

Digital Marketing and Customer Engagement of Selected Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Benin City

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between digital marketing and the performance of selected small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives analysed the impact of e-mail marketing, content marketing and social media marketing on customer engagement of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. The study applied structured questionnaires to the entire population of 137 respondents. The data generated was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means were used; inferential statistics such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was also used. The findings of the study showed that there was a statistical significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement, while there was no statistical significant relationship between content marketing, social media marketing and customer engagement of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. Based on the findings of this study, and in line with its specific objectives, SMEs should use their resources in developing effective e-mail, content and social media marketing strategies that could enhance customer engagement.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Email Marketing, Content Marketing, Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

Introduction

In recent times, firms of different classification in virtually all industrial sectors are constantly enriching their domain with digital tools Bokša, Šaroch, and Bokšová (2020). Digitalization is perceived to be a major topic in all aspects of the society, with a key note on the effects it poses on economic, political and social elements. According to Li, Su, Zhang, and Mao (2017). The introduction of the internet since the 1960s has propelled many firms to network via multiple computers, reaching out to each for sole purposes of expansion and growth. In this regard, virtually all management domains and employees in both large and medium firms, now access the computers via the internet to constantly create awareness.

A brand without an effective digital marketing strategy is like a car without tires. Its efficiency and essence is bound to be limited. The turn of the century experienced lots of business brands ditch the analog medium of conducting business and embrace diverse digital tools, to solidify their presence in the business environment and project their brands with a view of increasing their customer base, making a significant impact on small and medium-sized companies and large companies Lee H, Kelly, Lee J, and Lee S (2001). The application of digital tools on business activities have been found to improve business competitiveness and opportunity base for SMEs to compete on closer terms with larger organisations Chapman, Fames-Moore, and Szizygeil (2000) bearing special significance on the projection of business activities through effective digital marketing strategies with the most popular method of marketing in the modern technological era. The purpose is not only to sell products and services, but also to build relationships with customers. A prerequisite for SMEs to explore the digital space via sustainable digital marketing practices which help assess and communicate to a wider range of customers for a better productive output Mazzarol (2015).

Digital marketing is at the forefront of every marketing campaign in every business. Organizations have continued to prioritize the urgency to boost their brand productivity, increase customer base and realize more turnover applying effective digital marketing strategies. Research into SMEs and entrepreneurship has grown immensely at some point of the last decade and studies may have greatly increased focus in the various economy of the world. Digital platforms provide an excellent ability to grow the SMEs brand. A massive number of corporations compete in different parts of the world as SMEs, even though the performance level of SMEs varies, they play an important role in the overall performance of the whole economy, despite the challenge of sustained performance on the long term.

Development of corporate identity in modern times is an important strategic requirement for SMEs to grow their own brand marketing methods and processes Mingione and Abrarr (2020). Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises operate in a complex and unpredictable business environment, faced with the constant challenge of competing and providing value to customers, against established business organisations due to their size and economic capacity Lee et al.,

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(2001). SMEs brand building and projection through digital channels involves the application of digital marketing strategies, ensuring a move from traditional marketing methods Eggers, Niemand, Karus, and Breier (2020). There is a drastic need for SMEs to apply social networks, online advertising campaigns and different virtual approaches to boost their companies' developmental growth, which is in cognizance with adapting to new and innovative ways to improve and adapt to a rapid transformational growth Mohsen, Saeed, Raza, Omar, and Muffatto (2020). Business has proven to be essential to economic growth and in the last two decades, SMEs are becoming more important around the world Mingione and Abratt (2020). It becomes pertinent for governments and industry players around the world to encourage the growth of SMEs for a sustainable impact in the economy, in doing so a competitive advantage can be maintained.

It is crucial for organisations to position their brand in a manner that ensures continued growth and maintain competitive advantage in the market, thus not creating an avenue for its competitors to grow more to gain a massive edge in the market. SMEs must increase or maintain a healthy sales and profit level to ensure their survival Claver (2006). Management literature provides a platform for entrepreneurs to enhance their SMEs brand value and bolding through the digital space, as a guaranteed way of increasing sales, creating new customers and ensuring the retention of customers. This is in line with governmental efforts, which aims at investing in solid internet infrastructure, as a way of encouraging SMEs' digital business operations Beckinsale and Levy (2004). SMEs have been generally viewed as an integral part of significant economic growth and development both on a national and international pedestal Smallbone and Wyer (2000).

All SMEs are set up to achieve some specifically stated goals and objectives. SMEs performance depends strictly on how they are able to achieve their stated goals and objectives. Digital marketing is more common in better performing SMEs. SMEs that engage in digital marketing, compared to those that don't, are more likely to be those that achieve higher sales growth, higher returns on assets, higher margins on profit, higher customer engagement and higher employee growth.

Businesses of all sizes have the same goal of growing their bottom line: to make more money. An essential part of most organizations' marketing spending is publicizing the goods and services they provide. In Benin City, where a large percentage of the population uses social media sites like Facebook and Twitter on their mobile devices, there has been an explosion in digital marketing. Small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City have not been adequately studied in terms of the effect of digital marketing on their businesses. Even though several studies have been done on the role of digital marketing in enhancing company performance, it seems that no information is available on how SMEs utilize digital marketing to boost their performances in Benin City. This therefore is the research gap that this study wants to fill.

