

Research Proposal

by Runa Bibi

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Supervisor: James Williams

Research Proposal

Investigation implementation
and evaluation of up-to-date
Social Media strategies for
SMEs.

Runa Bibi (1702463)

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1. Introduction / Background to Proposed Research

Before I can consider carrying out my research project, I need to look at the research and literature that is already available on the topic and lay out the aim and objectives of my proposed project.

- **Give your research a working title**

The title of my research project will be Investigation implementation and evaluation of up-to-date social media strategies for SMEs.

- **Describe clearly the background to the subject area of study**

Marketing for small and medium enterprises has taken a shift from traditional media outlets e.g. TV, radio, newspapers and magazines to more modern technologies such as social media. While social media has long been a taboo in the workplace, it is now a powerful marketing tool utilized by organisations to share information on their products and reach a vast audience that may not have been possible before. Social media as defined by Cambridge Dictionary is computer programs and websites that allow people to share information and communicate on the internet by using a mobile phone device or computer [1]. As technology progresses, the definition of social media becomes more complex and Alan Charlesworth now defines it as “any web presence where users can add their own content but do not have control over the site in the same way as they would their own website” [2]. With 2.32 billion users on Facebook by the end of 2018 and 71% of users who had a good experience on social media being more likely to recommend it to others [3], businesses should be well inclined to create a social media marketing plan and increase their consumer outreach.

Social media marketing can be defined as marketing using social networks, online communities, blog marketing etc. [4]. In 2017, 96% of small medium businesses were using social media marketing [5]. When small and medium

enterprises are thinking of starting with social media marketing, they first need to develop a plan with goals which will help them meet their marketing targets [6]. One of the main goals of social media marketing is to gain a more loyal customer base [7] which in turn will help organisations to gain a better reputation. A business can build their brand on social media and increase their recognition so if they are seen anywhere online or in real life they are immediately known. If a business is struggling to get traffic to their website, simply by putting their URL on their social media page will help boost visits there [4].

Over half (58%) of businesses that use social media marketing see an improvement in their search engine rankings after a year or longer [8]. The higher their website is on search engine results, the more likely they are to be visited and to be seen as reliable and worth visiting. Compared to traditional marketing, using social media is much cheaper e.g. using Twitter for tweets which can give up-to-date information and quickly respond to customer queries is free as well as YouTube videos promoting the business. According to BigCommerce, when choosing a social media network, you need to understand your target market and pick the network where they are most concentrated, most accessible and most actively engage with adverts [9].

- **Provide the reader with an understanding of the field in which your study lies and an idea of where and how your study fits into this field**

Social media as a marketing tool is still a fairly new topic and while there are many general practices that businesses may choose to follow, there is nothing so coherent that evaluates various social media platforms after thorough investigation and testing of each which is the ultimate aim of my research project. I will be targeting small and medium enterprises so it will have a clear focus and once an up-to-date best practice guide has been produced, they should be able to follow it to achieve the best results with their social media marketing.

- **If relevant, introduce the industry/organisation/context that is being investigated**

I will select several social media networks to investigate, test and evaluate for marketing including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Tumblr and LinkedIn. Each test will be compiled and evaluated keeping in mind the ultimate goal of creating an up-to-date best practice guide for small and medium businesses.

- **Define one overarching aim of the study (the research purpose). Construct a series of objectives that specify what you will do to achieve the aim (typically 3 or 4 objectives).**

The aim of the project is to produce an up-to-date best practice social media marketing guide for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). To achieve this aim I will:

1. Investigate social media strategies used by SMEs today
2. Create a survey to see how SMEs use social media
3. Test social media strategies for SMEs
4. Evaluate social media strategies for SMEs
5. Write an up-to-date best practice guide on social media strategies for SMEs
6. Test the guide and share with survey participants to test it

- **Expected outcomes/deliverables**

By the end of the study, a best practice guide on social media strategies will be written that can be used by a small or medium enterprise and help them reach the best outcome with their social media marketing.

