



THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IN THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the role of digital marketing in the performance of small- and medium-scale enterprises in Imo State. Guided by four key objectives, the study explored the impact of social media marketing on brand visibility, the influence of search engine optimization (SEO) on market expansion, the implications of email marketing on customer engagement, and the effect of content marketing on customer base growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State. A survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 80 employees from 10 purposively selected SMEs that have been in existence for the past four years in Owerri Municipal. Imo State. Data analysis was conducted via descriptive statistics of mean and percentages. The hypothesis was tested using chi-square with the aid of SPSS version 22.0. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of digital marketing and the measures of performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The study recommends that SMEs in Imo State should integrate the digital marketing tools into their performance and growth strategies, particularly brand visibility and customer engagement, market expansion, and customer base growth.*

KEYWORDS: Digital Marketing, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Social Media, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), E-Marketing, Content Marketing, Brand Visibility, Customer Engagement.



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global business landscape has undergone a significant transformation due to the advent and rapid evolution of digital technologies (Dastane, 2020). These changes have redefined traditional marketing practices and introduced new, dynamic, and cost-effective ways of reaching customers, particularly through digital marketing (Alharbi & Al-Ashaab, 2020). Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use electronic devices or the internet to connect with potential and existing customers (Ana-Maria, Constantin & Ioana-Madalina, 2021). It includes channels such as social media, search engines, email, mobile applications, and websites. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in developing economies like Nigeria, digital marketing presents a crucial opportunity to enhance visibility, compete with larger corporations, and expand their customer base with relatively limited financial and human resources (Adam & Alarifi, 2021).

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has witnessed an impressive digital revolution in the past two decades, driven largely by increased internet penetration, mobile phone usage, and social media engagement. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Nigeria had over 154 million internet subscribers as of 2024, making it one of the largest internet markets on the continent (Dastane, 2020). The proliferation of affordable smartphones and improved access to broadband services has played a vital role in this development. As more Nigerians gain access to digital platforms, the way businesses interact with consumers has also evolved. In this context, SMEs—often considered the backbone of the Nigerian economy—stand to benefit enormously from integrating digital marketing into their business strategies (Alharbi & Al-Ashaab, 2020).

Small and medium-sized enterprises in Nigeria constitute about 96% of all businesses in the country and contribute approximately 48% to the gross domestic product (GDP), according to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) (Ana-Maria *et al.*, 2021). They also provide about 84% of employment opportunities, indicating their central role in economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction. Despite their importance, SMEs in Nigeria face a host of challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, low technological adoption, and poor marketing strategies (Tarazona-Montoya, Peris-Ortiz & Devece, 2020). Traditional marketing methods such as radio, television, and print media are often too expensive and ineffective for many SMEs, especially those operating in rural or semi-urban areas. As such, the need for affordable, flexible, and scalable marketing alternatives has become more pressing, with digital marketing emerging as a viable solution (Hasanat, Hoque, Hassan, Mou & Hamid, 2020).

Digital marketing tools and platforms offer the SMEs an opportunity to level the playing field with larger firms. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp Business, Twitter, and Google provide avenues for direct interaction with customers, real-time feedback, and targeted advertising (Tarazona-Montoya *et al.*, 2020). These tools are not only cost-effective but also enable SMEs to personalize customer experiences, monitor consumer behavior, and make data-driven marketing decisions (Alharbi & Al-Ashaab, 2020). For instance, a small fashion brand in Lagos can use Instagram to showcase its products, engage with followers, and drive traffic to its e-commerce website. Similarly, a food vendor in Abuja can use WhatsApp to receive orders and keep in touch with customers. These digital channels can significantly enhance brand recognition, customer loyalty, and overall profitability (Adam & Alarifi, 2021).



The use of digital marketing became more pronounced during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, justifying its relevance to the SMEs. With lockdowns and movement restrictions disrupting traditional business operations, many SMEs turned to digital platforms to sustain their activities. E-commerce, digital payments, and online customer engagement became indispensable tools for survival (Dastane, 2020). For instance, during the lockdown periods, several small businesses that had no prior online presence quickly adopted social media marketing and saw remarkable growth in reach and sales. This trend highlighted the resilience and adaptability of SMEs that embraced digital transformation and showcased the critical role of digital marketing in ensuring business continuity during crises (Ana-Maria *et al.*, 2021).

