Digital Marketing for Startup: A Systematic Literature Review

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KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Business Competitive, Digital Marketing, Start-up, Systematic Literature Review. **Article history:** Received Jul 22, 2025 Revised Sept 29, 2025 Accepted Oct 27, 2025 **Edition** Vol.5 No.2 (2025) Journal of Islamic Economics and Business	Startups encounter obstacles including constrained resources, minimal brand recognition, and fierce competition. Digital marketing provides economical solutions; nevertheless, its strategic application in startup environments is still little examined. This study intends to examine digital marketing methods appropriate for startups using a thorough literature review. This research innovatively synthesizes fragmented knowledge to determine the best efficient digital marketing strategies for early-stage enterprises. The overall population for this study comprised 1,709 articles, with a sample size of 50 articles. The study's findings indicate that start-ups face multiple challenges, one of which is securing capital. Consequently, start-ups must implement a suitable approach, wherein digital marketing is employed to address their challenges. The findings of this research indicate that digital marketing is crucial for the survival and success of startups in competitive business environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 epidemic has expedited the expansion of start-ups, as enterprises and consumers increasingly use digital solutions and remote technologies. The swift digital revolution has highlighted the durability and adaptability of start-ups, establishing them as important

catalysts for innovation and economic recovery in a post-pandemic environment. Nevertheless, the wider corporate sector encountered considerable difficulties throughout the pandemic. Business revenues plummeted significantly, with 70% of enterprises ceasing operations at the height of the initial wave and 84% indicating a decrease in income (World Bank Group, 2022). On average, companies encountered a 51% year-on-year decline in revenue owing to mobility restrictions, underscoring the necessity for businesses particularly startups to implement adaptable and digitally oriented strategies for survival and growth. Entrepreneurs set up start-ups to facilitate their innovations despite the uncertainties of business (Kalyanasundaram et al., 2021). Start-ups are important as key drivers of economic development, industrial evolution, and innovation because they are established to turn innovative ideas into commercial product (Battistella et al., 2017). They create new jobs and contribute to national economic growth. Start-ups are often the catalyst for the growth of new and potential economic sectors, such as information technology, e-commerce, fintech, and others. The commercial products produced by these start-ups are then sold to consumers. The emergence of start-ups is also a form of implementation of business learning made by various stakeholders such as academics and government to reduce product failure when commercialized (Ajah et al., 2022).

To survive in the market, startups use marketing as a solution (Gayathri ; Shiny; Sudhan, 2022). The growing number of start-ups also means that there are commercial products that have been produced, and these must be distributed to customers. At this stage, marketing plays an important role in finding new customers or retaining old customers. The condition of the internet-based business environment makes marketing activities also carried out digitally, which is referred to as digital marketing. Digital marketing is an important component in today's business to understand customer needs (Jadhav et al., 2023). By utilizing digital marketing effectively, startups can increase visibility, reach their target market, and accelerate their business growth. Digital marketing provides a great opportunity to reach the target market effectively, but it also requires the right strategy and a deep understanding of consumers and market needs. With good digital marketing implementation, start-ups can maximize their growth potential, manage their reputation effectively, and avoid mistakes that could lead to failure.

Understanding the market and consumers is essential for building an effective marketing strategy. Digital marketing allows start-ups to reach their target market more efficiently and at

lower cost. To drive purchasing decisions, it is crucial to align marketing strategies with customer needs and preferences (Sari et al., 2023). Through digital marketing, start-ups can promote their products or services more easily and quickly on various digital platforms. For this reason, it is very important to understand digital marketing before it is implemented (Wijaya. Ni Putu, 2021). In addition, the implementation of digital marketing also provides benefits to anticipate negative impacts such as various negative perspectives that appear on the internet regarding commercialized products (Aljarah et al., 2022). The implementation of startups in developing countries has some risks and the key to success (Oliva et al., 2022). This is because the company was born in a less mature business environment where conditions require high-level technology while growing knowledge is not enough to meet those needs. Some startups use digital marketing for their marketing activities.

