

Customer Journey Analysis and Funnel Strategy Based on Social Media in Leather Craft SMEs

Fransiskus Xaverius Agung Perkasa Jampur^{1*}, Bernadeta Wahyu Astri Pratita², Vinno Christmantara³

^{1,3} Department of Information System, Faculty of Engineering,
Widya Karya Catholic University, Malang, Indonesia

² Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business,
Widya Karya Catholic University, Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: agungprakasa@widyakarya.ac.id

Abstract

This study analyzes the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in a leather product SME in Malang City using two approaches: Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) and Marketing Funnel Analysis. The SME relies on Instagram and WhatsApp as its main interaction and sales channels but faces low user engagement and limited conversion of inquiries into transactions. A descriptive qualitative method was applied based on the analysis of customer conversations and social media insights. Data were collected from exported WhatsApp chats, Instagram Direct Messages (DMs), and customer interviews and surveys. The analysis included persona categorization, mapping of funnel stages (awareness, interest, consideration, conversion, loyalty), and identification of touchpoints, activities, emotions, and pain points, complemented by conversion rate calculations.

The results show that most customers interact through WhatsApp (62.6%), with an overall conversion rate of 35.48%. The transition from interest to consideration recorded the highest drop-off, while customer loyalty and repeat orders emerged as the SME's strongest asset. Interactions involving the owner achieved higher conversions than those managed by the admin, indicating the importance of personalized communication. CJM analysis also identified key pain points in sizing accuracy and product revisions, although these challenges were partly mitigated through after-sales support. Overall, the study concludes that digital marketing for SMEs can be strengthened by leveraging funnel and CJM-based insights to improve content quality, enhance communication performance, and optimize customer experience. These findings offer practical guidance for developing more targeted and data-driven digital marketing strategies within a business intelligence framework.

Keywords: Customer Journey Mapping; Funnel Analysis; Media Social; Leather Product SMEs

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved into a primary channel in digital marketing strategies, particularly for SMEs that face resource limitations. Previous studies emphasize that social media utilization can expand market reach, enhance customer interactions, and strengthen brand awareness (Harsya et al., 2020). For SMEs, platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp not only serve as promotional tools but also function as direct interaction channels between customers and sellers (Sharabati et al., 2024). This trend aligns with the adoption of customer-centric marketing strategies that prioritize personalization, product

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customization, and customer data analysis as key sources of business knowledge ([Sakti & Deslia, 2024](#)). The novelty of this research lies in its focus on a local SME in the leather product sector (handmade leather shoes) that relies exclusively on social media for sales without an e-commerce platform or official website. The methodological contribution is the integration of Customer Journey Mapping (CJM), Marketing Funnel Analysis, and WhatsApp-based selling analysis as the primary medium of interaction and conversion. This approach aligns with SMEs characterized by highly personalized communication and minimal use of formal CRM technologies. According to McKinsey, there are four main phases in describing the customer journey: Initial Consideration, where consumers form an initial list of brands they consider; Active Evaluation, where consumers search for information and add or remove brands from their list; Closure, where consumers make the purchase decision; and finally Post purchase, where post-purchase experiences influence loyalty and future decisions ([Court et al., 2009](#)). Furthermore, the analysis results are applied to design a data-driven digital marketing strategy based on actual customer interactions, which can be directly implemented by similar SMEs. Beyond the strategic framework, the research also produces a visual dashboard as a decision-support tool for SMEs to independently manage their marketing activities. Thus, this study contributes not only to the theoretical development of social media-based digital marketing for SMEs but also provides practical outputs to support data-driven digital transformation in the micro and small enterprise sector ([Ifadhila et al., 2024](#)).

Although numerous studies have highlighted the potential of social media in enhancing SME performance, a gap remains in how customer interactions on digital channels can be systematically mapped to understand customer journey patterns. The greatest influence now comes from consumer-driven touchpoints such as online reviews and peer recommendations, rather than solely from company advertising. Therefore, businesses must adjust their marketing strategies to target the most influential factors within the customer decision cycle ([Cheng & Shiu, 2018](#)). This theoretical concept is highly relevant in the digital era and provides a new framework for businesses and organizations to better understand and influence consumer behavior ([Marvi et al., 2024](#)). Many SMEs, including the handmade leather shoe SME from Malang that serves as the focus of this study, face challenges in managing customer data. Interactions via Instagram and WhatsApp chats are not documented in a structured database, limiting the potential to analyze purchasing patterns, repeat transactions, and the factors influencing customer decision-making ([Jampur et al., 2024](#)). Moreover, most previous research has focused on either increasing brand awareness or sales conversion in general, while the integration of Funnel Marketing and Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) within the SME context remains relatively underexplored ([Habib, 2025](#)).

