

Strategies to Improve Brand Awareness Through Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study consists of; 1) To understand the current situation of an Event Organizer Company (EOC), 2) To examine the influences between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM), advertisement, interaction, and customization, with brand awareness among the EOC clients, and 3) To recommend strategies to increase brand awareness among the EOC clients.

Design/Methods/Approach: Using the applied research approach, a situational analysis was used to gather information before survey questions were used to capture data. In this correlational study, which takes a quantitative method, individuals are the analytical unit. This research involved 108 clients in total. A 25-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was given to clients living in the Klang Valley in order to gather data. This research used regression analysis to analyze the data and two strategic tools (SWOT Analysis & TOWS Matrix) for data analysis.

Findings: The results show that EWOM, advertising, and interaction have a positive influence on brand awareness. In contrast, the influence of customization on brand awareness was found to be statistically insignificant.

Originality: This study's value lies in the fact that researchers examined the factors that influenced the EOC's brand awareness and provided recommendations to the company, such as increasing audience engagement and creating appealing social media content and advertisements. This research paper highlights a specific problem within the company in the event management industry that has not been addressed in prior studies.

Research Practical: The four critical factors in this research are EWOM, advertisement, interaction, and customization. The results of this study can be used as guidelines, and the researchers' suggested strategies can help the EOC increase awareness of its brand.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, EWOM, Advertisement, Interaction, Customization, Malaysia

JEL Classification: M1, M3, L1



1. Introduction

The event organizer company (EOC) refers to a small company that engages in full-service event management in Malaysia and offers a range of services to meet the needs of its clients. The company works closely with individuals, organizations, and businesses to create successful events, such as birthday parties, weddings, anniversaries, grand openings, conferences, and other public or private corporate events. Event coordination, guest management, and event consultation are among its primary services offered to clients from a range of sectors and levels. The EOC is in a position where this research is necessary to enhance the company's growth in the aspect of its brand awareness. Consequently, the primary goal of this research is to comprehend the EOC's current situation. The second part of this research investigates how EWOM, advertisements, interaction, and customization affect brand awareness among EOC clients. The third goal of this research is to suggest methods for raising brand awareness among EOC clients.

People's daily lives revolve around events, and the event management industry is expanding rapidly. The event management services sector unquestionably plays a significant part in celebrations, community events, and religious events in today's business environment (Backman, 2018). Over time, the expansion of technical innovation and the middle class in developed nations has led to higher incomes and more free time. Due to this, there has been a global upsurge in events at the local, regional, and national levels. Events are now taking on new forms in a variety of contexts, such as festivals, culture, sports, music, and cuisine (Backman, 2018).

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 significantly decreased event sector revenue. As a result, the government has prohibited travel, meetings, and activities abroad. According to a survey conducted by the Malaysian Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (MACEOS) (2020), the country's exhibition industry experienced a revenue decline of approximately 50% in 2020 compared to the previous year, and over RM1.75 billion was lost due to the postponement or cancellation of over 1,250 business events, which negatively impacted industry performance (Madray, 2020). The number of marriages decreased by 88% between April 2019 and April 2020 as a consequence of the MCO's implementation, from 14,056 to 1,698 (Bernama, 2021).

This affected the EOC, as only 20% of events originated from direct clients, according to the owner, the majority of clients only learned about the EOC through referrals from other clients or vendors in the event industry. The company is hired as a subcontractor by indirect clients for the remaining 80% of the events. The event management industry, which relies on new technology, must promote creativity and innovation to prosper (Zakirai@Zakaria et al., 2022). According to surveys, the company must create strategies to differentiate its services as customers are unlikely to use unidentified service suppliers (Świtła et al., 2018). As small businesses are unable to engage in extensive marketing campaigns due to financial constraints, any small company can benefit from social media marketing, which is effective and affordable, to increase brand exposure (Ahmad & Guerrero, 2020).

Based on research conducted by Ahmad & Guerrero (2020) and Karen & Zai (2022), small businesses should evaluate their prominent social media presence as there is a significant relationship between social media and brand awareness. Furthermore, according to a previous study, 77% of small businesses use social media to raise brand awareness, boost sales, and enhance customer service. Instagram is crucial to purchasing because 83% of its users discover new companies while using the app (Peek, 2023). In addition, a survey found that Instagram is a platform that increases brand awareness and promotes sales because 44% of respondents said it helps them gain product knowledge, 42% of respondents said it helps them find new products or services, and 54% of respondents said they bought a product or service either right away or later after seeing it on Instagram (Facebook IQ, 2019). Chierici et al. (2018) also claim that educating and interacting with customers through a vibrant social media presence can increase awareness and recall. Hence, this study aims to investigate the relationship between social media marketing and brand awareness of the EOC in the event management industry.

This research makes several significant contributions. Firstly, it addresses a research gap by focusing on the relationship between social media marketing and brand awareness, specifically in the event management industry. This aspect of the study is unique as previous studies have yet to explore this research problem extensively. Secondly, there is limited research on social media marketing and brand awareness in the service industry, particularly in the context of event management companies in Malaysia. This study fills that gap by investigating the EOC as an event management company. Thirdly, this study adds to the existing literature on social media marketing and brand awareness by highlighting the importance of social media marketing elements such as EWOM, interaction, customization, and advertising in influencing brand awareness. Lastly, the findings of this research provide valuable recommendations for the EOC regarding effective social media marketing strategies to enhance its brand awareness.

