



THE USE OF STORYTELLING IN DIGITAL MARKETING OF WOMEN SMES

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ABSTRACT:

Women's participation in entrepreneurship has seen a significant increase in recent years. However, women involved in entrepreneurship are still faced with complex obstacles, especially in the face of increasingly fierce business competition. Previous research has revealed that stereotypes attached to women often portray them as having limited mastery of technology, information, and communication. Despite this, data shows that most social media users are women. This phenomenon indicates women's great potential in utilizing social media as a means of effective marketing communication. Given the fierce competition and dominance of marketing communication through social media, an effective strategy is needed to build consumer awareness of women entrepreneurs' businesses. Therefore, this study aims to identify strategies used by women in carrying out their digital marketing communications. The research method used is a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to explore the experiences of women SME entrepreneurs in carrying out digital marketing communication strategies. The results showed that most female SMEs adopt storytelling strategies as a practical approach to building emotional connections with consumers and strengthening their brand appeal. This strategy was chosen because it can encourage deeper consumer engagement through a strong and unique narrative. By harnessing the power of narrative, they can differentiate their brand from competitors, create brand awareness, and strengthen women's brand identity in competitive business competition. This research provides valuable insights for women MSMEs and SMEs and contributes new understanding in the development of storytelling-based marketing strategies in the evolving digital era.

Keywords: storytelling, women, digital media, SMEs, digital marketing

INTRODUCTION

The development of the current era has been marked by a significant increase in women's participation in the world of entrepreneurship, data records that as many as 231 million women have launched or operated businesses in 59 economies around the world (Bullough et al., 2022). However, the role of women in

entrepreneurship is still faced with various complex obstacles (Cárdenas et al., 2014; Goyal & Yadav, 2014). Society tends to perceive women as having limitations in various aspects compared to men (Efendi, 2002; Koneru, 2017; Le & Raven, 2015). As a result, female SMEs often experience difficulties in marketing their products strategically, effectively and efficiently (Rachmawati, 2014b). This causes them to

often be forced to market their products in local markets with a limited number of buyers, so that the culture of men as successful entrepreneurs still dominates (Marlow & McAdam, 2013; Pradiani, 2017).

In this context, for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially female entrepreneurs who are just starting out or whose businesses are still little known, storytelling-based marketing strategies can be a good source of inspiration and guidance in developing their brands through digital marketing. By adopting this approach, they can harness the power of powerful and persuasive narratives to capture their audience's attention, build deep emotional bonds with consumers, and change their brand perception and image. Data shows that as many as 72% of social media users prefer to interact with brands that use storytelling in their content. This indicates that storytelling-based digital marketing provides the potential for female entrepreneurs to increase their brand influence on social media (Small Business Trends, 2017). Storytelling-based marketing strategies have proven successful and relevant in various business contexts, including for women entrepreneurs who want to adopt strategies to increase visibility, competitiveness and business success in an increasingly competitive market.

In a marketing context, storytelling-based marketing strategies have the potential to build an audience that is relevant to business stories. By leveraging the power of a strong narrative, this

strategy can significantly increase consumer loyalty and generate increased sales. As Aishwarya Balaji, CEO and Co-Founder of A Fresh Sip, an alcohol-free beverage platform, puts it, "People want a reason to support you, give it to them" (Forbes, 2021). Thus, adopting storytelling-based marketing strategies can provide significant added value for women entrepreneurs, as well as enable them to build strong relationships with consumers and achieve success in their businesses.

Although storytelling-based marketing strategies have been proven effective in building strong brands, knowledge about implementing this strategy is still limited. The problem that arises is how these female entrepreneurs can utilize storytelling strategies that have been successfully implemented by large and well-known SMEs, and develop their brands through digital storytelling marketing. Therefore, this research aims to fill this knowledge gap and provide new contributions in this field, with a focus on developing storytelling-based marketing strategies that can be used by female entrepreneurs to develop their businesses and achieve success in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Sonia Basil's experiences and perspectives. Sonia Basil is a female entrepreneur known for her unique storytelling-based content in her viral business on TikTok, known as

Cakeology. Research data was collected through direct interviews with the main source, namely Sonia Basil, as well as through analysis of previous journal references relevant to storytelling-based marketing strategies.

The interview was conducted online via Zoom Meeting on June 7 2023, this aims to facilitate effective and efficient communication. The unit of analysis in this research is Sonia Basil's experience and perspective regarding the implementation of storytelling-based marketing strategies. The collected data was analyzed comprehensively to identify patterns and findings that emerged from interviews and previous journal references.