Although there is increasing recognition of the significance of digital marketing for startups, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape, current research is disjointed and lacks a cohesive framework specific to the startup environment. A significant portion of the existing literature addresses digital marketing in general, failing to adequately consider the distinct constraints encountered by startups, including constrained resources, elevated uncertainty, and swift market fluctuations. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) technique to offer a thorough and organized overview of the utilization of digital marketing by startups. The SLR technique facilitates an objective and thorough synthesis of previous scholarly work, pinpointing essential tactics, trends, and deficiencies in the literature (Kraus et al., 2019). This study seeks to provide clear insights to assist startup founders, marketers, and legislators in formulating more effective and adaptive digital marketing strategies.

Research Problem Statement

Start-ups can utilize various digital platforms such as social media, search engines, email, or other elements to promote their products or services with digital marketing. Digital marketing allows start-ups to target the right audience, measure the performance of advertisements in real time, and optimize their marketing strategies. Digital marketing can also make a business survive in the mature phase (Rizvanović et al., 2023). Mistakes in the use of digital marketing elements can be one of the factors that cause business failure. This is because each business has a market

with different needs, and this makes each business use different digital marketing elements (Wang, 2020). In connection with this background, this research was done to answer existing problems related to the implementation of digital marketing in start-ups with the following research questions:

RQ 1: How has digital marketing developed in the context of startups?

RQ 2: How does digital marketing impact start-ups?

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Development of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is the use of digital channels, such as search engines, social media, email, and websites, to promote products or services (Goldman et al., 2021). Digital marketing refers to advertising through digital channels, which is recognized for its transformative impact on companies and its enormous influence on the brand-consumer relationship. Digital marketing enables interaction with customers anytime and anywhere (Makrides et al., 2020). Digital marketing is the promotion of products or services using digital communication channels to reach target audiences to create and maintaining good relationships between companies and consumers (Vidovic, 2020). Digital marketing is a technique that uses digital media to promote products and services and build strong customer relationships (Bhanot, 2023). It involves various platforms such as social media, mobile apps, blogs, emails, and search engine optimizers to deliver advertising to customers (Kankam, 2022). Digital marketing offers benefits such as cost-effectiveness, broad audience reach, two-way communication, personalized information, and insights into consumer behavior (Hagen et al., 2022). It is important for businesses to have digital marketing capabilities to reach customers and increase their competitiveness. The adoption of digital marketing practices can lead to improved customer relationships, increased brand awareness, and enhanced organizational performance. Trust plays a crucial role in the adoption of digital marketing, as it builds confidence among users and encourages adoption. In (Jadhav et al., 2023) explained about the development of digital marketing which began to be developed in the 1990s along with the development of internet 1.0. At the beginning of its development, online marketing was not so developed because the internet was still limited. Then along with the development of the internet, the use of internet marketing as a marketing strategy began to expand. Beginning with internet advertising in 1994, digital marketing began to exist and develop

today. Terms regarding digital marketing also vary such as internet marketing (Mathews et al., 2019) or e-marketing (Lubis et al., 2022). However, the understanding of these terms has the same understanding, namely the use of the internet or digital media for marketing activities.

Digital marketing has various elements or tools that can be utilized as a marketing strategy. The elements applicable to digital marketing are as follows: Website, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click advertising (PPC), affiliate and performance marketing, strategic partnerships, online public relations, social media, email marketing, mobile marketing, customer relationship management, content marketing, and display media (Ryan, 2014). The application of these features or technologies must be tailored to the market and the requirements of each company. Digital marketing is the utilization of electronic media by marketers to promote goods or services to the market, with the primary aim of attracting customers and facilitating their interaction with companies (Mkwizu, 2019).

Digital marketing tools are perfect for business marketers because they (1) are aimed at value chain intermediaries, (2) develop value propositions that focus on economic value, and (3) deal with fewer customers than larger individual transactions (Vieira et al., 2019). The context of digital marketing has three main factors at its core: using digital media, approaching customers digitally, and being interactive with them (Hien & Nhu, 2022). The digital marketing framework has five dimensions (Kannan & Li, 2017): Search engine, Social media and user generated content, platform market/ two sides, contextual interaction, and online consumer behaviour.

