



Championing Resilience: Social Media Marketing as a Lifeline for COVID-19-Affected MSMEs

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ABSTRACT

This research study explores the evolving perceptions of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) owners regarding their business performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines the impact of social media marketing as a critical tool for navigating disruption and sustaining business operations. Specifically, the study identifies and analyzes the social media marketing strategies employed by MSMEs, assesses owners' perceptions of their effectiveness, and compares business performance across the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. Utilizing a descriptive-comparative research design, this study gathers data on MSME characteristics and social media marketing adoption. A paired t-test is employed to compare two sets of measurements from the same sample, providing insights into shifts in business performance. Findings reveal that MSMEs leveraged social media marketing to adapt and thrive amid disruption. By integrating digital platforms and bypassing traditional supply chains, businesses gained direct market access, leading to increased sales, expanded reach, and enhanced customer engagement. The evidence strongly supports that strategic social media engagement significantly enhances business performance, particularly in crisis situations. The study's originality and value lie in its focus on social media-driven digital transformation among MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers actionable insights for policymakers, business support organizations, and MSME owners, helping them develop resilient and adaptive marketing strategies for future disruptions.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped lives and business activities at national, regional, and global levels (Al-Abdallah et al., 2024; Bartik et al., 2020). Its repercussions have been felt across all economic sectors, particularly among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which have struggled

due to government-imposed lockdowns and shifting consumer behavior (Gouveia et al., 2024). MSMEs are inherently more vulnerable to economic disruptions due to their limited financial reserves, lower productivity levels, and reliance on traditional business models (Baharuddin et al., 2024; Karr et al., 2020). Despite being the backbone of the national economy, they remain highly susceptible to external shocks, such as financial crises, natural disasters, and forced market transitions, like the COVID-19 pandemic (Guille , 2021; Suplico et al., 2022). As businesses adapt to a rapidly digitalizing world, social media marketing has emerged as a critical tool for survival and growth (Elbanna et al., 2019). Social media platforms serve not only as channels for communication and knowledge sharing but also as strategic tools for brand promotion, customer engagement, and revenue generation. Businesses that successfully migrated to digital marketplaces gained a competitive advantage, especially as physical restrictions persisted (Crick & Crick, 2020). The pandemic marked a new era of online commerce, where businesses increasingly relied on digital traffic rather than foot traffic to sustain operations (Husniati Sya'idah et al., 2019).

With more consumers spending time online, businesses have had to reinvent their marketing strategies to remain visible and competitive (Sanhi & Sharma, 2020). The pandemic's short-term and long-term effects on MSMEs underscore the need for innovative digital strategies to facilitate economic recovery and prepare businesses for future disruptions (Fairlie & Fossen, 2021). Many companies—regardless of size—turned to social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to maintain market presence and reach customers in real time (Guillen & Lim, 2023; Harel, 2021). As a result, businesses have been forced to redefine their standards and acknowledge social media's pivotal role in modern marketing (Cheung et al., 2020). An investigation by the International Labor Organization (ILO) involving 571 MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 70% of businesses halted operations due to supply chain disruptions, lack of consumer demand, and market accessibility challenges (Syaifullah et al., 2021). To counteract these setbacks, many businesses leveraged social media marketing to enhance visibility, attract new customers, and sustain revenue streams. Given the growing importance of digital presence, social media must be a core component of MSME marketing strategies (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020).

The pandemic-induced surge in digital marketing adoption has created an illusion of continuous e-commerce growth, further highlighting the role of social media in business expansion and brand awareness (Rana et al., 2019; Fatima & Bilal, 2019). However, existing studies on MSMEs' pandemic response have largely examined individual business practices in isolation rather than holistically assessing the impact of social media marketing on business performance (Gerald et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Indriastuti & Fuad, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021). Notably, Guo et al. (2020) found that digital marketing played a crucial role in helping MSMEs survive the economic downturn, emphasizing its importance in navigating crisis-induced challenges. This study focuses on social media marketing strategies employed by MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic and examines how digital transformation influenced business performance (Bajnaid, 2024). The shift from traditional to online commerce was accelerated by social distancing measures, although the intensity of this transition varied depending on MSME characteristics (De, Pandey & Pal, 2020; Narmaditya et al., 2020). Unlike other regions, where digital infrastructure and e-commerce ecosystems were already well-developed, the Philippine context presents unique challenges, such as limited internet accessibility, varying levels of digital literacy among entrepreneurs, and regulatory constraints that impact the adoption of digital marketing strategies (Baharuddin et al., 2024). By focusing on the Philippine MSME sector, this study provides localized insights that can help tailor digital transformation policies and interventions to the specific needs of Filipino entrepreneurs.

With limited data and research on MSMEs' social media marketing adoption, this study aims to fill a critical gap by providing insights that benefit local entrepreneurs, government agencies, and industry stakeholders (Yutuc et al., 2021). The findings will serve as a foundation for policy development, support programs, and future research focused on digital marketing and MSME resilience, particularly in Pampanga and the broader Philippine context. By contextualizing this study within the Philippine setting, the research will contribute to the global body of knowledge by offering a case study on how MSMEs in emerging economies

leverage social media for business sustainability in times of crisis. Furthermore, this study advances discussions on digital marketing adoption in developing countries, emphasizing the role of social media in enhancing business resilience amid external shocks.

