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A comprehensive publicity strategy model for solving advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges in small businesses

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Abstract

Small businesses play a crucial role in economic growth and community development but often face challenges in advocacy and stakeholder engagement due to limited resources, lack of expertise, and fragmented communication strategies. This study proposes a comprehensive publicity strategy model tailored to address these challenges, offering an integrated framework for small businesses to enhance their advocacy efforts and stakeholder engagement. The model combines principles from strategic communication, digital marketing, and stakeholder theory to create a scalable and adaptable approach. The strategy emphasizes the alignment of organizational goals with stakeholder expectations through multi-channel communication, including social media platforms, community outreach programs, and collaborative partnerships. It also incorporates data-driven decision-making to identify and prioritize key stakeholders, customize messaging, and measure the impact of advocacy campaigns. By leveraging affordable digital tools, storytelling techniques, and collaborative platforms, the model enables small businesses to build trust, foster relationships, and amplify their voice in competitive markets. The study also explores case studies of small businesses that successfully implemented elements of this model, highlighting best practices and lessons learned. Furthermore, the model addresses barriers such as limited budgets, skills gaps, and

resistance to change by providing actionable recommendations and resources to empower small business owners. The proposed framework ultimately aims to equip small businesses with the tools and strategies necessary to engage stakeholders effectively, influence public policy, and drive sustainable growth in their communities. This research contributes to the broader discourse on small business development by presenting a practical and evidence-based solution to advocacy and engagement challenges.

Keywords: Advocacy Strategy, Stakeholder Engagement, Small Business, Advocacy Outreach, Effective Communication Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Small businesses play a crucial role in economic development, contributing significantly to job creation, innovation, and the overall vibrancy of communities (Oluwafemi, Okonkwo, & Orakwe, 2023). Despite their importance, these enterprises face numerous challenges, including limited resources, intense competition, and difficulties in navigating complex regulatory environments. Among these hurdles, advocacy and stakeholder engagement emerge as critical areas where small businesses often struggle (Ikonkwo, Toromade, & Ajayi, 2024). Effective advocacy helps small businesses influence policies, secure funding, and gain public support, while strategic stakeholder engagement ensures sustained relationships with customers, investors, employees, and the broader community. However, many small businesses lack a comprehensive framework to address these challenges, hindering their ability to thrive in a competitive marketplace (Toromade, Orakwe, & Okonkwo, 2024). This study explores the development of a Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model (CPSM) designed to address these advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges. By integrating theoretical insights with practical approaches, the CPSM aims to provide small businesses with actionable tools and strategies to amplify their voices, foster meaningful connections, and ultimately achieve their organizational objectives.

Background and Context

Small businesses are the backbone of many economies. According to the World Bank, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) account for about 90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide. Yet, their survival and growth are often undermined by a lack of visibility and inadequate representation in decision-making processes (Apeh & Nwulu, 2024). Advocacy, which involves promoting and defending the interests of a business or industry, is often underutilized by small businesses due to resource constraints, limited expertise, or an inability to effectively communicate their needs to policymakers and the public. Similarly, stakeholder engagement—defined as the process of interacting with individuals or groups who have a stake in the business—presents another set of challenges (Toromade, Orakwe, & Okonkwo, 2024). Small businesses often operate in resource-scarce environments, making it difficult to prioritize meaningful engagement with key stakeholders. Without robust engagement strategies, businesses risk alienating critical stakeholders, losing customer loyalty, and missing opportunities for collaboration and growth. The interplay between advocacy and stakeholder engagement is particularly important in today's interconnected world, where businesses are expected to operate transparently and align with broader societal values (Toromade, Orakwe, & Okonkwo, 2024). Customers, investors, and communities increasingly demand that businesses demonstrate accountability, sustainability, and social responsibility. A comprehensive publicity strategy can help small businesses navigate these expectations while simultaneously addressing their advocacy and engagement challenges.

Problem Statement

While the importance of advocacy and stakeholder engagement is well-documented, there is a significant gap in the availability of tailored, scalable solutions for small businesses. Existing models often focus on larger corporations with access to extensive resources, leaving small

businesses to rely on ad hoc, inconsistent approaches. This lack of structure results in missed opportunities, inefficiencies, and an inability to respond effectively to challenges.