The general objective of this study is to explore the effect of digital marketing on the performance of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.

Specifically, this study intends to:

- Ascertain the effect of E-mail Marketing on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- Examine the effect of Content Marketing on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- To investigate the effect of Social Media Marketing on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.

Research Questions

- What is the effect of E-mail Marketing on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- Does Content Marketing have an effect on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- How does Social Media Marketing have an effect on Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.

Hypotheses Development

- H₀: There is no significant effect between E-Mail Marketing and Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- H₀: There is no significant effect between Content Marketing and Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.
- H₀: There is no significant effect between Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement in selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Definition of Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing is a type of marketing that is done by using electronic or digital media such as web pages, email, social media in alliance with digital data from a different range of databases and software applications. Kotler and Keller (n. d.)

Digital marketing is simply the act of promoting a brand, or service or product on the internet. There are variety of sources that can be used to promote services and products like search engines, email, sms, websites, social media and mobile devices. The digital nature of this style of marketing makes it a cost-effective means of promoting one's business.

The use of digital marketing depends on the organisation's marketing goals and objectives. It could be that the organisation wants to generate more leads, build their brands, increase sales or improve brand engagement. The application of digital media platforms in marketing assists in accelerating and enables more interaction with customers to get feedback that could be advantageous when making projections for expanding the target market.

Advantages of Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing is beneficial for all businesses. The reason is that it is easy to be personalized and used on targeted market with affordable price and efficient time. Below is the list of digital marketing advantages.

- **Measurable**, unlike traditional marketing that is difficult to measure, digital marketing enables businesses to measure their results. For example, it is easy to see how big the audience has been, how many have seen the ad or how many have opened the email.
- **Flexible**, with digital marketing, advertisement can be tailored made. Audience can be segmented and each group of them can be served accordingly by their interests and needs.
- **Low barrier to entry**, traditional marketing could have cost a fortune, making TV ads or billboards needing a lot of money. But digital marketing can be fixed according to the budget of the company.
- **Reach large audience**, as digital marketing is online, it is accessible to people all over the globe.
- **Easy to optimize**, after the first campaign it is easy to see what has worked and what has not. Therefore, it can be adjusted and improved for the next campaign.
- **Improved conversion rates**, Digital marketing ease the way for better interaction with the prospects. Reaching target market is easier for businesses, this therefore influence the conversion rate. MacDougall (2018)

Limits of Digital Marketing

A part of preparing for digital marketing campaign is to be aware of restrictions. Some of the drawbacks are:- Restricted by technology, Cyber security and data protection issues, Competitive market due to globalization, and Price sensitivity caused by higher clarity Sina (2018) etc. Cyber security and data protection issues constitutes one of the highest risks in digital marketing especially when businesses are aiming to reach a wide range of the audience.

Studies shows that in year 2018 the cost for the data violations for businesses has been over three million, while only in United States the average cost of it for a company could be over seven million. Therefore, it is important for Digital Marketing professionals to be aware of the risks Smith (2019).

The Main Differences between Traditional Marketing and Digital Marketing.

- Traditional marketing communication is unidirectional, meaning, a business communicates about its products or services with a group of people. In digital marketing communication is bidirectional. The customer can also ask questions or make suggestions about the business products and services.
- Medium of communication in traditional marketing is generally through phone calls, and letters. In digital marketing medium of communication is mainly through social media, chat, websites and emails.
- Campaigning takes more time for designing, preparing and launching in traditional marketing, while in digital marketing there is always a fast way to develop an online campaign and carry out changes along its development. With digital tools, campaigning is easier.
- Traditional marketing is carried out for a specific audience throughout from generating campaign ideas up to selling a product or a service. While in digital marketing the content is available for the general public. It is then made to reach the specific audience by employing search engine techniques.
- Traditional marketing is a conventional way of marketing; best for reaching local audience. While digital marketing is best for reaching global audience.
- It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a campaign in traditional marketing, while it is easier to measure the effectiveness of a campaign in digital marketing through analytics. Zazzlemedia (2009).

Some of the applicable forms of digital marketing include:

- **Website:** Internet usage and application has increased tremendously in the last decades as websites have become trusted tools for public communication, extensively serving both private and corporate needs. They are basically structured to intensify the business-to-customer interactions, as a way of engaging brand promotions which is quite synonymous to the objective of digital marketing. Simply put, websites are created by organizations to deliver information in form of advertisement and enlightenment to existing and prospective customers. It influences customer's perceptions of certain brands or products they might be interested in Kolesar and Galbraith (2000).
- **Pay-per-click:** Pay-per-click ads on the internet are provided by search engines and social media to help customers get access to certain brands as well as make reasonable payment in the process. This service is essential to calculating the number of people who can click on an ad and as well target specific persons based on demographics or locations. Barone (2020). Basically this is a way to ensure customers buy their way to visiting a company's site rather than trying to acquire the visit organically. This allows advertisers to bid on search engine sponsored link and ad placements when someone searches for keywords that are relevant to their business offering,

