

Developing Effective User Acquisition Strategies for The Early Stages of The Socles App

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Abstract: The The rapid growth of social media has transformed global interactions, often leading to superficial connections, particularly among younger generations. Socles, an early-stage social media startup in Indonesia, seeks to address this issue by fostering genuine relationships through its Socles App, which is designed specifically for Generation Z. The platform emphasizes authenticity and meaningful connections by encouraging offline interactions and offering interactive social games. However, Socles faces significant challenges in acquiring its initial user base, which is critical for its growth. To overcome these challenges, this study applies a strategic management approach to develop targeted user acquisition strategies, with a focus on capturing and retaining user interest in a competitive digital landscape. Utilizing the AIDA model—Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action—the research framework evaluates Socles' internal situation and analyzes the external environment through tools such as PESTEL and Porter's Five Forces models. Additionally, competitor and trend analyses, along with market insights, are incorporated to inform strategic recommendations. A SWOT analysis synthesizes these findings to guide actionable strategies. The study employs qualitative data from interviews with internal teams and potential users, along with quantitative data from surveys of Indonesian university students, to gain a comprehensive understanding of market preferences. The research concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing Socles' overall business readiness. This approach offers valuable insights for other startups in the social media industry looking to learn from the Socles case.

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INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution of the twenty-first century has profoundly transformed global communication, making social media an integral part of everyday life. As of January 2024, more than 5 billion individuals worldwide actively use social media, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping interpersonal interactions (Statista, 2024). In Indonesia, social media penetration is notably high, particularly among younger generations like Millennials and Generation Z, who predominantly engage with platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook (Annur, 2024).

Despite the global connectivity that social media fosters, it also presents significant challenges, especially regarding the depth and quality of interpersonal relationships. Many users, particularly within younger demographics, report feelings of loneliness and disconnection, often attributed to the superficial nature of online interactions (Halston, Iwamoto, Junker, & Chun, 2019). The prevailing trend among social media giants to prioritize quantity over quality has contributed to a communication environment where genuine, authentic relationships are increasingly scarce (Ballard, 2019). This situation has created a demand for platforms that facilitate not only online interactions but also nurture more meaningful and authentic connections.

In response to this need, Socles, an early-stage social media startup in Indonesia, developed the Socles App, designed specifically for Generation Z. The app's unique value proposition centers on fostering authenticity, meaningful connections, offline interactions, and engaging social games.

However, innovation alone does not guarantee success for startups like Socles in the fiercely competitive social media landscape. Statistics reveal that up to 90% of startups fail within their first year (Howarth, 2023). For early-stage social media startups, initial user acquisition is a critical factor for success, as user numbers directly influence revenue, market reach, and overall viability (Team Storyly, 2024). Effective early user acquisition strategies are therefore essential to overcoming this initial barrier (Veisdal, 2020).

The central problem this study addresses is how Socles can successfully overcome the user acquisition challenge to launch and grow its platform. Given the competitive nature of the industry, Socles must develop and implement effective strategies to attract its first 1,000 users, which are crucial for the platform's survival and growth. To explore and address these challenges, the study applies several strategic management tools.

PESTEL Analysis

The PESTEL framework is a strategic tool used to analyze the macro-environmental factors that affect an organization's operations and decision-making. It examines political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors, providing insights into external forces that could impact strategic decisions (Washington State University Libraries, 2023). This analysis helps Socles understand the broader environment in which it operates, ensuring that the company can anticipate and respond to external challenges effectively.

Porter's Five Forces Model

Developed by Michael Porter in 1979, Porter's Five Forces Model is a fundamental tool in business strategy. It assesses the competitive dynamics within an industry by analyzing five key forces: the intensity of rivalry among existing competitors, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, the threat of new entrants, and the threat of substitute products (Porter, 1979). By using this model, Socles can evaluate the competitive pressures within the

social media industry and devise strategies to enhance its market position (Mind Tools Content Team, 2024).