In Imo State, the number of SMEs operating in the state is limited compared to other states in Nigeria such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Aba, Kano, and Kaduna, among others. In particular, SMEs that engage in manufacturing are few in number, unlike those in the hospitality industry. The state is therefore in dire need of SME penetration. As has been observed in literature, digital marketing holds the key to unlocking the potential of the SMEs if embraced.

In light of the above, this study seeks to explore the role of digital marketing in the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Imo State. It aims to assess the extent to which SMEs utilize digital marketing tools, identify the challenges they face in implementation, and evaluate the impact of digital marketing on their growth and performance. By doing so, the study hopes to provide valuable insights for SME owners, policymakers, development agencies, and other stakeholders interested in promoting SME development and digital transformation in Imo State.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as critical drivers of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation in every economy, especially in a state like Imo State that is in dire need of these enterprises. Despite their importance, many Nigerian SMEs struggle to achieve long-term growth and sustainability due to various challenges, including limited access to finance, poor infrastructure, and ineffective marketing strategies. In today's digital age, digital marketing has emerged as a powerful and cost-effective tool for businesses to increase visibility, reach wider audiences, and enhance customer engagement. However, the extent to which SMEs in Imo State have adopted and successfully leveraged digital marketing remains a matter that requires empirical validation.

The role of digital marketing in enhancing the growth of the SMEs cannot be well appreciated if there are no empirical works to support the claim that these tools contribute to their performance. As such, using policy measures to encourage the penetration and adoption of the platforms may be hampered. This is more so in a state like Imo where the concentration of SMEs is limited. Extant literature on this topic in Nigeria has always focused on studies conducted in areas other than Imo State. The paucity of research works devoted to Imo State calls for urgent research attention. This will, apart from equipping the SMEs operators with the knowledge of the actual impact of the role of digital marketing in the performance of their business, also help policymakers to draft effective policies to address any identified impediments to the adoption of the digital marketing tools.



The main objective of this study is to examine the role of digital marketing in the Performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Imo State. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the impact of social media marketing on brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State
- ii. To ascertain the influence of search engine optimization (SEO) on market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State.
- iii. To evaluate the implications of email marketing on customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State.
- iv. To determine the effect of content marketing on customer base growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri Imo state

From the foregoing objectives, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the impact of social media marketing on the brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State?
2. How does the use of search engine optimization influence market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State?
3. What is the effect of email marketing on customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State?
4. Which role does content marketing play on customer base growth in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State?

Based on the research questions above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social media marketing and brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State.

H₀₂: Search engine optimization (SEO) has no significant relationship with market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Imo State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Imo State.

H₀₄: Content marketing has no significant relationship with the customer base in Owerri, Imo State.

The scope of this study is divided into content scope, geographical scope and unit scope

Content scope: This study covered only literature and theories that are relevant to digital marketing and its dimensions of social media marketing, search engine optimization, email marketing, and content marketing's measures of SMEs' performances as brand visibility, market expansion, customer engagement, and customer base growth.



Geographical Scope: The geographical area where this study was carried out is five selected SMEs in the Owerri municipal area of Imo State.

Unit scope: The unit scope for this study is at the micro level, where the individuals form the unit of analysis. The individuals are all the employees in the selected SMEs in Owerri Municipality, involving both senior (management) and junior cadres.

This study focuses on the roles of digital marketing in the performances of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Imo State, which is significant for several reasons:

- i. SMEs are critical to the state's economic development as they contribute significantly to employment generation. By examining how digital marketing strategies enhance their performance, this study supports efforts to strengthen this vital sector and stimulate economic growth. Useful to IMO state government as regards economic planning.
- ii. The findings of this research can guide policymakers and stakeholders in creating digital infrastructure, training programs, and policies that foster SME growth through digital channels. It will also help enterprise support organizations in designing targeted interventions.
- iii. By revealing the applications of digital marketing among the SMEs in the state, the study encourages innovation and entrepreneurship. It also empowers business owners, especially youths and women, to harness digital tools to expand their market reach and improve productivity.
- iv. The empirical findings of the study shall contribute to the existing body of literature on this topic.
- v. And a very relevant topic for undergraduates, postgraduates, and Lecturers undergoing research towards these Variables

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): SMEs can be defined in various ways, depending 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 (Garcia *et al.*, 2023). Ana-Maria *et al.* (2021) defined an SME as a business with fewer 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 Kocyigit and Akkaya (2020), 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 (€2,284,692.80).

