

Interpretive Structural Modeling of Social Network Marketing Based on Gaining a Competitive Advantage of Startup Travel Service Companies

Mohammad

Nazarihosseinabad 

Ph.D. Candidate in Marketing, Business Management Department, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

Mohammad Haghghi

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Assistant Professor, Faculty Member of the Business Management Department, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran

Kambiz Shahroodi 

Associate Professor, Department of Management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to identify the factors affecting social network marketing based on gaining a competitive advantage and designing a model related to the communication between them.

Method: This research is applied in its purpose, and conducted using a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative phase, first by reviewing the literature in the field of social network marketing and using the meta-combination method, the factors affecting it were identified and divided into three categories. subsequently, the relationships between these factors were determined and analytically analyzed using the interpretive structural modeling approach. In the modeling section, a questionnaire was distributed among experts selected through snowball sampling.

Findings: The results of this research led to the classification of factors affecting social network marketing based on gaining competitive advantage and designing a model of these factors. In this model, the categories of organizational and structural resources (responsiveness to customers, service

– Corresponding Author: Haghghimohammad710@gmail.com

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quality), marketing (attracting more customers, efficiency), and competitive advantage based on social media (branding, profitability), indicate the factors and the way of communication and interaction of these factors.

Conclusion: Finally, the interpretation of the model, analysis of its levels, and the relationships among dimensions were discussed and solutions were provided in this regard.

Keywords: Competitive Advantage, Interpretive Structural Modeling, Social Network Marketing, Travel Service Startups.



Introduction

In the era of changing global economy, organizations tend to gain competitive advantage, and these changes represent opportunities as well as challenges. To ensure survival and success, organizations need to expand their abilities and capacities to manage threats and quickly exploit emerging opportunities. This requires developing a competitive strategy that refers to positioning the company to maximize the value of the capabilities that differentiate it from its competitors (Chitale, 2013). Competitive strategy is defined as a distinctive approach that the company intends to use to be successful in each of the strategic areas of business (Ogutu & Samuel, 2011) and leads to the superiority of the company over competitors in terms of attracting customers and remaining safe from competitive forces. They believe that there are several reasons for competitive advantage, but the main one is to provide valuable goods or services to customers at a low price; A quality service is worth paying more for, or a valuable product offering that represents an attractive combination of price, features, quality, service, and other aspects that are attractive to customers.

The resource-based theory tries to explain how organizations achieve competitive advantages. This theory articulates a model of firm performance that emphasizes the resources and capabilities controlled by the firm as a source of competitive advantage (Katua, Mukulu & Gachunga, 2014). This theory shows that competitiveness can be achieved through the innovative provision of more value to the customer through the strategic identification and application of resources by the company to create a sustainable competitive advantage (Micheka & Ogollah, 2013). Resources in this field can be the data about the company's production process. They are classified as physical capital, human capital, and organizational capital. The strategic application of resources for competitive advantage contrasts with all organizational functions, from inbound logistics to operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and services in addition to supporting functions (company infrastructure, human resource management, technology development, purchasing).

In this research, marketing is considered the center of customer attention that covers the functions and processes of the organization and by committing through value reporting, facilitating the fulfillment of personal expectations created by such commitments, and fulfilling such expectations by helping the creation processes.

Customer value is relevant as a result of supporting value creation in

company processes in addition to its customers and other stakeholders (Gronroos, 2009). As a result, it is relevant to support value creation in company processes in addition to its customers and other stakeholders (Gronroos, 2009). Therefore, the process of making promises requires a communication channel, which as a medium, is used in sending messages from the organization to its customers.

Organizations have traditionally had several communication channels such as face-to-face advertising, print media, mass media, postcards, phone calls, billboards, etc. These traditional channels face challenges ranging from the failure to receive timely information from customers to difficulties in classifying a large number of messages (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Digital marketing, which involves using social media and mobile in marketing, includes branding/promotion management, contextualization, and marketing. This type of marketing goes beyond marketing through media such as the web, email, video, social apps, digital signage, and interactive television. This method emphasizes more on the method that will change the traditional advertising methods (Micek, 2008). In this context, marketing campaign management and digital marketing are used together. However, digital marketing represents an opportunity for the interaction of two practices, digital media and acceptance of the client's perspective and accurate documentation criteria. In addition, marketers should consider ad management as a strategy to add complexity to the overall online and offline marketing approach (Micek, 2008).

