

SOCIAL MEDIA: A MARKETING TOOL FOR DIGITAL MARKETING OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

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Abstract

This study investigated the utilization of social media platforms as a tool for the digitalization of marketing by SME managers in Anambra state. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested. The population comprised 2754 registered SMEs owners in Anambra State out of which 100 SMEs managers were randomly selected. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Social Media Marketing Tool Questionnaire" (SMMTQ) which was validated by three experts. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88. The researchers and two research assistants collected data for the study using the direct approach method and a 91% return rate was recorded. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while a t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. This study revealed that SME managers in Anambra State utilized Facebook marketing tools to a high extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that SME managers should acquaint themselves with the state-of-the-art marketing technologies powered by social media to create opportunities to reach target customers and generate new ideas for business growth. The government should provide adequate infrastructure like electricity, internet connections, and buildings that support the utilization of social media platforms

Keywords: Social Media, Marketing tool, Digital marketing, SMEs, Entrepreneurs

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are a veritable tool for economic growth and development. They play a key role in promoting prosperity by creating new jobs and increasing a region's economic prosperity (Mills and McCarthy, 2016). Small and medium enterprises operate in a complex and unpredictable business environment, faced with the constant challenge of competing and providing customer value against established business organizations due to their size and economic capacity (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011). SMEs must increase or maintain a healthy sales and profit level to ensure their survival. Thus, 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 line with adapting to new and innovative ways to improve and adapt to rapid transformational growth (Ainul et al., 2020).

In the recent past, the Internet has changed not only people's relationships by creating new platforms for social engagement but also people's ability to contribute and carry out entrepreneurial day-to-day activities. The introduction of the internet in the 1960s has propelled many firms to network via multiple computers, reaching out to each other for the sole purposes of expansion and growth. In this regard, virtually all management domains and employees in both large and medium firms, and small and medium enterprises now access computers via the internet to constantly create awareness. Organizations have continued to prioritize the need to boost their brand productivity, increase their customer base, and realize more turnover by applying effective digital marketing strategies (Kamal, 2016).

Digital marketing has become a new phenomenon that brings together customization and mass distribution to accomplish marketing goals. Technological convergence and the multiplication of devices have led to an opening up of how we think about marketing on the Internet and have pushed the boundaries towards a new concept of digital marketing—user-centered, more measurable, ubiquitous, and interactive (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán 2016). Digital marketing is the practice of promoting the goods or services of businesses online utilizing digital technology, such as display advertisements, mobile ads, and other digital media like Facebook and Google ads. (Sahem, 2023). All marketing initiatives that make use of a digital platform, such as the internet, computers, or mobile devices, are categorized as digital marketing.

In recent times, firms of different classifications in almost all industrial sectors are constantly enriching their domain with digital tools (Bokša, Šaroč & Bokšová, 2020). Digitalization is perceived to be a major topic in all aspects of society, with a keynote on the effects it poses on political, economic, and social elements (Isensee, Teuteberg, Griesse & Topi, 2020). According to Li, Su, Zhang, and Mao (2017), a brand without an effective digital marketing strategy is like a car without tires. Its efficiency and essence are 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 protect their brands with a view of increasing their customer base, making a significant impact on small and medium-sized companies and large companies (Lee et al., 2011). The application of digital tools in business activities has been found to improve business competitiveness and opportunity base for SMEs to compete on closer terms with larger organizations (Chapman et al., 2000).

SMEs Brand building and projection through digital tools involves the application of digital marketing strategies, ensuring a move from traditional marketing methods (Eggers et al., 2020). The purpose is not only to sell products and services but also to build relationships with customers.

Social media platforms and applications are often considered useful digital tools for SMEs. They enable entrepreneurs to easily identify changes and opportunities in business, through interactions and communications on the network. Social media offers opportunities to reach target customers and generate new ideas for the growth of any business (Zafar, Yasin, and Ijaz, 2012). Social media are a great opportunity to establish significant relationships and create ways of social interaction defined through dynamic exchanges between their members. Social media is booming in terms of the number and variety of platforms and users. Thus, one can find audiovisual platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and SoundCloud; image platforms such as Flickr, Picassa, Pinterest, or Instagram; general social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or specialized ones such as LinkedIn; news or bookmark aggregators such as Digg or Delicious; blogs; and wikis, etc., a vast digital arena where they become the new Web winners.

