

# Approaches of Digital Marketing in SMEs

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## Abstract:

**Purpose-** Digital Marketing is getting ahead of all the traditional ways of marketing, it has become not only necessary for the larger companies but for SMEs as well to keep up with the trend and adopt Digital Marketing. Digital Marketing started off not many years back, hence it is still not very popular amongst the SMEs. However, due to the need of the market the SMEs should look into it. Companies in West are already looking into it and adopting it. Therefore, the SMEs in Asia and South-east Asia should not be left behind either and start adopting it at its earliest. SO the purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between Digital marketing and how does it affect the sales of the company.

**Design/Methodology/Approach-** The data was collected from 400 employees working at different Digital Marketing firms in order to learn the difference how things worked prior and after adopting the Digital Marketing. The research was restricted to Malaysian context only hence; it can only be applied to the Malaysian context. The sample data was collected through questionnaires and also interviews were conducted from the higher level management in order to get better results out of the data and survey. The data from the survey was analyzed on SPSS and AMOS to get the analysis.

**Findings-** The findings of this study suggest that with the adoption of digital marketing not only does the sale increase, but it also reduces the cost of marketing for the company. Therefore, it is determined that digital marketing is a cheaper and optimized way of doing marketing. Also, it creates more awareness amongst the people and a very faster rate as compared to traditional marketing ways. Furthermore, Digital marketing has proven to be very popular amongst the Malaysian too and also many companies are doing it such as Zalora, Lazada, Shopee, Groupon. All these companies invest a huge amount of energy and money and they have ll their teams working on Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization and they have separate teams who are working on Social Media Marketing campaigns and it has turned out to be more popular and profitable ways of marketing their product to their customers.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Social Media Marketing, SMEs, Email Marketing.

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## Introduction

From being selling and advertising, marketing became a crucial role in organizations. 60 years back, marketing was nothing but considered as

selling. However, with evolution of industries, organizations came to build the perception that marketing is not merely selling but a way of identifying the market needs and building long

term relationships with the customers (Quinn et al., 2016). However, since the technology has been evolving and e-commerce came into being, we came across a whole new world i.e. A Digital World. With the digital world, we came across Digital marketing (Kaliappen, Nu'Man, & Jermisittiparsert, 2019; Rungsrisawat, Sriyakul, & Jermisittiparsert, 2019; Chetthamrongchai & Jermisittiparsert, 2020). There are many ways of doing Digital marketing. Most popular and the easiest way of doing it is these days through social media marketing which is one of a kind of Digital marketing. However, there are many other ways of doing it as well such as Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Email Marketing etc. The reason why it became so famous and popular amongst the marketers is because it is comparatively cheaper than the traditional marketing and also it allows to reach a broader market and at very ease and convenience (Faisal, 2016).

Since, the marketing became a central role in the organizations we witnessed many changes in the industries and we happened to see products that no one could have thought before. People are investing money in marketing and Research & Development to produce products that are customer centric and fulfill needs of people that customers themselves never know existed before (Dodson, 2016). Such as Apple when offered its first smart phone with the touch technology, no one ever knew that technology like this could exist or if it was even a need that could be fulfilled. However, Marketers came with it and we got introduced to a whole new concept of smartphones. Due to the availability of smart phones at such ease and convenience, the amount of data that was being produced has only added up by such huge numbers which allowed the marketers to create a whole new world of Big Data and Data Sciences (Talikoti, 2019).

With the globalization of our era, the world has become closer. Also, with the digitization of everything, it has become further close than it was ever before. The amount of digital content that is being produced on daily basis at the consumer ends is merely not just content, but it a way of reaching out to the customers for the marketers to understand what is that is trending and how is that customers want it (Talikoti, 2019). Therefore, the marketers have diverted their concentration towards social media to understand what is trending on the social media and how can they make their customers happier and satisfied by offering customization. Customized products for every different category of customers was something companies could have never thought of, perhaps the digital medium has solved the problem now. Despite of the fact that digital marketing has become a popular and fashion tool for the marketing world, SMEs in Asia are still resisting to shift towards digital marketing. There are various reasons for them to not do so (Gutierrez-Leefmans, et al., 2016). Such as, bigger companies already have reputable names and people are familiar with them, so for them it's not such big risk whereas, on the other hand SMEs have lower budgets as compared to the bigger sized companies. So, with the help of this study we intend to establish that digital marketing is an effective and efficient way of targeting the customers and it also brings larger profits than ever before.

