


Overcoming Marketing Communication Challenges in Startup Companies

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Marketing Communication, Startup, Social Media, Marketing Strategy, Brand Awareness.</p>	<p>Startups are companies that operate in a dynamic environment with unique challenges, including in marketing communications. This study aims to identify and analyze the marketing communication challenges faced by startup companies, and to offer effective strategies to overcome them. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection through in-depth interviews, case studies, and literature analysis. The results of the study indicate that startup companies face a number of challenges in implementing effective marketing communications, including budget constraints, difficulties in building brand awareness, and challenges in conveying the unique value of the product to the audience. However, startups can overcome these challenges by utilizing more cost-effective digital platforms, optimizing the use of data to assess marketing results, and maintaining flexibility in adapting to rapid market changes. Success in marketing communications also depends on the startup's ability to design creative and responsive campaigns to market needs, which in turn can support their growth and competitiveness in a competitive market.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Startup businesses in the global era have become one of the driving forces of innovation and economic growth. With the development of technology and digital connectivity, startups have unlimited access to the global market via the internet (Sholikhah, 2021). This allows them to reach consumers in various parts of the world quickly and efficiently. Startups can take advantage of digital platforms such as e-commerce, social media, and technology-based applications to expand their operational and marketing reach. The potential for rapid growth is also a major attraction for startups, supported by investment from venture capital, angel investors, and crowdfunding platforms which are now more easily accessible globally (Mahfudz & Hasniansyah, 2023). However, access to the global market is also accompanied by challenges, such as fierce competition and the need for continuous innovation in order to compete with startups and other large companies (Krisna, 2020).

In addition, startups in the global era must be able to build strong collaborations and networks to expand their business opportunities. Strategic partnerships, both locally and internationally, can help startups access greater resources, strengthen their market position,

and accelerate innovation (Miasa et al., 2023). However, globalization also brings complexity in terms of compliance with regulations and policies in different countries, such as taxation rules, data protection, and intellectual property rights. To remain relevant and competitive, startups must be able to utilize the latest technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things, in developing their products and services (Fernando, 2018). Adaptability is an important key for startups to face the ever-changing dynamics of the global market, ensuring the sustainability of their business in the long term.

Startups often face various obstacles, especially in terms of marketing, which is a major challenge for the sustainability and growth of their business. With limited resources, both in terms of budget and manpower, many startups have difficulty reaching their target audience widely and effectively (Tead, 2023). In addition, the lack of brand awareness amidst tight market competition makes startups have to work harder to build consumer trust. In the digital era, these obstacles are increasingly complex with the demand to utilize modern marketing technologies, such as social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and data analytics, which require special skills (Siadari et al., 2024). Startups also often have difficulty conveying the unique value of their products or services to consumers, which can hinder the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. Therefore, startups must find marketing strategies that are innovative, efficient, and able to adapt to changing market needs (Iriani et al., 2022).

Marketing communication plays a vital role in supporting the success of a business, especially in building brand awareness, increasing customer loyalty, and creating strong relationships with the market (Kurnianti, 2017). Through the right communication strategy, start-up companies can effectively introduce brand identity, values, and product or service advantages to the audience. Strong brand awareness allows consumers to better recognize and remember the brand, thus creating a competitive advantage in a crowded market (Octoriansyah, 2022). In addition, consistent and relevant marketing communication can strengthen the emotional connection between customers and brands, which ultimately increases customer loyalty. With this loyalty, customers tend to make repeat purchases and recommend the brand to others, which is the basis for long-term business growth. Marketing communications also serve as a bridge to understand market needs and preferences, so that companies can continue to innovate and offer relevant solutions (Nosita, 2020).

However, startups often struggle to differentiate themselves from competitors in an increasingly crowded market. In addition, the development of digital technology has changed the way consumers interact with brands, so startups need to adapt quickly to take advantage of opportunities on digital platforms, such as social media, content marketing, and data-driven strategies (Ananda et al., 2023). Another challenge is to effectively convey the unique value proposition of their products or services to consumers. In many cases, the message that startups want to convey is often not well understood by the audience, which can reduce the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. On the other hand, great opportunities arise with digital technology, where startups can reach a wider audience at a lower cost than traditional methods (Rachmad et al., 2024).