- **Content Marketing:** Content form of digital marketing applies a format that includes engaging various customers by creating and sharing of valuable content. These specific contents are usually disseminated on blogs, videos, E-Books and info graphics. Increase of traffic on the company's website to help brand building is basically responsible for adopting this digital marketing strategy. Content must be relevant and valuable in order to create a profitable action. Content marketing is the center of any kind of digital marketing.
- **Email Marketing:** Email marketing is a powerful marketing channel, a form of direct digital marketing that uses email to promote a company's product and services. Integrating with the marketing automation efforts, it helps customers aware of the latest items and offers. It can also play an important role in the adopted marketing strategy when it comes to lead generation, brand awareness; relationship building or retaining customer across different types of marketing process Adikesavan (2014). Email marketing can improve the relationship between the organization and the customers and promote the reputation of the business and aid customer loyalty.
- **Social Media Marketing:** Social media is an interactive technology that enables the generation or sharing of relevant information, opinions, career goals and other forms of personal expression through virtual networks and online communities. Social media marketing uses online social media tools to create products, services, information and ideas for consumers Dahnil, Marzuki, Landdat, and Fabeli (2014). These tools empower the organization to create lots of information and foster collaboration between social media users who are already existing or prospective customers to a particular brand. It is estimated that there are about 3.6 billion social media users' worldwide.
- **Affiliate Marketing:** Affiliate marketing is a partnership programme that allows individuals to become affiliates and reward their successful referrals to the business. Affiliate marketing programs depend on what is considered a conversation. This may be in form of a visit, purchase, or registration to a website or page. Affiliate is typically provided with a commission system that includes performance levels based on conversations. Affiliate marketing is an inexpensive way for business to increase brand awareness and customer base, Brown (2009). It becomes easy to attract customer's attention by engaging in marketing activities. Affiliates in most cases take the risk of marketing brand products and in the process receive commission on each product, Duffy (2005).
- **Viral Marketing:** Marketing is considered viral when it comes to been shared by the entire public, not just the target audience. Once this has been done, the message will appear in almost every social media feed. Viral marketing aims to get people to share their products using existing social networks with family and friends. Some products and services are easy to advertise through viral marketing as they could be observed or communicated as part of a fast digital marketing strategy. Numerous opportunities are attached to viral marketing as it gives effectiveness and visibility to a brand product. Customers make

recommendations easily for others to make patronage especially when the value proposition matches their expectations.

- **Blogs:** A blog is a website that contains written content about a topic. Most blogs allow readers the chance to comment on blog posts. Blogs offer many advantages to help build up an effective digital marketing strategy. With the presence of search engine marketing tools like google and yahoo, brand communication becomes easily structured along a direct two-way communication way, whereby a direct conversation between the brand representatives and customer can be achieved. Blogging allows bloggers to tell many stories about your brand, which creates a competitive differentiation, therefore helping the company in setting up a competitive edge Jain (2014).
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO),** SEO helps websites to get better ranking on the search engine results. With the help of SEO, the organic traffic of the website increase. Websites, blogs and infographics are the channels that benefit from SEO, Liimataine (2020)
- **Search Engine Marketing (SEM),** Unlike SEO that provides organic traffic to the websites, SEM gains traffic by using paid methods. By using SEM, the website will be visible to the potential customers when they are on search engines. SEM can be recognized by the “Ad” at the beginning of the URL Liimataine (2020)

Some other forms of digital marketing include: E-Commerce Marketing, Mobile Commerce Marketing, SMS Advertisement, Video Marketing etc

Characteristics for Determining the Successful Digital Marketing Campaigns

Research scholars have explained digital market under six characteristics for determining the successful digital marketing campaigns.

- Quality of website is considered a prerequisite for successful online business activities, and assist in taking customers away from the boundary. Further, it serves as a digital destination for the audience.
- Strong social media presence enables firms to reach customers through their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram applications directly, which enables firms to establish credible, improved and sustainable relationships in the long term.
- Search engine optimization is considered an integral and essential part of digital marketing for measuring online ranking at search engines that demonstrates online popularity.
- Email marketing remains an effective strategy to approach the audience but it must be done under proper planning to gain maximum results. It has been observed that emails to users may provide better responses with instant replies due to interest in the business. Customized offers and effective communication

encourages customers to remain and repeat purchases by establishing a long term relationship.

- It has been included that mobile friendly apps are also found to be impactful towards approaching customers. The majority of users utilize mobile phone apps to assess online stores to find their preferred items. Effective and user-friendly mobile applications must be developed by firms to give easy and quick access to customers. Nuseira and Aljumahb (2020)

Performance of SMEs

The performance of SMEs comprises the actual output or results of SMEs as measured against their intended outputs (or goals and objectives). The performance of SMEs depends first of all on how they are able to manage and, secondly, on the active and precise involvement of the employees in fulfilling the strategic objectives of the enterprises. According to Richard, Devinney, Yip, and Johnson (2009), organizational performance includes three specific areas of firm outcomes: Financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment, etc.); Product market performance (sales, market share, etc.); and Shareholder return (total shareholder return, economic value-added, etc.). In the fourth dimension, performance is often applied as a measure of a company's health across a certain time period. As a result, one of the most important concerns for SMEs is their performance.