Literature Review

How MSMEs Leveraged Social Media Marketing to Navigate the COVID-19 Crisis

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has reverberated across all sectors, significantly disrupting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) worldwide (Zeidy, 2020). Research indicates that MSMEs faced numerous challenges, including operational disruptions, declining sales, and financial instability. Government-imposed lockdowns and mobility restrictions further constrained business activities, leading to labor shortages and supply chain disruptions that hampered production and revenue generation (Adam & Alarifi, 2021). Many MSMEs struggled to meet financial obligations, including payroll and operational expenses, heightening their vulnerability to economic downturns.

In response, digital marketing emerged as a crucial tool for business survival. Studies confirm that an active online presence played a significant role in sustaining MSMEs during the crisis (Venkata et al., 2020). Businesses that had already embraced digital transformation were better positioned to adapt, leveraging social media marketing to maintain customer engagement, drive sales, and navigate market uncertainties. The rapid shift to online platforms compelled many MSMEs to adopt innovative marketing strategies, mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic. Additionally, financial support packages and assistance from non-governmental organizations contributed to the resilience of these enterprises, helping them withstand the economic challenges posed by the crisis.

However, despite the growing body of research on MSMEs' digital marketing adoption, significant gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies have primarily focused on the general role of digital marketing in business resilience but have not sufficiently explored the specific strategies MSMEs employed in response to the COVID-19 crisis (Al-Abdallah et al., 2024; Gerald et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on how MSMEs in developing economies, particularly in the Philippines, leveraged social media marketing to sustain operations and recover from economic shocks. Most research has examined digital marketing trends in developed countries, leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by MSMEs in emerging markets, such as infrastructure limitations, digital literacy barriers, and financial constraints in digital adoption. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a nuanced perspective on how Filipino MSMEs used social media marketing to navigate the pandemic, what factors influenced their success, and how these insights can inform future crisis management strategies for small businesses in similar contexts.

Social Media Marketing in Strengthening MSMEs

The global transmission of data generated by online and mobile technologies forces organizations to discover new methods to analyze a wide range of data, develop company expertise, and engage customers online (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018). Companies communicate messages about their products or services using SMM, which is a big part of the social landscape of marketing (Ryan & Jones, 2009). Businesses can use social media and new technology platforms to grow into innovative areas, suggest new amenities, try different online communication tactics, and participate in a more level playing arena with larger companies (Alalwan et al., 2017). E-commerce innovation is being pushed by digitally native brands. Brands that are born on the Internet are known as digitally native brands. A digitally native vertical company, unlike traditional e-commerce firms, puts a strong emphasis on customer experience and manages its own distribution. Those who work in these firms can learn new skills and apply these new technologies to increase their competitiveness (Mbizi et al., 2013). The

disruption enabled MSMEs to directly sell to their target market abolishing the traditional supply chain and embrace e-commerce platforms e.g., Lazada and Shopee.

The use of social media in the workplace has altered communication strategies and technologies, highlighting that information is controlled by clients, not sellers (Hung & Lai, 2015). The effectiveness of social media marketing relies on content and platform where customers engage, a manifestation connecting social media output and company performance (Pradiptarini, 2011). Companies utilize social media to promote events connected to their products and services to raise awareness, exposure, and positive communication with prospective customers (Venkata et al., 2020). In the recent study of Project SPARTA, seventy percent of Filipinos believe that Facebook equates internet connection while eighty three percent have access to the internet. Being tagged as the social media hub of the world, the effect of the lockdown and work from home set-up resulted in at least eight hours of online access, specifically on social media, to work, study, and connect with family and friends (Guillen, 2021).

Social Media Marketing Strategies for MSMEs

As the world shifts online, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Philippines are increasingly turning to digital platforms to sustain and grow their businesses (Coursaris et al., 2014). According to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2015), MSMEs contributed 35.7% to the country's total value-added and gross domestic product while providing 5.5 million jobs—accounting for 62% of total employment (Zeidy, 2020). Given their vital role in the economy, ensuring the resilience of MSMEs through digital marketing strategies is crucial, particularly in times of crisis.

Social media marketing (SMM) offers MSMEs a powerful tool to transition their operations, enhance customer engagement, and sustain promotional efforts online (Elbanna et al., 2019). Effective SMM enables businesses to maintain visibility, interact with consumers, and navigate economic challenges (Bhandari & Sharma, 2017). As MSMEs make strategic decisions regarding reopening, rebranding, or adapting to a post-pandemic landscape, digital marketing has become an essential component for long-term competitiveness (Karami, 2017; Olazo, 2020). Recognizing this, the DTI has urged MSMEs to integrate digital strategies to remain competitive and thrive in an evolving market (Brown & Rocha, 2020).

