



Understanding The Use Of Digital Marketing By Rural Micro Entrepreneurs Of India: A Systematic Literature Review

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Citation: Rahul Goel et.al (2024), Understanding The Use Of Digital Marketing By Rural Micro Entrepreneurs Of India: A Systematic Literature Review, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 7629-7638
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4217

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of digital marketing has drastically changed the manner of interaction between business owners and their target customers, enhancing the growth and transparency of business. This study digs into the relatively unexplored realm of rural entrepreneurship. We give a thorough examination of papers published since later nineties till time. Papers from various data bases like Google Scholar, Emerald, and Scopus, were studied. The study aims to understand the potential of digital marketing for rural entrepreneurs to achieve success in business, and, to determine the challenges and scope of improvement for the same.

This systematic Literature review Identify common themes and trends in the literature published, throwing light on the crucial determinants influencing the adoption and efficacy of digital marketing among rural entrepreneurs. Authors have combined information from many studies to uncover patterns in the use of social media, websites, search engine optimization, email marketing, and online advertising etc.

The findings suggest that rural entrepreneurs are now understanding the potential of digital marketing for growing their business and acquiring new clients. However, the level of adoption and the influence of digital marketing on rural business success vary a lot.

The utility of this study is to provide a detailed view of how rural entrepreneurs use digital marketing, The benefits and challenges faced by them and the methods the overcome it. This study is an important resource for scholars, practitioners, policy makers looking forward to improving the Rural Entrepreneurship through Digital means.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Rural Entrepreneurs, Micro Entrepreneurs

Introduction:

According to Smith (2011), digital marketing is process of advertising services and products online or through various distribution channels which are digital, while interacting with customers through digital or online advertising. "By creating, delivering, and presenting digital values and experiences through digital technologies, digital marketing encompasses the activities of establishing and maintaining relationships with consumers and partners who are digitally focused" (Rakić, B., & Rakić, M. 2018). According to Chaffey and Chadwick (2012), "digital marketing involves managing various forms of a company's online presence and using strategies like social media marketing, email branding, search engine marketing, digital advertising, online partnerships, and online public relations." Many terms, including online marketing (Jobber and Fahy, 2019), internet marketing (Chaffey & Patron, 2012), e-marketing (Strauss and Frost, 2009), and digital marketing (Chaffey and Chadwick, 2012), have been coined based on the marketing activities done by using internet. According to some writers who define these terms, e-marketing and digital marketing basically involve using electronic media to carry out marketing activities (Chaffey and others, 2006).

Digital marketing or Internet Marketing, plays a pivotal role in the growth and success of micro-entrepreneurs in rural India by providing them with a platform to reach a wider group of audience, optimize their marketing

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activities, and enhance their brand visibility. This comprehensive analysis will delve into the significance of digital marketing for rural businesses, supported by insights from various academic research papers.

1. Enhanced Reach and Audience Targeting

Digital marketing enables micro-entrepreneurs in rural India to overcome geographical barriers and connect with a larger audience beyond their immediate vicinity. Unlike traditional marketing methods that are limited by physical boundaries, digital marketing helps businesses to enhance their reach through internet-based channels such as social media, email, and search engines. By leveraging data analytics, businesses can target specific demographics and geographic locations, ensuring their marketing efforts are directed towards the right audience (Yadav and Reddy 2023).

2. Cost-Effectiveness and Measurable Results

An important advantage of digital marketing for rural micro-entrepreneurs is its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing approaches. Digital marketing strategies like social media marketing and search engine optimization offer measurable results, allowing businesses to track their progress, analyse the effectiveness of their campaigns, and make necessary adjustments to optimize their ROI (Jadhav et al 2023).

3. Increased Engagement and Brand Building

Through digital marketing, micro-entrepreneurs can engage with their customers in real-time, fostering a sense of community and loyalty around their brand. By utilizing platforms like social media, businesses can interact with customers, address their queries, and build a strong online presence. This engagement not only enhances customer relationships but also contributes to brand building and recognition in rural markets (Rashid et al 2021).