Although the tourism industry in Iran is still in its infancy, several start-up travel companies are operating and are rapidly expanding their scope of activities to meet the growing needs of the industry. Evidence shows that these sectors employ thousands of people to serve travelers and can capture markets on a large scale. Companies can invest in the widespread use of social media among millions of Internet users in Iran (99% of all Internet subscriptions are based on mobile data) to create unique services and gain more value and surpass competitors. To take advantage of this huge marketing opportunity offered by social media and mobile phones, there must be a clear understanding of the application of social media and mobile phones. The emergence of new communication media has led to a paradigm shift in the way organizations implement marketing practices.

Especially recently, huge changes have occurred due to the widespread use of new communication media such as social media and

mobile phones to establish constant communication between customers and companies (Bernhardt et al., 2012). This requires a clear understanding of the integration of social media/mobile marketing into the organization's competitive strategies to fully benefit from the advantages associated with these new communication channels. Despite this, due to the nascent level of social media in the corporate world, little research has been done on social media adoption and implementation models. Also, several kinds of research have been done with an emphasis on other sectors of the economy and other fields at different times for the adoption of social media as a marketing tool (Lu Weng and Han, 2013; Bernhardt, Mays, and Hall, 2012; Mitic et al. Kapoulas, 2012; Edosomwan et al., 2011). While there is a lack of important empirical evidence about the current situation of the use of social media/mobile phones in gaining competitive advantages in the tourism industry in Iran. This indicates an information gap. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the question of how social media can be used to increase the competitive advantage of travel service start-ups using an interpretive structural model according to the specific conditions and characteristics of the country?

Method

From the viewpoint of the paradigm, this study is quantitative-qualitative research. In terms of the approach, in the qualitative phase, the research is of the development type and in the quantitative phase, it is descriptive research that is done by survey method. In terms of its nature and purpose, it is considered applied research. In the qualitative section, firstly, with the help of reviewing the texts and analyzing the content of the literature related to the primary generalities about the competitive advantage and key competencies, we have found the effective factors of the key competencies. We identified some categories. Then, to determine more categories, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The text of the semi-structured interviews was implemented. In this section, we used the survey method. The research stages in this section included three steps, which include: drafting the questionnaire, which was obtained from the extraction of the results of the research, and the qualitative literature section which was developed based on the ISM. The implementation of the questionnaire and its analysis have been done using the ISM method. In the ISM section, the main categories were determined using the opinions of 20 experienced customers with post-graduate education and experienced managers selected through snowball sampling.

Non-probability targeted sampling method (snowball or chains) was used in the qualitative phase. The number of interviewees was 10 experienced customers with postgraduate education and 10 experienced managers and experts. Through interview questions, social media marketing components (Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Twitter) effective on the competitive advantage of 10-year-experienced travel start-ups have been examined. The validity and reliability of these questions were evaluated by two management professors and two tourism industry experts.

The last tool for collecting information is a questionnaire. The result of this phase was 14 components. the method of analyzing the quantitative data of this research is ISM, the questionnaire is made in such a way that all the components are placed in rows and columns in a parallel. The structural-interpretive modeling method was used to analyze the data. At this stage, the effective factors and types of social network marketing that lead to the competitive advantage in the tourism industry which were obtained in the interview were analyzed by using interpretive structural modeling and using the conceptual relationship of "experience". The steps of ISM in designing a competitive advantage formation model based on social media in the tourism industry are presented below:

Step 1: Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

Step 2: Accessibility matrix

Step 3: Partitioning of surfaces

Step 4: Conic matrix

Step 5: Directed graph

Step 6: ISM model

Findings

Self-interaction matrix

This matrix is used to analyze the relationship between the constituent elements and to show the relationship between them, the following four signs are used:

- A: one-way communication from i to j
- V: one-way communication from j to i
- X: two-way communication from i to j and vice versa
- O: There is no relationship between i and j.