The guide will include detailed steps for each social media platform and how to best utilise them for their customers and how to choose the right one(s) for them.

2. Research and Development Methods

- **Research philosophy and approach**

In order to start the research, a research philosophy needs to be chosen. There are two research philosophies to choose between. The first one is a positivist approach which is the idea that the only trustworthy knowledge is derived from scientific measurements and the senses and interpretation and data collection will be done objectively [10]. The second one is a phenomenographic approach which focuses on the feelings and experiences of individuals and aims for a general analysis of a certain phenomenon [11]. I will be using a phenomenographic philosophy for my research as I will be evaluating the social media strategies and specific social media platforms of SMEs.

There are also two research approaches which are inductive and deductive. Inductive research works with qualitative data and allows for a new theory to be created based on specific examples from individuals and evaluating existing theories [12]. Deductive research is building a hypothesis using an existing theory and testing the hypotheses by gathering data [13]. An inductive approach will be appropriate for my research as I will be using surveys to find out how SMEs use social media for marketing.

- **Research strategy**

My research strategy will use a survey and experiment. The survey will be online using an unbiased survey website and include questions which are open to find

out how SMEs use social media and what their experiences are with it. I will be experimenting with the social media myself and review the methods of posting and target market outreach. I will be evaluating each platform based on individual's opinions and my own experience with them. Document analysis will also be used when I am initially researching how SMEs are using social media and how each social media platform is used by popular businesses. I will be taking a cross-sectional approach with data collection which I feel is better suited for the timescale of my project.

- **Generalisability, reliability and validity**

Generalisability is the extent to which findings can be used in settings other than where it was tested [14]. It is important that my findings can be generalised as I am going to create a best practice guide that should be applicable to SMEs today. Reliability is consistency of results across items, across time and researchers [15]. Once I have created the guide, I will share it with local SMEs to see if they are able to follow and recreate the results successfully e.g. see a change in traffic to their website after a month. Validity establishes whether requirements have been met and if results are trustworthy [16]. I will work to produce high data validity by determining how long the individual from the SME has been using social media marketing to get a range of results and see how length of time affects success on the social media platform for their business.

- **Data collection methods**

I will be using a survey to gather information on what social media platforms SMEs are using for marketing. Quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting data will be used. The survey will be online, and the data will be collected and analysed using the correct methods.

- **Study population and sample**

My study population for the project will be local SMEs in Swansea who use social media platforms for marketing. The sample will be marketing or social media

managers from these organisations. I am aiming for 5-10 local SMEs for my sample size.

- **Identify risks/limitations/ethical/legal issues and ways that you might deal with those risks**

There are several risks associated with a project of this type and these risks need to be managed. The risks I have identified are:

1. Poor time management resulting in not completing the guide on time
2. Having an incomplete guide
3. Not having enough survey results to create cohesive generalised results
4. No results from the survey at all

In order to try and manage my time well I will be planning my project using a Gantt chart with clear timescales and realistic goals to meet. I will be collecting data from my evaluation which will help me know what I need to include in my final guide, and I will use a checklist of requirements so I can have a complete guide. With the survey, I will reach out to SMEs and inform them of my research and implore them to complete my survey.

The biggest limitation I have for this project is not having all the right knowledge to build an up-to-date practice guide. To help with this I need to start my research early and build on my knowledge through collection of survey results.

There are no outright legal and ethical issues in regard to this project.

- **How will you analyse the data/evaluate your results?**

I will evaluate my results by sharing the completed guide with participants of the survey to test and analyse and I will also complete my own tests to see how effective it is. The tests will be based on certain guidelines and objectives that the guide should achieve. I will also get feedback from the survey participants to see how effective the guide is for them.