4. E-commerce Opportunities and Mobile Accessibility

Digital marketing opens up avenues for rural micro-entrepreneurs to venture into e-commerce, allowing them to showcase and sell their products or services online beyond their local market (Jadhav et al 2023). Moreover, the mobile-friendly nature of digital marketing ensures accessibility to a wider audience, including individuals who may not have access to traditional forms of technology. This accessibility further boosts the visibility and reach of rural businesses in the digital landscape.

However, the above opportunities are not often being utilised by rural entrepreneurs more so for rural micro-entrepreneurs because of the existing rural-urban divide.

The rural-urban divide in terms of availability of ICT infrastructure and digital literacy in India and abroad is a pressing concern. In India, about 88% population use the internet in urban areas, while usage is only about 22% in rural areas (Chavi Asrani 2021). The government has taken several initiatives under the Digital India campaign to bridge this divide, including the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), which aims to make six crore people in rural areas digitally literate. In terms of digital literacy, the government has also launched the National Digital Literacy Mission to provide digital literacy training in rural areas (her circle report 2023). However, the digital divide persists due to socioeconomic disparities and historical infrastructure limitations (Basu Chandola 2022). Globally, the digital divide is a multifaceted challenge that has far-reaching implications for economic, social, and individual well-being (Jadhav & Reddy 2023). Governments, organizations, and individuals can work together to extend connectivity to underprivileged regions and promote greater equality in access to information, education, economic opportunities, and social inclusion.

This raises two questions in the mind.

Research Questions:

Q1. How has Digital Marketing evolved in rural areas of India?

Q2. How Digital Marketing has been impacting micro-entrepreneurs of rural India?

2. Background of study:

In the 1990s, digital marketing was introduced for the first time. At this time, Web 1.0 development was underway and the internet had just been launched. Users could still find the information they were looking for with Web 1.0, but they could not share it with others online. Because most people had not yet heard of the term "internet," marketers were still apprehensive about using digital platforms, which contributed to the lack of popularity of the internet at that time. The digital era officially began with the first clickable banner in 1993. Hotwired later bought this banner for their marketing. Then a continuous change in marketing strategies can be seen since 1994. After Yahoo was introduced, numerous businesses developed unique technologies for online advertising. When the World Wide Web first launched in 1996, Yahoo got roughly one million hits in its first year of operation. In light of this, businesses began to enhance their search engine rankings by optimising their websites, realising that the digital market was undergoing significant change. At the same time, various other tools and search engines also came up. Some examples are: the Hot Bot, Alexa and Look Smart. Google came up in 1998, MSN search engine was brought up by Microsoft and Yahoo came up with Yahoo web search to compete in the newly developing market. These Search engines took complete control of the market

within 2 years and , making all of the smaller search engines almost irrelevant. The peak year for digital marketing was 2006, when search engine traffic reportedly reached 6.4 billion hits in just a month. In an attempt to rival Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft introduced Live Search. Tumblr was introduced in 2007, and Hulu, a web streaming service, was also discovered in that year.

In the same year, the massive mobile company Apple released the iPhone. Both Groupon and Spotify debuted in 2008, the year of their respective launches. In 2009, Google introduced a real-time search engine. In light of this, Google also developed products like Google Ad Words, which enabled businesses to display their three-line advertisements at the top of search results pages, and AdSense, a cost-per-click advertising network. Google developed this technique to display ads to its customers based on their interests to target its audience, and it has since become a useful tool in the digital business world. Soon after the release of Web 2.0, which let users communicate with businesses and other users, users began to actively participate in the digital platform and make contributions. One more name of Internet was "super information highway." Going by this data, advertising through Internet has given a rise to digital marketing and Social media sites followed. Facebook came after Myspace as the first social networking site to offer digital marketing. 2012 was named as the "year of social media" as businesses increased their social media spending upto 65% during this time. Since MySpace and Facebook were the most widely used social media platforms, organisations used them to promote their brands and products across a variety of channels and grow their online businesses which was beneficial. The advent of cookies was beneficial to the digital marketing sectors as well. The original cookie was created to track users' browsing patterns and frequency of use of the internet in order to record user habits and enable businesses to market their products to users based on user preferences. Since then, cookies have been used in different ways. Currently, they are used to gather actual user data.