Table 1. Self-interaction matrix

j \ i	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
General human resources		o	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Marketing human resources	o		x	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Customer response	V	x		X	A	x	V	x	X	A	V	x	A	x
Quality of service	V	V	x		A	V	V	x	A	V	V	A	A	V
Attracting more customers	V	V	V	V		V	V	V	A	V	V	x	A	V
Customer orientation	V	V	x	A	A		V	o	X	V	o	x	A	A
Active presence in the market	V	V	A	A	A	A		A	X	A	A	x	A	x
Low cost	V	V	x	X	A	o	V		A	A	o	x	A	x
Profitability	V	V	x	V	V	x	x	V		V	o	x	x	x
Extent of influence	V	V	V	A	A	A	V	V	A		V	x	A	x
Competition	V	V	A	A	A	o	V	o	O	A		A	A	A
Efficiency	V	V	X	V	X	x	x	x	X	x	V		A	x
Branding	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	X	V	V	V		V
Availability	V	V	x	A	A	V	x	x	X	x	V	x	A	

Table 2. Primary access matrix

j \ i	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
General human resources		0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Marketing human resources	0		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Customer response	0	1		1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Quality of service	0	0	1		1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Attracting more customers	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Customer orientation	0	0	1	1	1		0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
Active presence in the market	0	0	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Low cost	0	0	1	1	1	0	0		1	1	0	1	1	1
Profitability	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0		0	0	1	1	1
Extent of influence	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1		0	1	1	1
Competition	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1		1	1	1
Efficiency	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0		1	1
Branding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0		0
Availability	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	

Primary access matrix

In this step, using the 1-0 substitution rule, the SSIM matrix is converted to a 1-0 matrix. This is called the primary achievement matrix. The 0-1 placement rule is as follows:

- If the relationship between two elements (j,i) in the self-interaction matrix is A, in the matrix RM, the relationship between j.i is replaced by the number 1, and vice versa, the relationship between i,j is replaced by the number 0.

- If the relationship between two elements (j.i) in the self-interaction matrix is v, in the matrix RM, the relationship between j.i is replaced by the number 0, and vice versa, the relationship between i.j is replaced by the number 1.
- If the relationship between two elements (j.i) in the self-interaction matrix is x, in the RM matrix, we replace the relationship between j.i with the number 1 and vice versa the relationship between i.j is replaced with the number 1.
- If the relationship between two elements (j.i) in the self-interaction matrix is O, in the RM matrix, we replace the relationship between j.i with the number 0 and vice versa, the relationship between i.j is replaced with the number 0.

Table 3. Final Access Matrix (SSIM)

j \ i	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Influence
General human resources	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Marketing human resources	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Customer response	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	11
Quality of service	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	7
Attracting more customers	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
Customer orientation	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	8
Active presence in the market	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Low cost	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	9
Profitability	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	7
Extent of influence	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
11. Competition	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	8

Efficiency	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	10
Branding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Availability	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	10
Dependency	0	2	1	1	1	8	6	8	1	9	4	1	1	1	1	

After determining the input set and the output set for each component and determining the common set, the leveling of criteria is done. By obtaining the commonality of two input and output sets, the common set is obtained. Criteria whose common set is the same as their output set are assigned the priority level. By removing these criteria and repeating this process for other criteria, the levels of other components are also determined. At this stage, we remove branding from the table.

