



Digital Marketing Strategy and Implementation of the Tools in Food and Beverage Services: Case Study of Sole Proprietorship in the Bangkok and Metropolitan Region of Thailand

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Abstract

Thanks to the change of the lifestyle towards the digitalization of Thai people, digital marketing is known as one of the well-known marketing strategies that can be used to increase a firm's sales by promoting products and services through digital media and customers' responsiveness. Nevertheless, business owners must learn to adapt digitalization to achieve their business successfully. For this reason, this research aims to study (i) the knowledge of digital marketing strategy of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services, (ii) their implementation of the tools of digital marketing, (iii) the relationship between digital marketing strategy knowledge and the implementation of digital marketing tools, and (iv) the problem and barriers of implementation of the tools of digital marketing. Data were collected from a sample of 310 sole proprietors aged 18 years and above in the Food and Beverage Services located in the Bangkok and Metropolitan Regions. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten respondents in this study. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation, were employed for the analysis. The hypothesis test was conducted by using a T-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. According to the results, it was found that the sole proprietors' digital marketing strategy knowledge was regarded as high to moderate levels. In contrast, the implementation level of digital marketing tools was at low to moderate levels. The knowledge of digital marketing strategy was positively correlated with the implementation of digital marketing tools at the moderate level. The in-depth interviews revealed that the most critical barrier to food delivery application platforms is a high commission fee charged by food delivery application providers, which enormously deducts from their food and beverage sales.

Keywords: *Marketing Strategy, Digital Marketing, Tools of Digital Marketing*

1. Introduction

The Thai population aged six years and above was approximately 63.6 million in 2019, 25.3 percent of the Thai people aged six years and above were computer users, and 66.7 percent of them were internet users. During 2015-2019, computer users had decreased from 34.9 percent to 25.3 percent whereas internet users had increased from 39.3 percent to 66.7 percent (National Statistical Office, 2019). Thai people use the internet, with an average of 10 hours and 22 minutes per day, due to changes in their lifestyle towards digitalization. Thais prefer to use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pantip (a popular Thai website and discussion forum) up to 3 hours 30 minutes per day, whereas watching video streaming such as YouTube or Line TV has an average hour of use. The average usage of chat applications such as Messenger and LINE is 2 hours 35 minutes per day, online gaming is 1 hour 51 minutes per day, and reading articles or books online is 1 hour and 31 minutes a day. The top five online activities are messaging, hotel bookings, ticket reservations or purchases, payments for goods and services, and watching movies or listening to music, respectively (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2019). Several studies showed that there are opportunities to implement digital strategies for all businesses to gain revenues due to the high growth of buyers' online shopping through the internet and mobile phone applications (Marketing oops, 2019). A survey of Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) also found that the online purchase of food and beverages had increased from 26.5 percent in 2019 to 49.8 percent in 2020 (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2020). The rapid growth of consumer's use of the internet and mobile phone applications creates an opportunity for any business to generate sales through digital marketing strategies.

Various researchers have defined the terms *digital marketing* and *digital marketing strategy* differently. For some, a digital marketing strategy is a series of actions that helps businesses to use online marketing channels to achieve their goals (Strom, 2020). Digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies such as the internet, social media, mobile phones, or any other digital medium. It also covers different marketing strategies such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and e-mail marketing (Kwok, 2018). A digital marketing strategy is a set of planned actions performed online to reach specific business goals. Those actions are taken consistently and timely through the most appropriate online channels to increase revenue and improve customer relationships (Sendpulse, 2020). Cravens and Piercy (2009) defined that the marketing strategy consists of the analysis, strategy development, and implementation of activities. The activities are comprised of developing a vision about the market of interest to the organization, selecting market target strategies, setting objectives, developing, implementing, and managing the market program positioning strategies designed to meet the value requirements of the customers in each market target. Rowan (2002) also identifies that digital marketing is more than simply adding website addresses to television commercials or sending customer service text messages. Digital networks are beginning to connect consumer's computers to their televisions, phones, and game consoles. Business customers see the bottom-line profit benefits of free-flowing information between their company, suppliers, and customers.