There is a debate over it, some companies still think that Digital Marketing is not as effective as it sounds. Irrespective of how effective and efficient Digital Marketing sounds, the companies need to be available online as everything out there is digital. Everyone in this era have a smartphone and uses social media one time a day at least which is why it is easier to reach out to your customers. Also, it not only helps to reach out customers to sell your product but it helps in

product development as well and building a significant relationship with your customers (Ismail and Zhang, 2018).

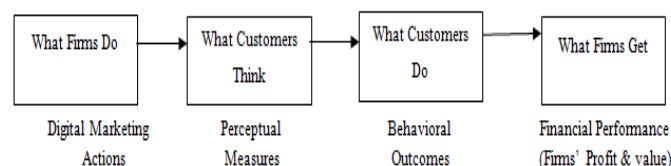
The aim of this study is to establish and identify the relationship between the use of Digital marketing and revenues of the SMEs. Also, the study will determine if it reaches out to more customers or not. Furthermore, this study will allow us to build the association between digital marketing and firm's effectiveness and efficiency.

## Literature Review

### Study Model

The theory that has been used in this study is MAM or Marketing Actions Model. It was proposed by Gupta & Zeithaml in 2006. This theory states that how can marketing actions help customers induce their perceptions which will subsequently affect their behavior. These behaviors then lead towards how the organization will perform. The actions that firms take in the first place are the main reason to be held responsible for the end goal i.e. performance of the firm. In this case, the study model will help out in identifying if the SMEs are taking action on the basis of digital marketing, how will it perform as compared to their previous performance based on traditional marketing. Furthermore, this study model measures the performance on two metrics i.e. perceptual and behavioral. Perceptual metrics could be: customer perceptions, customer attitudes, intentions to purchase, loyalty, service quality, commitment, perceived value, and trust whereas, the behavioral metrics would be actual purchase decisions and behavior, and measure customer acquisition, retention, up-selling and cross-category purchases.

The study model can be represented as followed in the diagram:



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework**

### Independent Variables

#### Website and Merchandising Performance

Ali Soomro et al.(2017), argues in his study of Effect of Visual Merchandising Elements of Retail Store on Consumer Attention about the major difference between a retail store and online store that it can be differentiated very easily. As the retail store can be seen and can offer a better face to face customer service. Whereas, on the other hand an online store cannot offer a tangible feel to the customer. However, it can offer a better performance if the online store offers a better quality website which is offering a better performance in terms of better guidance towards the product and services and detailed information regarding the products and services. As well as, how the website is running and how is the speed of it, if the website is safe and secure or not are the other characteristics that one might consider prior engaging in digital service. All these characteristics lead towards better digital experience.

Furthermore, Webber et al. (2018), stated in his research study of remodeling the retail store for better sales performance that to understand the performance of online store the marketers need to know: what are the key elements that needs to be considered to measure the performance of the digital marketing. Earlier, it was known that click through rate, bounce rate, how long someone stayed on your page were the only elements to check the performance. Also, Confos and Davis (2016), in their study of young consumer-brand relationship building potential

using digital marketing stated that there are many others to improvise the performance. Such as, knowing the source where the customer came from, which was the product that they have been looking for, did they find it or not, how long they stayed on the page, did they place the order, did you retrieve the customer or not and if you got their email or not to target them for future. Conversion rates and traffic source are the two most important to know where they come from to target them in future and it will also help you narrow down the target market and know exactly who to target were. It helps in saving the costs of the marketing as well. All of these features can be seen very easily in software such as Google Analytics and Webmasters.

