

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE INTERIOR OF CEARÁ

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technologies and increased access to the internet have driven small businesses to adopt digital marketing as an affordable and effective tool to connect with the public and improve their competitiveness, especially in regions with limited resources and local reach, such as the interior of Ceará. In this context, digital marketing offers opportunities for small businesses to promote their products and services, expand their visibility, and increase engagement with customers, especially through social networks such as Instagram and WhatsApp. The main objective of the study is to analyze the digital marketing strategies used by small companies in the interior of Ceará, seeking to understand how these companies can position themselves competitively in the local market through the effective use of social networks. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the most used platforms and marketing practices, and propose improvements to expand customer reach and loyalty. The research is of a bibliographic, exploratory nature and with participant observation, with analysis of academic literature and case study of three companies of different niches, located in the interior of Ceará. From secondary sources such as articles and case studies, best practices and challenges faced in digital marketing for small businesses are analyzed. The results show that companies adapt their digital strategies according to the profile of their services and customers, using mainly visual content, promotions and local partnerships to increase visibility and engagement. The practices have proven effective in fostering loyalty and attracting new customers, despite challenges linked to limited resources and a lack of expertise in digital marketing. The study concludes that digital marketing, especially through social media, is an essential and low-cost strategy for small businesses to expand their reach and competitiveness. It is recommended that future studies be expanded to include other sectors and assess the financial impact of these strategies, as well as guidance by specialized professionals to optimize results.

Keywords: Competitiveness, Digital Marketing, Small Business, Social Networks, Local Region.

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INTRODUCTION

With the exponential growth in the use of digital technologies and the democratization of internet access, small businesses have started to explore digital marketing as an essential tool to connect with the public and increase competitiveness. In the interior of Ceará, where many companies have local reach and limited resources, digital marketing becomes an effective and relatively affordable means to promote products and services, engage customers, and boost sales.

According to Moreira (2021), it is in this scenario that companies from the most diverse fields have benefited from social networks, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, to reach their target audience in a creative and direct way. The present study, focusing on a print shop, a gym and a snack bar located in municipalities in the interior of Ceará, explores the digital marketing strategies that these companies adopt and analyzes the effectiveness of these practices to attract, retain customers and expand visibility.

Thus, the present research has the following research problem: How can small businesses in the interior of Ceará, with limited resources and regional reach, use digital marketing effectively to position themselves competitively in the local market? And as a general objective to analyze the digital marketing strategies adopted by small businesses in the interior of Ceará, focusing on the use of social networks to promote their products and services, engage the public and increase brand visibility.

From this perspective, we have as specific objectives to identify the digital platforms and marketing practices used by the companies studied; evaluate the effectiveness of specific strategies, such as short videos, customer testimonials, and exclusive promotions, to engage customers; and propose improvements or adjustments in digital marketing strategies to increase customer reach and loyalty.

This study is important because digital marketing is a powerful tool for small businesses looking to stand out in an increasingly competitive market. Studying the digital marketing practices of businesses in the interior of Ceará offers insights into how local businesses, with limited resources, can maximize their reach and engagement. In addition, the study provides practical recommendations that can be applied by other entrepreneurs in the region, contributing to the strengthening of the local economy and the modernization of communication and sales practices.



METHODOLOGY

This research is bibliographic and exploratory in nature. It is based on the analysis of academic literature on digital marketing and small businesses, seeking to understand the most effective practices and trends for the local context. The specific strategies adopted by three companies in the interior of Ceará are also analyzed: a printing company, a gym and a snack bar. Through secondary sources, such as articles, books, and case studies, best practices for the use of social networks in digital marketing will be identified, as well as the challenges faced by small businesses when implementing them.

Shah; Oliveira & Alves (2021) analyze bibliographic research as an essential modality in the scientific field, especially for preliminary investigation and theoretical construction. It aims to clarify specific aspects of a topic through systematic investigation. The authors reinforce that it is necessary when there is not enough information to solve a problem or when the data is disorganized. Bibliographic research, widely used in the academic environment, seeks to update and improve knowledge based on works already published. Andrade points out that it is fundamental in all academic stages, from the delimitation of the theme to the presentation of conclusions, and is indispensable even in laboratory or field research.

Shah; Oliveira & Alves (2021) consider bibliographic research as a survey of published theoretical references, such as books and scientific articles, which guides the researcher on what has already been studied. This modality may even be the only basis in some studies, being useful to gather previous knowledge about the problem investigated. They also note that it uses materials already prepared, such as books and articles, allowing the use of data from previous research and emphasize its importance in influencing all stages of scientific work. In this way, it not only repeats information, but makes it possible to examine the topic from new perspectives and reach innovative conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital marketing is defined as a set of online activities to attract new business, build relationships, and strengthen brand identity. Strategies such as SEO, Inbound Marketing, and Content Marketing are fundamental for this digital transformation, which requires an active and strategic presence on digital platforms to strengthen the bond with the target audience. In recent years, the internet has brought a change in consumer behavior, making them more critical and demanding, which requires companies to evolve instead of simply replacing other means of marketing (Leal; Godinho & Castanheira, 2017)



In the interior of Ceará, small businesses from different sectors, such as a printing company, a gym, and a snack bar, use digital marketing strategies to reach and engage their local audience effectively. With limited resources and a focus on the regional market, these companies tailor their approaches to the specific needs of their customers and the types of services they offer, mainly exploiting the Instagram and WhatsApp platforms. Each company develops practices ranging from visual content and testimonials to promotions and local partnerships, seeking to maximize the impact of digital marketing to increase visibility and strengthen relationships with consumers. Below, the comparative analysis between these strategies reveals how each company shapes its use of social networks to create a strong digital presence targeted at local audiences.