From another perspective, some scholars have categorized businesses that constitute the small- and medium-scale businesses. According to Ahmad *et al.* (2020), small-scale enterprises are comprised of firewood supply, packaging of food items, meat retailing, plantain production, restaurant service, small-scale poultry raising, rabbit raising, organizing labor squads,



operating a nursery school for children, home service, arranging food for parties, etc. According to Alharbi and Al-Ashaab (2020), medium scale includes soap production, aquaculture/fish farming, chalk making, foam production, nylon production, concrete block production, hair/body cream production, chemical production, commercial poultry, professional practice law, accountancy, education, and food and beverage production, among others. For the sake of this study, the definition given by Garcia *et al.* (2023) is adopted since SMEs keep evolving, and as such, stating a definite number of employees and assets is not necessary.

Digital Marketing: Digital marketing has been defined by Ana-Maria *et al.* (2021) as a method used to accomplish sales, novel practices to bring attention and communication online, evaluate customer actions on social media, and expand business chances. Dahiya and Gayatri (2020) noted that digital marketing is used for promoting consumer emotional involvement or commitment; knowledge and understanding; attention, confidence, faith, and sales persuasion through pertinent digital content it provides. Alharbi and Al-Ashaab (2020) consider digital marketing a relationship marketing device that supports and benefits business accomplishment by customer loyalty towards brand and advancement of customers' affiliation. This study shall adopt the definition given by Ana-Maria *et al.* (2021) since it encompasses the major issues involved in digital marketing.

Search Engine Optimization: Bala and Verma (2020) defined search engine optimization (SEO) as the process of optimizing a website or online content to increase its visibility and ranking on search engine results pages (SERPs) for specific keywords or phrases. For Ana-Maria *et al.* (2021), SEO involves a range of techniques, including keyword research, on-page optimization, link building, and technical optimization. On-page optimization involves optimizing various elements of a webpage, such as the title tag, meta description, and header tags, to improve its relevance and structure (Bizhanova *et al.*, 2021). Link building refers to the process of acquiring high-quality links from other websites to improve the website's authority and credibility. Technical optimization involves optimizing the website's technical structure, such as improving site speed and mobile responsiveness, to improve its ranking on SERPs (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020). The definition given by Bala and Verma (2020) shall be adopted in this study.

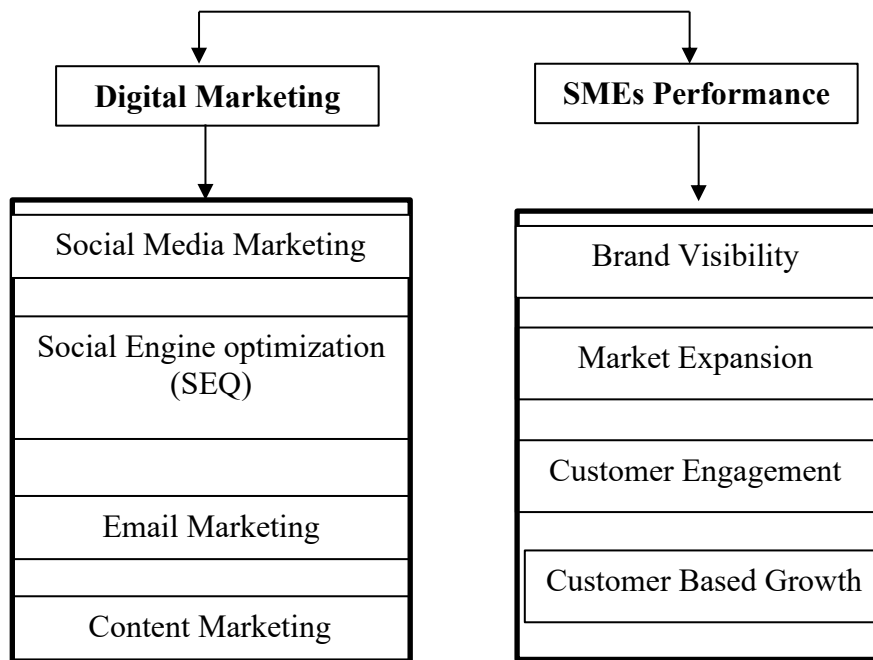
Email Marketing: According to Alharbi and Al-Ashaab (2020), email marketing is a marketing technique that involves sending commercial messages to a group of people via email. It can be used for a variety of purposes, including promoting products, building brand awareness, and maintaining customer relationship. For Bala and Verma (2020), email marketing campaigns can be measured using various metrics, such as open rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates. These metrics provide insights into the effectiveness of the campaign and can help businesses optimize their future campaigns. Ahmad *et al.* (2020) observed that email marketing is often used in conjunction with other digital marketing techniques, such as social media and content marketing for a more effective marketing strategy and better results. The study shall adopt the definition given by Alharbi and Al-Ashaab (2020).