With the above literature review we have established the hypothesis that:

**H1: Website and Merchandising Performance has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.**

#### *User Generated Content*

Müller & Christandl (2019), in their study of content is king – But who is the king of kings? The effect of content marketing, sponsored content & user-generated content on brand responses stated that there have been many years since the user generated content has been in establishment and revolving in the market. However, no one ever knew it could be a way of marketing. Today in this era, people have started user generated content marketing. It is a very effective tool of digital marketing that people are using in this era. Many websites are offering blog posts where people can write their experiences and share it with the rest. It could be bad or good regardless of whatever it is, it has proven to be very effective. Moreover, Tsiakali, K. (2018) stated in his research of user-generated-content versus marketing-generated-content: personality and content influence on traveler's behavior that,

while travelling when people want to go somewhere they tend to read people's reviews about some place, airlines, or even the hotels and everything. The content that is created by the people seems to influence people to go and try it out. Hence, the result of the study suggested that user generated content is an influential source of digital marketing and it affects the performance of the firm as well.

Hermaren & Achyar (2018) in their analysis of effect of firm created content and user generated content evaluation on customer-based brand equity demonstrated that, the content that been created by the firm has a very significant on the customers when it comes to brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty. However, if you tend to look at the evaluation of UGS (User generated content) that has a significant impact on the customers' brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand equity. It helps the marketers to understand which content should be used when, where and for what purpose. Hu, Y., Hong, Y., Gal, D., Xu, A., Sinha & Akkiraju (2018) stated in their study of generating Business Intelligence Through Social Media Analytics: Measuring Brand Personality with Consumer-, Employee-, and Firm-Generated Content that, firm generated content and user generated content both have equivalent importance for the customers however, firm generated content helps in creating awareness regarding the brand and user generated content helps in building trust if the brand is worth the experience or not.

With the above literature review we have established the hypothesis that:

**H2: User Generated Content (UGC) has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.**

### Social Media Performance

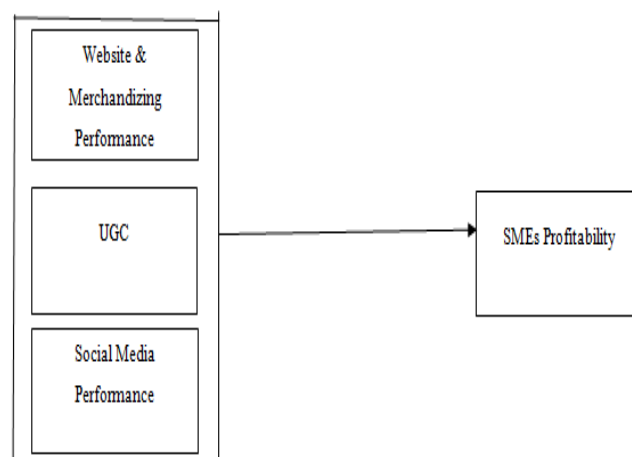
Moro et al. (2016) stated in their study of predicting social media performance metrics and evaluation of the impact on brand building which was a data mining approach, that more than 3000 US purchasers, advanced collaborations are relied upon to impact 64 pennies of each dollar spent in retail stored before the end of 2015, up from 14 pennies in 2012, implying that social media is expanding its immediate effect on organizations' profitability. The formation of virtual client situations might be activated by social media networks, for example, Twitter and Facebook, giving a rising enthusiasm around explicit firms, brands, what's more, items. In this way, so as to make business value, firms need to join network working as a major aspect of the usage of social media.

Furthermore, a few exact investigations were distributed over the most recent couple of years for surveying the effect of social media performance on brand building. Hudson et al. (2015) directed three reviews to investigate the connection between social media utilization and customer brand connections. Their outcomes demonstrated that drawing in customers by means of social media networking was related with higher purchaser brand connections. Also, another study by Griffiths and McLean, (2015) assessed the effect of social media adoption on a small scale in UK-based organization, presuming that social media marketing positively affected brand image. Conventionally, the writing appears to help a current impact of social media on brand building. In any case, research about in this area is still rare. Signifying the novelty and enthusiasm of social media, research is relied upon to thrive in the following couple of years, ideally uncovering novel investigations for filling this research hole.