Definition and Development of Start-ups

Start-ups are a fascinating business phenomenon that have a rapid cycle of failure (Štefan et al., 2021) (Shahzad et al., 2021). Startups are associated with scalable business models, the creation of new products or services, high risk of failure, and temporality (Koskinen, 2023). A start-up is a newly established business that is in its early stages of operation (Feng et al., 2022) (Qabil, 2023). A start-up can also be defined as a small company founded by one or more entrepreneurs to develop a unique product or service and bring it to market. Start-ups are often characterized by their innovative ideas, high growth potential, and focus on increasing competition in existing markets. (Sukumar et al., 2019). Start-ups are businesses that are often characterized by high uncertainty and constant change, so it is important to understand the early processes and challenges to success. (Slávik et al., 2021).

Startup phase explained by (Bruce, Shurong, Akakpo, et al., 2022), states startup phase : (1) early stages of a start-up, it begins with generating an idea about solving a problem in the market and providing a solution. In this stage, which is the initial stage where formalities, administration, organization are all still at an early stage so that interaction with customers does not yet exist. (2) Growth stage where at this stage the company produces products that can be attractive in the market. This stage is characterized by increased sales and diversification. The company also began to adapt to the market. (3) Mature phase at this stage sales began to fall, and the company's attention was more on operational efficiency. (4) Revival phase during which start-up companies diversify and expand to enter new markets and collaborate with other companies for business growth. (5) The last phase is declining. When entering this stage, the company begins to experience a decline and even exit the industry. A different explanation of the stages of startup can be seen from (Bruce, Shurong, Akakpo, et al., 2022) which states that the stages consist of the birth stage, the growth stages, decline stages, revival stages and maturity stages but this is just about different name but the meaning are the same That most studies on startup survival have focused on advanced economies and have a narrow focus on emerging economies (Azeem & Khanna, 2023).

In the context of startup business, there are various challenges, opportunities, and key success factors in dealing with them. The main challenge faced by start-ups is usually funding and the opportunities are startups can leverage technology and innovation to develop innovative products and services that meet the evolving demands of consumers, further enhancing their growth prospects in the consumer-oriented market (Qabil, 2023). The core success factors startup are the Idea, CEO's Leadership, Business Model, Marketing approach, and Entrepreneurial Team (Sevilla-Bernardo et al., 2022). Although startups are companies with a technological approach, the marketing approach is an important thing that needs to be considered.

3. METHODOLOGY

Systematic literature reviews, as a methodology, encompass the process of collecting, organizing, and evaluating existing literature within a certain review subject (Paul et al., 2021). This systematic literature review aims to consolidate and synthesize existing knowledge, identify gaps and consistencies in the literature, and offer direction for future research. It follows a

predefined protocol and uses specific criteria for selecting and analyzing relevant studies (Azeem & Khanna, 2023). This study conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 recommendations to synthesize evidence on digital marketing for startups. The SLR followed five main stages: (1) research question formulation, (2) structured search, (3) screening and eligibility assessment, and (4) data extraction, coding and synthesis.

(1) **Research Question Formulation**.

At this stage the author formulates the problem / research question. The research questions were formulated using PICO analysis. In (Purssell & McCrae, 2020) explains PICO stands for Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcomes, PICO helps researchers define their research question by identifying the key elements that need to be considered. The entire provisions of PICO are described in the following table:

Table 1. PICO Analysis

	Research Question	Problem	Interest	Context
RQ 1	How has digital marketing developed in the context of startups?	Development	Digital marketing	Start-up
RQ2	How does digital marketing impact start-ups?	Impact	Digital marketing	Start-up

(2) **Structured Search**

In designing this review, we selected four databases as sources for data collection: EBSCO, Scopus, ProQuest, and Taylor & Francis Online. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, we documented the exact search strings and search dates for each database. The search was limited to journal articles published in English between 2019 and 2023.

Scopus: TITLE-ABS-KEY("digital marketing") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("startup" OR "start-up" OR entrepreneur* OR "new venture") AND PUBYEAR > 2018 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))

EBSCO: AB("digital marketing") AND AB(startup OR "start-up" OR entrepreneur* OR "new venture") AND (PY 2019–2023)

ProQuest: ("digital marketing") AND ("startup" OR "start-up" OR entrepreneur* OR "new venture") AND PublicationYear >= 2019 AND PublicationYear <= 2023

Taylor & Francis Online: "digital marketing" AND (startup OR "new venture") (advanced search options applied with filters: 2019–2023, English, journal articles)

Following the database search, all retrieved records were exported and organized for screening. At this stage, it was essential to apply systematic criteria to ensure that only studies relevant to the research objectives were retained. Therefore, the subsequent phase involved the application of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the dataset and guarantee the quality and relevance of the final selection.