Table 4. Determining relationships and leveling dimensions and indicators 1

	Input set	Output set	Common collection	Level
General human resources	1	1.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14	1	
Marketing human resources	2,3	2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14	2,3	
Customer response	1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,11,12,14	2.3.4.5.6.8.9.10.12.13.14	2,3,4,6,8,9,12,14	
Quality of service	1,2,3,4,6,7,8,10,11,14	3.4.5.8.9.12.13	3,4,8	
Attracting more customers	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,10,11,12,14	5.9.11.12.13	5,11,12	
Customer orientation	1,2,3,6,7,9,10,12	3.4.5.6.9.12.13.14	3,6,9	
Active presence in the market	1,2,7,9,12,14	3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14	7,9,12,14	

Low cost	1.2.3.4.7.8. 12.14	3.4.5.8.9.10.12.13.14.	3,4,8,12,14	
Profitability	1.2.3.4.5.6.7 .8.9.10.12.1 3.14	3.6.7.9.12.13.14	3,6,7,9,12,13,1 4	
Extent of influence	1.2.3.7.8.10. 11.12.14	4.5.6.9.10.12.13.14	10,12,14	
Competition	1,2,7,11	3.4.5.10.11.12.13.14	11	
Efficiency	1,2,3,4,5,6,7 ,8,9,10.11.1 2.14	3.5.6.7.8.9.10.12.13.1 4	3.5.6.7.8.9.10. 12.14	
Branding	1.2.3.4.5.6.7 .8.9.10.11. 12.13.14	9,12	9.12	1
Availability	1.2.3.6.7.8.9 .10.11.12.14	3.4.5.7.8.9.10.12.13.1 4	3,7,8,9,10,12,1 4	

At this stage, we removed profitability from the table.

Table 5. Determining relationships and leveling dimensions and indicators 2

	Input set	Output set	Common collection	Level
Marketing human resources	2.3	2.3.4.5.6.7.8.10.11 13.14	2.3	
Customer response	2.3.4.6.7.8 11.14	2.3.4.5.6.8.10.13.14	2.3.4.6.8. 14	

Quality of service	2.3.4.6.7.8.1 1.14	3.4.5.8.13	3.4.8	
Attracting more customers	2.3.4.5.6.8.1 0.11.14	5.11.13	5.11	
Customer orientation	2.3.6.7.10	3.4.5.6.13.14	3.6	
Active presence in the market	2.7.14	3.4.5.6.7.8.10.11.13 .14	7.14	
Low cost	2.3.4.7.8.14	3.4.5.8.10.13.14	3.4.8.14	
Profitability	2.3.4.5.6.7.8 .10.13.14	3.6.7.13.14	3.6.7.13.14	2
Extent of influence	2.3.7.8.10.1 1.14	4.5.6.10.13.14	10.14	
Competition	2.7.11	3.4.5.10.11.13.14	11	
Efficiency	2.3.4.5.6.7.1 0.11.14	3.5.6.7.8.10.13.14	3.5.6.7.8.10.14	
Availability	2.3.6.7.8.10. 11.14	3.4.5.7.8.10.13.14	3.7.8.10.14	

At this stage, we removed more customer attraction and efficiency from the table.

Table 6. Determining relationships and leveling dimensions and indicators 3

	Input set	Output set	Common collection	Level
Marketing human resources	2	2.4.5.8 10.11	2	
Customer response	2.3.4.6.7.8. 11	2.4.5.8.10	2.4.8	

Quality of service	2.4.8.10.11	4.5.8	4.8	
Attracting more customers	2.4.5.8.10.11	5. 11	5.11	3
Low cost	2.4.8	4.5.8.10	4.8	
Extent of influence	2.8.10.11	4.5.10	10	
Competition	2.11	4.5.11.12	11	
Efficiency	2.4.5.8.10.11	5.8.10	5.8.10	
Availability	2.8.10.11	4.5.8 10.12	8.10	

At this stage, we removed customer response, service quality and low cost from the table.

Table 8. Determining relationships and leveling dimensions and indicators 4

	Input set	Output set	Common collection	Level
Customer response	2.3.4.6.7.8. 11	2.4.5.8.10	2.4.8	
Quality of service	2.4.8.10.11	4.5.8	4.8	
Low cost	2.4.8	4.5.8.10	4.8	

According to the components of the formation of competitive advantage based on the recovery of social networks, the model is as follows.

