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DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED SMES IN SOUTH- SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of digital marketing practices on the performance of selected SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. The study adopted the Cross-Sectional Research Design. Data was obtained from fifteen (15) digital marketing firms from the South-South and South-East Nigeria. The population for the study was 3,384 staff of selected firms and 320 respondents were sampled. A probability random sampling technique was employed for the selection of respondents. The statistical tools used for the analysis of data includes descriptive statistic, the Jacque Bera normality test and Correlation tests. The ordinary least square (OLS) multiple regression Test was conducted to test the hypotheses formulated using Stata version 13 software. The result shows that: E-mail marketing, social media marketing and mobile marketing have a significant positive association with the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. The study concluded that when a company's website is created with the informative, aesthetic, and interactive demands of its visitors in mind, it increases website traffic and also fosters better organizational results. The long-term performance of a firm can be improved if its digital marketing teams are successful in getting its website listed on the first pages of search results.

According to the study, search engine marketing teams should make sure to do ongoing research to identify the keywords people use when looking for content in the company's or its brand category and then implement the appropriate plan to raise the organization's online exposure.

Key Words: Email-Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Mobile Marketing, Performance of SMEs

Introduction

The rapidly emerging digital technology of this twenty-first century has brought unprecedented changes in consumer online behavior. These changes present new challenges and opportunities for Marketers within this digital and business world. Through digital media, consumers can access information anytime and in any place they want. Furthermore, they don't just rely on what companies say about their brands but also on what their friends, associations, peers, media etc., are saying as well. From an organizational perspective, digital channel offers cost efficiency and facilitates marketers' deepest need for frequent and interactive communication with their customers. These are some of the major concern that has led to the emergence of digital marketing.

Digital marketing is the utilization of electronic media to promote products or services and to reach consumers. It embodies a wide range of products, services and brand marketing tactics which mainly use the internet as a core promotional medium in addition to mobile and traditional TV and radio (Yasmin, Tasneem & Fatema, 2015). Digital channels like the Internet, e-mail, mobile phones and digital television offer new prospects to cultivate customer relationships. By being regularly in touch with customers, marketers can increase the level of personalization with low or non-excessive costs (Merisavo, 2019). This to some extent has potentials of strengthening relationships with customers and influence their satisfaction.

The SMEs play a vital role in an economy by promoting economic growth and development (Saona, 2011). In operating the service mechanism, the SMEs system serves as a medium for service delivery to society and the nation's economy. Even though SMEs affect every facet of a nation's economic activities, it is subservient to some exogenous and endogenous factors that impinge on their ability to meet stated objectives which goes a long way in determining performance and long-term survival.

The performance of SMEs has been a subject of keen interest in economic

literature due to the important role they play in an economy. A plethora of studies have been conducted to investigate the factors responsible for the performance of SMEs both in developed and developing economies around the world (Çekrezi, 2015; Owusu-Antwi, Banerjee &Antwi, 2017). However, a thorough examination of these studies reveals that focus is usually on measures such as service, return on interest, etc. Therefore it implies that few researchers have been interested in the non-financial dimensions of performance measurement in SMEs in Nigeria.

Akter, Hoque and Chowdhury (2016) contend that for the SMEs enterprises to successfully develop further, it is of critical importance to consider non-financial dimensions such as the marketing aspect that determines performance. Given the fact that marketing practices nowadays are often carried out through digital channels, there is a need for robust evidence on how digital marketing practice measures improve organizational performance. Against this backdrop, this research is directed to fill in some gaps in the knowledge of digital marketing indicators and performance measurement. To this end, the study will empirically investigate the effects of digital marketing practices as proxied by e-mail marketing, social media marketing and mobile marketing has on SME's performance.

The competition for customers and market share of SMEs in Nigeria is becoming tighter. Building on this theme, the outcome of this study is of great relevance to service-based institutions that offer digital products like online services etc. Specifically, it will offer them insights into their customers' viewpoints in developing a digital marketing strategy that fits well with the overall marketing strategy. Also, it will assist them in delivering consistent communications messages to achieve strategic positioning and superior performance. The results of this work will benefit digital technology-savvy firm customers who earnestly long for engagement and relationship building with their customers on the web.

Statement of the problem

SME operations are underperforming due to a lack of business knowledge about digitalization among human resources in Nigeria, and the required techniques for bringing end users to these digital platforms and triggering their purchase behaviour has not been fully developed to make the most of this online business method possible. Ever since the introduction of digital channels in the conduct of marketing activities, there has been tremendous improvement in the marketing outcomes of many industries and organizations.