Definition and Characteristics of Micro Enterprises in India

Micro enterprises are a vital component of the Indian economy, particularly within the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. In India, the classification of MSMEs is according to their investment in machinery for manufacturing units or equipment for service enterprises. The basis of classification as per the MSME Development Act of 2006 is as follows:

Micro Enterprises: Firms with investments up to ₹1 crore in plant and machinery for manufacturing units or up to ₹5 lakh in equipment for service enterprises are classified as micro enterprises (The Gazette of India. (2006). The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006.) .

Characteristics of Micro Enterprises:

Size: Micro enterprises are characterized by their small size in terms of investment in plant, machinery, and equipment.

Employment: Despite their small size, micro enterprises play a significant role in employment generation, providing livelihoods to a large number of individuals.

Contribution to GDP: These enterprises contribute substantially to the country's GDP through their diverse range of products and services.

Sectoral Distribution: Micro enterprises are prevalent in sectors such as food, agriculture, and rural industries, forming the backbone of these sectors.

Entrepreneurship: They foster entrepreneurship by offering opportunities for individuals to start and run their businesses with relatively lower capital costs.

Micro enterprises are crucial for inclusive industrial development, complementing large industries as ancillary units. Their role in fostering entrepreneurship, generating employment opportunities, and contributing to economic growth cannot be understated (MSPI 2023), (NIMSME), (mala singh 2023).

Digital marketing is a rapidly evolving field that has been the subject of numerous research papers and frameworks. This section will discuss some of the key concepts, theories, and frameworks related to digital marketing mentioned in various research papers.

Conceptual Frameworks

A conceptual framework for digital marketing was developed by Pinaki Mandal, which aims to create a broad conceptual framework for emerging digital marketing tools and stages (Pinaki Mandal 2016). This framework synthesizes information about the basic principles and components of the concept of digital marketing, including social media marketing and search engine marketing. Another conceptual framework for digital marketing research was proposed by researchers from the University of Technology Sydney, which investigates the four cultural eras of digital marketing (Busca, Laurent & Bertrandias, Laurent. 2019). This framework provides an integrative framework for research in digital marketing derived from the historical analysis of the Internet.

Theories and Strategies

Digital marketing has been proven to have many benefits for both suppliers and retailers, including increased customer engagement, improved brand awareness, and cost-effective marketing (Pinaki Mandal 2016). Theories and strategies related to digital marketing include customer relationship management (CRM), content marketing, and social media marketing.

Digital Marketing Framework

A digital marketing framework was developed by researchers from the University of Technology Sydney, which highlights the touchpoints in the process of marketing and in the marketing mix (P.K. Kannan, Hongshuang "Alice" Li 2017). This framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the digital marketing landscape and its implications for businesses.

Digital Marketing Research Agenda

A research agenda for digital marketing was proposed by researchers from the University of Technology Sydney, which aims to address the gaps in the existing literature and provide opportunities for future research (Qurtubi et al 2022). This agenda focuses on the strategy and content of the implementation of digital marketing, and its impact on various aspects of business.

Rural Micro-Entrepreneurs

Rural entrepreneurship has gained significant attention in recent years as a potential driver of economic development in rural areas. Various research papers have explored concepts, theories, and frameworks related to rural micro-entrepreneurs, shedding light on key aspects of their entrepreneurial behavior and the challenges they face.

Entrepreneurship Theories in Rural Development

Research by Martha Frederick and Celeste A. Long (1989) highlights the theoretical framework of entrepreneurship based on disequilibrium, emphasizing the need for more empirical studies testing theories in rural entrepreneurship. The literature points out gaps in understanding the characteristics of new businesses in rural areas, their job creation potential, and the proportion of businesses serving local versus export markets.

Conceptual Framework for Rural Business Models

A study on rural business models by Puie, Florina. (2019) conceptualizes the evolution of business models in rural areas, providing insights into how these models have evolved over time. This framework offers a structured approach to understanding the context of developing business models in rural regions.

