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Digital Marketing Challenges Among Selected Small Business Owners In Candaba Pampanga Towards Marketing Framework

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Abstract: *Digital marketing is a rapidly changing field and has become an essential strategy for small businesses to promote their products and services in the modern world. With the increased use of the internet and social media platforms, organizations have shifted from traditional marketing techniques to digital approaches. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of digital marketing for small businesses in Candaba, Pampanga. It employed semi-structured interviews with seven participants from the food and beverage sector. The findings revealed several challenges affecting digital marketing among small businesses. These included digital marketing readiness, technological competency and adaptability, as well as strategic social media engagement and maximizing social media presence. Furthermore, some business owners were unaware of available digital marketing tools, which limited their ability to expand their market reach and compete with larger businesses. The study emphasized the importance of enhancing digital skills and providing marketing solutions that can empower local entrepreneurs to effectively utilize digital platforms, increase customer engagement, and strengthen the growth ambitions of small businesses in Candaba, Pampanga.*

Keywords—Digital marketing, Small businesses, Technological Competency, Digital Readiness, Marketing Strategies, Customer, Local Entrepreneurs

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's fast-evolving digital business world, people are increasingly engaged with technology, spending much of their time on social media, search engines, websites, and email. Businesses have taken this opportunity to promote and advertise their products and services through digital marketing.

Digital marketing is defined as the promotion of products and services using technology and the internet. Strategies such as social media posting, email advertising, content creation, and other digital tools have helped businesses—particularly small enterprises—reach wider target markets, increase brand awareness, and enhance customer engagement.

However, many small businesses still struggle to adopt effective digital marketing practices due to limited digital skills, lack of resources, and challenges in creating content, engaging customers, and accessing technology.

Studies conducted by the World Economic Forum (2022) and the OECD (2021) found that digital marketing can have a positive effect on small businesses, particularly in expanding target market reach and maintaining competitiveness. However, despite these positive impacts, small businesses continue to face various challenges in effectively implementing digital marketing strategies.

According to DataReportal (2024), the Philippines has been recognized as a digital nation, with Filipinos spending an average of 10 hours and 56 minutes online daily—far exceeding the global average. This presents a significant opportunity for businesses, particularly small enterprises, to leverage digital marketing.

However, findings also reveal that many small business owners continue to face challenges in this fast-evolving technological landscape. These challenges include limited digital skills, insufficient resources, and low adoption of advanced digital tools, especially in non-urban areas (DTI, 2022; World Bank, 2020).

These research studies provide valuable insights into digital marketing practices and challenges at both the international and local levels. However, most of these studies primarily rely on quantitative surveys and large-scale assessments. As a result, such methodologies fail to capture the full spectrum of experiences, perceptions, and adaptations of small business owners, particularly those in rural areas. Gap of the study – The gap of the study is the lack of local and qualitative research on how small business owners such as those in Candaba, Pampanga deal with digital marketing challenges. The majority of literature is concentrated on the challenges faced by businesses in numeric analysis; however, there is little mention of the strategies that businesses use in order to cope with them. This shows the gap of this study which

needs more qualitative research in the field.

The findings of the study can act as a guide and tool for Business Owners in enhancing their digital marketing strategy, while aspiring entrepreneurs can use this study as guidance in establishing their businesses and digital marketing strategies in the future. It can also serve as an aid for educators in developing programs and trainings, and help policy makers develop projects and initiatives. In addition, the study can contribute to the world of business through several means, including an increased knowledge of digital marketing strategies, challenges and coping mechanisms employed by small businesses in digital marketing

1.2 Review of Related Literature Digital Marketing

As per (Kingsnorth 2022) in the research "Understanding the Concept and Evolution of Digital Marketing," digital marketing is not only limited to the promotion of goods and services through the use of technology. This form of marketing consists of analytics, automation, customer journey mapping, and multi-channel communication strategies. In addition, digital marketing is described as a process of 'discovery' for businesses. The study further describes that digital marketing is the integration of digital technology into a company's marketing strategies to communicate value, engage customers, and ultimately improve business performance. The study further describes the evolution of digital marketing compared to traditional marketing and how digital marketing is a complete shift in how a business interacts with its customers.

Pratama (2024) investigates the trends, challenges, and strategic impacts associated with digital marketing transformation. The study can identify key drivers behind this transformation, stressing the importance of not only adopting the technologies but also changing the cultures of the organizations. The research established that the use of advanced technologies such as Al, automation, and big data has revolutionized the way companies in the industry communicate and interact with their customers, and improve their overall performance.

Siraj Basha and Kulkarni (2025) The study examined the evolution and transformation of digital marketing such as focusing on trends, tools, and significant changes in the field. This work outlines how technology innovations such as social media, SEO, and mobile marketing have transformed marketing strategies, emphasizing the need for a strategic digital marketing approach to gain a competitive advantage.

Digital marketing allows personalized and interactive engagement, which helps to build trust, loyalty, and long-term commitment to sustain products. Digital marketing influences the sustainable consumer behavior, it emphasizes the digital strategies which promote ethical consumption and support sustainability goals. By utilizing online tools such as social media, websites, and mobile applications, a firm may be able to convey environmentally friendly practices, increase consumer awareness, and promote well-informed purchasing behaviors. This not only improves the firm's reputation by incorporating sustainable practices in its online marketing campaigns, but it also shows that the business objectives of a firm may be integrated with social and environmental concerns in a manner that highlights the compatibility of marketing and sustainability (Rosário and Dias, 2025).

According to Ma and Chang (2025), who studied the effects of e-commerce and digital marketing stimuli on product sales, marketing factors such as online advertisements, user engagement, and consumer attention have a significant impact on sales performance in platform enterprises. Their research revealed that digital marketing plays a major role in driving sales, particularly when businesses successfully capture and utilize consumer attention. This underscores the importance of digital marketing as a tool for achieving sales growth within digital channels, as well as the need for strategic approaches to attract and retain audience attention.

Similarly, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022), in their analysis of digital marketing, demonstrated how strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), paid advertisements, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems contribute to real sales outcomes. Their findings showed that companies employing digital marketing strategies achieved stronger sales growth compared to those that did not.

Zamr et al. (2024). Analyzing the Effectiveness of Digital Marketing towards SMEs: A Systematic Review examines how SMEs embrace and implement digital marketing approaches. It emphasizes the role of digital marketing as a strategy in the growth of SMEs, especially those with limited resources. In maximizing digital efficiency is important in ensuring sustainability and success in the digital age. This paper explains the critical role of digital marketing in enhancing visibility, targeting the audience and competing effectively in growing digital markets among SMEs. Important aspects of the successful integration of digital marketing include digital literacy within the organization, management support, availability of digital technologies and competitiveness in the market environment. The importance of adopting digital marketing approaches such as social media marketing, SEO, email marketing and online advertising cannot be understated. Just like the findings by Lubis et al., (2025) this study analyzes and identifies the best digital marketing approaches that can enhance the market expansion of innovative products of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Correspondingly, Noviana et al.

(2024) reviewed that studied digital marketing trends, challenges, and opportunities for SMEs. The study found that digital marketing offers significant opportunities for competitive marketing and customer engagement. However, barriers such as limited digital literacy and resource constraints continue to persist. The findings highlight the need for SMEs to embrace a digital culture and enhance their digital capabilities in order to fully capitalize on the opportunities provided by digital marketing.