Consumer Engagement

According to Van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, and Pick (2010) consumer engagement is defined as the behavioural interaction of a customer with a particular brand or company, beyond purchase that motivates customers association and loyalty in their purchasing journey. The basis of consumer engagement is widely used in industry and businesses by managers and consultants around the world Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012). When a company succeeds in adapting and facilitating an innovative approach while building long-term relationships with its customers, it is called consumer engagement Sashi (2012). Customer engagement is focused on being prioritized especially among competitors in order to gain brand loyalty. Loyal customers not only remain stakeholders, but also they create great value and high business equity for businesses to meet the needs and wants of customers.

E-Mail Marketing and Customer Engagement

As a result of low entrepreneur's budgets, E-mail marketing is one of the most recommended strategies for small and medium-sized business. It is an example of a cheap and accurate way of marketing to target new customers, keep contact with existing customers and increase sale. E-mail marketing, is a powerful tool for building long-term relations with consumers. This therefore means that E-mail marketing represents the best type of marketing for increasing engagement of existing customers Direct Marketing Association (2013)

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Content Marketing and Customer Engagement

Creating content marketing is not just writing in general, but it is an invention of valuable content that can engage with the customers Puro (2013). Providing valuable information to customer will create brand loyalty and purchases in the future Hakala, Svensson, and Vince (2012). Creating quality content may influence the consumer to engage with the brand. Companies need to create content that keeps customers visiting website and stimulate them to engage on purchase intention Puro (2013). Content marketing is used to attract customers, which is very useful to help customer easily access brand and pay less. Content is the main agent for engagement. It can also help to create positive attitude towards the brand to consumers. Meanwhile content marketing can attract new customers to contact the company which is called inbound marketing, people who are already interested in the product can easily become new customers Puro (2013). These new customers may come from a search by Search Engine or chat with friends on social media or reading from the Blog.

High-end items like smartphones, laptops and even automobiles are particularly susceptible to content marketing. Many buyers do considerable research on a company's website before making a purchase. Customers are more likely to purchase a product if the information is well-written, clear, and engaging. Content marketing may be used to attract and keep customers engaged in your product or service as they get closer to making a purchase. Insufficient information on the internet may force consumers to ask the same questions repeatedly. Content marketing may help the company's customer support reps if needed. Content marketing is a great way to increase business brand recognition and reputation according to Foo, Chung, Cheung, and Chu (2021)

Presently, creating valuable information is more effective than traditional advertising. Content marketing is one of the best strategies that is used to stimulate online engagement and has emerged simultaneously with the rise of social media Content Marketing Institute (2013). In the context of SMEs, it may seem that online marketing is far from SMEs operators. On the other hand, available research found that SMEs operators are using online more frequently and averagely using social media platforms to distribute content with up to six tools, compared with five last year. It is clear that content marketing is the most interesting strategy that SMEs should highlight to create customer brand engagement.

Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

Through participation in conversations on the social networking site of a firm (e.g. commenting on the company and its products, expressing support and criticism, sharing information with social connections), the online stakeholders make direct commitments with the firm and other consumers. Customer engagement in the field of relationship marketing, not only incorporates the relations established between buyers and sellers, but also any possible combination between potential and actual clients; non-clients; society, in general; and sellers, in other words, the stakeholders. Social networks offer possibilities for this participation that develop trust, goodwill and commitment to

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form relations between individuals and brands regardless of whether those same individuals acquire them or not Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012). Therefore when SMEs utilize social media in their marketing activities customer engagement will be seriously enhanced.

The Nigerian SMEs

SMEs can be defined in various ways; the definition depends on a country as different countries have what characterizes an SME. Some of the things to be considered to determine if a business is an SME are majorly the number of employees it has and what it owns as assets. Commission (2003) defined SME as a business with less than 250 employees and a yearly turnover of up to 50 million euros or a balance sheet with less than 43 million euros. According to SMEs Nigeria (2013), SMEs can be defined in these following ways: a micro enterprise is a business with less than 10 people and an annual turnover of less than ₦5,000,000.00(€ 22,896,35); a small enterprise is a business with 10-49 people and an annual turnover of ₦5 to ₦49,000.000.00(€228,469,28); and a medium enterprise is a business with 50-199 people with an annual turnover of ₦50 to ₦499,000.000.00(€228,469,28).

With the above definition, it is evidenced that SMEs are the drivers of the Economy of most countries, Nigeria inclusive. Because of this, it is very important to pay attention to SMEs and what can make them better. According to Commission (2003), SMEs have often been referred to as the backbone of the European economy as it has constantly provided jobs and economic growth. More still, Oyeyinka (2007) has it that studies by the International Financial Corporation shows that approximately 96% of Nigerian businesses are made up of SMEs, this indeed is an evidence that the value and importance of SMEs to the Nigerian economy cannot be overemphasized. This is why they have been generally acknowledged as the bedrock and the catalyst of the industrial development of any country. Governments and development experts have recognized SMEs as the main engine of economic growth and a major factor in promoting private sector development and partnership - John (2017).

