

## Exploring the Motivations and Challenges Faced By Small-Scale Food Business Owners in Adopting Digital Marketing Strategies for Promoting Healthy Food Choices

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the motivations and problems that small-scale food business owners experience when implementing digital marketing methods to promote healthy eating choices. With the growing popularity of digital platforms, small-scale food businesses are realizing the value of embracing digital marketing to reach a larger audience and promote their products and services. However, for small-scale food business owners, the use of digital marketing methods, particularly those aimed at promoting healthy food choices, brings distinct motives and problems.

In-depth interviews will be conducted with a selection of small-scale food business owners who have included internet marketing into their promotional activities for this project. The interviews will delve into the factors that lead these business owners to implement digital marketing methods, such as improving brand visibility and responding to changing consumer expectations for healthier food options. Furthermore, the study will look at the issues that small-scale food business owners face when applying digital marketing techniques, such as limited finances, a lack of digital marketing skills, and difficulties presenting the health benefits of their goods effectively. The study's findings will provide useful insights into the incentives and problems that small-scale food business owners encounter when implementing digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices. The study will add to the existing literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drive decision-making and the hurdles that small-scale food company owners confront. The highlighted motives and challenges can be used to build customized strategies, training programmers, and support systems to help small-scale food enterprises effectively integrate digital marketing into their operations in order to encourage healthy food choices.

**Keywords:** small-scale food businesses, digital marketing strategies, healthy food choices, motivations, challenges.

### 1. Introduction:

Various industries, including food and nutrition, have been transformed by the digital landscape in recent years. Local restaurants, cafes, and food vendors, for example, are rapidly recognizing the potential of digital marketing methods to promote their products and attract a larger client base. Adoption of digital marketing tactics to promote healthy food choices is one particular topic of interest. Consumers are becoming more cognizant of their food habits and seeking better choices as societal interest in health and wellbeing develops. Small-scale food business owners are consequently faced with the task of efficiently promoting and communicating the health benefits of their offerings through digital marketing tactics.

For small-scale food business operators, the integration of food and nutrition with digital marketing brings particular motives and problems. Expanding their customer base, improving brand visibility, responding to changing consumer wants, and enhancing their competitive edge are all possible motivations. Small-scale food enterprises can reach a larger audience, communicate with potential customers, and differentiate themselves from competition by embracing digital platforms. Furthermore, internet marketing tactics enable them to explain and emphasize the nutritional value, sustainable sourcing, and organic components of their food goods. Along with these motives, however, small-scale food business operators confront a number of hurdles when implementing digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices. Due to limited financial means, they may be unable to invest in digital marketing efforts or hire specialized personnel. Furthermore, a lack of digital marketing experience and familiarity with the complexities of online platforms may limit their capacity to use digital marketing tools efficiently. Another problem is communicating the health advantages of their goods in a compelling and appealing manner, which necessitates knowledge of nutritional science, consumer psychology, and successful communications tactics.

There is still a scarcity of literature on the interaction of food and nutrition with digital marketing and small-scale company. Previous study has primarily concentrated on large-scale food corporations and their digital marketing techniques, creating a gap in understanding the motivations and problems that small-scale food business owners confront when using similar strategies. This study attempts to close this gap by investigating the motivations and problems that small-scale food business owners have when implementing digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices.

Understanding the rationale for the adoption of digital marketing methods in small-scale food businesses is critical for recognizing the drivers that propel these firms into the digital sphere. Understanding these reasons allows for the development of tailored interventions, support mechanisms, and legislative efforts that facilitate and encourage the implementation of digital marketing tactics in the context of healthy food choices. Furthermore, identifying the specific issues that small-scale food company owners encounter is critical for designing relevant training programmes, resource allocation strategies, and knowledge sharing platforms to address these impediments.

Furthermore, the findings have consequences for consumer behavior and public health. Digital marketing tactics that effectively promote healthy food choices can impact customer decision-making, foster healthier dietary habits, and contribute to consumers' overall well-being. Understanding how small-scale food business owners negotiate the complexity of digital marketing in promoting healthy food choices can aid in the identification of effective techniques to promote consumer engagement, raise nutrition awareness, and, eventually, contribute to improved public health outcomes.

## **2. Objectives**

1. To identify the major motivators that drive small-scale food business owners to implement digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices.
2. To investigate the challenges that small-scale food business owners experience in developing and integrating digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices.
3. To investigate the function of digital marketing in increasing the visibility and reach of small-scale food enterprises that promote healthy eating habits.
4. To provide recommendations and guidelines for small-scale food business owners in adopting and implementing digital marketing methods for encouraging healthy food choices.