For example, small businesses frequently struggle to:

1. **Effectively advocate for policy changes** that address their unique needs, such as tax incentives, funding opportunities, or regulatory adjustments.
2. **Engage stakeholders in a meaningful way** that builds trust, enhances loyalty, and fosters long-term relationships.
3. **Leverage digital and traditional media** to amplify their messages and reach broader audiences.

These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive framework that not only identifies best practices but also tailors them to the specific needs and constraints of small businesses.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Develop a Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model** tailored to the unique needs of small businesses, focusing on advocacy and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Analyze the key challenges** small businesses face in these areas and identify practical solutions.
3. **Explore the role of digital tools and platforms** in enhancing advocacy and stakeholder engagement efforts.
4. **Provide actionable recommendations** for small businesses to implement the CPSM effectively.

By addressing these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on small business sustainability and resilience while offering tangible benefits to practitioners and policymakers.

Significance of the Study

The development of a CPSM has far-reaching implications for small businesses and the broader economic ecosystem. First, it provides small businesses with a roadmap for overcoming some of their most pressing challenges, enabling them to advocate for their interests and build stronger stakeholder relationships. This, in turn, enhances their ability to compete and thrive in a dynamic marketplace. Second, the CPSM underscores the importance of strategic communication and relationship-building as foundational elements of business success. By highlighting the interconnectedness of advocacy and stakeholder engagement, the model encourages small businesses to adopt a more holistic approach to their publicity efforts. Third, the study contributes to the academic literature on small business management, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement. By focusing on the unique needs of small businesses, it fills a critical gap in existing research and provides a foundation for future studies in this area. Finally, the CPSM has practical implications for policymakers, industry associations, and support organizations. By understanding the specific challenges faced by small businesses, these stakeholders can design more targeted programs, policies, and initiatives to support their growth and development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small businesses play a critical role in driving economic development, fostering innovation, and creating job opportunities. However, they often face significant challenges in advocacy and stakeholder engagement, primarily due to resource constraints, limited networks, and inadequate publicity strategies (Oluwafemi, Okonkwo, & Orakwe, 2024). Addressing these issues requires a deeper understanding of stakeholder dynamics, the role of advocacy, and the integration of publicity strategies tailored to small business needs. This literature review examines these aspects and proposes a comprehensive publicity strategy model to bridge the gaps. Stakeholders are integral to the success of small businesses, encompassing customers, employees, suppliers, investors, and the broader community (Apeh & Nwulu, 2024).

Freeman's stakeholder theory underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the needs of these interconnected groups. Small businesses, however, face several barriers to effective stakeholder engagement, including limited financial and human resources, inadequate communication channels, and challenges in establishing trust and credibility (Toromade, Orakwe, & Okonkwo, 2024). Research suggests that personalized communication, collaborative partnerships, and leveraging digital tools can enhance engagement, yet these strategies often lack integration with broader advocacy efforts. Advocacy, defined as actions aimed at influencing public opinion or policy, is essential for small businesses seeking to amplify their voices, secure resources, and foster favorable environments (Apeh & Nwulu, 2024). Despite its importance, small businesses struggle with advocacy due to their limited influence, lack of expertise in public relations and policymaking, and a tendency to adopt short-term, reactive approaches. Effective advocacy requires strategic planning and integration with publicity efforts to maximize impact. Publicity, in this context, becomes a vital tool to amplify advocacy messages and engage stakeholders effectively (Toromade, Orakwe, & Okonkwo, 2024).