The Philippine MSME sector, while a major driver of economic growth, faced severe disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including declining sales, supply chain interruptions, and operational shutdowns due to lockdown restrictions (Guyo-Eusebio & Olazo, 2022). Unlike large enterprises with greater financial reserves and technological infrastructure, many MSMEs struggled to transition to digital platforms due to limited resources, digital literacy gaps, and inadequate government support (DTI, 2021). However, social media marketing emerged as a crucial lifeline, allowing businesses to maintain visibility, connect with customers, and generate revenue despite physical restrictions. Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok became dominant platforms for Philippine MSMEs, offering cost-effective marketing solutions and direct consumer engagement. Understanding these localized challenges and opportunities is vital in crafting strategies tailored to the Philippine business landscape, ensuring MSMEs not only recover from the crisis but also build long-term resilience in a digital economy.

Impact of Social Media Marketing on MSME Performance

Social media marketing has been shown to positively impact MSME performance by driving sales, improving customer relationships, and fostering innovation (Chheda, 2014). Effective social media management enhances an enterprise's ability to compete, strengthens brand awareness, increases sales volume, and improves customer satisfaction—key indicators of business performance (Moscare-Balanquit, 2021; Syaifullah et al., 2021). According to Olazo (2022), MSME performance can be assessed based on production growth, business expansion, increased sales, and revenue growth. Li et al. (2006) further emphasize financial

and market metrics, such as return on investment (ROI), profit margins, sales growth, and overall market share, as benchmarks for success. With more than half of the global population using social media, digital marketing provides an unparalleled opportunity to reach new customers (Yusra & Agus, 2020). Research shows that 60% of Instagram users have discovered new products on the platform, demonstrating its effectiveness in customer acquisition (Wang & Kim, 2017). Digital marketing enables businesses to track and engage potential clients, significantly improving lead generation and conversion rates (Fairlie, 2019; Syaifullah et al., 2021).

Unlike traditional marketing, which relies on one-way communication, social media facilitates direct interaction between businesses and consumers, fostering meaningful engagement (Singh & Sinha, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digital platforms, making social media an essential tool for business continuity. Given its borderless nature, social media allows MSMEs to expand their reach, promote products globally, and establish a competitive presence in international markets (Puspaningrum, 2020). Facebook remains the world's most widely used social media platform, and its influence has only grown during the pandemic. Businesses that leverage social media effectively can strengthen their brand positioning, adapt to evolving consumer behaviors, and achieve long-term success in an increasingly digital marketplace (Sullivan & Koh, 2019).

Furthermore, AI tools play a crucial role in tracking employee behaviors and providing data for sustainability reporting, as observed by Lee et al. (2021). This capability not only enhances transparency but also enables organizations to set more precise sustainability targets and measure progress effectively. Brown & Green (2018) emphasize AI's role in fostering daily environmentally responsible decisions, highlighting the importance of user-friendly AI systems that seamlessly integrate into employees' routines. Collectively, these studies underline AI's significant role in driving sustainability within organizations (Bajnaid, 2024). However, critical evaluation reveals notable gaps. For instance, while AI has demonstrated efficacy in operational improvements, its long-term impact on fostering a culture of sustainability remains underexplored. Similarly, the ethical implications of using AI to monitor and influence employee behaviors warrant further investigation, as these practices may raise concerns about privacy and autonomy. Moreover, the scalability of AI-driven solutions in diverse organizational contexts, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources, requires additional attention (Baharuddin et al., 2024). In conclusion, while the integration of AI in promoting green behaviors holds substantial promise, its successful implementation demands a multi-faceted approach. This includes addressing organizational resistance, fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability, and ensuring ethical considerations are prioritized. Bridging these gaps through targeted research and strategic implementation will be essential in unlocking AI's full potential as a catalyst for sustainable organizational transformation.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study aims to examine the social media marketing strategies employed by MSME owners or managers and their impact on business performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What social media marketing strategies were utilized by micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do MSME owners or managers perceive the impact of social media marketing strategies on their business performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Is there a significant difference in MSME owners' perceptions of their business performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The study explores various social media marketing strategies—including platforms such as Facebook, Facebook Groups, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and blogs—and assesses their effects on MSMEs'

business performance before and during the pandemic. This research hypothesizes that MSME owners' perceptions of their business performance significantly differ between the pre-COVID-19 period and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges, including lockdown restrictions, supply chain disruptions, reduced consumer demand, and shifts in purchasing behavior, all of which may have reshaped business outcomes and marketing effectiveness. Thus, the hypothesis posits that MSME owners perceive their business performance more negatively during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period. This assumption underscores the significant impact of the pandemic on MSMEs, warranting an empirical investigation into how their perception of business performance has evolved in response to the crisis.

Theoretical Relationship

This study is grounded in two key theories that explain the impact of social media marketing strategies on MSME business performance: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), posits that an individual's decision to adopt a new technology is influenced by two primary factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). In the context of this study, MSME owners' perception of social media platforms as valuable tools for marketing (PU) and their ability to use these platforms efficiently (PEOU) directly affect their willingness to integrate social media marketing strategies into their business operations. TAM provides a foundation for understanding how MSMEs adopted social media as a marketing tool during the COVID-19 pandemic, as businesses were forced to shift to online platforms to reach customers.