The inclusion criteria consisted of works published from 2019 to 2023, written in English, derived from peer-reviewed publications, and concentrated on digital marketing in the start-up setting, specifically examining its influence, efficacy, tactics, or roles in business development. The exclusion criteria comprised the removal of articles irrelevant to digital marketing or start-ups, non-peer-reviewed publications including editorials or opinion pieces, studies focused on large corporations or conventional marketing strategies, and duplicate entries within the selected databases.

(3)   **Screening and eligibility assessment**

Data gathering involved querying four databases: EBSCO (239 articles), Scopus (412 articles), ProQuest (480 articles), and Taylor & Francis (578 articles). A total of 1,709 publications were located throughout different databases, from which a final sample of 50 articles was selected for this study via a thorough screening process. We adhered to the PRISMA 2020 principles to guarantee transparency and replicability in the selection process.

The PRISMA flow diagram (Haddaway et al., 2022) delineates each phase of identification, screening, eligibility evaluation, and the ultimate inclusion of research. Initially, 1,709 documents were identified using database searches, with no further records from registries. Prior to screening, 754 records were excluded (153 duplicates, 456 ineligibles as determined by automation techniques, and 145 eliminated for other reasons), resulting in 955 records available for screening. Out of them, 808 were excluded, and 147 reports were requested for recovery. Nevertheless, 74 reports were inaccessible, resulting in 73 reports evaluated for eligibility. At this stage, 23 reports were rejected for reasons including study emphasis (3), unit of analysis (5), and context (15). In conclusion, 50 studies satisfied the qualifying criteria and were incorporated into the review.
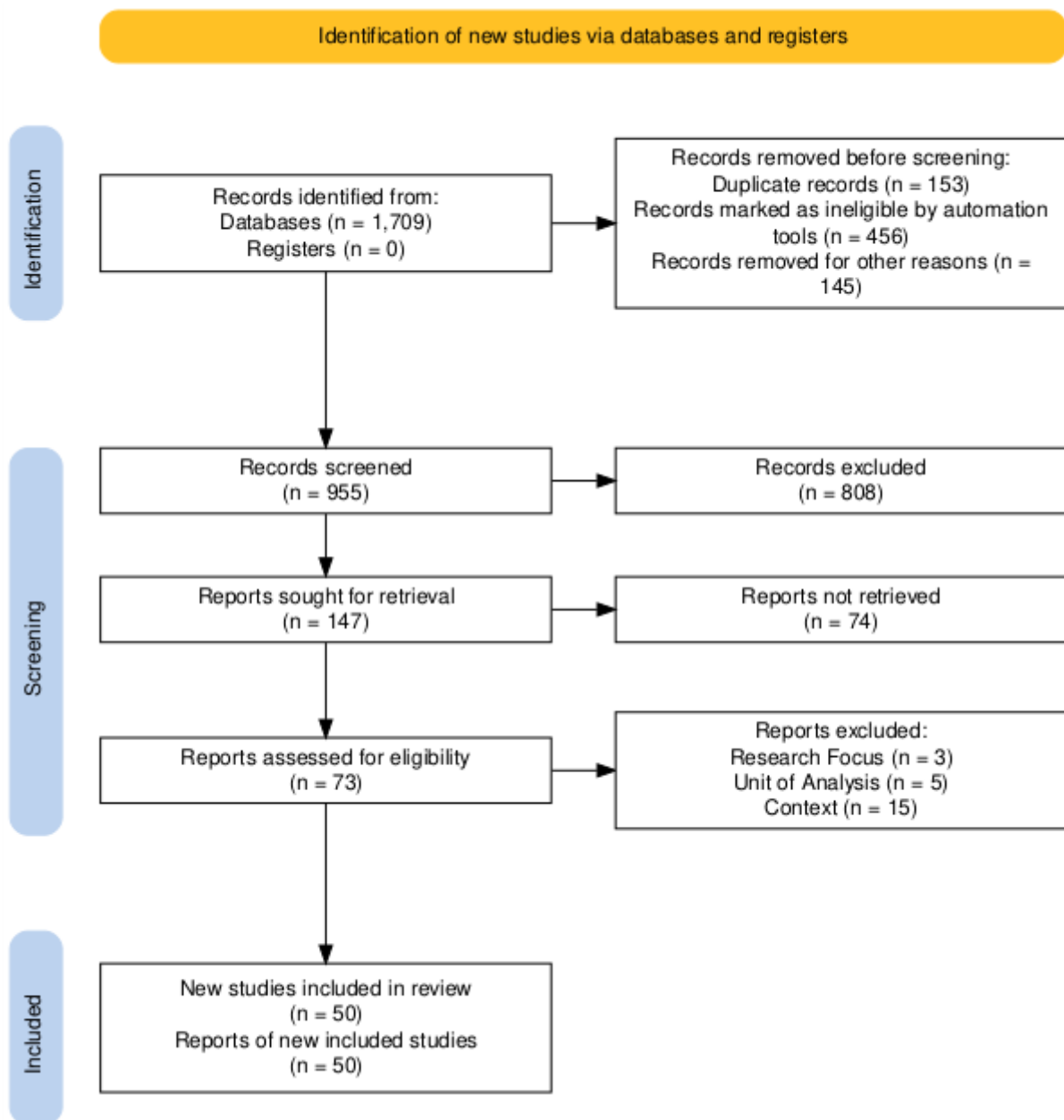
Figure 2. Prisma Flow Diagram