A thorough examination of the SMEs in light of the above fact shows that they are still lagging behind in terms of transactions executed through digital mediums as a majority of their customers still prefer physical presence. Hence, significant progress in the quest towards achieving superior organizational performance has been hampered.

Furthermore, in times past getting the attention and response of customers depended largely on placing ads in leading newspapers, commercials during popular TV shows and strategically placed billboards. In contrast to today's world, marketing is increasingly digital as people are constantly connected mainly through the internet at home, work and play. Despite digital connectivity offering marketers more means to reach, engage with, and influence customers, there have been challenges for companies to create customer value. Advertisements (ads), messages and posts are getting lost in an overwhelming storm of information on the internet. Hence, getting noticed in the digital media space is becoming more and more difficult. It is surmised that the explanation for the twin issues might be nested in the fact that the elements of digital marketing has not been integrated into a cohesive strategy. On this account, this study seeks to explore the effects the various elements of digital marketing could exert on the performance of SMEs in Nigeria.

Statement of Hypotheses

To guide data collection and analysis, the researcher makes conjectural statements about the expected relationship of the research variables as follows:

Ho_1**:** Email marketing has no significant positive relationship with the performance of SMEs.

Ho_2**:** Social media marketing has no significant positive relationship with the performance of SMEs.

Ho_3**:** Mobile marketing has no significant positive relationship with the performance of SMEs.

Review of Literature

Digital marketing practices

In its simplest form, digital marketing is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies or channels. It uses the Internet as the chief promotional medium but also extends to channels- mobile phones, display advertising and any other digital medium - that do not require the internet. The digital Marketing Institute aptly conceptualized it as “the use of digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication

which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationships with them" (Wymbs, 2011). This definition is insightful in that it emphasizes measurability, integration, as well as relationships and communications which are of strategic importance. Similarly, Merisavo (2019) defined digital marketing as "communication and interaction between a company or brand and its customers using digital channels (e.g. the Internet, email, mobile phones, and digital TV) and information technology." Besides the digital channels, the definitions usually emphasize the two-way, personalized dialogue with each customer (Wymbs, 2011).

Brief history of digital marketing

The origin of what is today known as digital marketing can be traced to the mid-1980s when computer sophistication allowed the mass storage of customer information. During this period, Channel Net (then softAd group) developed advertising campaigns for automobile companies, wherein people would send in reader reply cards found in magazines and receive in return floppy disks that contained multimedia content promoting various cars and offering free test drives (Clark, 2012). However, the term digital marketing was first used in the 1990s when the Internet and web 1.0 platforms debuted. Web 1.0 allows users only to read the content of the information they so desire but no sharing or interaction over the web.

Marketers worldwide began embracing digital platforms when new technologies such as clickable banners, Web 2.0, search engines, and cookies entered the digital marketplace from about 1993 to 1998 (Monnappa, 2015). The development of Web 2.0 made users active participants by allowing interaction with other users and businesses. The emergence of pioneer social media sites like MySpace, and Facebook opened new doors of opportunities for companies to promote their brands. With the growth of search engines, companies started optimizing their website to rank higher in search results (Lovata, 2016).

SMEs performance

The term performance is a multidimensional concept that there is a standardized or uniform definition of it. As a notion, it is connected to the survival and success of any firm. Examining the works of various scholars on the subject (Akter et al., 2016) aptly conceptualized it as the degree of achievement of objectives or the potentially possible accomplishment regarding the important characteristics of an organization for the relevant stakeholders. Performance is therefore principally specified through a

multidimensional set of criteria. The source of the performance is the actions of players in the business processes.

What organizational performance means is an issue subject to debate among academic scholars, practicing managers and researchers. As a recurrent theme of great interest, it is affiliated to the endurance and success of an organization. Organizational performance can be defined as the "organization's ability to attain its goals by using resources in an efficient and effective manner" (Wang & Chang, 2013) or as "the ability of the organization to achieve its goals and objectives". It is also a measure of the change of the state of an organization or the outcomes that result from management decisions and the execution of those decisions by members of the organization (Sano, 2015). The idea of organizational performance is affiliated with the survival and success of an organization. Organizational performance is "the ability to acquire and process human financial and physical resources properly to achieve goals of the organization". In fact, organizational performance is the outcome of an organization so that it is measured based on its goals and objectives (Lee, 2008).