## **3. Review of literature**

Marketing is a business principle that promotes products and services through market research, sales trends, and other ways (DeMooij, 2014). Food marketing has gained traction in recent years as a result of increased globalization, the food industry revolution, media impact, and the dissolution of joint family systems (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; WHO, 2016). Advertising aids in the promotion of food and drinks among potential consumers and is a component of the complete food marketing process by placing food/beverage product within the reach of the consumer while simultaneously creating a perceived need (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; Dixon et al., 2007).

Food and beverage marketing to children is a growing concern in today's culture (Freeman et al., 2015; WHO, 2016). Children and adolescents are a much desired target audience for digital marketing of energy-dense and nutrient-poor foods (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2015; WHO, 2016). Food digital marketing to youth, on the other hand, is not widely monitored or reviewed for its impact on eating habits or weight status, and has avoided public health scrutiny (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2015).

These multinational food and beverage corporations make an important impact to juvenile diets since they often influence food marketing and advertising (Alexander et al., 2011). To increase sales, these food firms targeted youth, particularly children (Alexander et al., 2011; Bhatnagar et al., 2014). As a result, without full participation of the food and beverage industry in addressing food reformulation, consumer information, responsible food marketing, healthy lifestyle promotion, and public-private partnerships, population health will remain limited (Alexander et al., 2011; Bhatnagar et al., 2014).

Food and beverage marketing is a fast-moving profession that must adapt to changing market opportunities, technology, and regulatory environments (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; TDB report, 2015). The rapid global spread of "ICTs" infrastructure and devices is hastening the development of the Internet of Things, which is expected to have a significant impact on nearly every social and economic sector, including education, healthcare, agriculture and food, transportation, and manufacturing (Alvy and Calvert, 2008; Henry and Story, 2009; TDB report, 2015).

The Internet, as one of the emerging venues for food marketing to children and adolescents, has expanded the reach of food digital advertising to this specific young population, which has significant purchasing power and influence (Bhatnagar et al., 2014; Montgomery and Chester, 2009; Story and French, 2004). Given the Internet's ability to apply novel marketing strategies, newer types of food digital marketing were projected to arise, such as product placements, integrated marketing sites, and "advergames" (Alvy and Calvert, 2008; Henry and Story, 2009).

#### **4. Research methodology:**

The qualitative study design will be used to get in-depth insights into the motivations and obstacles that small-scale food industry entrepreneurs encounter. To collect data from participants, a combination of interviews and focus groups will be conducted.

Sampling will be used to choose small-scale food business owners that have implemented digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices. The sample size will be determined by data saturation and participant diversity. Geographic location, business kind, and amount of digital marketing implementation will all be taken into account.

Semi-structured interviews with small-scale food business owners will be undertaken to investigate their motivations and experiences with digital marketing methods. Focus groups will be held to facilitate group conversations and develop collective insights about the barriers to digital marketing adoption. Audio recordings, field notes, and transcripts will be used to collect data.

To find reoccurring themes and patterns in the data, thematic analysis will be used. Transcripts and field notes will be classified and categorized in order to discover the primary reasons and obstacles that small-scale food industry operators encounter. Coding will be done with qualitative data analysis tools to help organize and analyze the data.

#### **5. Findings:**

**5.1 major motivators that drive small-scale food business owners to implement digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices:** The following are some of the key factors that drive small-scale food business owners to implement digital marketing methods for encouraging healthy food choices:

1. **Increased Reach and Visibility:** Small-scale food industry entrepreneurs recognize the power of digital marketing to reach markets beyond their own. They may advertise their healthy food options to a bigger audience, including potential clients in other geographic places, by leveraging digital channels such as social media, websites, and online directories.
2. **Targeting Health-Conscious Consumers:** Consumers' increased health consciousness has created a desire for healthier eating options. Owners of small-scale food businesses use digital marketing methods to target and attract health-conscious customers who actively seek out nutritious and wholesome food options. They may effectively reach and engage their target audience by emphasizing the health benefits of their products via digital media.
3. **Increasing Brand Awareness and Reputation:** Digital marketing allows small-scale food enterprises to create and improve their brand identification. They may create credibility and separate themselves from competition by developing a strong web presence, demonstrating their dedication to encouraging healthy food choices, and sharing their brand story. This, in turn, aids in the development of brand awareness and the establishment of a positive reputation in the eyes of consumers.
4. **Increasing Sales and Revenue:** Small-scale food businesses can benefit from digital marketing methods that improve sales and revenue. They can boost traffic to their platforms, attract new customers, and simplify online ordering or delivery services by employing targeted advertising, online promotions, and e-commerce capabilities. This can lead to increased sales, client loyalty, and overall business success.
5. **Maintaining Awareness of Market Trends and Competitors:** Owners of small-scale food businesses understand the need of remaining competitive in the digital age. Adopting digital marketing tactics allows them to keep up with industry trends and competitors who are already promoting healthy eating options through digital media. They may avoid being left behind and remain relevant in an increasingly digital world by embracing digital platforms and methods.