(4) Data extraction, coding and synthesis.

For each included article we extracted standard bibliographic and study-level information into a structured Excel sheet: Author(s), Year, Country/Context, Study Aims, Methodology, Sample (if empirical), Digital marketing tools/strategies examined, Key findings, Limitations, DOI.

Coding and thematic analysis (NVivo)

Author use NVivo to identify recurring themes and patterns across studies. The coding workflow was developing an initial codebook from a pilot coding of 10 randomly selected articles. The initial codebook included categories such as: *Digital tools (social media, SEO, email), Customer engagement, Resource constraints.*

Synthesis approach and theoretical integration

After final coding, codes were grouped into higher-order themes and used for thematic synthesis. Applied a thematic synthesis approach: (1) descriptive synthesis (publication year, journals, methods), (2) thematic grouping (NVivo clusters), and (3) interpretive synthesis linking themes to theory.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULTS

This research comes from four databases: EBSCO, Scopus, ProQuest, and Tailor & France. All articles were taken from the publication year 2019 to 2023. The following is a graph of the distribution of articles seen from the year of publication:
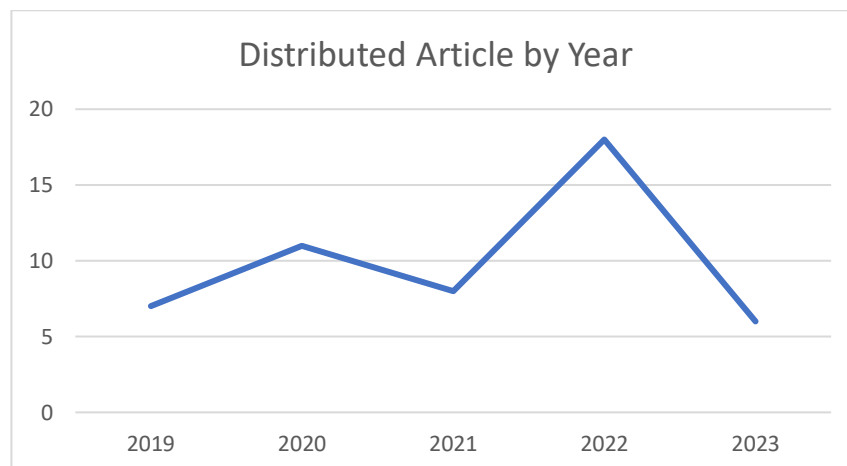

Figure 3. Distributed Article

Based on the graph above, the discussion of research on digital marketing and start-up has changed over time. The dominance of publications in the field of digital marketing and start-ups is in 2022 with a total of 18 articles, then in 2020 there were 11 articles, 2021 there were eight articles, on 2019 there were seven articles and finally six articles. The dominance of the highest

number is 2022, this can also be explained that during the pandemic the emergence of start-ups was quite high. Along with the growth of start-ups, research in this field has also increased.