This research aims to reveal a deep understanding of the motivations, challenges, successes and lessons learned from using storytelling-based marketing strategies in the business context of Sonia Basil. By using a phenomenological approach and analyzing Sonia Basil's experience as the main source, it is hoped that this research will provide valuable insights and new contributions to the understanding of the use of storytelling-based marketing strategies in the business success of female entrepreneurs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Entrepreneurship for Female SMEs

There are many factors that support a woman in opening a business or entrepreneurship. These factors can come

from themselves as good intentions and willingness, their family, or their environment. Women have several factors that support the development of their careers in the entrepreneurial field (Alma, 2010). First, the instincts of women who work more carefully, are good at anticipating the future, maintaining harmony and working together in the household can be applied in business life. Second, educating family members to be successful in the future can be developed in company management personnel. Third, the customary factor (in Bali and West Sumatra) where women play a role in managing the household economy. Fourth, the environment for living necessities such as sewing, embroidery, cake making, various dishes, cosmetics, encourages the birth of women entrepreneurs who develop these commodities. Fifth, advances in women's education greatly encourage the development of women's careers, becoming employees or opening their own businesses in various business fields.

The advancement of the world of technology also makes communication networks easier for women in entrepreneurship (Lestari, 2011). Women have various reasons why they can enter the world of entrepreneurship (Rachmawati, 2014a). Entrepreneurial women try to develop the potential within themselves, before women become entrepreneurs they first work as private employees. Based on discomfort in the work environment, some female entrepreneurs view entrepreneurship as

something new that they can do to apply all the knowledge they gained when they worked as private employees. As stated by Alma (2010), women entrepreneurs are motivated to open a business because they want to achieve and because they were frustrated in their previous job. He felt constrained and unable to display his abilities and develop his talents (Alma, 2010). Women's success in running their business is greatly influenced by how they form perceptions (Le & Raven, 2015). This is based on the perception that grows within women will influence the motivation they develop. This means that every perception formed within women can influence success in building their business through the motivation formed within them.

The abilities women have hidden since they worked in a company are then invested in them when they start to become entrepreneurs. They open up employment opportunities for other people and try to learn from their own abilities. Entrepreneurial women can develop with all the skills they have, driven by their inner will or good intentions as well as a tenacious, persistent and diligent attitude. So the result is that with these abilities, female entrepreneurs are able to work hard and have the goal of producing their own brand. Murphy and Peck in Alma state that hard work is the basic capital for a person's success (Alma, 2010).

Besides that, a female entrepreneur must have high self-confidence. They see a possible target market and believe that they can market the product appropriately. Self-

confidence can be implemented in real entrepreneurial activities and felt by oneself and others. Furthermore, Zimmer and Scarborough stated that regarding the personality characteristics of female entrepreneurs, they are tolerant and flexible, realistic and creative, enthusiastic and energetic and able to relate to the community and have a medium level of self-tolerance (Alma, 2010).

The level of self-confidence of women entrepreneurs is not as high as that of men, but women always have a sense of optimism as a value that women entrepreneurs instill in themselves. Entrepreneurial women interpret their entrepreneurship as proving themselves that they are independent people. Entrepreneurial women try to prove that they are capable of rising and not causing trouble to other people. They must also carry out their entrepreneurship based on creative and innovative thinking. Zimmer stated that, Creativity is the ability to develop new ideas and to discover new ways of looking at problems and opportunities. Creativity is the ability to develop new ideas and find new ways of looking at opportunities or problems faced. Innovation is the ability to apply creative solutions to those problems and opportunities to enhance or to enrich people's lives. Innovation is the ability to use creative solutions to fill opportunities so that they bring benefits to people's lives (Alma, 2010).

The innovations they carry out cannot be separated from the various creative

thoughts of female entrepreneurs. Differentiating a product from the many other products is one of the tasks of women who are entrepreneurs. In the end, creative and innovative thinking is what leads many women to become successful entrepreneurs.

Based on the research results, women also interpret themselves in entrepreneurship as hope for the future or as future-oriented. Generally, they choose to become entrepreneurs because they see many promising things in the future. One of them is that they want their brand to be known by everyone nationally and internationally. As Tambunan said, if we want to be successful we have to market our products at least until they penetrate the local market (Tulus Tambunan, 2004). Women entrepreneurs use technological developments to make it easier for them to market their products. Their direct involvement in the business means they have the freedom to determine the goals of the business. Several informants admitted that through entrepreneurship they dared to take risks, dared to dream more, and dared to achieve what they hoped for. As stated by Hisrich-Peters (in Alma, 2010), entrepreneurship is a dynamic process to create prosperity. This additional prosperity is created by entrepreneurial individuals who assume risks, spend time, and provide various goods and services

Everything they do is to meet personal needs in the future. Their long-term desire is to create an application or shop to create product branding. Another

hope is to form a commitment with themselves to remain consistent with their goal of opening a business, namely to make their family and closest relatives happy.

Marketing communication strategy using digital media

Sonia Basil manages three brands, namely Cakeology, Keku, and Monsora. Cakeology and Keku focus on online cake businesses, with different types of cakes and target markets, while Monsora is an offline business that offers desserts (TFR, 2022). Sonia understands that content and marketing communications must be tailored to different types of businesses and target markets because each brand has a different target market and type of product. Storytelling is a marketing strategy that can be used to communicate messages to target audiences and inspire them to make purchases.