Above notwithstanding, Nigerian SMEs are struggling to make ends meet as regards progress and growth because the world is rapidly going digital and they have not fully embraced it or are sluggish in their process of absorption of these digital technologies. Oyeyinka (2007) states that SMEs in Nigeria contribute 1% of the GDP as opposed to 40% in Asia and 50% in US or Europe. According to Rai (2017), with internet marketing, which is a part of digital marketing, it is easy to gain more traffic and ensure a way to engage customers better than using the traditional marketing, this might be just what Nigerian SMEs need in order to impact much in the country's economy.

One major challenge faced by Nigerian based SMEs is how to create awareness for their brand, product, services or business. Most Nigerian SMEs lack understanding of marketing and its concept. This is because they are young and are most likely relying on their personal knowledge,

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rather than studies and proper guidelines as regards marketing. Most Nigerian SMEs mistake marketing to be the actual selling thereby missing out completely as it regards customer relationship and a way to retain the customers. Daniel (2013).

Also, the cost of marketing, especially traditional marketing tools like, print, broadcast, telemarketing, etc. do not meet their results when you calculate the number of people they can get to. This is because, most target audience of these SMEs are not easily reached through these traditional marketing channels, and even when reached are not easily convinced about the products and services, they are mostly on social media platforms, or are more accessible through other digital means, and this platforms offers more opportunity to present the product or services in a very attractive manner to charm the viewer.

Types of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Owirendu (2014) categorized businesses which fall under the umbrella of small and medium scale as follow; Under small scale enterprise there are: firewood supply, packaging of food items, meat retailing, plantain production, restaurant service, small scale poultry raising, rabbit raising, organizing labour squad, operating a nursery school for children, home service, arranging food for parties etc. Under medium scale are soap production, aqua culture/fish farming, chalk making, foam production, nylon production, concrete block production, hair/body cream productions, chemical production, commercial poultry, professional law practice, accountancy, education, food and beverage production among others.

Factors Affecting SMEs in Nigeria

Abbakin (2019) gave a detailed description of the numerous factors affecting the progress of SMEs in Nigeria, these numerous factors are as follows;

- **Financial Factor:** It is well known that money is the heart of any business, to start up a business, an initial reasonable amount of money is required. Young Nigerians who try to start up a business usually encounter this problem as the harsh economic environment makes it difficult to save up enough money that would start a business. More still, it is almost impossible to get a loan from the bank to finance a start-up because banks are mostly not ready to take the risk of investing in some start-up that could fail, they rather invest in already established businesses. As a result of this, when start-up businesses come to ask for loans, the banks demand them to provide some unrealistic collateral. Also, there are

very few government programs that support start-ups. And these few programs usually have a lot of complex procedures as regards applying for them.

- **Lack of Technical and Technological Infrastructure:** In addition to lack of access to reasonable capital, is shortage of vital technical skills and technological infrastructure. There is poor road network that connects cities thereby making it more difficult to move around while starting up a business. More still, poor internet connection, lousy security systems and non-steady power supply have a devastating effect on SMEs.
- **Competitions with Foreign Companies:** One of the major challenges Nigerian SMEs face is the competition that arise from big foreign companies that establish their businesses in Nigeria. Most known brands which have been long enough in the market and have recorded huge success over the history have invested in the Nigerian markets, this bigger companies pose as a threat to the SMEs because the consumers already believe in their product, also, they have better business strategy and more money to spend on advertisement. Examples of these businesses are; MTN in telecommunication industry, Shoprite in Retail stores sectors, Shell in Oil sector, etc.
- **Lack of Organizational and Management Skills:** Many SMEs are started by young people who just got excited about an idea and decided to set it up and make money out of it. Mostly, these young people do not take into consideration, the fact that they need to hire an expert to help in some aspect of the business, or they do not have the money to hire. They as well do not have the patience to drop everything and try to acquire these knowledge first. As a result of this, many start-ups have collapsed due to poor management.
- **Inability to form Partnership:** Most start-ups go into partnership to save their businesses. This is not the case with Nigerian Start-ups. As partnership negotiations are always done by a third party, Most Nigerian young business owners are not educated enough to understand fully what partnership entails, as a result, they decide not to go into it because of the fear of being defrauded.
- **Human Resource Factor:** The type of employees in a business, especially start-ups can influence the success of that business. Therefore, big and rich companies spend money to hire professional human resource personnel's who make sure that they scrutinize and employ the best candidates for the company. In the case of Nigerian SMEs, their lack of huge capital limit their choices of employee's recruitment pattern, as a result of this, they run the risk of employing the wrong people who will eventually collapse their business.

- **Lack of Marketing Strategy and professional Skills:** Even when Nigerian SMEs owners manage to launch their businesses, one of the major challenges they face is how to create awareness on their product and or services. They simply do not take this into consideration and at the time this comes to light, they try to engage in some marketing activities that usually fail because they do not have the required marketing skills.

Roles of SMEs in Economic Development

According to Eniola (2014), a healthy and fast-growing SME is an instrument for socially sustainable development and ignites the economy of a country. This positive influence it has on the economy can be seen in various sectors, Eniola (2014) goes further to explain more about these sectors and how SMEs impacts them:

Generating Employment: Employment generation is one of the most important reasons for supporting the creation and promotions of SMEs. SMEs are responsible for half of new jobs created by countries economy annually; also, as most SMEs start from the scratch, they create valuable jobs that help to focus on the immediate need of the people. Eniola (2014) pointed out that the “Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria” estimates that “SMEs employs 87.9% of the workforce in the private sector”. So, it is very important to support and promote SMEs development as it invariably enhances the development of the country’s economy.