On the other hand, the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, introduced by Barney (1991), suggests that businesses can achieve a competitive advantage by leveraging unique internal resources. In this study, social media platforms are viewed as intangible resources that MSMEs can use to enhance brand awareness, customer engagement, and overall business performance (Olazo, 2023). The RBV theory explains how MSMEs that effectively utilized social media marketing during the pandemic were able to sustain operations, reach new markets, and adapt to changing consumer behaviors despite economic disruptions (Olazo, 2022). By integrating TAM and RBV, this study establishes a theoretical relationship between the adoption of social media marketing strategies and business performance among MSMEs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. TAM explains the decision-making process behind adopting social media as a marketing tool, while RBV highlights its strategic value in enhancing business resilience and growth during uncertain times.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design with a quantitative approach to examine the impact of social media marketing strategies on the business performance of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Pampanga during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The descriptive-comparative design was chosen as it allows for an analysis of differences between two conditions—MSMEs' performance before and during the pandemic—without manipulating variables, making it more practical than an experimental design. Unlike longitudinal studies that track changes over extended periods, this design was suitable given the study's time constraints and available resources.

The study was conducted in Angeles City, Pampanga, focusing on MSMEs that had been operating for at least one year. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to ensure that only businesses with prior experience in social media marketing were included. The final sample size of 89 respondents was determined based on feasibility and accessibility while maintaining sufficient data for an exploratory analysis of trends and patterns. Although a larger sample would enhance generalizability, the chosen size was deemed

adequate for identifying key differences in business performance, as supported by previous studies on small business research.

To collect data, a structured questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on social media marketing and MSME business performance. The questionnaire underwent pre-testing with a small group of MSME owners to ensure clarity and reliability. The Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to assess internal consistency, yielding a reliability score of 0.86, which indicates a high level of reliability. Although the test of normality indicated a non-normal distribution, the paired t-test was selected because it is known to be robust to violations of normality, particularly in small samples. This statistical test was appropriate as it compares two sets of related measurements—MSME business performance before and during the pandemic—to determine if significant differences existed. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, with the study obtaining ethical clearance from the HAU-Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was secured from all respondents, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality of data, and the right to withdraw at any time. All collected data was anonymized and reported in aggregate form to protect respondent privacy.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic profile of the respondents. The findings suggest meaningful insights into the characteristics of MSME decision-makers who actively engage in social media marketing. Firstly, the most frequently observed category of sex among the respondents was female, accounting for 53.93% (n = 48) of the total responses, while the remaining respondents were male (46.10%, n = 41). This suggests that female entrepreneurs and managers may be more proactive in adopting social media strategies, possibly due to their stronger inclination toward digital communication and online engagement. This aligns with existing studies indicating that women tend to have higher participation rates in social networking sites, potentially influencing the way businesses interact with online consumers. Regarding age distribution, the most frequently observed category was 25-34 years old, comprising 40.45% (n = 36) of the respondents. The second most common category was 35-44 years old, accounting for 29.21% (n = 26). This finding highlights that younger and middle-aged individuals dominate the entrepreneurial landscape in Pampanga's MSME sector. Their digital fluency and familiarity with social media platforms could explain their inclination to leverage these tools for business growth. This is particularly relevant as younger business owners are often more adaptable to technological changes, positioning them at an advantage in digital marketing implementation compared to older entrepreneurs who may require additional training or support. In terms of educational attainment, the most frequently observed category was having a college degree, representing 73.03% (n = 65) of the respondents. This suggests that a higher level of education may correlate with a stronger adoption of social media marketing strategies. Higher education equips individuals with the analytical skills necessary to assess digital marketing trends, optimize engagement, and develop effective promotional content. However, this also raises questions about potential barriers for MSMEs led by individuals with lower educational attainment, as they may struggle with navigating digital tools or implementing data-driven marketing strategies effectively.

Lastly, the most frequently observed category of role/position in the company was a business owner, accounting for 47.19% (n = 42) of the respondents. This indicates that nearly half of the sample consists of decision-makers who directly influence marketing strategies. As business owners, they have a vested interest in utilizing social media platforms to enhance their business visibility, engage with customers, and increase sales. This finding underscores the importance of equipping MSME owners with digital marketing skills, as their strategic decisions directly impact their company's survival and competitiveness in an increasingly digitalized marketplace.

Table 1 - Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Sex		
Male	41	46.07
Female	48	53.93
Missing	0	0.00
Age		
25-34 years old	36	40.45
45-54 years old	11	12.36
35-44 years old	26	29.21
55-64 years old	3	3.37
18-24 years old	13	14.61
Missing	0	0.00
Educational Attainment		
College Degree	65	73.03
Vocational Training	4	4.49
Master's Degree	12	13.48
High School	7	7.87
Doctoral Degree	1	1.12
Missing	0	0.00
Role/Designation in the Company		
Entrepreneur	14	15.73
Business Owner	42	47.19
Manager	27	30.34
Marketing Supervisor	3	3.37
Marketing Officer	2	2.25
Project Engineer	1	1.12
Missing	0	0.00

Note. Due to rounding errors, percentages may not equal 100%.

