

DIGITAL MARKETING AND SUSTAINABILITY OF SMALL-MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

¹OLUGBOYEGUN, Damilola O. – Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria
damilolaolugboyegun@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates how digital marketing can help foster sustainable SMEs in a few business areas in Lagos state, Nigeria. In most nations, SMEs have the potential to be the main forces behind economic growth that is sustainable. Most small businesses in developing nations have worked hard over the span of time to develop their businesses consistently with novel concepts, but evidence suggests that their lack of adoption of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy, among other factors, has resulted in low marketing performance. The study's theoretical framework is the diffusion of innovation theory which explains the rate at which innovation spreads. For this study, a sample size of 162 respondents was purposefully chosen. Only small and medium-sized enterprises in the study area possessing an online presence comprised the research population. The quantitative research design method was used for this investigation. Using the relevant statistical tools of IBM-SPSS software, version 25, the obtained data were verified and analyzed. The results of this study showed that the degree of sales growth of SMEs is significantly impacted by whether or not digital marketing methods are adopted. In order to satisfy their specific company needs and position themselves to benefit from the worldwide developments in the industrial sector, businesses in Nigeria are advised to acquire the necessary knowledge of and practice in digital marketing which will help improve sales and ensure sustainability.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Sustainability, SMEs, Social media and Lagos.

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INTRODUCTION

Billions of people throughout the world use the internet, social media, mobile apps, and other digital communications technology on a daily basis. According to the most recent data for January 2020, 4.54 billion people or 59% of the world's population are active internet users (Statista, 2020a). The development of smartphones, tablets, and other digital technology has been made possible by the internet's accelerating pace and current trend, revolutionizing communication methods. The internet has grown to be a significant center for the promotion of goods and services as a result of the current dynamism in the business environment (Ziókowska, 2021). Companies can accomplish their marketing goals through digital and social media marketing at a reasonably low cost (Ajina, 2019).

Digital marketing is the process of reaching customers through the internet, social media, search engines, mobile devices, display advertising, and other digital platforms. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of the internet as a platform for the commercialization of goods and services also became prominent, social media and digital platforms are now frequently used in business transactions and the maintenance of ongoing business operations, with virtually every organization relying solely on these platforms to do so (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021). Digital marketing includes all marketing initiatives and actions that involve utilizing an electronic device or the internet. To engage

with both present and potential customers, businesses use digital channels including search engines, social media, email, and their websites. Digital marketing entails using technological know-how to create customer preferences, attract consumers, and promote business brands, all of which are expected to increase business income (Kannan & Li, 2017). Digital marketing goes beyond media marketing to include channels that may not require data services, such as using the mobile phones to send messages both SMS and MMS (Neti, 2011).

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have historically made up around 97.2% of the industrial sector in terms of the number of companies (World Bank). According to Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014), SMEs are the catalyst for both economic growth and industrial development. Social media has become a crucial medium for modern consumer goods and services advertising, thus business owners have accepted its use. Despite the fact that social media was first designed as a way to socialize, business owners have started to use it as a way to connect with a big audience by making use of the features and opportunities that social media platforms offer for businesses. However, it appears that many SMEs are not utilizing these new digital technologies to their fullest capacity, which has contributed to the demise of these organizations. (Gilmore 2017; Olowe, Moradeyo and Babalola, 2019; Adebisi & Gbegi, 2019; Dugguh, 2020).

Small and medium-sized businesses are acknowledged as significant forces behind economic growth (Ugurlu & Jindrichovska, 2019). Due to their contribution to the economy and their capacity to foster and sustain growth, combat poverty, and boost employment rates, SMEs are seen as important aspects in any country. Social media and digital marketing can help small businesses reach out to current customers and win over prospective clients. Years ago, advertising via word-of-mouth only was a successful strategy for small businesses to promote their goods and services, but with the development of the internet and digital marketing, the focus of marketing has evolved from the sale of goods alone to the provision of services, interactivity, connectivity, and client relationships (Vargo & Lusch 2016).

Numerous SMEs have struggled hard over the years to develop a conventional digital presence using current, creative concepts and ideas in an effort to make a name for themselves in the business world. Some have succeeded in having a great impact, but sadly, the majority have struggled to become established. Less than 80% of newly founded SMEs are known to survive over the initial five years' window. (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2019; Schroder, 2020). Due to their failure to reach the critical mass of their target market, a great number of SMEs are struggling, and some are even in danger of going out of business. Small and medium-sized firms deal with issues such as a lack of technological know-how, and it has become extremely difficult for SMEs to compete with well-established profitable company's marketing strategies, as asserted by Arinaitwe (2016). Only a tiny percentage of small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria are making investments and expressing interest in the Internet/online marketing industry. One of the greatest undoing of the average Nigerian small company owner is a lack of basic technical skills. Digital technologies are being adopted slowly, and many SMEs are lagging behind, especially in the adoption of digital tools and apps that increase productivity (Adegbuyi & Akinyele, 2015).