Below is Conceptual Framework showing the link between the independent variables and the various dependent variables is displayed. From the left hand side of the diagram, the various digital marketing tools such as social media, search engine optimization, email marketing, and content marketing are shown. On the other hand, the various performance metrics of SMEs such as customer base growth, revenue increase, market expansion, and brand visibility are



displayed. The arrow points in the direction of SMEs' performance metrics, indicating that the digital tools have the potential to impact the SMEs' performance.

Conceptual framework of the role of digital marketing and SMEs performance



Authors' compilation

Theory that link digital marketing to SMEs are reviewed in this study, including

The Social Exchange Theory (SET): This theory was propounded by George C. Homans, an American sociologist, in 1958 (Ogers, 2023). Homans outlined the fundamental concepts of the theory, emphasizing that social interactions are fundamentally rooted in the principles of cost and reward. According to this theory, individuals participate in social relationships when they perceive that the benefits surpass the costs, and they are inclined to sustain these relationships as long as the rewards outweigh the expenses (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal & Evans, 2021). The Social Exchange Theory (SET) operates under the assumption that individuals are rational actors, meticulously assessing the costs and benefits of their actions within relationships. The theory offers a robust framework for predicting and comprehending human behavior across diverse social settings. It offers valuable perspectives on how SMEs can utilize digital marketing to cultivate positive interactions with their target audience. Through an emphasis on reciprocity, customer engagement, perceived value, and ethical behavior, SMEs can establish sustainable growth by enhancing brand loyalty, acquiring new customers, and generating positive word-of-mouth.



Research Methodology

The survey research design was utilized to investigate the role of digital marketing in the performance of SMEs in Imo State with a focus on SMEs located in Owerri. Owerri is comprised of three zones, namely, Owerri Municipal, Owerri West, and Owerri North. The questionnaires were designed to capture responses from the SMEs operating in these three local councils using the purposive and random sampling techniques. This research design is considered because it guarantees the collection of adequate data for description, analysis, and interpretation purposes.

The population for the study constituted the management of small and medium enterprises located in Owerri that were purposively and randomly selected. The SMEs that were focused on were those that have existed for four years and above with operational offices located in Owerri. Employees and management of these small and medium enterprises constituted the elements of the population from which subjects were selected to form the sample size for the study. The population is made up of 80 employees and management teams of 10 selected SMEs in Owerri, Imo State that includes the following categories: hotels, pure water companies, bakeries, fast food industries, etc.

All 80 employees were used as a sample.

Data for the study was collected from two main sources, namely, primary sources and secondary sources. The questionnaire method was adopted for the collection of primary data. However, the secondary sources were from textbooks, Journals, etc.

The major research instrument used is a questionnaire, which was appropriately moderated. The respondents were administered the questionnaires to complete, with or without disclosing their identities. The questionnaires were designed to obtain sufficient and relevant information from the respondents. The respondents were required to give specific answers to questions by ticking in front of an appropriate answer. The structured questions were divided into sections.

