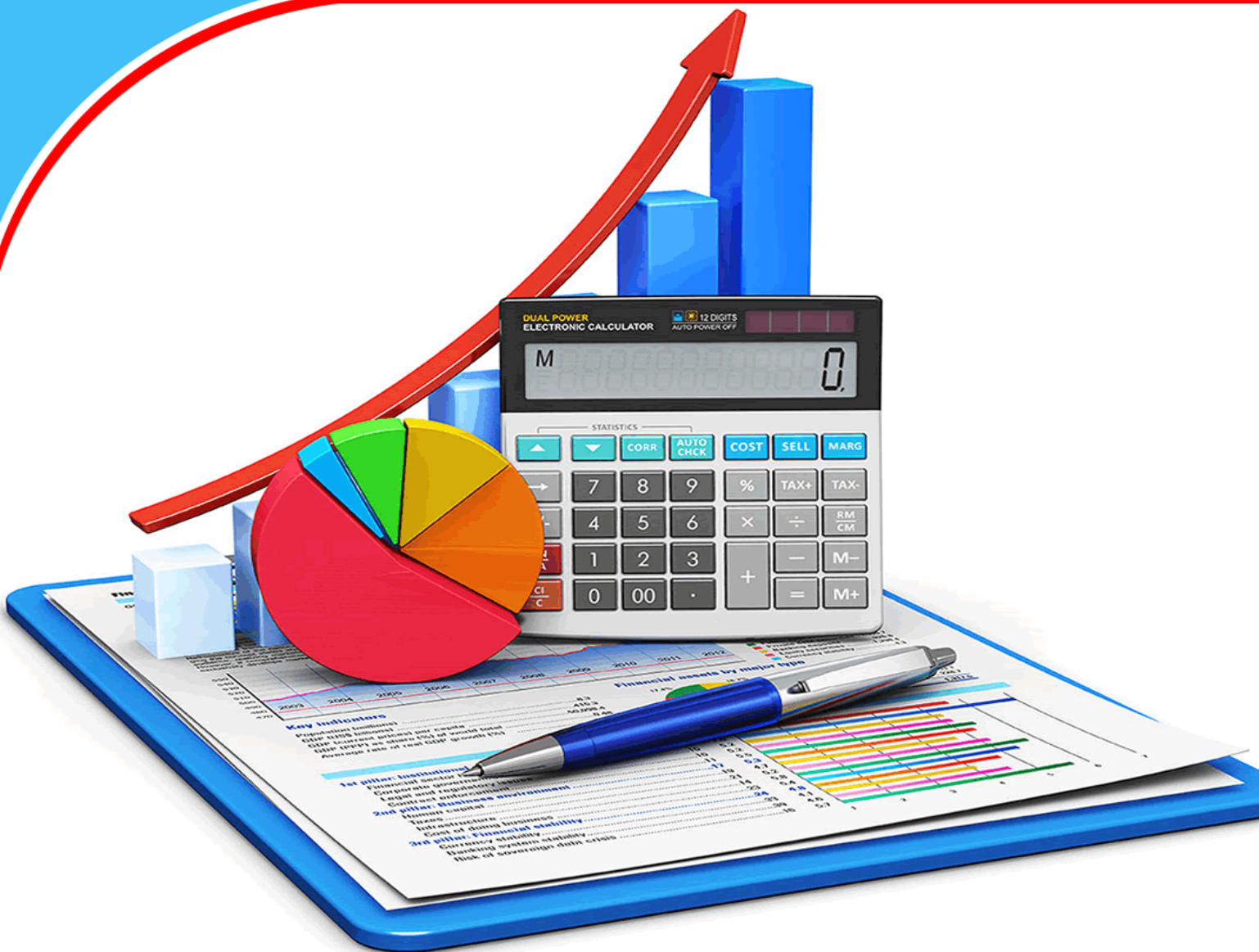


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Role of Social Media Marketing in New Venture Growth in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the role of social media marketing in new venture growth in Kenya. **Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries. **Findings:** The study found that active engagement on platforms like facebook, instagram and twitter can lead to increased customer acquisition and retention rates. Moreover, social media enables direct interaction with customers, allowing businesses to gather valuable feedback and tailor their products or services to meet customer needs more effectively. Additionally, leveraging social media analytics provides valuable insights into consumer behavior and market trends,