The subsequent section of the article provides a concise overview of the literature review, while the following section delves into the research methodology. Adopting an applied research approach, this study used situational analysis and survey questionnaires to collect data. Taking a quantitative approach, the analytical unit in this correlational study was individuals, whereby 108 clients participated in the research, responding to a 25-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. Regression analysis was employed to analyze the collected data, and two strategic tools, namely SWOT Analysis and TOWS Matrix, were utilized for data analysis. The next section explains the research findings in which the results show that EWOM, advertisement, and interaction positively influence brand awareness. In contrast, the influence of customization on brand awareness was found to be statistically insignificant.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the ability of potential customers to recognize or remember a brand, which enables them to make connections between products and brands (Cheung et al., 2019). Rustemi and Baca (2021) describe brand awareness as the consumer's ability to recognize or remember the brand of a particular product or service. Therefore, brand awareness must first be established and responsible for communicating product attributes until a brand name is established. This is consistent with a previous study by Cheung et al. (2019), which found that brand recognition and brand recall are the two components that make up the overall concept of brand awareness. For example, Bilgin (2018) pointed out that brand awareness is about consumers' ability to remember or recognize a brand in different situations.

Rustemi and Baca (2021) added that brand awareness is critical during the decision-making process because consumers use awareness to remember a particular brand. When it comes time to make a choice, customers remember specific brands by invoking their familiarity. As mentioned earlier, brand awareness is essential to the decision-making process (Rustemi & Baca, 2021). According to Dabbous & Barakat (2019), brand awareness is the first and most important constraint in any brand-related search. It directly impacts consumers' purchase decisions for products or services. In addition, by using social media platforms, companies can promote their brands, increase awareness of those brands, and then convert that awareness into purchase behavior.

Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2022) found that brand awareness in online social networks is also distinct in terms of intensity and extent. The term "extent of brand awareness" refers to the potential of consumers to purchase and use products and services associated with a brand using social networks, especially when the brand appears in the minds of consumers using social networks (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022). Thus, increasing brand awareness increases the likelihood that a brand will be included in the consideration set, which is the collection of brands considered when purchasing a product or service (Hutter et al., 2013).

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

It is well known that social media marketing, also known as SMM, plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes toward brands (Cheung et al., 2019). According to Rimadias et al. (2021), social media marketing (SMM) is the use of social media to generate memory, awareness, recognition, and action for businesses, products, people, brands, or other entities. Cheung et al. (2019) also noted that SMM is widely acknowledged to impact how customers perceive brands significantly. As a result, businesses are increasingly using social media platforms to generate feedback, gather information about consumer preferences, conduct brand-building activities, and manage customer relationships. In addition, customers frequently seek brand and product information on various social media platforms (Cheung et al., 2019).

According to Bradley (2021), traditional marketing cannot replicate the effectiveness of social media marketing because it enables a connection with the audience that traditional marketing cannot provide. Furthermore, when businesses utilize social media marketing as a key element of their strategic plans, it can reduce the cost of marketing spend, increase sales, and positively impact the company's bottom line (Bradley, 2021). Therefore, Harb et al. (2019) found in their study that social media is an effective marketing tool due to its speed, accessibility, and ease of sharing, which can also reduce marketing costs.

In addition, Cheung et al. (2019) mentioned that there is general agreement that social media is one of the most important communication platforms for brand information, as the platform's interactive features enable participatory, collaborative, and knowledge-sharing activities. Moreover, according to Harb et al. (2019), social media is "a social and managerial process through which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want by creating and exchanging products and value with others." Their study also states that traditional media, such as print, television, and radio, are less effective at reaching the community than newer social media marketing forms (Cheung et al., 2019). In addition, 90% of marketers believe their social media marketing efforts have increased their company's visibility, and another 75% believe they have increased website traffic (Nick G., 2022).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM)

EWOM is an acronym for "electronic word-of-mouth" and refers to remarks and comments about a product, brand, or company made available to the public through social media platforms by potential, actual, or former customers (Cheung et al., 2019). The level of EWOM refers to the extent to which consumers use social media to share, disseminate, and upload information online. This includes sharing information about the brands, uploading content from a brand page, and sharing opinions with peers about the products and services (Cheung et al., 2020).

Rimadias et al. (2021) explained that EWOM aims to facilitate communications among individuals who are potential users or who have used brands, products, or services using social media. The extent to which customers share and upload information on social media platforms is assessed by EWOM. This is done to spread information about the brand by publishing content on their blog and interacting with others' perspectives. EWOM communication occurs when

neither the recipient nor the sender knows the other. However, since many people are involved in the discussion, any information or feedback can be considered trustworthy. Cheung et al. (2020) found that a positive EWOM strengthens consumers' positive perceptions of brand awareness. Conversely, a negative EWOM can lead to less desirable brand-related outcomes, with detrimental effects on consumers' trust in the brand and, ultimately, the brand's value.

Previous research has shown that EWOM has a particular power to influence consumer awareness and, thus, behavior. In addition, positive word of mouth can effectively increase both brand awareness and association (Maria et al., 2019). Consumers tend to evaluate brands based on EWOM on social media platforms due to the perception that they are credible and trustworthy. They reflect the previous experiences of users of the brand, which ultimately draws the attention of other consumers to the product or service (Cheung et al., 2021).

Finally, EWOM can also be conceptually defined as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about the product or company over the Internet that is made available to an individual or an institution (Chu, 2021). It is known that EWOM leads to high referral intent because it is easier for consumers to communicate online in this era. Cheung et al. (2019) explained that when consumers act as brand ambassadors to spread positive EWOM on social media platforms, it is beneficial for building consumers' positive perceptions of brands and strengthening their purchase intentions. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: EWOM has a positive influence on brand awareness.

Advertisement

Advertising as a component refers to advertising and promotional campaigns conducted by businesses on social media to increase sales and expand their customer portfolio (Bilgin, 2018). Advertising can be viewed from two angles, that of marketing and communication. From the point of view of advertising, it means that a certain sponsor presents and promotes a service or product, which corresponds to paid advertising. From the point of view of communication, advertising can disseminate information through a variety of mass media (Rrustemi and Baca, 2021).

