

Digital Marketing Adoption among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates digital marketing adoption among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria, focusing on limited resources, lack of expertise, and inadequate infrastructure. Using a descriptive survey design, data were gathered from 387 participants via structured questionnaires from a population of 11,663 registered SME owners. The study involved descriptive statistics and data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings reveal high digital marketing adoption, with social media platforms leading followed by mobile marketing tools and short message service (SMS). Email marketing and multimedia brochures are also significant, while search engine optimization (SEO) and on-hold mobile ringtones are less utilised. The overall adoption indicates consistent use of digital marketing. The study concludes that SMEs should maintain a robust digital presence, focusing on social media and mobile marketing to stay competitive. The low SEO adoption suggests the need for enhanced education and support. Recommendations include targeted training to improve SEO and broader digital marketing skills for SME owners.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Social Media Platforms, Mobile Marketing, Multimedia Brochure, SMEs

1. Introduction

In the digital era, technology has profoundly transformed the business landscape, introducing several innovative marketing strategies. Among these, digital marketing stands out as a crucial approach that allows organizations to optimize sales and disseminate essential information about products and services. Digital marketing involves promoting products or services through electronic media to connect with consumers. The widespread adoption of digital technologies and media has been driven by the rapid embrace of digital culture by target audiences. According to Laila et al. (2024), digital marketing achieves marketing objectives by leveraging digital technologies and media. This shift towards e-commerce and digital interactions has enabled businesses to engage in direct and interactive communication with consumers, facilitating transactions with online retailers (Alhalwachi et al., 2024).

The 21st century has witnessed a fundamental shift towards a networked information economy, fundamentally altering the production and exchange of goods and services. The digital economy, adopted by both developed and developing countries, creates a connected economic system that allows unprecedented interactions between businesses and consumers (Agbotoba & Adebambo, 2021). This transformation has sparked significant

interest among business operators, practitioners, and scholars in digital marketing, particularly for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs play a crucial role in creating wealth and employment, significantly impacting the economy when effectively supported in a growing business environment (Jadhav et al., 2023). While digital marketing has been linked to SME growth and survival in Nigeria, many SMEs operate inefficiently and ineffectively due to a lack of business knowledge among human resources. Suroso and Rafinda (2021) emphasize that this knowledge gap is a critical barrier to effective digital marketing adoption.

Many SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria, struggle with digital marketing adoption, leading to poor performance compared to competitors who effectively utilize digital marketing strategies. Current studies indicate that digital marketing benefits SMEs by enabling them to reach wider markets, increase awareness of goods and services, attract new customers, and enhance performance. Chatterjee et al. (2022) highlights these benefits but also note that many SMEs in developing countries have not fully leveraged digital marketing due to various challenges. Bollweg et al. (2020) further explain that these challenges include limited resources, lack of expertise, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder SMEs' ability to fully utilize digital marketing strategies. The SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria, are significantly affected by these challenges. Limited resources, lack of expertise, and inadequate infrastructure are major barriers to the effective adoption of digital marketing strategies, as noted by Apulu et al. (2011) and Inuwa et al. (2023). If these problems are not addressed, SMEs in Lagos State will continue to underperform, potentially leading to business failures, reduced competitiveness, and lost economic opportunities. The slow adoption of digital marketing will hinder their growth and survival, limiting their contribution to the economy.

Several recent studies have highlighted various aspects of this issue. Suroso and Rafinda (2021) studied the inefficiencies in SME operations due to a lack of business knowledge and recommended further research on enhancing digital literacy and business knowledge among SME owners. Chatterjee et al. (2022) explored the benefits of digital marketing for SMEs and suggested further research on overcoming adoption barriers. Bollweg et al. (2020) investigated the slow adoption of digital marketing by SMEs and recommended more studies on effective digital marketing strategies tailored for SMEs. Ritz et al. (2019) examined the challenges SMEs face in adopting technology in marketing and proposed research on support mechanisms for SMEs to integrate digital marketing. Ajayi et al. (2024) examined marketing innovation and performance of SMEs in Oyo Township.

Despite the increasing prevalence of digital marketing practices globally, there remains paucity of empirical on digital marketing adoption by SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the level of digital marketing adoption among SMEs in Lagos State. Understanding these dynamics can help SMEs become more proactive and strategic, crucial for their growth and survival. Digital marketing has been shown to have a significant impact on the performance and survival of SMEs in prior research. However, most of these studies have concentrated on large businesses and neglected SMEs. Studies by Mohd Salleh et al. (2017) and Anderson (2021) underscore that small and medium-sized enterprises still have a long way to go before fully implementing digital marketing.

