

Empowering Local Brands: A Case Study on Ruaya's Digital Branding and Marketing

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana praktisi *Public Relations* (PR) membantu Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) lokal Indonesia yang bergerak di bidang percetakan souvenir untuk berbagai keperluan. Produk yang dihasilkan UMKM lokal bernama Ruaya itu digunakan dalam keperluan klien mereka yang hendak merancang kampanye digital untuk menciptakan strategi *branding* yang lebih baik dan mengembangkan kesadaran pelanggan baru dalam pemasarannya. Penelitian berfokus pada dua isu utama, yaitu integrasi 'Teori Disonansi Kognitif' (*Cognitive Dissonance Theory*) dalam *branding* dan promosi produk Ruaya. Di samping itu peneliti melihat bagaimana strategi pelatihan karyawan dan pengembangan kepemimpinan perusahaan yang beralih dari media tradisional ke media *digital* dalam *branding* dan promosi. Tujuan makalah ini adalah untuk mengembangkan strategi yang dapat diterapkan Ruaya dalam memanfaatkan media sosial secara efektif demi menciptakan strategi *branding* dalam meningkatkan kesadaran merek dan menarik konsumen baru. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga berfokus pada pengembangan kapasitas karyawan dengan memanfaatkan CDT sebagai alat komunikasi untuk mempromosikan keterlibatan *online* yang aktif, mengadopsi strategi pemasaran *niche*, dan membangun identitas unik bagi Ruaya. Strategi yang ditawarkan oleh praktisi PR kepada manajemen Ruaya adalah, secara konsisten menciptakan konten dalam bentuk video dengan *storytelling*, merencanakan konten secara teratur, dan berkolaborasi dengan *influencer*. Keterbaruan penelitian kualitatif ini terletak pada eksplorasi pemanfaatan CDT, yang menyoroti perannya dalam tiga area aspek: kepemimpinan, pemasaran, dan strategi konten.

Kata kunci: merek lokal; strategi *branding*; teori disonansi kognitif; marketing *niche*.

ABSTRACT

This study highlights how Public Relations (PR) practitioners assist Indonesia's local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the souvenir printing business for various needs. The products created by the local MSME named Ruaya are used by their clients to design digital campaigns aimed at developing better branding strategies and increasing customer awareness in marketing efforts. "The research focuses on two main issues: integrating the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) into Ruaya's product branding and promotion, and developing strategies for employee training and leadership as the company transitions from traditional to digital media for branding and promotion." The aim of this paper is to develop strategies that Ruaya can adopt to effectively utilize social media for creating branding strategies that enhance brand awareness and attract new consumers. Additionally, the research focuses on building employee capacity by leveraging CDT as a communication tool to promote active online engagement, adopting niche marketing strategies, and establishing a unique identity for Ruaya. The strategies suggested by PR practitioners to Ruaya's management include consistently creating video content with storytelling elements, planning content regularly, and collaborating with influencers. The novelty of this qualitative research lies in the exploration of CDT utilization, highlighting its role in three aspects: leadership, marketing, and content strategy.

Keywords: local brand; branding strategy; cognitive dissonance theory; marketing niche

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in potential in terms of tourism, agriculture, mining, and other natural resources that can boost the economy if continuously developed and managed well by Local brands (Putri, 2020). According to *Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2008* (as cited in *Lembaga Pengembangan Perbankan Indonesia (LPPI)* and *Bank Indonesia*, 2015), a 'local brand' refers to businesses or enterprises operated by individuals, groups, small business entities, or households that possess a certain level of wealth and income (p. 13). For the government, local brands have been recognised as business activities capable of contributing to job creation in society and increasing community income.

Local brands themselves are relatively more accessible to the community compared to large businesses. The growth in the number of local brands in Indonesia is quite rapid, as evidenced by *Kementerian Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil dan Menengah*, which states that the prevalence of local brands in Indonesia has increased from 61,6 million in 2016 to 65,4 million in 2019. This indicates that the growth of local brands in Indonesia has shown consistent annual increases (Munandar et al., 2022). Currently, many people also have the creativity to create local brands (Syafitri et al., 2023).