Bang and Hell (2015) found that social media can contribute to a firm's competitive position as long as the firm has a well-established network and has sufficient platforms to utilize before the implementation. Social media can also increase brand awareness among business-to-business (B2B) companies. Khankaew (2019) discovered that digital marketing strategy in content marketing and online corporate reputation management had a positive correlation and impact on marketing performance and also on relationships between buyers and sellers. Online corporate reputation management strategy had a positive correlation and impact on brand awareness. Brand awareness and relationships between buyers and sellers had a positive correlation and impact on marketing performance. Furthermore, Patrutiu-Baltes (2016) proposed the study of inbound marketing. They indicated that the most important digital marketing strategy, the main form of digital marketing, was the inbound marketing, which represents an organic marketing form, based on the close relationship between the company and its prospects or customers, who have expressed their interest in the company's products voluntarily and who have been attracted and involved by a high quality of the content marketing.

Digital marketing tools (sometimes called internet marketing, online marketing, or electronic marketing) are tools that businesses use to develop and promote their products and services via the internet. The popular tools for online marketing consist of blog marketing, affiliate marketing, classified and webboard marketing, email marketing, social network marketing, mobile marketing, video marketing, and search engine and blog marketing (Apikulwarasit, 2017). Digital marketing tools by the strategy are organic social media, paid social media, email marketing, display retargeting, programmatic advertising, website testing, video hosting, content creation, content curation, website analytics, customer service, search engine optimization, affiliate marketing (Barnhart, 2020). Not all digital marketing tools are suitable for all types of businesses. Kongthananon and Kamthornpasinee, 2017 stated that for the food and beverage business, key factors that lead to success in sales besides taste and service are also comprised of how to create brand stories such as shop decoration, signature dishes, photo spots, and other selling points. The suitable digital marketing tools for the food and beverage business are social media marketing by using Facebook, Instagram, and also another tool as Google my business. In this research, questionnaires concerning the digital marketing tools focus on popular and well-known tools in Thailand. They are divided into three groups: social media marketing, website and search marketing, and food delivery mobile application.

Most of the research studies focus on consumer behavior and have consistent findings that consumers nowadays are very interested in and perceived information through digital media. Therefore, this research aims to study the relationship between digital marketing strategy knowledge and the implementation of digital marketing tools, which can be used to increase a firm's sales by promoting products and services via digital media and customers' responsiveness.

2. Objectives

This research aims to study as follows:

1. The knowledge of digital marketing strategy of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services,
2. The implementation of the tools of digital marketing of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services,
3. The relationship between digital marketing strategy knowledge and the implementation of digital marketing tools of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services, and
4. The problem and barriers of implementing digital marketing tools of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services.

3. Materials and Methods

This study used mixed methods; the quantitative survey method was used to collect data and test hypotheses, while qualitative in-depth interviews were used to increase the reliability of the data. There was no data from any organization for the number of sole proprietorships in food and beverage services in Thailand, so the authors used the sample size formula for the unknown population as follows:

$$n = p(1-p) \frac{(Z)^2}{e^2}$$

Where:

Z = Z value (=1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = percentage picking a choice (=0.5)

e = confidence interval (=0.0557)

So, sample size, n = 310

Bång and Hell (2015) mentioned that qualitative interviews aim to give flexibility and a deeper discussion in the subject area. Qualitative interviews also contain open questions to ask the interviewee to answer in greater detail and with their own words. It is closely connected to the descriptive research design, and it takes the interviewees' view of the topic and enables the questions how and why that are asked in this study to be answered more deeply. For this study, ten key informants were selected using a purposeful random sampling method with a small sample selection instead of large samples to increase the reliability of the data, as mentioned above. They were of the selection criteria that they could facilitate the answering of the research questions and that the characteristics of the actively chosen sole proprietorships had some sort of connection to the digital marketing strategy.

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation, were employed for the analysis. The hypothesis test was conducted by using a T-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 sections; Sections 1-4 were close-ended questions, and Section 5 was an open-ended question.

More specifically, section 1 of the questionnaire consisted of 6 questions of demographic factors such as gender, age, education, income or sale per month, business location, and type of product for sale of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services.

Section 2 consisted of 20 questions on a 3-choice scale with 1 for 'true,' 2 for 'not true,' and 3 for 'not sure.' The scoring was 1 point per correct answer and no point for incorrect or not sure answer. The highest score for each sample was 20, and the lowest score was 0. The knowledge of digital marketing strategy was divided into three levels with a 6.66 size interval (finding range from the difference between the highest and lowest scores and dividing the range by the number of knowledge levels). The high-level score was between 14-20, the moderate level score was 7-13, and the low-level score was 0-6.

