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## Research Article

### Coping with Disruption using Social Media Marketing: A Full Throttle

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## ABSTRACT

This review expands our insights into how micro, small, and medium enterprises or MSMEs cope with disruption in Metro Manila in the Philippines using social media marketing. COVID-19 accelerated certain processes forcing local businesses to embrace digital marketing transformation. Thus, it enables local businesses to intensify their social media marketing (SMM) efforts to remain relevant due to a series of lockdowns and government-initiated restrictions. Based on the systematic review, the researcher proposes a conceptual framework to answer the question: How can MSMEs cope with disruption through social media marketing to attain positive brand equity? The proposed conceptual framework looked into synonymous themes such as marketing competencies (MC), omnichannel strategies (OC), and brand equity (BE). Within the process, MSMEs can optimize their social media marketing strategies as a springboard to reimagine the new normal with significance on how the business would aggrandize its resources. Moreover, as of October 2021, the entire nation has entered the post-pandemic period, making this study pertinent for local enterprises. Indeed, MSMEs attempt to bounce back from a two-year incubus.

**Keywords:** *Brand Equity, Marketing Competencies, Omnichannel Strategies, Social Media Marketing*

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines started last March 2020, and the saga continues even with the presence of vaccines. The country entered the post-pandemic phase last October 2021. Indeed, the pandemic has extraordinarily affected several trends and provided new challenges to doing business, primarily in Metro Manila. However, one dominant activity stood out: social media marketing (SMM).

Although SMM remains relevant through attracting, engaging, and delighting target customers, there is a shift in delivering and communicating value due to the blurring lines of work, school, and life balance from the pre-pandemic to the post-pandemic phase.

In addition, there were changes in the shopping pattern unique to COVID-19. Consumers are much more likely to buy online than in the past, with a higher inclination to purchase

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online than before (Kahn, 2021). Payment processes for certain transactions become frictionless and flexible. With the recent announcement of the Inter-Agency Taskforce or IATF, allowing movement of people with certain restrictions (Suplico-Jeong et al., 2021), retailers or legacy brands with physical stores are still expected to exercise good hygiene practices, wear masks, have hand sanitizers accessible, and social distancing rules, gloves for employees, disinfection, and low touch environment. Today, customers are more exposed to social media content with the rise of online businesses known as digital native vertical brands or DNBVs. They promote and sell products predominantly online, specifically on Facebook and Instagram. It is also notable that target customers are very aware of the protocols in line with health and safety. Compliance measures must be entrenched before the local government allows the resumption of business operations and for customers to walk in at their favorite shops or restaurant.

Although social media marketing was already a staple activity prior to the pandemic, the usage of Facebook and Instagram was maximized by people to gather pertinent information, communicate with other consumers, and share information. A local business aiming to sell products are viewed by others as exasperating. Indeed, in order to gain attention, MSMEs must effectively work toward content, creating positive brand equity (Dubbelink et al., 2021). Whether DNBVs or legacy brands, MSMEs cannot stay online or strictly offline. They are highly recommended to utilize omnichannel strategies (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016; Kahn, 2020). In addition, local businesses should be at full throttle, quickly adapting to rapid changes to increase their competitiveness on social media and other digital channels. Aside from social media marketing, additional components must be revisited to optimize the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies. These are the level of marketing competency, understanding of omnichannel strategies, and their effect on brand equity. A social media marketing campaign becomes useless without converting or impacting its target customers. Businesses do

not always have the resources to retain and acquire customers (Kumpu et al., 2021; Matayka & Coumbe-Lilley, 2016; Parida & Kumar, 2020; Romdonny & Maulany, 2020)

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected several trends and posed new challenges to doing business in the Philippines, particularly in Metro Manila. Despite this, social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a dominant activity, with local businesses leveraging Facebook and Instagram to attract, engage, and delight target customers. However, the shift in delivering and communicating value due to the blurring lines of work, school, and life balance in the post-pandemic phase, coupled with changes in the shopping patterns, have highlighted the need for businesses to adapt and optimize their SMM strategies. To effectively create positive brand equity and remain competitive, MSMEs must utilize omnichannel strategies and optimize their level of marketing competency. Moreover, compliance with health and safety protocols is essential before businesses can resume operations and customers can walk into their favorite shops or restaurants. As the nation continues to recover from the pandemic, businesses must remain agile and adapt to rapid changes in order to optimize the effectiveness of their social media marketing campaigns and ultimately retain and acquire customers.