This study aims to (1) analyze the effectiveness of SME digital marketing strategies in reaching new customers and retaining existing ones, (2) map customer journey patterns from awareness to conversion stages based on Instagram and WhatsApp conversation data, and (3) formulate data-driven digital marketing strategies to improve customer engagement and conversion rates. The contributions of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it extends the understanding of Funnel Marketing and CJM applications in SMEs that are oriented toward product personalization and constrained resources. Practically, it offers data-driven recommendations to support digital marketing decision-making for SMEs, particularly in maximizing Instagram and WhatsApp as primary interaction channels. Therefore, this study provides a relevant strategic framework to enhance SME competitiveness within an increasingly competitive digital business ecosystem.

METHOD, DATA, AND ANALYSIS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method by analyzing customer conversations and social media insights from SMEs XYZ. The approach used is a combination of Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) and Marketing Funnel Analysis to examine customer interaction patterns on Instagram and WhatsApp. This strategy was selected due to the partner SMEs strong reliance on social media as the primary channel for sales and customer engagement, while lacking a structured system to manage marketing and customer data. By applying a data-driven marketing approach, this research aims to

provide practical solutions that can be directly implemented to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies ([Reitsamer & Becker, 2024](#)). The research stages are as follows:

1. **Data Collection.** Data were collected through exporting and documenting customer conversations from WhatsApp and Instagram Direct Messages (DMs), along with Instagram Insight metrics such as reach, profile visits, link clicks to WhatsApp, and story/post engagement. A simple transaction log was also recorded, including purchase volume, product type, and repeat orders. To strengthen the analysis of emotions and funnel stages, a short questionnaire was distributed to customers and potential customers, while a limited Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the SMEs owner was conducted to validate findings.
2. **Data Preprocessing.** This vital stage involved cleaning irrelevant conversations such as spam or external promotions, categorizing customers into personas (new customers, returning customers, and loyal customers), and determining the funnel stage for each interaction (awareness, interest, consideration, conversion, loyalty). Furthermore, the study identified touchpoints (Instagram feed, story, WhatsApp chats, or exhibitions), mapped conversational activities, and coded customer emotions and main pain points.
3. **Data Analysis.** The CJM analysis was conducted to visualize the customer journey from initial contact to becoming a loyal buyer. The Marketing Funnel analysis was then applied by calculating the conversion rate (CR) at each funnel stage (Awareness → Interest → Consideration → Conversion → Loyalty). Conversion Rate is calculated using the following formula ([Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019](#)):

$$CR = \frac{\text{Number of Customers Who Proceed to Next Stage}}{\text{Number of Customers in Previous Stage}} \times 100\%$$

Additionally, customer distribution was analyzed based on their channel of reach (Instagram, WhatsApp, referrals, or exhibitions). Finally, qualitative triangulation of interviews, FGDs, and questionnaires was performed to strengthen interpretations of customer pain points and needs.

4. **Visualization & Recommendations.** Findings were presented to the SMEs in the form of a customer journey map illustrating personas, touchpoints, activities, emotions, and pain points. A simple dashboard was also designed to monitor SMEs digital marketing performance, alongside practical recommendations for implementing data-driven digital marketing strategies to increase customer engagement and conversions.

RESULTS

Marketing Funnel Analysis

The funnel marketing analysis in this study was conducted to understand the customer journey flow from the initial stage of brand awareness through to purchase (conversion) and repeat purchases (loyalty). Based on the processed data, a total of 189 customers were analyzed and categorized into five funnel stages: awareness, interest, consideration, conversion, and loyalty. For SMEs XYZ, which relies on Instagram and WhatsApp as its main sales channels, funnel marketing can be mapped using digital metrics such as reach (impressions), profile visits, direct messages (DMs), and WhatsApp conversations that lead to transactions. This mapping is essential to identify critical drop-off points where potential customers disengage, and to understand how digital marketing strategies can be optimized accordingly ([Tariaranie Wiraguna & Nabila, 2024](#)). However, the initial findings revealed that a number of customers directly entered the conversion or even loyalty stage without clear traces of earlier funnel stages. These cases were classified as unknown journeys. This phenomenon aligns with the characteristics of SMEs XYZ, which focuses more on managing existing customers and repeat orders rather than strategies for new customer acquisition. Moreover, 38 customers, or 20.11% of the total, directly entered the loyalty stage without identifiable awareness or interest phases. This indicates the presence of unknown journeys, most likely driven by word of mouth, personal relationships with the owner, or repeat orders from previous buyers.

