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# Digital Marketing and Sales Improvement in Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

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**Abstract** – This study examines the effect of digital marketing adoption on sales improvement of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire from randomly sampled respondents in the SMEs sector. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to the data. The results of the analysis show that adoptions of digital marketing tools such as e-mails, search engine optimization, pay per click and online advertising would significantly improve sales of SMEs. However, the result suggests that for SMEs to sustain improved sales in the sector there is need to take advantage of more than one of the digital tools as part of marketing strategies.

**Keywords** – Marketing, Digital Marketing, Sales, Small Business, Medium Enterprise, SMEs.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Business enterprises desire sales improvement in order to expand their assets and market size. As a result of increasing market competition, several strategies are devised to retain after attraction of customers with a view to raising the sales level and thereby remaining on profitable path. Improving sales however depends on marketing skills of business organizations. Hence, the idea of marketing idea rests on the notion that the application aids in boosting the performance of businesses (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013). Furthermore, marketing is considered to be a business test to determine the effect its uses exerts on vital business indices such as market share and sales improvement. Thus, it is important for Small and Medium Scale businesses to improve for the purpose of ensuring market survival and to remain relevant in the competing market. Across the World, SMEs has been found to contribute not less than 60 percent of employment in the business sectors. Consequently, the progress of SMEs in any nation is crucial as it indicates economic growth. Economic growth is the one of the aim of the governments (Ugurlu, 2009). Therefore, greater encouragements should be created to advance the SMEs. Part of the relevant factors in the promotion of small businesses is the sales which are primary in revenue generation. However, improvement of sales may be attained by providing good marketing of products of SMEs and its services. These are known to generate awareness and increased preferences for the advertised products relative to the competing products.

Consequently, digital marketing has been discovered to provide fast, far reaching and affordable for most businesses. Although a number of findings suggests that size of firms may likely affect applicability of digital channels, with SMEs being the lowest in the adoption cycle (Bordanaba-Juste, Lucia & Polo, 2012). But, large enterprises may likely possess necessary resources and capacity to successfully take advantage of existing digital channels and resources (Barnes *et al.*, 2012). Most small and medium businesses are usually at the lowest stage of business growth and at this stage, attraction and retention of customer are significant to attain a marketing goal of ensuring operational reach to customers to improve sales. Prior to the current digital world, effective and successful enterprises have thrived on “word-of-mouth” as marketing tool. However, in the current period of digital technology as a marketing tool, the strategy of marketing has moved mere goods exchange as a means of

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service provision, interaction and connection with customers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The change is made possible by innovations in technological advancement, new mode of marketing conduits, with frequent changes in the media environment (Bhattacharya & Bolton, 2000).

Sales improvement represents an increase in the volume of business revenue generated by an enterprise firm over a period of time. Improvement could be in form of increase in prices of commodities and sales of more commodities or goods (Mahmood, 2004). In another circumstance, it could be an improvement in both. However, sales improvement that occurs due to increase in price could be linked to adjustment in inflation and could therefore not linked to actual or real growth in sales of products. However, if the costs remain at low level, it could then be described as the real increase in sales. On the other hand, an increase in sales of goods may imply growth in sales and this could be due to expansion in geographical business environment, increase in the number of branches, and expansion of quantity of products as well as the number of services provided.

In the current times, the traditional methods of marketing seem to have gone beyond the SMEs. Therefore, a trending alternative which is digital marketing has largely been suggested as viable options for several SMEs. This will enable them to reach out to wider market environment for broad awareness of their goods and services. However, it is important for small businesses to know whether digital marketing will contribute to improvement of sales of their products in the competitive environment. It is important for them to know whether digital marketing can impact their business through promotion of goods and improvement of sales. About the growth of the SMEs and their financial performance trade of and pecking order theory is important to take into consider (Jindrichovska, Ugurlu and Kubickova, 2013).