Not only does it equalise the economic level of the small people, it turns out that *UMKM* can also generate foreign exchange income for the country. According to data from *Kementerian Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil dan Menengah*, data obtained from *UMKM* or *MSME* for state foreign exchange increased compared to 2016, reaching Rp. 88.4 billion. The good news is, the additional data from the website of *Kemenkopukm* found in 2018, there were more than 64 million *UMKM* units capable of absorbing around 116 million people. This figure increased to around 65.4 million *UMKM* units with a workforce reaching 119 million people in 2019 or an increase of 2.2% every year.

An example of a local brand as the object of this research which the field is in the printing or screen printing, is Ruaya as a local company *UMKM* or *MSME* in Indonesia which operates in the field of printing souvenirs or merchandises for various purposes such as corporate gifts, weddings, communities, political campaigns, etc. This company was established in 2002 by two people who has been friends for long time, they are Yadi and Sudiarno. They built the company using their personal savings and a loan from bank with a total of 15 million rupiah at that time.

When Ruaya first started, it focused on three products: coffee, skincare, and souvenirs/merchandise, with branches in Depok, Bekasi, and Petojo, Jakarta. Each branch managed one product category -- coffee in Depok, skincare in Bekasi, and souvenirs/merchandise in Petojo, Jakarta. However, after a few years, the coffee and skincare businesses struggled, prompting Ruaya to close its Depok and Bekasi branches and focus solely on souvenir and merchandise production in Jakarta. This decision paid off as orders for souvenirs and merchandise surged, leading the owners to dedicate their efforts exclusively to this category.

After years of existence, Ruaya has partnered with many companies from various sectors ranging from small, medium scale to large and well-known companies. Apart from that, Ruaya has also been partnering with a major vendor to provide Tumblr water bottle as souvenirs to many companies, that basically a company that specialised in the manufacturing of a wide range of plastic products, particularly food storage containers. The product line

includes various kitchenware and storage solutions, such as containers, lunch boxes, water bottles, and cookware.

In establishing effective communication branding strategies for local brand, especially Ruaya, it is important to identify the gap analysis or phenomenon on the disparity between Ruaya's current branding efforts and the potential opportunities by digital presence. After conducting interviews with the owners of Ruaya, it is informed that Ruaya has primarily focused on traditional offline marketing approaches and relied on word-of-mouth tactics to promote its business since the business first started. They also said that they did not have an official website for their company and any social media business account. As a result, information about Ruaya is only known by a small circle such as families, colleagues, and close relatives.

The current marketing strategy implemented by Ruaya, which uses traditional marketing through word-of-mouth, is no longer effective in this era of digital development. It makes Ruaya unable to reach a wider audience and take longer to disseminate information. Therefore, Ruaya needs a digital transformation by switching from traditional marketing to digital or online marketing. According to Chakti (2019, in Lesmana & Valentina, 2021), digital marketing is an effort to market a product or service using internet-connected devices. This method involves various digital strategies and media to attract attention, interact, and build communication with potential customers, one of which is by using social media. In line with the previous study, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok which use the internet technology to let users interact, share information, and communicate in new ways. Users not only receive information but also create content, such as sharing opinions, photos, or videos. In term of businesses pattern, social media offers great marketing opportunities by allowing direct communication with customers, making the process more interactive and enabling immediate feedback (Arroisi et al., 2024).

These days with the development of technology, the use of social media has been widely studied by several studies, one of which according to Yang et al., (2021) used qualitative research to explore how users form and develop attachment relationships with social media platforms like TikTok, WeChat, and MicroBlog. User participation is essential for creating co-creation value, which fosters continuous use and attachment to social media. It means that psychological needs and self-expression facilitate the relationship between co-creation value and social attachment, enhancing users' sense of belonging to the platforms.

These findings shed light on the dynamics of social attachment and offer practical implications for leveraging social media in commercial contexts. Meanwhile, Muneer et al. (2024) explores the relationship between social media usage, user engagement, and cognitive dissonance, highlighting e-compulsive buying behavior as a mediating factor. The study suggests strategies for women to cultivate healthier habits on social networking sites (SNS) through mindful consumption, financial awareness, and self-awareness, emphasizing how social media can influence emotional triggers in purchase decisions.