Domazet et al. (2017) explained that advertising is used to build a lasting product or service image to achieve rapid sales. It can communicate the values of the product and services to the customers. The same authors also indicated that the value of a product can increase because of advertising, which can lead customers to believe that the product, which is advertised extensively, has a reasonable value. This can also influence the level of awareness of a particular product among customers. Maria et al. (2019) stated that advertising aims to familiarise consumers with a product and raise their awareness of that product by presenting information about the product and its benefits compared to those of competitors. There is a direct correlation between the money spent on advertising a brand and the number of people who know that brand. This is because higher advertising spending increases the reach and frequency of advertising messages (Bilgin, 2018).

Moreover, advertising encompasses presenting goods and services to increase the existing demand while attracting new customers. Therefore, the advertising itself should be creative and attractive. At the same time, it can attract new customers while connecting with existing ones (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021). The advertisement should provide basic information about the product or service, increasing the likelihood that a person will buy or use the advertised product or service (Maria et al., 2019). The more people recognize the image of the product or service, the easier it becomes to gain trust, which ultimately increases brand awareness among customers. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Advertisement has a positive influence on brand awareness.

Interaction

Interaction includes opportunities for two-way communication and information sharing on social media platforms allowing consumers to share their thoughts on specific products or brands with peers (Cheung et al., 2021). Previous studies have found that social media interaction serves as a driving force for producing user-generated content and sharing ideas with others, which ultimately influences consumer attitudes toward the brand directly or indirectly (Cheung et al., 2019). Posting material relevant to the target audience of social media users can stimulate discussion and strengthen the bond between consumer and brand. Interaction positively influences consumer brand engagement, which is related to company brand awareness (Rimadias et al., 2021).

Rrustemi and Baca (2021) pointed out that social media has changed the way companies communicate with their customers and clients. Due to social media, the conditions for interaction and communication with customers have become more favorable and appropriate. Cheung et al. (2019) also mentioned that interaction in social media marketing occurs when users contribute their ideas to meet, interact, and discuss, which shows that interaction on social media provides opportunities to share information about the product or services. This is supported by a study by Cheung et al. (2021), in which consumer-brand interaction helps consumers improve their cognitive understanding of product attributes and brand benefits. The authors also mentioned that the reader's understanding of the product or service can be improved through messages encouraging brand information sharing. These messages can take the form of conversations about current events, personal experiences with the product or service, or new product developments.

By using social media as a platform for interaction between companies and customers, the company will eventually be able to identify the needs and desires of customers. At the same time, companies can access real-time feedback from

customers about their products and services (Bilgin, 2018). As confirmed by Rrustemi & Baca (2021), this interaction can increase brand loyalty, making people familiar with the company's brands and products. As a result, by reviewing and interacting with customers, the company better understands customer needs and wants.

When consumers are excited about interactive brand posts, they are also more likely to upload and post their opinions or ideas on a brand's social media pages, creating user-generated content. User-generated content is content created by users themselves (Cheung et al., 2021). Consequently, this engagement can help brands develop new products. The same authors, Cheung et al. (2020), mentioned that this type of interaction could eventually lead to higher levels of enthusiasm and, eventually, the development of affection. It can be concluded that consumer interaction leads to higher brand awareness (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Interaction has a positive influence on brand awareness.

Customisation

Customization is the degree to which services are adapted to meet specific consumer preferences (Cheung et al., 2019). Rimadias et al. (2021) stated that customization is a marketing and messaging service that aims to satisfy consumers by making the service customizable and the information easily accessible to add value to specific consumers. At the same time, it becomes easier to reach intended customers, build trust in them and increase the value of certain customers (Cheung et al., 2020). The findings by Bilgin (2018) showed that consumer customization is the most important part of social media marketing.

Bilgin (2018) defined customization as a component in the process of creating customer satisfaction based on the contact a company has with individual users of the product or service. It can convey unique product or service characteristics to the consumer who uses it. To achieve customization and create value for a specific customer group, marketers personalized not only their marketing efforts and services but also the messages they send to customers. This can be done by immediately responding to customers' personalized requests and providing excellent customer service to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cheung et al., 2019).

Next, customization will make it easier to reach the target customer while reinforcing value. Providing content tailored to customer preferences will lead to personalized brand experiences, which in turn will drive consumer awareness of the brand and positive associations with the brand (Cheung et al., 2021). The same authors also noted that the evolution of social media would allow marketers to engage in dialog with customers and discuss topics related to their personal interests. This encourages customers to contribute their perspectives and ideas to improve the brand's products and services. Bilgin (2018) also emphasized that contact with customers makes them feel important, especially regarding their problems. This benefits those who have influence over product and service preferences. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Customisation has a positive influence on brand awareness.

3. Method

This study aims to provide real-world applications to real-world existing problems. In an applied research study, a case study entails an in-depth analysis and examination of a specific real-life issue, organization, or phenomenon (Bell & Warren, 2023). Therefore, a case study on the EOC was carried out. This company is suitable for this study because researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the event management industry's practices, identify the SWOT, and uncover social media marketing (SMM) strategies that can be employed to improve brand awareness based on the real existing problems of a company in the industry. To achieve the three objectives of this study, researchers followed the three steps of inquiry by Amiera et al. (2022). The 3-step approach is deemed suitable for applied business research as it helps researchers address the specific objectives, which are: (i) understanding the current situation via situational analysis; (ii) examining the relationship between variables by testing the conceptual framework developed for the EOC using a set of questionnaires; and (iii) proposing a viable solution for the EOC through the TOWS matrix analysis.