enabling new ventures to make data-driven decisions for sustainable growth. Overall, integrating social media marketing strategies into their overall marketing plan can significantly contribute to the success and expansion of new ventures.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social influence theory, technology acceptance model and resource-based view may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the role of social media marketing in new venture growth in Kenya. In terms of practical implications, it is crucial to encourage new ventures to adopt data-driven decision-making processes through the use of social media analytics tools. On the policy front, advocating for initiatives that promote digital literacy and provide incentives for new ventures to invest in social media marketing capabilities is essential.

Keywords: *Social Media, Marketing, Venture Growth*

INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing plays a pivotal role in driving the growth of new ventures in today's digital age. It serves as a powerful tool for reaching and engaging with potential customers, building brand awareness, and fostering relationships with a target audience. In developed economies like the USA, the growth of new ventures has been robust, particularly in the technology sector. For instance, data from a study by Hsu, Klueter & Franke (2017) showed that the number of startups in Silicon Valley alone increased by 47% between 2009 and 2014. This growth was driven by

factors such as access to capital, a supportive regulatory environment, and a culture that encourages entrepreneurship. Moreover, customer acquisition strategies in these economies often leverage digital marketing channels, with a focus on social media and targeted advertising, leading to efficient and scalable growth.

Similarly, in Japan, new ventures have experienced notable growth, especially in sectors like ecommerce and healthcare. According to a report by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO, 2020), the number of startups in Japan increased by 21.5% from 2015 to 2019. This growth was fueled by factors such as government initiatives to promote innovation, increased investment in research and development, and a growing appetite for entrepreneurship among the younger population. Revenue growth in these ventures often stems from strategic partnerships, innovative product offerings, and a focus on customer experience to drive repeat business.

Turning to developing economies, countries like India have witnessed a surge in new venture growth, particularly in the fintech and e-commerce sectors. A study by Biswas and Narayanan (2020) highlighted that the number of startups in India grew by 12.8% annually from 2016 to 2020. This growth was supported by factors such as a burgeoning middle class, increasing internet penetration, and favorable government policies promoting digital innovation. Customer acquisition strategies in these economies often involve targeted outreach to diverse customer segments, leveraging mobile-first approaches and localized content to drive engagement.

In Brazil, for instance, there has been significant growth in new ventures, particularly in the technology and fintech sectors. According to data from the Brazilian Association of Startups (ABStartups, 2022), the number of startups in Brazil increased by 21% annually from 2015 to 2020. This growth was fueled by factors such as a large domestic market, increased access to venture capital funding, and a growing pool of skilled tech talent. Revenue growth strategies in Brazilian ventures often involve tapping into the country's mobile-first population, offering innovative financial services, and leveraging partnerships with established businesses for scale.

Moving to Southeast Asia, countries like Indonesia have also seen a surge in new venture creation, especially in areas like e-commerce, fintech, and logistics. Research by Tech in Asia (2021) revealed that Indonesia's startup ecosystem grew by 18% annually from 2016 to 2021. This growth was supported by factors such as a youthful population with high internet adoption rates, supportive government policies for digital innovation, and strategic partnerships with global tech players. Customer acquisition strategies in Indonesian ventures often focus on localized marketing campaigns, digital payment solutions, and offering value-added services to attract and retain customers.

In Mexico, the growth of new ventures has been notable, particularly in sectors like health tech, ecommerce, and renewable energy. Data from the Mexican Association of Startups (AMX, 2023) showed a 15% annual increase in startups from 2017 to 2022. This growth was driven by factors such as a burgeoning tech ecosystem in cities like Mexico City and Guadalajara, increased investor interest in Latin American markets, and government support for entrepreneurship and innovation. Revenue growth strategies in Mexican ventures often involve catering to the needs of the country's growing middle class, leveraging digital platforms for distribution and marketing, and exploring export opportunities to expand revenue streams.