Building Blocks of Rural Entrepreneurship

In a comprehensive framework for mapping components of rural entrepreneurship (Brilliant Asmit et al 2024), researchers uncover the building blocks essential for rural entrepreneurship. This framework delves into various concepts and capitals involved in rural entrepreneurship, highlighting issues such as social entrepreneurship, governance, livelihood growth, and eco-entrepreneurship.

Rural Entrepreneurship from Sustainable Livelihood Framework

An analysis of current and emerging issues in rural entrepreneurship from the sustainable livelihood framework (Tabares A et al 2022) explores concepts like poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, and women's roles in rural entrepreneurship. This research identifies key issues such as lack of finance, physical infrastructure challenges, and human capital constraints faced by rural entrepreneurs.

Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurial Behaviour

Studies on digital literacy and farmers' entrepreneurial behaviour Bai Q et al 2023 emphasize the role of digital literacy in enhancing farmers' entrepreneurial capabilities. Digital literacy provides access to information resources crucial for entrepreneurial success, improves farmers' entrepreneurial skills, and enables them to leverage digital platforms like e-commerce for business growth. In conclusion, these concepts, theories, and frameworks provide valuable insights into the dynamics of rural entrepreneurship, highlighting the challenges faced by rural micro-entrepreneurs and proposing strategies to support their growth and sustainability.

3. Review Method:

This study employs a systematic review methodology to address the aforementioned research questions. A well-executed review can establish a solid basis for knowledge advancement, aid in the development of theories, and identify areas in which further research is required (Webster and Watson, 2002). According to Kitchenham and Charters (2007), a systematic review is the process of finding, assessing, and interpreting all available research that is pertinent to research questions, an area of study, or a rising phenomenon of interest. A systematic review is carried out to provide a deep understanding of a new phenomenon and to identify any

research gaps in the existing literature. It also serves to summarise the evidence regarding a technology or treatment and the benefits of a particular method. (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007).

These explanations thus align with the purpose of our review. The protocols of Kitchenham and Charters are adhered to in this study. A systematic review task consists of three main stages, as stated by Kitchenham and Charters (2007): planning, carrying out, and reporting the review. There are specific tasks associated with each step, such as formulating research questions, creating review protocols, determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, formulating search strategies, selecting studies, carrying out quality assessment (QA) procedures, and extracting and synthesising data. Below is a description of each activity's specifics.

3.1 Review Protocol:

The protocol followed in this review study includes the background, Research Questions, search Strategy, Study Selection Process, Quality Assessments, Data Extraction and Analysis.

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion Criteria:

Online Data Base of SCOPUS, Science Direct, Elsevier, and Web of Science are used for identifying relevant research publications. Initially the search was done for the papers including research including 3 aspects (Keywords): 1) Digital Marketing, 2) Micro Entrepreneurs 3) of Rural India. Very few papers were found in the initial search and hence the scope of inclusion was further widened to include relevant papers for the research questions. Google Scholar Search engine was used to find various studies cited in the primary studies. Studies which were not related to the research questions were then excluded.

We focussed on following parameters while including the research papers in the study:

- 1) Is the paper topic addressing to use of digital marketing by Rural micro-Entrepreneurs?
- 2) Is the paper having a clear description of research Methodology?

Base on the above parameters 42 out of 157 Papers downloaded were selected for study.

4. Data Extraction:

We identified 8 points to be extracted from the Data:1) Title of the study, 2) Author's Name, 3) Year of Publication, 4) Source of study, 5) Focus of study, 6) Methodology used, 7) Factors/variables identified in the study, 8) Findings of the study. The description of each is given in the table below:

Data Extracted	Description
Author's Name:	Name of Authors
Title of study:	Title of the research paper
Year of Publication:	Year in which the paper was published
Source:	Conference Proceedings, Journal, Book Chapter etc.
Focus of Study:	Domain of the study like user behaviour, Adoption reasons etc.
Methodology Used:	Qualitative or Quantitative or mixed method
Factors marked out in the study:	Theory used or Variables studied/Identified
Finding of the study:	Final findings and outcomes of the study.