3. Resources and Planning

- **Identify any resources required**

To complete my project, I will need the following resources:

1. Computer/Laptop – To complete my research and type of my project
2. Books on social media marketing – To expand on my initial research (from the University library or online)
3. Access to journals – To research social media marketing
4. Microsoft Word – To write up my guide
5. Microsoft Excel – To create tables to visualise any quantitative data from survey results
6. Online survey creator – SoGoSurvey, Typeform etc.
7. Survey participants from SMEs

- **Construct a Gantt chart that demonstrates evidence of project planning and management. Identify the timescales for each component of the study.**

I have created a Gantt chart that shows a timeline I will hope to adhere to. Figure 1 shows a list of my tasks and the duration I plan to do them in. Figure 2 and 3 show my Gantt Chart and how the timeline of my project should go.

Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish
 			
Initial research	31d	07/14/19	08/23/19
Create survey	18d	08/16/19	09/10/19
Evaluate survey results	11d	09/10/19	09/24/19
Implement and test social media platforms	31d	09/25/19	11/06/19
Write best practice guide	31d	11/12/19	12/24/19
Test practice guide	7d	12/25/19	01/02/20

Figure 1 – Task list

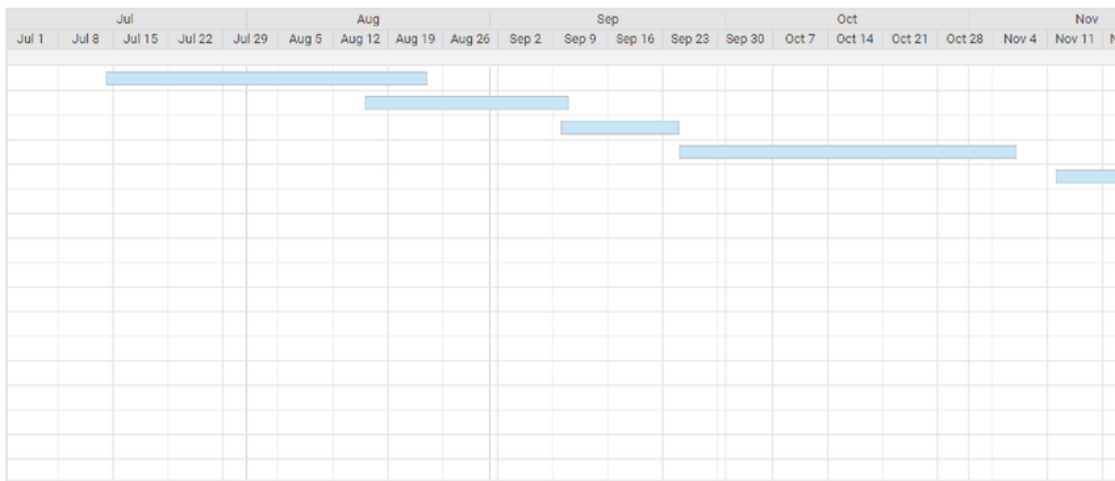


Figure 2 – Gantt Chart View 1

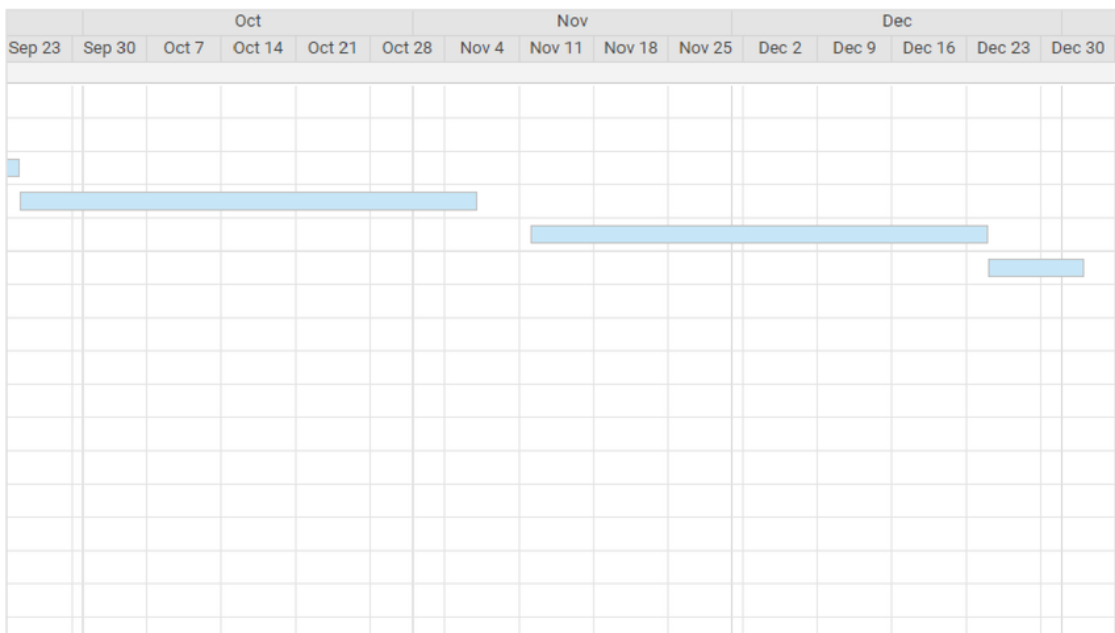


Figure 3 – Gantt Chart View 2

The initial research will include intense research on social media marketing and social media using books and online journals. I will also research the social media platforms themselves including the age of the users and what content gains the most traction on

them. I will then create the survey using an online survey maker including questions on the participants experience with social media for marketing and how long they have been using each platform. I will spend time evaluating these results and see if there are any shared experiences on social media with each business and if there is one or more that is prevalent in use. Next, I will test the social media platforms myself and analyse the results. Then I can start writing my up-to-date best practice guide that should be able to be followed by small and medium enterprises and achieve the objectives I set out initially. Finally, once the guide has been completed, I will test social media platforms for marketing using the guide and share it with the participants of the survey who will hopefully test it out and give feedback.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, from analysing the existing literature and guidance in my project's field on my research topic I can see there is still room for a more up-to-date, concise and thorough guide that will be trialled and tested by existing SMEs. The resources required are freely available both at University and at home, however should any not be available, this may slow down the completion of the project. I will hopefully have a wide array of opinions and results from my survey so that when I create the guide, it will have their interests in mind and will help them to achieve marketing goals.