Poverty Alleviation: Many poverty alleviation programs are built around SMEs, this is because, SMEs create numerous opportunities for the citizens to get job and these programs help citizens to become their own boss while helping to improve the standard of living in the society. Through these programs, SMEs play a vital role in bridging the gap between the poor and the rich in the society.

Transformation of Indigenous Technology: Eniola (2014) states that looking back in history, most giant manufacturing industries like Honda of Japan started as a small firm. This shows that SMEs can use readily available raw materials and transform them to something big, of course with recourse to some sample imported goods that might enhance their productivity or their transformation speed.

Production of Intermediate Goods: Some SMEs make different intermediate goods needed for finishing in some large firms, in this way, they eliminate the competition from these large firms, instead they foster collaboration which helps for smooth production process, both for the big firms and the SMEs.

The Role of the Government and others in the Development of SMEs

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With all the challenges facing SMEs, and the fact that SMEs account for a huge part of the country's economy, it is therefore necessary that the government should play a vital role in the development of SMEs. In Nigeria, the journey of SMEs and government intervention has evolved over the years. Different intervention programs with the intention of encouraging and supporting SMEs have been introduced in the past. These programs have helped in improving the state of the SMEs in Nigeria Atsu and Ojong (2014). Apart from the direct government intervention program, there are other many programs that support SMEs in Nigeria. According to Biz Watch Nigeria (2018) there were seven different intervention funds available to Nigerian SMEs. These programs made funds available for people that had a good business idea but did not have enough capital to pull it off. To be eligible for the funds, they had to put up a good business plan, which was supposed to explain in detail, the type of market and product and or services the entrepreneur wanted to venture in, present a plan for the future of the business. Below are examples of these programs and what they represent.

BoI Funds: The Bank of Industry offers lots of opportunities aimed at promoting SMEs in Nigeria and by so doing, help the masses and boost the economy. Among different opportunities it offers are: Graduate Entrepreneurship Funds; This fund is usually focused on young innovative graduates, they are supposed to submit their business ideas, and the best ideas are given access to funds between N500,000 and N2 million. (€1218.44 to €4873.74). Then there is the Cottage Agro Processing fund for agricultural development purposes, Fashion funds for designers, etc.

Tony Elumelu Fund: Tony Elumelu is a Nigerian Economist who founded this intervention program in 2010. This program has allotted the sum of \$100 million for 1000 African entrepreneurs. This fund is to be distributed in a way that \$10 million is distributed every year for 10 years. The program concentrates on areas of Agriculture, Fashion and design, Light manufacturing, ICT, etc.

GroFin Fund: This is a development financier that has allotted \$500 million to funding Nigerian micro, small and medium businesses (MSMEs) across Nigeria. It has categorized its program into; Aspire Nigeria Fund, Growth Africa Fund, Small Growing Business Fund, Aspire Small Business Fund and Aspire Growth Fund.

Shell LiveWire: Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, Provides support for entrepreneurs within the age of 18 through 35. This support in the form of funds or by organized training exercises is meant to educate the young people on how to start their own business.

Table 1: Comparison of Features: Large Firms Vs. SMEs

LARGE FIRMS	SMES
Large firm size	Small scale firms
Ample resources (capital, equity, credit)	Limited resources (internal findings)
Experience, portfolio and specialization Higher market share	Limited experience/no specialization. Small market share
Brand identity	No brand identity or very limited
Higher net income growth, lower cost/high efficiency	Lower net income and no economy of scale
Very complex in structure and management	Flexibility and agility due to no complex structures.
Slower decision making and bureaucratic	Faster decision making
Difficulty to respond to changing external environment	Flexibility and agility due to no complex structures
Resistance to change	Entrepreneurial drive, motivation, risks-seeking behaviour and perseverance
Complex process to manage customer relations	Proximity to customer relations
Liability of being too big	Liability of smallness and newness
Complicated production lines/processes	Non complicated production and absorption of demands
Deployment of advanced ICTs to manage business processes	Limited deployment of ICTs, but flexibility of adaption
Legitimacy, social ties and networks	No or limited legitimacy and acceptance, no social ties and limited networks.

Source: Arobo (2022)

Benefits of SMEs Adopting Digital Marketing

Arobo (2022) highlighted them below:

Develop brand awareness, boost their visibility, increase sales, increase online conversation rate reduce their marketing budget, improve customer engagement, influence purchasing decisions, generate leads and track their return on investment

Theoretical Framework

Technology acceptance model provided the theoretical base for the study. Technology acceptance model is a theoretical construct developed by Fred Davis in 1989 cited in Agbo, (2015). According to Agbo (2015), the theory is an information system theory that illustrates how prospective or potential users of a new technology or information system come to accept and use it. Technology acceptance model postulates that when a new information system like the digital media, is

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introduced, the likelihood that the target users will readily adopt it is consequent upon two major factors, the perceived utilities and perceived ease-of application. The former refers to the extent to which a user thinks the new technology would be useful to him while the latter is the extent to which he hopes that use of the new technology would be simple and free from constrains. In the model, Fred Davis presupposes that there is a relationship between an individual's propensity to accept and use a new technology and his perceptions of the system. According to him the attitudes or behaviours of users towards a new technology is determined by its perceived usefulness and ease of application. Technology acceptance model is relevant to this study because the rise of search engines, advanced mobile devices and interfaces, peer to peer communication vehicles, e-mails, content creation and online social networks have extended marketers' ability to reach buyers in contemporary times Paquette (2013). The model essentially will help establish whether SME's owners have accepted or are applying the use of e-mail marketing, content marketing and social media platforms in promoting their activities or sales.

