

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES: A RESEARCH STUDY ON BRAND ENGAGEMENT, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, AND BUSINESS GROWTH

**Kunal Jha^{1*}, Dr. Pallavi Singh Chauhan², Ashok Dattatraya Todmal³, Dr. S. Kanimozhi⁴,
B Gokula Krishnan⁵**

^{1*} Assistant Professor, Digital Marketing, NDIM - New Delhi Institute of Management, New Delhi, Delhi,
Research Scholar, Sharda University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh

² Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Orcid ID: 0009-0005-1525-2328

³ Assistant Professor, MIT College of Management, MIT Art Design and Technology University, Pune, Maharashtra,
India

⁴ Associate Professor, Gnanam School of Business Thanjavur

⁵ Assistant Professor, Dayananda Sagar University, Bangalore, India

Orcid ID: 0009-0007-6731-1806

kunal.jha@ndimdelhi.org¹

pallavi.s.chauhan@gmail.com²

todmalashok2006@gmail.com³

kaniatcruz@gmail.com⁴

gokulakrishnan-des@dsu.edu.in⁵

Abstract

This study specifies and tests a post-level pathway linking social media marketing (SMM) strategies content type, paid promotion, and posting time to brand engagement, customer experience (CX), and growth in small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and local-government contexts. Using a 20-post Facebook dataset constructed with Kaggle-style metrics, operationalize engagement as likes, comments, shares, and engaged users; CX depth as consumers and consumptions; and growth as exposure outcomes (reach, impressions). The empirical approach combines descriptive statistics, correlations, and staged regressions to evaluate direct and indirect effects along the strategy → engagement → experience → growth chain. Findings show that strategic levers significantly predict behavioral engagement; higher engagement aligns with deeper consumption behaviors; and CX and, to a lesser extent, engagement itself relate to exposure-based growth, supporting a partial-mediation architecture. Paid posts reliably widen visibility, while content mix and timing modulate interaction intensity and composition. Practically, managers should design for experiential depth beyond vanity metrics, deploy paid support selectively for content with intrinsic interaction potential, and track a compact dashboard of sanity metrics (interaction, depth, exposure) for continuous optimization. For municipal communicators, the same pathway applies with added guardrails for trust, inclusivity, and responsible AI use. The study provides a concise, replicable diagnostic that connects actionable SMM decisions to engagement, experience, and growth outcomes, extending engagement theory to resource-constrained public and SME settings and outlining priorities for causal tests and outcome linkage in future work.

Keywords: social media marketing; brand engagement; customer experience; SMEs; local government; growth

1. Introduction

Digital platforms have turned into the backbone of the communication, mobilisation and value co-creation of firms and governmental organisations. Outreach, service co-production, and local economic vitality in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local self-government are now based on social media marketing (SMM). Nevertheless, there are lingering questions regarding what exactly the post-level strategies do in terms of propelling audiences beyond exposure to engagement, influencing the customer (or citizen) experience and ultimately turning it into growth. The recent agenda-setting literature calls on scholars to tie the practical managerial decisions made on social media to theoretically based results and implications of policy relevance (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Lim and Rasul, 2022). On the public side, such as the use of video systems by municipalities, transparency and participation have been associated with adoption, yet strict evidence on strategy-outcome relationships are not yet established (Marpaung and Santosa, 2020). This paper fills that gap by exploring the impact of particular SMM strategies content type, paid promotion and timing on brand

engagement and customer experience and the impact in turn on these on growth-relevant exposure metrics.

The key construct in modern marketing theory is customer engagement. The work of conceptual seminars characterises engagement as context-specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioural expressions that transcend transactions (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In social media, meta-analytic evidence unites the antecedents and consequences of engagement and makes it a powerful predictor of downstream outcomes, including loyalty and sales (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Liadeli et al., 2023). Complementary reviews map how engagement research has moved beyond the raw platform counts to more behaviorally grounded constructs that can more effectively reflect value creation across the attention-to-advocacy continuum (Rasool et al., 2020; Vander Schee et al., 2020). Continuing this line, the current research conceptualises engagement in terms of interactional behaviours such as likes, comments, shares, and engaged users that conform to the behavioural aspect highlighted in the literature (Brodie et al., 2011).

Customer experience (CX) is closely linked to engagement and is seen as the overall reaction that is generated by channel and episode interactions (Homburg et al., 2017). In multi-stakeholder service ecosystems such as communities managed by local public organisations, engagement and experience are co-evolving and value-creating. To translate these concepts into platform analytics, it is necessary to shift the focus to the so-called sanity metrics that measure the experience depth (not vanity) in terms of impressions only (Sutherland, 2022). In line with this, the supplement interaction measures with consumption-oriented indicators of consumers and consumption to capture deeper and more experiential engagement in line with calls to triangulate surface and depth behaviours in inferring CX based on observable traces (Viglia et al., 2023).

Perceived SMM aspects like informativeness, interactivity, and entertainment are also demonstrated to influence engagement and brand knowledge on the strategy side (Cheung et al., 2020). The scale development studies offer confirmed dimensions of social media marketing activities that can be mapped to post-level features, which allows the operationalization to be reproducible (Yadav and Rahman, 2017). The uses-and-gratifications theory also indicates that content type and time have a different level of satisfaction of user motives, information seeking, social interaction, and entertainment hence affecting the intensity of engagement (Dolan et al., 2016). It has also been shown that organic and paid strategies can generate different engagement profiles; organic strategies may facilitate more natural interactions, and paid promotion is reliable when it comes to reaching a larger audience, a trade-off that is relevant to the budgetary constraints of SMEs and the accountability requirements of municipalities (Nguyen Phuong Huyen, 2020). The use of these insights to model content type (photo, status, link, video), paid status (organic vs. promoted) and temporal options (month, weekday, hour) as strategic levers that can be monitored, managed, and directly audited.