Companies A, B and C, despite operating in different branches in the interior of Ceará, adopt digital marketing as a fundamental strategy to boost their business through social networks, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, each with practices adapted to its audience and the nature of the services.

Company A, a printing company, uses digital marketing to promote a variety of personalized services, such as printing, object customization, and bookbinding. Its strategies focus on impactful visual content, with short, interactive videos that demonstrate the production process before, during, and after, generating engagement. Additionally, it uses customer testimonials, exclusive promotions, and coupons, as well as seasonal campaigns to attract audiences. Direct interaction is strengthened through interactive stories, polls, and local partnerships, which help consolidate the brand in the regional context.

Company B, a gym, has a focus on digital marketing centered on motivation and visual monitoring of its clients' results. On Instagram, the creation of content shows training, the environment and the evolution of the students. The short videos serve as a motivational and educational tool, with exercise and nutrition tips. The academy also explores student testimonials, which help attract new members by conveying confidence, and uses interactive stories to foster a closer connection with the public. Its strategies are aimed at offering informative value and stimulating the engagement of followers.

Company C, a snack bar, focuses on the visual dissemination of its products through attractive photos of dishes, combos and promotions on Instagram, while WhatsApp Business is used to receive orders and communicate exclusive promotions directly to customers. The snack bar also uses loyalty strategies, such as rewards programs (for example, offering a free snack after several purchases) and seasonal campaigns on



commemorative dates. To achieve greater local visibility, it invests in partnerships with influencers in the region, expanding brand perception and building public loyalty.

Julio; Rosa & Sigrist (2019) found in their studies that networks such as Facebook and Instagram offer great opportunities to attract customers, increase brand visibility, reach new audiences, and facilitate communication, all at a low cost of advertising small businesses. However, it warned about the risks of poorly planned posts, which can generate negative repercussions. In general, active social media presence is seen as essential for the growth of small businesses with limited resources. In their research, the authors suggest that studies include other economic areas, examine the impact of professionals specialized in social networks, and quantify the effect of digital advertising on monthly profitability.

In the analyses of Victorino et al (2021), small businesses still face challenges when using digital marketing, especially due to the lack of knowledge and resources to analyze the large volume of data generated by online interaction with consumers. The authors reinforce that the internet offers ways for these businesses to monitor and adjust their marketing actions, helping to professionalize management and build customer loyalty, which positively impacts visibility and profitability. Tools such as Web Analytics are useful for measuring the results of digital campaigns, but they require proper and specialized use to become a competitive differential. However, many small entrepreneurs still avoid investing in digital marketing due to financial limitations, lack of skilled labor, and lack of planning, which impacts their digital presence. Thus, the lack of time and interest in learning about new digital tools and strategies remains a major obstacle for these managers.

In summary, each company adapts digital platforms to the characteristics of its services: the printing company bets on educational content and customer testimonials; the gym highlights clients' visual progress and health tips; and the snack bar utilizes eye-catching photos and loyalty programs to attract and retain customers. This adaptation to the needs and preferences of the audience in each sector makes digital marketing an effective and low-cost means to expand local reach and engagement.

CONCLUSION

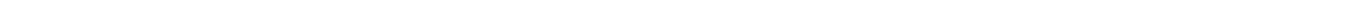
This study highlighted the importance of digital marketing as an essential and effective tool for small businesses in the interior of Ceará, making it possible to expand visibility, reach, and engagement with the local public. The analyses carried out with a printing company, a gym, and a snack bar showed that, despite the challenges faced, such



as the lack of specialized knowledge and limited resources, these companies have been strategically exploring platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. The adaptation of digital practices to the characteristics of each sector has been a differential, allowing companies to strengthen their positioning and relationship with the public.

In this way, we identified that the printer, for example, obtains engagement with impactful visual content and customer testimonials; the academy promotes student progress and provides health tips to encourage interaction; And the snack bar bets on quality photos of the products and loyalty programs to attract and retain customers. The survey reaffirms that, for small businesses, digital marketing becomes not only a means of dissemination, but a competitive necessity in an increasingly demanding and digitized market.

Finally, the results suggest that, with the expansion of knowledge about digital marketing and the use of analytical tools, these companies can further professionalize their actions and increase local competitiveness. From this perspective, future studies can broaden the scope, exploring other economic sectors and the effectiveness of professional mentoring strategies, to measure the direct financial impact of these actions on profitability. Thus, digital marketing continues to consolidate itself as an indispensable strategy for the strengthening and modernization of small regional businesses.





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