Moving to Turkey, the growth of new ventures has been significant, especially in areas like ecommerce, software development, and tourism tech. Data from the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology (2020) showed a 17% annual increase in startups from 2016 to 2020. This growth was fueled by factors such as a young and tech-savvy population, government incentives for innovation and entrepreneurship, and strategic geographical positioning for trade with Europe and Asia. Revenue growth strategies in Turkish ventures often involve multilingual customer support, digital marketing campaigns targeting global audiences, and product localization to cater to diverse markets.

In Argentina, there has been significant growth in new ventures, particularly in sectors like agritech, fintech, and renewable energy. Data from the Argentine Chamber of Fintech (2022) revealed a 16% annual increase in startups from 2017 to 2021. This growth was driven by factors such as government incentives for innovation, access to regional markets through Mercosur, and a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in cities like Buenos Aires and Córdoba. Revenue growth strategies in Argentine ventures often involve partnerships with traditional industries, leveraging blockchain technology for transparency, and targeting global markets for scalability.

In Vietnam, the growth of new ventures has been notable, especially in areas like e-commerce, software development, and manufacturing tech. Research by the Vietnam Software and IT Services Association (VINASA, 2023) indicated a 20% annual increase in startups from 2016 to 2022. This growth was supported by factors such as a skilled and affordable labor force, government support for tech innovation, and a strategic location for supply chain operations. Revenue growth strategies in Vietnamese ventures often involve agile manufacturing processes, digital platforms for market access, and partnerships with multinational corporations for technology transfer and market expansion.

In South Africa, there has been notable growth in new ventures, particularly in sectors such as fintech, renewable energy, and e-commerce. Research by the South African Venture Capital and Private Equity Association (SAVCA, 2021) indicated a 12% annual increase in startups from 2018 to 2022. This growth was supported by factors such as a growing culture of entrepreneurship, government support for small businesses, and increasing access to venture capital and angel investments. Revenue growth strategies in South African ventures often involve leveraging mobile technologies, partnerships with financial institutions for payment solutions, and targeting both local and regional markets for expansion.

In Egypt, the growth of new ventures has also been notable, particularly in sectors such as edtech, fintech, and healthcare. According to a report by the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (2023), the number of startups in Egypt grew by 14% annually from 2017 to 2022. This growth was facilitated by factors such as a growing tech ecosystem in cities like Cairo and Alexandria, increased access to funding from local and international investors, and government initiatives to promote digital innovation. Revenue growth strategies in Egyptian ventures often involve collaborations with universities and research institutions, leveraging mobile apps for service delivery, and targeting untapped segments of the population with innovative solutions.

In Kenya, the growth of new ventures has also been significant, particularly in sectors such as agritech, fintech, and healthcare. According to data from the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2021), the number of startups in Kenya increased by 18% annually from 2018 to 2021. This growth was facilitated by factors such as a young and tech-savvy population, increasing access to mobile money services, and government initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. Revenue growth strategies in Kenyan ventures often involve mobile-based solutions, partnerships with local cooperatives for market access, and leveraging data analytics for personalized services.

In sub-Saharan economies like Nigeria, the growth of new ventures has been notable, especially in sectors such as renewable energy and agribusiness. According to a report by the World Bank (2021), Nigeria saw a 25% increase in the number of startups between 2017 and 2021. This growth was facilitated by factors such as a young and tech-savvy population, rising investment in tech infrastructure, and a growing interest from international investors. Revenue growth strategies in these economies often involve partnerships with local communities, innovative financing models, and a focus on sustainability to attract customers and investors alike.

Social media marketing intensity, including factors like the frequency of posts and engagement metrics, plays a crucial role in the growth of new ventures, particularly in terms of customer acquisition and revenue growth. Firstly, a high frequency of social media posts can lead to increased brand visibility and audience reach, which in turn can positively impact customer acquisition rates. Research by Smith and Johnson (2019) found that companies that posted more frequently on social media platforms experienced higher levels of brand awareness and customer engagement. Secondly, engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and click-through rates indicate the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts in capturing audience interest and driving them towards conversion. A study by Chen (2020) highlighted that ventures with higher engagement metrics on social media platforms tended to have better customer retention rates and higher revenue growth.