Step I – Situational Analysis using SWOT

At the beginning of the study, a situation analysis is conducted to understand the current situation of the EOC by interviewing the owner of the company. As is common with businesses, SWOT analytical tools are used to assess specific areas of the business, primarily strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Benzaghta et al., 2021). This type of assessment has become an essential tool for companies to determine their position in the market. Moreover, it helps to identify the internal and external aspects to achieve the company's objectives, where the internal aspects include the aspects that the company can control, and the external ones refer to the aspects that cannot be controlled by the company (Benzaghta et al., 2021). Thus, in this study, the SWOT analysis is used to justify the adoption of a well-established research framework. Aside from that, SWOT will aid the study in achieving Research Objective I.

Step 2 – Testing of Conceptual Framework

To understand the problem, which is brand awareness of the company from a customer perspective, this study adopts a pre-existing framework derived from previous research by Rrustemi and Baca (2021) and Cheung et al. (2019). Then, due to the nature of applied research, the framework was adapted to fit the company's concerns that researchers identified from the input of the interview session used for SWOT analysis (Step 1). Also, in this study, the framework is supplemented by a set of 25-item questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly Disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements in Table 1 below. The collection of questionnaires will be empirically tested using regression analysis to address Research Objective 2. Thus, the conceptual framework is necessary as it was designed to help researchers use strategic tools to analyze the relevant information needed for making a strategic business decision.

Step 3 – TOWS Matrix

Lastly, this study utilized another strategic tool which is the TOWS matrix, to help address Research Objective 3. This is in line with past studies, as Morley et al. (2015) mentioned that they discovered the benefits of the TOWS matrix after using it to structure the outcome of the analysis for the organization. The idea of TOWS analysis can be used in identifying and examining potential business opportunities to enable better decision-making. The analysis was developed based on the results of the SWOT analysis earlier. Therefore, the TOWS matrix was developed between the elements in SWOT to assist in formulating strategies for the EOC to increase brand awareness for their organization. This research step follows a similar process of inquiry by Amiera et al. (2022) because the authors also seek to provide solutions to real-world existing problems.

Thus, the Academic Construct (Figure 1) below was developed from the research steps above. It comprises two strategic tools and a research framework. The research framework comprises five variables; brand awareness as the dependent variable, EWOM, advertisement, interaction, and customization as the independent variables.

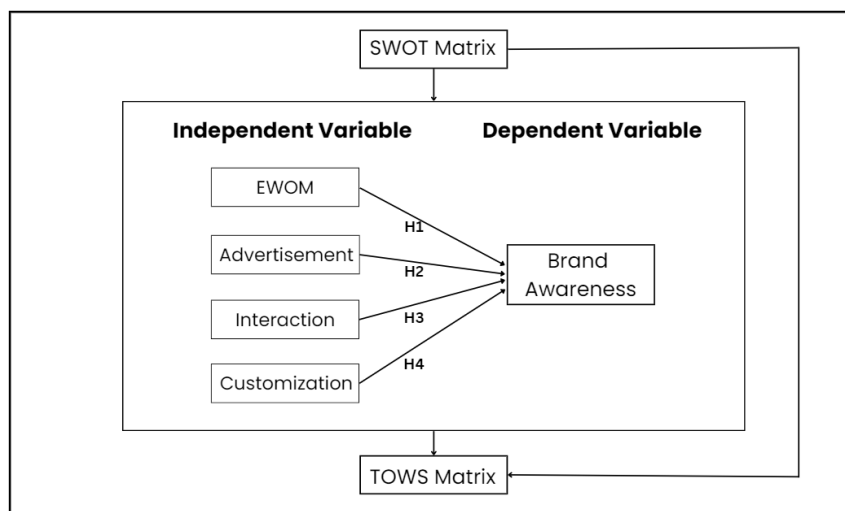


Figure 1: The Academic Construct for EOC

Since the study is also set to understand the determinants of clients' brand awareness, it is important to ensure that the respondents know about the company and have prior experience using their services. Systematic simple random sampling was used to collect the information from the respondents, as researchers managed to get the database of 150 clients from the EOC in Excel form as the sampling frame. Therefore, by using RAOsoft sample size calculator, researchers can determine that they need a sample size of 109 for $N = 150$. From that, researchers distributed the questionnaires using systematic simple random sampling to 109 samples. However, one client did not respond on time, leaving the response rate at only 99% ($n = 108$). Thus, this study only analyses 108 sets of responses for final analysis. Table 1 presents the variables, the questionnaire items, and their respective sources.

The online survey form was designed and used to aid with data collection for this study. After obtaining ethical approval on October 21, 2022, the researchers distributed the questionnaires. Thus, data collection began at the end of October and lasted until November 2022. The link for the survey questionnaire form was emailed to the EOC's representative, together with the instructions for distribution to the chosen 108 clients only. Following that, all data were analyzed using SPSS version 27.