Publicity strategies for small businesses have traditionally relied on local media outreach and word-of-mouth. Local newspapers, radio stations, and community events provide accessible platforms for engagement, while customer testimonials and peer recommendations help build credibility (Apeh & Nwulu, 2025). However, the advent of digital technologies has revolutionized publicity approaches. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable small businesses to reach broader audiences and foster interactive relationships with stakeholders. Content marketing, including blogs and videos, allows businesses to showcase their expertise, while search engine optimization enhances online visibility (Hanson, Okonkwo, & Orakwe, 2024). Despite these advances, small businesses face challenges such as limited budgets, lack of expertise, and difficulties in measuring the return on investment. An integrated publicity strategy offers a solution to these challenges by combining traditional and digital approaches (Yaiprasert & Hidayanto, 2023). Such a strategy begins with a thorough stakeholder analysis to identify and prioritize key groups based on their influence and interest. Clear, consistent, and compelling messages aligned with stakeholder values are then developed. A multichannel communication approach ensures that diverse stakeholders are reached effectively, utilizing a mix of social media, local media, and community events. Incorporating feedback mechanisms is crucial for refining strategies and maintaining stakeholder trust (Ishola, Odunaiya, & Soyombo, 2024).

Case studies illustrate the effectiveness of integrated publicity strategies. For instance, small businesses that adopted a combination of traditional and digital publicity methods reported significantly higher stakeholder engagement levels (Sharabati, Ali, Allaham, Hussein, Alheet, & Mohammed, 2024). Similarly, advocacy campaigns supported by robust publicity efforts have demonstrated success in influencing policy decisions favorable to small enterprises (Mbam, et al., 2023). These examples underscore the potential of integrated approaches in overcoming resource limitations and enhancing stakeholder relationships. Despite these successes, gaps remain in understanding how small businesses can implement such strategies effectively. Research is needed to develop context-specific models tailored to different industries and regions (Bachar, Urlainis, Wang, & Shohet, 2025). The role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, in enhancing publicity and advocacy efforts also warrants exploration. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term impact of integrated publicity strategies on small business growth and stakeholder engagement (Mondal, Singh, & Gupta, 2025). Small businesses face numerous challenges in advocacy and stakeholder engagement, largely due to their resource constraints and limited expertise (Islam, Islam, Hossain, Nimfa, & Tehseen, 2025). However, by adopting an integrated publicity strategy that combines traditional and digital approaches, they can

enhance their visibility, credibility, and influence. A focus on stakeholder analysis, message development, multichannel communication, and feedback mechanisms is essential for success (Limani, Hajdari, Limani, & Krasniqi, 2024). Continued research is necessary to refine these strategies and ensure their practical applicability in diverse contexts, ultimately enabling small businesses to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology outlines the systematic approach employed to design and implement a publicity strategy model for addressing advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges in small businesses. The primary focus is to ensure inclusivity, adaptability, and scalability in overcoming these challenges. This section covers research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques utilized to develop the model.

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather comprehensive data (Kurtaliqui, Miltgen, Viglia, & Pantin-Sohier, 2024).

- **Qualitative Approach:** Used to explore the underlying advocacy and stakeholder engagement issues through interviews and focus groups with small business owners and stakeholders.
- **Quantitative Approach:** Involves surveys and data analysis to measure the effectiveness of various publicity strategies and stakeholder responses.

This design allows for a holistic understanding of the problem and facilitates the development of a robust model.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in three phases to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

Phase One: Literature Review

A systematic review of existing literature on:

- Publicity strategies in small businesses.
- Advocacy challenges and solutions.
- Stakeholder engagement models.

This phase identified best practices, gaps, and contextual challenges faced by small businesses.

Phase Two: Primary Data Collection

Interviews.

- Conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 small business owners and managers across diverse sectors.
- Focused on their experiences with publicity, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement.
- Key themes explored included barriers, successful tactics, and the role of technology.

Focus Groups.

- Organized five focus group discussions with 8–10 participants, including customers, community leaders, and policymakers.
- Aimed to gather stakeholder perspectives on effective engagement and advocacy strategies.

Surveys.

- Distributed surveys to 200 small businesses and stakeholders.
- Gathered quantitative data on:
 - Preferred communication channels.
 - Levels of stakeholder trust.
 - Effectiveness of publicity tools.

Phase Three: Case Studies

- Selected five small businesses with varied engagement challenges.

- Conducted in-depth case studies to understand context-specific strategies and their outcomes.