In contrast, a study by Urakami et al. (2022) emphasizes that misinformation on social media remains a significant challenge. Recent research has tested various strategies to combat this issue, such as modifying platform structures and user education, with mixed results. This research aims to develop intelligent tools to help users build metacognitive skills to combat misinformation. Focus groups revealed that users find it hard to detect misinformation and

lack resources for cross-checking information. Misinformation also affects people emotionally. The study suggests designing tools to help users select and engage with information and manage their emotional responses. Social media offers new opportunities for branding and connecting with the customers. However, many companies find it challenging to implement effective social media strategies. They often treat each platform separately instead of as part of a unified marketing strategy. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to use social media effectively for better marketing results. By understanding online shopping challenges and using social media wisely, companies can enhance customer experience and marketing performance (Tafesse & Wien, 2018).

The research conducted by Bai et al., (2019) explaining that cognitive dissonance theory has strong relevance in the context of social media where users are often exposed to various opinions that cause conflict with the individual's beliefs. When they receive information that is not in line with what they believe, individuals can experience psychological discomfort, called cognitive dissonance. To overcome the discomfort, social media users may take several steps, such as changing their views to align with the new information, avoiding content that contradicts their views, or justifying their pre-existing beliefs. Therefore, understanding cognitive dissonance on social media is crucial for companies when designing effective marketing messages. Overall, cognitive dissonance plays a major role in understanding social media user behaviour, especially in how individuals interact with diverse information and views on the platform. As for another study explained by Carpenter (2019) in today's digital era, understanding cognitive dissonance is key in branding strategies on social media. When companies convey messages that conflict with existing beliefs in consumers, this creates a risk of psychological discomfort that can make consumers reject the new information. Therefore, companies need to design effective communications by presenting information that aligns with consumers' values or presents credible evidence to support a change of view. Building a strong emotional connection and providing relevant information, will open up opportunities for them to be more open to new information.

When delivering messages or information, Ruaya must carefully consider and understand branding strategies to ensure the messages capture consumers' attention. One of the functions of branding is as a means to instil a positive image in the minds of consumers (Oktaviani et al., 2018). A powerful branding strategy enables companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors, foster trust with their customers, and establish lasting relationships that encourage repeat business. Branding goes beyond merely naming a product that it involves creating an emotional connection and embodying a range of physical, social, and psychological attributes and values (Mi & Baharun, 2013). In this case, to achieve effective branding goals, Ruaya needs to adopt the right approach to delivering messages to consumers. One of the ways is by utilising content marketing that is in line with current digital developments. In the effort of branding, Odongo (2016) implemented a content marketing in social media and internet which the goal is to increase a company's visibility and saleability which is crucial to achieve successful sales and business in the market. The pillars of content marketing performed includes editorial-based, marketing-based, behaviour-driven, multi-platform, and targeted. To increase brand strategy, Sundaram et al., (2020)

recommended popular marketing strategies, especially, among the millennials, are e-WOM, celebrity endorsement, brand engagement, content, creativity and caused-related marketing.

By adopting a content marketing strategy that proved to be effective, Ruaya was able to strengthen its brand image and increase its marketability in the market. Therefore, in this study, the researcher looked at how a PR practitioner guided Ruaya in the development of an effective branding strategy. The PR practitioner's involvement included conducting an in-depth analysis of their current brand positioning, identifying key areas for improvement, and providing expert advice on digital marketing techniques. In addition, the PR practitioner also helped design comprehensive training sessions to educate Ruaya's team on the importance of creating consistent and engaging content, leveraging social media platforms, and implementing targeted advertising campaigns. Through PR consultancy services, the aim is to empower Ruaya to build a strong and cohesive brand presence, which can resonate with their target audience and drive business growth.

To build a strong brand image, Ruaya needs to optimise an effective branding strategy by implementing persuasive communication. This communication aims to influence consumers' attitudes and thoughts to change their behaviour towards the brands offered. As explained by Schwartz (as cited in Griffin et al., 2019), an effective persuasive message can evoke past experiences and create resonance between the content of the message and a person's thoughts or feelings. This allows the message to touch consumers' hearts and awaken their self-awareness. As such, the persuasive messages to be implemented in our proposed strategies and tactics for Ruaya aim not only to capture the audience's attention but also to create a strong emotional bond, which can support changes in consumer behaviour and increase brand loyalty.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in its exploration of the application of CDT as a strategic communication tool for Ruaya's transition from traditional to online marketing. By leveraging CDT, the study highlights its role in three key areas: leadership, where it assists company leaders in motivating employees to develop high-quality content and improve their digital skills; marketing, where it encourages employees to promote products through diverse methods; and content strategy, where it supports the alignment of niche content with marketing objectives. This approach not only bridges the gap between traditional and digital marketing but also demonstrates how CDT can be strategically applied to drive organisational transformation and enhance marketing effectiveness.