Gabelaia (2024) examined the combined impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and social media platforms on customer relationship management. The aim of the study was to demonstrate that AI can enhance customer relationships by enabling quicker responses, greater personalization, and a deeper understanding of customer needs through data analysis.

Social media sites provide platforms for businesses to interact directly with customers, helping build trust and maintain continuous engagement. Research has concluded that the combination of these two factors enables companies to create meaningful interactions and build emotional connections with customers. Overall, these findings highlight that this combination enhances customer experience, fosters long-term relationships, and boosts brand loyalty, making AI and social media essential tools in modern relationship marketing.

According to Sharafuddin et al. (2024), a study in Thailand's tourism industry assessed the impact of digital marketing and its effectiveness in shaping tourist perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The study also revealed challenges related to message relevance and platform effectiveness—fundamental issues in digital marketing research within tourism contexts. Similarly, Zhang (2024) analyzed the digital marketing strategies of European enterprises and found that they face challenges such as cultural diversity and skills shortages, offering an international and regional perspective on the difficulties affecting cross-border campaigns.

Technological Marketing Challenges

Garg et al. (2024) defined the challenges faced by businesses when adopting digital marketing strategies in rural areas. The study examined the hindrances to the adoption of digital marketing due to the lack of digital infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, and cultural resistance. It emphasized the technological hurdles faced by small and remote businesses and highlighted the importance of building the digital capacity of small enterprises to enhance the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

According to Chhabra et al. (2025), digital transformation in marketing strategies involves changes in promotions, operational practices, and future marketing trends. The paper discussed the roles of artificial intelligence (AI), analytics, and automation in transforming marketing approaches adopted by companies, as well as the challenges encountered during the process of digital transformation.

Figueiredo et al. (2021) discussed information technology adoption in digital marketing. The study provided a thorough examination of the influence of big data and IT adoption on digital marketing and stressed the difficulties associated with integrating data analytics and information systems technologies into marketing plans.

Arief (2021) examined the challenges of digital technology management in marketing, as discussed in the *Journal of Industrial and Business Management*. The study analyzed the impact of digital technology and platform integration on marketing activities, particularly in terms of user capability limitations, data management issues, and other technological disruptions.

According to Adebafa (2024), digital marketing faces several challenges due to the complexities of its dynamic environment. The study examines key technological challenges in digital marketing, including changes in consumer behavior, barriers related to artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, privacy and security concerns, and issues associated with multichannel integration.

Cioppi et al. (2023) examined digital transformation in marketing through a review of 117 articles focusing on the role of digital transformation in marketing processes. The study discusses both the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of new technologies in marketing activities. Furthermore, the literature review helps in understanding technological barriers in marketing implementation and provides insights into strategic marketing decisions in a rapidly evolving digital economy.

Suherlan et al. (2023) examined technological innovation in marketing and its effect on consumer behavior. The study highlighted that technological innovation has significant potential in marketing, particularly in enhancing customer experience. The research focused on identifying how technological innovations influence consumer behavior in various markets.

Le-Dain et al. (2024) examined the barriers and strategies associated with digital marketing adoption in courier companies in France, an emerging market. The study found that several barriers hinder digital marketing implementation, including limited knowledge, resistance to change, and integration challenges. These challenges also involve concerns about data privacy, lack of technical skills, integration difficulties, and organizational resistance.

Audience Targeting and Engagement

Siva and Felisiya (2024) examined the effect of social media platforms on audience engagement. Their research analyzed the role of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram in fostering connections between brands and their audiences. Similarly, the *Digital 2026 Philippines*report (DataReportal, 2026) presents trends in platform usage and advertising penetration among the Filipino population. The report highlights the importance of understanding local digital audience demographics in order to develop effective strategies for engaging users on emerging social media platforms.

Survey results from the report indicate high levels of interaction with video and user-generated content (UGC) among Filipino users, suggesting that interactive and personalized content is preferred by the target audience. Supporting this finding, Statista (2023) reported strong engagement levels with user-generated content, emphasizing the importance of UGC-friendly campaigns in increasing audience interaction. In a local context, Santos et al. (2024) examined social media marketing among small enterprises in San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, and found that the use of social media platforms can significantly enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement.

Chen et al. (2023) discussed effective strategies for attracting and engaging target audiences in today's competitive market. The study emphasized that audience targeting and engagement are central to modern marketing, communication, and media strategies, as they determine how effectively messages reach the appropriate audience and how consumers react, interact, and develop meaningful connections with brands or content. The research also identified practical strategies for understanding audience needs and preferences through systematic research, highlighting their importance in attracting and retaining customers.

Vinerean et al. (2021) conducted quantitative research measuring customer engagement in social media marketing. The study examined the antecedents and outcomes of engagement, particularly its relationship with customer loyalty, thereby emphasizing its significance in marketing campaigns.

The authors explained that audience targeting ensures that messages reach the appropriate market segments, while engagement reflects the extent to which audiences interact with marketing communication, influencing attention, loyalty, and overall brand relationships.

Taylor et al. (2021) explored interactive media and audience engagement strategies in the *Frontiers of Creative Media Industries and Cultural Studies*. Their study examined how emerging interactive media formats influence engagement strategies, particularly through personalization and storytelling. The research highlighted the growing role of technology in reshaping audience interactions and strengthening connections between media content and audiences.

Mikkel et al. (2022) evaluated the effectiveness of targeted social media marketing on user interaction and engagement. The research investigated the impact of personalized digital campaigns on engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares. The findings illustrated the importance of personalized content in enhancing audience engagement. Similarly, Dwivedi et al. examined consumer engagement in social media brand communities and identified the multidimensional nature of engagement. Their review emphasized that targeted engagement strategies within brand communities strengthen consumer–brand relationships. The study also explained that targeting focuses on identifying and reaching appropriate audience segments based on demographics, interests, and behaviors, thereby improving the relevance and efficiency of marketing communication.

Naresh Babu et al. (2025) examined digital advertisement effectiveness and audience engagement through an online survey. Their research highlighted how message relevance and audience perception influence engagement outcomes, such as recommendations and purchase behavior. These findings emphasize the need to develop clear and audience-centered messages to attract more users. Additionally, the study showed that effective targeting and relevance have a direct impact on engagement and conversion rates in online advertising.

Libertas Konka et al. (2025) analyzed patterns of social media engagement across multiple nations. Their research examined how aesthetic and structural elements influence Instagram engagement in different cultural contexts, demonstrating that variations in design, content style, and platform features can affect how audiences interact with social media marketing campaigns.

Digital Marketing Skills and knowledge

Przybylska and Minga (2024) conducted a study among industry professionals to identify the crucial skills required for digital marketers, including web management and online advertising. Their findings emphasize the need for a strong academic foundation and comprehensive knowledge of various online marketing platforms. The study also highlights the importance of practical skills that allow marketers to apply these competencies effectively in their professional work, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the digital marketing industry.