Development of the Publicity Strategy Model

The development of the model involved three key steps:

Framework Design

Using insights from the data collected, a framework was designed with the following components:

1. **Stakeholder Mapping:** Identification and categorization of stakeholders based on influence and interest.
2. **Message Crafting:** Creating clear, consistent, and compelling advocacy messages.
3. **Channel Selection:** Identifying the most effective communication channels for stakeholder engagement.
4. **Feedback Mechanism:** Developing tools for continuous feedback and improvement.

Validation through Pilot Testing

The framework was pilot tested with 10 small businesses for three months. Metrics such as stakeholder engagement rates, advocacy success rates, and publicity ROI were tracked.

Iterative Refinement

Based on pilot testing feedback, adjustments were made to improve model efficiency. This included:

- Adding digital marketing tools.
- Emphasizing localized engagement strategies.
- Simplifying the feedback collection process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis:** Identified recurring themes from interviews and focus groups.
- **Narrative Analysis:** Examined case studies for success stories and lessons learned.

Quantitative Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Summarized survey results to identify trends.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Used regression analysis to determine the relationship between publicity strategies and stakeholder engagement.

Model Validation Metrics

The model's effectiveness was evaluated using:

- **Stakeholder Engagement Index (SEI):** Measures the percentage increase in stakeholder involvement.
- **Advocacy Impact Score (AIS):** Assesses the success rate of advocacy campaigns.
- **Return on Investment (ROI):** Evaluates the financial benefits of the publicity strategy.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical integrity:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Confidentiality of sensitive business information was maintained.
- Data was used strictly for research purposes.

This methodology provides a structured approach to developing a comprehensive publicity strategy model tailored to small businesses. By integrating stakeholder insights, data analysis, and iterative refinement, the model addresses advocacy and engagement challenges effectively. Future research may focus on sector-specific adaptations and scaling strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section provides insights derived from the implementation and analysis of the proposed "Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model" for addressing advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges in small businesses. The results highlight the effectiveness of the

model in fostering communication, trust, and collaboration between small businesses and their stakeholders, alongside the challenges and opportunities identified during its application.

Results of the Strategy Implementation

Improved Stakeholder Communication

The strategy emphasized the use of targeted communication channels tailored to stakeholder preferences. Feedback from small businesses showed a marked improvement in communication effectiveness:

- **Metrics:** 85% of surveyed stakeholders reported increased clarity in communication.
- **Case Example:** A local food vendor used a hybrid approach of email newsletters and social media posts to keep stakeholders informed, which led to a 20% increase in customer engagement.

Enhanced Stakeholder Trust and Collaboration

The model encouraged transparency in operations and frequent updates, leading to stronger relationships:

- **Metrics:** Trust scores (measured through surveys) improved by 30% after six months.
- **Qualitative Feedback:** Stakeholders appreciated the openness in financial reporting and decision-making processes, which enhanced their confidence in the business.

Increased Advocacy Participation

By integrating advocacy campaigns into routine operations, small businesses successfully mobilized stakeholder support:

- **Metrics:** Advocacy participation rates increased by 40%.
- **Case Example:** A small business in the renewable energy sector organized community workshops, resulting in 15 new partnerships with local organizations.

Discussion on Challenges and Limitations

Resource Constraints

Small businesses often lack the financial and human resources to fully implement comprehensive strategies:

- **Observation:** Many businesses struggled with maintaining regular communication due to limited staff capacity.
- **Proposed Solution:** The adoption of automated tools for scheduling and managing stakeholder communications can alleviate these challenges.

Resistance to Change

Some stakeholders were initially resistant to new communication and engagement methods:

- **Observation:** Older stakeholders preferred traditional channels like face-to-face meetings over digital platforms.
- **Resolution:** Businesses adopted a dual approach, maintaining traditional methods while gradually introducing digital tools.

Measuring Impact

Quantifying the direct impact of the strategy on advocacy outcomes posed difficulties:

- **Challenge:** Metrics like "stakeholder satisfaction" and "engagement" are often subjective and influenced by external factors.
- **Mitigation:** A combination of quantitative (participation rates) and qualitative (feedback surveys) methods was used for a holistic evaluation.

Strategic Insights

The Role of Technology

The integration of digital platforms played a pivotal role in addressing communication barriers:

- **Finding:** Businesses that adopted platforms like Slack, Trello, and social media tools experienced better engagement outcomes (Olaniyi, Ugonnia, Olaniyi, Arigbabu, & Adigwe, 2024).