Table 1: Conversion rate per transisi funnel

Stages	CR by Funnel
Awareness → Interest	2,7
Interest → Consideration	0,56
Consideration → Conversion	1,23
Conversion → Loyalty	0,53

The calculation of the conversion rate (CR) yielded an overall value of 35.48%. This figure represents the proportion of customers who successfully progressed across funnel stages. The detailed CR per transition is presented in Table 1. Based on these results, it was observed that awareness levels were relatively low, while interest levels were high; similarly, consideration was low, but conversion rates were comparatively higher. This suggests a funnel structure that differs from the standard model, reflecting SMEs focus on managing returning buyers rather than acquiring new ones. Furthermore, the analysis identified the largest drop point at the Interest to Consideration stage, where many customers showed initial interest but did not proceed to product evaluation. This pattern is consistent with both interview findings and chat data, which revealed that many potential customers discontinued their journey after merely asking about price or stock availability without moving forward to purchase.

Table 2: Top 5 Conversions based on Question Patterns

Pattern	Total	Conversion	CR (%)
Ask for the price	122	59	48,36
Ask about product	102	55	53,92
Custom request	106	67	63,21
Ask about material	84	62	73,81
Ask about color	73	57	78,08

Further findings on interaction patterns show that conversations such as “asking for price,” “asking about product,” and “asking about customization” appeared across almost all early funnel stages, yet had relatively low conversion rates. This can be explained by the fact that the SME has no online catalog or e-commerce website that allows customers to directly view product prices and specifications. As a result, potential customers are required to initiate interactions through Instagram (IG) or WhatsApp (WA), which prolongs the process at the consideration stage. From a quantitative perspective, “asking for price” and “asking about product” emerge as two of the biggest conversion gaps, with a significant discrepancy between the number of conversations at this stage and the actual number of completed transactions.

Table 3: Top 5 Customer Channels

Customer Channel	%
Sending messages via WhatsApp	62,6
Viewing IG stories/posts	40,72
Sending messages via IG DM	26,32
Commenting on IG stories/posts	11,63
From IG link tree	9,42

Path analysis reveals that 62.6% of customers prefer to communicate directly through WhatsApp rather than engaging on Instagram. While Instagram serves as the primary showcase platform for products, levels of likes, comments, and shares remain relatively low. Another interesting fact is the existence of two communication channels—an admin number and the owner’s number. The majority of customers who sought product recommendations and completed transactions tended to interact directly with the owner. This indicates that personal communication with the owner adds significant value for customers, though it also poses a potential bottleneck in customer management if the entire

process depends on one person. In addition, the proportion of customers with an unknown journey is relatively high, particularly in data sourced from WhatsApp. Many customers were already at the loyalty stage without a clear record of their initial awareness or interest. This reflects a weakness in the SME’s customer data management system, as there is no systematic documentation of customer acquisition paths. Such conditions hinder efforts to track the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, particularly in assessing Instagram’s contribution as an awareness channel.

Overall, the funnel analysis results indicate that the SME’s digital marketing strategy is not yet balanced. The loyalty stage appears to dominate due to a strong base of repeat customers, while the awareness stage is relatively weak. This means that although the loyalty of existing customers is well-maintained, strategies to expand the new customer base through digital channels remain under-optimized. These findings provide an important foundation for formulating a more targeted digital marketing strategy, particularly by strengthening content and engagement at the early funnel stages.

Building on these insights, the next step is to analyze the Customer Journey Mapping (CJM). While the funnel highlights quantitative drop-offs and conversion rates, CJM provides a complementary perspective by capturing the qualitative aspects of customer interactions such as touchpoints, emotions, and pain points across different stages. This integrated view allows for a deeper understanding of not only where customers disengage, but also why these disengagements occur and how the SME can design interventions to improve the overall customer experience.

