

EXPLORING THE PATH TO DIGITAL MARKETING IN MSMES: UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the traditional marketing strategies used by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Sri Lanka, focusing specifically on T.D.V. Tailoring in Jaffna and exploring proactive involvement in digital marketing. It also proposes improvements through an awareness campaign to boost digital marketing proficiency. Marketing students from the University of Jaffna conducted Participatory Action Research using focus groups, participant observation, and interviews to gather insights. The SWOT analysis revealed that T.D.V. Tailoring had strengths, such as a strong market presence and traditional marketing experience, but faced weaknesses, such as limited digital marketing knowledge and resource constraints. Opportunities were identified in digital marketing, social media engagement, online sales, and partnerships, whereas threats included competition, economic challenges, and shifting customer preferences. Despite its potential, barriers such as limited digital literacy, financial constraints, and reluctance to adopt new technologies hindered the business's digital transformation. However, PAR noted that the business owner was open to embracing digital strategies if provided with adequate support. Practical recommendations include offering foundational digital marketing knowledge through hands-on engagement, creating engaging online content, optimizing social media profiles, and educating business owners on accessing financial and technological resources. The study highlighted the potential of MSMEs, such as T.D.V. Tailoring to grow through digital platforms and emphasizing the importance of community-driven initiatives in fostering digital marketing competence among local businesses in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the study assumed access to the necessary technologies and infrastructure, which may not be available to all MSMEs, particularly in remote areas. Future research could address infrastructure issues and explore the role of training initiatives, possibly in collaboration with universities, tech companies, or government bodies, to enhance digital literacy and facilitate MSMEs' digital transformation of MSMEs. This research acknowledged several limitations, including its focus on a single business type in Jaffna, which reduces the generalizability of the findings to other MSMEs globally.

Keywords: Local business growth, marketing strategy transition, micro, small, and medium enterprises, participatory action research, SWOT analysis.