Section 3 used 11 questions on a 4-point scale with 0 for 'never use' and 3 for 'most use' to measure the implementation of the digital marketing tools that were divided into three categories; (i) website/search Marketing, (ii) social media marketing, and (iii) food delivery application. Levels of the implementation of the tools were divided into four levels with a 0.75 size interval (finding range from the

difference between the highest and lowest scores and dividing the range by the number of the implementation levels). The very high-level score was 2.26-3.0, the high-level score was 1.51-2.25, the moderate level score was 0.76-1.50, and the low-level score was 0.00-0.75.

Section 4 focused on the problem and barriers to the implementation of the tools of digital marketing

by using six questions on a 3-choice scale with 1 for ‘true,’ 2 for ‘not true,’ and 3 for ‘not sure.’

Section 5 was an open-ended question.

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted in this study for a qualitative research method. These samples were chosen by the researcher using the purposeful random sampling method. The questions focused on their current use of digital marketing, the problem and barriers to the implementation of the tools of digital marketing, and their need or suggestion for the service providers and also any stakeholder such as the regulators.

There were three hypotheses of this study: (i) the sole proprietors’ knowledge of digital marketing strategy was different due to their demographic factors, (ii) the sole proprietors’ implementation of the tools of digital marketing was different due to their demographic factors, and (iii) there was a relationship between the knowledge of digital marketing strategy and the implementation of digital marketing tools of the sole proprietorship in food and beverage services. Hypotheses 1-2 were tested by using a T-test and one-way ANOVA, whereas hypothesis 3 was proved by using Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The knowledge of digital marketing strategy of sole proprietorship in food and beverage services.

The research found that 91.3% of the sole proprietor samples knew that at present, there was a rapidly growing number of food delivery businesses such as Line Man, Grab Food, and Food Panda, and the consumers had been increasingly using them. 84.8% knew that creating a brand story such as shop decoration, signature dishes, photo spots, and other selling points could increase their sales, and 78.4% knew that in addition to posting a video for promotion, they could also make money from social media such as the YouTube channel.

Overall, it was found that most of the sole proprietor samples had the knowledge of digital marketing strategy at a high level (46.5%), followed by a moderate (40.6%) and a low (12.9%). Table 1 summarizes this finding.

Table 1 The knowledge level of digital marketing strategy

Knowledge Level	number	%
High (14-20 score)	144	46.5
Moderate (7-13 score)	126	40.6
Low (0-6 score)	40	12.9
Total	310	100.0

4.2 The implementation of the digital marketing tools

Table 2 shows that most sole proprietorships had used food delivery application with a mean of 1.52, followed by social media marketing with a mean of 1.06, while the lowest was website and search marketing with a mean of 0.95.

Table 2 The implementation of the tools of digital marketing

Implementation of the tools	Mean	SD
Website and search marketing	0.95	1.11
Social media marketing	1.06	1.14
Food delivery application	1.52	1.35

Table 3 shows that most sole proprietorships had a low level of implementing the tools of digital marketing (45.8%), followed by a moderate level (21.9%), a high level (16.8%), and a very high level (15.5%).

Table 3 The level of the implementation of the tools digital marketing

Implementation Level	number	%
Very high (2.26-3.00 average score)	48	15.5
High (1.51-2.25 average score)	52	16.8
Moderate (0.76-1.50 average score)	68	21.9
Low (0.00-0.75 average score)	142	45.8
Total	310	100.0

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1 The sole proprietors' knowledge of digital marketing strategy was different due to their different demographic factors.

The result of the hypothesis testing found that there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy with Sig. equal .547, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 The difference in knowledge of digital marketing strategy in terms of gender

Gender	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	11.6111	4.41076	.363	.547
Female	12.1881	4.25485		

There was a statistically significant difference in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy between those aged 21-30 years and 51-60 years. The finding is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 The difference in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy in terms of age

Age (years old)	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair Comparison (Scheffe)
(1) 15-20	12.6667	2.16025	3.705	.003	(2) and (5)
(2) 21-30	13.3095	3.15837			
(3) 31-40	12.1509	4.26903			
(4) 41-50	11.1970	4.70424			
(5) 51-60	10.3810	5.19828			
(6) more than 60	9.8333	4.53505			

There were two pairs of statistically significant differences in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy between the upper-undergraduate degree level and the lower-undergraduate degree level and between the undergraduate degree level and the lower-undergraduate degree level, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 The difference of knowledge of digital marketing strategy in terms of education

Education	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair Comparison (Scheffe)
(1) Lower undergraduate	10.0138	4.63829	36.482	.000	(3) and (1),
(2) Undergraduate	13.5442	3.15844			(2) and (1)
(3) Upper undergraduate	15.1667	2.25571			