Regarding the distribution of articles in journals, of the 50 final articles thoroughly reviewed, 35 came from different journals. The number of journal distributions is large and different because start-ups and digital marketing come from different scientific studies. For start-up articles, the distribution comes from journals related to technology and entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, the distribution for digital marketing articles comes from marketing and management journals. The journal with the most articles comes from Journal: Sustainability (Switzerland) as many as five articles. Then Cogent Business & Management, Industrial Marketing Management, and Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity respectively contributed three articles. The rest are distributed in other journals with one to two articles. Furthermore, in analyzing the data, NVIVO was used in grouping articles based on similar words. The function of this is to visualize patterns in research by grouping sources.

Table 2. Item Clustered By-Word Similarity

Cluster Identity	Topic	Article Code & Authors
Cluster 1 (Yellow) Start-up and Digital marketing	Start- up	Start-up – DS 34 - (Feng et al., 2022)
	Digital Marketing for managerial	DS4 (Makrides et al., 2020), DS6 (Brzaković & Brzaković, 2021)
	Digital Marketing for SME	DS11 (Hapsari et al., 2019), DS60 (Carpio et al., 2020)
	Digital Marketing for B2B and Start-up	DS 37 (Terho et al., 2022) DS13(Vieira et al., 2019), DS 31(Rizvanović et al., 2023), DS5 (Setkute & Dibb, 2022), DS63 (Pandey et al., 2020)
	Digital marketing and impact on any sector	DS 32 (Giantari et al., 2022), DS8 (Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020), DS38 (Tongdhamachart & Niyomsilpa, 2022), DS52 (Masrianto et al., 2022)
Cluster 2 (Red) Sosial Media and Impact for Business	Sosial Media and Impact for Business	DS2 (Wahid et al., 2022), DS68 (Syawaluddin et al., 2019), DS57 (Parida, 2021), DS58 (Kumar et al., 2019), DS28 (Peixoto et al., 2023), DS43 (Sukumar et al., 2019), DS18 (Bruce, Shurong, Egala, et al., 2022), DS36 (Bruce, Shurong, Akakpo, et al., 2022), DS69 (Kim & Choi, 2019)

Cluster Identity	Topic	Article Code & Authors
Cluster 3 (Green) Key Success Factor for Start-up and relation with Digital marketing	Key success factor start-up	DS 41 (Shahzad et al., 2021), DS 44 (Skawińska & Zalewski, 2020), DS30 (Griva et al., 2023), DS 42 (Štefan et al., 2021), DS56 (Slávik et al., 2021), DS29 (Sohail et al., 2023), DS 39 (De Noronha et al., 2022), DS23 (Danarahmanto et al., 2020), DS35 (Sevilla-Bernardo et al., 2022), DS33 (Habiburrahman et al., 2022)
	Digital marketing capability for start-up	DS49 (Hien & Nhu, 2022), DS 50(Lubis et al., 2022), DS3 (Goldman et al., 2021), DS55 (Patma et al., 2021), DS, 47 (Javid et al., 2019), DS 64 (Bartosik-Purgat, 2019), DS22 (Tolstoy et al., 2022), DS7(Mathews et al., 2019), DS59 (Wang, 2020)

It can be explained from the table above that the grouping is done based on the similarity of the research topic. Through this grouping, it can facilitate analysis. Cluster one discusses start-ups and digital marketing. It is explained that the function of digital marketing turns out to be in various business scopes such as: B2B, start-up, SME. Then for cluster two, there is a discussion about the impact of social media. Of course, people will think why social media appears when the discussion is about digital marketing and start-ups. Social media is one of the tools in digital marketing, because in some countries social media has its own phenomenon, many studies related to social media appear as part of digital marketing of course. Then cluster three focuses on start-ups and most of the discussion is about the structure of start-ups and the key success factors of start-ups but still connected to digital marketing. So, in this cluster there is also a connecting line that connects the context of start-ups and digital marketing.