Table 1: Operationalisation and Measurement

Variable	Items	Source & Scale
Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) Statements and comments are posted on social media platforms made by potential, current, or former customers about a product, brand, or company (Cheung et al. 2019).	I would like to pass on information on brands, products, or services from the EOC's social media to my friends.	Cheung et al. (2020) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	I would like to upload content from the EOC's social media on my social media page or my blog.	
	I would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from the EOC's social media with my friends.	
	The information I receive through the EOC is usually trustworthy.	Rimadias et al. (2021) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
Advertisement A form of paid promotion supported by a well-known sponsor to attract the attention of the public to a product or brand that is being offered (Pahwa 2022).	I would share positive feedback about the EOC on my social media.	The EOC 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	I like the ads that the EOC has published on social media.	Bilgin (2018) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	The ads that the EOC has released on social media are interesting.	
	Social media ads of the EOC positively affect my attention to the brand.	
Interaction The degree to which social media platforms enable two-way exchange of opinions and information sharing is referred to as interaction, according to Cheung et al. (2020).	The information on the EOC's social media ads is adequate.	The EOC 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	The EOC's social media ads provided are relevant to me.	
	It is easy to convey my opinion through the EOC's social media.	Cheung et al. (2020) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	It is easy to convey my opinions or conversation with other users through the EOC's social media.	
Customisation The degree to which services, marketing efforts, and messages are tailored to the preferences of individual consumers, as defined by Cheung et al. (2020).	It is possible to have two-way interaction through th. EOC's social media.	
	It is possible to share information with other users through the EOC's social media.	
	I feel that the EOC interacts well and gives adequate information for my inquiries through the EOC's social media.	The EOC 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	It is possible to search for customized information on the EOC's social media.	Cheung et al. (2020) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
Brand Awareness Target clients' ability to recognize or recall a brand, which helps consumers associate brands with products or services (Cheung et al., 2019).	The EOC's social media provides customized services.	
	The EOC's social media provides a lively feed of information I am interested in.	
	It is easy to use the EOC's social media.	
	I think the EOC's social media is customized to the needs and wants of the clients.	The EOC's 5-point scale To indicate this accordingly, 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
Brand Awareness Target clients' ability to recognize or recall a brand, which helps consumers associate brands with products or services (Cheung et al., 2019).	I am always aware of the EOC.	Cheung et al. (2020) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)
	Characteristics of the EOC come to my mind quickly.	
	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of the EOC.	
	I can remember the EOC often.	
	I can quickly recognize the EOC on social media among other competing brands.	Dabbous & Barakat (2019) 5-point scale 1 (SD) to 5 (SA)

4. Result and Discussion

To achieve the first objective of this study, a situation analysis of the EOC was conducted using the SWOT matrix (Table 2). The situation analysis deals with the internal and external environment of the company that can identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to analyze the factors that influence the company's performance and brand awareness among the existing clients of the company.

Table 2: SWOT Matrix

Strengths		Weaknesses	
1. Niche service of event coordination and consultation		1. Low brand recognition from the public	
2. Effective networking between clients and vendors		2. Lack of social media presence	
3. Competitive prices with high-quality service		3. Poor organizational structure	
4. Business diversification			
Opportunities		Threats	
1. Business event industry growth in Malaysia		1. Increasing intensity of rivalry	
2. Favorable economic conditions		2. COVID - 19 Pandemic	
3. Wide access opportunities to social media platforms			

For this study, the key aspect contributing to the strength of the EOC are niche event coordination services and consultation with over two years of experience in the field. At the same time, with effective networking, they have always been the recommended coordinators for clients and vendors in the event sector. The company has competitive prices with high-quality services compared with other companies; thus, its strength in approaching diversifies its business in wedding, corporate, and sports events. As for the weaknesses, it was found that the EOC had a low level of brand awareness from the public as the company does not have a strong presence on social media platforms, which can be seen from the number of followers on the EOC page, only about 1,500. The last weakness of the EOC is a poor organizational structure in shaping institutional strategies, including their execution and effectiveness to ensure the goals are achieved.

There is a great opportunity for the EOC to expand its business event industry into a wider market to meet the higher demand for event coordinators; thus, people are now willing to spend more money on their weddings due to the favorable economy, such as wage increases. The number of wage and salary earners increased by 3.4 percent, reaching a record of 9.7 million people (2020 forecast: +2.1%; 9.4 million people) (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2022). Furthermore, nowadays, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have wide opportunities to market their services as it becomes the main platform for clients to notice the tempo simultaneously, able to connect and fulfill their needs and wants.

Last, for threats, event coordinators have a high intensity of rivalry in the event management industry, such as GlamHall, Rerama, and others, as they include other services in their packages. The Covid-19 pandemic also led to suspended the EOC service, where clients had to cancel or postpone their wedding to another time. This has led to a serious problem that greatly affects wedding industry players, as they have little to no income (Mohtar & Mei Si, 2020).

To answer the second research objective (RO2), a preliminary analysis or initial examination of the collected data was conducted first. The preliminary analysis includes analyzing the survey response rate, frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and correlation analysis to verify that the instruments used in this study are valid and reliable before conducting a more detailed analysis (regression analysis). Table 3 summarises the response rate for this study. The distribution of questionnaires by the representative of the EOC resulted in the successful collection of 108 responses from existing clients, indicating a remarkable 99% response rate.

Table 3: Response Rate

Description	Total Number of Responses (n)	Response Rate
Existing clients of the EOC based in Klang Valley	108	99%

According to the data collection of frequency analysis from Table 4, more than half were female, about 64.8%, and less than 36% were from the male population. Many respondents were from the age group 30-39 years old. To look closer, 50.9% of the respondents work in the private sector with a monthly income of RM4000-RM6000. Finally, the result for the summary of general event management service usage behavior shows that 50 out of 108 respondents

(46.3%) use the service once or twice a year. In addition, the table shows that more than half of the respondents (75.9%) use the event management service for wedding ceremonies, whereas 85 out of 108 respondents (78.7%) typically search for event management services through Instagram accounts.

Table 4: Demographic Profiling of the Respondents

Items	Frequency (n = 108)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	38	35.2
Female	70	64.8
Age		
20 - 29	40	37.0
30 - 39	46	42.6
40 - 49	20	18.5
50 - 59	2	1.9
Occupation		
Employed in the private sector	55	50.9
Employed in the public sector	25	23.1
Self - employed	24	22.2
Student	4	3.7
Monthly Income		
RM2000 and below	7	6.5
RM2001 - RM4000	27	25.0
RM4001 - RM6000	28	25.9
RM6001 - RM8000	27	25.0
RM8001 - RM10000	15	13.9
RM10001 and above	4	3.7
Frequently use event management service		
Once or twice per month	23	21.3
More than twice per month	3	2.8
Once or twice per year	50	46.3
Rarely or never	32	29.6
Occasion		
Corporate dinner	39	36.1
Wedding ceremony	82	75.9
Anniversary	16	14.8
Birthday party	21	19.4
Where to search for event management service		
Facebook	41	38.0
Instagram	85	78.7
WhatsApp	12	11.1
Friends or family	47	43.5
Others	13	12.0