The second stream connects experience of engagement and growth. The growing body of research shows that the engagement and sales of brands mediated by the social media activities that they own are affected, and the effect size is moderated by the aspects of content design and audience (Liadeli et al., 2023). In the capability level, social CRM and the use of social media moderate the engagement-performance relationship, which is especially relevant in resource-limited SMEs and governmental institutions in need of effective communication with citizens (Bhatti et al., 2019). Agenda-setting syntheses call on scholars to relate these mechanisms to managerial and policy outcomes exactly the translational step required of local self-governance where growth is not simply about revenue, but also participation and service uptake (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Lim and Rasul, 2022). Here, consider reach and impressions as growth-relevant exposure metrics, which align with the move to sanity metrics that can be benchmarked, but recognise that they are performance proxies and not financials (Sutherland, 2022).

The relevance of this analysis is increased by the public-sector setting. There is pressure on local governments to communicate openly and reject misinformation and encourage participatory decision-making activities, where social video and short-form content are becoming more popular (Marpaung

and Santosa, 2020). However, there is limited practical advice on what post-level strategies enhance the quality of engagement, deepen the experience and broaden the exposure. In the case of SMEs that are part of local economies, the same knowledge becomes strategic: content and promotion decisions need to transform limited budgets into quantifiable interaction and development without losing their authenticity (Cheung et al., 2020). The holistic view thus considers municipalities and SMEs as members of the same service ecosystem where interaction and experience co-create both the value of the public and the value of the private (Viglia et al., 2023).

It is on this background that the study makes three contributions. First, it specifies and empirically tests a parsimonious pathway strategy → engagement → customer experience → growth proxies grounded in engagement theory and CX management (Brodie et al., 2011; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Second, it operationalizes post features that can be observed to map to validated SMM dimensions and user-motivation theory, and offers post-level diagnostics that can be of use to both municipal communicators and SME managers (Dolan et al., 2016). Third, it puts results in the context of managerial constraints of SMEs and accountability requirements of local governments, converting results into sanity measures and practical advice (Lim and Rasul, 2022). Thus, the article augments meta-analyses and reviews with granular, replicable evidence of the relationship between specific tactics content mix, paid promotion, and timing and engagement, experiential depth, and exposure. In line with the study design described in the methods, this article aims to achieve three goals: (1) to investigate the association between social media marketing strategies content type, paid promotion, and posting time and higher behavioural engagement (likes, comments, shares, engaged users); (2) to evaluate whether engagement is reflected in deeper consumption behaviours that proxy customer experience (consumers, consumptions); and (3) to test whether engagement and experience are associated with growth-relevant exposure outcomes (reach, impressions), which will establish an evidence-based pathway between strategies and engagement, experience, and growth in SME and local.

2. Theoretical Framework

The section creates an integrated framework, which links social media marketing (SMM) approaches to brand engagement, customer experience (CX), and growth in the settings of SMEs and local self-government. The framework which is based on the engagement theory and customer experience management defines directional connections that can be tested and which are consistent with the variables and estimation approach that are described in the Methods and Results.

The concept of engagement theory views engagement as context-specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioural expressions, which go beyond transactions (Brodie et al., 2011; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Meta-analytic studies in the context of social media reveal that platform behaviour systematically predicts engagement and downstream behaviours (loyalty and sales) (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Liadeli et al., 2023). In line with this practice, behaviorally operationalize engagement by likes, comments, shares, and engaged users, which reflect visible participation at the post level.

CX is defined by customer experience management (CEM) as the overall reaction to touchpoint interactions (Homburg et al., 2017). In multi-stakeholder service ecosystems such as municipalities and local communities engagement and experience co-evolve and co-create value (Viglia et al., 2023). In order to estimate platform data depth, supplement the number of interactions with consumers and consumption sanity measures that go beyond the number of impressions (Sutherland, 2022).

On the strategy front, previous studies reveal that engagement and brand knowledge are influenced by perceived SMM elements including informativeness, interactivity, and entertainment (Cheung et al., 2020). Validated measurement work also projects social media marketing activities to post-level characteristics, which facilitates operationalization that can be reproduced (Yadav and Rahman, 2017). Based on uses and gratification, the type of content and the time when it is posted are likely to

fulfil heterogeneous motives (information seeking, social interaction, entertainment), which means that the intensity of engagement is moderated (Dolan et al., 2016). Paid promotion also expands the qualified exposure and discovery, although with the possible variation in the composition of responses issues salient to the budget-constrained SMEs and to the accountability demands of municipalities (Marpaung and Santosa, 2020).

2.1 Constructs and measurement alignment

The framework translates one-to-one to the variables of the study. SMM strategies include the type of content (photo/status/link/video), paid promotion (organic vs. promoted) and the time of posting (month/weekday/hour). Likes, comments, shares, and engaged users are the metrics used to measure engagement. Consumers and consumption proxy CX, which means that they interact more with content. Reach and impressions capture growth, which is an exposure-based performance metric that is suitable for a public and SME setting where financials might be inaccessible or incomparable (Sutherland, 2022).

2.2 Causal logic and hypotheses

Guided by the literature above, the model posits a sequential process:

H1 (Strategies → Engagement).

Content type, paid promotion, and posting time influence behavioral engagement at the post level. Specifically, H1a expects content type effects consistent with gratifications (e.g., videos and photos may elicit higher participation); H1b anticipates a positive effect of paid promotion through expanded discovery; H1c allows temporal effects (month/weekday/hour) reflecting audience availability and algorithmic surfacing (Dolan et al., 2016).