Sonia emphasizes the importance of storytelling in her content, sharing experiences, processes, failures and lessons from her business, which adds value to her audience and allows them to feel involved in the process. The use of storytelling in digital marketing can create an emotional connection between the audience and the brand, making it easier for them to remember the brand. Sonia also uses various social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Instagram Reels, which have different functions and roles in her marketing strategy. Using the right media is the key in storytelling marketing to convey messages

according to the target market. In the interview, several strategies were found used by Sonia Basil in using storytelling as digital marketing communications for her business, including:

1. Specific Content for Business Types

Sonia Basil's digital marketing strategy incorporates story-based content, which she customizes for each brand she manages. Storytelling is a strategy that effectively communicates a narrative to a target audience, inspiring them to make a purchase. This helps create an emotional connection, entertains, educates and makes the content memorable. Sonia's approach aligns with the benefits of storytelling marketing, as it encourages consumers to engage and transact with the brand.

Sonia has experimented with different types of content to find the content that suits her business and herself. Sonia mentioned that she learns from other content creators and incorporates their ideas into her own content. This shows its commitment to continuing to learn and improve its digital marketing strategy. By leveraging story-based content, Sonia Basil successfully engages her audience and differentiates her brand in a competitive market.

2. Social Media Platforms Used

Sonia Basil utilizes various social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Instagram Reels. Each platform has a different function and has its own role in its

marketing strategy. For example, Instagram is used for portfolios, while YouTube Shorts and TikTok are used to increase market awareness (Barnhart, 2022; Southern, 2023)

According to a study conducted by Social Insider, TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts are the dominant platforms for short-form video content, with each platform serving specific audiences and marketing goals (Southern, 2023). TikTok holds the most engagement, while Instagram Reels leads in terms of viewing rates. Brands also post twice as much content on TikTok compared to Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. These findings highlight the importance of leveraging multiple platforms to reach and interact with diverse audiences.

3. Storytelling as Featured Content

Sonia Basil's emphasis on storytelling in her content is supported by various sources. Storytelling is an effective strategy for creating content on social media because it helps create emotional connections, entertains, educates, and makes content memorable (Moss, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Thomson, 2018; Tika & Diyah, 2023). By sharing her experiences, processes, failures and lessons learned from her business, Sonia creates an emotional connection with her audience, adds value and makes her content more engaging. Storytelling marketing is the process of using social media platforms to tell stories about a

brand, product, or service to captivate an audience. It is a strong business skill that can boost a business in various ways, such as increasing customer loyalty, creating strong marketing strategies, and increasing profits. Storytelling conveys purpose, and businesses that have purpose will get noticed and win consumer loyalty.

4. Interaction with Audience

Sonia understands the importance of interacting with her audience. He mentioned that he responds to comments and questions from his followers, which helps increase interaction and engagement. Interacting with audiences is an important aspect of digital marketing, as it helps businesses understand their customers' needs and preferences (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2013). It also helps build trust and loyalty, which can lead to increased sales and revenue.

5. Facing Controversy

Sonia avoids controversial content and focuses on positive content. This is important for maintaining good relationships with customers and audiences. According to a study conducted by Oracle, businesses should avoid controversial content that could offend their audience and instead focus on creating positive content that resonates with their target market (Oracle, 2022). This is because negative content can damage a brand's reputation and result in the loss of customers.

6. Measuring Content Success

Sonia regularly measures the success of her content by looking at data such as the number of visitors and responses from her audience. This helps in evaluating the effectiveness of its digital marketing strategy. Analyzing and measuring the impact of content on revenue generation is critical in evaluating the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. This can be done by tracking conversion rates, average order value, or customer lifetime value to evaluate the effectiveness of content in increasing revenue (McBride).

7. Consistency in Content

Consistency is an important aspect of social media marketing, as it helps businesses develop and nurture their audience, connect with customers, and strengthen engagement (Adobe, 2023; Martinez, 2023; Simpson, 2019). Sonia emphasizes the importance of consistency in creating content, even though social media algorithms can change.

Sonia has gone through a lot of experimentation to find the type of content that suits her business and herself. Sonia mentioned that she learned from other content creators and was inspired to create content that was not only entertaining but also educational. He believes that every content should not be just a story, but there is always a lesson he learned from the process of making it, which he wants to share with his audience.

Sonia's commitment to consistency and experimentation shows her dedication to improving her digital marketing strategy and achieving her goals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Storytelling is a powerful strategy in creating content on social media, especially for female SMEs. The use of storytelling in digital marketing helps build lasting relationships with audiences, creates emotional connections, entertains, educates and makes content memorable. Sonia Basil's digital marketing strategy incorporates story-based content, which she customizes for each brand she manages. By sharing her experiences, processes, failures and lessons learned from her business, Sonia creates an emotional connection with her audience, adds value and makes her content more engaging. Sonia's approach aligns with the marketing benefits of storytelling, as it encourages consumers to engage and transact with the brand. The use of storytelling in digital marketing has proven to be an effective strategy in various industries, including the cake business. Women's SMEs can benefit from story-based marketing by creating strong marketing strategies, increasing customer loyalty and increasing profits. In conclusion, storytelling is an effective strategy for women SMEs to achieve success in digital marketing by creating an emotional connection with their audience, humanizing their brand, and building lasting relationships with their customers.

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