Demir (2025) emphasized the importance of digital marketing literacy among university students, particularly in relation to their vulnerability to digital persuasion. The study suggests that higher levels of digital marketing literacy enable students to understand and critically evaluate different marketing strategies used in digital

environments. As a result, students become more capable of making informed decisions online and are less likely to be easily influenced or manipulated by persuasive marketing techniques.

According to Liu (2021), there is a strong positive relationship between digital marketing capability and the performance of marketing operations within organizations. Improved digital marketing skills and competencies allow organizations to strengthen their internal processes and respond more effectively to changing market demands.

Medita et al. (2025) conducted a literature review on factors affecting the adoption of technology in micro and small enterprises. The study identified insufficient knowledge of digital marketing strategies as one of the major barriers to the effective use of digital technologies. The authors noted that limited skills, knowledge, and expertise can lead to ineffective implementation of technological solutions, which negatively affects the efficiency and competitiveness of small businesses in the digital environment. Similarly, Medita (2023) emphasized the importance of digital marketing literacy for micro and small enterprises, highlighting its role in promoting business sustainability. Digital marketing involves not only the application of marketing strategies through digital platforms but also the development of content, data analytics, understanding consumer behavior, and informed decision-making. The study also pointed out that many business owners struggle to utilize digital marketing effectively due to limited knowledge, poor social media utilization, weak customer interaction, ineffective branding strategies, and inadequate use of marketing data.

Urakova (2023) investigated digital skills proficiency among higher education students in Russia and its influence on their readiness for digital work environments. The findings revealed that students with higher levels of digital skills demonstrated greater confidence and adaptability in technology-driven settings. This supports the idea that strong digital competencies are essential for developing advanced skills such as digital marketing. The study also advocates for the integration of digital skills training in higher education curricula to better prepare students for digitally oriented careers.

Neuvonen and Pecoraro (2024) explored digital marketing skill development in Finland, focusing on the alignment between academic programs and industry requirements. The study identified significant skill gaps in areas such as digital analytics, social media management, and content marketing. It emphasized the importance of lifelong learning and continuous updates in digital tools and marketing strategies to ensure that graduates possess the competencies required by the modern digital marketing workforce.

Strategy Adoption

One key perspective in strategy adoption research focuses on digital and innovation adoption. Campagna and Bhada (2024) highlighted the importance of strategic adoption in digital innovation, emphasizing that the collaborative adoption of various technological developments is crucial for achieving comprehensive operational change and sustaining market competitiveness in complex business environments. This strategic approach expands beyond traditional adoption studies, which often focus on individual technologies, by examining the interplay and integration of multiple innovations.

Diaz-Arancibia et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive literature review on digital transformation and technological adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in transitional countries. The study revealed that SMEs face significant challenges, including limited financial resources, low levels of digital literacy, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder effective strategy adoption. Despite these challenges, the research demonstrated that community-based networks and entrepreneurial ecosystems can support the effective use of digital technologies. The authors recommended the development of strategy adoption models that are responsive to the specific environmental conditions and constraints faced by SMEs.

Similarly, Osman et al. (2025) assessed online business adoption among small business entrepreneurs and found that psychological and capability-related factors—such as capability awareness and self-determination—play a significant role in influencing the adoption of digital business strategies. In the retail sector, Hartono et al. (2025) analyzed the adoption of digital platforms such as TikTok among micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and discovered that strategic adoption intentions are strongly influenced by owner support and external environmental factors. Complementing these findings, Simorangkir et al. (2025) explored digital transformation adoption in SMEs and highlighted that strategic planning and organizational readiness are critical conditions for successful adoption outcomes.

Colombo (2024) conducted a comparative cultural analysis of SMEs in Italy and found that effective strategic leadership plays a crucial role in encouraging innovation adoption. The study emphasized that strong leadership commitment enables organizations to overcome common adoption barriers and ensures that innovation initiatives align with overall strategic goals, thereby supporting organizational change and successful innovation outcomes.

Similarly, AlGhamdi et al. (2026) examined the influence

of the perceived usefulness of artificial intelligence (AI) across different stages of the digital marketing process—Plan, Reach, Act, Convert, and Engage—on adoption intentions among Saudi retail SMEs. By extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the study provided deeper insights into the determinants of strategic adoption in SMEs across various stages of the marketing process. The findings emphasize the importance of a structured and strategic approach in adopting technology-driven innovations in marketing.

Market Innovation

Purchase, et. al (2020) defines marketing innovation as the implementation of new marketing practices involving significant changes in design, distribution, promotion, or pricing. The systematic review underlines how thinking has shifted from seeing marketing as an active supporter of technological innovation to recognizing marketing practices as innovations in their own right. Correspondingly, According to Noer and M. Y. (2025) Digital Marketing acts as big factor and the foundation for marketing innovation. Innovative digital practices improve the sustainability and long-term business performance.

Al Barwari et al. (2025) conducted a detailed study on the role of innovative marketing practices in achieving sustainable business performance, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The findings indicated that firms engaging in marketing innovation—such as new promotional strategies, novel methods of engaging customers, and enhanced value creation techniques—are better positioned to improve long-term performance and organizational survival. The study emphasized that marketing innovation enables SMEs to adapt to dynamic market environments, intense competition, and changing customer preferences. Additionally, the research highlighted the broader social and economic significance of marketing innovation, noting its contribution to enterprise sustainability, job creation, and regional economic stability. Similarly, Nasir et al. (2024) demonstrated that marketing innovation plays a critical role in enhancing SME performance, showing that businesses adopting innovative marketing approaches are more competitive and adaptable.

Gupta et al. (2021) examined various dimensions of innovation—including product, process, organizational, and marketing innovation—to understand their combined and individual effects on organizational performance. The study revealed that both product and marketing innovation have a significant positive impact on organizational outcomes. Organizations that continuously innovate not only in their offerings but also in their marketing strategies are more likely to achieve superior performance. The research emphasized thatbmarketing innovation enhances the effectiveness of product innovations by improving market accessibility, customer awareness, and value creation. Moreover, marketing innovation supports other types of innovation by aligning new products with customer needs and market requirements, thereby strengthening competitive advantage and overall success.

Peng et al. (2021) highlighted marketing innovation as a critical dimension of contemporary business strategy, encompassing the implementation of novel marketing methods that affect product design, pricing, promotion, distribution channels, customer experience, and technology use. Marketing innovation is increasingly recognized as essential for competitive advantage, improved firm performance, and sustainable value creation in rapidly evolving markets.

Qu and Mardani (2023) examined innovation performance in China, showing that new product innovations enhance firm performance when combined with absorptive capacity and market-oriented strategies. Their findings provide evidence that market-focused innovation supports competitive performance, particularly in high-tech industries.

Business Online Presence

Sharabati et al. (2024) examined the impact of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs. The study indicates that digital marketing, as a component of online presence, enhances business reach and overall performance, particularly in areas such as customer engagement, search engine optimization (SEO), and advertising effectiveness.

The role of online presence in fostering customer loyalty in urban tourism has also been highlighted. Using a structural equation model, Yankov (2025) empirically demonstrated that a firm's online presence is a significant predictor of customer loyalty—a critical factor for customer retention and business competitiveness. Similarly, Suhartono et al. (2024) found that SMEs in the tourism sector experience improved business performance when strong online presence is combined with high service quality.