With the above literature review we have established the hypothesis that:

**H3: Social Media Performance has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.**

### Digital Marketing Tools



**Fig 2. Conceptual Framework**

### Data & Methodology

The purpose of this study is to find out if the adoption of digital marketing has a significant effect on the profitability of SMEs or not. To find out, the data has been collected from the employees who work in digital marketing firms or firms who have already adopted digital marketing. The data was collected through questionnaire technique and also the people from higher manager level posts were interviewed in order to understand better how can digital marketing effect the firms' profitability. Hence, quantitative and qualitative technique both are used, this is a mixed approach study. The purpose is to learn how it effects the profitability of the firm. The sampling method used in this method was random sampling method as the people working in firms were randomly being selected. Then to evaluate the results reliability analysis and correlation were applied in order to measure the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To run the tests, the software that has been used in

this study was IBM SPSS. The sampling size of this study was 400 employees. The questionnaires in this study were filled both online and face to face. The number of people interviewed for this study were 10.

## Analysis & Results:

### Respondents' Profile

With the following table, we have come to know the sample size was based on 400 respondents out of which 300 people were male and 100 were female. 275 out of 400 were single whereas the rest were married people. Furthermore, 100 respondents were hired at executive level, 100 at senior managerial level and 200 were middle managerial level at their respectable firms across Malaysia. 24 respondents out of 400 were hired on diploma degree, 192 at bachelor degree, 96 at master degree and 88 had doctorate degree or any other higher degree. They were again from 19 and onwards. 56 respondents were aged between 19-25, 304 were aged between 26-35, 16 respondents were aged between 36-45 and 24 respondents were aged 46 and above. The income they earned was from 2000 and above. 64 respondents earned between RM2000 and RM4000, 234 respondents earned between RM4000-RM6000, 96 respondents earned between RM6000-RM8000 and only respondents earned between RM8000 and above. Finally, 170 respondents had work experience between 0-2 years, 100 respondents were experienced between 3-5 years, 55 respondents were experienced between 6-8 years, and 75 respondents were experienced from 8-9 years and above.

**Table I: Demographic Profile**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	300	75.0
Female	100	25.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	275	68.75
Married	125	31.25

<b>Level of Employment</b>		
Executive level	75 respondents	18.75
Middle manager level	200	50.0
Senior Manager level	100	25.0
<b>Qualification</b>		
Diploma	24	6.0
Bachelor Degree	192	48.0
Master Degree	96	24.0
Doctorate Degree or High	88	22.0
<b>Age</b>		
19-25	56	14.0
26-35	304	76.0
36-45	16	4.0
46 or Above	24	6.0
<b>Income</b>		
2001-4000	64	16.0
4001-6000	232	58.0
6001-8000	96	24.0
10000 or Above	8	2.0
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
0-2 years	170	42.5
3-5 years	100	25.0
6-8	55	13.75
9 years or above	75	18.75

### Descriptive Statistics

In the following table we can see the descriptive statistics between the independent and dependent variables. As the table shows that Website and Merchandising performance is the furthest from the distribution curve which means that it is more dispersed and scattered. Hence, it is the least affecting characteristics towards digital marketing and SMEs profitability.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
W&MP	13.1200	3.19208
UGC	11.5600	2.15861
SMP	15.8000	2.68024
SMEs PR	15.5200	1.83214

### Reliability Analysis

To test the reliability of this data, the tool that we have used is Cronbach's alpha. It will help us determine the internal consistency of the data

which will demonstrate how the items set are correlated with each other. Since, we find out the reliability of the data by using Cronbach's alpha which ranges from 0.715 to 0.902. The closer the alpha is to 1 the higher is the consistency of the data considered. According to George and Mallery (2003), the alpha that is above 0.7 is considered as reliable and acceptable.