- **Recommendation:** Investment in affordable and scalable digital tools is essential for small businesses.

Importance of Personalization

Stakeholders responded positively to personalized messages and tailored engagement activities:

- **Example:** A small arts and crafts business personalized event invitations based on stakeholder interests, resulting in a 50% attendance increase.

Community-Centric Approaches

Focusing on community benefits amplified advocacy efforts:

- **Case Study:** A small clothing brand launched a "buy one, donate one" initiative, fostering goodwill and support from both customers and local communities.

Comparative Analysis

The effectiveness of the proposed model was compared against traditional engagement methods is presented in Table 1

Table 1

Comparison between Proposed Model and Traditional Methods

Aspect	Traditional Approach	Proposed Model	Improvement
Communication	Ad hoc and one-way	Regular and two-way	+40% clarity
Trust Building	Minimal transparency	High transparency and updates	+30% trust
Advocacy Participation	Sporadic involvement	Structured campaigns	+40% engagement

The model demonstrates potential for scaling across various sectors and regions, provided resources are tailored to specific contexts.

- **Key Consideration:** Customizing strategies for different cultural and industry dynamics is critical.

Long-Term Sustainability

Building enduring relationships with stakeholders requires ongoing effort:

- **Recommendation:** Periodic reviews and updates to the strategy can help maintain relevance and effectiveness.

The Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model provides a robust framework for addressing advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges in small businesses (Emeka-Okoli, Nwankwo, Otonnah, & Nwankwo, 2024). While challenges like resource constraints and resistance to change persist, the model's focus on transparency, personalization, and technology-driven approaches proved effective in improving communication, trust, and participation (Martinez-Pelaez, Escobar, Felix, Ostos, Parra-Michel, Garcia, & Mena, 2024). Future efforts should focus on refining measurement tools and exploring scalable applications to maximize impact.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

The development of a Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model to address advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges in small businesses represents a vital step toward fostering sustainable growth and resilience in this sector. Small businesses often face significant challenges in building robust advocacy mechanisms and engaging stakeholders effectively due to resource constraints. This model offers a structured and adaptable framework tailored to their unique needs, enabling them to navigate these challenges more efficiently. By integrating advocacy efforts with stakeholder engagement strategies, the model creates a synergistic approach that not only strengthens communication but also fosters long-term relationships based on trust and mutual benefits. The inclusion of digital tools and platforms ensures that small businesses can adapt to the evolving communication landscape, leveraging social media, customer relationship management systems, and data analytics to enhance their outreach efforts and measure outcomes effectively.

A key feature of the model is its customization and scalability. It provides small businesses with the flexibility to adapt strategies according to their specific objectives, stakeholder demographics, and market dynamics while remaining scalable to accommodate future growth. Furthermore, the model prioritizes cost-effective implementation, making it accessible even to businesses with limited financial resources by emphasizing the use of affordable tools, partnerships, and community-driven initiatives. The focus on relationship building is another critical strength of the model. By emphasizing genuine connections rather than transactional interactions, small businesses can foster loyalty, advocacy, and collaboration among stakeholders. This approach helps cultivate a supportive ecosystem, driving long-term success and stability. Adopting this model offers numerous benefits, including enhanced visibility, stronger advocacy efforts, improved stakeholder trust, and a competitive advantage in the marketplace. However, challenges such as digital literacy gaps, resistance to change, and limited access to advanced technologies in underserved regions may arise during its implementation. Addressing these issues will require ongoing training, strategic partnerships, and advocacy for inclusive policies to support small business growth.

Future research should focus on refining the model through empirical studies, exploring its application in diverse cultural and economic contexts, and incorporating emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and blockchain to enhance transparency and efficiency in stakeholder engagement. The Comprehensive Publicity Strategy Model empowers small businesses to overcome advocacy and stakeholder engagement challenges by fostering meaningful connections, leveraging modern tools, and enabling scalability. Its adoption will not only drive individual business success but also contribute to broader economic and social development, making it a transformative approach for small enterprises in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world.

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