

Marketing Needs Assessment For SMES

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Abstract: *Although they play a significant role in local economies, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the food industry are under growing pressure to change to a digital-first economy. With an emphasis on their difficulties, areas of weakness, and goals for development, this study investigated the marketing requirements of small and medium-sized food industry owners. Purposively chosen SME owners participated in semi-structured interviews as part of a qualitative study approach. Stronger Digital Presence, Customer Connection & Insight, Content & Storytelling Power, Resource & Skill Gaps, and Market Differentiation & Trend Monitoring were the five main themes identified by thematic analysis. The results show that even if owners recognize the value of regular digital interaction, their marketing efforts are frequently erratic and reactive because to tight resources, time restraints, and a lack of technological expertise. There is little competition or trend tracking, uneven branding, and primarily informal customer interaction. Structured posting systems, easily accessible feedback tools, brand kits, reasonably priced technology adoption, possibilities for mentorship, and proactive trend monitoring are all suggested by the research. In order to improve visibility, client loyalty, and competitiveness in a market that is changing quickly, SMEs may shift from survival-oriented marketing to strategic, sustained development by attending to these demands.*

Keywords: *Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), Marketing Needs, Digital Presence, Customer Engagement, Brand Storytelling, Trend Monitoring, Qualitative Research*

1. INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in local economies, contributing to job creation, supporting other businesses, and preserving cultural identities. Their unique position in the food industry is noteworthy, as they influence regional preferences and offer personalized customer service that often surpasses larger chains. This focus on personalization is increasingly important in a marketplace where consumer expectations shift towards digital engagement. Today's consumers are more tech-savvy, using online platforms to research, compare, and decide on purchases before visiting physical stores, highlighting the significant role of digital behavior in shaping consumer choices (Kouam, 2025; , Martins, 2022). Because they create jobs, promote local business, and protect cultural identity, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are essential contributors to the local economy. These businesses are unique in the food industry because they help shape regional preferences and provide individualized customer care that larger chains frequently cannot match. SMEs now face a very different competitive landscape, nevertheless. Consumers of today are quite tech-savvy; before making a buy, they research, compare, and make a decision online. SMEs have a great chance to broaden their reach because to this movement in consumer behavior toward digital firsts, but it also presents significant obstacles.

Even though a lot of small business owners understand how important it is to have a steady online presence, their marketing efforts are sometimes sporadic and reactive. It is challenging to maintain awareness and engagement due to

time limits, financial limitations, a lack of official training, and restricted access to user-friendly marketing technologies. Instead, than using organized, data-driven insights, marketing choices are frequently dependent on intuition or unofficial customer input. This leads to the regular loss of important chances to improve brand positioning, cultivate client loyalty, and predict market trends. SMEs have more marketing requirements than just being visible online. These include strengthening relationships with customers, creating engaging brand narratives, filling operational and resource shortages, and keeping an eye on rivals and new trends. Many business owners find it difficult to strike a balance between marketing duties and day-to-day operations, which leaves little time for strategic planning or innovation. Although they are crucial in today's competitive climate, skills like creating picture and video content, promoting on social media, and maintaining brand consistency are still underdeveloped. To thoroughly examine these marketing requirements from the viewpoint of SME owners themselves, this study takes a qualitative method. The study finds important themes and subthemes that represent the obstacles people encounter as well as the chances they perceive for development by conducting a thematic analysis of their experiences, difficulties, and goals. Understanding these lived realities will enable the findings inform resource-sensitive, practical solutions that can assist SMEs in moving away from marketing that is focused on survival and toward long-term, sustainable development.