The problem statement of this research emphasised on:

1. How is 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT) integrated into Ruaya's product branding and promotion?
2. What are the suitable employee training and leadership development strategies for company owners to transition from traditional to digital media in promotion and branding?

METHOD

The research method used is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. The qualitative research approach is used to capture facts, conditions, variables, and phenomena that occur during the research and present them as they are (Subakti & Prasetya, 2021).

The descriptive method is employed to depict, describe, or present the objective state being studied by the research conditions (Sugiyono, 2017). This research was conducted by directly visiting the Ruaya production house located at Jl. Tanah Abang V No. 27 D, Petojo Selatan, Gambir, Central Jakarta, DKI Jakarta. This research was conducted from November 2023 to February, 2024.

This research utilises two data collection techniques, that using primary data, which is sourced from observation and interviews. Secondary data sourced from the document data. In this study, primary data is obtained or collected directly by the researcher from the field where the research will be conducted, and the data collection technique using secondary data is sourced from document data. The document data referred here are the data sourced from books, research reports, journals, and others (Kaharuddin, 2021).

The following are the steps for collecting data in this study are:

1. Interview

The interview is a communication process to obtain information through question and answer between the researcher and the research subjects (Subakti & Prasetya, 2021). Another opinion according to Sugiyono, (2017) suggests that interviews are used as a data collection technique to identify issues that need to be studied and also if the researcher wants to understand deeper insights from the informant. In this research, in-depth interviews were conducted with several informants such as the Owner of Ruaya, Yadi and Sudiyarno, as well as several other employees to gather additional information.

To collect information and data to support this research, we conducted more than one interview sessions, which are with the owners of Ruaya and their employees. Interviews with Ruaya's owners were conducted to uncover insights regarding the company's operational and strategic challenges, while the session with employees were conducted to see Ruaya more deeply from another perspective, regarding their understanding and capacity for digital marketing. Additionally, these interviews help uncover potential gaps in communication between management and staff regarding the development of an online presence and branding strategy.

2. Observation

The observation was also conducted in the same day with the interview sessions. In our direct observation of Ruaya's office, we found two key challenges affecting their ability to engage in online promotion. First, everyone in the company is already preoccupied with fulfilling customer orders, leaving little to no time to create or even consider online content. Secondly, they lack a clear concept and the necessary tools to produce high-quality content that effectively promotes their products online. Third, they believe they are unable to hire an extra human resources or team to manage their online presence, as it does not fit within their current budget. This financial constraint further limits their ability to expand into digital marketing and online branding efforts.

3. Analysis Data

By examining the responses from interviews with the owners and employees, we can identify key patterns, strengths, and areas needing improvement. This section will systematically explore these findings, offering a detailed understanding of how 'Ruaya' can enhance its brand awareness and engagement in the digital marketplace.

After conducting interviews and direct observation, we highlighted some primary issues. First, the situation of overwhelming responsibility borne by the two owners, who manage every aspect of Ruaya's operations limits their ability to focus on developing and implementing a comprehensive branding strategy. The owners admitted that their extensive workload leaves little time for strategic initiatives, particularly in the areas of online and digital branding.

Additionally, the owners expressed that they cannot push their employees to engage in online branding strategies, as it is not their area of expertise, and their duties are primarily focused on production. The employees' roles and responsibilities are centred around maintaining the quality and efficiency of production, leaving them neither the time nor the skills to handle digital branding tasks effectively.

As informed, Ruaya does not have an official social media account which can be used to carry out sales and marketing activities online and does not present itself in website or social media to attract clients and consumers more widely. We are told that any information about Ruaya, including what projects Ruaya is handling, is usually broadcasted via employees' personal social media account, and it is based on employee's personal initiative.

The condition of relying on face-to-face communication for their sales and customer interactions indicates the business approach largely to offline, focusing on direct, and in-person engagement with customer. Regularly, when the owners are contacted by potential customers, they often ask to be sent the samples of the products they want to order, as they require to directly touch and feel the products. Then, Ruaya sends a courier to customer/consumers' place to collect the samples. The problem is that most of the samples were never returned to Ruaya, although the customer decided not to purchase the product.