The questionnaires used as the research instrument were subjected to validation. They were adequately checked and validated by experts who provided further contributions and corrections before the final draft of the research instrument. The reason for this is for the correction of errors and to check if the questionnaires answer the research questions accurately and measure the objectives of the study. The corrections were integrated, and this led to the production of the final draft.

In a bid to ensure more reliable work, the researcher embarked on a pilot test. This involved the administering of questionnaires to some staff of a fast food SME in Umuagwo, which was not used in the census population selected for the main study. The responses obtained assisted in making the instruments reliable. And the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was employed



Data Analysis Techniques

For the sake of analyses, the study employed descriptive statistics and other non-parametric techniques for the analysis of collected data. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, tables, and graphs were employed for the analysis of data obtained through the administration of the questionnaire, while the chi-square (X^2) was used for the test of the hypothesis using SPSS 22.0 as the statistical tool.

This section of the work contains tabular presentation and analysis of data collected from small and medium enterprises (selected enterprises) in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, with footnotes explaining each of the tables.

Table 4.1.1: Questionnaire Analysis

Questionnaires	Total	Percent (%)	Cum. (%)
Returned	67	83.75	83
Not-returned	13	16.25	100
Distributed	80	100	-

Source: *Survey Report (2025)*

The above table captures the total number of questionnaires distributed, the number returned, and those not returned. Accordingly, the table shows that out of the 80 questionnaires distributed to selected enterprises in Owerri, Imo State, 67 questionnaires were returned (87%), and 58 questionnaires were properly filled. while 13 questionnaires were not returned (16.25%). Thus, further analyses were based on the 58 returned questionnaires that were properly filled.

Section A: Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	(Cum. Percent (%))
Gender	Female	38	66	66
	Male	20	34	100
	Total	58	100	-
Age	18 – 25	5	9	9
	26 – 35	7	12	21
	36 – 45	11	19	40
	46 – 55	14	24	64
	Greater than 55	21	36	100
	Total	58	100	-
Marital Status	Married	31	53	53
	Divorced	3	5	58
	Single	24	42	100
	Total	58	100	-
Educational Qualification	Non-Formal	-	-	-
	Primary	5	9	9
	Secondary	25	43	52
	Tertiary	28	48	100



	Total	58	100	-
Years of Work Experience	Less than 5 years	7	12	12
	5 - 9 years	26	45	57
	10 - 14 years	14	24	81
	15 – 19 years	11	19	100
	Total	58	100	-
Level of Work	Junior Staff	13	22	22
	Management Staff	22	38	60
	Senior Staff	23	40	100
	Total	58	100	-

Source: Survey Report (2025)

Section B: Social Media Marketing

Questions	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cum. Percent (%)
Social media marketing has significantly improved the visibility of my business brand in Imo State.	Strongly disagree	2	3	12
	Disagree	2	3	33
	Neutral	4	7	40
	Agree	10	17	100
	Strongly Agree	40	70	
	Total	58	100	
The use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp has increased customer awareness of my SME.	Strongly disagree	3	5	46
	Disagree	4	7	77
	Neutral	8	14	91
	Agree	9	15	100
	Strongly Agree	34	59	
	Total	58	100	
Regular posting and engagement on social media directly contribute to higher brand recognition.	Strongly disagree	8	14	5
	Disagree	2	3	72
	Neutral	7	13	100
	Agree	11	19	
	Strongly Agree	30	51	
	Total	58	100	
My business has experienced an increase in customer reach since adopting social media	Strongly disagree	3	5	24
	Disagree	1	2	57
	Neutral	5	8	78
	Agree	9	15	95
	Strongly Agree	40	70	100



marketing strategies.				
	Total	58	100	
Social media marketing is more effective in enhancing brand visibility than traditional marketing methods.	Strongly disagree	1	2	
	Disagree	2	3	
	Neutral	5	8	
	Agree	8	14	
	Strongly Agree	42	73	
	Total	58	100	

Source: *Survey Report (2025)*

The table above contains responses of respondents to questions under the impact of social media marketing on brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Accordingly, 40 of the respondents surveyed, representing 70%, strongly agree that social media marketing has an impact on the brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Suggesting that social media marketing on brand visibility is very important. 10 of the respondents, representing 17%, agreed that social media marketing has an impact on the brand visibility of small and medium enterprises; 4 respondents, representing 7%, were neutral on the impact of social media marketing on the brand visibility of small and medium enterprises, while 2 respondents, representing 3%, disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, on the impact of social media marketing on the brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State.