Digital marketing development in start-ups

Digital marketing needs to be utilized in start-ups because it can be implemented based on an appropriate budget. The use of various tools in digital marketing, for example social media, can save costs for start-ups (Parida, 2021). As we know, start-ups are new companies being pioneered, so they need a suitable strategy so that budget expenditures are not large. The need for the importance of digital marketing in start-ups is the origin of its development, which will

then become aspects, dimensions, and become a strategy. According to (Hawaldar et al., 2022) stated that start-ups need digital marketing to increase sales and build brand image. This is because digital marketing has powerful tools that the online market needs today. Starting from increasing sales, organizing content on the internet, and so on. As a start-up company, there are many obstacles felt by start-ups, including funding issues (Qabil, 2023) (Slávik et al., 2021). It also describes other barriers that start-ups face such as limited resources, difficulty in attracting and retaining talent, competition from established companies, regulatory barriers, lack of market demand, inability to scale the business, lack of experience of the founders, and failure to pivot when necessary. These causes make many start-ups fail in the industry. The need for an understanding of digital marketing is necessary for start-ups. Start-ups need to understand the market to know what their consumers need, especially in the digital market.

The impact of digital marketing on start-ups

(Bruce, Shurong, Akakpo, et al., 2022) in his research stated that what helps start-ups survive is through social media, this is also supported by (Peixoto et al., 2023). In the research conducted (Rizvanović et al., 2023) stated that digital marketing has a huge impact on the growth of start-ups and helps start-ups survive the competition. In addition, digital marketing also has a role to complement the maturity of start-ups. Digital marketing with its various tools, one of which is social media, allows start-up entrepreneurs to survive in the industry (Sukumar et al., 2019). Digital marketing implementation can impact market effectiveness (Tongdhamachart & Niyomsilpa, 2022). In the end, strategies in digital marketing through several existing tools can be used as a strategy to create value for users (Kim & Choi, 2019). In Table 2 we can see that there are several impacts or benefits of utilizing digital marketing. Among the start-ups that are the subject of this research, others also have an impact on B2B, Small Medium Enterprise (SME) and various other sectors. In addition, some studies reveal that digital marketing is used as a company's business strategy (Vieira et al., 2019) among others serves to improve company performance (Terho et al., 2022). Digital marketing is important for businesses to improve their competitiveness with consumers. A company's ability to plan, implement, and manage digital marketing to increase competitiveness in the eyes of consumers is referred to as digital marketing capability. Using DMUI (Digital marketing Utilization Index) to evaluate and improve digital marketing capabilities (Masrianto et al., 2022).

DISCUSSIONS

Digital marketing is used in various businesses such as B2B, SMEs, and Start-ups. The use of digital marketing has various objectives such as a business strategy for the company, to improve company performance, and to increase marketing effectiveness. As a newly pioneered business, start-ups do have many obstacles so that many fail (Shahzad et al., 2021; Slávik et al., 2021) but not a few have had success. This can be seen from some literature that reveals the key factors that can drive success in start-ups. To provide a deeper theoretical understanding of the literature synthesized in this review, we frame our discussion through three complementary strategic management perspectives: the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities, and the Customer Journey.

From the RBV perspective, digital marketing can be understood as a valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resource that enables start-ups to differentiate themselves in highly competitive markets (Barney, 1991). Building on this, the Dynamic Capabilities view extends the analysis by focusing on how start-ups continuously sense market changes, seize emerging opportunities, and transform their resource base through digital technologies (Teece, David; Pisano, Gary; Shuen, 2018). The Customer Journey perspective complements these internal and adaptive orientations by emphasizing the external dimension how firms engage customers across multiple touchpoints, foster loyalty, and co-create value throughout the decision-making process (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Collectively, these perspectives explain not only what resources and capabilities start-ups require but also how these must be orchestrated to translate digital marketing initiatives into sustained competitive advantage.