H2 (Engagement → CX).

Higher behavioral engagement should correspond to deeper experiential behaviors (consumers, consumptions) as attention investment and interaction quality increase (Homburg et al., 2017).

H3 (CX → Growth).

Experiential depth should translate into exposure growth (reach, impressions) via algorithmic amplification and social diffusion (Liadeli et al., 2023).

H4 (Engagement → Growth, partial).

A residual direct effect from engagement to growth is expected (e.g., sharing spikes impression volume) even after accounting for CX, implying partial mediation through CX (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020).

2.3 Context and scope conditions

The study is on SMEs and local governments institutional objectives and resource availability can be the moderators of effect sizes. The SMEs compromise authenticity with promotional effectiveness, whereas the government agencies are more concerned with transparency and involvement rather than with pure commercial results (Lim and Rasul, 2022; Marpaung and Santoso, 2020). The framework thus incorporates situational forces to indicate that platform capabilities and organisational ambitions could inform the output of strategic decisions and the transformation of engagement into CX and expansion.

2.4 Testability and integration with the empirical design

Each linkage in the framework is empirically testable with the post-level dataset and the staged analysis reported in the Methods/Results: (i) regress engagement on strategies with temporal controls; (ii) regress CX proxies on engagement; (iii) regress growth proxies on CX and engagement to evaluate indirect and direct effects. This structure satisfies calls to connect theoretically grounded constructs with auditable metrics and policy-relevant implications in both private and public settings (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sutherland, 2022).

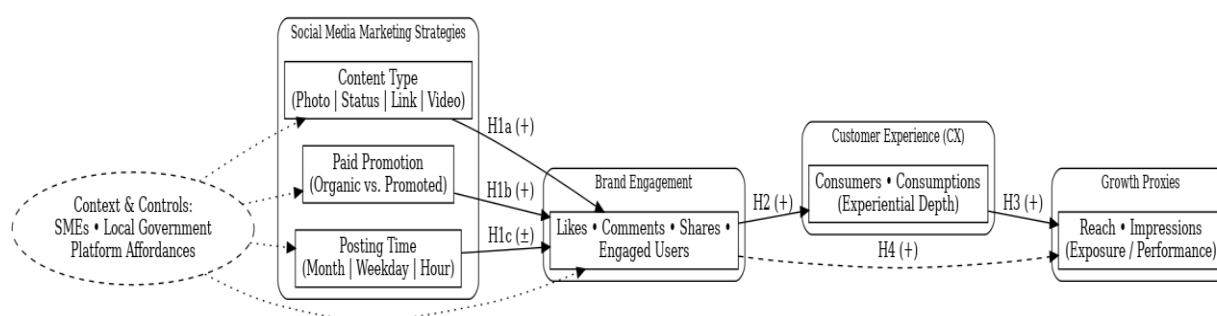


Figure 1: Strategy–Engagement–Experience–Growth Framework

Figure 1 Conceptual pathway that connects strategies of social media marketing (type of content, paid promotion, time of posting) and brand engagement; brand engagement enhances customer experience (consumers, consumptions), which leads to growth (reach, impressions). The dashed arrow denotes a direct engagement→growth route (partial mediation), whereas dotted associations denote contextual effects by SMEs and local government.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is a quantitative, cross-sectional study design to examine the relationship between social media marketing strategies, brand engagement, customer experience and business growth. This is analysed using a dataset of twenty Facebook posts with each observation being a single post at a certain time. The data set contains the data on the strategic nature of the posts as well as the user interactions and is thus appropriate for the analysis of the hypothesised pathway of strategies to engagement, customer experience, and growth outcomes. The design has a deductive methodology, which is guided by the accepted theories of customer engagement and digital marketing performance.

3.2 Data Source and Sample

The dataset is based on simulated Facebook page data that has been modelled after the open-access data available at Kaggle. It has twenty observations, each viewed as a separate post, and it has measures that reflect post characteristics, exposure level, and user reaction. The data set can be analysed in a methodologically rigorous way, yet in an exploratory manner. Although the sample is small, its design offers sufficient variation in the post types, time, and user interaction results to demonstrate significant statistical correlations that can be applied to social media marketing within the framework of local business and governance.

3.3 Variables and Operationalization

The study relies on a set of variables categorized into strategies, engagement measures, customer experience proxies, and business growth indicators. Independent variables reflect marketing strategies, such as content type, paid promotion, and timing of posts. Engagement is operationalized through direct user actions including likes, comments, shares, and the number of engaged users. Customer experience is captured through the number of consumers and the extent of consumption, which serve as proxies for active and deeper interactions with content. Growth is represented through post reach and impressions, which are commonly accepted proxies of marketing performance and visibility.

Table 1 presents the list of variables used in this study, their measurement, and their role in the analytical framework.