In Lagos State, Nigeria, SMEs face various challenges in adopting digital marketing strategies, including limited resources, lack of expertise, and inadequate infrastructure. This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by evaluating the digital marketing strategies of SMEs and providing insights that can help them leverage digital tools for growth and survival. This research is timely and essential for increasing the knowledge of SMEs about

the digital marketing tools at their disposal, helping them become more proactive and strategic in their decision-making, which is crucial for their growth and survival.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing describes the methods used to promote a business, service, or product via cyberspace. Digital marketing is a technology application that offers a business the opportunity to interconnect with clients regularly. This has transformed the ways both prospective and actual customers communicate through the use of phones and other devices (Hosseini et al., 2016; Arghya et al., 2020). Although it has some similarities with internet marketing, its primary difference from more conventional forms of advertising is the use of metrics derived from online interactions to gauge the efficacy of a company's advertising campaigns. The emergence of web presence in most companies in the 21st century has encouraged online marketing which allows business organization to put banners on website as a form of advertising, digital marketing has incorporated customer relationship management (CRM) which has improved interactions between business enterprises and their customers (Kingsnorth, 2019).

When it comes to digital marketing, the majority of companies rely on their websites. These sites serve as the hub for all of their online activities, including search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) ads, social media marketing, and email marketing (Kingsnorth, 2019). Digital marketing, in the context of this study on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos State, is defined as the utilisation of online platforms and digital technologies to promote products and services, engage with customers, and drive business growth. This includes, but is not limited to, social media marketing, search engine optimisation (SEO), email marketing, content marketing, and online advertising.

2.2 Digital Marketing Strategies

Establishing digital marketing strategy is an important element to using digital marketing (Kalei, 2020). Marketing business products and brand would not achieve its target goal without incorporating it on the internet. Knowing what to accomplish without knowing how to go about it often leads to failure in launching digital marketing campaign (Gibson, 2018). Hence, having a good digital marketing strategy involves a digital marketing plan which includes defining the brand, building buyers personas, creating SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) goals, choosing the relevant strategy, selecting digital budget, brainstorming the strategy, launch campaigns and track results. The implementation of digital marketing into business strategy has become a more regularly used strategy among SMEs as a means that provides organization the ability to reach clients by establishing innovative practices, combining technology with traditional marketing strategies (Gibson, 2018). Digital marketing strategy helps organizations achieve their marketing goals through establishing a link between customization and mass distribution (Kaufman et al., 2023).

There are several digital marketing strategies that exists, these include: social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), e-mail marketing, blogs and websites and marketing products and services through online personalities and social influencers; companies can also use other digital marketing strategies such as video advertisements, sponsoring content on more popular websites and carrying out on-line sales such as flash sales. Businesses can utilize these advertisement channels to promote their products digitally to a wider audience and increase their

competitive edge; digital marketing strategies also allow businesses to target specific customers with specific marketing strategies depending on their age, social status, preferences and financial capabilities (Ng'ang'a, 2015).

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive survey design and was carried out in Lagos State, Nigeria. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire from a target population of 11,663 and sample size of 387 participants who are owners of registered SMEs in the study area. The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Each of the study variables was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, while descriptive method was used to analyse the data, The descriptive statistics include mean, frequency, tables and percentages.