Statement of the Problem

This research delves into the need for SMEs to position their brand in a manner that ensures continued growth and maintains a competitive advantage in the market, thus not creating an avenue for its competitors to grow more to gain a massive edge in the market. Over the years, numerous SMEs have strived to achieve consistent digital growth with new innovative concepts and ideas with the intent of establishing their presence in the corporate world. Some have managed to make a significant impact; unfortunately, most of them have had a hard time establishing themselves. Evidence shows that only 51% of newly established SMEs survive over the first 5-year window. (SAB Office of Advocacy, 2012, Ripsas, et. al., 2018). It becomes very challenging for SMEs to compete with well-existing profitable companies' marketing strategies. According to Montgomery (2018), 17% of failed SME companies link their failure to a lack of comprehensive digital marketing strategy leading to poor marketing performance.

With these rapid changes in business environment and processes, it has become paramount for SMEs to follow the trends by changing their advertising platforms to remain relevant and competitive in this modern time. In the past, SMEs had predominantly relied on traditional communication tools. However, the emergence of social media has brought about a completely new set of digital tools that are not only relevant for large multinational firms but also for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This process involves building effective interactions with their target customers by regularly updating their activities and events, creating their brand image through digital networking, and stimulating quality partnerships with members from the online community. SMEs have growth potential and opportunities to add value to customers through creative products and services with great value propositions, delivered on the digital network, making it the ultimate marketing platform in this scenario. The utilization of social media as a marketing tool, therefore becomes imperative for SMEs to widen their reach by having a presence where people are increasingly hanging out. However, it seems that the extent to which SMEs utilize social media as a marketing tool is low and in most cases non-existence. This could be a contributory factor to their lack of competitiveness and consequently short lives. This situation prompted this study to provide empirical evidence on the extent of utilization of social media as a marketing tool for digital marketing among SMEs in Anambra state.

Research Aims

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent of utilization of social media as a marketing tool for digital marketing by SME managers in Anambra state. Specifically, the study intends to ascertain the extent of utilization of:

1. Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing by SMEs
2. Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing by SMEs

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra state utilize Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing?
2. To what extent do Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State utilize Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female SME managers on their extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing.
 2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female SME managers on their extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design generates quantitative data, which can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and relationships. This is justified because it aligns with the research's comprehensive scope, the need for objective data collection, and the goal of assessing the current state of SMEs', social media and digital marketing in Anambra state. The participants of this study consist of all the 2,745 legally registered SMEs who are currently involved in entrepreneurship business in Anambra state. SME managers in Anambra state were considered appropriate for this study because Anambra is a hub of various entrepreneurial ventures and establishments ranging from construction, trading or merchandise, manufacturing, and service business. In addition, the popular Onitsha main market which is the largest market in South-East Nigeria is residence in the state. A simple

random sampling technique was used to select 100 SME managers from the major markets in the 6 urban catchment areas (Onitsha, Nnewi, Ogbaru, Idemili, Awka, and Aguata) of the state. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire which is titled "Utilization of Social Media as a Marketing Strategy by SME Managers in Anambra State" consists of two parts, 1 and 2. Part 1 contains items designed to collect demographic data of respondents such as gender and area of operation. Part 2 contains 2 sections A to B. A contains eight items on the utilization of Facebook by SME managers in Anambra state. Section B contains six items on the utilization of Instagram by SME managers in Anambra state. A total of 20 items were developed for this study and 14 were valid after face and content validation. The instrument was a five-point rating scale with the following options: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Medium Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). The instrument was subjected to face validation by three research experts. Two lecturers in the Department of Technology and Vocational Education and a lecturer in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Foundations all from the Faculty of Education. The experts were given copies of the instruments, together with the topic, purpose of the study, research questions, and hypotheses. The major corrections of the experts were incorporated in the final draft of the instrument. The data was collected using the direct delivery method. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and 95 were collected after completion which represents a 95% retrieval rate. Completed copies of the questionnaire were collected from the respondents on the spot. The distribution and retrieval of the research instrument was conducted within 2 weeks. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of arithmetic mean to answer the research questions. Standard deviation was used to find the mean spread whether mean scores are homogeneous or heterogeneous. The mean responses were weighted with a real limit of numbers as follows:

Response Options	Rating	Real Limit Of Numbers
Very High Extent (VHE)	5	4.50-5.00
High Extent (HE)	4	3.50-4.49
Medium Extent (ME)	3	2.50-3.49
Low Extent (LE)	2	1.50-2.49
Very Low Extent (VLE)	1	0.50-1.49

The items with mean scores between 0.50-1.49 were considered very low extent. Items with mean scores between 1.50-2.49 were considered low extent, items with mean scores between 2.50-3.49 were considered medium extent, items with mean scores between 3.50-4.49 were considered high extent while items with mean scores between 4.50-5.00 was considered very high extent.