Therefore, our reliability test has been approved since the results are greater than 0.7. The results can be seen in the table III.

**Table-III Results of reliability analysis**

Variables	Items	Cronbach's alpha
W&MP	4	0.858
UGC	5	0.715
SMP	4	0.796
Overall	20	0.789

Source: Authors estimation

### Hypothesis Testing & Correlations:

#### H1: Website and Merchandising Performance has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.

The following table IV shows that the correlation between Website and Merchandise Performance with SMEs profitability is weakly correlated yet positive. It means that there is relationship between both the factors but it is not very strong. Website and Merchandise performance does affect the SMEs profitability but not to an extent that its weak performance will cause any bad effect to SMEs profitability.

**Table IV Correlations Between W&MP and SMEs PR**

Correlations			
SMEs PR	SMEs PR		
	W&MP		
	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
		1	.322*
			.022
		50	50

W&MP	SMEs PR		
	UGC		
	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
		.322*	1
		.022	
		50	50

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### H2: User Generated Content (UGC) has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.

The following table V represents strong and positive correlation between these two variables i.e. SMEs profitability and User Generated content (UGC). The result is within the range which means that this hypothesis is accepted depicting strong relationship between UGC and SMEs profitability. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted.

**Table V Correlations between UGC & SMEs PR**

Correlations			
SMEs PR	SMEs PR		
	UGC		
	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
		1	.766**
			.002
		50	50
UGC	SMEs PR		
	UGC		
	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
		.766	1
		.002	
		50	50

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### H3: Social Media Performance has a significantly positive effect on SMEs profitability.

In table VI, we can see that there is very strong relationship between the social media performance and SMEs profitability. Also, the significance level is within the range which means they're highly correlated. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted suggesting that there is high correlation between these two variables.

**Table VI Correlations between SMP & SMEs PR**

Correlations			
SMEs PR	SMEs PR		
	SMP		
	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		

SMEs PR	Pearson Correlation	1	.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
SMP	Pearson Correlation	.782**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Regression Analysis:

The following table VII shows that there is significant correlation between the independent variables and dependent variables as we can see the R value which is 0.898 or 89.8%. Any result above 70% makes correlation strong. The adjusted R square determines the contribution of independent variables towards dependent variables. According to our results, 78.5% times our independent variables contributes towards the dependent variables i.e. SMEs profitability.

**Table IX Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	4.796	1.724		2.782	.008
UGC	.055	.075	-.096	-.732	.468
W&MP	.025	.103	.029	.240	.812
SMP	.959	.195	1.403	4.923	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs PR

**Table VII Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.898	.681	.785	1.09180

a. Predictors: (Constant), W&MP, UGC, SMP

b. Dependent Variable: SMEs PR

In the ANOVA, the aim of this analysis is to find out the fitness of the data or in other words how well does it define our dependent variable which is Small Medium size Enterprises Profitability.

According to our results, the regression model suggest that the fitness of the data is significantly well as the significance has turned out to be 0.01 which is less than the benchmark i.e. 0.05 (table VII).

**Table VIII ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	112.031	5	22.406	18.797	.0001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	52.449	44	1.192		
Total	164.480	49			

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs PR

b. Predictors: (Constant), W&MP, UGC, SMP.

Table IX which is co-efficient table will help us determine the important information to analyze and predict the SMEs profitability based on Website and Merchandise Performance, User generated Content, and Social Media Performance. It helps us define to what extent or level does the independent variables contribute statistically towards the dependent variable. As we can see the p-value by looking at significance column we can see that it is less than 0.05. With the help of this table we can formulate the equation that Website and Merchandise Performance, User generated Content, and Social Media Performance contributes statistically towards SMES profitability and these are the factors that organizations should consider to optimize their digital marketing tools.