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is a widely-used strategic planning tool that identifies a company's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. This framework helps organizations like Socles align their internal capabilities with external market opportunities while addressing potential risks (Shewan, 2017). The analysis provides a comprehensive overview of both internal and external factors that influence strategic decisions, allowing Socles to make informed choices.

TOWS Matrix

The TOWS Matrix is an extension of the SWOT analysis that focuses on the interactions between internal and external factors. It helps in developing specific strategic actions by organizing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats into actionable strategies. The TOWS Matrix allows Socles to formulate strategies that leverage its strengths to exploit opportunities, while also addressing weaknesses and minimizing threats (Weihrich, 1982). This approach provides a more dynamic and integrated method for strategic planning.

AIDA Model

The AIDA model, formulated by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in the late 19th century, describes the stages a user goes through when interacting with a persuasive message: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. This model is crucial for developing effective marketing and user acquisition strategies, as it guides the process of attracting, engaging, and converting potential users (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). By applying the AIDA model, Socles can structure its marketing efforts to effectively capture user interest and drive engagement (Singh & Sharma, 2020).

The purpose of this article is to develop and propose targeted user acquisition strategies for Socles, leveraging strategic management frameworks such as the AIDA model, PESTEL analysis, Porter's Five Forces, and SWOT analysis. By addressing the early-stage user acquisition challenges, this study aims to provide actionable insights to help Socles achieve its initial growth targets and establish a strong market presence.

METHOD

This study employs a research design structured to address specific business challenges faced by Socles. The design follows a framework based on benchmarks from Cadle, Paul, and Turner (2010), providing a structured approach to understanding both internal and external factors impacting the company. The research process includes sequential steps, beginning with profiling Socles and culminating in the implementation of strategic solutions. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Socles, making the design replicable and effective in addressing the company's strategic needs.

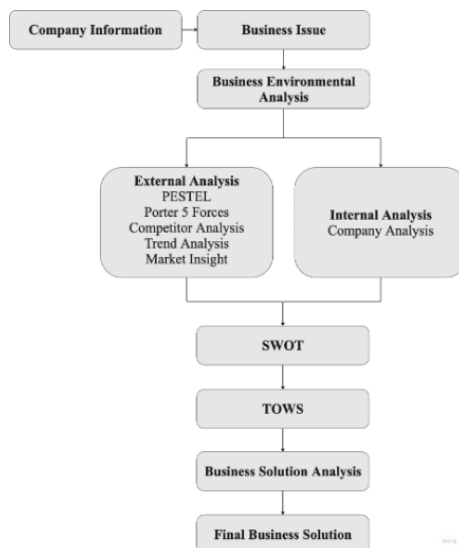


Figure 1. Research Design

Company Information and Business Issue Identification

The research began by profiling Socles to gather detailed company information. This step was essential to understanding the business issue that the study aimed to address, laying the foundation for subsequent analysis and strategy development.

Business Environmental Analysis

The business environment, comprising internal and external factors, influences a company's operations (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). This study evaluates both aspects to develop tailored recommendations for Socles.

External Analysis

External analysis evaluates industry dynamics and external changes, helping businesses like Socles adapt and identify opportunities and threats. This process is essential for strategic positioning and ensuring long-term competitiveness.

- 1) The PESTEL Analysis: A qualitative method was employed to assess the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors affecting the social media industry. Data were collected from secondary sources, such as industry reports and government publications, to identify external influences on Socles.
- 2) Porter’s Five Forces Analysis: This analysis mapped the competitive landscape by evaluating the intensity of rivalry, supplier power, buyer power, the threat of substitutes, and the threat of new entrants. Data for this analysis were sourced from credible secondary sources, providing insights into the competitive dynamics of the social media industry.
- 3) Competitor Analysis: A thorough examination of key competitors, including WhatsApp, LINE, Discord, and BeReal, was conducted. This analysis provided insights into the competitive strategies, market positioning, and unique value propositions of these platforms.
- 4) Trend Analysis: Patterns in social media usage, particularly among Generation Z users in Indonesia, were identified using data from industry reports. This analysis informed the development of user acquisition strategies tailored to Socles' target market.
- 5) Market Insight: A mixed-methods approach was adopted to gather in-depth insights into user needs and motivations. This approach included both qualitative and quantitative data collection, ensuring that the strategies developed were targeted and broadly applicable. The subjects of this study were Generation Z individuals, specifically those born between 1997 and 2012, who are active users of various social media platforms. Participants were selected

using purposive sampling to ensure representativeness of Socles' target market.

Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Generation Z participants to explore their motivations for trying new social media platforms. The interview questions were developed using the AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), guiding participants through these stages to gather comprehensive insights into their preferences and motivations. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring no new themes emerged. The collected data were then analyzed using a systematic coding process—open, axial, and selective coding—to identify key themes and insights related to user behaviors.

Quantitative Data Collection

To complement the qualitative findings, a quantitative study was conducted. An online survey was administered to a sample of at least 200 participants, following the recommendation of Malhotra (2010) for problem-solving research. The survey aimed to quantify preferences and behaviors related to user acquisition strategies. The questionnaire, developed based on qualitative findings, was distributed via Google Forms, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize and interpret the preferences and behaviors of the target population.

Internal Analysis

Internal analysis assesses a company's strengths and weaknesses to gain insights into its internal capabilities. For Socles, a structured interview with the CEO was conducted, focusing on the company's internal conditions and marketing activities. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using open coding techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the internal environment, essential for subsequent strategic analysis.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis integrated findings from the external and internal analyses to identify Socles' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This provided a comprehensive view of the company's strategic position, which served as the foundation for the TOWS matrix.

TOWS Matrix

The TOWS matrix was used to develop specific strategies by examining the interactions between internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. This process aligned Socles' internal capabilities with external market conditions.

Business Solution Analysis

The strategies from the TOWS matrix were evaluated for feasibility. The analysis prioritized and selected the most viable strategies, ensuring they were practical and aligned with Socles' strategic goals.

Final Business Solution

An implementation plan was created using the OKR (Objectives and Key Results) framework. This plan outlined clear objectives, measurable key results, and timelines, ensuring effective execution and monitoring of the chosen strategies for Socles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PESTEL Analysis

The PESTEL analysis identified several opportunities and threats for Socles in the Indonesian market. Key opportunities include supportive government policies, a rapidly growing digital economy, high smartphone penetration, and a large, digitally engaged Gen Z population. However, challenges such as the economic climate, strict data privacy regulations, and

competition from established social media platforms must be carefully navigated.

Porter’s Five Forces Analysis

The The Porter’s Five Forces analysis highlights significant competitive pressures in the Indonesian market. Socles faces intense rivalry from established platforms, driven by high buyer power and a strong threat of substitutes. While the threat of new entrants is low due to market dominance by existing players, Socles must focus on differentiation through unique features and targeted marketing to succeed. The moderate bargaining power of suppliers adds some pressure but is less critical compared to the high competitive forces within the industry.

Competitor Analysis

Socles competes with established platforms like WhatsApp, LINE, Discord, and BeReal, each with distinct strengths. Socles can differentiate itself through hyper-localized marketing, promoting authentic user experiences, and fostering community-driven content.

Trend Analysis

The trend analysis highlights the preferences of Gen Z users in Indonesia, particularly their high digital engagement, preference for authentic and interactive content, and concerns about digital privacy. These insights are critical for shaping Socles’ user acquisition strategies.

Market Insight

Market insights gathered from qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys indicate that social influence, unique features, privacy concerns, and user testimonials significantly influence user adoption. Therefore, Socles should leverage personal endorsements, create engaging content, and emphasize privacy and ease of use in its strategies to increase user adoption.

Internal Analysis Results

An in-depth interview with Socles’ CEO revealed the company’s internal strengths and weaknesses. Socles’ strengths include its unique offline-first approach, an innovative value proposition, and a strong focus on engaging Gen Z university students. However, the company faces challenges in clearly communicating its concept and acquiring initial users, both of which are critical for successful market penetration.