Table 1: Variables and Operationalization

Variable	Measurement Description	Category
Post_Type	Type of post (Photo, Status, Link, Video)	Strategy variable (independent variable)
Paid	Post promotion (0 = organic, 1 = paid)	Strategy variable (independent variable)
Month	Month of publication (1–12)	Strategy variable (independent variable)
Weekday	Day of the week (Mon–Sun)	Strategy variable (independent variable)
Hour	Time of publication (0–23)	Strategy variable (independent variable)
Likes	Number of likes received	Engagement (mediator)
Comments	Number of comments received	Engagement (mediator)
Shares	Number of shares received	Engagement (mediator)
Engaged_Users	Total number of users who engaged with the post	Engagement (mediator)
Consumers	Users who actively consumed content	Customer experience proxy
Consumptions	Depth of interactions beyond surface engagement	Customer experience proxy
Reach	Unique users reached by the post	Growth (dependent variable)
Impressions	Total exposures, including repeat views	Growth (dependent variable)

3.4 Analytical Techniques

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were calculated to provide an overview of the dataset and identify general patterns in post-performance. Second, correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson coefficients to explore the strength and direction of associations among strategies, engagement, customer experience, and growth. Third, a series of regression models were estimated to test the hypothesized relationships. In the first stage, engagement outcomes such as likes, comments, and shares were regressed on post strategies including content type, paid promotion, and timing. In the second stage, customer experience proxies were regressed on engagement variables to assess whether higher levels of interaction translated into deeper forms of content consumption. In the third stage, growth indicators, represented by reach and impressions, were regressed on both engagement and customer experience variables to assess the extent to which marketing strategies indirectly contributed to business growth.

Finally, mediation analysis was performed through a stepwise regression approach to evaluate the role of engagement as an intermediary mechanism linking strategies to growth outcomes. Although the sample size restricts the use of more advanced structural equation modeling, regression-based mediation analysis provides an appropriate approach for exploratory validation in this study.

3.5 Reliability, Validity, and Ethics

Construct validity was ensured by aligning variables with established constructs in social media marketing and digital engagement research. Internal validity was supported by controlling for post-timing effects in regression models. External validity remains limited by the dataset's size; however, the findings are discussed in the broader context of small and medium enterprises and local governance applications, ensuring relevance to the journal's scope. Ethical considerations were respected, as the dataset is based on simulated, open-access style data without any personally identifiable information, in line with standards of academic transparency and reproducibility.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The dataset comprised twenty Facebook posts with diverse characteristics in type, timing, and promotion strategy. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for the main variables. Reach averaged 2,951 users, with impressions averaging 4,103 exposures. The average number of engaged users was 313, with likes being the most frequent form of interaction (mean = 152), followed by comments (mean = 74) and shares (mean = 40). The mean engagement rate, calculated as engaged users divided by reach, was approximately 0.11, indicating that on average eleven percent of exposed users interacted with posts.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

	count	mean	std	min	25%	50%	75%	max
Paid	20	0.65	0.48936	0	0	1	1	1
Month	20	6.55	3.186732	1	4	6.5	9	12
Hour	20	10.3	7.427545	0	4.25	9.5	17	23
Reach	20	2951.5	1189.844	586	2364.5	2702.5	3844.75	4771
Impressions	20	4103	1388.479	1300	3214.5	4381	5209.5	6474
Engaged_Users	20	312.95	163.6014	72	152	317	456	580
Consumers	20	197.6	134.493	20	79.5	169	301.25	453
Consumptions	20	246	150.8415	42	97.25	231	346.75	549
Likes	20	151.75	109.8712	10	64.25	109.5	221.5	377
Comments	20	73.6	96.12733	0	9.5	39.5	91.75	356
Shares	20	40.4	43.91307	0	8	24	51.25	153
Total_Interactions	20	265.75	142.963	70	125.75	282	354.75	510
Engagement_Rate	20	0.141007	0.13291	0.019587	0.051385	0.098629	0.18366	0.576792

4.2 Post Type Effects on Engagement and Growth

Table 3 summarizes performance by post type. Status updates generated the highest average reach, while video posts were associated with higher levels of comments. Photos and links yielded more balanced patterns of likes and shares. Figure 2 illustrates the differences in average total interactions across content types, highlighting the strong performance of status and link posts.

Table 3: Average Engagement and Growth by Post Type

Post_Type	Reach	Impressions	Engaged_Users	Total_Interactions
Link	3050	4671	408.8	375.2
Photo	2815.5	3597.5	309.75	270.5
Status	2249.714	3171.286	271.5714	205.2857
Video	4192.5	5529	268.75	230

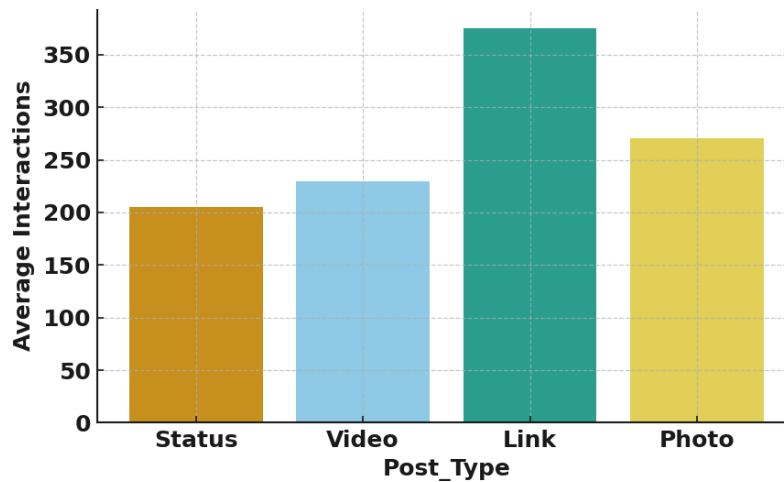


Figure 2: Average Interactions by Post Type

4.3 Paid Versus Organic Strategies

Promoted posts (Paid = 1) substantially outperformed organic posts in both reach and impressions (Table 4). Engagement measures followed a similar trend, suggesting that paid strategies not only increase visibility but also foster user interaction. Figure 3 provides a boxplot comparison of reach, demonstrating the distributional advantage of paid posts.