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the mean for each variable, which are EWOM, advertisement, interaction, and customization with the brand awareness among the EOC clients. Descriptive analysis was conducted for the remainder of the 5-point Likert scale questions asked of the 108 survey respondents. Table 5 shows that the overall mean of the dependent variable is 3.815 and a standard deviation of 0.8859, indicating a high level at which respondents mostly agree with the elements of the variable. In addition, the table shows that EWOM is the largest

contributor to brand awareness of the EOC, with a mean of 3.919 and a standard deviation of 0.7898. Customization has the lowest mean value of 3.835 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.7241. However, from the results analysis, the mean value for all variables is above the value of 3.00 and considered high with the range of 3.8 – 3.9 over 5. This means that the respondents considered all the factors, including advertisement, interaction, and customization, that are associated with brand awareness of the EOC, as most of them answered neutral, agree, and strongly agree with the items in the questionnaire.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rating (based on mean)
EWOM	108	3.919	0.7898	1
Advertisement	108	3.867	0.6980	2
Interaction	108	3.839	0.7510	3
Customisation	108	3.835	0.7241	4
Brand Awareness	108	3.815	0.8859	
Valid N (listwise)	108			

Scale: 1 - Strongly disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neutral 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly agree

Reliability Analysis

Next, the reliability test was performed on the items using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The test determines the instrument's internal consistency. From Table 6, Results for reliability show that EWOM, Advertisement, Interaction, and Customisation have good internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.839, 0.845, 0.884, and 0.860, respectively. While the brand awareness factor has excellent internal consistency, indicated by an alpha value of 0.900. Therefore, it can be concluded that the instrument of the survey can be relied upon.

Table 6: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Items	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Internal consistency
EWOM	5	0.839	Good
Advertisement	5	0.845	Good
Interaction	5	0.884	Good
Customisation	5	0.860	Good
Brand Awareness	5	0.900	Excellent

(Source: Hair et al., 2016)

Pearson Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficients for all independent and dependent variables are displayed in Table 7. It indicates the strength of the relationship and can range from -1 to +1, where -1 is a perfect negative correlation, and +1 is a perfect positive correlation. The table shows that brand awareness has a high correlation of 0.743 and 0.734 with advertisement and interaction. While there is a moderate correlation between EWOM and customization of 0.697 and 0.691.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5
EWOM	1				
Advertisement	.696	1			
Interaction	.671	.658	1		
Customisation	.715	.801	.691	1	
Brand Awareness	.697	.743	.734	.691	1

Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was used to analyze the data to accomplish the second research objective. Table 8 shows a positive and significant influence between EWOM, Advertisement, and Interaction on the EOC client's brand awareness as the p-value is less than 0.05. As presented, the results support three of the four hypotheses. Out of the three variables, advertisement has the strongest influence among independent variables with the highest beta ($\beta = 0.359$, $t = 3.617$, $p = 0.000$), followed by Interaction ($\beta = 0.352$, $t = 4.192$, $p = 0.000$) and EWOM ($\beta = 0.196$, $t = 2.221$, $p =$

0.014). This demonstrates that advertisement, interaction, and EWOM positively influence brand awareness. Therefore, the hypotheses proposed by H1, H2, and H3 have been accepted. However, the standardized beta for customization is 0.021, which indicates that customization ($\beta = 0.021$, $t = 0.198$, $p = 0.422$) was found to be insignificantly related to the brand awareness of the EOC. Therefore, H4 was not supported. This finding is acceptable, considering that the EOCs did not directly provide customization information on their social media. Meanwhile, the R-squared values indicate how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variables models (IVs). The R-squared is 0.676, indicating only 67.6% of the variance in Brand awareness can be explained by EWOM, Advertisement, Interaction, and Customisation. While 32.4% of the variation is explained by other factors that are not considered in the study.

Table 8: Multiple Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Std Beta	Std Error	T-Value	p-value	95% CI		Decision
					LL	UL	
H1 EWOM → BA	0.196	0.107	2.221	0.014	.025	.025	Supported H1
H2 ADV → BA	0.359	0.136	3.617	0.000	.222	.222	Supported H2
H3 INT → BA	0.352	0.101	4.192	0.000	.224	.626	Supported H3
H4 CSTM → BA	0.021	0.135	0.198	0.422	-.240	.294	Not Supported H4
R-Square				0.676			
Adjust R-Square				0.663			
F-Value				53.627			
p-Value				0.000			

TOWS Analysis

To accomplish the third research objective, the TOWS matrix was developed between the elements in SWOT to assist in formulating strategies for the EOC to increase brand awareness for their organization. The TOWS matrix is proposed in this research to analyze the Threats, Opportunities (in the environment), Weaknesses, and Strengths (of the organization) in that order as a problem-solving tool for the organization. This is consistent with previous research that combined SWOT analysis with other multi-criteria decision-making techniques (Amiera et al., 2022). Therefore, the S-O strategy focuses on how the EOC can leverage its strengths to respond to potential opportunities in the marketplace. By analyzing the Weakness-Opportunity strategy, the organization can overcome internal weaknesses by leveraging and seizing the opportunities listed in Figure 2. Although the EOC has recognized its strengths, external threats are difficult to avoid. The final component of TOWS is the Weakness-Threat Strategy, which aims to mitigate threats and weaknesses. Figure 2 below shows a summary of the TOWS Matrix conducted consisting of nine recommended strategies to improve the brand awareness of the EOC's clients.