TOWS Analysis

The external and internal analyses identified key factors shaping Socles’ strategic position. These findings were integrated into a SWOT analysis, providing a clear view of Socles’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Based on the SWOT analysis, a TOWS matrix was developed to systematically generate strategies by cross-referencing internal and external factors. The TOWS matrix outlines strategies for leveraging strengths to exploit opportunities (SO strategies), using strengths to counter threats (ST strategies), addressing weaknesses by capitalizing on opportunities (WO strategies), and mitigating both weaknesses and threats (WT strategies).

Table 1 TOWS Analysis

SO Strategies		ST Strategies	
SO-1	Utilize the unique offline-first approach (S1) and innovative value proposition (S2) to attract the highly engaged Gen Z population (O4). Differentiate Socles from competitors like WhatsApp, LINE, Discord, and BeReal (O5) by emphasizing the platform's focus on genuine relationships (S2) and high engagement with Gen Z university students (S3)	ST-1	Utilize the established social media presence for content creation (S5) and strong focus on product development (S4) to compete with established social media platforms (T3) and address significant concerns over data privacy and security (T5). Implement robust privacy policies and user-friendly design to build trust.
SO-2	Enhance content creation and direct university marketing approaches (S5) to collaborate with influencers (O6) and create engaging and creative advertisements (O7). Continuous product development (S4) will ensure the platform remains appealing and	ST-2	Foster genuine relationships (S2) and leverage the high market engagement with Gen Z university students (S3) to combat increasing ad fatigue due to digital ad saturation (T4). Focus on personalized and authentic user experiences to maintain engagement.

	relevant.		
WO Strategies		WT Strategies	
WO-1	Overcome challenges in acquiring initial users (W1) and clearly explain the platform’s concept (W2) by taking advantage of supportive government policies and political stability (O1) and the expanding digital economy (O2). Use government initiatives to boost visibility and internet penetration to reach a broader audience.	WT-1	Develop clear communication strategies to explain the platform’s concept (W2) and implement robust user acquisition strategies to overcome initial challenges (W1). Address economic climate influences (T1) by highlighting the platform’s value for real-life interactions (S1). Ensure compliance with strict data privacy, electronic transactions, and cybersecurity laws (T2) to build user trust.
WO-2	Promote honest reviews and educational content (O8), leverage social influence and friend recommendations (O9), and utilize user testimonials and short videos (O10) to reduce challenges in acquiring initial users (W1). This will help build trust and clearly communicate the platform’s value proposition (W2).	WT-2	Focus on unique user acquisition strategies to mitigate challenges in acquiring initial users (W1) and combat competition from established social media platforms (T3). Emphasize authentic user engagement to address increasing ad fatigue (T4)

Following the TOWS analysis, several strategies were identified and evaluated based on their cost-effectiveness, scalability, suitability for an early-stage startup, and implementation complexity. The strategies proposed for Socles to secure its first 1,000 users include SO-1, SO-2, ST-2, WO-2, WT-1, and WT-2. These strategies form the foundation of the final user acquisition plan.

The implementation of Socles’ user acquisition strategy is systematically organized into three distinct phases, each targeting specific objectives to ensure successful user engagement and long-term retention. This strategic approach is tailored to the unique characteristics of the Indonesian market, particularly focusing on university students, who represent a key demographic for Socles.

Phase 1: Connecting with Potential Users

The initial phase of Socles’ strategy targets Indonesian university students as its primary audience. Emphasizing Socles’ unique offline-first approach, this phase focuses on fostering genuine relationships through strategies SO-1 and SO-2. The aim is to build a strong initial user base by leveraging social media campaigns, university partnerships, and collaborations with influencers. These efforts are designed to resonate with Gen Z’s preference for authenticity and demonstrate how Socles facilitates meaningful real-life interactions.

Key initiatives include developing a compelling social media presence that highlights Socles’ ability to foster real-life interactions through user stories, testimonials, and user-generated content. Additionally, Socles will collaborate with universities to organize events, integrate into student organizations, and recruit student ambassadors to promote the platform within their networks, enhancing credibility through peer recommendations. Strategic partnerships with micro-influencers will further boost visibility and trust, ensuring the platform reaches and resonates with the target demographic.