As a result, the findings from these interviews revealed several key issues are:

1. Employees lack education on digital branding strategies.
2. Owners provide insufficient guidance on digital matters.
3. There are no dedicated resources with specific responsibilities in this area.

In the context of communication and marketing, Ruaya is not practising integrated communication, which is a strategic approach using various communication channels, tools and messages to deliver a consistent brand image or message to the target audiences or prospective clients. In this internet era, channels used to reach new audiences can include website and social media. In today's global business landscape, organisations are forced to quickly change their strategic direction to stay competitive (Eisenberg et al., 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

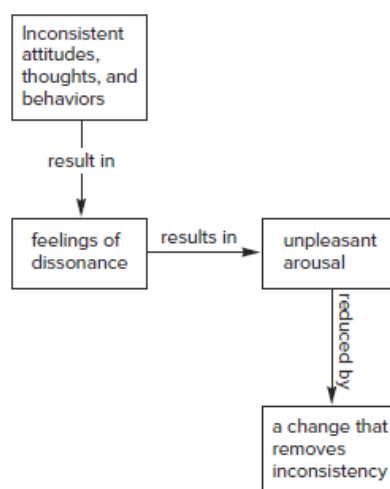
'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT) was introduced by Leon Festinger (1957, in West & Turner, 2018), explaining the psychological discomfort individuals experience when holding conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes. Festinger's concept of cognitive dissonance, as addressed in West and Turner (2018), examines how individuals handle conflicting beliefs and the discomfort that arises from such conflicts. This discomfort drives people to take actions to reduce it. In branding, this theory can effectively boost consumer engagement and brand awareness. When there is an inconsistency between a customer's current view of a brand and the ideal image the brand promotes, it creates dissonance. To recover this

discomfort, consumers are motivated to adjust their behaviour to match the brand's messaging.

Once consumers feel cognitive dissonance or discomfort due to the discrepancy between their beliefs and the decisions they have made, brands have the opportunity to capitalise on this moment by presenting compelling and convincing messages. For example, by highlighting the unique benefits of the product or service, creating an emotional story, or showing testimonials of satisfied customers. Therefore, brands can also create emotional stories that evoke consumer feelings such as inspirational or unique stories involving the product. This approach can strengthen consumers' beliefs that choosing the brand is the right decision while encouraging deeper emotional engagement with the brand.

Image 1.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, 2018



Source: West & Turner, (2018)

It can be seen in image 1, based on the 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT) framework presented by West and Turner (2018) which explains that the cognitive dissonance process occurs when a person experiences inconsistencies between attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour. This inconsistency arises when individuals have two or more conflicting cognitive elements, for example, certain beliefs are not in line with the actions taken. This inconsistency then produces feelings of dissonance, which is a sense of discomfort or psychological pressure that arises due to pressure in the mind due to conflict within oneself. This feeling can be in the form of anxiety, stress, or dissatisfaction with oneself because one realises some things do not fit. This feeling is the core of cognitive dissonance because humans naturally want to eliminate these feelings of discomfort.

This feeling of dissonance will then cause unpleasant emotional arousal, triggering an emotional reaction that drives person to find ways to resolve the discrepancy. This discomfort is difficult to ignore, so people will continue to feel uneasy until they find a solution to reduce it. To reduce the distress, individuals usually make changes that aim to eliminate the inconsistency. These changes can take many forms, such as changing beliefs, adjusting attitudes, or even modifying behaviours to make them more appropriate. This process reflects

human efforts to maintain balance and consistency in their belief system. In the context of branding, this theory can be a powerful tool to drive consumer engagement and increase brand awareness. When customers face a gap between their current perception of a brand and the ideal image that is promoted, this will make consumers feel dissonance. To overcome this discomfort, consumers will be motivated to align their behaviour with the brand message.

To resolve the dissonance that consumers feel, brands can design communication strategies that focus on the benefits of the product or service. By highlighting the benefits of the product to buyers, this can strengthen consumers' belief that they have made the right decision. This theory can also measure the extent to which consumers perceive product benefits, whether they later provide feedback in the form of satisfaction or otherwise so that companies can develop creativity and improve services according to consumer needs. Thus, this CDT is relevant and can be applied to the marketing campaign conducted by Ruaya. This theory can be used to communicate marketing campaigns by showing the benefits of Ruaya products in dealing with uncomfortable conditions in everyday life, such as bad weather or traffic jams. By showing the products that Ruaya has created, consumers will feel encouraged to buy these items as a solution to overcome unpleasant situations, while understanding their usefulness. As an illustration, the message that brings customer dissonance are:

1. Umbrellas' printed content: This marketing content tells a story about unpredictable weather, the message highlighting how people need umbrellas before it rains, which makes customers interested in buying them.
2. Lunch Box printed content: This marketing content tells a story about how food gets cold quickly without an aluminium foil inside the lunch box. This message will encourage the audience/ customers to buy a lunch box with aluminium foil that keeps food warm for up to 4 hours.