Fejzié and N. (2023) explored the influence of digital presence and the use of information technology on business performance. Although they observed low adoption levels of digital presence among businesses, their findings confirmed that effective digital presence strategies—including websites, social media, and SEO—correlate with higher profitability.

Bahtiar et al. (2024) investigated digital marketing strategies for building social media presence and found that these strategies help increase market reach, reduce competitive pressure, and enhance brand visibility on platforms such as Instagram. Saleem et al. (2022) examined the role of website quality on customer

satisfaction and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), demonstrating that high-quality online platforms positively influence online purchase intentions, thereby linking the quality of online presence directly to consumer behavior and business outcomes.

Fitriani (2023) emphasized that interactive online technologies, such as social media, improve business performance for micro-scale e-commerce enterprises, highlighting the importance of establishing and maintaining a strong online presence. Additionally, a systematic review by Social Media&Entrepreneurship Research (2020) noted a growing interest in the relationship between social media presence and entrepreneurial success, observing a positive correlation between the two.

Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Pratama and Febriati (2025) conducted a study on the effectiveness of digital content marketing using the systematic literature review method. Their research concluded that digital content significantly impacts brand awareness, trust, emotional connections, engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and customer loyalty. The study synthesized 46 primary studies published between 2020 and 2025 using the PRISMA method.

Alkhalfan (2025) highlighted the advantages and challenges faced during the implementation of digital marketing, particularly in B2B industries. Key themes identified for effective digital marketing include maximizing customer reach, gaining competitive advantage, and addressing data privacy concerns, such as transparency.

Sayudin, Kartono, and Curatman (2022) emphasized the effectiveness of integrating multiple digital marketing channels—social media, search engines, and paid advertisements—into a cohesive strategy. Organizations adopting this holistic approach experienced improved brand awareness, market penetration, and customer loyalty compared to those using isolated digital initiatives.

Yuniarti, Aziz, and Abdul Gani (2024) found that creativity in digital marketing enhances performance by increasing website traffic, customer conversions, and sales. Their study highlights that innovative content design leads to greater customer engagement and more effective achievement of marketing objectives.

Palma et al. (2026) conducted a quantitative study comparing social media and traditional marketing effectiveness on customer intentions in local restaurants in Boac, Marinduque. The results showed that social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—have a significantly greater impact on visit intentions and customer engagement than traditional media.

Acabal et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of social media as a marketing strategy among Grade 12 ABM students at Bestlink College of the Philippines. Their research found that social media is a highly effective medium for connecting brands with customers that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

Local studies in the Philippines also support these findings. The De La Salle University (DLSU) Center for Business Research and Development (2021) reported that SMEs utilizing social media and online marketplaces experienced increased inquiries and sales. Digital marketing was found to enhance consumer brand recall and is especially beneficial for businesses with budget constraints due to its cost-effectiveness. The study highlights the importance of designing digital marketing strategies that account for consumer psychological and social factors.

Content Marketing Capability

Pang et al. (2020) examined the positioning of content creation and its strategic alignment with business value, emphasizing the need to generate content that drives customer engagement and creates measurable value. Their study addressed definitional ambiguities and capability gaps in practice by developing a conceptual framework for building content marketing capabilities.

Lopes and Casais (2022) highlighted the scarcity of academic guidance on content marketing capabilities and implementation, which often leaves practitioners dependent on fragmented insights. Their conceptual review demonstrated how well-structured content creation strategies can enhance customer-brand engagement and loyalty. Similarly, Dailys et al. (2022) studied content marketing structures, developing a model that illustrates how content marketing capabilities significantly contribute to deeper audience engagement and co-creation of value.

Sharabati et al. (2024) examined digital marketing adoption in SMEs and found that the lack of technical skills, limited financial resources, and resistance to change hinder the development of digital marketing capabilities, particularly in content creation strategies.

Homburg and Wielgos (2022) emphasized the contribution of digital marketing capabilities, such as content marketing, to business profitability. They showed that the strategic integration of digital capabilities with traditional marketing enhances firm performance. Their study also highlighted challenges and tactics in implementing content strategies that support both brand positioning and revenue objectives, demonstrating the strategic role of content capabilities in driving engagement and sales.

Hadiyati (2024) and Lopez and M.A. (2024) investigated the influence of content marketing strategy and customer engagement on firm performance among SMEs in Tagum City, Davao del Norte. They found that structured content marketing processes—including production, measurement, and organization—significantly impact business success and performance outcomes in social media engagement contexts.

Chan and J.F. (2025) examined digital marketing strategies and revenue growth among SMEs, emphasizing that content marketing is a key contributor to customer reach and sales growth, even though some findings are still emerging.

Santos et al. (2022) studied the effective digital marketing strategies used by MSMEs in the National Capital Region under the "new normal." Their research identified several benefits of content and social media marketing strategies, including increased engagement and brand visibility, though they noted challenges such as limited expertise in digital marketing tools.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine what are the Digital Marketing challenges issues facing by Businesses Owners. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the central and the following sub question questions:

Central Question:

"What are the lived experiences and digital marketing challenges encountered by selected small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, as they navigate the digital landscape?"

Sub Questions:

- What specific difficulties do small business owners experience when using digital marketing platforms?
- How do their past challenges influence the way they plan future digital marketing activities?
- Based on the lived experiences of small business owners, what marketing frameworks or strategies may be proposed to address their digital marketing challenges?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research examines the challenges faced by small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, in implementing digital marketing, with a particular focus on the food and beverage (F&B) sector. This focus is significant because it provides a broad understanding of the lived experiences of entrepreneurs and offers practical insights. The findings of this study could offer meaningful benefits to several groups:

Small Business Owners:. The study helps small business owners understand the challenges they face in digital marketing. By learning from the lived experiences of fellow entrepreneurs, business owners can develop strategies to improve their digital marketing practices, which can positively influence overall business performance.

Food and Beverage (F&B) Business Owners. This research is particularly relevant for small business owners in the F&B sector. The findings provide insights into common digital marketing challenges and highlight effective strategies adopted by other F&B entrepreneurs. Understanding these experiences can help F&B business owners enhance customer reach, operational efficiency, and competitiveness.

Aspiring Entrepreneurs. The study serves as a guide for aspiring entrepreneurs by offering real-life experiences and insights into the realities of digital marketing. Awareness of these challenges before starting a business allows future entrepreneurs to prepare more effectively, avoid common pitfalls, and develop strategies tailored to digital marketing success.

Local Government Units (LGUs). The insights from this research can assist LGUs in designing and implementing programs, workshops, and policy interventions that directly address the actual needs and challenges of small businesses in Candaba. This study provides a valuable basis for informed decision-making and strategic planning at the local level.

Future Researchers, This study offers a useful reference for future researchers interested in digital marketing challenges among small businesses. The findings provide a framework for understanding common challenges and can inform further research in other municipalities or business sectors.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design that sought to understand and explore the experiences of Food and Beverage business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, regarding digital marketing challenges. The Phenomenology Research Design was applicable in this study since it sought to understand how individuals perceived their experiences. This study sought to understand the experiences of Food and Beverage business owners through direct data collection, allowing it to capture their struggles and ways of coping up with digital marketing challenges.