The goal is to acquire 300 users through targeted strategies aligned with the preferences and behaviors of Indonesian university students, setting the stage for long-term growth and retention.

Phase 2: Building Trust and Driving User Engagement

Once the initial user base is established, the focus shifts to maintaining engagement and building long-term trust, guided by strategies ST-2 and WO-2. The primary objective of this phase

is to enhance user satisfaction and foster sustained engagement by introducing personalized content recommendations, promoting honest reviews, and providing educational content. These efforts will solidify the initial user base's commitment to Socles and drive organic growth.

To achieve this, Socles will develop and deploy algorithms that tailor content to individual user preferences, boosting satisfaction and interaction on the platform. The promotion of honest reviews and regular publication of educational content will strengthen Socles' credibility, helping users clearly understand and appreciate the platform's value. Social influence will be leveraged through referral programs that incentivize users to invite friends, expanding the user base through peer recommendations. These programs will offer rewards for successful referrals and encourage users to foster active participation within their networks, thereby driving continuous growth and engagement. The target is to engage and retain an additional 400 users, bringing the cumulative total to 700. This growth will create a stable and engaged user base, forming the foundation for Socles' continued success and positioning it as a trusted platform for meaningful social interactions.

Phase 3: Implementing the Strategic Growth and Retention Plan

To ensure sustained growth and user retention, a comprehensive plan based on strategies WT-1 and WT-2 will be implemented. The objective is to transition from initial user acquisition to building a sustainable and engaged community. This will be achieved through clear and concise messaging, full compliance with data privacy laws, effective viral marketing campaigns, and continuous feature development aligned with users' evolving needs.

The plan involves crafting messaging that clearly communicates Socles' unique value proposition across various communication channels, paired with transparency in data privacy and security practices to build and maintain user trust. Educational content will inform users about data handling and privacy measures, reinforcing confidence in the platform's commitment to protecting their personal information. Viral marketing campaigns will be launched to encourage organic sharing and user sign-ups, broadening the platform's reach at minimal cost. These campaigns will leverage social media and user-generated content, offering incentives for successful referrals to maximize engagement and growth. Continuous feature development will ensure the platform stays aligned with users' evolving needs. By involving users in the development process and regularly updating the platform based on their feedback, Socles will foster ongoing engagement and loyalty. The target for this phase is to acquire and retain the remaining 300 users, bringing the cumulative total to 1,000. Achieving this will ensure Socles has a solid, engaged, and loyal user base, crucial for the platform's long-term success and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This research developed a comprehensive user acquisition strategy for Socles, a social media startup focused on Indonesian university students. Utilizing strategic tools such as PESTEL, Porter's Five Forces, SWOT analysis, and the AIDA model, the study identified both opportunities and challenges in the Indonesian market. While the market offers significant potential due to high digital engagement among Gen Z and supportive government policies, Socles must carefully navigate strict data privacy laws and intense competition from established platforms.

The proposed strategy is structured into three phases: Connecting with Potential Users, Building Trust and Driving User Engagement, and Implementing the Strategic Growth and Retention Plan. These phases offer a clear roadmap for acquiring and retaining users, focusing on personalized content, authentic engagement, and targeted referral programs.

Adopting these strategies is expected to significantly boost Socles' brand awareness, driving higher interest and willingness among Indonesian university students to join the platform. Consequently, Socles can anticipate increased user registrations, enhanced

engagement levels, and overall platform activity. Tailored to the specific needs of the target audience, these strategies are likely to result in higher retention rates and organic growth.

This study contributes to management science by providing a thorough approach to problem-solving and strategy development, specifically designed to secure Socles' initial user base and ensure sustained growth. The strategies outlined also offer a replicable framework for other startups facing similar challenges. In summary, this research supports Socles in its early development stages, positioning the company to achieve its business objectives and establish a strong presence in the competitive social media industry.

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