Customer Journey Analysis

The customer journey can be understood as a process of experiences that customers undergo when consuming a product, in which the emotional journey of the customer needs to be explored and visualized. This includes how customers move through the stages of awareness, interest, consideration, conversion, and loyalty (Okeke et al., 2024). For SMEs, this mapping is particularly important to identify touchpoints, emotions, and customer pain points, so that marketing strategies developed are not only effective in attracting new customers but also in retaining existing ones by delivering better experiences (Ijomah et al., 2024). The Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) analysis was conducted to understand how customers of SME XYZ interact with the brand across each stage of their journey. Unlike funnel analysis, which focuses on quantifying movements between stages, CJM provides a qualitative perspective by capturing customer experiences, emotions, pain points, and interaction patterns, as follows:

Persona

Based on customer classification using the CJM and Funnel Analysis approaches, five main persona groups were identified with the following distribution: Explorer (32.63%), New Buyer (21.05%), Repeat Buyer (20.53%), Loyal Buyer (15.26%), and Curious (10.53%).

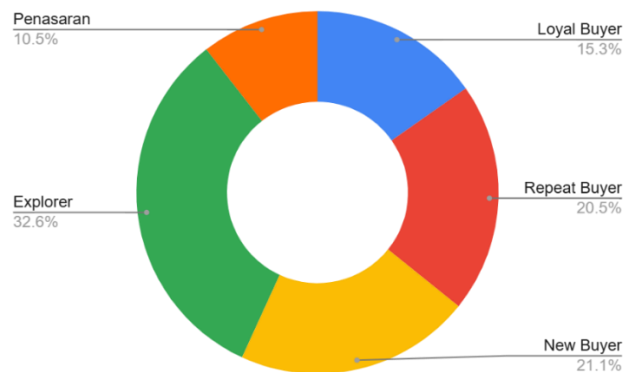


Figure 1: Distribution of SME XYZ Personas

The data shows that the Explorer group dominates (32.63%), representing potential customers who actively engage through Instagram and WhatsApp—such as asking about products, prices, or availability—yet do not always proceed to purchase. This high proportion indicates significant market potential but also highlights a gap between initial interest and actual conversion. More persuasive content and digital communication strategies are needed to move Explorers to the next funnel stage. Meanwhile, New Buyers (21.05%) and Repeat Buyers (20.53%) together account for 41.58% of total customers. The relatively balanced proportion between the two confirms that the SME attracts new buyers while also managing to retain some customers for repeat purchases. However, the gap between New Buyers and Repeat Buyers still signals room for improvement in retention strategies, such as personalized offers or post-purchase follow-ups. The next group, Loyal Buyers (15.26%), represents the most strategically valuable segment, despite being smaller in proportion. Their characteristics are marked by strong trust in product quality as well as personal relationships with the SME’s owner. This group is less influenced by the intensity of social media content, focusing instead on after-sales experiences and the SME’s ability to tailor products to customer needs. Finally, the Curious group (10.53%) consists of individuals who interact briefly, such as asking about the store address, production status, or merely showing initial interest. Although small, this group is important as an indicator of early-stage content (awareness) effectiveness and presents opportunities to be guided toward the interest or consideration stages through more proactive communication strategies. Overall, the persona distribution confirms that the SME’s digital marketing strategy is stronger in managing relationships with existing customers than in continuously acquiring new ones. Therefore, funnel optimization should focus on two priorities: (1) maximizing the conversion of Explorers and Curious into New Buyers, and (2) strengthening retention strategies to transform New Buyers into Repeat and ultimately Loyal Buyers.

Stage Mapping

The mapping was conducted by referring to the stages of awareness → interest → consideration → conversion → loyalty. From the collected data, an interesting pattern emerged. At the Awareness stage, most new customers became familiar with the SME’s brand through Instagram, either via posts or friend recommendations. However, engagement was relatively low (few likes/comments), indicating that awareness occurred more outside of public interactions. At the Interest stage, interactions were dominated by returning customers who directly searched for products or asked about customization options, rather than by new potential customers. At the Consideration stage, customers frequently asked about prices, materials, and models. However, a significant gap was observed—many conversations stopped at this stage without moving forward to conversion.

Tabel 4: Top 10 Stage Gap Patterns

Customer Chat Pattern	Total	Conversion	Conversion rate (%)
Asking about price	122	59	48,36
Asking about product	102	55	53,92
Asking about custom product	106	67	63,21
Asking about material	84	62	73,81
Asking about color	73	57	78,08
Asking for address/boutique	32	17	53,12
Interaction/liking stories	15	0	0
Asking about lead time	78	63	80,77
Asking about product service	30	16	53,33
Asking about size	51	37	72,55

At the Conversion stage, purchases mainly occurred through the WhatsApp channel, with a high success rate when customers received direct recommendations from the owner. Finally, at the Loyalty stage, returning customers were highly dominant. Their loyalty was less influenced by Instagram

content and more shaped by trust and personal product experience, which became the key drivers of customer retention.