4. Data Analyses and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of respondents

To achieve the study's objectives, 400 questionnaires were distributed (exceeding the minimum sample size of 387). 386 questionnaires were retrieved, with 373 deemed well-filled and usable, resulting in a 93.3% response rate. According to Moser and Kalton (2017), a response rate above 30-40% is significant, validating this rate as adequate for analysis. The high response rate reflects strong engagement from respondents, providing a robust dataset and enhancing the reliability of the findings.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Item	Description	Frequency	Percent
Age	less than 25 years	8	2.1
	26 - 35 years	94	25.2
	36 - 45 years	107	28.7
	46 - 55 years	120	32.2
	above 55 years	44	11.8
	Total	373	100.0
Gender	Male	257	68.9
	Female	116	31.1
	Total	373	100.0
Level of Education	O'Level	12	3.2
	Diploma/NCE	83	22.3
	HND/Bachelor Degree	231	61.9
	Postgraduate (Master/PhD.)	47	12.6
	Total	373	100.0
Number of Employees	1 - 10 Employees	156	41.8
	11 - 50 Employees	159	42.6
	51 - 200 Employees	58	15.5
	Total	373	100.0
Business Ownership	Sole proprietorship	277	74.3
	Partnership	96	25.7
	Total	373	100.0
Position	Owner	228	61.1
	Manager	145	38.9
	Total	373	100.0
Trade	Wholesale	280	75.1
	Retail	93	24.9
	Total	373	100.0
Agriculture	Yes	122	32.7
	No	251	67.3
	Total	373	100.0
Manufacturing	Yes	142	38.1
	No	231	61.9
	Total	373	100.0
Hospitality, Tourism and Catering	Yes	18	4.8
	No	355	95.2
	Total	373	100.0
Year of establishment	less than 5 years	107	28.7
	5 - 10 years	149	39.9
	11 - 15 years	59	15.8
	16 - 20 years	26	7.0
	above 20 years	32	8.6
	Total	373	100.0
Have you adopted Digital Marketing for your business operations?	Yes	373	96.0
	No	0	0.0
	Total	373	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Report (2024)

The demographic characteristics of respondents in Lagos State, Nigeria, reveal in Table 1 that most SME owners and managers are mid-career (46-55 years), with a notable male dominance (68.9% male, 31.1% female). A high educational attainment is observed, with 61.9% holding HND/Bachelor degrees and 12.6% having postgraduate qualifications,

indicating a well-informed group likely open to digital marketing. Most businesses are small-scale (41.8% with 1-10 employees, 42.6% with 11-50 employees), predominantly sole proprietorships (74.3%), and mainly engaged in wholesale trade (75.1%). The majority (61.1%) of respondents are business owners, providing strategic insights. An overwhelming 96% have adopted digital marketing, indicating its essential role in business competitiveness. The high response rate and diverse demographic backgrounds suggest tailored digital marketing strategies are needed to accommodate varied experiences and business sizes, with the sectoral focus on trade reflecting specific needs in online sales and distribution. The gender disparity highlights potential areas for policy intervention to encourage balanced participation.

4.2 Digital Marketing Adoption among SMEs in Lagos State

Table 2 provides a detailed view of the extent to which digital marketing tools are adopted by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. The table shows both internet and non-internet digital marketing platforms and rank their usage, giving insights into preferences and trends among SMEs.

Table 2: Ranking of Digital Marketing Adoption among SMEs (ALL demographics)

Code	Description	Mean	STD	LR	GR
Internet Platform		4.106	0.894	1	
bIP1	Social Media platform (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Threads, Tik Tok)	4.727	0.458	1	1
bIP2	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	3.381	1.136	4	7
bIP3	Email marketing	4.155	0.575	3	6
bIP4	Multimedia brochures	4.161	0.673	2	5
Non-Internet Platform		4.009	0.961	2	
bNIP1	Cell Phone (short message service)	4.316	0.641	2	3
bNIP2	Cell Phone (Multimedia message Services)	4.386	0.715	1	2
bNIP3	Call back	4.239	0.595	3	4
bNIP4	On-hold mobile ring tone	3.097	1.139	4	8
Aggregate DMA		4.058	0.929		

Source: Authors' Computation (2024)

Social media platforms rank the highest (mean of 4.727), reinforcing their critical role in SME marketing strategies. This is followed by cell phone MMS (mean of 4.386) and SMS (mean of 4.316), highlighting the importance of mobile communications. Email marketing (mean of 4.155) and multimedia brochures (mean of 4.161) also rank high, suggesting their effectiveness in digital marketing campaigns. Conversely, SEO (mean of 3.381) and on-hold mobile ring tones (mean of 3.097) rank lower, indicating areas where adoption is less uniform and may need further emphasis or training. The aggregate digital marketing adoption (DMA) score of 4.058, with a standard deviation of 0.929, reflects a generally high level of digital marketing adoption among SMEs in Lagos State.

The high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations for most tools indicate consistent use across the respondent base, implying that digital marketing is well-integrated into the business operations of these SMEs. The implications of these results are significant. The high adoption rates of social media and mobile-based marketing tools suggest that these platforms are viewed as essential for reaching and engaging customers. This widespread use points to the necessity for SMEs to maintain a strong digital presence to remain competitive. The variability in the adoption of tools like SEO suggests opportunities for further education

and support to help SMEs fully leverage these strategies.

