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FORMATION OF STARTUP MARKETING STRATEGIES BASED ON THE AUTHOR'S SMIV FRAMEWORK

Abstract. *The article examines approaches to demand validation in the context of startup operations and the formation of marketing and sales strategies. The limitations of traditional marketing research methods based on consumers' stated preferences are substantiated in the context of high uncertainty in the innovation environment. It is determined that this necessitates a transition to behavioral approaches for demand assessment. The author's SMIV (Social Media Idea Validation) framework is proposed as a tool for behavioral demand validation, grounded in revealed preference theory and lean entrepreneurship principles. Its stage-by-stage structure and the mechanism of behavioral signal triangulation are described. A comparative analysis with traditional approaches is conducted, demonstrating the advantages of SMIV in terms of speed, cost, and data validity. It is determined that the use of digital platforms enhances the accuracy of managerial decisions and the efficiency of startup commercialization.*

Ключові слова: *startup, demand validation, behavioral data, revealed preference theory, digital marketing, SMIV framework, social media, marketing strategy, sales strategy.*

ФОРМУВАННЯ МАРКЕТИНГОВИХ СТРАТЕГІЙ СТАРТАПІВ НА ОСНОВІ АВТОРСЬКОГО ФРЕЙМВОРКУ SMIV FRAMEWORK

Анотація. *У статті здійснено комплексне дослідження підходів до валідації попиту в контексті розвитку стартапів та формування маркетингових і збутових стратегій в умовах високої невизначеності та обмеженості ресурсів. Розкрито теоретичні засади функціонування стартапів, акцентовано увагу на їх інноваційності, масштабованості, високому рівні ризику та залежності від зовнішнього фінансування. Обґрунтовано, що традиційні методи маркетингових досліджень, які базуються на аналізі заявлених уподобань споживачів, не забезпечують достатнього рівня достовірності оцінки попиту на ранніх етапах розвитку стартапів. Особливу увагу приділено трансформації підходів до валідації попиту на основі використання поведінкових методів, що ґрунтуються на аналізі фактичних дій споживачів.*

У цьому контексті запропоновано та обґрунтовано авторський фреймворк SMIV (Social Media Idea Validation) як інноваційний інструмент поведінкової валідації попиту із застосуванням цифрових маркетингових інструментів. Визначено, що фреймворк базується на теорії виявлених переваг та принципах ощадливого підприємництва, передбачаючи ітеративне тестування гіпотез і прийняття рішень на основі емпіричних даних. Проаналізовано структурну архітектуру фреймворку SMIV, яка передбачає поетапне зростання рівня зобов'язання споживача та використання підходу триангуляції поведінкових сигналів, зокрема залученості, наміру та фінансового зобов'язання. Доведено, що такий підхід підвищує валідність оцінки попиту та знижує ризик хибнопозитивних управлінських рішень. Проведено порівняльний аналіз фреймворку SMIV і традиційних методів маркетингових досліджень, що дозволило виявити його переваги за критеріями швидкості отримання результатів, вартості, доступності та достовірності даних. Визначено, що ефективність застосування SMIV зумовлена використанням можливостей цифрових платформ соціальних медіа, зокрема доступом до поведінкових даних у реальному часі та інструментів точного таргетування аудиторії. Водночас підкреслено, що фреймворк не є універсальною альтернативою всім видам маркетингових досліджень



і має чітко окреслену сферу застосування, яка полягає у попередній валідації попиту перед запуском продукту. Обґрунтовано, що використання SMIV сприяє підвищенню обґрунтованості стратегічних рішень, оптимізації використання ресурсів та зростанню ефективності комерціалізації стартапів у сучасних ринкових умовах.