However, the effectiveness of SMM strategies in converting and impacting target customers remains unclear, particularly in the post-pandemic phase.

*Problem statement: How can MSMEs cope with disruption through social media marketing to attain positive brand equity in the post-pandemic phase?*

#### *Research Objectives:*

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of omnichannel strategies in optimizing SMM campaigns for MSMEs in the Philippines
2. To provide recommendations for MSMEs to improve the effectiveness of their SMM campaigns and increase their competitiveness in the post-pandemic phase.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### *Social Media Marketing and Social Media Landscape*

Social media channels allow people to interact with one another through content. These platforms help brands around the world build networks as well as online communities. In addition, there is an increasing number of users and usage of social media platforms today, and contemporary businesses see these as an opportunity to boost their marketing communication to target more customers (Jessica Angelie et al., 2019). MSMEs may be able to recover from the pandemic effects with the accessibility and affordability of social media marketing tools (Alfian Singgih Prasetyo & R. Wahdiniwaty, 2021; Allen, 2019; H. Chen et al., 2021). MSMEs can create brand experiences that attract and engage clients other than conversion. This is for the target customers to trust brands based on the perceived value it communicates (Z. Chen & Peng, 2021; Chou et al., 2021, 2021). For instance, Facebook is the most popular social media platform that MSMEs utilize for reach, engagement, and conversion (DTI, 2021). Facebook has various tools and options that fit each business's needs to jumpstart a successful campaign. Consequently, it can be done within the Facebook business page, whether paid or organic (Meta, 2021). The dynamic Facebook marketing ecosystem of apps enables a business to promote a page, boost a post, promote local business, acquire more website visitors, promote the business app, get more leads, promote the send message button, and get more website sales. The Facebook ecosystem of apps under Meta, such as Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp, are all integrated.

As the dominant platform, Facebook provides an integrated app ecosystem that allows a user, whether for personal or business use what content to communicate and accept. Facebook's impact has been evident during the lockdown periods as it influenced consumer decisions, and online conversations increased by almost 90% (HubSpot & Talkwalker, 2021).

The significance of Facebook in the metamorphosis of the online buying process continues to evolve and improve over time. Facebook can influence and revitalize the shopping environment based on online conversations,

whether good or bad. What people say affects the reputation of a brand. These may include like, share, or unlike a product or service. (Hlavac, 2020).

Brands during the pandemic have set a new parameter of engagement. Marketers reach customers openly while utilizing closed channels like groups to build relationships with prospective customers. The future is getting more exclusive for Facebook as it attempts to unify Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp to respond to the new demand for legendary social experiences. Instagram launched Threads to connect to friends in a private space through photos, while LinkedIn has Teammates to discern people they work with on a personal basis (HubSpot & Talkwalker, 2021). Brands earn equity through social trust and advocacy by taking a stand on relevant social issues. Dogmas no longer work, but people today believe in world view. Despite the pandemic, today's generation looks forward to improvement and positive news. They celebrate little victories (HubSpot & Talkwalker, 2021). With the hullabaloo of apps occupying the social media landscape, MSMEs should understand the market niche and the dominant apps, and the not-so-dominant apps to jumpstart their marketing campaign. Although the dominant apps are Facebook and Instagram, it can be noted that there are apps that appear irrelevant or not popular in a specific territory. For instance, Twitter is popular in Manila but not in Rizal. WhatsApp may be prevalent in China but not in the Philippines. A platform for streamers like Twitch may be different from one geographical area to another. Understanding the social media landscape is crucial in communication (Meta, 2021).