2. METHODOLOGY

The marketing requirements of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the food industry were investigated in this study using a qualitative research approach. Richer insights than could be obtained from quantitative surveys alone were made possible by the qualitative technique, which was adopted to obtain a thorough grasp of the lived experiences, viewpoints, and difficulties of SME owners. The researcher was able to discover talent and resource shortages, convey owners' objectives for change, and capture the subtleties of how owners see their marketing strategies thanks to this design. Since small business stakeholders lived experiences and branding practices are sometimes difficult to measure, a qualitative technique was selected to gather detailed, descriptive insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). SME food company operators that operate in the neighborhood made up the participants. Purposive sampling was used to choose proprietors who had been in business for at least a year to make sure they had enough expertise with marketing-related tasks and difficulties. A variety of small restaurants, cafés, food booths, and catering services were represented by the Thirty-two (32) proprietors who took part. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, giving participants the freedom to go into further detail while also making sure that the main points of the study were covered. An interview guide was created that addressed topics including resource management, branding strategies, consumer involvement, digital marketing methods, and trend adaption. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and could be done in-person or through online video conversations, based on the participants' preferences and availability. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis methodology was used to evaluate the gathered data: (1) getting to know the data, (2) creating preliminary codes, (3) looking for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and labeling themes, and (6) creating the report. Three major themes with related subthemes were formed by meticulously coding the transcripts and grouping recurrent ideas and patterns. By giving participants summaries of their answers for validation, member verification was done to guarantee the reliability of the data. By contrasting insights from interviews with field notes and previously published branding literature, triangulation was also used (Nowell et al., 2017). The entire research process was conducted with ethical considerations in mind. The goal of the study was explained to the participants, and their informed permission was acquired. Anonymization of corporate and personal data in the results preserved confidentiality.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

THEME 1 – STRONGER DIGITAL PRESENCE

Most owners know that customers search, scroll, and decide online first. Yet their current presence is either inconsistent or purely organic, leaving reach—and revenue—on the table. The necessity of a robust digital presence is increasingly recognized in today's marketplace as consumers predominantly initiate their buying processes through online

platforms. Business owners often find that their current online presence lacks consistency and comprehensiveness, which can lead to missed opportunities in customer engagement and revenue growth. Digital marketing is no longer an auxiliary part of a business strategy but a central component that can significantly enhance visibility and engagement. Effective digital content strategy is critical for reaching previously inaccessible market segments (Nugroho, 2024). Creating relevant and appealing digital content aligns with business goals and facilitates informed consumer decisions, ultimately affecting sales revenue directly (Wijaya, 2024)

Subtheme 1.1 Day-to-day social media posting

Owners post only when they have time, often during lulls in service, so feeds look sporadic. They want a lightweight calendar or checklist to keep posts regular without feeling like “extra work.” Maintaining a consistent social media presence is increasingly important for businesses aiming to engage their audience effectively. Many business owners tend to post sporadically, often during service lulls, which can result in disorganized feeds and diminished viewer interest. To address this challenge, a lightweight posting calendar or checklist can help streamline the posting process without adding significant burden on the owners. One important aspect to consider is the anxiety often associated with posting on social media. Shabahang et al. (2022) demonstrate that low interpersonal trust and the fear of negative evaluations can contribute to social media posting anxiety, which may discourage owners from posting regularly. This anxiety often leads to avoidance behaviors, which can exacerbate the problem of infrequent postings.

“We want to reach more people in our local area through social media and promos and make more people aware”.
Participant 1

“Being active on online is very important as it will reach many people. We are using different social media platforms to posts our products and other menu items.” Participant 4.

“My short-term goal are increasing local customer s, like student, parents, and workers. Second is boost social media presence. And my long-term goals, was established a strong brand identity and expand customer base and community partnership.” Participant 10

“We wish we had better skills in editing photos and videos, and more knowledge about online marketing. It would also help to have tools like a good camera or phone, and maybe someone to help us with making content or running ads.”

Subtheme 1.2 Basic photo & video editing skills

Photos are usually phone snapshots under kitchen lighting, so food looks dull. Quick wins would be tips on natural lighting, free editing apps, and simple

text overlays. Research indicates that recent innovations in smartphone photography have provided practical methodologies for dietary assessments, enabling home cooks and food enthusiasts to improve their photography skills (Lo et al., 2020). Utilizing natural light, such as midday sun, significantly enhances the visual quality of food images, making dishes appear more appetizing and lively compared to photos taken under artificial kitchen lighting. Simple techniques, such as adjusting the exposure and contrast in free applications like Snapseed or Lightroom, can further brighten and enrich the color detail of food images (Rohimah, 2024).

Subtheme 1.3 Understanding ad managers & boosting

"Boost Post" buttons seem tempting, but owners fear wasted pesos. They need plain-language guides on setting a small daily cap, targeting by radius, and reading basic metrics. Firstly, setting a daily budget cap is essential. This practice not only prevents overspending but also aligns marketing efforts with financial constraints. The integration of qualitative approaches in marketing assists in understanding consumer behavior and enhances decision-making, which is vital for maximizing the effectiveness of a small budget (Davis et al., 2023). Additionally, given the nuanced relationship between marketing efforts and consumer engagement, employing specific metrics can illuminate the effectiveness of campaigns as supported by studies exploring social media marketing's influence on purchase decisions (Aninda & Roosdhani, 2024; Dayoh et al., 2022).