2.2 Population and Sample of the Study

This research had 7 small Food and Beverage (F&B) Sector

owners as the respondents from Candaba, Pampanga. The study specifically focused on the F&B sector because it is one of the most active small business industries that heavily relies on digital marketing, making it relevant to the study's focus. Purposive sampling is a data sampling approach that is defined as the deliberate selection of particular units such as people, cases, or events based on their particular relevance to the research question or problem. This data sampling approach enabled the research team to gain in-depth knowledge on a complex phenomenon (Suen et al., 2025). The 7 F&B Sector owners were purposively selected to ensure that the research had deeper relevance to the subject matter. The coding system was implemented to ensure the data privacy of the participants. The participants were coded from Small Business Owner 1 (SBO1) to Small Business Owner 7 (SBO7). This coding system was used to ensure that the participants' to kept their identities and their confidentiality.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria were established to ensure that the participants were small business owners who could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the challenges of digital marketing. The study specifically targeted small Food and Beverage (F&B) business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, with direct experience in implementing digital marketing strategies. The criteria included the following:

1. **Small Business Owners in Candaba, Pampanga** – Participants must own a Food and Beverage business located in Candaba, Pampanga, and be actively involved in its daily operations. This ensured that the respondents had firsthand experience managing their business.

2. **Decision-Making Role** – Participants had to be the primary decision-makers or directly involved in marketing-related decisions for their business. This criterion ensured that the insights provided were based on personal involvement in planning and implementing digital marketing strategies.

3. **Length of Business Operation** – Participants were required to have operated their business for at least one year. This ensured sufficient experience to evaluate the effectiveness and challenges of digital marketing strategies over time.

4. **Experience with Digital Marketing Challenges** – Participants must have encountered challenges or difficulties in using digital marketing. This criterion ensured that respondents could provide firsthand accounts of obstacles faced in implementing online marketing strategies.

5. **Relevant Experience and Knowledge** – Participants were expected to possess adequate knowledge and experience in managing their businesses, particularly in using digital marketing tools. This criterion ensured the provision of informed and reliable insights regarding digital marketing practices.

6. **Active Use of Digital Platforms** – Participants needed to actively use digital marketing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, online marketplaces, or websites for business promotion. This ensured that responses were grounded in practical experience rather than theoretical knowledge.

7. **Voluntary Participation** – Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants provided informed consent and willingly shared their experiences, opinions, and insights.

2.3 Instruments of the Study

The study utilized a semi-structured interview, which was a method in which the interviewer followed a guide of questions but was free to clarify and explore issues that arose during the conversation (Kallio et al., 2016), The semi-structured interview allowed the researchers to capture the lived experiences and adaptive strategies by selected small food and Beverage business owners in Candaba, Pampanga. This approach was appropriate for the study as it provided participants with the opportunity to share detailed insights, which helped address gaps identified in previous studies. The questionnaire was structured to collect information related to the respondents' business profile, level of digital marketing usage, and the challenges and issues they encounter when implementing digital marketing strategies.

Structure of the Instrument Part I: Profile of the Participants

The first part identified the profile of the participants. This section aimed to determine the demographic and business-related information of the respondents. It included the type of small business, which focused on Food and Beverage, and the length of business operation, which was more than one (1) year. The primary target market was identified as local customers, online customers, or both.

Part II: Digital Marketing Practices of Small Business Owners

The second part identified the digital marketing practices of small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga. This section determined the digital marketing platforms and tools used by small business owners. These may include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, websites, online

marketplaces (such as Shopee, Lazada, etc.), email marketing, or none.

Part III: The third part focused on the digital marketing issues encountered by small business owners. Some issues were classified into the following categories:

A. Technical Challenges

- lacked sufficient knowledge about digital marketing tools.
  - found it challenging to create engaging online conten

B.

C. Time and Resource Constraints

- did not have enough time to manage digital marketing activities.
  - lacked manpower to handle online promotions.

D. Technology and Internet Issues

- Lack of access to proper technology limited my online marketing efforts.
- Poor internet connection affected my digital marketing activities.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers designed a formal letter to the small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, to seek approval for the execution of the research beyond the school campus. The participants were selected based on the purposive sampling method. The participants were small business owners who were facing challenges and issues in the field of Digital Marketing. The total number of participants for the research was 7 small business owners who were the participants in the data collection procedure.

By choosing the participants based on the purposive sampling method, the participants were aware of the challenges in the field of digital marketing. A semi-structured interview design was developed based on the research question and the research question's sub-questions. The semi-structured interview design consisted of a set of questions that were asked to the participants to gather the experiences, difficulties, impacts, and coping strategies of the small business owners who were utilizing digital marketing.

The semi-structured interview guide used in this study was validated by the research adviser to ensure that the questions were appropriate, clear, and aligned with the research objectives and sub-questions of the study. The data was collected through in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Convenient time was arranged for the interviews to take place. The interviews were audio recorded and documented with video and photos with the participants' consent for the accurate collection of the data. The interviews were transcribed, and the collected data was reviewed for accuracy before the analysis. The collected data was analyzed. The analysis of the data was done through thematic analysis to identify the common themes, patterns, and categories of the challenges of digital marketing. The ethical consideration was strictly observed throughout the research process. The participants were made aware of the purpose of the research, and confidentiality was assured before the actual research was conducted.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the collected data and its interpretation, organized using a coding system arranged sequentially. The analysis serves as the foundation for addressing the research problem and provides a basis for the study's conclusions and recommendations.

The first research question aimed to examine the lived experiences of small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, particularly regarding the digital marketing challenges they faced. It focused on understanding the perceptions, insights, and experiences of the participants.

The analysis employed pre-determined codes to systematically examine patterns in the responses. These codes were used to identify recurring ideas and behaviors, which were then grouped into themes. The resulting themes provide a deeper understanding of the challenges small business owners encounter in implementing digital marketing strategies and offer insights for developing practical solutions.

Participant(s)	Details / Insights	Code	Theme
SBO2	Early Promotion even before opening the Business	Early Adoption	Digital Marketing Readiness and Early Social Media Adoption
SBO4	Already have social media before the business operations	Ahead Content Creation	
SBO5	Already have Social Media Account	Existing Social Media Presence	
SBO6	Already have Knowledge about Digital Marketing	Prior-Digital Marketing Knowledge	

PART 1. Lived experiences in Digital Marketing Challenges (*Mga Karanasan sa Digital Marketing)*

Table 3.1. Summary of Codes according to the transcript of the participants

A noticeable commonality among SBO2, SBO4, SBO5, and SBO6 in their journey of transitioning from traditional to digital marketing was that they began using digital marketing prior to opening their businesses and were early adopters of it. The participants consistently emphasized that they already had knowledge of digital marketing, so they all prioritized digital marketing for their businesses. and how important Digital Marketing was in modern times. The recent study will support these findings: Mishra et al. (2025) This study aimed to analyze how social media platforms will help startup businesses gather market information, understand customer needs, and make better business decisions before and during the early

stages of launching a business. The study emphasized that social media has become an important tool for market research and competitive intelligence

Figure 3.1. ***Visual Representation of Codes and Themes***

The theme "**Digital Marketing Readiness**" was formed through the analysis of participants' responses regarding their preparation for digital marketing in their businesses. During the coding process, several key ideas emerged from the data, which were grouped into our main codes. such as early adoption, ahead content creation, existing social media presence, and prior digital marketing knowledge. These codes reflect how participants already integrate digital marketing in their business operations. Digital Marketing Readiness refers to the ability of business owners to effectively plan, implement, and optimize marketing strategies using appropriate tools, skills, processes, and infrastructure. This readiness allows businesses to engage customers, build brand awareness, and gain a competitive edge even before official operations begin.