TikTok is a revelation with the unprecedented rise of users and followers of the platform. It brings a new flavor to the way firms do business. However, this has not been fully maximized by most MSMEs. Brand building has been the name of the game on social media, but with the decline of organic reach, transitioning to a more robust social performance, getting noticed, conversion, sale, or lead generation becomes more manageable. In addition, MSMEs are empowered today with the advent of big data (McLean & Wilson, 2016). Social media

advertising platforms have integrated attribution models, giving rise to social media commerce and creating a new dimension of the sales funnel and customer journey. However,

with these advancements happening on social media and social media commerce, tracking efficient conversions is still challenging for most firms. (HubSpot & Talkwalker, 2021).



Figure 1. The Social Media Landscape of 2020 (HubSpot & Talkwalker, 2021)

### *The Omnichannel Strategy*

Omnichannel marketing is an integrated branding and messaging strategy highlighting the online and offline touchpoints as consumers move from attention, interest, desire, and action, enabling excellent brand and customer experience (Erlandsson, 2014; Komodromos et al., 2018; Malesev et al., 2021). Omnichannel marketing takes a customer-centric view of marketing tactics. The advancement of internet technology during the pre-pandemic has transformed the retailing environment. More channels are emerging, yielding consumer shopping behavior changes (Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016). However, this was further accelerated by the pandemic in 2020 (Kahn, 2021). An omnichannel strategy is a retailing technique that enables real interaction, empowering target customers to shop in multiple channels, thus, providing a dynamic shopping experience. It breaks down barriers between online and offline channels (Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016). The pandemic has presented opportunities for entrepreneurs and marketers to create purely online businesses known as Digital Native Vertical Brands or DNBVs. It significantly impacted legacy brands or traditional firms to sell directly to customers, eliminating other channels during the pandemic. The advantage of DNBVs is that they have data and direct customer access. Legacy brands with a traditional supply

chain do not have this information forcing them to adapt and compete with the DNBVs. In the case of Apple and Nike, target customers can now purchase products directly from the company, eliminating some distribution channels to remain relevant (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Kahn, 2021). In Metro Manila, the inter-agency task force (IATF) declared an alert level 1, transitioning to the post-pandemic phase as early as October 2021, allowing people to move and shop with certain restrictions. DNBVs and legacy brands knew they had to maximize this opportunity by utilizing omnichannel strategies (Kahn, 2021) concerning their marketing competency while maximizing Facebook Marketing to attract, engage, and continuously delight customers online and offline.

### *The Marketing Competencies*

Marketing competencies highlight retailing success strategies identified by Kahn (2020) primarily applicable to MSMEs. Many classical frameworks attempting to explain retail marketing are missing a crucial point: the customer viewpoint. When customers go shopping, what do they really want? Furthermore, it should provide a superior competitive advantage over competing brands. The Kahn Retailing Success Matrix is a method for classifying today's winning retailing strategies. It offers a mechanism for MSMEs to plot their strategies or

marketing competencies. Lead on Brand: MSMEs in the top left quadrant offer products that leverage differentiation, value, and pleasure and eventually provide greater confidence to a specific customer segment than the competitors (Kahn, 2020). Lead on Experiential: The top right quadrant is where retailers offer more than a physical store customer experience by providing more pleasure, more customer intimacy, and more interaction than other retailers (Kahn, 2020). Lead on Low

Price: Talks about reliable products or services being provided at the lowest prices, which gives customers more savings. Lead on Frictionless: These MSMEs provide a frictionless experience for customers by eliminating pain points and offering customers the most accessible and convenient product purchase (Kahn, 2020). The general idea of this model is for MSMEs to integrate these winning ways by being the best in two quadrants and at least good enough in one quadrant.