This study aims to identify marketing communication challenges faced by startup companies and explore innovative strategies that can be applied to overcome them. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study will provide in-depth insights into how startups can leverage marketing communications to strengthen their position in the market and achieve long-term success. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for startup entrepreneurs, academics, and marketing practitioners in developing more effective and adaptive communication strategies.

METHOD

Qualitative research methods with a descriptive approach are an appropriate approach to exploring complex phenomena, such as understanding challenges and strategies in overcoming certain issues. For example, in the context of a study entitled "Overcoming Marketing Communication Challenges in Startup Companies," this method provides an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of marketing communication within startups. According to Sugiyono (2016), qualitative research is often referred to as a naturalistic method because it examines phenomena in a natural context without significant intervention from researchers. This is very relevant to the need to explore the real challenges faced by startups in building brand awareness, engaging audiences, and adapting to the rapidly evolving technological landscape. By using methods such as in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, researchers can gain insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of startup founders, marketing professionals, and other stakeholders.

The descriptive approach focuses on providing a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomena studied, rather than generalizing findings or making predictions (Yulianah, 2022). In the case of marketing communications challenges, this means uncovering the unique barriers, strategies, and innovations that startups use to differentiate themselves in a competitive market. The data collected, whether from interviews, case studies, or visual materials, can be analyzed interpretively to capture the nuances and complexities of the startup environment. This approach is valuable because it allows researchers to identify context-specific solutions and strategies that may not be apparent through more structured quantitative methods. Ultimately, this qualitative descriptive approach allows for a thorough exploration of how startups address marketing communications challenges, providing insights that are both practical and theoretically significant.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In an increasingly crowded tech industry, having a million-dollar idea is just the first step in a long and challenging journey. To turn that idea into a successful business, it takes more than just innovation—it takes hard work, a well-thought-out strategy, and a high level of adaptability. Although startups often start with great potential, reality shows that only a few are able to survive and achieve long-term success (Ismail & Pranadani, 2023). According to the Harvard Business Review, more than two-thirds of startups never provide positive returns to their investors, which shows how difficult it is to create a sustainable business model amidst fierce competition.

Effective marketing communications are needed to help startup companies deal with the various problems they face in a competitive market. Proper marketing communications not only serve to introduce products or services to the audience, but also to build brand awareness and create trust among consumers. By using a strategic and innovative approach, startups can convey their product's unique value proposition clearly and convincingly to the target market. In today's digital era, marketing communications must also be able to utilize various platforms, such as social media, content marketing, and data-based technology to reach a wider audience efficiently. A well -designed strategy can help startups create closer relationships with customers, understand their needs, and provide relevant solutions. Without effective marketing communications, startups risk losing opportunities to grow and compete, so it is important for them to continue to innovate in conveying messages to the market creatively and adaptively.

However, implementing effective marketing communications in start-up companies is not easy. There are a number of challenges faced. The author has already covered several of these challenges.

1. Limited Budget

Limited budget is one of the main challenges faced by startups in implementing effective marketing communications. Most startups have to prioritize their spending on operations and product development, so there is not much money available for marketing activities. In this case, they must be smart in choosing a marketing strategy that can provide maximum impact with minimal cost. Typically, startups should take advantage of more affordable marketing channels, such as social media, content marketing, or referral-based marketing methods that don't require a large budget. However, budget constraints can limit their marketing reach and impact, especially when compared to larger companies that have more resources.

On the other hand , limited budgets also require startups to be more creative in designing marketing campaigns that attract the attention of the audience. They often cannot use paid advertising or large campaigns to introduce their products. Therefore, it is important for startups to leverage the power of storytelling, collaboration with small influencers, or viral marketing programs to increase brand awareness at a relatively low cost. Despite these budget challenges, with proper planning and a smart approach, startups can still execute effective marketing communications and achieve their goals despite financial constraints.

2. Building Brand Awareness

Building brand awareness is a big challenge for startups, especially since they have to compete with established companies that have stronger market recognition. As new players, startups must find ways to attract the attention of consumers who may not be familiar with the products or services they offer. The tight competition requires startups to have a more creative and innovative approach in introducing their brands, in order to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract the interest of the target audience. Without sufficient brand awareness, even the best quality products can struggle to thrive in a highly competitive market.