Discussion

The initial hypothesis (H1) was tested using regression analysis, and the obtained results indicated statistical significance with a p-value of 0.014 and a t-statistic of 2.221. This suggests a significant positive relationship between EWOM and brand awareness, supporting H1. Consumers commonly use social media platforms to evaluate brands based on EWOM, which is seen as trustworthy and reliable. Positive EWOM shared by brand advocates on social media platforms helps shape consumers' favorable perceptions of brands and strengthens their purchase intentions (Cheung et al., 2021). Similarly, previous studies have also demonstrated the positive impact of EWOM on brand awareness (Maria et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2020). Therefore, this study further confirms the role of EWOM in significantly enhancing brand awareness within the event management industry. Conversely, negative EWOM can have detrimental effects on brand-related outcomes.

Based on Table 8, the regression analysis conducted between advertisement and brand awareness yielded a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant positive impact as it is smaller than the threshold of 0.05 (<0.05). Additionally, the t-value for advertisement reached 3.617, further supporting the significance of the influence between advertisement and brand awareness. Thus, H2 was confirmed. Advertisements play a crucial role in conveying essential information about a product or service, increasing the likelihood of consumer purchases or usage (Maria et al., 2019). Moreover, higher advertising expenditure enhances the reach and frequency of advertising messages (Bilgin, 2018). When more people recognize a product or service's image, it becomes easier to establish trust and ultimately enhance brand awareness among customers. This study's findings indicate that event management and service sector advertisements can effectively familiarise consumers with the offered services and elevate brand awareness. These results align with previous research that also demonstrates the positive impact of advertisements on brand awareness (Maria et al., 2019).

For H3, it is predicted that Interaction positively influences brand awareness ($\beta = 0.352$, $t = 4.192$, $p = 0.000$). Cheung et al. (2021) supported this by mentioning that consumer-brand interaction helps consumers improve their cognitive understanding of product attributes and benefits. The company will be able to identify the needs and wants of

customers by using social media as a platform for interaction. The same authors, Cheung et al. (2020), this type of interaction will lead to higher levels of enthusiasm, which means it can be concluded that consumer interaction will lead to higher brand awareness (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021). Therefore, this study is in line with Rrustemi & Baca (2021), which found a positive influence on interaction on brand awareness. Hence, H3 was supported.

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 aims to measure the influence between customization and brand awareness. The regression analysis conducted indicated an insignificant positive impact on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.021$, $t = 0.198$, $p = 0.422$). Thus, H4 was not supported. Customization will eventually make it easier to reach the target customer by providing content according to customer preferences which will drive consumer awareness of the brand awareness (Cheung et al., 2021). This does not match the findings from previous studies. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is not accepted.

TOWS Matrix		STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
		S1 Niche service of event coordination and consultation. S2 Effective networking between clients and vendors. S3 Competitive prices with high quality service. S4 Business diversification - corporate, sports, weddings.	W1 Low brand recognition from the public. W2 Lack of social media presence. W3 Poor organisational structure.
OPPORTUNITIES		SO Strategies	WO Strategies
O1	Business event industry growth in Malaysia	Internal strength (S) to take advantage external opportunities (O) 1. Grow professional network by connecting with other key players from the same industry (S2, O1)	External opportunities (O) to overcome internal weakness (W) 1. Educate and promote the importance of using event coordinators service for event management. (W1, O2)
O2	Favourable economic conditions	2. Explore and engage in different types of events such as cultural and food festival events. (S4, O1)	2. Utilise social media pages for the TMPO and implement effective marketing content. (W2, O3)
O3	Wide access opportunities to social media platforms	3. Create promotional activities to promote competitive pricing through the wide access of social media platforms. (S3, O3)	3. Restructuring organisational structure and employing the right personnel for the right positions. (W3, O1)
THREATS		ST Strategies	WT Strategies
T1	Increasing intensity of rivalry	Internal strength (S) to avoid or reduce external threats 1. Offer affordable prices over their competitors. (S3, T1)	Minimise internal weakness (W) and possibly reduce external threats (T) 1. Provide exceptional engagement with potential clients on social media to create competitive advantage. (W2, T1)
T2	Pandemic	2. Diversify services to accommodate clients' needs. (S4, T1)	

Figure 2. TOWS Matrix

5. Conclusion

Event management is a multifaceted profession that operates in a dynamic and ever-expanding sector. The industry attracts individuals with creative abilities and organizational skills who use their talents to manage all event-related tasks. Event management is an environment where no two days are alike, and events provide people with entertaining, unique, and memorable experiences. Furthermore, events can reflect and shape society, making it imperative for event managers or event management companies to understand their capabilities, target market, and trends in the industry. Marketing their services effectively is also crucial to keep existing customers up to date, attract new potential customers, and stay ahead of the competition in this dynamic industry.

Social media marketing is increasingly recognized as numerous industries focus on improving customer relationships and increasing brand awareness. Utilizing social media to promote an event and event-related materials can benefit event management companies, especially in increasing brand awareness among their customers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how social media marketing, including EWOM, advertisement, interaction, and customization, influences the brand awareness of EOC clients. The company requires more direct clients due to the

price difference between direct and indirect clients to maximize the company's profitability. The study tested four different factors that could influence brand awareness among the EOC clients, including EWOM, advertisement, interaction, and customization. According to the findings, three tested factors are crucial for brand awareness: EWOM, advertisement, and interaction. As a result, the study yields two strategic recommendations for the EOC to improve its brand awareness among clients.

The first recommendation is to increase engagement with audiences by regularly soliciting feedback from existing clients and directly interacting with social media users through Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok live streams, ultimately increasing engagement with TikTok users. As for the second recommendation, the EOC can also create attractive content and advertisements on social media, including creating a posting schedule, uploading the right type and content of information, monitoring the metrics of the posts, and promoting the posts with the greatest reach or engagement. Hence, by effectively leveraging the use of social media marketing, the EOC can increase its sales, profitability, and future growth while increasing brand awareness among its clients and potential clients.