Ключові слова: *стартап, валідація попиту, поведінкові дані, теорія виявлених переваг, цифровий маркетинг, фреймворк SMIV, соціальні мережі, маркетингова стратегія, збутова стратегія.*

Formulation of the problem. Modern conditions of startup operations are characterized by a high level of uncertainty, limited resources, and the need for rapid market entry, which makes the issue of sound marketing and sales decision-making particularly relevant. In such conditions, the key task is to determine the real demand for an innovative product before its full launch, since mistakes at the early stages can lead to significant financial losses and inefficient use of resources.

At the same time, traditional marketing research methods, in particular surveys, focus groups, and expert assessments, are based primarily on the analysis of consumers' stated preferences, which is accompanied by the risk of hypothetical distortions and socially desirable behavior. This limits their ability to provide a reliable assessment of real demand, especially in innovative markets where consumers often lack formed experience of interacting with new products.

In addition, these approaches require significant time and financial resources, which makes them inaccessible to startups and small enterprises. As a result, a structural gap is formed between the need for fast and accurate demand validation and the available tools for its provision. This necessitates the search for new approaches to marketing research focused on analyzing actual consumer behavior in real market conditions.

In this context, the development and implementation of methodologies that allow for rapid behavioral demand validation using digital tools becomes particularly relevant, ensuring increased accuracy of managerial decisions and reduced risks of commercializing innovative products.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issues of demand validation, startup development, digitalization of business processes, and the use of behavioral approaches in marketing research are covered in the works of Ayele S., Fayek A. R. [1], Rezazadeh A., Kohns M., Bohnsack R., António N., Rita P. [2], Björkdahl J. [3], Jäkel J. I., Fischerkeller F., Oberhoff T., Klemm-Albert K. [4], Ariely D., Norton M. I. [5], Blank S. [6], Chandon P., Morwitz V. G., Reinartz W. J. [7], Smuk I. [8], Christensen C. M., Hall T., Dillon K., Duncan D. S. [9], Cialdini R. B. [10], Kohavi R., Thomke S. [11], and others.

Scientific research covers a wide range of issues related to the transformation of marketing approaches in the digital age, in particular the implementation of the lean entrepreneurship concept, the use of online experiments, and the integration of growth hacking tools into startup development strategies. Considerable attention is paid to the limitations of traditional market research methods based on consumers' declared intentions, which may differ significantly from their actual behavior. In this context, the expediency of transitioning to behavioral analysis models based on recording actual user actions is substantiated, as well as the use of digital platforms and experimental approaches to improve the accuracy of demand assessment and reduce uncertainty in managerial decision-making in the startup environment.

The purpose of the article is the theoretical substantiation and development of the author's SMIV (Social Media Idea Validation) framework as a tool for behavioral demand validation in the process of forming marketing and sales strategies for startups, as well as determining its practical advantages compared to traditional marketing research methods.

The main material presentation. The term "startup" was first used in the mid-20th century in the United States. Stanford University graduates D. Packard and W. Hewlett used it to denote their own project focused on the development of software and hardware. Subsequently, this student project transformed into the multi-million-dollar corporation Hewlett-Packard, and the term "startup" gained wide use in the scientific and business community.

Translated from English, "startup" means the beginning of a process or the launch of an activity; however, not every newly created business can be classified as a startup. Only a small proportion of entrepreneurial initiatives meet the criteria of this concept, which necessitates its clear theoretical understanding in the context of forming marketing strategies.

In a broad sense, a startup is defined as a newly created company characterized by the innovativeness of a product or service, a limited period of operational activity, and a high level of uncertainty and risk. This specificity conditions the need for flexible and experimental approaches to management and marketing, in particular methods for rapid testing of business hypotheses and behavioral demand validation [5, p. 15]. Thus, according to the approach of S. Blank, a startup is considered as a temporary organization aimed at searching for a scalable and repeatable business model [6, p. 65]. In turn, the lean entrepreneurship concept emphasizes

that a startup operates under conditions of extreme uncertainty, which requires constant hypothesis testing, the use of experiments, and data-driven decision-making obtained through interaction with the market [9; 11].

Based on the approaches presented, it is appropriate to identify the key criteria of a startup project (Fig. 1).