Empirical

Arobo (2022) carried out a study which was to investigate the value and influence of digital marketing on the competitive participation of small and medium-sized establishments in the business environment. This study applies a qualitative research approach which involved five (5) companies which operate as SMEs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, to help provide the primary data, where respondents to the best of their abilities, provided important information that helped in conducting this study. Secondary data/information relevant to the study was also gathered through peer-reviewed articles, journals and websites. The study concludes with the view that digital marketing is identified as creative and an efficient method of acquiring, growing and maintaining customer relationships. Online platforms such as websites, industry-specific outlets and forums, have been identified to be the most beneficial for SMEs. It further recommends that newly established and existing SMEs should adopt digital marketing because of the huge benefits they can gain in creating brand awareness, and building brand trust amongst customers.

Amin (2021) carried out a study on how digital marketing, which is represented by two proxies, affects business performance. Sixty-three (63) owners/managers of medium-sized businesses in Abuja responded to the survey questionnaire, which was conducted using a simple random sampling technique. The data was analyzed using inferential statistical tools, notably Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results of the study revealed that the two constructs of digital marketing investigated were positively and significantly correlated to business performance. Furthermore, the regression study revealed that both social media and e-mail marketing are highly significant to the model, with 53.8 percent of the variance in the dependent variable explained by the variance in the independent variables. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that social media marketing was the more often used digital marketing construct,

explaining more to the model than e-mail marketing. Further research was proposed as recommendations.

Kawira, Mukulu and Odhiambo (2019) carried out a study to examine the effect of digital marketing on the performance of MSMEs in Kenya. The study was guided by positivism research philosophy. It utilized a descriptive survey design. The study population included 8,526 licensed MSMEs in Tharaka-Nithi County. Stratified sampling and random sampling techniques were employed to arrive at the study sample. Data was collected using questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed using both the descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics included frequency distributions, mean and measures of dispersion while the inferential statistics were t-test, multiple regression analysis, Karl-Pearson correlation coefficient and F-test. The findings of this study revealed that digital marketing accounted for 38.8% of the variation in performance of MSMEs. The study further showed a strong positive correlation between digital marketing and performance of MSMEs. The descriptive findings on digital marketing and performance of MSMEs ascertained that a majority of MSME's owners and managers that utilized digital marketing perceived the performance of their firms to be growing. The bivariate regression findings further revealed that digital marketing had a significant positive effect on the performance of MSMEs. This study recommends that owners/managers of MSMEs in Kenya should embrace digital marketing as a strategy towards improved performance. Embedded on the high mobile phone penetration and improved internet connectivity in Kenya, coupled with vibrant and easy to use social media platforms, entrepreneurs in Kenya should position such tools for marketing purposes. Masika (2013) found that, the use of mobile marketing can provide advertisers with a big opportunity of enhancing consumer exposure to brand, thus increasing brand awareness. This study investigated mobile marketing practices at Safari.com and how they influence brand equity. The results showed that some marketers are confident in mobile as a means of enhancing equity due to the high customer adoption of mobile app and mobile web. Top brands such as Safaricom are spending significant amounts of money on mobile advertising for brand building and for reinforcing the sales push. Mobile phones are making it easier for cross-media messages to get to individuals more than any other connected devices.

Oztamur and Karakadilar (2014) explored the role of social media for SMEs as a new marketing strategy tool for firms' performance. Using case study method and the quantitative research technique, the authors did a comparative analysis of four American and Turkish companies Facebook and Twitter accounts in terms of the numbers of likes and followers, richness of content, interaction with customers and the use of language. The major objective of their study was to compare how these companies engage with their customers online and use social media as a strategic tool of social network marketing. The findings of the study reveal that the common problems of the Turkish SMEs are related with using formal language during the customers' communication process and creating unattractive content lacking richness to attract their customers' attention in their social media activities. On the other hand, SMEs in America are less

effective in using Twitter when compared to their Facebook accounts. The findings, therefore, showed that even though the two countries utilize the social media for marketing communication, however, the platforms that they frequently use differ from one another.