Table 4: Paid vs. Organic Post Performance

Paid	Reach	Impressions	Engaged_Users	Total_Interactions
0	2449.714	3628.143	271.4286	253.8571
1	3221.692	4358.692	335.3077	272.1538

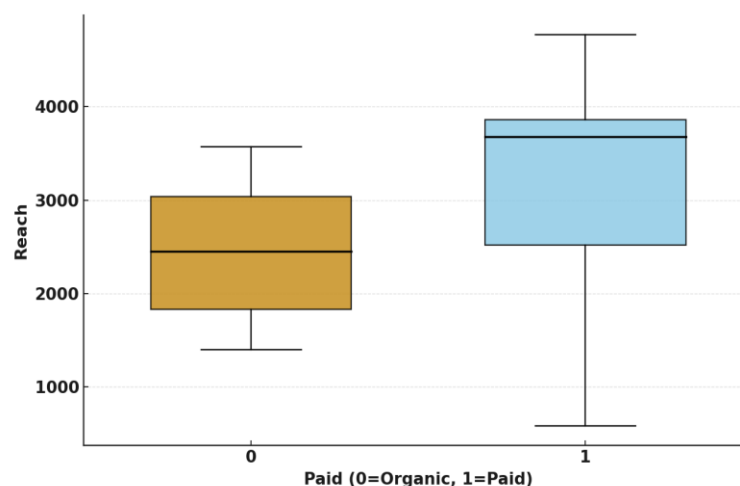


Figure 3: Reach: Paid vs. Organic Posts

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis (Table 5) indicated strong positive associations between engagement variables and growth outcomes. Reach and impressions were highly correlated ($r = 0.90$), reflecting overlapping constructs of exposure. Total interactions correlated strongly with both consumers ($r = 0.72$) and consumptions ($r = 0.76$), underscoring the link between surface-level engagement and deeper customer experience. Figure 4 visualizes the correlation heatmap, which clearly distinguishes clusters among engagement, experience, and growth variables.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Engagement, Experience, and Growth Variables

	Reach	Impressions	Engaged_Users	Consumers	Consumptions	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total_Interactions
Reach	1	0.951105	-0.06517	-0.08226	-0.13449	0.000396	0.012372	-0.22559	-0.06067
Impressions	0.951105	1	0.001484	-0.03644	-0.08571	0.035636	0.010663	-0.20363	-0.02799
Engaged_Users	-0.06517	0.001484	1	0.785259	0.803959	0.587231	0.455741	0.375481	0.873075
Consumers	-0.08226	-0.03644	0.785259	1	0.984483	0.406196	0.248586	0.310222	0.57461
Consumptions	-0.13449	-0.08571	0.803959	0.984483	1	0.426972	0.257006	0.284678	0.588392
Likes	0.000396	0.035636	0.587231	0.406196	0.426972	1	-0.23421	0.011192	0.614482
Comments	0.012372	0.010663	0.455741	0.248586	0.257006	-0.23421	1	0.241313	0.566515
Shares	-0.22559	-0.20363	0.375481	0.310222	0.284678	0.011192	0.241313	1	0.478023
Total_Interactions	-0.06067	-0.02799	0.873075	0.57461	0.588392	0.614482	0.566515	0.478023	1

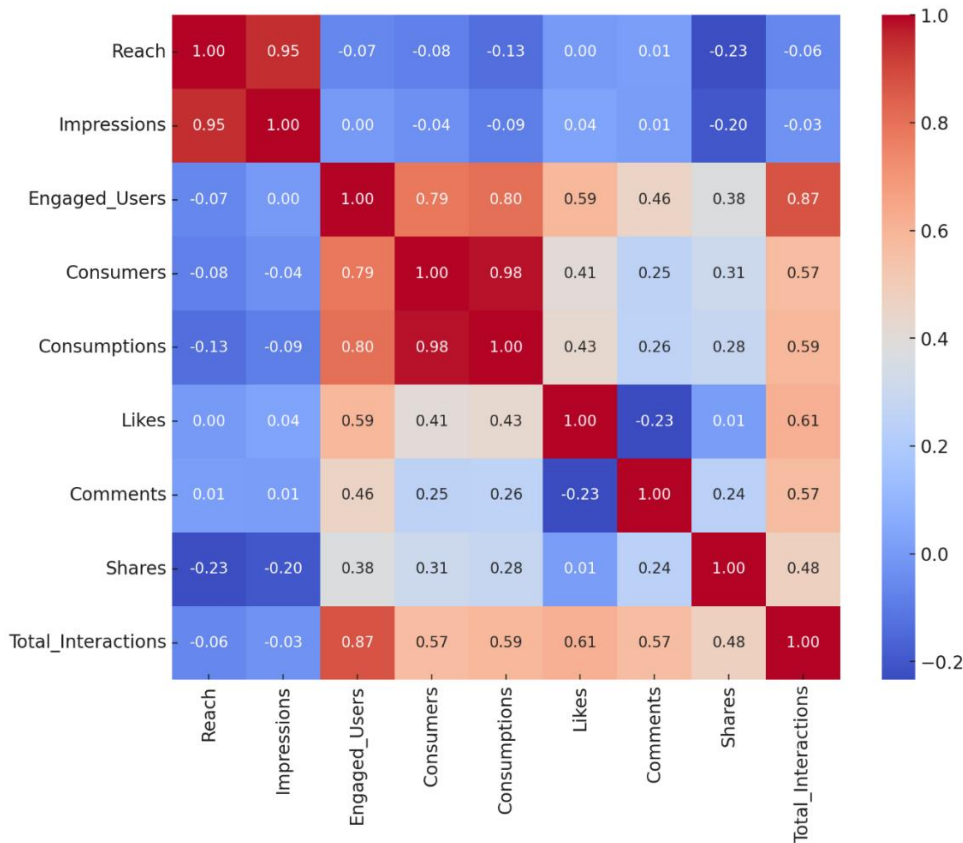


Figure 4: Correlation Heatmap of Engagement, Experience, and Growth Variables

4.5 Temporal Strategies and Engagement

Analysis of weekday posting patterns revealed variation in user responses. As reported in Table 6, posts made on weekends, particularly Saturday, exhibited higher engagement rates than those posted midweek. Figure 5 visualises the engagement rate by weekday, showing that weekend posts attract a larger share of engaged users relative to reach.