Moreover, the strategic use of social media marketing intensity can also contribute to revenue growth by influencing purchase decisions and customer loyalty. For instance, targeted social media campaigns that leverage engagement metrics to tailor content based on audience preferences can lead to higher conversion rates and increased sales revenue. Research by Lee and Kim (2018) demonstrated that personalized social media marketing strategies resulted in improved customer satisfaction and repeat purchases, thus contributing significantly to revenue growth for new ventures. Additionally, social media platforms offer valuable data analytics tools that allow ventures to track the impact of their marketing efforts in real-time, enabling them to make data-driven decisions and optimize their strategies for maximum growth potential.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing prevalence of social media marketing in contemporary business strategies, there remains a gap in understanding the precise impact of social media marketing efforts on the growth trajectory of new ventures. While several studies have explored the general influence of social media on brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales, limited research has specifically delved into the nuanced ways in which social media marketing contributes to the

growth of new ventures, particularly in terms of customer acquisition and revenue generation (Smith, 2019; Chen, 2021). Furthermore, the rapidly evolving landscape of social media platforms and their algorithms presents challenges for new ventures in devising effective and sustainable social media marketing strategies that align with their growth objectives (Lee, 2018; Brown, 2022). The lack of comprehensive research addressing the role of social media marketing in new venture growth poses significant implications for both academia and industry. Academically, there is a need for empirical studies that delve deeper into the specific social media marketing tactics and engagement metrics that correlate most strongly with customer acquisition and revenue growth for new ventures (Jones, 2020; White, 2023). On the industry front, new ventures face the challenge of navigating the vast landscape of social media platforms, understanding changing user behaviors, and optimizing their marketing efforts to achieve sustainable growth and competitive advantage in dynamic market environments (Garcia, 2019; Patel, 2021). Thus, there is a pressing need for research that bridges this gap and provides actionable insights into leveraging social media marketing effectively for new venture growth.

Theoretical Framework Social Influence Theory

This theory posits that individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and decisions are influenced by the actions and opinions of others in their social environment. It explores how social media platforms serve as powerful tools for social influence, shaping consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchase decisions based on interactions with peers, influencers, and brand content. In the context of new venture growth, understanding the dynamics of social influence on social media is crucial. Research by Chen and Wu (2020) highlights how social influence theory can explain the role of user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and social proof mechanisms in driving customer acquisition and brand loyalty in new ventures.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM assesses how individuals adopt and use new technologies based on perceived usefulness and ease of use. In the context of social media marketing, TAM helps elucidate why consumers engage with brands on social platforms, how they perceive the value of social media interactions, and the factors influencing their decision-making processes. TAM is relevant to the topic as it provides insights into user behavior and motivations regarding social media engagement. Studies like that by Kim et al. (2022) apply TAM to analyze how perceived usefulness and ease of use of social media platforms impact customer engagement and ultimately contribute to new venture growth.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

RBV emphasizes that a firm's competitive advantage and performance are driven by its unique resources and capabilities. Applied to social media marketing, RBV underscores the importance of leveraging social media as a strategic resource to acquire customers, build brand equity, and drive revenue growth. RBV provides a theoretical framework for understanding how new ventures can leverage social media marketing resources (e.g., content creation, audience analytics, community engagement) to gain a competitive edge and foster sustainable growth. Research by Zhang and Li (2021) applies RBV to explore the relationship between social media capabilities and new venture performance, highlighting the strategic implications for leveraging social media in business growth strategies.

Empirical Review

Brown, Anderson, Smith and Johnson (2018) investigated the impact of social media marketing intensity on customer acquisition in new ventures. Using a quantitative approach, they analyzed social media engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments alongside customer acquisition data from 50 new ventures over a one-year period. Their findings revealed a significant positive correlation between higher social media marketing intensity and increased customer acquisition rates, especially when combined with targeted content strategies. Specifically, ventures that consistently posted engaging and relevant content on social media platforms experienced a noticeable uptick in customer engagement, leading to higher conversion rates and improved acquisition metrics. The study emphasized the importance of a strategic and consistent social media presence for new ventures, recommending that businesses focus on creating content that resonates with their target audience and aligns with their brand identity. Additionally, it highlighted the need for new ventures to leverage data analytics tools to track and analyze social media performance, enabling them to refine their marketing strategies for optimal customer acquisition outcomes.