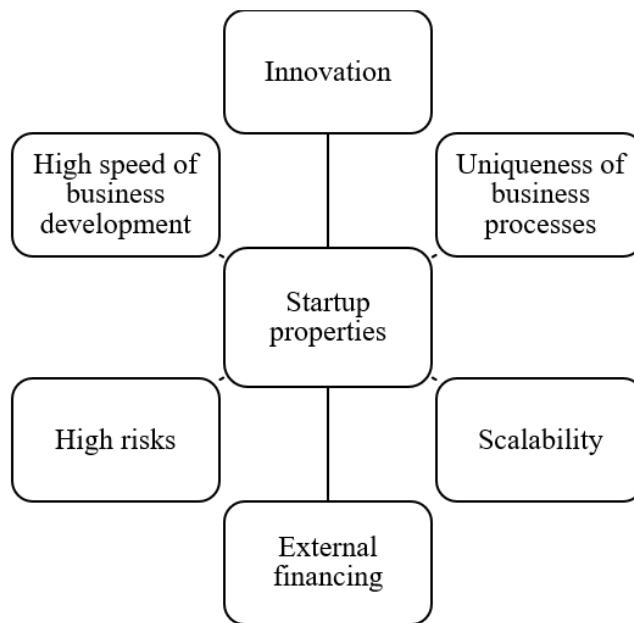


Fig. 1. Characteristics of a startup

Source: compiled by the author based on [1; 5; 9]

Innovativeness is the key characteristic of a startup, as the novelty of the product or service determines its market value and development potential. Startup projects are based on creating new solutions or rethinking existing approaches, which conditions the uniqueness of business processes, including non-standard methods of promotion, sales, and consumer interaction. At the same time, an important feature of a startup is scalability, which provides the possibility of rapid growth without a proportional increase in resources. This allows for effective expansion of activities through digital technologies and flexible business models. As a rule, startups develop at a high pace, which is associated with the need for rapid testing of ideas and market entry in a competitive environment.

At the same time, startups are characterized by a high level of risk and significant dependence on external financing, in particular investments and grant support. The pace of development is often accompanied by imperfections in certain business processes, which can lead to failures even in the presence of a promising product. In this context, an effective marketing and sales strategy becomes particularly important, as it ensures the transformation of an innovative idea into real demand and the delivery of the product to the end consumer. This is why approaches to demand validation, in particular the use of behavioral methods that reduce uncertainty and enhance the validity of managerial decisions, play a key role in modern conditions [4, p. 779].

A sales strategy includes not only the creation of a system for distributing goods and services between production and the consumer, but also encompasses the determination of a consumer engagement model, the required level of service, and communication channels. Thus, the essence of a sales strategy lies in the organization and optimization of the smooth functioning of the product and service sales system, as well as in the development of effective sales methods and attraction of potential consumers. As mentioned earlier, delivering a product to a specific consumer is one of the most pressing problems for startups. The effectiveness of sales organized within the framework of a sales strategy directly depends on the selected distribution channels and strategy classification, which becomes particularly relevant in the context of using behavioral approaches to demand validation [11, p. 81].

It is appropriate to begin the examination of this issue with an analysis of the specifics of distribution channels. Distribution channels significantly affect the success of a startup, as they determine such key aspects of a business as the level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, revenues and profitability, as well as growth rates and scaling opportunities. In modern scientific literature, several classifications of distribution channels are distinguished. First, direct and indirect channels. A direct channel involves selling products or services directly to consumers without the use of intermediaries; sales can be carried out through physical retail outlets

or sales departments (offline channels), as well as through the company's website or mobile applications (online channels). Direct channels ensure full control over customer interactions, pricing, and service quality, but their creation and maintenance require significant time and financial resources. Indirect channels, on the contrary, involve selling goods and services through one or more intermediaries (distributors, retail chains, partners, etc.). They allow expanding market share and gaining access to new segments, but are accompanied by increased costs due to commission payments to intermediaries.