When compared to traditional methods of advertising, a solid digital marketing plan can produce a significantly higher return on investment (ROI). In order to take advantage of the internet and comprehend the most recent marketing strategies, businesses must invest time and resources toward

creating a digital marketing plan (Kingsnorth, 2016). Startups and other entrepreneurial endeavors have benefited from the use of digital platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among others, in more industrialized nations.

Small and medium enterprises perform better by taking advantage of digital marketing as it enables them to incorporate technology into their clientele and business procedures for profitable growth (Njau & Karugu, 2014). Businesses can employ digital marketing to connect with new customers, raise brand awareness, and decrease customer complaints, all of which increase profitability. A company's brand can foretell the future, prevent crises, and invent new products because, through the use of social media and digital marketing, business owners can keep tabs on their brand's rivals. SMEs can also determine the frequency of customers who were reached by their advertisements, their comments or feedback, and the buying and lifestyle habits of their target market (Kithinji, 2014).

It has been discovered that a rising array of services, including entertainment, online shopping, access to the web and social networks, maps, and directions, are utilized by young people in particular (Democratic Media, 2011). Websites are vital for implementing digital marketing. As a result, according to Mwarania (2022), the use of websites to drive SMEs has increased market share and profitability for businesses. This demonstrates how the current generation depends on social media to influence their feelings and purchasing decisions. Five digital goals drive the need for SMEs to be active on social media: to create brand awareness, create database and engage with them, ensure customers retention and loyalty, check out competitors via online, and finally to gain conversion for sales (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015, Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014).

This study will benefit the business and industrial sectors by investigating how different digital platforms can be used for marketing products and services, as well as improve sales, and business exposure. The results of this study will inform other young and aspiring business owners about the benefits of using social media marketing to maintain the viability of their enterprises. Irrespective of the industry, this study will improve how effectively entrepreneurs employ digital marketing in their varied enterprises. Therefore, the goal of this study is to ascertain how much the use of digital marketing might affect the expansion, success, and survival of small and medium-sized businesses. examining the impact of digital marketing on small and medium-sized businesses, to put it another way. How much does the use of digital marketing affect the expansion and sustainability of SMEs in the study area, is one of the specific research questions posed.

Theoretical Framework

The diffusion of innovations theory describes how new technological products and other developments spread throughout civilizations and cultures, from their introduction to their general adoption. Everett M. Rogers, a communication theorist at the University of New Mexico, created the idea in 1962. The diffusion of innovations hypothesis aims to clarify how and why society's members accept and embrace novel concepts and behaviors, with timelines potentially extending across lengthy periods of time (Halton, 2021).

According to Rogers (2003), the innovation theory describes the process through which new ideas, behaviors, or products are disseminated among the participants in a system of society. The diffusion of innovation theory explains how an idea spreads through several actors at various phases of acceptance. The major individuals (actors) in this theory are; Innovators (2.5% of the market) are

people who are willing to take chances and are the first to experiment with new concepts or technologies. The early adopters (13.5% of the market) are open to change and are interested in experimenting with new technologies and establishing their use in society; the early majority (34% of the market) are people who adopt new ideas and technologies before the typical person, paving the path for their application in mainstream culture. Before this category will adopt the innovation, though, there must be proof that it works. The late majority (34% of the market) comprise the segment of the general public that adopts innovations only after they have been broadly embraced and adopted by the majority of people. Finally, the Laggards (16% of the market) are the people who are slow to adopt novel goods, modern technologies, or novel concepts. They are the last to adopt new technologies because they are so conventional, risk-averse, and traditional. They can be difficult to persuade, but eventually, the spread of an innovation or the emergence of a scenario in society makes it impossible for them to go about their everyday lives or jobs without those new innovations, thus they are obliged to start using it.

The ratio of rural to urban residents in a society, the level of education in that society, and the degree of industrialization and development are all factors that influence the rate of innovation diffusion. A novel idea is likely to be adopted at varying rates depending on the society, innovation type, and other factors. Rogers (1995) discussed the ways in which communities adopt new ideas. According to Rogers, the process of invention spread has five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation stages. This clarifies that in order to embrace a new technology or idea, one must first gain knowledge of it, develop an attitude toward it, decide whether to adopt it or not, execute the new idea, and then confirm their choice (Rogers, 2003; Olley, 2009; Woods, 2016).