The testing also found a statistically significant difference in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy between the incomes or sales per month of 30,001-60,000 baht and lower than 30,000 baht. The finding is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 The difference in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy in terms of income or sales per month

Income/Sale per month (Baht)	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair comparison (Scheffe)
(1) Lower than 30,000	11.0127	4.72037	3.740	.003	(2) and (1)
(2) 30,001 – 60,000	12.9886	3.50531			
(3) 60,001 – 90,000	13.2222	4.35635			
(4) 90,001 – 120,000	12.6471	2.99877			
(5) 120,001 – 150,000	11.0000	2.12132			
(6) More than 150,000	14.0000	2.58199			

In conclusion, the result of hypothesis testing one found that three demographic factors led to statistically significant differences in the knowledge of digital marketing strategy, namely, age, education, and income/sales per month. Although there was no statistically significant difference in gender, it was found that females had more knowledge of the digital marketing strategy than males. This finding is in accordance with the study that reported the differences in communication behavior from the gender difference, in which the females want to communicate more than the males (Subphawong, 2011).

The finding also conforms to Subphawong's (2011) study that age indicates a person's ability to understand content and news, as well as to perceive things. An experience of each age group affects their thought processes and emotional control. The results of the study showed that the population aged between 21-30 years had the highest mean of knowledge, which was statistically significantly different from those of 51-60 years old.

4.3.2 The sole proprietors' implementation of the tools of digital marketing was different due to their different demographic factors.

The result of the hypothesis testing found that there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in the implementation of the digital marketing tools with Sig. equal .944, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 The difference in the implementation of the digital marketing tools in terms of gender

Gender	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	1.0816	.89573	.005	.944
Female	1.0522	.90404		

There were two pairs of significant differences in the implementation of the tools of digital marketing. The first pair is the difference between the ages of 21-30 years and 41-50 years. The second is the difference between the ages of 21-30 years and 51-60 years. The finding is shown in Table 9.

Table 9 The difference in the implementation of the tools of digital marketing in terms of age

Age (years old)	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair Comparison (Scheffe)
(1) 15-20	1.0909	1.32241	7.258	.000	(2) and (4), (2) and (5)
(2) 21-30	1.4372	.92208			
(3) 31-40	1.1209	.78200			
(4) 41-50	.7066	.77053			
(5) 51-60	.8377	.99110			
(6) more than 60	.2424	.47296			

The testing also found two pairs of statistically significant differences in the implementation of digital marketing tools between the upper-undergraduate degree level and the lower-undergraduate degree level and between the undergraduate degree level and the lower-undergraduate degree level, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10 The difference in the implementation of the digital marketing tools in terms of education

Education	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair Comparison (Scheffe)
(1) Lower undergraduate	10.0138	4.63829	36.482	.000	(3) and (1),
(2) Undergraduate	13.5442	3.15844			(2) and (1)
(3) Upper undergraduate	15.1667	2.25571			

The testing also found three pairs of statistically significant differences in the implementation of digital marketing tools between different incomes or sales per month. The first pair was 30,001-60,000 baht and lower than 30,000 baht, the second was 60,001-90,000 baht and lower than 30,000 baht, and the third was 90,001-120,000 baht and lower than 30,000 baht. The finding is shown in Table 11.

Table 11 The difference in the implementation of the digital marketing tools in terms of income or sales per month

Income/Sale per month (Baht)	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	Pair comparison (Scheffe)
(1) Lower than 30,000	.8089	.84300	6.900	.000	(2) and (1),
(2) 30,001 – 60,000	1.2521	.85333			(3) and (1),
(3) 60,001 – 90,000	1.4419	.95499			(4) and (1)
(4) 90,001 – 120,000	1.5829	.98494			
(5) 120,001 – 150,000	.5818	.69413			
(6) More than 150,000	1.4935	.42916			

The finding to the second hypothesis found that the three demographic factors; age, education, and income/sale per month, also led to a statistically significant difference in the implementation of the digital marketing tools. Almost 50% of the sole proprietorship used the tools of digital marketing at a low level, whereas 21.9% were at a moderate level.

There was a study that the digital marketing strategies for the ability to create content, organization reputation management, and brand awareness had a positive correlation and impact the marketing performance (Khankaew, 2019), which corresponds to our finding that although the use of the tools of digital marketing in average was at low to moderate levels, the sole proprietorships still mostly used social media marketing through Facebook and food delivery applications to promote their sales.