Second, active and passive distribution channels are distinguished. Active channels involve initiating interaction with the client on the part of the business; these include telemarketing, affiliate programs, and direct sales. Passive channels, on the contrary, are based on the initiative of the consumer who makes a purchase decision under the influence of advertising or recommendations; these include advertising and so-called "word of mouth." Third, hybrid distribution channels involve the combination of different approaches, for example, the simultaneous use of own sales channels and partner networks, which provides greater flexibility and adaptability in product sales.

After examining the types of distribution channels, it is appropriate to proceed to the classification of strategies. Within the existing variety of strategies, the choice of a specific approach depends on a number of factors, including: product or service characteristics; target audience features; the company's business model; available resources; competitive environment. As a rule, the sales strategy of a startup is based on a marketing strategy that includes such elements as product, price, promotion, and communications [7; 8]. Both strategies share a common goal: the formation and use of effective distribution channels to ensure effective product sales. At the same time, traditional approaches to the formation of sales strategies do not take into account the fundamental problem inherent in startups — the limited availability of reliable data on real demand at the early stages of development. Thus, thorough pre-launch validation has historically been the prerogative of large organizations with significant research budgets, while startups and SMEs have been left without tools for accurately measuring market response [1; 2]. This structural gap creates increased risks of erroneous selection of distribution channels and marketing strategies, which directly affects the efficiency of commercializing innovative products. In this context, there is a need to implement methodologies capable of providing rapid and well-founded demand validation in real market conditions.

One such methodology is the author's SMIV (Social Media Idea Validation) framework, which is aimed at eliminating the indicated gap by using behavioral demand signals obtained through digital consumer interaction channels. The theoretical basis of the framework is revealed preference theory, according to which real consumer preferences are manifested through their behavior, not intentions [3, p. 35]. This approach allows transitioning from hypothetical demand assessments to the analysis of actual user actions, which significantly improves the accuracy of market response forecasting. Within SMIV, this is realized through the creation of conditions in which the consumer interacts with the product in an environment as close to reality as possible, forming measurable behavioral metrics.

In addition, the framework integrates lean entrepreneurship principles, in particular iterative hypothesis testing and the Build–Measure–Learn cycle, which ensures the adaptability of marketing decisions in a dynamic environment [6, p. 70]. A key element of SMIV is the demand signal triangulation approach, which provides for the sequential receipt and alignment of behavioral indicators at different levels of consumer interaction — engagement, intent, financial commitment. The requirement to confirm demand at all levels minimizes the risk of false-positive product launch decisions and forms a scientifically grounded basis for selecting the marketing and sales strategy of a startup.

Taking into account the theoretical provisions set out above, it is appropriate to proceed to examining the structural logic of the SMIV framework's functioning, which reflects the mechanism of practical demand validation. Unlike traditional approaches, this model involves the sequential passage of interrelated stages, where each managerial decision is based on recorded behavioral responses of consumers rather than hypothetical assessments. This stage-by-stage process ensures the formation of an empirically validated basis for assessing the market prospects of a product, which, in turn, increases the validity of marketing and sales decision-making (Fig. 2).

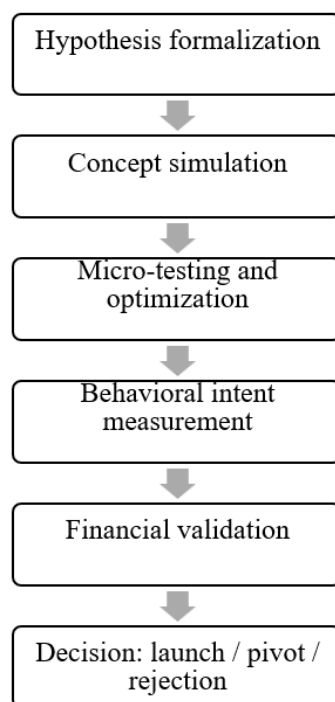


Fig. 2. Architecture of the author's SMIV framework

Source: compiled by the author independently

Fig. 2 reflects the logic of gradual increase in the level of consumer commitment and the simultaneous increase in the accuracy of demand assessment. Each stage performs a separate function, ensuring the verification of basic assumptions and confirmation of real willingness to pay, while all elements are integrated into a unified decision-making system. The transition between stages is only possible when there is sufficient volume of behavioral signals, which significantly reduces the risk of drawing erroneous conclusions.