The findings from the study reveal significant insights into the level of digital marketing adoption among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. These findings align with a considerable body of existing literature, which underscores the critical role of digital marketing tools in enhancing the business operations of SMEs. The prominence of social media platforms as the most adopted digital marketing tool among Lagos SMEs is supported by numerous studies. For instance, Osakwe et al. (2020), social media marketing has been pivotal for SMEs due to its accessibility and ability to foster direct customer engagement. Similarly, Nwaizugbo and Anukam (2021) highlight that SMEs leverage social media to build brand awareness and enhance customer loyalty without incurring substantial costs. Taneja and Toombs (2014) highlight how social media platforms provide SMEs with an unparalleled opportunity to engage with a broad audience, foster customer relationships, and promote their products and services effectively. The widespread use of social media aligns with the observations of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who assert that social media has revolutionised marketing by enabling interactive communication and fostering brand loyalty.

Mobile-based marketing tools, such as MMS and SMS, also show high adoption rates among SMEs in Lagos. This trend is consistent with global findings that highlight the effectiveness of mobile marketing in delivering personalised messages and ensuring immediate customer reach. Leppäniemi and Karjaluo (2008) discuss the efficiency of mobile marketing in providing timely and direct communication, which is especially relevant in regions with high mobile phone penetration, as noted by Aker and Mbiti (2010). Email marketing and multimedia brochures are also popular among Lagos SMEs, reflecting their effectiveness in digital marketing campaigns. The continued relevance of email marketing is well-documented by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), who note its cost-effectiveness and ability to nurture customer relationships through targeted messaging. Email marketing's high adoption is supported by Kalu and Ejiofor (2019), who argue that email marketing is effective for maintaining customer engagement and delivering personalized content. Baggott (2011) further emphasises the role of email marketing in driving repeat business and maintaining customer engagement, supporting the findings of this study.

The relatively lower adoption of SEO indicates a potential area for improvement. A study by Dholakia and Kshetri (2020) suggests that many SMEs lack the technical knowledge to effectively utilize SEO, which may explain its lower adoption rate. Furthermore, SEO requires continuous effort and expertise, which may not be feasible for all SMEs due to resource constraints (Alford & Page, 2015). Jones, Borgman, and Ulusoy (2015) highlight the importance of SEO for enhancing online visibility and attracting organic traffic. The lower utilisation of SEO among Lagos SMEs suggests that additional training and resources could help these businesses fully exploit this critical digital marketing tool. On-hold mobile ring tones, the least adopted tool, reflect a trend observed in broader digital marketing literature.

Sundar and Kim (2014) discuss the limited integration of such tools into comprehensive marketing strategies, which aligns with the findings from this study. The aggregate digital marketing adoption score reflects a high level of integration of digital tools into the business operations of Lagos SMEs. This is significant for maintaining competitiveness, as highlighted by Durkin, McGowan, and McKeown (2013), who argue that digital marketing is essential for SMEs to thrive in the digital age. Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with existing literature, reinforcing the importance of digital marketing in SME operations. By effectively leveraging digital marketing tools, SMEs in

Lagos State can enhance customer engagement, improve business performance, and secure a competitive edge.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the extensive adoption of digital marketing tools among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings indicate a strong preference for social media platforms and mobile-based marketing tools, such as MMS and SMS, reflecting their critical role in modern marketing strategies. Email marketing and multimedia brochures also demonstrate high adoption rates, underscoring their effectiveness in digital campaigns. However, the lower usage of SEO suggests a need for increased focus on training and resource allocation to maximize its potential benefits. The overall high level of digital marketing adoption among Lagos SMEs suggests that these businesses are keenly aware of the importance of maintaining a robust digital presence to remain competitive. This trend aligns with global observations, which emphasize the role of digital marketing in enhancing customer engagement and business performance. The study's findings contribute to the existing body of literature, reinforcing the necessity for SMEs to integrate digital marketing tools into their operations strategically.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that SMEs in Lagos State receive targeted training and resources to improve their understanding and utilisation of SEO, as this area shows relatively low adoption. Emphasis should continue to be placed on social media and mobile marketing, given their high adoption rates and effectiveness in engaging customers and driving business growth. Email marketing and multimedia brochures should also remain integral components of SMEs' marketing strategies. Furthermore, regular reviews and updates to digital marketing strategies are essential to stay current with trends and technologies. Support from government and industry bodies is critical to bridging the digital skills gap among SMEs, providing necessary resources and training to enhance their digital marketing capabilities.

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