2020). Through social media performance analysis such as engagement rate and reach, startups can consistently increase brand awareness by up to 60% in a short period of time, while building long-term relationships with digital-native audiences (Statista, 2023; Rahmawati & Anggraini, 2022).

Working with influencers has proven to be an effective tactic for startups to increase brand credibility and authentically expand marketing reach (Brown & Fiorella, 2021). Influencers have a huge influence in shaping the opinions of their followers, which helps startups get past the early stages of market skepticism towards new brands. Studies show that 89% of marketers consider the ROI (Return on Investment) of influencer marketing to be higher than other traditional forms of marketing (Forbes, 2023). The success of this strategy is highly dependent on the selection of influencers who have values that are in line with the startup's identity, so that the message conveyed feels more sincere and is able to increase sales conversions as well as brand awareness in a specific niche.

In an era of rapid content consumption, video marketing, particularly in short formats such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, has become a major catalyst for startup brand virality. The video format allows for a more emotional, dynamic, and digestible message delivery than static text (Smith, 2023). For startups, the main advantage of short videos is the platform's algorithm that allows content to reach audiences organically without relying entirely on the number of followers. This provides a great opportunity for startups to create massive brand recognition in a short time with relatively low production costs but a very high engagement rate (Digital Marketing Institute, 2023).

Although often considered an outdated method, email marketing remains one of the digital strategies with the highest ROI (Return on Investment) to build brand loyalty and recall. For startups, email marketing functions as a direct communication channel (owned media) that is not affected by changes in social media algorithms. By regularly sending out personalized newsletters, exclusive offers, or educational content, startups can keep their brand in the top-of-mind position of customers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). The use of a CRM system allows startups to segment audiences based on behavior, so that the message conveyed is more relevant and increases the chances of conversion from audiences who already know the brand.

Performance-based marketing, such as Google Ads (SEM) and paid advertising on social media, provides instant and measurable results for startups looking to accelerate their growth (scaling up). Unlike SEO which is long-term, PPC allows startups to "buy" visibility in the top positions of search results or on the homepage of the target audience directly (Google, 2023). This strategy is very effective at the launch stage of new products to create a brand awareness spike. With a pay-per-click or per-impression system, startups can tightly control their marketing budgets while getting accurate data regarding the behavior of potential customers (WordStream, 2023).

The cornerstone of all startup digital marketing strategies is data-driven decision making. The use of analytics tools such as Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, and other conversion tracking tools allows startups to evaluate the effectiveness of each campaign in real-time. Metrics such as Reach, Impressions, Click-Through Rate (CTR), and Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) are key indicators to measure the success of increasing brand awareness (Ryan, 2022). By analyzing this data, startups with agile characteristics can quickly make adjustments (pivot) to less effective strategies, thus ensuring that every rupiah spent contributes significantly to strengthening their digital presence in the market.

To achieve maximum brand awareness, startups must implement Integrated Marketing Communication. This means that all digital channels from SEO, social media, to email marketing must have a consistent narrative, message, and visual identity (Clow & Baack, 2022). This consistency is very important for startups so that the audience is not confused and can easily recognize the brand on a variety of different platforms. This synergy between digital channels creates a multiplier effect, where the presence of a brand on one platform

will strengthen the audience's memory when they see the same brand on another, thus accelerating the transition from just "knowing" to "remembering" and finally "loyal" to the brand.

In addition to technical factors such as SEO and social media, the success of a digital marketing strategy is also greatly influenced by the quality of user experience. A website or application that is easy to use, has an attractive design, and is able to provide clear information will increase the likelihood of consumers to continue interacting with the brand. A good user experience can also increase the conversion rate from visitors to customers. For example, startups that provide a simple and fast buying process through digital platforms tend to have higher conversion rates compared to companies that have complex and difficult-to-use systems. In addition, the storytelling aspect in digital marketing is also increasingly important in building an emotional connection with the audience. Through compelling stories about the company's vision, product development process, or the social impact generated by the company, startups can build a stronger and more authentic brand image. Implementing a consistent digital marketing strategy also allows startups to build a loyal community of customers. These communities not only serve as customers, but also as brand ambassadors who voluntarily promote products to others through social media or personal recommendations. Thus, the success of digital marketing is not only determined by the number of ads served or the number of followers on social media, but also by the company's ability to create meaningful experiences for consumers.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the theoretical foundations and the draft of the research methods that have been prepared, it can be concluded that digital marketing strategies are the most effective and efficient instrument for startup companies to build and increase brand *awareness* in the midst of limited resources. The integration of various digital channels—from SEO for organic visibility, Social Media for two-way interactions, to Influencer and Content Marketing to build credibility—is able to move a brand's position in the brand awareness pyramid, from brand *recognition* to *brand recall* to achieving *top-of-mind* status in the minds of consumers. The success of this strategy in startups is largely determined by three main factors:

1. **Agility and Innovation:** Startups' ability to experiment quickly (growth hacking) on various digital platforms allows them to find the most responsive niche without having to spend massive marketing budgets.
2. **Data-Driven Decisions:** The use of digital analytics allows startups to monitor campaign performance in real-time, so budget allocation can be optimized only on channels that have a significant impact on audience reach and engagement.
3. **Unified Marketing Communication (IMC):** Consistency of messaging and visual identity across digital platforms is crucial for startups to strengthen audience memories and build a solid brand identity in the long run.

Suggestions

In practical terms, this study shows that startups do not need to compete in terms of advertising budgets with large companies, but rather must excel in content relevance, interaction authenticity, and accuracy of audience targets. The implementation of a structured and consistent digital strategy will not only increase website traffic or follower count, but it will also build a foundation of customer trust and loyalty that will be a valuable asset for the startup's future growth.

As a suggestion for further research, it is recommended to explore the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on more specific sectors of the startup industry or conduct longitudinal studies to look at the long-term impact of digital brand awareness on purchasing decisions and customer retention.



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