The theory explains how new ideas and innovation is widely spread in a society. The theory argues that individuals adopt innovations at varying rates, which accounts for why some business owners are embracing digitization while others are lagging behind. Others accept digitalization immediately it comes but some others wait for people to test the waters, give their feedback before they decide to adopt it. In adopting digital marketing tools, there are business owners who are perceived to be innovator, they are the risk takers and first to try out a new digital application in other to advertise their brand. In time past, the best social media app for business marketing was Facebook, later on it became Instagram, as at 2023 the Tiktok app is the latest marketing platform for business owners, and the first set of people to try out these new technologies can be regarded as the innovators. The early adopters follow suit as well as the early majority, after the digital platform has been tested and trusted to spur sales, the late majority joins the trend. Business owners that have refused to adopt digital marketing are likened to be the laggards, and until situations such as what happened in the Lockdown during COVID-19 occurs, that is when they are left with no choice but to adopt the innovation.

Additionally, this theory aids marketers and business owners in understanding the rate at which their target market is likely to adopt a new good or service via the internet. Technology adoption and the uptake of new goods, services, or concepts do not occur instantaneously among all members of a social system or overnight. To sustain itself, the innovation needs to be widely utilized. The idea also asserts that the media conveys information and shapes public perception and evaluation of new goods. Many online shoppers buy products they perceive will be of advantage to them based on the influence and information from the media. So also, the adoption of digital marketing will be embraced if a business owner perceives it as being of greater advantage than the traditional marketing.

Methodology

This study implemented the quantitative research method. It utilized the survey research design through the administration of copies of the questionnaire. The sample elements comprised selected SMEs in Lagos that has embraced the use of digital marketing in advertising their product or services. Selected business districts in Lagos, Nigeria, were the focus of the study. Lagos serves as both the primary national and international communications hub as well as Nigeria's main economic, social, and financial center. The Selected business areas in Lagos includes: Agege, Somolu, Lekki, Festac Town, Ikorodu, Ojo, Eti Osa and Ikeja.

The study population in the selected areas included owners and staff of businesses from different industries, such as Cosmetics, Food and Catering Services, Clothing lines, bedding companies, Perfume stores, Bags and Shoe making companies, Education, Health and even Finance Companies, that utilizes digital marketing. A total number of 192 respondents were required to fill the copies of the questionnaire. However, 162 copies were retrieved. The quantitative sample size was determined using the Isreal Gleen formula which states that:

$$n = \left[\frac{Z (d-c)}{2e^2} \right]^2$$

Where n = Sample Size

$$Z = 1.96$$

$$d = 1$$

$$2 = 2$$

e = Acceptable Sampling error (0.05)

where the confidence level is 95% and a margin error of 0.05

$$n = [1.96 (10)]^2$$

$$n = [19.6]^2$$

$$n = 384.16 \text{ (384, in one whole number)}$$

Due to financial and scheduling constraints, the sample size was reduced in half because it would have been challenging to obtain 384 respondents.

$$384 \div 2 = 192$$

The respondents for this survey were chosen using the multi-stage sampling method. The SMEs to be investigated were chosen in the first stage using the snowball and Purposive sampling techniques, and the workers of each SME were then divided into several clusters, these clusters were according to the departments of the company ranging from sales, marketing, packaging and dispatching, customer care and the managerial department. From the several departments in the organizations, respondents were further selected using accidental sampling to get the population to fill out the questionnaire. A total number of 162 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved out of 192 shared. A well-structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions served as the research tool for this study. The first section of the questionnaire requests information about the respondents' sociodemographics, while the subsequent sections addressed questions about the research's objectives. The Statistical Package (IPM-SPSS) version 25 was used to analyse the data using descriptive statistics. Based on

descriptive analysis, frequency counts, and percentages were used to analyse the questionnaire copies.

Results and Discussion

This section displays the distribution depending on the study's respondents' gender, location of SMEs, academic qualification, business industry and position in the business.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Table 1. Selected demographics characteristics of the respondents		
Location of the study	Frequency (N = 162)	Percent (%)
Agege (A)	11	6.8
Eti-Osa (B)	16	9.9
Festac (C)	18	11.1
Ikeja (D)	20	12.3
Ikorodu (E)	26	16.0
Lekki (F)	34	21.0
Ojo (G)	23	14.2
Somolu (H)	14	8.6
Total	162	100.0
Gender		
Male	50	30.9
Female	112	69.1
Academic Qualification		
SSCE	7	4.3
NCE/Diploma	6	3.7
BSc/HND	91	56.2
Postgraduate	58	35.8
Business classification by industry		
Health	7	4.3
Food/Confectioneries	34	21.0
Cosmetics	36	22.2
Fashion	44	27.2
General business	35	21.6
Beddings	6	3.7
Respondent Position in the company		
CEO/Biz Owner	25	15.4
Manager (HR, Logistics, Project, etc)	26	16.0
Director/Executive Officer	65	40.1
Sales Rep / Team Leaders	15	9.3
Creative Director	13	8.0
Lead Designer	11	6.8
Proprietor	7	4.3