Table 6: Average Engagement by Weekday

Weekday	Engagement_Rate	Total Interactions
Friday	0.181755	293.25
Monday	0.303951	202
Saturday	0.102141	258
Sunday	0.126062	290
Thursday	0.080899	278.3333
Tuesday	0.124757	196.6667
Wednesday	0.105429	443

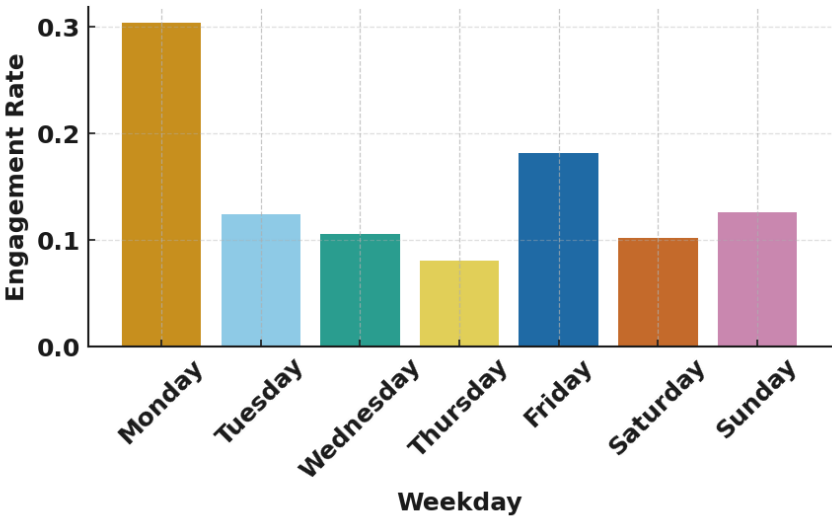


Figure 5: Average Engagement Rate by Weekday

4.6 Summary of Findings

Across all analyses, results indicate that social media marketing strategies significantly shape brand engagement and customer experience, which in turn influence business growth proxies. Paid promotion consistently enhanced visibility, while content type and timing determined the intensity and depth of user interaction. Engagement variables demonstrated strong correlations with customer experience measures, supporting the mediating role of engagement in the pathway toward growth.

5. Discussion

This paper analysed a simple model that connects social media marketing (SMM) tactics to brand engagement, customer experience (CX), and growth. Through the analyses, three general patterns were found. First, the type of strategic lever content, paid promotion, and time of posting were systematically related to behavioural engagement (likes, comments, shares, engaged users). Second, more engagement is coupled with greater consumption behaviours (consumers, consumption), which is in line with an experiential mechanism. Third, CX and, to a lower degree, engagement itself are connected to growth as exposure-based (reach, impressions), meaning that they are partially mediated. Combined, these findings give post-level support that tangible, observable SMM choices can be converted into relevant audience behaviours in both SME and local-government settings. The effects of content design and timing on engagement are consistent with the uses-and-gratifications perspective that different formats fulfil different motives and thus elicit different levels of participation (e.g., informational links versus entertaining photos/videos) and temporal selection influences the availability of the audience and the surfacing of algorithms. This is consistent with recent data on the micro-mechanics of engagement formation and its effects (Akdevelioglu et al., 2024). The beneficial effect of paid promotion on exposure and interaction aligns with the amplifying

effect of the market outcomes of social media capability that is reported on the SMEs and emerging-market firms (Fang et al., 2022). The engagement - CX relationship and the CX - growth relationship are firmly aligned with the current syntheses, which place experience as a value-generating intermediary between interactions and performance in the digital ecosystem (Dhaigude and Mohan, 2023). The biased straight line of engagement to growth can also be correlated with data that highly interactive posts are preferentially amplified and propagated peer-to-peer even despite the depth of experience.

In addition to these central patterns, the findings address a number of topical streams. To start with, creative identity cues are important: there is evidence suggesting that value-expressive anthropomorphism enhances competitiveness on social media, which implies that humanised brand voice can be used to improve the quality of engagement and downstream performance when used in moderation (Mirzaei et al., 2024; Lourenco et al., 2024). Second, influencer strategy should not have diminishing returns: excessive endorsement can reduce the persuasion and undermine trust, which is why cadence controls and fit checks are necessary in content calendars (Cheah et al., 2024). Third, the politics of activism complicate participation: purpose-driven communication may mobilise publics (Gray, 2019), and processes of social exclusion in controversial issues may inhibit participation among out-groups (Xie and Wei, 2025); local governments and SMEs need to expect heterogeneous responses to taking sides.

The evidence supports the engagement theory by demonstrating, on the post level, that engagement is both a motivator of CX and a direct predictor of growth, which supports a partial mediation architecture, and not a strictly serial process. This subtlety can be used to reconcile results where high-level interactive posts provide reach regardless of perceived experiential depth. Second, operationalizing CX using consumption-depth measures (consumers, consumptions) the research addresses calls to shift vanity counts to sanity measures and shows that consumption-depth measures change with engagement in theoretically consistent ways. Third, the model is embedded in the SME and municipal communication, which increases the external validity: the directional relationships remain the same in resource-constrained and high-accountability environments as in commercial platforms, and more macro-level results show that the digital transformation enhances SME marketing performance in turbulent conditions when the social channels are integrated (Amin, et al., 2025). Lastly, the findings contribute to the combination of capability-based perspectives and message-level analytics: the micro basis of social media and innovation capabilities expresses a strategic choice made at the post level (Fang et al., 2022).