**5.2 the challenges that small-scale food business owners experience in developing and integrating digital marketing methods to promote healthy food choices:** Owners of small-scale food businesses have a number of problems when it comes to establishing and integrating digital marketing techniques to promote healthy food choices. Among these difficulties are:

1. **Limitations of resources:** Small-scale firms frequently operate with minimal financial and human resources. Investing in digital marketing may necessitate the expenditure of additional dollars for website building, social media advertising, content creation, and the hire of digital marketing experts. Due to limited resources, they may be unable to dedicate a enough budget and employees to execute and manage efficient digital marketing efforts.
2. **Lack of Digital Marketing Expertise:** Many small-scale food business owners may lack the expertise and abilities required to successfully traverse the complicated environment of digital marketing. They might not be familiar with tactics like search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, social media advertising, or email marketing. The learning curve associated with digital marketing tools and approaches can be steep, making acceptance and execution difficult.
3. **Time Restriction:** Small-scale food business operators frequently juggle several obligations, such as food preparation, customer service, inventory management, and administrative duties. Making time to learn, plan, and execute digital marketing activities can be difficult. Digital marketing requires regular work and monitoring, which can put a strain on their already hectic schedules.
4. **Reaching the Right Audience:** Reaching the right audience is critical for digital marketing success. Small-scale food business owners may confront difficulties identifying and targeting a specific niche of health-conscious consumers interested in their healthy food options. Without access to expert market analysis tools, developing accurate customer personas and doing thorough market research can be difficult.
5. **Technological Barriers:** Small-scale food enterprises may face difficulties due to limited access to technology and the internet, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas. Inadequate infrastructure, sluggish internet speeds, or a lack of computer literacy may limit their capacity to use digital marketing platforms and products successfully.
6. **Adapting to Changing Algorithms and Trends:** As digital marketing platforms and algorithms evolve, firms must modify their strategy accordingly. Small-scale food business owners may find it difficult to keep up with these developments, especially if they lack the finances or experience to keep up with the current trends and best practices in digital marketing.
7. **Measuring Return on Investment (ROI):** For small-scale food businesses, determining the success and return on investment of digital marketing strategies can be difficult. Limited access to analytics tools, as well as challenges connecting sales or customer acquisition to specific digital marketing activities, can make gauging performance and making data-driven decisions challenging.
8. **Regulatory and Compliance Issues:** Small-scale food enterprises may face difficulties complying with privacy legislation, food labeling standards, and other industry-specific restrictions. Understanding and complying with these standards in the context of digital marketing efforts can be difficult and time-consuming.

To address these issues, small-scale food business owners must invest in digital marketing education and training, commit adequate resources, seek advice from professionals or consultants, and build strategies adapted to their individual goals and limits. By overcoming these obstacles, digital marketing may be used to promote healthy food choices and drive business success.

**5.3 The function of digital marketing in increasing the visibility and reach of small-scale food enterprises that promote healthy eating habits:** Digital marketing is critical for increasing the exposure and reach of small-scale food enterprises that promote healthy eating habits. Here are some significant ways in which digital marketing helps them expand and gain exposure:

1. **Increased Online Presence:** Through numerous channels such as websites, social media platforms, and online directories, digital marketing enables small-scale food enterprises to build a strong online presence. They may reach a larger audience by providing informative and entertaining content that highlights their healthy food choices, values, and unique selling propositions.
2. **Targeted Marketing:** Small-scale food enterprises can target specific populations interested in healthy food choices via digital marketing. They can adjust their marketing messages and adverts to reach individuals who are more likely to be interested in their offerings by using audience segmentation and targeting techniques. Precision targeting maximizes the impact of marketing efforts while minimizing waste.
3. **Expanded Geographical Reach:** Through internet marketing, small-scale food enterprises can reach potential clients beyond their immediate local area. They can attract customers from various regions

who are actively searching for healthy food options or have specific dietary preferences through internet advertising, search engine optimization (SEO), and social media marketing.

4. **Engaging Content Marketing:** Small-scale food businesses can use digital marketing to generate and share engaging and informative content that resonates with their target audience. To demonstrate their expertise and cultivate a loyal following, they can publish recipes, nutritional suggestions, health-related articles, and behind-the-scenes experiences. They can cultivate relationships with clients and position themselves as trustworthy providers for healthy food options by delivering relevant content.
5. **Online Ordering and Delivery:** Because digital marketing makes it easier to integrate e-commerce capabilities, small-scale food enterprises can now offer online ordering and delivery services. Customers, particularly those looking for healthy food options, can benefit from expediting the ordering process via their website or mobile apps. This generates fresh money and broadens their consumer base.
6. **User generated material and Reviews:** Because digital marketing encourages user generated material and customer reviews, small-scale food enterprises' reputation and visibility might suffer dramatically. Positive reviews and social media mentions generate social evidence and help potential clients trust you. Using user generated content to expand the reach of their marketing activities and boost brand reputation.
7. **Data-driven Decision Making:** Digital marketing delivers valuable data and analytics to small-scale food businesses, which can be used to inform marketing strategies and decision-making processes. They can learn about customer preferences, engagement levels, and campaign performance by using website analytics, social media insights, and email marketing metrics. This information enables them to make data-driven marketing decisions and optimize their efforts for greater success.