Source: Author's field survey, (2023)

Eight (8) business areas in Lagos were studied due to the high level of commercial activities in those

areas. The proportion of respondents from the different local governments are; Agege (6.8%), Eti-Osa (9.9%), Festac town (11.1%), Ikeja (12.3%), Ikorodu (16.0%), Lekki (21.0%), Ojo (14.2%), to Somolu (8.6%). The gender distribution shows that there are more females (69.1%) than men (30.9%). The academic qualification of the respondents shows that the proportion that have only Senior Secondary School Certificate of Examination (SSSCE) are only 4.3%, National Certificate of Education or Diploma (3.7%), Bachelor or Higher National Diploma (56.2%) and the Postgraduate was 35.8%. The respondents were asked to identify the industry their business belonged to, 6 groups were created for this study namely: Food/Confectioneries (21.0%), Fashion (27.2%), Beddings (3.7%), Cosmetic (22.2%), Health (4.3%) and Others businesses (21.6%) which included estate and land business, Stationary store, logistics Companies, printing press, education and photocopying services, to mention a few. Various positions of the respondents include Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Business Owners (15.4%), Managers (16.0%), Director/Executive Officer (40.1%), Sales Representative (9.3%), Creative Director (8.0%), Lead Designer (6.8%), and School Proprietors (4.3%) as shown in table 1.

Descriptive statistics for the research question: To what extent does the usage of digital marketing have an impact on the expansion of sales and the long-term sustainability of SMEs in the research area?

Table 2. Digital marketing usage and SMEs growth

Table 2. Digital marketing strategies employed by SMEs		
Are you aware of online/digital marketing?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	160	98.8
No	2	1.2
Total	162	100.0
Which of your products/services makes use of digital Marketing?		
Only One	50	31.4
1-2 products/Items	31	19.5
3-4 products/Items	17	10.7
5 & more items	61	38.4
Total	159	100.0
How often does this Brand make use of traditional marketing for advertising?		
Very often	22	13.6
Not often	34	21.0
Rarely	17	10.5
Not at all	89	54.9
Total	162	100.0
Number of trade brands		
1-2 Brands	38	41.8
3-4 Brands	36	39.6
5 Brands & above	17	18.7
Total	91	100

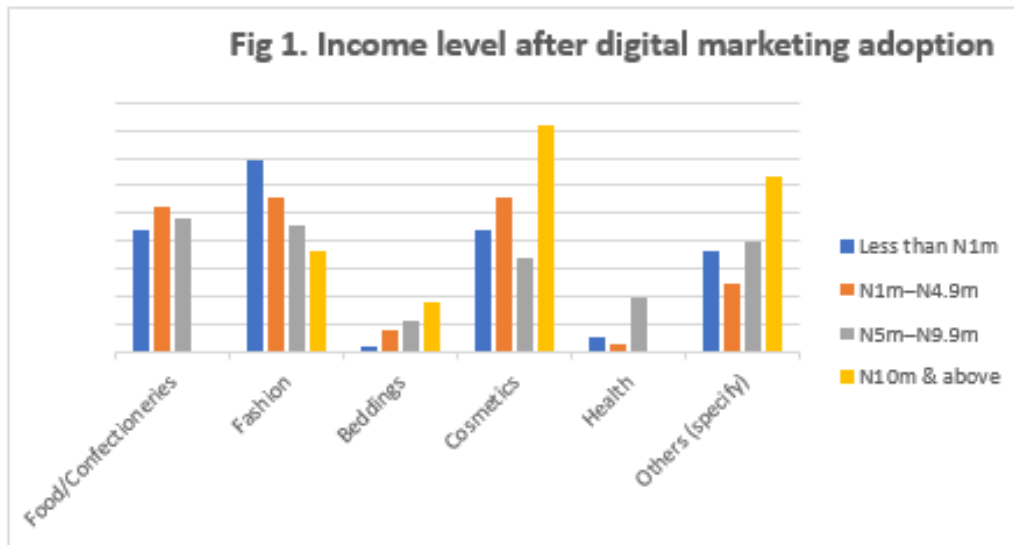
Initial business income before the online/digital marketing?		
Less than ₦1m	133	82.1
₦1m – ₦4.9m	11	6.8
₦5m – ₦9.9m	13	8.0
₦10m & above	5	3.1
Total	162	100.0
What would you now say is the income of your business		
Less than ₦1m	64	40.0
₦1m – ₦4.9m	45	28.1
₦5m – ₦9.9m	39	24.4
₦10m & above	12	7.5
Total	160	100.0