As reflected in participant responses:

- SBO2 shared, *"Ay, meron na agad, di paman kami ng oopen, ahh, pre-promote na namin sya sa social media,"* indicating proactive promotion before opening.
- SBO6 stated, *"Uhm, No, Actually may knowledge naman po kami sa mga digital marketing,"* highlighting existing knowledge and capability.

These insights suggest that business owners who plan ahead and leverage digital marketing tools early can effectively attract and engage customers online, demonstrating preparedness and strategic foresight.

Most participants indicated that they adopted digital marketing tools in advance when establishing their businesses, reflecting a proactive approach to online promotion. The presence of active social media platforms demonstrates that these businesses are already leveraging digital channels to reach and engage customers. Participants also emphasized the

importance of preparing marketing content ahead of time, ensuring consistent engagement with their audience.

Table 3.2. Summary of Codes according to the transcript of the participants

Participant(s)	Details / Insights	Code	Theme
SBO2	lack of knowledge in editing and content creation	**Technical Skills Deficiency**	**Digital Marketing Readiness and Early Social Media Adoption**
SBO4	Unfamiliarity with certain digital tools	**Familiarity with New Tools**	
SBO6	Keeping up with new technologies	**Keeping up with New Technologies**	
SBO5, SBO2	Having the right device, Need for Hightech Tools	**Assess to High Tech Tools**	

Additionally, their prior knowledge and experience in digital marketing contributed to their ability to implement strategies effectively.

When these related codes were analyzed collectively, they revealed a common thread of preparedness and capability in using digital marketing tools. This led to the development of the central theme of Digital Marketing Readiness, which reflects participants' overall readiness and strategic approach to adopting digital marketing practices to enhance business performance.

These findings align closely with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which suggests that beliefs about the usefulness and ease of use of technology drive

early and strategic adoption. Supporting this, Alenezi (2025) found that organizational knowledge, experience, and capability significantly enhance business readiness, which in turn positively influences success in digital marketing initiatives. Similarly, Asmawati et al. (2024), using the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework, documented that technological infrastructure, organizational support, and environmental factors collectively determine the preparedness of MSMEs to implement e-commerce and digital marketing solutions.

This theme highlights that strategic foresight, prior experience, and structured preparation are key factors enabling small business owners in Candaba, Pampanga, to successfully adopt and utilize digital marketing strategies.

PART 2: Digital Marketing Challenges and their Impact
(Mga Hamon at Epekto nito sa Negosyo)

The challenges experienced by SBO2, SBO4, SBO5, and SBO6 highlighted that, despite operating in a modern business environment, some small business owners still face significant difficulties in adopting digital marketing. The findings revealed a commonality in their lived experiences: challenges primarily stemmed from deficiencies in technical skills, limited familiarity with new tools, difficulty keeping up with rapidly evolving technologies, and restricted access to high-tech equipment. Participants emphasized that a lack of knowledge and expertise in using digital platforms, technological tools, and emerging applications hindered the development and execution of effective digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, the fast-paced evolution of technology imposed additional pressure, requiring business owners to continuously learn and adapt to remain competitive and maintain productivity.

Supported by LeanBPI (2024), an analysis survey of small business owners showed that many business owners were not confident with digital marketing, with 46% saying they felt "out of their depth" on tech skills critical to running their business. This survey finding revealed the struggles with new technologies and the pressure to learn and adapt among small business owners. Similarly, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (2024), the study titled "Breaking the digitalization barrier for SMEs: Organizational and technological challenges" found that lack of digital skills and knowledge challenged the development of effective digital marketing strategies. In the same study, they found that business owners operated within limited budgets and often struggled to allocate resources for training or advanced tools. They also found that lack of awareness about available tools and how to use them led many businesses to continue traditional marketing.

The theme "**Technological Competency and Digital Adaptability Challenges**" was formed by grouping similar

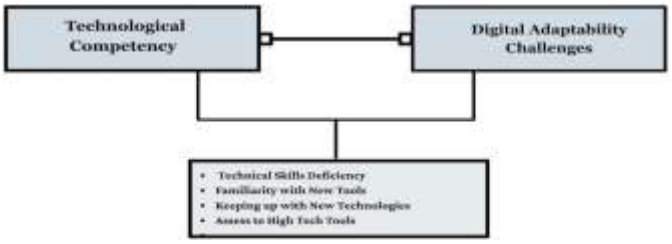

Figure 3.2. ***Visual Representation of Codes and Themes***

ideas from the participants' responses. It's about their experiences with digital marketing. During the coding process, several common issues were identified, like technical skills deficiency, lack of familiarity with new tools, difficulty keeping up with new technologies, and the limited access to high-tech tools. Since these codes are related to difficulties in using and adapting to digital technologies, they were combined into one theme.

The theme represents the challenges faced by business owners in developing technological skills and adjusting to continuing changing digital tools and platforms. It shows limited knowledge, skill gaps, and difficulty adapting to new technologies can affect how businesses use digital marketing and manage their business operations effectively.

This theme reflects the difficulties that small business owners face in both understanding how to use technology effectively and adapting to the rapid changes in digital tools and platforms. It highlights the need for business owners to develop essential skills, such as using computers, applications, and online tools, while maintaining flexibility to adjust when new technologies emerge.

Participants shared experiences that illustrate these challenges. SBO2 mentioned, *"Ayy minsan lack of knowledge din, una kase nung hindi pa ako maruning sa editing puro picture lang,"* emphasizing the initial struggle with digital content creation. Similarly, SBO4 stated, *"Actually yung mga Google Form nayan indi ako masyadong familiar hindi ako masyado ng familiar,"* highlighting difficulty in using new digital tools outside their existing knowledge.
These lived experiences show that technological competency and the ability to adapt to digital changes are critical challenges affecting the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies among small business owners in the Food and Beverage sector These challenges in editing,

content creation, and unfamiliarity with certain digital tools arise when business owners lack the necessary knowledge, skills, techniques, or understanding required to effectively produce and refine digital content. This includes videos, images, written posts, and other materials used on social media platforms. Without these competencies, small business owners struggle to maintain quality, consistency, and engagement in their digital marketing efforts.

The lack of digital skills makes technology appear difficult and less useful, which results in lower adoption—precisely what the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains. Supporting this, Liang (2025) emphasized that technological competency extends beyond individual skills to encompass organizational capability. This suggests that businesses must not only understand digital tools but also leverage them to improve overall performance and gain a competitive advantage. Similarly, Islam (2025) identified resistance to change, skill gaps, and data security concerns as significant factors contributing to challenges in digital adaptation. Moreover, cultivating a digital mindset and engaging in continuous learning are critical strategies for overcoming these challenges and achieving sustainable growth in digital marketing practices.