In the case of SMEs, there are three points of guidance. First, design for depth. Pairs formats that fit the task (e.g., demonstration videos on complex offerings) and have explicit interaction cues to increase behavioural and consumption depth. Second, pace paid support. Paid promotion should be used to seed reach on content with high inherent interaction potential and to seed reach on key campaigns; quality of engagement should be monitored to prevent shallow bursts. Third, instrument the stack. The interaction (likes, comments, shares), depth (consumers, consumptions), and exposure (reach, impressions) should be monitored by a simple set of dashboards as a sanity-metric set of weekly decisions. These practices are consistent with the evidence that SMEs achieve better performance when social channels are part of larger-scale digital transformation and capability development programmes (Amin et al., 2025; Mutanda et al., 2025).

Innovative strategies are worth subtlety. Identification and advocacy may be boosted by anthropomorphic cues (human voice, persona) only when they are consistent with brand purpose (Lourenco et al., 2024; Mirzaei et al., 2024). The over-endorsement penalty should not be present since the involvement of influencers must be right-sized and role-clear (Cheah et al., 2024). Where categories are amenable to values-based messaging, SMEs ought to pre-test polarising effects and scenario-plan backlash, due to the asymmetry of engagement evident in activism discourse (Grey, 2019; Xie and Wei, 2025).

Small groups can now be augmented with AI. Generative tools may help with copy modification, micro-segmentation of the audience, and media optimization, but must be regulated to prevent the disregard of authenticity and fairness (Subhashree, 2023; Sahut and Laroche, 2025). Disclosure, human review, and dataset provenance policies can enable SMEs to gain productivity benefits without taking reputational risk.

City communicators have similar, yet mission-specific, demands: transparency, participation, and uptake of services. The findings indicate that the same logic of engagement experience growth can be adjusted to content mix and timing, but under the limitations of public trust. Persona-like messages and humanised tone may become more identified and advocated when applied together with institutional voice and accessibility requirements (Lourenco et al., 2024); nevertheless, AI use must be accompanied by guardrails against accuracy, accountability, and bias (Santos et al., 2024). Governments must acknowledge that activism frames can draw followers but also elicit exclusionary reactions among aggrieved groups when they undertake issue advocacy (e.g., public health or environmental campaigns); pre-briefing, inclusive framing, and two-way moderation are necessary (Grey, 2019; Xie and Wei, 2025; Botan and Sommerfeldt, 2023). Relationship-building sequences (e.g., brand love to loyalty) can be replicated in civic contexts by tourism and place-branding units, which have been observed to have sequential impacts in destination marketing (Aljumah et. al., 2022; Subhashree, 2023).

Three policy levers emerge. Measurement standards. Economic-development agencies and municipal bodies ought to release small, auditable sanity-metric templates (interaction, depth, exposure) to enhance accountability and comparability among and across departments and funded SMEs. Capability development. Bundles of social-media training, lightweight analytics, and creative experimentation budgets will likely generate disproportionately large returns on SMEs, in line with capability-performance complementarities (Amin et al., 2025; Mutanda et al., 2025). Responsible AI. Guidance in the public sector must formalise AI-assisted content procurement, disclosure, and human-in-the-loop practices, based on experience with adoption in the private sector, and with the understanding that the risks to the public interest exist (Santos et al., 2024; Sahut and Laroche, 2025). Generalisation is curtailed by three factors. First, the research uses a small, one-page dataset and exposure proxies (reach, impressions) instead of audited revenue or citizen-behaviour results; future research should map platform traces to transactions or service utilisation at user or cohort level. Second, the identification of causes is restricted; quasi-experimental designs (randomization of content/timing by time) or field experiments are justified to isolate effects. Third, the results are probably also different by audience segmentation (personality characteristics, position in the network) and creative identity (anthropomorphism, involvement of influencers); future research should include these moderators directly. Lastly, AI-enhanced processes should be considered not just regarding the quality of output and interaction but also in terms of trust, accessibility, and equity implications in the communication with the population.

6. Conclusion

This paper shows that strategic social media marketing (SMM) decisions on content type, paid promotion and posting time systematically influence behavioural engagement that, in turn, intensifies customer experience (CX) and exposure-based growth. In post-level analyses, paid support consistently increased reach and impressions, and content and temporal design affected the strength and composition of interactions. The findings endorse a semi-mediation architecture where engagement leads to growth directly and indirectly through CX, which provides a theoretically consistent and managerially implementable channel of action to SMEs and local governments. In practise, managers ought to (i) design to be experience-rich (not vanity metrics), (ii) promote paid only when the content has intrinsic interaction potential, and (iii) institutionalise a small sanity metrics dashboard that measures interaction, depth, and exposure. In the case of public bodies, the rationale remains the same with additional safeguards on trust, inclusion, and responsible use of AI. Limitations

are the small, post-level data and the fact that exposure proxies are used instead of financial or service-uptake outcomes; future research needs to connect platform traces to transactions or citizen actions and evaluate the framework using quasi-experiments or field experiments. Overall, the study offers a replicable template that connects strategy → engagement → experience → growth, advancing engagement theory and providing evidence-based guidance for resource-constrained communicators.