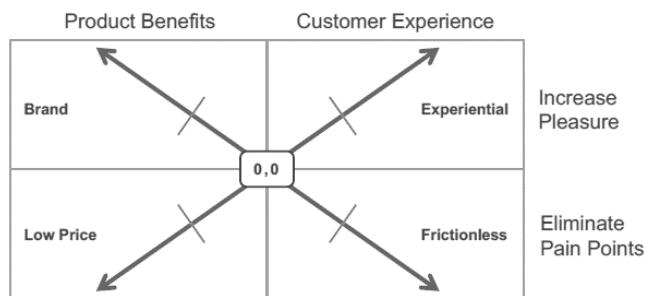


Figure 2. The Retail Success Matrix (Kahn, 2021)

### Relevance of Brand Equity

Brand equity is a term that explains brand value determined by consumer perception and brand experiences. If the target market thinks the brand is highly relevant, there is positive brand equity. However, it is not easy to attain this as people during the pandemic were all exposed and exhausted with several brands to gain the attention of bewildered customers (Chryssoula Chatzigeorgiou & Evangelos Christou, 2020; Eze et al., 2021; I. Prayoga & R. Y. Fridayani, 2021; Lupo & Stroman, 2020). Given the circumstances of doing business today, social media marketing complements the MSMEs' omnichannel strategies intending to contribute to brand equity. As such, brand equity talks about the strength of the business offering, hoping that the brand appears in the consideration or evoked set of its target customers (Dubbelink et al., 2021). Creating positive experiences will make target customers remember the brand and its perceived value. Indeed, good brand equity directly affects sales volume since the target market highly favors products of excellent reputation and experience, with a dose of community engagement (Bastani et al., 2021; Nummelin, 2015).

### Methodology

The author presented a research question that will be answered via a systematic review of literature. This is an opportunity to identify the literature gaps and provide a contribution to new knowledge, elucidate inconsistencies, and develop a conceptual framework (Dubbelink et al., 2021). Systematic literature reviews can be classified as domain-based, theory-based, and method-based. Domain-based reviews examine, expands, and synthesizes knowledge in a specific domain, while theory-based reviews evaluate the role of a specific theory in a specific field, and a method-based review analyzes literature using an inherent methodology to the conclusion (Bastani et al., 2021; Dubbelink et al., 2021). This study is a domain-based review in line with the objective of developing a conceptual framework.

### Article Search Process, Inclusion, and Exclusion Criteria

Scopus, Semantics Scholar, and Google Scholar were utilized to collect literature using Research Rabbit, an artificial intelligence software aimed to help discover interconnected

and relevant manuscripts. Keyword searches such as COVID-19, social media marketing, omnichannel strategies, marketing competencies, and brand equity were filtered. The search protocol of this systematic literature review consists of the following inclusion criteria: (1) books, (2) qualitative papers, (3) theses, (4) annual reports, and (5) conference papers. Articles that are not written in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have been excluded except for critical concepts related to the study,

### Literature Selection

The literature search emanates a sample of  $N = 24$  from Semantic Scholar ( $N = 15$ ), Scopus ( $N = 4$ ), and Google Scholar ( $N = 5$ ). Although more papers can be included, only a limited sample remained as others were COVID-19 related but had no implications for local businesses or social media marketing (SMM). Others were irrelevant or had overlapping statements related to omnichannel strategy and brand equity. This ensures that the paper will not deviate from the original topic.

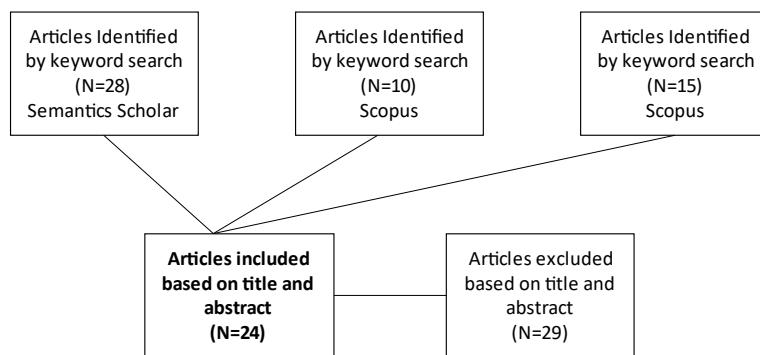


Figure 3. Data Visualization of the Literature Search

## Results and Discussions

### Descriptive Analysis

The twenty-four articles (24) from journal articles with some reports have been identified

and categorized into specific areas with stakeholder involvement. Table 1 shows the sample distribution of articles per specified category in line with the topic.