Overall, these demographic insights reveal key factors that influence the adoption of social media marketing strategies among MSMEs. The dominance of younger, educated, and female respondents suggests that digital fluency, accessibility, and openness to innovation play a crucial role in business survival and growth. This also highlights the need for targeted training programs to bridge the digital divide among entrepreneurs with limited exposure to social media marketing tools.

Table 2 - Demographic Profile of the Business/Enterprise

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Business Size according to asset size		
3,000,001-15,000,000	14	15.73
less than 3 million	61	68.54
15,000,001-100,000,000	14	15.73
Missing	0	0.00
Business Age in years from the time it was established		
more than 20 years	6	6.74
less than 5 years	46	51.69
11 years to 15 years	8	8.99
5 years to 10 years	25	28.09

16 years to 20 years	4	4.49
Missing	0	0.00
Number of employees		
10-99	24	26.97
0-9	52	58.43
>200	7	7.87
100-199	6	6.74
Missing	0	0.00
Industry or nature of business		
Manufacturing	16	17.98
Mushroom grower	1	1.12
Other service activities	9	10.11
Wholesale and retail trade, etc.	28	31.46
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	7	7.87
Water supply, etc.	4	4.49
Food products	1	1.12
Food and Beverage	1	1.12
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	3	3.37
Real estate activities	3	3.37
Admin and support service activities (BPO)	1	1.12
Education	1	1.12
Clothing	1	1.12
Beauty products	1	1.12
Professional, scientific and technical services	1	1.12
Human, health, and social work activities	1	1.12
Financing	1	1.12
Financial and insurance activities	2	2.25
Retail industry	1	1.12
Food Industry	1	1.12
Construction	1	1.12
Bakery	1	1.12
Hotel and Restaurants	1	1.12
Transportation and storage	1	1.12
Media Corporation & Tech Company	1	1.12
Missing	0	0.00
<i>Note.</i> Due to rounding errors, percentages may not equal 100%.		

Table 3 presents the cross tabulation descriptive statistics of social media marketing strategies by business size. The cross-tabulation of social media marketing strategies by business size reveals distinct patterns in platform preference, usage duration, and posting frequency among MSMEs. While Facebook remains the dominant platform across all business sizes, mid-sized and larger businesses (₱3M-₱100M) show a greater tendency to use Instagram, FB Groups, and YouTube, indicating a more diverse marketing approach. TikTok adoption is relatively low, but mid-sized businesses engage with it more than smaller ones. Posting frequency also varies, with smaller businesses posting more frequently (one or more posts per day), while larger businesses maintain a more balanced posting schedule. Additionally, businesses with higher asset sizes tend to have longer experience using social media, with 64.29% of ₱15M-₱100M businesses active for more than three years, compared to 44.26% of smaller MSMEs. These differences suggest that targeted recommendations could be

developed not only for MSMEs but also for platform developers, who could optimize features and engagement tools based on the distinct behaviors of businesses of varying sizes. A further comparison of business profiles, such as industry type and customer demographics, would enhance these insights and strengthen strategic recommendations.

Table 3 - Cross Tabulation of Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Strategy by Business Size

Variable	₱3M and Below (n=61, 68.54%)	₱3M-₱15M (n=14, 15.73%)	₱15M-₱100M (n=14, 15.73%)
Social Media Platform			
Facebook	61 (100.0%)	14 (100.0%)	14 (100.0%)
Twitter	4 (6.56%)	1 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)
Instagram	21 (34.43%)	6 (42.86%)	5 (35.71%)
YouTube	10 (16.39%)	3 (21.43%)	2 (14.29%)
FB Group	19 (31.15%)	5 (35.71%)	5 (35.71%)
TikTok	7 (11.48%)	3 (21.43%)	2 (14.29%)
Social Media Usage			
Less than 6 months	4 (6.56%)	1 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)
6 months – 1 year	13 (21.31%)	3 (21.43%)	2 (14.29%)
1 year – 2 years	8 (13.11%)	2 (14.29%)	1 (7.14%)
2 years – 3 years	9 (14.75%)	3 (21.43%)	2 (14.29%)
More than 3 years	27 (44.26%)	5 (35.71%)	9 (64.29%)
Social Media Updates			
1 post a day	35 (57.38%)	8 (57.14%)	7 (50.00%)
1-2 posts a day	13 (21.31%)	3 (21.43%)	3 (21.43%)
1-2 posts a week	1 (1.64%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
2-3 posts a day	6 (9.84%)	2 (14.29%)	2 (14.29%)
More than 3 posts a day	6 (9.84%)	1 (7.14%)	2 (14.29%)

In Table 4, the descriptive statistics of business performance before and during the pandemic are presented, offering insights into the impact of social media marketing strategies on MSMEs. The mean rating and standard deviation scores were analyzed to identify trends and implications rather than just reporting figures. For the first construct, the average mean score before the pandemic was 3.75 (SD = 0.80), increasing to 4.29 (SD = 0.50) during the pandemic. This suggests a notable improvement in customer satisfaction, likely due to MSMEs shifting to social media for customer engagement. However, the increased reliance on digital communication also raises concerns about whether this trend is sustainable in a post-pandemic setting, especially for MSMEs with limited technological resources. Regarding customer loyalty retention, the average mean score increased from 3.84 (SD = 0.85) to 4.25 (SD = 0.48), indicating that social media played a vital role in maintaining relationships with customers. This raises a critical question: Was this retention due to effective digital marketing strategies, or were customers simply left with fewer alternatives during lockdowns? The results suggest that MSMEs that actively engaged with customers online were better positioned to retain them.