Table:1

4.1 Temporal View:

Figure below represents the year wise distribution of the papers studied. We can see a considerable increase in the number of papers from 2018 onwards. The maximum number of relevant papers are from 2020 (12 research papers). One reason of having so many papers in 2020 may be the pandemic (COVID-19) which forced businesses to go digital for almost everything. Though this figure does not represent the number of papers published in the year. It only shows the number of papers included in the study.

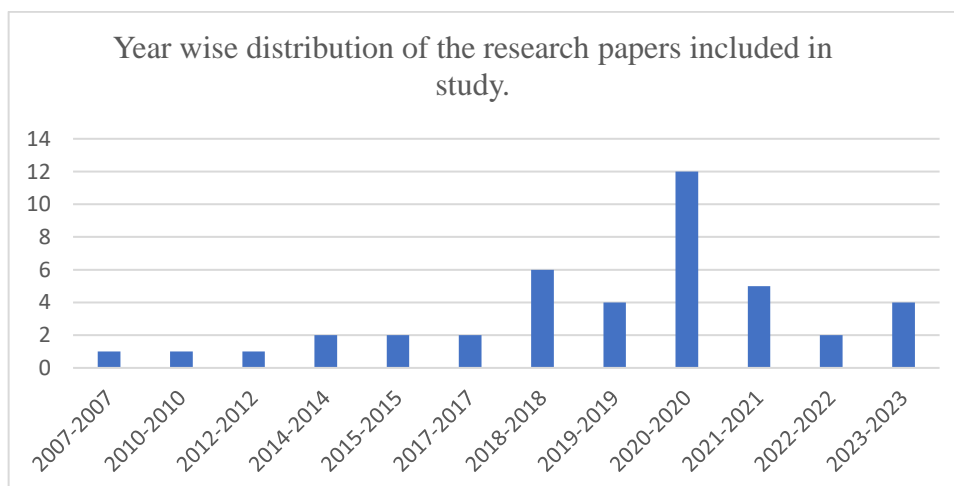


Figure 1-Year wise distribution of the research papers included in study.

4.2 Source:

The papers included in the study are majorly from Journals. The figure below shows the distribution of papers on the basis of their source.

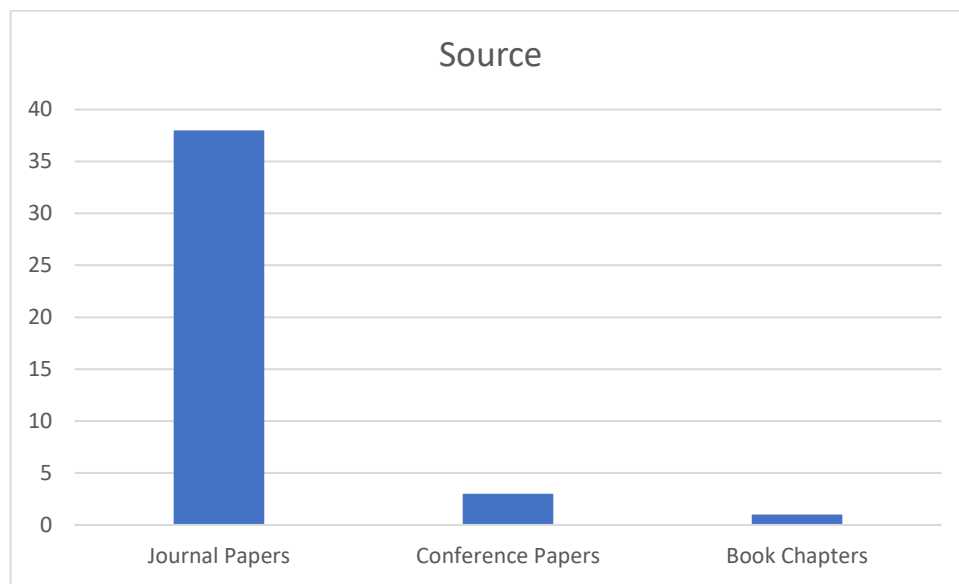


Figure 2: Source of Research Papers.