4.3.3 There was a relationship between the knowledge of the digital marketing strategy and the implementation of the digital marketing tools of the sole proprietorship in food and beverage services.

The testing showed that Pearson Correlation Coefficient was a positive number and equal to .441, which indicated a direct and moderate-level relationship between the knowledge of the digital marketing strategy and the implementation of the digital marketing tools. The result is shown in Table 12.

Table 12 The relationship between the knowledge of the digital marketing strategy and the implementation of the digital marketing tools

		Correlations	
		Knowledge	Implementation
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	.441**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	310	310

Correlations			
		Knowledge	Implementation
Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.441**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	310	310

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The finding to the third hypothesis revealed that there was a positive relationship between the knowledge and the implementation of the digital marketing tools. Otherwise, the result showed a moderate level of the relationship, which indicated that other factors were affecting the decision to use the tools. Factors found in the study on the issue of the problem and barriers of implementation of the tools of digital marketing are described in the next topic.

4.4 The problem and barriers of implementation of the tools of digital marketing.

The study found that more than 50 percent of the samples mentioned that the problems and obstacles in implementing the digital marketing tools were i) having a budget constraint and concerning large investments, ii) desiring to use the digital tools but not knowing how to start them, and iii) not having enough time to study digital marketing tools and not receiving any help from anyone. However, they still desired to use digital marketing tools.

These data were supported by the results of the in-depth interviews, which indicated that the most anxiety in using the tools of digital marketing was the high cost of investment and high commission fee charged by the food delivery application providers.

4.5 The analysis from In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews revealed that i) more than 50 percent of the samples joined the food delivery application services and most of them used more than one service provider, such as Food Panda, Line Man, and Grab food, ii) the satisfaction towards the food delivery application services was at a moderate level due to an increase in sales they had to trade off with the less per unit profit, and iii) the most critical barrier to food delivery application platforms is a high commission fee charged by food delivery application providers, which enormously deducts from their food and beverage sales.

All of the sole proprietorship in food and beverage services had experienced at least one of the tools of social media technology such as using Facebook or Instagram for sharing photos and posting information for the customers, and joining the food delivery application for sale.

This research was conducted during the COVID-19 situation, which was in an unusual condition. Most people kept themselves in their homes and ordered food to be delivered more than usual. Most of the sole proprietors in food and beverage services were contacted directly by a salesman of the food delivery application providers to offer and introduce their services. This situation led to a rapid increase in the food delivery service providers, more competition to get more market shares, and expansion of service areas to other provinces in Thailand.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that the sole proprietorship in food and beverage services had knowledge of the digital marketing strategy at moderate to high levels, while the implementation of the digital marketing tools was at low to moderate levels. The relationship between the knowledge of digital marketing strategy and the implementation of the digital marketing tools was positive at a moderate level. Problems and barriers to the implementation of the digital marketing tools were a budget constraint and large investment concerns. Besides, the sole proprietors did not know how to start, did not have enough time to study digital marketing tools, and did not receive any help from anyone while they still desired to use the digital marketing tools. The sole proprietorship, who used the tools, mainly used social media marketing through Facebook and Food delivery applications to promote their sales. The most critical barrier to food delivery application platforms is a high commission fee charged by food delivery application providers, which enormously deducts from their food and beverage sales.

Although the sole proprietorship in food and beverage services had knowledge of the digital marketing strategy at the moderate to high levels, they still need more specific skills to gain more advantages, such as building a brand on social media. Social media is one of the good ways to build a strong brand identity or reputation and get in touch with current and potential customers. The research findings may be productive for the sole proprietorship and any other businesses if there is supervision from the government by supporting and contributing comprehensive technology access with higher efficiency and lower cost. The development of digital networks has created both new opportunities and challenges for marketers. The marketers can personalize their messages like never before, and customers have the option of allowing the marketers to communicate with them or not. The customers can choose to support corporates that aim to respond to society, reduce the cost of living, and return a profit to society. For a good example, the development of a food delivery application named 'Robinhood' by Siam Commercial Bank or SCB Group offers food delivery services without charging any fee from the sellers; thus the customers only pay for their actual food and delivery (Siam Commercial Bank, 2019).

Finally, this research studied the knowledge of digital marketing strategy in general. Future research can be developed by exploring an in-depth study of digital marketing strategies such as content marketing, branding, each one of four (or seven) of the marketing mix throughout social media technology.

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