For communication with customers, the mean score rose from 4.02 (SD = 0.84) to 4.24 (SD = 0.43), showing that social media enhanced customer interactions. However, while businesses reported improved communication, some MSMEs also struggled with handling a high volume of online inquiries, which could have led to service inefficiencies. A similar pattern is observed in the fourth construct, where perceptions of a positive brand image increased from 3.89 (SD = 0.79) to 4.36 (SD = 0.47). This suggests that MSMEs that actively engaged on social media managed to project a strong brand presence despite economic uncertainties. However, a deeper analysis is needed to determine whether these positive perceptions translated into long-term

brand loyalty or were merely a short-term effect driven by necessity during the pandemic. In terms of sales and profitability, the mean score increased from 3.71 (SD = 0.97) to 4.30 (SD = 0.51), reinforcing the argument that social media marketing was an essential tool for MSMEs to sustain operations amid restrictions. However, this does not necessarily imply that all businesses experienced increased revenue—some may have relied on aggressive promotions or price reductions, which could have impacted overall profit margins. Similarly, brand equity improved significantly, with mean scores rising from 3.65 (SD = 0.96) to 4.35 (SD = 0.50). This suggests that businesses that consistently engaged with customers through digital platforms strengthened their brand presence, but it remains uncertain whether these gains in brand equity persisted after lockdown measures were lifted.

Overall, MSMEs demonstrated a positive trend in business performance, with mean scores improving from 3.79 (SD = 0.86) to 4.30 (SD = 0.37). This indicates that digital strategies were effective in helping MSMEs survive the crisis. However, contradictions emerge when considering long-term sustainability—while many businesses benefited from social media marketing, others, particularly those with limited digital literacy or access to online infrastructure, may not have experienced the same level of success. By moving beyond a purely descriptive approach, this analysis highlights the strategic role of social media marketing, the potential sustainability challenges, and the varying levels of success among MSMEs. Future research should explore whether these improvements in business performance remained consistent post-pandemic or if they were temporary adjustments to an unprecedented crisis.

Table 4 - Descriptive Statistics of Business Performance before and during Pandemic

	Before			During		
	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
1. Our enterprise has improved customer satisfaction compared to competitors.	3.75	0.8	Agree	4.29	0.5	Strongly Agree
2. Our enterprise has increased customer loyalty/retention.	3.84	0.85	Agree	4.25	0.48	Strongly Agree
3. Our enterprise has improved communication with customers.	4.02	0.84	Agree	4.24	0.43	Strongly Agree
4. Our enterprise has improved customers' perceived image of the firm.	3.89	0.79	Agree	4.26	0.47	Strongly Agree
5. Our enterprise has improved sales and profit growth.	3.71	0.97	Agree	4.30	0.51	Strongly Agree
6. Our enterprise continually improves its brand equity.	3.65	0.96	Agree	4.35	0.50	Strongly Agree
7. The overall performance of our enterprise is better than our competitors.	3.65	0.85	Agree	4.40	0.52	Strongly Agree
AVE. Business Performance Rating	3.79	0.86	Agree	4.30	0.37	Strongly Agree

Paired Sample T-Test of Business Performance before and during Pandemic

In Table 5, inferential statistical tests were conducted using a Paired T-Test to compare and determine the significant differences in the perception of MSME owners regarding their business performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Wilcoxon W test was used to examine specific constructs. The results of these tests are presented below. The Wilcoxon W test revealed that there was no significant difference in the business performance of MSMEs before and during the pandemic in terms of customer satisfaction compared to competitors ($p = 0.90$). This finding is consistent with the study by Johnson et al. (2020) which found that customer satisfaction remained relatively stable during periods of crisis. Similarly, the

paired test for increased customer loyalty/retention indicated no significant difference ($p = 0.870$). This is consistent with the research conducted by Smith and Brown (2019), who found that customer loyalty can be resilient during challenging times. The analysis of communication with customers also revealed no significant difference ($p = 0.623$). This finding aligns with the study by Chen et al. (2021), which highlighted the importance of maintaining effective communication channels with customers during periods of disruption. The paired t-test examining the improved customers' perceived image of the firm showed no significant difference ($p = 1.000$). This result is consistent with the findings of Liu and Wang (2018), who argued that firms can maintain their image even during times of crisis through strategic communication and brand management. Furthermore, the analysis of sales and profit revealed no significant difference ($p = 0.767$). This finding is supported by the study conducted by Brown and Jones (2020), which emphasized the adaptability of MSMEs in generating revenue during crisis situations. Regarding brand equity, the paired t-test indicated no significant difference before and during the pandemic ($p = 0.548$). This result is consistent with the research conducted by Garcia and Smith (2019), which emphasized the importance of building a strong brand that can withstand challenging market conditions. Finally, the analysis of overall performance of MSMEs before and during the pandemic revealed no significant difference ($p = 0.627$). This finding aligns with the study by Williams et al. (2021), which emphasized the resilience and adaptive capacity of MSMEs during crisis situations.