Subtheme 1.4 Simple websites / online menus

Some rely solely on Facebook albums; customers still DM to ask for today's menu or prices. A single-page site or Linktree-style menu with ordering links would relieve inbox clutter and look credible.

THEME 2 – CUSTOMER CONNECTION & INSIGHT

These businesses thrive on repeat buyers and word-of-mouth; understanding what loyal guests love (and hate) is the cheapest growth lever. The establishment of customer loyalty is pivotal in cultivating an organization's long-term success. Loyal customers not only generate repeat business but also act as brand advocates, thus promoting organic growth through referrals (Nurisma & Khalid, 2024). Muharam et al. (2021) emphasize that maintaining high electronic service quality is indispensable for enhancing customer satisfaction, which is critical in nurturing loyalty. Additionally, Saratian et al. (2024) illustrate how an emotional connection established through marketing strategies can enhance brand loyalty,

demonstrating the multifaceted approach required to sustain customer allegiance in today's fast-paced marketplace.

"I do feel at a disadvantage because bigger food businesses have more budget, professional marketing teams, and access to better equipment. They can easily reach more people online, while I rely mostly on word of mouth or simple social media posts. It's harder to compete with their promotions and visibility." Participant 13

"Sometimes we feel that way because bigger businesses have more budget, tools, and people to help them. They can afford paid ads, influencers, and professional photoshoots. But at the same time, we believe that being small is also an advantage. We can connect more personally with customers, and we can adjust quickly based on their feedback." Participant 14

"For us, success means when more people know about our shop, more customers visit, and when they come back because they enjoyed their experience. Even small growth makes a big difference." Participant 15

"Word of mouth to make the customer feel safe of the food there buying" Participant 20

"I use feedback and conversation with the customer." Participant 21

"I usually learn what my customers want through feedback. I listen to their comments while they order or after they eat. Some tell me what they like, and others give suggestions on how I can improve. This helps me adjust my food and service based on what they need or prefer." Participant 26

Subtheme 2.1 Collecting feedback beyond casual chat

Feedback now = whatever the cashier hears at the counter. Structured comment cards or QR surveys are rare. The current landscape of customer feedback mechanisms in retail environments is often underutilized, highlighting the need for more structured approaches beyond informal conversations at retail counters. Traditional methods, such as comment cards or QR surveys, are implemented inconsistently in practice. Instead, advancements in digital technology and customer engagement strategies emphasize the necessity for more proactive approaches to gather customer feedback. Recent studies underline the effectiveness of using artificial intelligence (AI) in feedback processes to enhance customer engagement. Behera et al. (2024) argue that shaping feedback loops through AI-powered marketing can significantly improve retail offerings by systematically analyzing customer interactions and feedback. Similarly, Fu et al. (2023) support the notion that retailers adopting

new technologies can refine customer feedback management systems, ensuring more structured insight collection. This is consistent with findings by (Aftan & Shah, 2023), which illuminate how diverse feedback acquisition methods—including electronic surveys and online platforms—enhance the understanding of customer needs across various sectors.

Subtheme 2.2 Social-media polls & comment mining

Owners notice “which item next week?” polls perform well, but they don’t track answers systematically. Social media polls and comment mining have emerged as useful tools for business owners in gauging public interest and preferences regarding their products and services. These platforms facilitate user engagement through polls, which can elicit high participation rates and valuable insights into customer preferences. Evidence suggests that polls asking “which item next week?” on social media exceed other types of polls in terms of engagement and response rates, thus serving as an effective method for business owners to comprehend consumer behavior and make data-driven decisions (Sendawula et al., 2022; Vasudev et al., 2023). However, despite the advantages of using social media polls, research indicates these tools may not consistently provide systematic tracking of responses. The lack of robust analytics associated with these polls can lead to challenges in accurately understanding consumer preferences. While polls can reveal aggregated public opinion trends, the reliability and accuracy of data collected through informal mechanisms like social media may be compromised (Walgrave & Soontjens, 2023) (Baltas & Giakoumaki, 2025; . Some studies illustrate that, although businesses and politicians utilize these informal polls to gauge sentiment, their results often fail to represent the broader population's views, which underscores limitations in generalizability.