These theories explain how startups utilize digital marketing to establish and maintain a competitive advantage in an uncertain market. The critical factors are the company's business plan, suitable capital, effective innovation, skilled human resources with entrepreneurial capabilities, and, most crucially, market comprehension (marketing skills). This pertains to the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory. When a startup can identify its VRIN resources, it gains an edge only when these resources are effectively integrated with other distinctive, intangible assets such as proficient human capital or new digital tactics.

When addressing start-ups, the focus is not only on creating an innovative concept, but also on assuring the organizational capacity to effectively execute and maintain it. Dynamic

Capabilities theory offers a crucial perspective, highlighting that start-ups must cultivate the capacity to identify market opportunities, capitalize on them through suitable strategic initiatives, and adapt their resource base in response to environmental volatility (Zhou & Kuang, 2025). The capacity to modify digital marketing strategies in accordance with changing customer behaviours exemplifies these competencies in action. Investing significantly in social media advertising would be futile if the target market seldom interacts with those platforms. Start-ups must exhibit agility in adapting their marketing tools such as websites, email marketing, online advertising, mobile applications, or web analytics to remain pertinent to customer preferences (Dolega et al., 2021). This statement related to the previous study (Silva et al., 2020).

This study suggests that the integration of digital marketing tools with dynamic capabilities and customer journey management is essential for start-ups, building on prior research that analysed individual components of digital marketing, including online advertising and social media (Chaffey and Chadwick, 2016; Franque et al., 2023). Through doing so, start-ups can enhance competitiveness, maintain growth throughout development phases, and more effectively navigate volatile markets. This theoretical integration enhances the literature by shifting from a tool-centric perspective of digital marketing to a capability-based and customer-centric approach, which is crucial for start-ups aiming for long-term viability and success.

Compared with previous systematic reviews, the novelty of this study lies in its specific focus and methodological approach. Earlier reviews (Pandey et al., 2020) (Jadhav et al., 2023) examined digital marketing in SMEs more broadly, often without distinguishing startups as a unique context. Our review contributes novelty by: (1) focusing exclusively on startups, which face distinct constraints and agility compared to SMEs; (2) covering the post-pandemic period (2019–2023) when digital marketing adoption became more critical; and (3) applying NVivo-based thematic coding to synthesize insights systematically. These contributions position the study as complementary to earlier reviews while offering fresh insights into startup-focused digital marketing.

This theme synthesis not only emphasizes existing knowledge but also reveals gaps that can guide future research agendas. This review delineates digital marketing in start-ups through the frameworks of resource-based theory, dynamic capabilities, and customer journey, establishing a systematic basis for subsequent research to develop more comprehensive models, examine causal relationships, and investigate under-explored topics such as post-pandemic

consumer behavior changes, cross-market scalability, and the significance of entrepreneurial agility. Thus, the originality of our method extends beyond mere descriptive contribution; it also serves as a framework for enhancing theoretical advancement and practical comprehension in the subject.

5.   CONCLUSION

The development of digital marketing has been widely researched, including the utilization of digital marketing elements such as social media and online advertising. However, understanding the market is the main thing that must be known by businesspeople, especially for start-ups. If start-ups do not understand the market well, the use of digital marketing becomes useless. Apart from social media, there are many elements and tools in digital marketing that can be utilized, such as websites, email marketing, online advertising, mobile applications, and web analytics tools. Start-ups also need to have an agile culture in running the company and the ability to innovate, adapt, and have human resources with adequate entrepreneurial skills. The stages of start-up development include knowing the problem and creating a solution, having an organized business model, and entering international markets for growth and high profits. Digital marketing plays an important role in enabling start-ups to survive and thrive in business competition.

For future research, it can be suggested to use other databases such as WOS, Emerald, and so on. As well as research studies can research in other fields such as the utilization of digital marketing for SME'S. Start-up companies in digital marketing could focus on exploring the effectiveness of various digital marketing channels and tactics in different stages of a start-up's growth. For instance, a study could compare the impact of social media marketing, email marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) on customer acquisition and brand awareness for early-stage start-ups versus more established ones. Additionally, researchers could investigate the influence of factors such as industry type, target audience demographics, and geographical location on the choice and success of digital marketing strategies for start-ups. This research could provide practical insights for start-up entrepreneurs to optimize their digital marketing efforts based on their specific context and objectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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