Table 1. Categories Collected from the Literature

Categories related to SMM & COVID-19	Manuscripts per topic
Marketing Competencies	19
Cost Leadership/Value for Money	
Premium/Brand Superiority	
Customer Experience	
Online Payment/Transactions; Frictionless	
Omnichannel Strategies/IMC	14
Brand Equity	15
Social Media Marketing	24
Facebook	
Instagram	
TikTok	

### Thematic Analysis and Key Success Factors

Based on the predefined categories, manuscripts are clustered per theme to overview the conceptual framework and how MSMEs cope with disruption using social media marketing.

The key success factors correspond to the success framework of Khan (2021) by highlighting the importance of marketing competencies, increased usage of social media marketing, the

proliferation of omnichannel marketing strategies, and the significance of brand equity.

### *Marketing Competencies in relation to Social Media Marketing*

Coping with disruption among MSMEs enables firms to revisit their direction as a business. Such competencies are related to the evolving shopping behavior accelerated by the pandemic. As retailers strive to win and offer something valuable to the customer over time, this advantage transitions to a new fair value, a new requirement expected to compete effectively (Khan, 2021). The general idea of the marketing competencies is to understand what works best for the business, whether they will focus on proving product superiority, cost leadership like the everyday low price, or customer-centricity, which will be echoed in their social media tactics. In addition, COVID-19 has made all transactions possible online, making it frictionless, eliminating the pain points of purchasing a product or availing of services in a few clicks (Khan, 2020; Chen, 2021). Therefore, marketing competencies serve as a mechanism to drive engagement and optimize conversions. Whether DNVB or legacy brands, MSMEs should revisit their competencies as a prerequisite to a robust social media campaign.

### *Omnichannel Strategy and Social Media Marketing*

Omnichannel is the total customer experience across multiple platforms, marketing, and touchpoints, including online and offline marketing. When a business knows its competencies and translates them into social media stories, what is next? Omnichannel strategy is a confirmation that every customer counts and their journey is well accounted for, whether online or offline, with the availability of data (Dubbelink et al., 2021; Marzuki, 2021; Thao et al., 2020). The omnichannel marketing strategy empowers MSMEs to know their target customers at a deeper level: the location, message, and time. With omnichannel marketing, local businesses communicate their unique selling proposition, thus, acknowledging customer touchpoints aside from social media to further understand the customers' journey even in the post-pandemic period.

### *Brand Equity and Social Media Marketing*

Good brand equity signifies that more target customers are now aware of the brand than before. Customers should be cognizant that the product exists, e.g., on social media before forming positive or negative associations through brand interactions (Chryssoula Chatzigeorgiou & Evangelos Christou, 2020; Eze et al., 2021; I. Prayoga & R. Y. Fridayani, 2021). The goal is to arrive at a subconscious value that target customers are associated with the brand (Dubbelink et al., 2021). When consumers positively react to a brand, there is a high probability that they may buy the product and recommend it to others, leading to increases in the brand's bottom line (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Lupo & Stroman, 2020). Conversely, when a brand is negatively perceived, the customer's reaction may create a domino effect, downplay, or criticize a product to others.