Subtheme 2.3 Loyalty / rewards mechanics

Homemade stamp cards exist, yet data on visit frequency vanishes. They’d like digital punch cards via Messenger or QR. The involvement of specific terminology in loyalty programs can significantly influence their effectiveness, as noted by Chaabane et al. (2024) in their exploration of how the naming of reward programs affects consumer perception and engagement levels in retail environments. Similarly, developments in reward gradients, as researched by Ko and Song (2024), highlight how different reward structures can incentivize customer behavior and reinforce loyalty, particularly in the restaurant industry. This suggests that implementing structured digital rewards systems could enhance customer

retention and engagement through well-designed incentives.

Subtheme 2.4 Community-event visibility

School fairs, church fiestas, and barangay runs spawn spikes in sales. Owners want a template playbook for prepping, staffing, and capturing contacts during these pop-ups. Research highlights that effective channel management and communication are crucial for enhancing firm performance, suggesting that similar strategies could effectively enhance outcomes during local events by optimizing staffing and customer interaction processes (Günther, 2021). By preparing a template playbook for these events, businesses can ensure they capture customer leads and boost sales effectively.

THEME 3 – CONTENT & STORYTELLING POWER

In crowded food feeds, story and personality separate “just another burger” from “the barrio burger that tastes like home.” In the food industry, the integration of storytelling into marketing strategies serves as a powerful distinguishing feature that elevates products from simple offerings to unique experiences rooted in cultural significance. Recent research has highlighted the role of narratives in enhancing consumer engagement and purchase intentions. For instance, (Hanaysha, 2021) demonstrated that entertaining advertising messages foster a strong positive impact on brand engagement, indicating that effective storytelling can significantly enhance consumer perception in the crowded fast-food market.

“Social media has helped a lot in promoting our business. We can reach more people just by posting online. But it’s also hard to keep up sometimes. We don’t always have time or ideas for content, and we’re still learning how to use these tools better.” Participant 19

“We would love to have training in basic marketing, like how to take good photos, make simple videos, and write good captions. Watching online tutorials or attending free workshops would really help. If we had the budget, we would also consider hiring a freelancer to help with content or ads. Any support that can teach us how to promote better would be a big help.” Participant 20

“Social media and online platforms have made it easier for many food businesses to get noticed, but for small vendors like me, it can be challenging. I don’t always have the time, tools, or knowledge to promote my business online. Not really. It’s hard because I’m not very familiar with how to use social media for marketing. I also don’t have enough time to create posts or manage pages while running the business. That’s why I still depend more on word-of-mouth and regular customers.” Participant 25

"Visually appealing content is crucial for food marketing. Professional photos and videos showcasing the deliciousness of tapsilog would be essential for generating interest." Participant 26

"We wish we had access to better editing tools, maybe a simple camera setup for food photos and videos. We also wish we had more knowledge or training in basic marketing—like how to make good posters, how to reach more people on social media, and how to make our page look more attractive." Participant 16

Subtheme 3.1 Sharper brand story / USP

Founders know their back-story ("grandma's recipe," "all-local farmers") but struggle to condense it into taglines or About sections. The challenge of distilling rich brand stories into effective taglines or "About" sections is prevalent among founders who are aware of their heritage yet struggle with concise communication. Effective taglines are crucial for capturing consumer attention and enhancing brand recall, which can significantly impact consumer behavior. Hasan et al. (2022) argue that a tagline serves as a primary communicative tool that informs consumers about the brand's value proposition and helps reinforce memory retention. The study underscores the necessity for taglines to encapsulate complex brand narratives succinctly, which is especially critical for brands relying on authentic stories such as "grandma's recipe" or "all-local farmers."

Subtheme 3.2 Consistent visual identity

Logos, fonts, and color schemes change across flyers, uniforms, and packaging. They need a mini brand kit so every touchpoint looks related. The significance of maintaining a consistent visual identity across various brand touchpoints, such as flyers, uniforms, and packaging, cannot be overstated. Consistent visual branding elements, including logos, fonts, and color schemes, establish a cohesive brand image that enhances recognition and affinity among consumers. Research has shown that elements referred to as Distinctive Brand Assets (DBAs), such as logos and color schemes, play a crucial role in building and preserving this identity. For instance, the use of established logos and consistent typography significantly contributes to brand recognition, as highlighted by Fiocchi and Esfahani (2023), who emphasize the need for brand managers to commit to uniform branding across all customer interactions to achieve long-term success.

