

Do we need to understand the specific challenges related to omni-channel marketing technology among SMEs in Sri Lanka?

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Purpose This study fills a significant research gap by addressing the lack of attention to specific issues and challenges related to omni-channel marketing technology for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka. There is currently a dearth of in-depth research focusing on SMEs in Sri Lanka and their challenges with omni-channel marketing strategies. Therefore, this research explores the challenges and issues faced by SMEs in relation to omni-channel marketing strategies and proposes possible solutions to mitigate these challenges.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This qualitative study, using thematic analysis as its primary methodological framework, explores the experiences and perspectives of SME owners in Sri Lanka regarding omni-channel marketing technology. Data collection involves in-depth interviews with 25 SME owners representing various sectors, including 5 agri-businesses owners, 3 retailers, 2 service providers, 4 product manufacturers, 5 small hotel owners, and 6 online shop owners. The researcher conducts these interviews using a semi-structured interview guide designed for the study, each lasting between 40 and 50 minutes. After data collection, recorded interviews are transcribed verbatim, translated as needed, and coded by the researcher to identify recurring patterns, themes, and ideas. Through thematic analysis, themes are refined to incorporate the depth and richness of SME owners' experiences and perspectives.

Findings: Sri Lankan SMEs face unique and difficult challenges related to omni-channel marketing technology, unlike well-established large enterprises. These challenges include limited resources and financial constraints, necessitating reliance on outsourcing consultancy for omni-channel marketing technology and strategies. SMEs struggle to compete with larger enterprises and brands due to higher competition. Providing personalized customer experiences is consistently challenging, impacting customer loyalty and sustainability. Additionally, SMEs lack a proper supply chain management (SCM) system for maintaining omni-channel marketing. Among these issues, measuring return on investment (ROI) is a major problem. The complexity of customer journeys, various touch points, and changeable key performance indicators (KPIs) contribute to difficulties in accurately measuring ROI.

Originality/value: This study is the first to use qualitative data to identify specific challenges related to omni-channel marketing technology among SMEs in Sri Lanka. It provides valuable insights into these challenges, offering a unique perspective for developing countries like Sri Lanka.

Practical Implications: SMEs can leverage low-budget or free technology tools tailored to their needs and prioritize the most effective channels for their business types. Owners should progressively improve their technological skills and integrate traditional stores with online marketing platforms. Implementing loyalty programs suitable for all channels and using automated emails, SMS alerts, and reminders can enhance customer sustainability. Forming partnerships between traditional retail stores and online SMEs can diversify sales channels. Addressing ROI challenges with these solutions allows SMEs to execute omni-channel marketing strategies effectively, make better investment decisions, and compete in a competitive market.

Keywords: Omni-channel marketing technology, Qualitative study, Return on investment (ROI), Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Sri Lanka

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