The null hypothesis formulated was tested using an independent sample t-test at a 0.05 level of significance. Decisions were taken based on values of associated probabilities denoted by p. When the p-value was found to be equal to or less than 0.05 alpha levels, the noted difference was said to be significant, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. However, if the p-value is found to be greater than 0.05, the noted difference was insignificant, therefore the null hypothesis was accepted.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent do Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra state utilize Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing in Anambra state?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores of Respondents on the extent of utilization of Facebook social media platform in Anambra State
(N: 95)

S/N	Facebook Social Media platforms	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Posting pictures of my brand on my Facebook page.	4.54	0.92	Very High Extent
2	Creating an online store.	4.51	0.67	Very High Extent
3	Creating Facebook ads for my brand.	4.16	0.95	High Extent
4	Post videos of my brand on Facebook.	4.31	0.74	High Extent
5	Creating Facebook promotional content for my brand using Facebook.	4.13	0.83	High Extent
6	Use Facebook to foster my relationship with customers.	4.25	0.70	High Extent
7	Working together with employees to promote my brand through Facebook.	4.19	0.75	High Extent
8	Reaching out to new customers via my Facebook page.	4.52	0.70	Very High Extent
Cluster Mean and SD		4.33	1.04	High Extent

Table 1 illustrates the ratings given by SMES managers regarding the utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing in Anambra State. The table shows that SME managers utilize items 1, 2, and 8 with mean scores of 4.54, 4.51, and 4.52, respectively, to a very high extent, while SME managers utilize items 3–7 with mean scores ranging from 4.13 to 4.31. This indicates that the Facebook social media platform has gained popularity among SME managers as a marketing tool for digitalizing their marketing, thereby widening their reach and customer base.

Furthermore, the cluster mean of 4.33 indicates that SME managers in Anambra State utilize Facebook social media platforms as a marketing tool for digital marketing to a high extent. The narrow range of standard deviations suggests that SME managers' opinions on the extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool were consistent and homogeneous.

Research Question 2

To what extent do Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra state utilize Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing in Anambra state?

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores of Respondents on the extent of utilization of Facebook social media platform in Anambra State
(N: 95)

S/n	Extent of utilization Instagram social media platforms	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
9	I utilize Instagram social media platform for my brand	3.64	1.15	high extent
10	I utilize Instagram to create awareness for my brand.	3.46	1.10	Moderate extent
11	I usually post marketing content for my brand on Instagram.	3.43	1.10	Moderate extent
12	I use Instagram to attract more customers to my brand.	3.57	1.14	high extent
13	Instagram has helped my brand to attract business partners.	3.25	1.07	moderate extent
14	I use Instagram to improve the goodwill of my brand.	3.57	1.17	high extent
Cluster mean and SD		3.49	1.12	Moderate extent

Table 1 illustrates the ratings given by SMES managers regarding the utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing in Anambra State. Data presented in Table 2 show that SME managers utilize items 9, 12, and 14 with mean scores ranging from 3.57 – 3.64 to a high extent while SME managers utilize items 10, 11 & 13 with a mean score from 3.25 - 3.46 to a moderate extent. This indicates that while some SMEs in Anambra have fully embraced and adopted Instagram as a marketing tool for their business some are still at their early stage of adoption and utilization. Additionally, the cluster mean of 3.49 suggests that all SME managers in Anambra state moderately utilize Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing. This implies that the surveyed SME managers have adopted the utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing and, hence, strive to achieve consistent digital growth with new innovative concepts and ideas with the intent of establishing their presence in the corporate world. The standard deviation scores fall all the items in Table 2 are similar, indicating a high level of agreement and consistency among the respondents. The narrow range of standard deviations suggests that SME managers' opinions on the extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool were consistent and homogeneous.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female SME managers on their extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing.

Table 3

Summary of t-test Analysis of Mean Ratings of male and female SME managers on the extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing

Facebook	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	48	4.31	.70	93	.228	.820	Accept H_0
Female	47	4.34	.47				

The analysis of data from the table suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female SME managers in Anambra State on their extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing. This is supported by the t-

test results, which yielded a t-value of 0.228 with a degree of freedom (df) equal to 93 and a p-value of 0.820.

Based on the acceptance of the hypothesis, it can be concluded that there is no significant variation in the mean responses between male and female SME managers. In other words, the gender of SME managers in Anambra State does not significantly influence their extent of utilization of Facebook as a marketing tool for digital marketing.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female SME managers on their extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing.