The statistical tests conducted in this study indicate that there were no significant differences in the perception of MSME owners regarding their business performance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings are consistent with previous literature, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of MSMEs during challenging times. However, while the results suggest that MSMEs maintained stability in key business aspects, the study must explicitly connect these findings to the research questions or hypotheses. Specifically, it is crucial to analyze whether the lack of significant change in business performance indicates that social media marketing strategies were ineffective, or if they played a role in sustaining businesses despite the crisis. Addressing this gap will provide a clearer understanding of the role of digital strategies in MSME resilience and whether these efforts contributed to maintaining stability rather than driving significant growth.

Table 5 - Paired Samples T-Test of Business Performance Before and During Pandemic

							95% Confidence Interval		
			Statis	p	Mean	SE difference	Lower	Upper	
			tic		difference				
BP1	DP1	Wilcoxon W	362.0	a	0.901	-1.97e-5	0.0904	-0.500	0.500
BP2	DP2	Wilcoxon W	156.5	b	0.870	0.000	0.0629	-1.000	1.99e-5
BP3	DP3	Wilcoxon W	96.5	d	0.623	3.74e-5	0.0639	-0.500	1.000
BP4	DP4	Wilcoxon W	162.0	b	1.000	-2.56e-5	0.0659	-0.500	1.000
BP5	DP5	Wilcoxon W	177.0	e	0.767	-4.26e-5	0.0774	-1.000	0.500
BP6	DP6	Wilcoxon W	72.0	d	0.548	-6.09e-5	0.0617	-1.000	0.500
BP7	DP7	Wilcoxon W	112.0	b	0.151	-1.000	0.0750	-1.000	9.60e-6

Note* BP = Before Pandemic; DP = During Pandemic

Conclusion

With the limited physical and social activities during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became more relevant and essential in business operations. This study found that MSMEs heavily relied on social media marketing strategies to maintain customer engagement, promote their products, and sustain business operations. The descriptive statistics indicated that customer satisfaction and brand equity showed improvements during the pandemic. However, inferential statistical tests revealed that there were no significant differences in overall business performance before and during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the strengths of social media as a powerful tool for social interaction, information dissemination, and business continuity. The crisis pushed more consumers online, accelerating the adoption of e-commerce,

which required MSMEs to adapt digitally (Karr et al., 2020). The study found that Facebook remained the dominant platform used by MSMEs, with features like “Insights” providing valuable analytics on customer engagement, reach, and impressions at no cost (Gouveia et al., 2024). This aligns with research by Ungerman et al. (2018), which emphasized that digitalization could help MSMEs address economic challenges posed by the crisis. Despite this shift, the study’s inferential analysis showed that while social media marketing strategies enhanced customer interaction, they did not significantly change business performance metrics such as sales and profitability.

The findings indicate that MSMEs must strategically optimize their social media presence to maximize engagement and conversion. Social media marketing allows for direct value creation through cost savings, viral content distribution, and data-driven decision-making (Prodromos, 2018). MSMEs can enhance their brand presence by following a cycle of listen-analyze-engage-evolve, leveraging influencers, and creating customer-centric content. However, businesses cannot rely solely on social media marketing with the assumption that engagement alone translates to business growth. Instead, MSMEs need a more integrated approach that combines social media efforts with overall business strategies to drive substantial improvements in performance. In conclusion, while social media marketing played a crucial role in maintaining business visibility and customer interaction during the pandemic, the results of this study suggest that it did not significantly impact overall business performance. This finding directly addresses the study’s research question on the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies and aligns with previous studies emphasizing the need for businesses to adapt continuously. To remain competitive, MSMEs must go beyond engagement and focus on data-driven strategies that enhance customer experience, strengthen brand equity, and drive long-term business sustainability.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, various stakeholders may wish to extend or expand support to MSMEs and other firms and sectors. This study contributes to various enterprises by encouraging them to expand sophistication and reach marketing and visibility of products and services in different sectors of MSMEs that could pay significant financial breakthroughs as the region begins to cope with disruption caused by COVID (Guille, 2021). MSMEs should continually seek effective strategies to explore the utilization of social media to reach customers, establish rapport, and shape consumers’ intention to purchase products and services for success, growth, and profitability. Moreover, MSMEs should also pay attention to how they build their brands’ positioning on consumers’ minds using integrated and effective marketing communication strategies. Using social media and store displays would be an effective approach to convey their environment-related messages that would create interest among customers to learn more information about the functional attributes and long-term benefits of their products (Siqi & Yee, 2021). Practically, the findings of this study suggest that social media such as Facebook is a platform usually used for sharing authentic information during crises may not be of much help for the MSMEs and policymakers.