Gap in Knowledge

Based on the findings of the literature reviewed, it was observed that none of the studies had carried out any research on digital marketing and performance of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. This therefore is the research gap that this study wants to fill.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey research design to find out the effect of digital marketing on performance of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. The study focused on digital marketing in four SMEs numbering two small sized enterprises and two medium sized enterprises with respondents of 137 employees and this number was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to the respondents, 124 copies of the questionnaire that were fully and properly filled were retrieved giving a recovery rate of 90.5%. The instrument adopted a five-point Likert scale. Each item on the Likert scale was rated. The scale was anchored as follows: 1 = undecided, 2 = strongly disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was designed according to the objectives of the research study. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) ver. 23 program was used in the data analysis. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, and mean scores were used for data analysis. Inferential statistics such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in analyzing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the hypotheses at 5% level of significance.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 2: E-MAIL MARKETING

S/N	E-MAIL MARKETING PARAMETERS	UD	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Email marketing is used in my organization.	0	0	0	8	116	124	4.94
2	The delivery rate of email marketing is quite good in reaching	0	0	4	0	120	124	4.94

	target customers and has enhanced market share.							
3	The Emails are very informative..	0	0	11	16	97	124	4.69
4	E-mail marketing is important for SMEs.	0	0	10	16	98	124	4.71
5	Email marketing has effectively and steadily linked products' brands and customers.	0	0	9	15	100	124	4.73
	Average Mean							4.802

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2023

The above table shows that the average mean is 4.802, this implies that the respondents strongly agreed with the E-mail Marketing utilized by the respective organizations.

TABLE 3: CONTENT MARKETING

S/N	CONTENT MARKETING	UD	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Content marketing is used in my organization.	0	0	3	0	121	124	4.95
2	Content marketing has provided a consistent and better customer experience.	0	0	4	12	108	124	4.84
3	Customers are actively engaged with content marketing.	0	0	0	8	116	124	4.94
4	Content marketing helps in acquiring and retaining customers for SMEs.	0	0	5	0	119	124	4.92
5	Content marketing helps SMEs to create brand trust.	0	0	11	19	94	124	4.67
	Average Mean							4.864

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2023

The above table shows that the average mean is 4.864, this implies that the respondents strongly agreed with the Content Marketing utilized by the respective organizations.

Table 4: SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

S/N	SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PARAMETERS	UD	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	My organization uses social media marketing to promote its brand.	0	0	11	17	96	124	4.69
2	My organization face challenges in using social media to market its goods and services.	0	0	9	16	99	124	4.73
3	Social media marketing helps SMEs to create brand awareness.	0	4	0	1	119	124	4.93
4	My organization regularly updates its social media posts.	0	0	4	12	108	124	4.84
5	The organization makes use of social media statistics analyzers such as Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, Hootsuite Analytics, IBM Social Analytics, Oracle Analytics etc	0	0	0	8	116	124	4.94
	Average Mean							4.826

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 4 shows that the average mean is 4.826, this implies that the respondents strongly agreed with the Social Media Marketing used by the respective organizations.

Table 5: CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

S/N	CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT PARAMETERS	UD	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The organization digital platforms provide easy access and clarity of information when needed.	0	0	4	1	119	124	4.93
2	Prompt speed in dealing with matters.	0	0	7	22	95	124	4.71
3	The organization insists on error free records.	0	0	9	19	96	124	4.70
4	The organization provides quality content in its digital platforms.	0	0	5	20	99	124	4.76
5	Customers are in love with our digital platforms.	0	0	3	1	120	124	4.94
	Average Mean							4.808

Source: Field Survey 2023

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The above table shows that the average mean is 4.808, this implies that the respondents strongly agreed with the level of customer engagement in the various organizations.

Table 6: Summary of the Correlation Result of the Hypothesis.

		Email_Marketing	Content_Marketing	Social_Media_Marketing	Customer_Engagement
Email_Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.015	.050	.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.866	.579	.005
	N	124	124	124	124
Content_Marketing	Pearson Correlation	-.015	1	-.351**	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.866		.000	.308
	N	124	124	124	124
Social_Media_Marketing	Pearson Correlation	.050	-.351**	1	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.579	.000		.711
	N	124	124	124	124
Customer_Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.250**	.092	.034	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.308	.711	
	N	124	124	124	124

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Computation: SPSS ver.23

The above table indicates that Email Marketing and Customer Engagement have a correlation coefficient of 0.250, and a p-value of 0.005, this indicates a weak relationship and it is statistically significant. Content Marketing and Customer Engagement have a correlation coefficient of 0.092 and a p-value of 0.308 this indicates a weak relationship and it is not statistically significant. Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement have a correlation of 0.034, and a p-value of 0.711 this indicates a very weak relationship and it is not statistically significant.

Findings

Email Marketing and Customer Engagement

The findings above depicts that there was a significant effect between Email Marketing and Customer Engagement. This finding is consistent with previous findings of Direct Marketing Association (2013).

Content Marketing and Customer Engagement

The findings above depicts that there was no significant effect between Content Marketing and Customer Engagement . This finding is inconsistent with the previous findings of Puro (2013) who postulated that Content Marketing has a significant effect on Customer Engagement

Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

The findings above depicts that there was no significant effect between Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement. This finding is inconsistent with previous findings of Vivek et al., (2012) who all postulated that Social Media Marketing has a significant effect on Customer Engagement .

Conclusion

Email Marketing and Customer Engagement

The organizations have channeled all appropriate resources into developing an effective Email Marketing strategy that effectively generated Customer Engagement.

Content Marketing and Customer Engagement

The organizations have not sufficiently developed their Content Marketing strategies that can effectively make their customers to be actively engaged.

Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement

The organizations have not sufficiently invested on Social Media Marketing strategies that can make their customers engaged.

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