Source: Author's field survey, (2023)

A question used to assess the level of awareness of respondents about online/digital marketing was asked, and the result showed that majority of the respondents (98.8%) are aware of online and digital marketing. The number of respondent's products/services that are advertised via digital Marketing revealed that 31.4% of the business trade only one brands online, 19.5% trade with 1-2 items, 10.7% trades 3-4 Items and businesses that trade with 5 brands or more digitally constitute 38.4%. The study shows that 45.1% of respondents from the various SMEs stated that their business utilizes traditional marketing in terms of handbills, Newspaper adverts, radio to mention a few. However, nearly two-third (specifically, 54.9%) of the businesses use only digital and not traditional marketing.

To further assess the research objective, questions were asked to ascertain the level of sales growth and sustainability of the business. The sales growth before implementing digital marketing and the level of sales after implementing digital marketing were assessed, the results are seen in table 2. The income level before implementing digital marketing showed less than ₦1m (82.1%) representing 133 businesses, and between ₦1m and ₦4.9m were 6.8%. The income group of (₦5m - ₦9.9m) were 8.0% while 3.1% had an income range of ₦10m and above. The study revealed an improvement in sales growth after implementing digital marketing. The proportion of less than N1m was reduced to 40.0%. The income group of (N1m–N4.9m) improved to 28.1%, and those businesses having (₦5m - ₦9.9m) and ₦10m and above are 24.4% and 7.5%, respectively. While everyone indicated their initial income level, two businesses refused to answer the question.

Figure 1. Income after digital marketing adoption



Source: Author's field survey, (2023)

The study investigated the impact of using digital marketing on the development of SMEs' sales and the sustainability of these businesses. The results showed that digital marketing has helped businesses and various brands attract more customers, which has in turn led to increased business growth and revenue, in line with the study of Kannan & Li (2017). The performance of SMEs is positively and significantly impacted by innovation (Winarso, Sinaga, Syarief & Supardi, 2023). The study reveals that all the respondents are aware of digital marketing, this explains the wide spread of new technology and the innovation of advertising via the online platform. The promotion of entrepreneurial education is emphasized as one of the most effective methods for spreading culture and educating aspiring entrepreneurs (Sundarraaj & Subbalakshmi, 2023).

From the findings, all respondents are aware of digital marketing but, not all entrepreneurs into business have adopted digital marketing for their businesses. This agrees with the findings of Kingsnorth (2016), that majority of the business owners have not invested in the utilization of digital marketing. He further admitted that to ensure growth and sustainability, it is not just about being aware of digital marketing but the need to invest skills and time in creating a digital marketing strategy, leveraging on the internet and understanding the latest marketing techniques to ensure business sales. The study also reveals that businesses in the fashion sector make up the majority of those engaged in digital marketing. This is due to the fact that many people view digital apps as socializing avenues; they post pictures online, making it easier for friends to see the post, fall in love with the fashion item, and buy it because the media is thought to affect consumers' purchasing decisions. Businesses centered on health represented 4.3% which is a very few percentages. This is due to the fact that many people believe that, unlike fashion and food, it is not easy to advertise a health-related business via the internet.

The findings support other studies that have highlighted the need for digital marketing as it aids more sales for businesses and help SMEs reach their target audience better than traditional marketing. It creates awareness and visibility to the business, and increases the sales of the products. Through online marketing, businesses have been able to reach out to customers not just within their environment but

also all around the world (Jagongo & kinyua 2016).

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, businesses need digital marketing to satisfy their own operational needs and put themselves in a position to benefit from the industrial sector's widespread developments. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in particular now have more opportunities to offer their goods and services to a bigger audience than they would have been able to afford to reach through traditional channels due to the expansion of the Internet. A brand without a successful digital marketing plan can be compared to a vehicle without tires. Its impact and essence could be constrained. Small businesses today must have an online presence. Aside from a basic website or search engine ad, social media is one of the most popular channels for digital marketing. Social media's widespread usage has helped businesses attract clients from all over the world. Therefore, it is advised that business owners and managers be required not only to be aware of the benefits of digital marketing but to invest and adopt the exploitation of it in order to help grow business sales/sustainability and prevent the closure of SMEs.

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