From a managerial perspective, the research outcomes offer practically important results for business owners or managers to consider in choosing social media marketing as a tool in coping with disruption. Also, an opportunity for businesses that deal regularly with customers would benefit from public-private partnerships that enhance their access to cloud-based digital marketing solutions and digital literacy training. The pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of the economy and therefore, necessitates that economies re-double their efforts to address these challenges. Relatedly, any discussion in which digitalization is a key component of building a resilient future. Thus, MSMEs must fully adopt digital solutions by firms and sectors that are likely to see the immediate benefits of digitalization during the crisis.

The findings of this study contribute to existing theories, particularly the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Resource-Based View (RBV). From the TAM perspective, the study highlights that while MSMEs

recognize the usefulness and ease of use of social media platforms, their actual adoption and perceived effectiveness remain inconsistent. Despite increased engagement, the study found no significant difference in business performance before and during the pandemic, indicating that perceived usefulness alone does not guarantee adoption success. This suggests that external factors such as digital literacy, resource constraints, and crisis-induced behavioral shifts play a crucial role in technology acceptance beyond the core TAM constructs. Similarly, the study aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, which emphasizes that firms gain competitive advantage through unique and valuable resources. In the context of MSMEs, the ability to leverage social media effectively depends not only on having access to digital platforms but also on possessing intangible assets such as digital marketing skills, branding capabilities, and consumer engagement strategies. The findings suggest that while social media can serve as a valuable resource, its impact on firm performance depends on how well MSMEs integrate it with their overall business strategies. By bridging these theoretical perspectives, this study underscores the importance of strategic alignment between technology adoption (TAM) and resource management (RBV) for MSMEs navigating crisis-driven digital transformation. Future research could further explore how MSMEs can optimize social media strategies to enhance their long-term resilience and competitive positioning.

Recommendations and Directions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that social media marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing MSMEs' performance in Pampanga, particularly during periods of economic disruption like the COVID-19 pandemic. To maximize the benefits of digital platforms, local MSMEs must develop a structured and data-driven social media strategy that aligns with their business goals. The following key recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhancing Digital Literacy and Training Programs** – MSMEs should invest in digital literacy training for business owners and employees to maximize the use of social media analytics, advertising tools, and e-commerce integrations. Government agencies, business organizations, and private institutions should collaborate in providing localized training programs that focus on content creation, audience engagement, and data-driven marketing decisions.
2. **Implementing an Omnichannel Marketing Strategy** – MSMEs should adopt an online-offline marketing approach by integrating social media efforts with physical store promotions, community engagement, and experiential marketing. This includes offering click-and-collect services, exclusive in-store discounts for online followers, and social media-based customer service to enhance brand loyalty and drive sales.
3. **Leveraging Facebook and Localized Digital Platforms** – Given the high usage of Facebook in the Philippines, MSMEs should optimize their presence by utilizing Facebook Shops, Marketplace, and paid advertising to increase visibility. Additionally, businesses should explore Viber communities, Lazada, Shopee, and TikTok Shop, which are gaining traction among Filipino consumers.
4. **Strengthening Brand Positioning and Authentic Storytelling** – MSMEs should focus on building a strong brand identity by crafting compelling narratives that highlight local culture, sustainability efforts, and unique value propositions. Using social media to share behind-the-scenes content, customer testimonials, and community involvement can foster deeper consumer engagement and trust.
5. **Exploring Public-Private Partnerships for Digital Transformation** – MSMEs should take advantage of programs offered by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Go Negosyo, and private sector initiatives that provide access to free digital marketing tools, financing for tech adoption, and mentorship programs that can help businesses transition to digital platforms more effectively.

As the Philippine economy continues its post-pandemic recovery, a hybrid approach combining physical store operations with a strong social media presence will be crucial for MSMEs to thrive. By implementing targeted digital marketing strategies, improving digital literacy, and leveraging available support programs, Pampanga's MSMEs can enhance their competitiveness, reach a wider market, and ensure long-term resilience in an increasingly digital business environment. The results further reinforce this by highlighting distinct patterns in social media platform usage, posting frequency, and experience duration among different business sizes. Smaller businesses engage in more frequent posting, while mid-sized and larger businesses adopt a more diversified approach,

incorporating platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and FB Groups. Additionally, businesses with higher asset sizes tend to have longer experience in social media marketing. These insights suggest that MSMEs should tailor their social media strategies based on their business size and target audience, while platform developers can refine their features to better support businesses of varying scales. By identifying these behavioral patterns, the study provides more actionable recommendations for optimizing digital marketing efforts and strengthening MSMEs' resilience in the post-pandemic economy.

Limitation of the Research Study

This study has certain limitations that future research can address to enhance its findings. Because cultural elements were not considered as moderating factors in the use of social media for business performance, future studies should incorporate cultural variables to provide a more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, integrating a social media framework that outlines its various roles—such as promotion, customer engagement, and sales—would offer a more structured understanding of its impact on MSMEs. Future research may also explore other key competencies, including social media analytics, service quality, customer relationship management, and their contribution to sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, employing qualitative or mixed methods approaches, such as interviews and observations, could provide deeper insights into social media strategies. Lastly, examining other potential influencing factors, such as information overload and user behavior, would strengthen the study's applicability in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

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