Emotions and Pain Points

The analysis revealed variations in customer emotions during interactions. Positive emotions emerged when customers expressed satisfaction with product quality, customization flexibility, and after-sales services such as the option to revise shoe sizes up to two times. Neutral emotions were observed in brief interactions, such as asking about stock availability or liking Instagram content. Meanwhile, Negative emotions appeared in cases of incorrect sizing, perceived long production times, slow responses from the admin, and the lack of a comprehensive product catalog, which forced customers to repeatedly ask for detailed information.

Table 5: Top 10 Pain Points

Pain Point	Frequency
Production delays	28
Incorrect sizing	25
Requesting revisions	23
No post-purchase feedback	19
Slow response from admin	16
Price mismatch	12
No rental option	10
Admin did not provide further explanation	10
Admin did not reply to chats	10
Shipping issues	8

In addition, the analysis of pain points identified through questionnaires and focus group discussions highlighted several challenges. The absence of a complete product catalog on Instagram resulted in repetitive conversations regarding models, materials, and prices. Sizing errors were sometimes caused by customers themselves, leading to revisions and potential delays in product use. Furthermore, Instagram engagement (likes, comments, shares) was relatively low despite having a considerable number of followers. Another notable issue was the difference in communication quality between the admin and the owner, with many customers feeling more comfortable interacting directly with the owner.

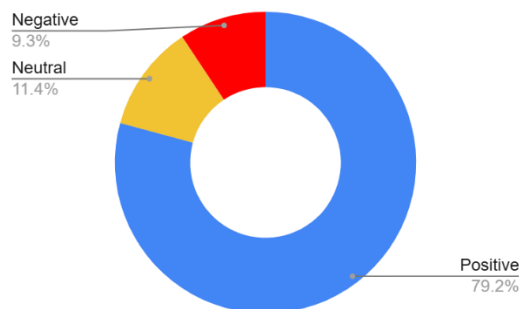


Figure 2: Emotion Distribution

The analysis of emotions derived from customer conversations shows a dominance of positive emotions at 79.22%, largely influenced by satisfaction with product quality, flexibility in customization services, and the availability of after-sales support such as size revisions. Neutral emotions (11.45%) emerged in brief interactions, such as asking about stock availability or simply liking Instagram content, reflecting initial customer engagement without progressing to the purchasing stage. Meanwhile, negative emotions (9.34%) were concentrated on several critical pain points, including production delays (28 cases), inaccurate product sizing (25 cases), repeated revision requests (23 cases), and slow

responses from the admin (16 cases). This distribution indicates that although the majority of customer experiences are positive, there is a small yet significant group that encounters negative experiences at specific touchpoints. Major pain points such as production delays and sizing issues often act as direct triggers for negative emotions. In addition, the lack of a complete product catalog on Instagram forces potential customers to repeatedly ask about prices, materials, and models, which can increase frustration if responses are delayed.

These findings carry important strategic implications. First, positive emotion drivers such as customization and after-sales services should be maintained as key competitive advantages. Second, improvements should focus on dominant pain points, particularly in production management and admin communication standards. Addressing these two areas could potentially reduce negative emotions by more than half. Third, the low public engagement on Instagram (likes, comments, shares) suggests that awareness strategies need to be strengthened with more interactive and informative content, such as the development of an integrated digital product catalog. In conclusion, the analysis of emotions and pain points not only highlights customer perceptions quantitatively but also provides practical guidance for SMEs to enhance interaction quality, minimize negative experiences, and strengthen customer loyalty.

Interaction Pattern

The analysis revealed that customer interactions involving requests for product recommendations from the admin demonstrated a very high conversion rate of 86.84%. Interestingly, the majority of these conversations occurred through the owner’s WhatsApp number rather than the admin’s contact. This phenomenon highlights a stronger dimension of trust when customers communicate directly with the business owner. In the context of handmade products such as customized leather shoes, the owner is perceived as the person most knowledgeable about the product and therefore able to provide more accurate recommendations tailored to customer needs.