Developing brand equity, especially on social media, which most MSMEs currently utilize, will give the business a competitive edge in the marketplace (Nummelin, 2015). In a saturated market, the brand must stand out and appeal to customers through its unique selling proposition or point of differentiation. Better brand equity will enable MSMEs to charge more or add a premium over the average market price. With superior brand equity, target customers have the tendency to be loyal to the brand with ensured engagement and repeat purchases. Indeed, a chance to co-create with target customers. Despite the situation, MSMEs can leverage brand equity to co-create, form partnerships, and expand the business to the next level.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### *Coping with Disruption using Social Media Marketing*

MSMEs in Metro Manila should have a long-term vision of the pandemic and its aftermath. They must make decisions based on recovery. To cope with disruption as we approach the post-pandemic signifies reassessment of competencies to revitalize processes. Being known as the social media capital world, intensifying social media efforts is a key to omnichannel success, where online and offline platforms are

integrated to give ample options to the changing consumer shopping behavior. Social media marketing is essential in connecting with customers to gain a competitive advantage in this extraordinary time. A conceptual framework has been developed by the researcher benchmarking the success matrix of Barbara Khan with the other critical success factors. In Figure

4, MSMEs, e.g., owners or entrepreneurial marketers, should revisit their marketing competencies based on their resources before utilizing social media tactics to elaborate and affirm their omnichannel strategies on multiple platforms, channels, and touchpoints. Finally, check whether brand equity is positive or negative relative to conversions.

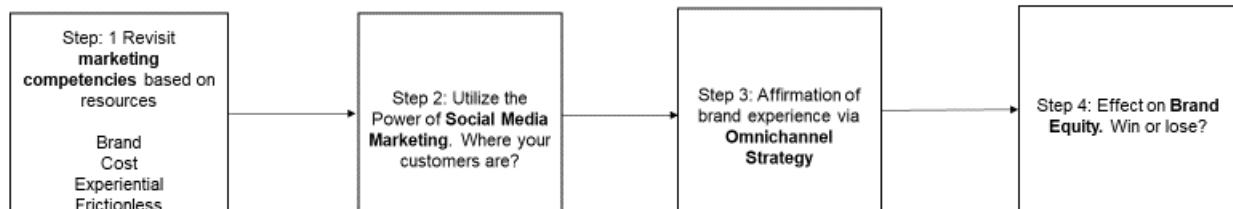


Figure 4: The Extended Success Matrix

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This systematic literature review aimed to provide insights as well as an answer on how micro, small, and medium enterprises or MSMEs cope with disruption through social media marketing. Specifically, how can MSMEs remain relevant through social media marketing to attain positive brand equity in the post-pandemic phase? The proposed conceptual framework looks into components such as marketing competencies (MC), omnichannel strategies (OC), and brand equity (BE) in relation to social media marketing. There is no definite formula for an MSME to succeed in the post-pandemic; however, revisiting the relevance of social media marketing by understanding the firm's competency, omnichannel strategies, and brand equity measures will be crucial in revitalizing their effort to bounce back from the two-year incubus. Decisions based on recovery require a long-term vision. As time passes, local businesses may have likely established a community in the retail trade area. This situation is the best time to engage with customers through stories on social media platforms. However, brands should shift their narrative from offering goods and services or push strategy to social listening and brand community. MSMEs can use this time to consider engaging and attracting customers by purposely delighting them. Crowdsourcing and customer co-creation are just some of the techniques to do this. For instance, requesting the community of

brand advocates to post pictures or share inspiring stories could help make the brand more lovable. The main idea is for target customers to visit the social media page constantly—an endeavor to foster relationships with more potential customers when it matters. MSMEs can distinctively position themselves innovatively and creatively even in the time of the pandemic. COVID-19 continues to be a threat. However, it can also bring unexpected opportunities to thrive the business. Indeed, a full-throttle signifies that the marketing potential knows no bounds.

## Study's Limitation and Areas for Future Research

Since this systematic review tackled a few articles on the subject matter, the findings of this study may not be applicable outside Metro Manila. Future research may also check the geographical and regional differences in terms of how MSMEs cope with disruption using social media marketing in the Philippines. Future research can also test and review other emerging apps, e.g., TikTok, Kumu, and LinkedIn, to complement marketing competencies and omnichannel strategies concerning brand equity.

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