PART 3. Future Planning and Strategies (*Mga Plano at Estratehiya para sa Paglago)*

Table 3.3. Summary of Codes according to the transcriptof the participants

Participant(s)	Details / Insights	Code	Theme
SBO1	Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing	Social Media Engagement Strategy	Strategic Social Media Engagement and Maximizing Digital Presence
SBO3	Posting to consistent, live social media engagement	Digital Platform Live-Post Strategy	
SBO5	Prioritizes digital marketing to organically expand reach	Platform Prioritization	
SBO6	Importance of following digital marketing trends	Trend Activity Engagement	
SBO2	Active social media to attract customers	Digital Impact	

The participants—SBO1, SBO2, SBO3, SBO5, and SBO6—demonstrated a shared focus on future planning strategies that leverage social media to strengthen their businesses. Their approaches include maximizing engagement, following trending activities, live posting, and digital promotions across multiple platforms. This proactive use of social media reflects an understanding of its critical role in small business marketing.

Supporting this, Efendioglu and Durmaz (2022) found that consumer perceptions significantly influence advertising effectiveness and brand awareness, emphasizing that relevant content is key for success in digital marketing. Likewise, Bryła et al. (2022) highlighted that social media marketing enhances consumer engagement, fosters relationship building, encourages behavioral responses, and strengthens long-term brand loyalty. Collectively, these insights show that small business owners who strategically plan and optimize their social media activities can achieve greater visibility, stronger customer connections, and sustained growth.

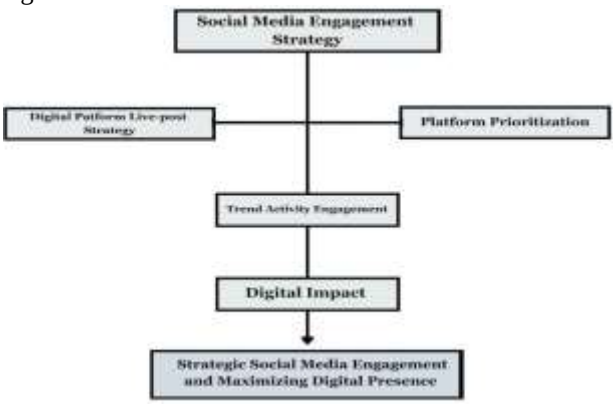

Figure 3.3. ***Visual Representation of Codes and Themes***

The theme Strategic Social Media Engagement and Maximizing Digital Presence emerged from analyzing participants' responses. It captures how small business owners leverage social media to grow their businesses. During coding, key codes were identified, including social media engagement strategy, digital platform live-post strategy, platform prioritization, trend activity engagement, and digital impact. These codes reflect the various ways business owners interact with customers online, choose which platforms to focus on, participate in trending activities, and optimize their overall digital presence for maximum reach and engagement.

Strategic Social Media Engagement and Maximizing Digital Presence refers to intentionally using social media platforms to build visibility, connect with their audiences, to achieve specific goals. whether for a brand, business, or personal identity. It combines planning, content creation, audience interaction, and performance analysis.

SBO1 mentioned, *"Yon nga, ang ginawa ko, nagbayad ako ng Facebook ads para di ako mahirapan."* These codes, which relate to how businesses intentionally use social media to reach and engage customers, were grouped into a single theme. This theme highlights how business owners strategically post content, prioritize the most effective platforms, and follow trends to enhance social media engagement and strengthen their online presence. Implementing these strategies helps maximize their digital presence, ultimately creating a greater impact on overall business performance.

The findings align closely with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly in terms of Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). SBO1 believes that paying for Facebook ads will help the business reach more potential customers, effectively enhancing marketing performance (PU). Regarding PEOU, she mentioned, *"para di ako mahirapan,"* indicating that paying for ads reduces effort compared to manually posting or building an organic following, making the process easier and more efficien

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of Findings

1. The study found that SBO2, SBO4, SBO5, and SBO6 demonstrated a high level of digital marketing readiness. A key similarity among these business owners is that they began using digital marketing even before their businesses officially launched. Each owner leveraged social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram to promote their products and prepare marketing strategies in advance, showing a proactive and strategic approach to business promotion.

   The business owners proposed that they have already a knowledge and awareness of using digital marketing before starting their businesses. SBO2 focused on early business promotion, while SBO4 highlighted the importance of content creation before starting the business. SBO5 emphasized building a social media presence early, and SBO6 shared that it had an understanding of digital marketing concepts before the business started. There practices reflect their digital marketing readiness, which helped them to connect with the customers and communicate their business marketing effectively.

2. The research indicated that small business owners face multiple challenges in adopting online marketing platforms, primarily due to limitations in digital competency and access to technology. The digital Competency Gaps participants SBO2, SBO4, SBO5, and SBO6 mentioned that the difficulties referred to technical skills and familiarity with digital platforms. SBO2 said that limited knowledge in video content creation and editing highly affects the application of digital marketing activities. SBO4 highlighted unfamiliarity with specific digital tools, making it hard to fully use the platforms for business engagement. SBO6 described the challenges of keeping up with the fast development of technologies, indicating the pressure on business owners to consistently learn and adapt. The access to Technology and Tools of SBO2 and SBO5 highlighted the lack of suitable devices and high-tech tools, which are important to effective digital marketing. Limited access to the resources constrains small business owners from fully implementing digital strategies.

3. The findings indicated that SBO1, SBO2, SBO3, SBO5, and SBO6 carefully used social media to improve engagement and maximize their digital presence. The participants prioritize digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others platform to attract customers, being stay updated with trends and promote their products effectively. Social media engagement was applied through posts, comments, and content to communicate and build meaningful relationships. SBO1 highlighted the effectiveness of engagement strategies. Live-post strategy the posting content in real-time to capture audience attention and increase interaction, as mentioned by SBO3. Platform Focus this is the focusing on the platforms that provide the most engagement and reach, indicated by SBO5. Trend activity engagement the balancing of posts and video content with current trends to enhance audience interaction, shared by SBO6. Active social media presence, consistently updating and maintaining accounts to attract and retain customers, emphasized by SBO2.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

After the researchers' analyze the findings the following conclusions were drawn

1. The data indicates that the digital marketing readiness plays a key role due to successful adoption of digital marketing strategies among small business owners. Business owners who exposed digital marketing earlier were more prepared to apply digital marketing strategy

successfully. The background knowledge or study for early engagement with social media platforms allowed them to reach potential customers and strengthen their business improvement.

2. Based on the findings, the study included that the main challenges for small business owners in digital marketing are digital competency gaps and limited access to technology. Many business owners still in limited proficiency, knowledge, and technological resources to the successfully use the modern digital marketing. Detailed problems are the limited technical skills, unfamiliarity with new digital platforms, challenging to adapt fast technological changes, and lack of access to high-tech tools.