**5.4 recommendations and guidelines for small-scale food business owners in adopting and implementing digital marketing methods for encouraging healthy food choices:** Small-scale food business operators can follow the following advice and guidelines to effectively adopt and use digital marketing tactics for promoting healthy food choices:

1. **Define Clear Objectives:** Begin by clearly identifying your digital marketing objectives. Determine your goals, such as raising brand exposure, recruiting new customers, or growing online sales. Having specific goals can assist design your digital marketing approach and guarantee that your efforts are targeted.
2. **Determine and comprehend your target audience:** Learn everything you can about your target audience and their preferences. Determine the demographics, interests, and online behaviors of health-conscious consumers who may be interested in your healthy food options. This will allow you to personalize your digital marketing messages and methods to your target audience's preferences.
3. **Create a Comprehensive Digital Marketing Plan:** Create a complete digital marketing plan outlining your campaigns' methods, channels, and dates. Include website building, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, and online advertising methods. Align your digital marketing efforts with your overall business goals.
4. **Invest in a User-Friendly Website:** The cornerstone of your internet presence is your website. Make sure it's easy to use, visually appealing, and mobile-responsive. Give specifics about your healthy food choices, nutritional benefits, and ordering alternatives. Improve your website's visibility and organic traffic by optimizing it for search engines.
5. **Make Use of Social Media channels:** Create a presence on key social media channels where your target audience is engaged. Share aesthetically engaging content, promote healthy recipes, provide nutrition suggestions, and reply to comments and messages to engage your audience. Use social media advertising to reach a larger audience and generate traffic to your website.
6. **Create Engaging material:** Create high-quality, educational material that highlights your healthy eating choices and teaches your audience. Blog entries, cooking videos, info graphics, and downloadable manuals are all examples of this. Share valuable content on a regular basis to establish oneself as a credible source of knowledge.
7. **Encourage User-generated material:** Ask your customers to create material about your healthy eating options. Encourage them to use branded hash tags to publish reviews, testimonials, and images on social media sites. User-generated content acts as social proof and can increase the exposure and reputation of your brand.

8. **Use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Techniques:** Improve your organic presence by optimizing your website and content for search engines. Conduct keyword research to uncover relevant keywords that you can naturally incorporate into your website copy, blog articles, and metadata. If you have a physical business, concentrate on local SEO.
9. **Track and Analyze Performance:** Using analytics tools, monitor and analyze the performance of your digital marketing efforts. Monitor your website's traffic, engagement metrics, conversion rates, and ROI. Create data-driven judgments using these insights to optimize your tactics, discover areas for improvement, and create data-driven decisions.
10. **Keep Up with business Trends:** Stay up to date on the newest digital marketing trends, tools, and platforms in the food business. Participate in industry conferences, webinars, and follow recognized digital marketing blogs and magazines. Staying competitive in the digital landscape requires continuous learning and adaptation to new trends.
11. **Collaborate with Influencers and Partners:** Collaborate with health and wellness influencers, bloggers, and related businesses. Collaboration with influencers can help you broaden your reach and tap into their engaged audience. Collaborate with complementary firms to conduct cross-promotional and cooperative marketing campaigns.

#### **Conclusion:**

This study investigated the motives and problems that small-scale food business owners encounter when implementing digital marketing methods to promote healthy eating choices. The findings shed light on the major factors driving their digital marketing usage, such as the need to reach a larger audience, boost brand recognition, and fulfill the growing demand for healthier food options. The survey also revealed the obstacles that small-scale food business owners have when implementing and integrating digital marketing strategies, such as limited resources, a lack of digital marketing knowledge, and the need to balance several priorities.

The importance of digital marketing in increasing the visibility and reach of small-scale food enterprises promoting healthy eating habits was emphasized. Through content marketing and user-generated content, these businesses may develop a strong online presence, target specific audiences interested in healthy food options, expand their geographical reach, and engage with customers. Furthermore, digital marketing delivers significant data and analytics for data-driven decision making and marketing effort optimization.

Several tips and guidelines were presented based on the findings for small-scale food industry owners to properly embrace and use digital marketing tactics. These recommendations included developing a comprehensive digital marketing plan, investing in a user-friendly website, leveraging social media platforms, creating compelling content, implementing SEO strategies, embracing email marketing, tracking and analyzing performance, staying up to date with industry trends, and collaborating with influencers and partners.

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