Table 4

Summary of t-test Analysis of Mean Ratings of male and female SME managers on the extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing

Instagram	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	48	4.31	1.19	93	.850	.398	Accept H ₀
Female	47	4.34	.83				

The analysis of data from the table suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female SME managers in Anambra State on their extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing. This is supported by the t-test results, which yielded a t-value of 0.850 with a degree of freedom (df) equal to 93 and a p-value of 0.398. Based on the acceptance of the hypothesis, it can be concluded that there is no significant variation in the mean responses between male and female SME managers. In other words, the gender of SME managers in Anambra State does not significantly influence their extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing.

Discussion of Findings

Extent of Utilization of Facebook as a marketing strategy

The study findings demonstrate that SME managers in Anambra State recognize the special significance of the projection of business activities through effective digital marketing strategies with the most prevalent marketing tool (Facebook) in this modern technological era. This is in line with the findings of Adoyi et al. (2022) which revealed that there is a significant and positive relationship between the use of Facebook and brand awareness. The study also stated that social media represents a potential vehicle to help SMEs create better brand awareness, build strong customer relationships, and increase sales. According to Punawirawan (2015), positive reviews on Facebook posts by customers will make the reader recommend the product to others more than negative reviews. A positive recommendation has the strongest positive advertising effect (Baker et al., 2016). Also not very surprising is the connection between credible reviews and higher purchase intentions (Jiménez et al., 2013). Detailed information on Facebook makes reviews for search products more credible. Reviews for experience goods are more credible than reviews for search goods if the reviewer agrees with the original review (Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013). Firms and brands on Facebook should bear in mind that consumers rely heavily on average ratings (de Langhe, 2016). In addition, Haque et al. (2013), Chigora (2016), Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2010) opined that Facebook has an effect on brand awareness toward a product or service as a result of widespread community participation and reflection on a product or service in online media. This implies that advertising on Facebook improves brand recognition, raises customer awareness of a specific brand, and acts as a tool that facilitates information exchange quickly and easily between customers and SMEs.

Extent of utilization of Instagram as a marketing strategy

The study demonstrates that digital platforms provide an excellent ability to grow an SME brand. The development of corporate identity in modern times is an important strategic requirement for SMEs to grow their brand marketing methods and processes. Digital Marketing is the avenue of electronic communication that is used by marketers to endorse goods and services in the marketplace. These findings highlight the positive significance and opportunities presented by digitalization, with specific attention on brand building and communication in the SMS business environment. According to Oyekan (2020) whose study sought to analyze the pattern of Instagram usage for advertising among youth online marketers in Niger State, SME managers were moderately ready to use Instagram and they moderately accepted the implementation of Instagram social media platforms. SME managers have realized the usefulness and the ease of use of Instagram social media platforms which in turn have influenced their acceptance of Instagram as a marketing tool for digital marketing. This study's finding is supported by the documentation of Ismail (2017), Lee, Yen, and Hsiao (2014), Phau and Teah (2009), and Von Hippel (2005) who asserted that Instagram has a positive influence on brand loyalty on products and services of businesses.

Conclusion and Implication

The demand for e-commerce has increased in recent years due to the convenience of social media platforms and the importance of the active participation of customers in the trading process for effective buying and selling. The new generation of customers with distinct purchasing profiles compared to other generations requires the use of varied and creative commercial resources to support their capabilities and motivation for purchasing power.

The findings of this study have several implications that may assist SME managers, business owners, customers, and future researchers.

The findings of this study have created insight into the extent of utilization of social by SME managers. SME managers are therefore inspired to change their marketing strategy according to technological progress.

In the past, the marketing strategy and marketing materials were in traditional form as in walk-in- customers. Hence, in efforts to cater for 21st-century customers, SME managers need to increase their technical skills so that their marketing would be efficient, effective, and enjoyable, not necessarily within the marketplace. This study shows the poor extent of social media utilization which is empowered by ICT as a marketing tool. Consequently, upon purchasing, customers will lack the purchasing skills, knowledge, and attitude to function effectively in the modern world of technological advancement. Wider coverage, increased customer quota, and practice of modern and quality purchases are some of the goals of an SME manager. Social media allows wider coverage and flexible access to quality markets.

The findings of this study also show that the current marketing tool of SME managers in the marketplace is void of contents that integrate e-commerce as a marketing strategy. Therefore, strategy planners should upgrade the commercial activity to include contents that integrate e-commerce as a marketing strategy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. SME managers should regularly organize in-service training to train and update SME owners on current trends in the utilization of social media platforms in the marketplace.
2. There should be adequate provision of infrastructure like electricity, internet connections, and buildings that support the utilization of social media platforms. Social Media platforms should

be utilized as a marketing strategy by SME managers in the marketplace to equip business owners with the requisite digital skills needed for jobs in 21st-century labor.

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