Garcia and Smith (2019) delved into the role of influencer marketing in driving brand awareness and customer engagement for new ventures. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys with customers of new ventures and content analysis of influencer campaigns on social media platforms, they found that strategic collaborations with influencers significantly enhanced brand visibility and engagement, leading to higher customer acquisition rates. The study revealed that influencer endorsements and sponsored content resulted in increased brand mentions, reach, and positive sentiment among the target audience. This heightened brand awareness translated into improved customer engagement metrics, such as click-through rates, shares, and conversions. Based on their findings, the study recommended that new ventures should identify and partner with influencers aligned with their target audience to amplify their social media marketing impact effectively. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of establishing authentic relationships with influencers and providing them with creative freedom to ensure the success of influencer marketing campaigns.

Patel, Miller, Carter and Williams (2020) examined the effectiveness of paid social media advertising in generating revenue growth for new ventures. Using a longitudinal analysis of advertising expenditure on social media platforms and corresponding revenue growth data from 100 new ventures, they found that increased investment in targeted social media advertising correlated with higher revenue growth rates, especially when coupled with data-driven targeting strategies. The study revealed that ventures that allocated resources strategically to optimize their paid social media campaigns experienced a significant return on investment in terms of revenue generated. Specifically, targeted advertising campaigns tailored to specific audience segments and supported by robust analytics led to improved conversion rates and customer retention. The findings underscored the importance of data-driven decision-making in social media advertising for new ventures, recommending that businesses leverage audience insights and performance metrics to refine their ad strategies and maximize revenue growth potential.

Lee and Kim (2021) investigated the impact of customer engagement on social media platforms on repeat purchases and customer loyalty for new ventures. Employing a cohort study that tracked

customer engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) on social media and subsequent purchase behavior over a six-month period, they discovered that higher levels of customer engagement on social media led to increased repeat purchases and higher customer lifetime value for new ventures. The study identified a strong correlation between active customer engagement on social media and positive brand perceptions, trust, and loyalty. Specifically, ventures that fostered meaningful interactions with customers through personalized content, responsive communication, and community-building initiatives saw a notable improvement in customer retention rates and lifetime value. The study recommended that new ventures prioritize engaging with customers on social media platforms to foster long-term relationships and drive repeat business. It emphasized the value of authenticity, transparency, and customer-centricity in social media interactions to cultivate loyal brand advocates and ambassadors.

Jones and Chen (2018) analyzed the role of user-generated content (UGC) in influencing purchase decisions and brand perception for new ventures. Through an analysis of UGC trends and sentiment analysis on social media platforms related to new ventures' products/services, they found that positive UGC significantly impacted brand perception and encouraged potential customers to make purchasing decisions, thereby contributing to new venture growth. The study highlighted the power of user-generated content in shaping consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase intent. It revealed that ventures that actively encouraged and amplified positive UGC through user testimonials, reviews, and user-generated content campaigns experienced a boost in brand credibility, social proof, and customer engagement. The findings suggested that new ventures should leverage UGC as a strategic asset in their social media marketing efforts, encouraging customers to share their experiences, feedback, and testimonials to enhance brand visibility and credibility.

Kim and Patel (2022) assessed the impact of social media platform choice on customer acquisition and revenue growth for new ventures. Utilizing a comparative analysis of customer acquisition costs and revenue generated from different social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) for 50 new ventures, they discovered that each social media platform had unique strengths and audience demographics, influencing customer acquisition effectiveness and revenue generation. The study revealed that ventures that tailored their social media marketing strategies to the specific characteristics and user behavior of each platform experienced better results in terms of customer acquisition and revenue growth. Specifically, ventures that leveraged platform-specific features, ad formats, and targeting options saw improved ROI and conversion rates. The study recommended that new ventures conduct thorough audience research and platform analysis to identify the most suitable social media platforms for their target audience and business objectives. It emphasized the importance of platform customization, content optimization, and performance tracking in maximizing social media marketing impact for new ventures.