For this reason, startups need to use various marketing strategies that can effectively increase their brand visibility. One of the most common ways is to utilize social media and digital marketing, which allows startups to reach a wider audience at a lower cost compared to traditional marketing methods. However, just having a presence on social media is not enough; startups also need to be consistent in conveying a clear message and building strong relationships with consumers. The right approach, such as creating relevant and engaging content and focusing on positive customer experiences, can help startups build strong brand awareness despite the challenges of stiff competition.

3. Conveying Unique Value (Unique Value Proposition)

Communicating a unique value proposition (UVP) is a major challenge for many startups, especially in markets that are saturated with similar options. Startups often have an innovation or solution that sets them apart, but they often struggle to articulate that value clearly and effectively to their target audience. Many startups sometimes focus too much on the features of their product or service, but not enough on the tangible benefits to consumers. Without proper communication, audiences may not clearly understand how the startup's product or service can meet their needs or solve their problems better than existing solutions on the market.

Additionally, startups need to be mindful of how they communicate their message to diverse audiences with varying preferences. Communicating unique value that is too complex or irrelevant to real consumer problems can diminish the brand's appeal. Therefore, it is very important for startups to identify and understand the audience's needs in depth and then craft messages that go straight to the heart of their problems. Therefore, startups need to create a more focused and simple communication strategy, and use stories or testimonials that help the audience feel and understand the benefits of the product or service. In this way, startups can build a better understanding of their UVP, which will ultimately strengthen the brand's appeal in the market.

4. Measuring ROI

Measuring Return on Investment (ROI) from digital marketing campaigns is a major challenge for many startups, especially because of the many metrics to consider and the varying ways in which results can be measured. In digital marketing, ROI can be measured beyond simple calculations such as calculating return on advertising costs. There are various elements that influence the success of a campaign, such as the number of clicks, conversions, social media interactions, customer retention rates, and increased brand awareness. Each of these metrics provides a different picture of a campaign's effectiveness, and it's often difficult to determine which metrics are most relevant to a startup's business goals.

Additionally, differences in how results are measured can also create their own confusion. For example, some startups may be more focused on short-term gains, such as immediate sales, while others may be more interested in long-term impacts such as customer loyalty and brand recognition. This creates challenges in aligning marketing objectives with the metrics used to measure results. To address this, startups need to have a more holistic and structured approach to evaluating ROI, including the use of analytics tools that can provide more accurate and in-depth data, and align metrics with their

strategic business goals. This way, they can get a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the campaign and can make more informed decisions for the next campaign .

5. Communication crisis

Crisis communication is one of the major challenges faced by startups, especially since the company's reputation and integrity depend heavily on public perception and the wider audience. Crises can come in many forms, from poor product or service issues to internal scandals or mistakes in marketing campaigns. Without proper preparation, an inappropriate or slow reaction to a crisis can worsen the situation and permanently damage the company's image. Therefore, it is important for startups to have a clear and effective crisis communication plan that can be implemented immediately when a crisis occurs. This plan should include who will be the company spokesperson, how to communicate with the media and customers, and what steps need to be taken to remedy the situation.

In addition, crisis communication also requires the ability to adapt quickly to dynamically changing situations. Startups often have limited resources, so they may not be able to immediately mobilize a large team to handle a crisis. However, with the right approach, such as relying on technology for fast and effective communication, and having a strategy to approach the audience transparently, companies can ease tensions and restore consumer trust. Transparent and honest communication, even in difficult situations, can demonstrate a company's commitment to correcting mistakes and show that they care about the customer experience and satisfaction. A good response to a crisis can turn challenges into opportunities to strengthen relationships with customers and increase their loyalty.

6. Speed of Market Change

The speed of market change is a big challenge for startups, because the very dynamic and rapidly changing business environment demands that they always adapt to stay relevant in the eyes of consumers. Changing trends, new technologies, and rapidly evolving consumer preferences influence how startups must design and adapt their marketing communications strategies. If startups are not responsive enough to these changes, they can quickly lose their competitive edge and lose their target audience. For example, if a startup fails to keep up with the latest marketing technologies such as automation, data-driven marketing, or artificial intelligence, they could fall far behind more adaptive competitors.