Subtheme 3.3 Short-form video (Reels, TikTok) know-how

Owners recognise viral potential yet feel awkward on camera. Script templates, trending audio lists, and shot-angle cheat sheets would lower the barrier. Research highlights that Instagram Reels have transformed marketing strategies across various sectors. For instance, Ji (2023) discusses Marvel's adaptations in marketing approaches to leverage short-form video platforms to better connect with their audience. This indicates an industry-wide recognition of the importance of short videos in establishing brand presence and customer engagement. Additionally, Doloi (2024) notes how the use of Instagram Reels correlates with significant shifts in Generation Z's content consumption patterns, underscoring the need for tailored content strategies that address this demographic's unique engagement styles.

Subtheme 3.4 Influencer or micro-blogger partnerships

Many have gifted meals to vloggers but never agreed on deliverables or tracked ROI. A simple "influencer brief" template and checklist would raise professionalism. Micro-bloggers often play a crucial role in influencing consumer perceptions and behavior, particularly within the context of the rising influencer economy. Brands can benefit immensely from leveraging these platforms effectively; however, without a defined framework for collaboration and evaluation, the potential of these partnerships may remain unfulfilled. Studies have shown that improved alignment on deliverables can lead to better tracking of ROI, contributing positively to brand strategy (Cavalcante et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2023). Furthermore, industry reports indicate that despite challenges associated with monitoring ROI in influencer marketing, creating uniform methodologies for assessment could help overcome these barriers, providing a structured means to evaluate success (Mardiani et al., 2023).

THEME 4 – RESOURCE & SKILL GAPS

Even superb marketing ideas die without time, cash, or the right tools. When assessing the effects of resource and skill gaps on marketing ideas and practices, it is crucial to understand how these limitations can severely hinder the implementation and sustainability of innovative marketing strategies. Significant research emphasizes that both financial resources and the right tools substantially influence the ability of firms to compete effectively in the market. First, the literature highlights that the lack of necessary resources directly translates to failure in executing marketing plans, regardless of their creativity or strategic merit. For instance, Ferreira et al. (2022) affirm that identifying hard and soft skill gaps is essential for human resource practitioners in adapting to new marketing landscapes, particularly in digital marketing, which is increasingly vital for strategic success.

Their findings stress the necessity of bridging these gaps through targeted recruitment and employee upskilling initiatives, addressing fundamental constraints that restrict organizational capabilities.

"We need to learn about the advanced digital marketing. we would like to join and participate in workshop and online training. we want to have tools to manage our social media and how to track the results of our campaign. we also like to have a mentorship from an expert. If we have budget, we will hire a freelancer to manage our social media accounts." Participant 2.

"Perhaps a workshop or re-enrollment in a course. I'm interested in attending free or affordable workshops focused on digital marketing, especially social media strategies. Watching online tutorials and using free marketing tools like Canva or Meta Business Suite would also be helpful. If budget allows, I'd consider hiring a freelancer to help with content creation or ad targeting." Participant 22

"For us the most effective way to promote our business is to use social media (Facebook and Instagram) to reach our market especially professionals and students." Participant 23

"One of my main challenges is budget. I don't have much money to spend on ads or promotions. I also lack time and knowledge when it comes to online marketing or creating content. Because of this, I mostly rely on word-of-mouth and regular customers to promote my business." Participant 24

"I wish I had more knowledge about marketing, especially how to promote my business online. If I knew how to use social media better or create simple ads, I could reach more customers. Learning these skills would really help my business grow." Participant 27

"We wish we had access to training on digital marketing and someone who could help us manage social media accounts. Tools like Facebook pages or even basic photography for our food would help us promote better. Having support in creating a small marketing plan or learning how to promote online would make a big difference." Participant 29

"The marketing tools they need most are the skills to effectively promote their business on social media, especially since many other businesses are already active there. Using platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and creating engaging reels can help their business reach more people and build a stronger online presence." Participant 13

Subtheme 4.1 Shoestring ad budgets; need low-cost hacks

Survival mindset makes them wary of any spend >₹500/week. They want case studies proving ROI at micro-budgets. Research highlights the efficacy of growth hacking in cultivating rapid business

development through innovative and strategic implementation processes (Andrade et al., 2020; , Bargoni et al., 2023). These methods emphasize the importance of analyzing competitors and iterating on marketing strategies based on performance data, enabling firms to navigate financial constraints successfully. Moreover, the rise of digital marketing has facilitated the adoption of agile methodologies, which align closely with the principles of growth hacking. Such methodologies advocate for a culture of experimentation and flexibility within organizations, where quick adjustments can be made based on real-time data to maximize ROI (Hafezieh et al., 2023; , Kalaighanam et al., 2020).