By emphasising these product benefits and advantages, Ruaya can reduce cognitive dissonance by making consumers feel that buying the product is the right decision. In addition, campaigns that showcase the product's usefulness clearly and are relevant to consumers' daily needs can strengthen their beliefs, encourage emotional engagement, and increase customer satisfaction. By understanding how much benefit is perceived, Ruaya can also evaluate whether the products offered meet consumer expectations and innovate to improve quality and service based on the feedback provided.

To support broader marketing efforts, Ruaya can leverage social media as a channel to introduce and increase brand awareness. Meanwhile, the first and most crucial for online activities is raising brand awareness. Before engaging customers or driving sales, potential audiences must recognise and understand the brand. Establishing a strong online presence through consistent, engaging content helps introduce Ruaya to a broader audience. The influence of social media on consumer behaviour spans a wide range of activities, from providing information and sharing ideas and opinions to fostering awareness and understanding and even allowing consumers to visualise post-purchase behaviour without making an actual purchase (Tatar & Erdoğan, 2016 as cited in Bilgin, 2018). This involves showcasing the brand's unique values, products, and story in a way that resonates with target customers. By increasing brand visibility and recognition on platforms like Instagram, Tiktok, and e-commerce sites, Ruaya can build familiarity and trust, creating a solid

foundation for future marketing efforts. Without brand awareness, other marketing strategies may struggle to gain traction or achieve meaningful results.

For Ruaya, leveraging online platforms to present a consistent, engaging, and appealing brand image can create this cognitive dissonance in potential customers, prompting them to seek more information and engage with the brand. By strategically implementing online activities, Ruaya can use this psychological effect to raise brand awareness, encouraging consumers to resolve the dissonance by interacting more deeply with the brand and ultimately choosing Ruaya over competitors. Also, by highlighting the benefits of the product to buyers, this theory can strengthen consumers' confidence that they have made the right decision. The theory can also measure the extent to which consumers feel the benefits of the product, whether later buyers can provide feedback in the form of satisfaction or vice versa, so that companies can develop creativity and improve services according to consumer needs.

After analysing the data gathered from interviews and direct observations, and identifying the key issues, we, play a role as PR practitioner, assist Ruaya by proposing a digital campaign to ease the customer/consumers' needs to see or view the details of the materials through the real photos and videos that available on the social media content. Our recommendations will focus on helping them effectively apply digital platforms to enhance their brand awareness and visibility and reach a wider audience. As was said by Anne Gregory (2010), to reach the campaign objectives, PR practitioners should start from the awareness to finally shape the audiences' behaviours.

Relating to 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT), the branding strategies should focus on motivating customers to engage more deeply. It would emphasise to some points, they are:

1. Consistently producing high-quality content that highlights Ruaya's values and unique selling points,
2. Growing social media engagement by designing social media posts and campaign to present ideal version of its brand, and
3. Regularly create monthly content plans to reinforce brand message and give new information to form a stronger connection with the brand.

To implement the points above, our campaign proposal includes several actionable steps, they would be (1) providing coaching sessions or training programs to equip the owners and employees with the necessary knowledge and skills for digital branding. For instance, teaching them on the process of content creation, from developing content that aligns with scheduled plans to posting on social media. This includes taking high-quality photos and video clips, adding some edits with music and voiceovers, and crafting engaging captions. To support the coaching and training sessions on digital content creation for Ruaya, the training material would include the step to set up a mini studio equipped with professional tools and proper lighting to ensure the production of high-quality content, (2) assisting Ruaya in creating an official website, as well as establishing these days popular social media; Instagram and TikTok accounts. Additionally, we would help them to manage the content on these platforms, providing examples of how to effectively curate and maintain their online presence to engage their target audience, (3) assisting Ruaya in developing a monthly content

plan and designing each piece of content to ensure that the brand's values are effectively communicated and remembered by customers, (4) regularly assessing the performance of the content and overall digital strategy. This includes monitoring key metrics such as engagement rates, follower growth, and customer feedback across Ruaya's social media platforms and website. We will also review the alignment between the content produced and Ruaya's brand values, ensuring that the intended message is resonating with the target audience. This evaluation process will be conducted quarterly to track progress and ensure that the branding efforts are achieving the desired results, and (5) identify areas where costs can be reduced with digital optimisation.