To face these challenges, startups need to have the ability to continuously monitor market trends, gather insights from the audience, and identify new opportunities to exploit. With the right information, startups can design flexible communication strategies that can adapt to changing market needs. A data-focused marketing approach, experimentation with faster campaigns, and the ability to innovate using new and popular communication platforms are critical to success. The speed of market change requires startups to not only be reactive, but also proactive in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies that can answer the challenges of the ever-changing market.

Furthermore, to overcome marketing communication challenges in startups, several strategic efforts can be made:

1. Increase Marketing Budget with Efficient Resources

While startups often face budget constraints, they can optimize their use of resources by leveraging more affordable digital platforms. Using social media, content marketing, and email-based marketing can reduce marketing costs while increasing audience reach. Additionally, startups can prioritize investments in measurable campaigns that have immediate results that can be analyzed to increase return on investment (ROI).

2. Creative and Targeted Marketing Strategies to Build Brand Awareness

To build brand awareness, startups must focus on brand differentiation and create clear values that are in line with consumer needs. One effort that can be made is to utilize authentic stories and marketing approaches based on values that appeal to the target audience. Creative marketing campaigns and collaborations with relevant influencers or partners can introduce the brand effectively. Additionally, using multiple social media platforms and engaging content can help introduce your brand and increase awareness in the market.

3. Clear and Compelling Communication of Unique Value

Startups need to clearly formulate their Unique Value Proposition (UVP) and ensure that the message is delivered in a simple and easy-to-understand way for the audience. Delivering the UVP can be done by highlighting real benefits that can be felt by consumers through testimonials or case studies that show the positive impact of the product or service. The use of visual content, videos, and product demos can also clarify the unique value a startup offers, so that the audience can easily identify the startup's competitive advantages.

4. Measuring and Optimizing ROI Effectively

To overcome the challenges of measuring ROI, startups can use sophisticated analytics tools to monitor and evaluate various marketing metrics in real-time. Selecting the right metrics according to the campaign objectives is very important. For example, if the goal of a campaign is to increase brand awareness, a startup can monitor metrics such as impressions, engagement, and share of voice. With a deeper understanding of desired outcomes, startups can more easily assess whether their marketing investments are delivering the results they expect and continually optimize their strategies.

5. Developing a Clear Crisis Communication Plan

Startups need to prepare a comprehensive crisis communications plan, including the appointment of a trained communications team and a quick response to emerging issues. In the face of a crisis, transparency and a quick response are essential to maintaining consumer trust. Additionally, having open communication channels that allow dialogue with the audience, such as through social media or customer service, can speed up reputation recovery and provide necessary clarification.

6. Adapting Quickly to the Speed of Market Change

To stay relevant in a fast-changing market, startups must have flexibility in their marketing strategies. They can conduct continuous market research and use the collected data to design more personalized and data-driven campaigns. Conducting A/B tests, experimenting with different marketing campaigns, and quickly analyzing the results can help startups adapt their strategies to new market trends. In addition, maintaining innovation in communications and marketing and using the latest technology to increase efficiency are important steps to stay competitive.

CONCLUSION

Effective marketing communications plays a critical role in the success of startups, which must navigate a variety of challenges, including limited budgets, building brand awareness, and communicating the product's unique value in a clear and compelling way. Despite limited resources, startups can overcome these obstacles by leveraging more affordable digital platforms and developing creative, data-driven marketing campaigns. This approach allows startups to continue to reach a wider audience, increase brand awareness, and communicate their competitive advantages in a more efficient manner. Additionally, startups need to be prepared for additional challenges, such as accurately measuring ROI and managing a communications crisis that could threaten their reputation. With a flexible strategy, startups can adapt their approach to rapid market changes and leverage the latest technologies to improve their marketing efficiency. In the face of ever-changing market dynamics, startups that can develop a solid communication plan, transparency, and quick response to change will have a greater chance of growing and succeeding in the long run.

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