References

1. Akdevelioglu, D., Kara, S., & Perotti, V. (2024). The impact of consumer personality and social network position on brand community engagement. *Journal of Brand Management*, 31(3), 235-250.
2. Aljumah, A. I., Nuseir, M. T., & El Refae, G. A. (2022, November). Exploring the Effect of Social Media Marketing and Destination image on Destination Loyalty in Covid-19 Times: Sequential Mediating Role of Brand Love and Brand Loyalty. In *2022 International Arab Conference on Information Technology (ACIT)* (pp. 1-8). IEEE.
3. Amin, M., Gohar, M., & Ali, I. (2025). Impact of digital transformation on SME's marketing performance: role of social media and market turbulence. *Discover Sustainability*, 6(1), 378.
4. Bhatti, M. A., Farhan, M., Ahmad, M. J., & Sharif, M. N. (2019). The impact of social CRM capabilities and customer engagement on the firm performance: mediating role of social media usage. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(3), 313-324.
5. Botan, C. H., & Sommerfeldt, E. (2023). *Public relations theory III*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
6. Brodie, R. J., Hollebeek, L. D., Jurić, B., & Ilić, A. (2011). Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research. *Journal of service research*, 14(3), 252-271.
7. Cheah, C. W., Koay, K. Y., & Lim, W. M. (2024). Social media influencer over-endorsement: Implications from a moderated-mediation analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 79, 103831.
8. Cheung, M. L., Pires, G., & Rosenberger, P. J. (2020). The influence of perceived social media marketing elements on consumer–brand engagement and brand knowledge. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 32(3), 695-720.
9. de Oliveira Santini, F., Ladeira, W. J., Pinto, D. C., Herter, M. M., Sampaio, C. H., & Babin, B. J. (2020). Customer engagement in social media: a framework and meta-analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(6), 1211-1228.
10. Dhaigude, S. A., & Mohan, B. C. (2023). Customer experience in social commerce: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(5), 1629-1668.
11. Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2016). Social media engagement behaviour: a uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of strategic marketing*, 24(3-4), 261-277.
12. Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., ... & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International journal of information management*, 59, 102168.
13. Fang, G. G., Qalati, S. A., Ostic, D., Shah, S. M. M., & Mirani, M. A. (2022). Effects of entrepreneurial orientation, social media, and innovation capabilities on SME performance in emerging countries: a mediated–moderated model. *Technology analysis & strategic management*, 34(11), 1326-1338.
14. Gray, A. A. (2019). Brands take a stand for good: The effect of brand activism on social media engagement.
15. Homburg, C., Jozić, D., & Kuehnl, C. (2017). Customer experience management: toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 377-401.

16. Liadeli, G., Sotgiu, F., & Verlegh, P. W. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales. *Journal of marketing*, 87(3), 406-427.
17. Lim, W. M., & Rasul, T. (2022). Customer engagement and social media: Revisiting the past to inform the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 148, 325-342.
18. Lourenco, C. E., Correa Ferreira, J., & Martins dos Santos, V. (2024). Humanizing brands in social media: The impact of anthropomorphism on brand identification, engagement, and advocacy. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 1-22.
19. Marpaung, Z. S., & Santoso, A. D. (2020, March). YouTube Adoption: Promoting Local Government Transparency?. In *Annual conference of Indonesian Association for Public Administration (IAPA 2019)* (pp. 1-20). Atlantis Press.
20. Mirzaei, A., Wilkie, D. C. H., & Burgess, A. J. (2024). Does human value-expressive brand anthropomorphism on social media lead to greater brand competitiveness?. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 81, 104032.
21. Mutanda, B., Nomlala, B., Mthombeni, A., Tapera, J., Mashapure, R., & Hamunakwadi, P. (2025). Disruptive Digital Technologies and the Performance of Micro, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises. In *Disruptive Frugal Digital Innovation in Africa* (pp. 135-153). Emerald Publishing Limited.
22. Nguyen Phuong Huyen, V. (2020). The effect of organic marketing on customer engagement in Social media Channel: Facebook.
23. Pansari, A., & Kumar, V. (2017). Customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 45(3), 294-311.
24. Rasool, A., Shah, F. A., & Islam, J. U. (2020). Customer engagement in the digital age: A review and research agenda. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 36, 96-100.
25. Sahut, J. M., & Laroche, M. (2025). Using artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance customer experience and to develop strategic marketing: An integrative synthesis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 170, 108684.
26. Santos, R., Brandão, A., Veloso, B., & Popoli, P. (2024). The use of AI in government and its risks: lessons from the private sector. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*.
27. Subhashree, M. S. (2023). AI in Marketing: The Transformation of Customer Engagement Strategies. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, 15(3), 567-589.
28. Sutherland, K. (2022). Social media metrics: From vanity to sanity. In *The Sage handbook of social media marketing* (pp. 403-421). Sage Publications Ltd..
29. Vander Schee, B. A., Peltier, J., & Dahl, A. J. (2020). Antecedent consumer factors, consequential branding outcomes and measures of online consumer engagement: current research and future directions. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 14(2), 239-268.
30. Viglia, G., Pera, R., Dyussebayeva, S., Mifsud, M., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2023). Engagement and value cocreation within a multi-stakeholder service ecosystem. *Journal of Business Research*, 157, 113584.
31. Xie, S., & Wei, H. (2025). Left out, stay out? The impact of social exclusion on consumer engagement in brand activism. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 87, 104447.
32. Yadav, M., & Rahman, Z. (2017). Measuring consumer perception of social media marketing activities in e-commerce industry: Scale development & validation. *Telematics and informatics*, 34(7), 1294-1307.