Given the presented logic of the SMIV framework's construction, there is a need to compare it with traditional marketing research tools for a deeper understanding of the specifics of its functioning (Table 1).

Table 1

Comparative analysis of the SMIV framework and traditional demand validation methods

Parameter	Traditional Research	framework SMIV
Time to first actionable insight	4–12 weeks	5–14 days
Cost	\$5,000 – \$50,000+	\$300 – \$2 000
Type of data	Stated preferences (surveys, focus groups)	Revealed behavioral signals (clicks, leads, purchases)
Cost of pivot	High — methodology requires restarting	Low, adjustable within the same campaign
Required expertise	Marketing research specialists	Digital advertising specialist
Accessibility	Large companies with research budgets	Startups, SMEs, enterprises of any scale
Conditions	Controlled or simulated environment	Real market conditions with actual audience
Signal validity	Socially desirable behavior, hypothetical distortions	Behavioral commitment, actual consumer actions

Source: compiled by the author independently

The identified advantages are conditioned by the existence of two key structural characteristics of social media platforms that determine their suitability for behavioral market validation. These are the ability to obtain behavioral data in real time, which ensures the prompt recording of consumer responses to a value proposition, as well as high-precision targeting mechanisms that allow testing hypotheses on clearly defined audience segments. The formation of these characteristics is a result of the development of programmatic digital advertising during the period 2010–2020; however, their systematic operationalization within research practices of pre-launch demand validation remained limited for a long time.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the SMIV framework is not a universal alternative to all forms of marketing research. Its functional purpose is focused on pre-launch demand validation tasks, while

longitudinal attitudinal research, brand equity assessment, regulatory compliance studies, and fundamental consumer segmentation are beyond its scope. The most relevant area of application of the framework is the stage of making a product launch decision, when an organization must establish whether there is a sufficient level of market demand to justify further commercial and investment decisions. Thus, the proposed model allows not only reducing the level of uncertainty characteristic of the early stages of innovative project development, but also ensuring more efficient use of limited resources through the early identification of the viability of business hypotheses.

Conclusions. In the course of the study, it was established that traditional approaches to marketing research based on the analysis of consumers' stated preferences have limited effectiveness in the context of startups due to the high level of uncertainty and the dynamic nature of the market environment. This necessitates the use of approaches focused on analyzing actual consumer behavior, which allows improving the reliability of demand assessment. It is demonstrated that the author's SMIV framework, built on the foundations of revealed preference theory and lean entrepreneurship principles, ensures the formation of an empirically grounded basis for making marketing and sales decisions. Its stage-by-stage structure, which provides for an increase in the level of consumer behavioral commitment, contributes to improving the validity of the results obtained and minimizing the risk of false-positive demand validation. At the same time, it is established that the use of SMIV allows for a significant reduction in the time and financial costs of research, increasing the accessibility of validation tools for startups and small enterprises.

It is substantiated that the use of social media digital platforms as a source of real-time behavioral data creates new opportunities for rapid testing of business hypotheses and the formation of effective marketing strategies. At the same time, it is determined that the SMIV framework has a clearly defined scope of application, limited to pre-launch demand validation tasks, and does not replace other types of marketing research.

Prospects for further research are associated with the empirical testing of the effectiveness of the SMIV framework in various industries, the improvement of its methodological tools, and integration with modern digital analytical systems to improve the accuracy of demand forecasting and the effectiveness of strategic startup management.

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