Test of Hypotheses

Here, the four hypotheses formulated in this study were tested using t-statistics and the significance value of the individual variables in the regression result. The essence of this is to ascertain how significant the effect of the individual independent or explanatory variables is on the dependent variables.

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no significant relationship between social media marketing and brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between social media marketing and brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

In testing this hypothesis, the t-statistic and probability value are in the table. Social media marketing has a t-statistic of 2.387 and a probability value of 0.007, which is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses, which state that there is a significant relationship between social media marketing and brand visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.



Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀: Search engine optimization (SEO) has no significant relationship with market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

H₂: Search engine optimization (SEO) has a significant relationship with market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

Search engine marketing has a t-statistic of 3.376 and a probability value of 0.000, which is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses, which state that search engine optimization (SEO) has a significant relationship with market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

Test of Hypothesis three

H₀: There is no significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

E-mail marketing has a t-statistic of 3.251 and a probability value of 0.001, which is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses and conclude that there is a significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri.

Test of Hypothesis four

H₀: Content marketing has no significant relationship with customer base in Owerri.

H₄: Content marketing has a significant relationship with the customer base in Owerri.

Content marketing has a t-statistic of 1.146 and a probability value of 0.252, which is statistically insignificant. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypotheses. We therefore conclude that content marketing has a significant relationship with the customer base in Owerri.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study investigated the roles of digital marketing in the performances of small- and medium-sized enterprises in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. The data generated were analyzed, and the following were discovered. The study found that social media marketing has a significant effect on the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State. This shows that the performance of SMEs can be enhanced through social media marketing. This agrees with the findings of Oyedele, Oworu, and Abdulganiyu (2020) that online marketing affected the performance of SMEs positively. This also agrees with the findings of Nwoko and Obi (2024) that social media marketing has a significant positive influence on SMEs' performance. The study also found that content marketing has a significant effect on the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State. This implies that content marketing can enhance the performance of SMEs. This also agrees



with the findings of Nwoko and Obi (2024), which revealed that digital marketing has a significant positive impact on SME performance.

The study further found that search engine marketing has significant effect on the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri, Imo State. This implies that search engine marketing can enhance the performance of SMEs. This collaborates with the findings of Mushi (2024), which revealed that search engine marketing does enhance the marketing performance of the SMEs in Tanzania.

Finally, the result indicates that e-mail marketing has a significant effect on the performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owerri State. This shows that SME performance can be enhanced through e-mail marketing. This agrees with the findings of Veseli-Kurtishi (2024) that e-mail marketing has a significant positive influence on SMEs' performance. This also agrees with the findings of Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023), which indicated that e-mail marketing does enhance marketing performance of SMEs in IMO State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of digital marketing on the performance of small- and medium-scale enterprises in Owerri, Imo State. The data sourced were subjected to empirical analysis, and the following were discovered: On the grounds of the findings, the study concludes that social media marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, and e-mail marketing have a significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Owerri, Imo State. The study contends that digital marketing is a crucial tool for SME businesses that are positioned to maximize the opportunities from digitalization, growing online presence, and enhancing customer patronage in Imo State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following major recommendations were put forward to ensure the role of digital marketing in the performance of small and medium enterprises.

1. The study recommended that SMEs should fully integrate the use of social media to increase customer patronage of the organization's products. As this means creating visibility of products and customer loyalty.
2. The study also recommended the use of content marketing, email marketing, and search engine marketing as a means of promoting customer base growth. SMEs should organize digital literacy training for entrepreneurs.
3. Government should improve digital infrastructure and affordable internet access.
4. Government should also encourage collaboration between SMEs and tech firms to improve innovation and market reach.



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