The outcomes of the SWOT and multiple regression analyses were analyzed to develop suitable suggestions, ensuring that the EOC can implement efficient strategies to raise awareness of the brand among clients. The EOC is advised to concentrate on implementing EWOM, advertising, and interaction strategies in light of the survey findings. The TOWS matrix in Figure 2 displays the strategies that the EOC can employ to raise awareness of its brand among its clients in accordance with the findings of the SWOT analysis and the multiple regression analysis. However, for this study, recommendations suggested were derived from SO, WO, and WT strategies, including creating promotional activities to promote competitive pricing through wide access to social media platforms (S3, O3), utilizing social media pages for the EOC, and implementing effective marketing content (W2, O3) and provide exceptional engagement with potential clients on social media to create a competitive advantage (W2, T1).

Increase engagement with audiences

On social media platforms, successful companies are frequently discussed, and these exchanges are crucial to developing awareness of the brand and increasing revenue. The EOC is advised to boost its engagement with customers through social media in order to address the significance between EWOM and interaction with brand awareness, as determined by the TOWS analysis of S3 and O3, as well as W2 and T1. However, social media provides companies with the opportunity to meet in person with current as well as potential clients. Approximately 74% of consumers use social media to make purchase choices (Square Contributor, 2021). Therefore, the EOC can interact with its customers by routinely seeking feedback from them in order to learn about the issues they frequently encounter and the areas that can be improved. The EOC can demonstrate to its audience that it values their ideas and views by encouraging them to express them. Additionally, the EOC can use customer testimonials as an EWOM medium to provide social evidence of the excellence and efficacy of its service. This tactic will boost user interaction on social media.

Additionally, the EOC can engage clients more through apps on Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok Live. The company is available to answer any questions from its viewers via the live broadcast, including those regarding the services provided, promotions, and price offers. Clients have the willingness to put forth the time and effort necessary to maintain relationships with the things in which they are interested. Therefore, if a company's social media platforms can offer more entertainment, knowledge, and promotional benefits to its users, customer engagement may increase. Additionally, studies have shown that greater user involvement typically has a favorable effect on consumption intention (Chen et al., 2020). Finally, it is advised that the EOC uses the TikTok platform to communicate with clients more frequently. The majority of Malaysia's 4 million TikTok users, as reported by the Digital Business Lab in 2022, were under 30. Malaysia has the sixth-highest TikTok penetration rate worldwide as a consequence (Tan, 2022). As a result, the EOC can raise TikTok engagement by using the Q&A function and creating new videos in response to user comments. The EOC can produce the most pertinent content for its audience and develop relationships with potential clients by utilizing this feature. In order to raise awareness of the brand, the EOC should engage its audience more frequently.

Building attractive social media content and advertisement

The multiple regression analysis and analysis of TOWS both point to the need for the company to emphasize the advertising component while fully using and expanding its social media presence to reach the target market. The TOWS analysis of W2 and O3 suggests building attractive social media content and advertisement on social media to address the significance of advertisement with brand awareness and the insignificance of customization with brand awareness. The EOC must set up a posting timetable for social media. The schedule must outline the kind of content the company will publish, the frequency at which it will do so, the best time to do so, and the specifics of what will be included in each posting. The timing of social media uploads is important, say Kanuri et al. (2018), because Instagram stories published in the morning get more clicks than those published in the afternoon or evening. In order to boost audience engagement in the form of likes, comments, and profile views, it is advised that the company start posting in the morning between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

Additionally, the company is urged to include the necessary information. The research found that providing viewers with emotionally stirring content boosts virality because it encourages sharing and that providing educational

content is also well-received online (Kanuri et al., 2018). It is advised that the EOC posts current, amusing, and amazed-looking content. For instance, the company might share Instagram Reels or TikTok videos that highlight intriguing details from previous clients' weddings, like the brides' dresses and event decorations. This is the perfect opportunity to highlight and inform the audience about the value of event coordinators for their most significant occasions and share details about the customization services that the EOC provides. Because there is so little information about customization on the company's social media website, regression analysis findings indicate that customization has little impact on brand awareness. As a result, the company needs to publish its customization package for different kinds of events, like weddings and business dinners. Depending on the activities of the gathering, they can also provide more information on the minimum and maximum number of coordinators. Depending on what is most appropriate, this material may be included in the videos or added to the captions.

In terms of advertisement, the company needs to use social media to promote its current posts. They can keep an eye on the metrics of the posts, particularly for Instagram ads, and select "Boost" on the ones that have the highest reach or engagement as indicated by the number of views or the number of likes, comments, saved posts, and/or shared posts. This allows Instagram ads to automatically boost the posts to reach the intended audience and connect with people who share their interest in weddings or other events. In the insights of the social media platforms Instagram or TikTok, which are updated at least 24 hours after the posting, the information of the ads, such as the number of views and saves, is accessible after boosting. The posts will continue to reach a much wider population as engagement increases. Since posts are what draw people in, if the company chooses the right posts, there is a greater chance that they will gain a large following and appeal to the intended audience. The company must be able to maximize and make the most of its important expenditures due to the high cost of advertising. As a result, the company can use Instagram and TikTok ads to raise awareness of its brand.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, the main limitation is the number of existing clients of the EOC available as respondents. Basically, the target population of this study is the existing clients of the EOC located mainly in the Klang Valley. Therefore, the unit analysis is limited to existing customers only, leading to a low number of respondents ($n=108$). This limitation restricts the depth of the study's findings, as the insights may not fully represent the diverse range of customers and their experiences. Thus, it is suggested that future researchers work with a larger sample to increase the number of respondents by including existing clients from other states, such as Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. That is because the company also has clients from other states. This would allow for a larger pool of respondents over time and provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer perceptions and satisfaction.

Author Contribution

Author 1: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology. Author 2: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology.

Author 3: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology.

Author 4: review and editing, writing review and editing, supervision, validation, visualization.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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