3. The study determined that strategic social media engagement and maximizing digital presence were essential for the success of small businesses in today's digital market. Business owners applied Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to engage more people. They did things like post and use popular content to stay on top of what is happening. The business owners focused on the platforms that worked best for them and made sure to be active on social media. This helped them to know their customers and build relationships with

them. The business owners found out that having a presence on media is not just about having a page on Facebook or Instagram. It is about using those pages to help their business grow. In the end business owners who have a presence online can talk to their customers and do well with digital marketing. Digital marketing is important for business owners to succeed. Business owners need to use marketing to get ahead.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are aimed at improving digital marketing practices that can help not only for small businesses but also for the whole business world. These recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

1. The findings reveal that many business owners already possess knowledge of digital marketing, and some have implemented digital marketing strategies early in their operations. This study highlights the concept of "Readiness", showing that SBOs who used social media even before opening their business tended to be more successful. However, despite having prior knowledge and skills, business owners must continue learning. In the fast-evolving digital world, failure to keep up with new tools and trends may result in challenges that could affect their business performance.

   For future and aspiring entrepreneurs, studying and learning about digital marketing before opening a business can provide a strong understanding of its fundamentals, highlighting the importance of "Readiness." Aspiring entrepreneurs should familiarize themselves with digital marketing platforms, such as social media and other marketing tools, to gain hands-on experience in advertising even before officially launching their business. Establishing an online presence at least 3–6 months prior to a physical launch can help engage the target market early. Strategic planning is crucial for a successful launch, and being prepared in digital marketing enables aspiring entrepreneurs to effectively implement their strategies, setting the foundation for long-term business success.

2. Based on the findings of the study, business owners must recommend not to stop learning.

   Improve Digital and Technical Skills: Small business owners should be encouraged to actively utilize digital platforms, such as social media, online marketplaces, and websites, to expand their market reach. Developing digital marketing skills can enhance brand visibility, strengthen customer engagement, and enable businesses to connect with a wider audience, ultimately increasing growth and competitiveness.

Familiarity with Different Platforms: Business owners should explore and learn about a variety of digital platforms, including social media, online marketplaces, and advertising tools. Gaining familiarity with these platforms can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts.

Stay Updated with Technological Developments: Even with existing digital marketing knowledge, business owners must continue learning and stay informed about new tools, trends, and strategies. Keeping up with technological advancements is essential to maintain competitiveness and support faster business growth.

Address the High-Tech Barrier: Some participants

noted the need for expensive devices, like the iPhone 16 Pro Max, to produce high-quality content. However, effective digital marketing can still be achieved creatively using affordable devices, proper lighting, and accessible editing applications. Training programs can help business owners develop techniques for creating engaging content without relying on costly technology.

Involvement in Digital Marketing Seminars: Small business owners are encouraged to attend seminars or training programs that focus on basic digital marketing strategies. These programs can enhance their preparation and readiness, enabling them to use digital platforms more effectively to promote products and reach a wider audience online.

3. Based on the findings, it is recommended that small business owners continue using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to enhance customer engagement and expand their online presence. They should focus on creating consistent and engaging content, including live posts and trend-based posts, to attract more customers and remain competitive in the digital market. Maintaining an active social media presence and regularly updating their accounts will help build strong connections with their audience.

   Additionally, small business owners are encouraged to actively interact with customers by responding to comments and messages, which fosters trust and loyalty. Participating in digital marketing training or workshops can further improve their strategies and help them maximize the effectiveness of their online presence.

4. Based on the findings of the study, the following must be recommended to the Local Government Unit (LGU).

   Conduct Digital Marketing Seminars for Small Business Owners: The Local Government Unit (LGU) can organize seminars and training programs on digital marketing to help small business owners understand its foundations. These seminars can significantly impact both existing and aspiring entrepreneurs by guiding them in applying effective digital marketing strategies. Participants will gain practical knowledge and skills to promote their products, reach more customers online, and improve overall business performance.

   Provide Workshops on Technological Competency and Digital Adaptability: The LGU can also provide workshops aimed at enhancing small business owners' technological skills and digital adaptability. These workshops will help participants learn to use new digital platforms, stay updated with the latest technology, and implement innovative marketing strategies. Strengthening technological competency enables businesses to remain competitive, adapt to emerging trends, and optimize their digital marketing efforts. Such initiatives not only benefit individual entrepreneurs but also contribute to the municipality's overall digital advancement.

   Establish a One-Stop Municipal Digital Marketplace Page: Based on the study's findings, the LGU can create an official social media page across multiple platforms to serve as a "one-stop digital marketplace." This centralized platform functions like a virtual store where all local businesses can showcase their products and services. Through strategic use of social media and digital marketing techniques, the page can maximize reach, increase visibility, and engage potential customers. This initiative provides small business owners with a free, centralized promotion space, encourages collaboration, fosters healthy competition, and positions the municipality as a digitally connected, community-driven economy.

5. Future researchers must be encouraged to explore more aspects of digital marketing and to gain a deeperunderstanding and its impact on Small businesses and consumers. They may examine the effectiveness of different digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, email marketing, search engine, and other online platforms. It mayrecommend that the future studies focus on digital marketing influences like, consumer behavior, purchasing decisions, customer satisfaction and sales performance. for the digital marketing Study researchers may create a study using a larger sample size or different research methods to obtain more reliable results. Lastly, the future researchers may also conduct studies in different fields and location to compare how digital marketing strategies work for every business.

Proposed Marketing Framework

Figure 4.1 *Candaba Digital Marketing Readiness Framework*

Based on the findings and themes of the study, a proposed marketing framework is being developed. This framework shows the connection between all themes: digital marketing readiness, technological competency and digital adaptability challenges, strategic social media engagement, and maximizing digital presence among small business owners.

The proposed framework begins with the input section, which highlights the theme of digital marketing readiness. This refers to the prior knowledge, early exposure, and preparedness of small business owners in digital marketing before embarking on business operations. In the same section, it also highlights the theme of technological competency and digital adaptability challenges, which describes the difficulties experienced by business owners in terms of limited digital marketing skills, lack of technological knowledge, and challenges in adapting to a rapidly evolving digital marketing landscape.

The second section is the process section, which outlines the actions and strategies that business owners can take in response to the challenges they face. This section is anchored in the theme of strategic social media engagement, which emphasizes how business owners actively utilize digital marketing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others, to promote their products and services. On the other hand, it also refers to the theme of maximizing digital presence, where business owners engage in content creation, trend-based marketing, and online activities to strengthen their visibility and competitiveness in the digital market

The next section is the support system section, which focuses on external support. In this section it highlights the role of external assistance in enhancing the capabilities of business owners. This includes training programs, seminars, and workshops that contribute to improving technological competency and digital adaptability. This support can be provided by institutions such as local government units, as well as initiatives like one-stop municipal digital marketplaces.

Finally, the last section is the output section which highlights the outcomes of all the previous sections. Through this process, small business owners are able to achieve maximized digital presence, improved customer engagement, enhanced marketing strategies, and overall business growth. The outcomes of the proposed marketing framework demonstrate the transformation of small business owners from facing digital marketing challenges to becoming more effective and adaptable in the digital marketing landscape.

Overall, the proposed framework illustrates the clear progression from the digital marketing challenges and readiness of small business owners towards strategic engagement and maximizing digital presence. Through continuous learning and external assistance, it shows that success in digital marketing is not only about initial readiness but also about capability and active engagement in digital marketing strategies, ensuring they do not fall behind in the fast-evolving digital marketing world.

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