### Conclusions & Recommendations:

#### Summary of Results:

The result of the hypothesis can be seen in the following table 5.1. The findings of our study have suggested that the digital marketing tools i.e. Website and Merchandise Performance, User Generated Content and Social Media Performance have a positive and significant impact on SMEs profitability. However, these tools are not the only tools that organizations that organizations use as digital marketing tactics. There are many more.

However, we only focused on these tools and they have turned out to be affective according to the analysis of our study.

**Table 5.1: Summary of Results**

Hypothesis	Supported	Results
H1: There is significant relationship between website & merchandise performance and SMEs profitability,	Yes	$r = .322^*$ $p = 0.022$ $p > 0.05$
H2: There is significant relationship between UGC and SMEs Profitability	Yes	$r = .766^{**}$ $p = 0.002$ $p < 0.05$
H3: There is significant relationship between SMP and SMEs profitability.	Yes	$r = .782^{**}$ $p = 0.000$ $p < 0.05$

### Discussions:

According to the results of our study, there is appositve relationship between Website & merchandise performance and SMEs profitability. However, it tends out to be very weak with the respective context of our study. It is significant yet it is weak. It means that it contributes towards our study but not to an extent that it will create a massive or huge impact. If we deduct this factor and introduce any other digital marketing tool it will be more effective.

Furthermore, moving towards the net variable i.e. User Generated Content (UGC). It has shown great result and high correlation with the SMEs profitability. These are the kind of factors that companies need to work on to create effective

profits and create longer term relationships with their customers. It is cheaper and efficient marketing tool as compared to other digital marketing such as Search Engine Marketing. It also takes lesser time and turns out to be effective.

Finally, the last variable i.e. Social Media Performance also showed high correlation and significance with the dependent variable i.e. SMEs profitability. These days, all big and small companies are working on their relationship with their consumers via Social media. Even in Malaysiancontext we can see all the big names working on their social media pages to deal with their consumers because it grasps customers faster, at cheaper rates and also creates great brand equity if you are doing it right.

### Conclusion:

According to the prior researches made by Ali Soomro et al. (2017); Webber et al. (2018); Confos and Davis (2016), that there is a positive and significant relationship between the merchandise performance and SMEs profitability, becausethese are the factors that allow you to help you retain the customers in ways that builds a strong relationship between the customers and brand. However, according to our analysis the results have turned out to be weak. We cannot completely ignore this factor, perhaps they will affect in future. However, these results can only be applied to the respective context that we have studied on.

On the other hand, UGC has turned out to be significant and highly correlated according to our analysis and results. Müller &Christandl (2019); Tsiakali, K. (2018); Hermaren & Achyar (2018); Hu et al. (2018) stated in their studies that UGC was established many years back. However, using it as a marketing tool is a very latest trend. Once, the marketers got to know it can be effective for marketing they have started offering blog posts to the customers to write and share experience with

the rest. It has resulted to be effective as people trust others experiences and believes in the word-of-mouth. Also, the results of our findings suggested likewise, which means it can be applied by the SMEs to get most out of their marketing tools.

Furthermore, our last variable i.e. Social Media Performance has turned out to be the most significant indicator as it has showed the highest correlation with SMEs profitability. The prior researches made by Moro et al. (2016); Hudson et al. (2015); Griffiths and McLean, (2015) stated in their studies that social media performance helps the companies in building their brand and helps them retain more customers. Nowadays, every age group is using social media. Social media is no longer just for communication but it provides businesses to market their brands at cheaper rates and at ease and convenience. Facebook marketing provides niche and broad markets to be targeted as per your demographics and segmentations. Hence, this tool is an effective tool and SMEs should be using it to enhance their profits and build their brand image.

### Recommendations:

Besides working on and adopting these factors by the SMEs there are various other factors that SMEs and future studies can work on. Such as:

- Work on more variables and find out how effective can they be to escalate the profits with maximum optimization. Such as Search Engine Marketing, Email Marketing, Search Engine Optimization etc.
- The number of respondents are limited; to expand the study it should cover more number of companies.
- To compare the demographics, the study should be applied on more locations to compare how they can be differential and similar at what extents.

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