4.3 Discussions:

It has been observed that while many researches are done related to SME's and Rural Marketing, very few researches are there focussing exclusively on rural Micro Entrepreneurs and the use of Digital Marketing by them. Adoption of Digital marketing by micro entrepreneurs is a challenging job and the challenges increase in the rural areas. According to Lekhanya (2015) studying the Digital Marketing impact in rural areas is not useful owing to the lack of Infrastructure in these areas. However, the infrastructure has improved significantly over the period and so has the awareness regarding Digital Marketing. Still a rural urban divide in ICT infrastructure can be seen (Sampat & Shiva 2018).

RPandit and A.Chauhan (2020) found that opportunities for the growth of digital marketing in Rural India is largely untapped. Hence they predicted a good growth in use of Digital marketing by rural entrepreneurs. Shruthi Jayaprakash (2019) also highlighted the viability of digital marketing in rural areas using local languages. Ravi and rajshekharan (2023) also emphasised on the promising potential of digital Marketing tools in rural India. T.Sudhakar reddy (2021) found that the major factors that raise awareness and use of ICT and digital marketing platforms to sell products are advertising and self-knowledge. Digital marketing platforms were found to be helpful for farmers as they reduced marketing cost and increased the selling price of agricultural outputs. The study also found that a majority of the respondents found digital marketing in agriculture to be beneficial. Additionally, it was found that socio-economic and demographic characteristics affect the use of digital marketing platforms by farmers. Phillips & Williams (2019) finds that inadequate digital connectivity and a lack of ICT skills affect the ability of home-based rural businesses to operate effectively. It suggests that current digital divides are no longer simply about internet access but are also concerned with the quality of that access. It also highlights how digitally underserved communities can benefit from technology upskilling and highlights the need for ICT development programs targeted at rural communities. The paper argues for more nuanced understanding of the requirements, circumstances, and aspirations of remote rural businesses to support their digital future. Furthermore, it emphasizes that technology alone is insufficient to ensure digital inclusion, but needs to be complemented with skills training, financial services, legal advice, social media engagement, and marketing strategies.

In conclusion we can say that rural micro entrepreneurs have evolved over the period of time to use digital marketing but still there is a long way to go. Major problems faced by them are, lack of skills and training availability, lack quality infrastructure, financial constraints and so on.

5. Research Questions Answers:

Q1. How has Digital Marketing evolved in rural areas of India?

What was earlier considered as backward area not feasible to study the use of digital marketing has evolved over the period of time. Thanks to the efforts of government to expand the ICT infrastructure. Still there is a long way to go as the rural urban divide may have narrowed but has not ended. COVID-19 has pushed rural entrepreneurs towards the use of digital marketing and has made it relevant. It has also brought rural

population on social media helping their engagement on various platforms. So we have seen a great advancement in Digital marketing in rural areas of India, however a lot of opportunities are still untapped.

Q2. How Digital Marketing has been impacting micro entrepreneurs of rural India?

Adoption of digital marketing by micro entrepreneurs in rural India is not that easy. Various factors like lack of education, awareness and skills required, financial constraints and lack of quality infrastructure add to the challenges faced by them. However, in post COVID era many of them have stepped into the field and have reaped the benefits of Digital Marketing. Though the level of adoption of digital marketing by micro entrepreneurs of rural India is still in its beginning, A lot of opportunities are there for them. This untapped area may be of great interest for the marketeers to find revenue resources. Those who have already adopted it found it useful and beneficial for their business, however, a gap was seen in terms of proper strategy of implementation in them. The requirement of awareness and training programs related to digital marketing for micro entrepreneurs is felt. This can help in improving the skills and use of Digital Marketing among them.

6. Conclusion:

Though many studies are there regarding the use of digital marketing and its impact on SME's or rural Entrepreneurs, however very few studies have been found focussing on Micro entrepreneurs of rural India. The rural urban divide in terms of ICT infrastructure has limited the use of digital marketing in rural areas. This limitation increases in case of micro entrepreneurs owing to lack of awareness skills, and financial support. COVID pandemic has contributed to the drift towards the use of digital marketing still a big gap can be seen in these areas making them an untapped market for digital marketeers. This can be an area to explore for the researchers as well. Advancement of research in this area may help in providing more strategical frameworks for the adoption of digital marketing by rural micro entrepreneurs, and may provide guidelines for policy formulations related to the area concerned.

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