To build brand awareness to be more effective, if it's possible, we could consider using influencers or celebrities. Seitel (2017) argues that influencers play a crucial role in modern media campaigns. PR practitioners can build relationships with influencers to drive successful campaigns, leveraging their ability to reach specific target groups. By aligning with influencers whose scope matches the desired audience, brands can effectively engage and resonate with these groups. Besides, celebrities are often chosen for endorsements because they are charismatic and well-known. While their support doesn't always lead to direct sales or votes, it can attract media coverage and public interest. Borchers (2019) further explains that to enhance brand awareness, communication practitioners should use 'Social Media Influencers' (SMIs) strategically. SMIs can transfer positive emotions from one brand to another and operate across various platforms. The term SMI emphasises their role as strategic communication tools, capable of building relationships and influencing stakeholders through their content and interactions. SMI communication is a growing trend, with 75% of surveyed US brands budgeting for it to reach young adults and achieve high acceptance rates.

Influencers can introduce Ruaya to a larger and more diverse audience than it might reach organically, including people who haven't heard of the brand, which can quickly raise awareness. They can showcase Ruaya's products in real-life scenario, making the brand more relatable to potential customers. Incorporating influencers into Ruaya's digital strategy can significantly boost brand awareness and accelerate brand recognition and credibility.

The application of 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT) in this study not only highlights consumer behaviours, but also emphasises employee capacity development and its role in digital marketing. CDT is strategically used to train employees to be more active online, adopt a marketing niche, and create a unique identity for Ruaya. The coaching sessions, mini studio setup, and structured content planning are enabling employees to adapt, think creatively, and align their promotional efforts with CDT principles. The employees not only enhance their skills but also contribute to the creation of innovative content and effective promotion strategies that reflect Ruaya's unique brand identity, ensuring the company's success in the digital space.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examines the challenges and opportunities Ruaya encounters while shifting from a traditional offline business model to an online presence. It highlights that the non-existence of a cohesive digital branding strategy has hindered Ruaya's ability to expand its audience and enhance brand awareness. The study emphasises the need for a

structured social media strategy, leveraging platforms like an official website, Instagram, and TikTok, and producing high-quality content to engage contemporary consumers.

The introduction of 'Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (CDT) as a framework shows how Ruaya can align its digital strategies to influence consumer behaviour and perception. By producing consistent, engaging content that mirrors the brand's values, Ruaya can encourage customers to reconsider their perceptions and engage more with the brand. Anne Gregory's perspective supports this approach, suggesting that collaborating with influencers or celebrities can further enhance brand awareness.

To implement the theories, a digital campaign is proposed with actionable steps to enhance skills in digital branding and marketing. This includes:

1. **Training Sessions:** Conduct workshops on social media management, content creation, and digital marketing tools.
2. **Influencer Collaboration:** Employ influencers to boost brand visibility.
3. **Content Planning:** Establish a monthly content plan with a niche promotion aiming to establish a strong presence and become the go-to brand for audience
4. **Performance Evaluation:** Regularly evaluate performance metrics.
5. **Leadership Training:** To growth the business, leadership training helps Ruaya owners adapt to changes, drive continuous growth, and stay competitive in market with interpersonal skills to have a wider network through digital marketing that might have a chance to get a strong relationship with existing customers.

These steps' objective is to help Ruaya grow its online presence and strengthen brand recognition in a competitive market.

Future research should focus on the broader evolution of digital transformation over time and its long-term effects on customer engagement and sales through social media strategies. Additionally, comparative studies with the competitors can offer valuable insights into industry best practices and areas for continuous improvement, enhancing the relevance of the findings. Furthermore, digital marketing and business transformation efforts can be used from behaviour analysis to understand how different demographics interact with digital platforms and how these behaviours influence purchasing decisions. To maintain customer loyalty and repeat purchases, future studies could also explore the role of sustainable practices in digital branding and their impact on consumer loyalty and brand perception.

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