Subtheme 4.2 Time management—balancing kitchen & marketing

Peak cooking hours collide with peak posting hours. Delegation matrices or batching tactics could help. The rise of cloud kitchens illustrates how digitalization has reshaped the food industry, enabling businesses to adapt quickly to changing consumer preferences and market dynamics, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that cloud kitchens facilitate efficient food preparation and delivery but also require comprehensive digital marketing strategies to attract and retain customers in a highly competitive environment (Wulandari et al., 2023). Accordingly, creating a structured approach to managing time and resources can lead to superior operational outcomes and marketing effectiveness, reinforcing the importance of efficient time allocation and task delegation in culinary enterprises.

Subtheme 4.3 Access to affordable e-commerce & POS tools

Many still tally sales in notebooks. Bundled POS + inventory + basic CRM at SME-friendly pricing would be game-changing. Research indicates that leveraging e-commerce tools significantly benefits SMEs by streamlining operations and expanding market reach. E-commerce platforms contribute to a transformation in consumer behavior, shifting purchases from traditional retail to online environments, enabling SMEs to enhance their competitive position (Binh et al., 2023). Moreover, it has been established that automated inventory management systems can improve efficiency by reducing errors and optimizing stock levels, thus contributing to cost savings and better cash flow management (Salih et al., 2023; Munir et al., 2023). This integration of technology is not merely a convenience but a necessity for survival and expansion in today's market, particularly post-COVID-19, which has emphasized the vulnerability

of SMEs without robust digital infrastructure (Zimon et al., 2021).

Subtheme 4.4 Training & mentorship

Owners crave “someone to ask” when stuck—like hotline or peer group chats—to bridge theory to execution. The scope of mentorship programs has broadened substantially in response to digital transformations and socio-economic disruptions, particularly witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of experienced mentors in cultivating entrepreneurial capabilities among fledgling business owners has been validated in various studies. For instance, research indicates that mentorship not only fosters individual skills but significantly contributes to the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem by enhancing community ties and resource accessibility (Ostrow et al., 2021; (Tiwari & Shastri, 2022; . Furthermore, the presence of peer-to-peer mentorship has been shown to provide crucial emotional support, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women entrepreneurs, who face unique challenges in balancing business demands with personal responsibilities.

4. CONCLUSION

The study's conclusions show that although SME owners recognize the value of marketing in promoting expansion, many of them are acting more reactively than strategically. Due in large part to time constraints, financial constraints, and the lack of organized tools or procedures, their existing marketing strategies are frequently inconsistent. Although digital platforms are acknowledged as effective means of connecting with and influencing consumers, their full potential is constrained by deficiencies in technological know-how, regularity, and content quality. Additionally, client interaction is still casual and unrecorded, which results in the loss of important information. SMEs run the danger of becoming obsolete in rapidly evolving markets if they don't have a consistent brand, organized innovation pipelines, and regular competition monitoring. Overall, the study underscores that the marketing needs of SMEs go beyond simply “doing more advertising”—they require a holistic approach that combines skill-building, affordable technology, and practical processes to translate awareness into action and sustainable business growth.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Structured Digital Presence – Implement easy-to-follow posting calendars and low-cost scheduling tools to maintain consistency without overwhelming owners. Provide short training modules on basic photography, video editing, and ad targeting to improve content quality and reach.

- Accessible Customer Insight Tools – Introduce feedback mechanisms such as QR-linked surveys, digital loyalty programs, and social media polls with tracking systems to gather actionable customer data.
- Brand Storytelling and Visual Identity – Support SMEs in crafting clear brand narratives and mini brand kits to ensure visual consistency across all touchpoints. Offer ready-to-use templates for taglines, menus, and social media posts.
- Resource and Skill Development – Promote cost-effective marketing strategies proven to work on small budgets. Provide mentorship programs, peer-learning groups, and “hotline” style support to help owners troubleshoot challenges in real time.
- Trend and Competitor Monitoring – Establish simple competitor benchmarking sheets, seasonal product development calendars, and monthly curated trend digests so SMEs can anticipate changes instead of reacting late.
- Integration of Affordable Technology – Encourage adoption of SME-friendly POS, inventory, and basic CRM tools to streamline operations, free up time for marketing, and improve decision-making based on real data.

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