Table 6: Customer Interaction Patterns

Customer Chat Pattern	Total	Conversion	Conversion rate
Payment (down/full)	66	66	100 %
Request preferred courier	10	9	90 %
Ask for recommendation	38	33	86,84 %
Ask about production time	78	63	80,77 %
Ask for discount	31	25	80,65%
Ask how to measure size	30	24	80%

Within the marketing funnel framework, the “ask for recommendation” pattern typically appears at the consideration-to-conversion stage. Customer purchase decisions are not solely influenced by promotional content on social media, but also by personal interactions that provide reassurance and confidence in the chosen product. Thus, the touchpoint of direct consultation with the owner can be considered a key driver of conversion. Meanwhile, other interaction patterns such as “payment (down/full)” tend to occur in the post-purchase stage and are more administrative in nature, without directly affecting the initial purchase decision. Therefore, the “ask for recommendation” pattern whether directed at the admin or owner is strategically more important in shaping digital marketing strategies for SMEs. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of personal interaction and product consultation in improving conversion effectiveness for SMEs offering customized products ([Jaakkola & Alexander, 2024](#); [Micheaux & Bosio, 2019](#)).

Implication for similar SMEs, digital marketing strategies should not only focus on optimizing Instagram content as a promotional medium, but also strengthen communication mechanisms that highlight the owner’s role as a product consultant. A hybrid model, where admins act as the initial filter and the owner provides premium product recommendations, has strong potential to increase conversion rates while fostering long-term customer relationships.

DISCUSSION

This study generated several important findings regarding the digital marketing strategies of SMEs XYZ, which provide practical insights:

1. **Dominance of Loyal and Repeat Buyers**, the data reveal that the customer journey does not always follow the classic funnel flow from awareness to loyalty. A significant number of customers entered directly at the conversion or even loyalty stage, primarily due to the trust already established with the owner. This indicates that the existing customer base is the SMEs main asset, making retention strategies more crucial than acquisition.
2. **Low Public Awareness on Instagram**, although Instagram is the SMEs main promotional channel, public engagement in the form of likes, comments, or shares remains very low. Most awareness is driven by word-of-mouth recommendations or direct searches rather than uploaded content. This highlights the need to improve visual content strategies and storytelling on Instagram to effectively reach potential new customers.
3. **Conversion Gap at the Consideration Stage**, many potential customers stop after asking about prices or product details without moving forward to purchase. This gap arises because the SMEs lacks a complete and easily accessible product catalog. As a result, customers often repeat standard questions, increasing the risk of losing momentum for conversion.
4. **The Owner's Role as the Primary Trust Factor**, interaction analysis shows that customers feel more comfortable communicating directly with the owner than with the admin. Conversations involving the owner achieve higher conversion rates, especially when customers seek product recommendations. This emphasizes that personalized communication and the owner's brand image are critical elements in maintaining loyalty.
5. **After-Sales Pain Points**, the most frequent pain point is the need for shoe size revisions, caused by inaccurate self-measurements by customers. Although the SMEs provides measurement guidelines and offers up to two free revisions, this still leads to potential inconvenience, product usage delays, and additional costs.
6. **Integration of CJM and Funnel Analysis Provides Comprehensive Insights**, funnel analysis highlights conversion rates and stage gaps, while CJM explains the customer experience behind those numbers. For example, low conversion at the consideration stage is explained by the lack of a product catalog and limited admin communication, whereas high loyalty is explained by personal relationships with the owner.

Opportunities for Developing Digital Marketing Strategies the SMEs must optimize digital marketing in two directions strengthening Instagram engagement to build awareness among new customers and enhancing personalized services and after-sales support to retain and expand the loyal customer base.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that SMEs XYZ's digital marketing strategy is currently more effective in retaining existing customers than in acquiring new ones. This is reflected in the high proportion of loyal and repeat buyers (>35%) and a relatively stable conversion rate at the final stages of the funnel. However, effectiveness in attracting new customers remains low, as indicated by weak Instagram engagement such as likes, comments, and reach that rarely progresses into deeper interactions. The Customer Journey Mapping revealed weaknesses at the awareness and interest stages, with many potential customers dropping off at the consideration stage. In contrast, loyalty is driven by strong after-sales services and product customization. Funnel analysis further shows that customer conversion rates are significantly higher when direct interactions occur with the owner. Based on these findings, several data-driven strategies are recommended: optimizing Instagram content, enhancing the role of admins in communication, leveraging data insights to monitor funnel performance, and implementing customer retention programs to strengthen engagement and increase sales conversion.

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