This study focuses on the effect of digital marketing on sales of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Although, limited attempts have been made by several scholars to understand the link between digital marketing and sales improvement, relevance inherent in digital marketing to drive sales improvement in SMEs in Nigeria has not been addressed, hence, this study. The rest of the paper is arranged as follows. Section II presents theoretical framework, section presents literature review. Section III presents the research methodology while section IV presents the results. The last section focuses on conclusion of the paper.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marketing represents an important aspect of many business growth and development. Since activities of marketing are comparatively costly, most small businesses run on a restricted budget and for the reason that, small businesses normally maximize their marketing struggles using cheap options which include digital marketing (Haereid & Indregard, 2015). Digital Marketing connotes various forms of marketing which operates via various e-devices which may be available through mobile, on-screen and online. Digital marketing is also used in the field of marketing to define marketing activities which exploits electronic devices such as computer system, tablets, and smart-phones to interact with customers. As reported by Gartner (2008), about twenty eight per cent (28%) in the marketing field have additional budget for digital marketing aside traditional advertising. Scholars such as Kotler and Armstrong (2011) contend that although majority of the marketing strategies that are carried out in over a decade have focused more on mass marketing, the current focus in the area of marketing is currently tilted towards strategies of direct primary marketing or its complementary.

By definition, digital marketing could be viewed as a process that involve usage of digital technological know-

how to attract consumers and promote business brands in addition to building customers' preferences which are expected to result in increasing growth in business revenue (Kannan & Li, 2017). Furthermore, it enables a business enterprise to entice potential consumers or retain the existing ones through provision of "digitally generated content" to clients that could attract consumers to the business ideas (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). Some of the types of digital marketing include e-mail, mobile, social media, search engine, pay-per-click and online advertising (Scharl, Dickinger & Murphy, 2005).

Small and medium businesses and entrepreneurship in general are recognized as important drivers of economic development. In the European Union application of IFRS (International Financial Reporting Standards) made some effects on SMEs (Ugurlu and Jindrichovska, 2019). Small and micro businesses especially in developing nation is considered more relevant due to their contribution to economies and their abilities to drive and sustain growth, reduce poverty and increase the rate of employment. Based on this notion and the existing realities with small businesses, SME is conceptualized in terms of employment generation. In Nigeria, it is considered to be a business with employment capacity ranging between 10 and 300. However, definition based on size also exists. The European Union opined that SMEs should be viewed as that which employ up to 250 persons and up to 50 million euros in annual turnover. In addition, it is expected to come with a balance sheet that is up to forty-three million euros (Olowe, Moradeyo and Babalola, 2013).

Theoretically, several theories are connected to the study of digital marketing business improvement. Some of the relevant theories to the context of this study include the theory of social network, theory of technology adoption and theory of reasoned action. Adoption of new technology (including digital marketing) by firms and businesses is generally centered on the theoretical foundations laid by Rogers (2003). The Technology Acceptance Model is often used to examine adoption of technology in various businesses. The theory of reasoned action abbreviated as 'TRA' was framed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The theory is one of the most broadly studied and applied method to explain planned behaviours of people as well as the factors influencing the implementation of those behaviour. Behavioural intention of people is considered to be determined by two things; individual attitude and subjective norm. The former explains the positive or negative beliefs individual have about implementing any particular decision (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989). The subjective norm according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) is based on individual's perception.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have found positive effect of digital marketing adoption on improvement of business sales (Srinivasan, Bajaj and Bhanot, 2016; Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema, 2015; Njau and Karugu, 2014). On the contrary, Taiminen and Heikki (2015) found negative effect of digital marketing on business returns. However, Wanjuki (2014) found mixed result of effect of digital marketing on businesses. The finding of Jagongo and Kinyua (2013) showed that the pathway to increase in revenue was identified through improved communications enabled by social media usage. Other studies on digital marketing including Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) focused on brand loyalty of business firms. Results of the study suggest positive effect of social media marketing on loyalty of customers to brand. The impact of internet marketing on performance of small and medium businesses was a subject of interest to Kithinji (2014) who found that a large number of small businesses express fear of losing existing customers if social media platform of marketing is adopted. Nonetheless, improved market share, expansion and profitability were recorded by the SMEs following the use of social media strategies.

Palmatier, Dant, Grewal and Evans (2006) analyzed the factors inducing the effectiveness of relationship marketing. The results showed that, among others, making relationship benefits, encouraging customer dependency, and raising similarity to customers are more effective strategies for increasing customer commitment than to building trust.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data collected through structured questionnaire. The data covers entrepreneurs and business characteristics in addition to information on digital marketing usage and sales improvement of SMEs. A total of 387 respondents were randomly sampled from registered small and medium business in Lagos State, Nigeria. Data were collected between the month of March and July, 2019. The data collected were analysed using percentages, frequency counts and regression analysis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was utilized as the statistical tool. The empirical model of the study is specified as:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

The dependent variable (Y) is the sales improvement of the firms. The explanatory variables X1 to X6 are the digital marketing options adopted business owners. These are e-mails, mobile marketing, social media, search engine optimization, pay-per-click and online advertising respectively.

#### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### *Characteristics of Business Firms*

Data describing the business enterprises in the study area are presented in Table 1. On the type or form of business run by the sample firms, 34.4% are sole proprietorship, 56.6% are partnership form of business while 9.1% are limited liability companies. The results also show that 19.7% of the sample firms have annual sales less than 1 million Naira; 30.6% have sales turnover between 1 million and 3 million Naira; 28.1% of the firm have annual sales between 3 and 5 million Naira while 21.6% have more than 5 million Naira. Most of the firms are well above 1 million sales before digital marketing adoption. Highest percentage of business (52.6%) firms earn between 1 and 3 million Naira after digital marketing adoption. Descriptive analysis of the sales improvement show that higher percentage of firms (20.3%) earns below 1 million in sales value on annual basis, after adoption. The implication is that, digital marketing contributes less to sales improvement for sales value below 1 million of Nigerian currency. However, sales value above 1 million but not greater than 3 million was observed for firms. However, sales above 1 million but not greater than 3 million was found to be higher (52.6%) for firms after adopting digital marketing compared to sales before adoption which was found to be 30.6%. By implication, there are over 20% changes in value after adoption of digital marketing. Other sales value above 3 million was found to be more favourable to situation before adoption of digital marketing. Descriptive analysis of years of business experience denoted by years of business operation show that 29.2% have less than 1 year experience; 49.1% have between 1 and 5 years of business experience while 21.7% have been operating the business for more than 5 years.

Table 1. Characteristic of Business Firms.

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Type of business</b>	Sole proprietorship	110	34.4
	Partnership	181	56.6

	Limited Liability Company	29	9.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of employees</b>	Less than 5	99	30.9
	Between 5 and 20	130	40.6
	Between 21 and 50	91	28.4
	More than 50	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Annual sales before digital Adoption</b>	Less than 1 million*	63	19.7
	Between 1 million and 3 million	98	30.6
	Between 3 million and 5 million	90	28.1
	More than 5 million	69	21.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Annual sales after digital Adoption</b>	Less than 1 million	65	20.3
	Between 1 million and 3 million	168	52.6
	Between 3 million and 5 million	55	17.2
	More than 5 million	32	10.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Years of Business operation</b>	Less than 1 year	93	29.2
	Between 1 and 5 years	156	49.1
	More than 5 years	69	21.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field work, 2019. \*million is captured in Nigerian currency.

### *Analysis of Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs*

Results in Table 2 show the various digital options used by business firms in Nigeria. The result shows that 29.99% of the respondents strongly agreed that e-mail marketing is used to promote businesses. The response is corroborated by 17.8% who agreed that e-mail marketing is used as digital marketing strategies. However, 8.4% do not subscribe to the use of e-mail as digital marketing options while 22.1% corroborate the findings with strong disagreement for the use of e-mail as digital marketing options. However, larger percentage of respondents 47.7% agreed to the use of email since 21.8% are undecided. The use of mobile marketing is supported strongly by mere 5.6% of the respondents and supported by the agreement of 21.9% of respondents. However, 43.4% are not certain of the use of mobile marketing. But, 23.1% of the respondents disagreed with the use of mobile marketing as digital marketing options while 5.9% are in support of the strong level of disagreement with the use of mobile marketing.

In Nigeria business environment, social media marketing seems to be more adopted by larger percentage of respondents. From the results, 45.9% of respondents strongly agree to the use social media marketing as digital options for promoting their business. This is corroborated by 39.4% who also agreed to use social media in digital

marketing of businesses. Very low percentage (0.9%) of the respondents is on the contrary, indicating that use of media marketing is widely supported. Search engine optimization option in digital marketing is fully supported by 21.3% with 40.0% of the respondents supporting the use of SEO in digital marketing options. Lowest percentage of the respondents (9.1%) disagreed to the use of SEO as digital marketing options. Use of Pay-Per-Click (PPP) in digital marketing business in Nigeria is supported by 42.9% and supported by 42.6% of the respondents. Respondents below 2% however did not support the use of PPP as digital marketing. Online advertising as digital marketing option is strongly supported by 21.3% of respondents and corroborated by 42.3% of the respondents; 28.8% are undecided while 7.5% disagreed to the use of online advertising as digital marketing strategies.