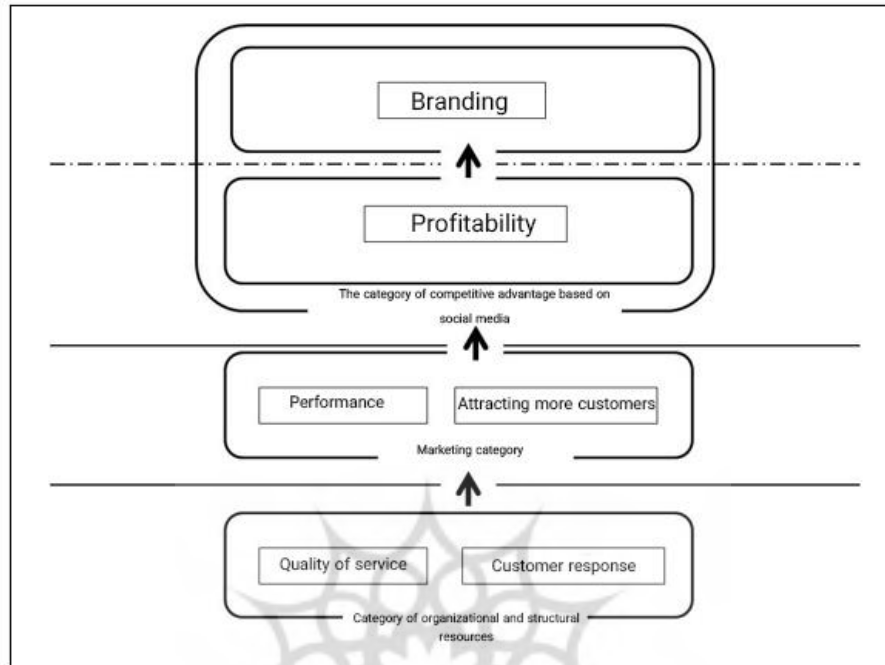


Figure 1. The final model based on ISM

Conclusion

The importance of social media marketing is clear to everyone in this era due to its important effects on companies and their personnel. The increasing trend of this process has led countless researches to this field. In this study, while introducing the importance of social network marketing, we tried to model using the basic and influential factors of social network marketing and the relationship between them. From this point of view, the integration of opinions and their connection and sequence was carried out to identify the influential factors. The factors were identified through a literature review and the use of the meta-synthesis technique, and finally, the ISM technique was utilized. In the first part, by reviewing the literature, social network marketing drivers were extracted. In this section, some studies were used (Gail et al., 2014, Jordi and Jaun, 2014, Burcu and Eda, 2014, Ioannis and Michail, 2014, Holsapple et al., 2014, Wu et al., 2015, Dijkman et al., 2015, Georgescu and Popescul, 2015, Kim et al., 2015, Wamba et al., 2016, Luo et al., 2016, Steininger et al., 2012, Kurniawati et al., 2013). Therefore, our goal in this research was the integration of

these approaches and the comprehensiveness of data on these factors. First, the desired factors were categorized. Then, by designing a questionnaire in order to determine the relationships of the factors, experts' opinions were collected, and finally, the model was designed using the ISM method. The marketing model of social networks based on competitive advantage is obtained from the analysis of relationships and the leveling of factors affecting the marketing of social networks based on competitive advantage in Figure 1.

In other words, by combining the relationships of these factors, the interaction network diagram can be turned into an integrated model for the social network marketing process based on competitive advantage. In the mentioned model, the factors of organizational and structural resources are designed as the basis of the model and placed at the last level in terms of ranking. The next level that has been confirmed is the marketing category, which is influenced by the previous two factors and is ranked next. The next level is the competitive advantage based on social media, which is influenced and affected by other factors.

Based on the extracted results and model, it can be concluded the model and factors that managers can improve the situation of companies and organizations and use it to increase their economic and social efficiency and continue to improve their competitive status. These results show that social networks are new tools used for customer retention and more profit; Therefore, social networks are a strategic tool for the industry owners and are known for developing brands. Companies utilize these new media to communicate with and encourage social networks' users to their companies and brands.