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Research Proposal

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

70/100

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GRADING FORM: NEW ASSESSMENT

RUNA BIBI

70

ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE



+ Good use of citations to support report content. + Well formatted relevant quality reference list.

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KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING



+ Social Media & SM for marketing. Good clear introduction and overview. - Google+ no longer in service for public use. An up-to-date review of social media platforms could be documented. Blogs: If Tumblr is being reviewed should other blogging sites be included also. Or should it be discarded, replaced by Snapchat? or Pin-interest?. Something for the review to consider.

10

COGNITIVE, INTELLECTUAL SKILLS



+ Working title. Very good. More appropriate and could replace the Aim. The Aim could be included as an objective. + Very good objective list. Note: I can see you have included the Aim as an objective. Good. + Good overview of research methods. - Generalisability, reliability and validity considered, Good, could be looked at in more detail to document more clearly how the research will be reliable and valid. - Data collection methods / platforms could be reviewed e.g. Google forms, Survey Monkey and selected based on their functions. + Risks. Valuable considerations here. Good. - Legal / ethical considerations would include the acquisition of

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personal data / information. This needs to be considered. - Data evaluation method could be clearly identified e.g. using quantitative and qualitative survey analysis methods including perhaps use of graphs and identifying links to lit. rev. information.

PRACTICAL SKILLS



+ Resources required. Very good. + Gantt chart. Good. Identifies some key stages. – could be extended to include all project areas. Please see Project handbook. + Excellent overview of how you intend to complete the project. Very good.

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TRANSFERABLE SKILLS



+ Good report format structure and presentation. – Format could be improved by including sub-section titles and numbers.

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