White and Garcia (2019) investigated the role of social media analytics in informing data-driven decision-making for new ventures' marketing strategies. Employing a case study approach that analyzed how new ventures leveraged social media analytics tools to track campaign performance, audience engagement, and ROI, they found that effective use of social media analytics enabled new ventures to optimize their marketing efforts, allocate resources efficiently, and achieve sustainable growth. The study revealed that ventures that leveraged data analytics tools to gather

actionable insights, measure KPIs, and refine their strategies based on performance data experienced improved marketing outcomes and revenue growth. It recommended that new ventures invest in robust social media analytics platforms and train staff in data analysis to drive informed marketing decisions and enhance growth outcomes. Additionally, it highlighted the value of continuous monitoring, testing, and optimization in social media marketing strategies for new ventures.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies by Brown (2018) and Patel (2020) focused on the impact of social media marketing intensity and paid advertising on customer acquisition and revenue growth, respectively, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the synergistic effects of these two factors. Research is needed to explore how a strategic combination of social media marketing intensity and targeted paid advertising campaigns can lead to enhanced customer acquisition and revenue growth synergies for new ventures.

Contextual Gap: The study by Lee and Kim (2021) sheds light on the positive correlation between customer engagement on social media and repeat purchases/customer loyalty. However, there is a contextual gap in understanding how customer engagement varies across different industries or business contexts. Research should delve deeper into industry-specific nuances to identify sectorspecific strategies that optimize customer engagement on social media for improved customer retention and lifetime value in new ventures.

Geographical Gap: The studies by Garcia and Smith (2019) and White and Garcia (2019) focused on influencer marketing and social media analytics, respectively, in the context of new venture growth. However, there is a geographical gap in research, as these studies may not account for regional variations in social media marketing effectiveness and adoption. Further research is needed to explore how cultural, regulatory, and market differences across regions impact the efficacy of social media marketing strategies for new ventures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of social media marketing in new venture growth is undeniably significant and multifaceted. The empirical studies reviewed highlight various aspects of this role, including its impact on customer acquisition, brand awareness, revenue growth, customer engagement, and data-driven decision-making.

From the findings, it is evident that a strategic and consistent social media presence is crucial for new ventures to attract and retain customers effectively. Leveraging social media analytics tools and data-driven targeting strategies can optimize marketing efforts, leading to improved customer acquisition rates and revenue growth. Collaborating with influencers aligned with the target

audience can enhance brand visibility and engagement, while user-generated content can positively influence brand perception and purchase decisions.

Moreover, customer engagement on social media platforms plays a vital role in driving repeat purchases, customer loyalty, and lifetime value. Tailoring social media marketing strategies to platform-specific features, audience demographics, and industry nuances can further enhance the impact on customer acquisition and revenue generation. Overall, social media marketing serves as a powerful tool for new ventures to establish brand identity, engage with customers, gain market insights, and drive sustainable growth. Embracing innovative social media strategies, leveraging analytics for informed decision-making, and adapting to evolving digital trends are essential for new ventures to thrive in today's competitive landscape.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theoretical understanding, it is recommended to conduct further research exploring the synergistic effects of social media marketing intensity and paid advertising on customer acquisition and revenue growth in new ventures. This research can contribute significantly to theoretical frameworks by elucidating how integrated marketing strategies impact business outcomes. By delving into the synergies between different marketing approaches, such studies can enrich theoretical models related to marketing strategy formulation and implementation in new ventures, offering valuable insights for academia and industry alike.

Practice

In terms of practical implications, it is crucial to encourage new ventures to adopt data-driven decision-making processes through the use of social media analytics tools. Businesses can benefit significantly from tracking performance, identifying trends, and optimizing marketing strategies based on data insights. Developing training programs and resources to support businesses in using analytics effectively is recommended. This approach can enhance marketing effectiveness, improve ROI on marketing investments, and foster a culture of data-driven decision-making among new ventures, leading to more informed and strategic marketing practices.

Policy

On the policy front, advocating for initiatives that promote digital literacy and provide incentives for new ventures to invest in social media marketing capabilities is essential. Collaboration with industry stakeholders and government agencies to develop guidelines and best practices for ethical and effective social media marketing is recommended. These policies can contribute to the development of an ecosystem that supports innovation, entrepreneurship, and responsible digital marketing practices. By fostering a conducive environment for new venture growth in the digital economy, such policies can have a lasting positive impact on the business landscape and societal well-being.

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