Table 2. Analysis of digital marketing adoption in SMEs.

Variables	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
Emails	96	29.9	57	17.8	70	21.8	27	8.4	71	22.1
Mobile marketing	18	5.6	70	21.9	139	43.4	74	23.1	19	5.9
Social media marketing	147	45.9	126	39.4	44	13.8	3	0.9	0	0
Search engine optimization	68	21.3	128	40.0	95	29.7	29	9.1	0	0
Pay-per-click	137	42.9	136	42.6	40	12.5	6	1.9	0	0
Online advertising (websites, blogs etc)	68	21.3	135	42.3	92	28.8	24	7.5	0	0

Source: Field survey, 2019

### *Regression Estimates of Digital Marketing Adoption on Sales Improvement in SMEs*

The estimated effect of digital marketing adoption on sales improvement in SMEs is presented in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows ANOVA result of the regression estimates. The F-statistic of the model is 8.258 which is significant at 5% level. The significance of the F value indicates the fit of the model and the appropriateness of the specification. The result in Table 4 show the significance of independent variables included in the model. The results showed that e-mails, search engine optimization, pay-per-click and online advertising are the significant (5%) digital variables influencing sales improvement of SMEs in Nigeria. Specifically, coefficient of e-mail marketing has positive and significant effect on sales improvement in SMEs. An increase in the use of e-mail digital strategy ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $t = 2.169$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) is expected to lead to increase in sales of SMEs, *ceteris paribus*. The coefficient of search engine optimization as digital marketing strategy is also positive and significant at 5% level of significance. It is expected that an increase in the use of SEO by small business managers would result in increase in sales improvement. Similarly, PPP exerts a positive and significant effect on sales improvement ( $\beta = 0.152$ ,  $t = 2.355$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, Parameter estimates of online advertising are negative but significantly related to sales improvement. This implies an inverse effect of the variable on sales improvement. The result suggests that small business managers should spend less on online advertisement as such spending may not result in positive outcome effort on sales improvement. The result supports the findings of Kithinji (2014) on the relevance of digital marketing to SMEs improvement.



Table 3. ANOVA of the Regression Model.

Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	32.451	6	5.409	8.258	0.000
Residual	203.687	311	.655		
Total	236.138	317			

Dependent variable: Annual sales after digital marketing adoption.

Table 4. Estimated Regression of the Model.

Model	Coefficients	Std. error	t	Sig
Constant	1.007	0.241	4.173	0.000
Emails	0.067	0.031	2.169	0.031
Mobile	0.073	0.049	1.496	0.136
Social media	0.112	0.069	1.616	0.107
Search engine	0.324	0.061	5.305	0.000
Pay-per-click	0.152	0.065	2.355	0.019
Online advertising	-0.190	0.063	-3.035	0.003
R = 0.371	R Square = 0.137	Adjusted R square = 0.121		

Source: Data Analysis, 2019.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

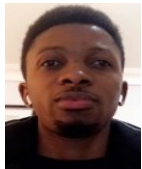
The existing strategies of marketing appear to have move beyond the survival level of small enterprises. Consequently, there is a changing trend through trending alternative as represented by digital marketing. Wider network provision for increased awareness is part of the often mentioned benefit of digital marketing options. In Nigeria however, there is dearth of empirical finding on the role digital marketing options could play in sales improvement of small and medium businesses. The findings of the study showed that digital marketing has positive impact on sales improvement of SMEs in Nigeria. The analysis also leads to conclusion that the relevant digital marketing options to SMEs include e-mail, social media, search engine optimization, Pay-per-click and online advertising. Meanwhile, the impact of digital marketing options on sales improvement is more positive through e-mails, search engine optimization, and pay per click. The SMEs in Nigeria are constrained by challenges of finance, and lack of sufficient knowledge of digital marketing. There is a need for provision of improve education on digital marketing use by small and medium business entrepreneurs in Nigeria. In order to improve sales of SMEs products, there is for all concerned stakeholders to take advantage of more than one of the digital tools as part of marketing strategies. The impact of digital marketing at various levels of sales should be monitored for appropriate policy drive towards ensure sustainable success of SMEs.

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