In general, with extensive studies conducted in this field, it is concluded that the use of social networks has significant effects on different parts of modern marketing and plays a vital role in marketing and creating brand loyalty and relationships with consumers. In this way it will affect the satisfaction of consumers; Therefore, it is suggested that managers and marketers of companies learn the complete skills of new marketing methods in social networks, for instance by creating electronic word-of-mouth advertisements, they can encourage users to share the company's products, services, and product brands in social networks; Because this has a wide impact on people's opinions and purchase decisions and as a result their loyalty. It is also necessary for company managers to consider social networks as a new media and an important part of their marketing future in order to use social networks effectively

and achieve expected results. This helps the managers to achieve their goals and accelerates the process of these goals.

The distinctive point of this research was that the studies in this field have only paid attention to the benefits of social media in general or have emphasized on only one specific aspect of the social media benefits; While this research has paid attention to the competitive advantage based on social network marketing and has also considered components for this category. Also, in other studies, less attention has been paid to the dimensions of social media analysis, and only a few articles have focused on the source-based perspective in social media analysis. While this research has focused on the perspective of competitive advantage based on social media marketing. By reviewing the previous studies, it can be stated that all the studies conducted on the competitive advantage of social media have only presented a framework or general topics. This research is the first research that provides a model to gain a competitive advantage based on social media marketing. Regarding the internal articles and theses carried out so far, several theses and articles have been presented in the field of social media, and they only focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the media and their impact on societies and businesses. The innovation of this research is that in addition to providing a competitive advantage model, it is based on social media marketing.

Practical suggestions in line with the benefits related to customers can include the following: Considering the positive impact of social media marketing on customers, the organization should increase the ways of interacting with customers based on their preferred values and channels. In addition, given the positive impact of social media marketing on gaining insight into customers, organizations should achieve a deeper understanding of customers' values, preferences, and behaviors. Also, considering the positive effect of social media marketing on customer targeting, the organization should personalize marketing messages based on customers to benefit from the analysis to a greater extent. Considering the ineffectiveness of social media marketing in attracting new customers, the organization should design methods to identify interested customers and give appropriate feedback to their opinions. Moreover, considering the lack of impact of social media marketing on improving interaction with customers, the organization should identify the channels preferred by customers and respond to customers' opinions in a timely manner. In addition, due to the lack of impact of social media marketing on the identification of customer satisfaction levels, the organization should

follow up on customer expectations on social media and discover them and perceived value by customers. Finally, considering the lack of impact of social media marketing on the identification of social influencers, organizations should try to identify individuals or communities that have the power and ability to influence others.

Practical suggestions in line with the benefits related to companies and organizations are: Considering the positive impact of social media marketing on the innovation component, the organization should continuously follow up and monitor the issues and how they change over time. In addition, due to the positive impact of social media marketing on the identification of competitors and their performance, organizations should follow and monitor people's opinions about competitors' brands, products, and services. Likewise, considering the positive impact of social media marketing on the recruitment and hiring process of employees, organizations can use social media to find experts. Also, considering the positive effect of competitive advantage based on social media marketing on improving interaction with partners and suppliers, organizations can use social media to interact with them. Considering the lack of impact of competitive advantage based on social media marketing on the production/improvement of products and services, organizations should provide innovative products based on customer data and respond to customer feedback in a timely and appropriate manner. Regarding the lack of impact of competitive advantage based on social media marketing on employee commitment, managers should provide an environment for employees to express their opinions freely and encourage employees to share their images and achievements with other employees. Regarding the lack of impact of competitive advantage based on social media marketing on marketing, managers should reconsider their marketing strategies and take initiative approaches to effectively deliver messages to customers. In addition, given the lack of impact of competitive advantage based on social media marketing on crisis identification, organizations should be able to identify comments that contain negative feelings about products and brands and take action to solve problems; finally, due to the positive impact of social media on improving profitability, organizations should use other social media to a greater extent.

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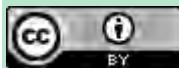
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