Email marketing and SME performance

Research has established a link between email marketing and the performance of businesses. Nuseir and Aljumah, (2020) stressed that when carried out under proper planning email marketing remains an effective strategy to approach the audience to gain maximum results. It has been observed that emails to users may provide better responses with instant replies due to interest in the business. Customized offers and effective communication encourage customers to remain and repeat purchases by establishing a long-term relationship that generates guaranteed streams of revenue for the organization continually. As a tool for strengthening customer relationships, e-mail marketing helps companies keep in touch with their customers regularly at a low cost. As asserted by Merisavo and Raulas (2018) customers appreciate regular communication through e-mail because it brings value and satisfaction to them by providing them with relevant information and by reducing their efforts to search for information.

Social media marketing and SME performance

Research scholars have argued that online feedback from social media platforms assists managers to assess the attitude, opinion and satisfaction level of customers and, by investing appropriately, can play a role in managing

business activities in response to feedback. Studies have found that if managers consider and value feedback and develop their marketing strategy accordingly, they are likely to improve in quality and influence the perception of customers in a way that will boost the performance of the organization (Aluri, Slevitch, &Larzelere, 2016; Nusseir & Aljumah, 2020). Social media provides a platform for companies to extend marketing campaigns to vast audiences all over the world even in remote places. Chinakidzwa & Phiri, M. (2020) stressed that facilitating online purchases induces consumers into repeat purchases which results when they are satisfied. Online communities provide an avenue for users to share experiences and information among themselves. With continuous interaction, members become familiar with themselves cultivating some level of trust.

Mobile marketing and SME performance

The effectiveness of mobile devices makes it possible to reach consumers throughout the day not just when they are with their computers, watching TV or reading newspaper. This provides marketers with an avenue to tap into their demographics using the information derived thereof to strengthen customer relationships and improve satisfaction levels which eventually will favor the organization's bottom line (Xu, 2007). Chanthinok and Kaiwinik (2018) emphasized that mobile marketing strategy is very essential to e-commerce growth that operated over a wireless network as most businesses have been utilizing any smart device platforms for mobile marketing in their strategy. Therefore, mobile marketing helps in increasing the existing network and creates new paths to market the products. In addition, the personalization advertising flexibility focus which is an integral part of mobile marketing is more likely to positively influence individual customer service, competitive advantage, and firm performance. With mobile marketing, organizations can distribute relevant information about their offerings on a personalized and interactive basis to online customers through mobile devices and mobile web browsing technologies (Hopkins & Turner, 2012).

Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis (1986), is one of the most widely used models to explain user acceptance behavior. This model is grounded in social psychology theory in general and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in particular (Fishbein, & Azjen, 1975). TRA asserts that beliefs influence attitudes, which lead to intentions and therefore generate behavior. Correspondingly, Davis (1986, 1989) introduced the constructs in the original TAM as follows: perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use

(PEOU), attitude, and behavioral intention to use. In simple terms, TAM proposes that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness predict the acceptance of information technology. These two determinants are considered useful indicators of the attitudes of users towards new technologies and their eventual adoption or rejection (Enyioko & Nwokah, 2018).

According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is the potential users' subjective belief that the use of a particular system will enhance his/her action or organizational performance. In other words, it is the degree to which an entity believes that using a particular technology would enhance its operations and achieve its objectives. According to Davis, a system high in perceived usefulness is considered to positively influence the adoption of the specific system. Perceived ease of use is the level to which the potential user anticipates the technology to be uncomplicated (Etim, James, Arikpo & Okeowo, 2021). Thus, TAM provides us with a deep grasp that the reason why digital marketing is gaining wider acceptance and popularity is because of its potential in aiding organizations to achieve superior performance.

Review of Related Empirical Works

Kalei (2020) investigated digital marketing strategies and the marketing performance of Top 100 100 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The dependent variable was marketing performance while the independent variables were social media, search engine optimization, websites and blogs and display adverts. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to administer a questionnaire to thirty (30) Top 100 SMEs in the Commercial and Trade, Service. The study conducted regression analysis on identified variables. The results indicated that digital marketing strategies had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs and that social media, search engine optimization, websites and blogs and display adverts explained a significant proportion of variance in marketing performance, R2 = .758. The study findings also established that 40.7% of the respondents agreed that Websites and Blogs increased their market share, and 44.4% percent strongly agreed that Websites and Blogs increased the number of unique visitors to their social media pages. 51.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that Websites and Blogs enabled access to new markets and customers, 40.7% agreed, 3.7% disagreed while 3.7% strongly disagreed. The study concluded that the adoption of digital marketing strategies has a positive influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. It was recommended that SMEs adopt digital marketing strategies such as social media, search engine optimization, display adverts and websites and blogs.

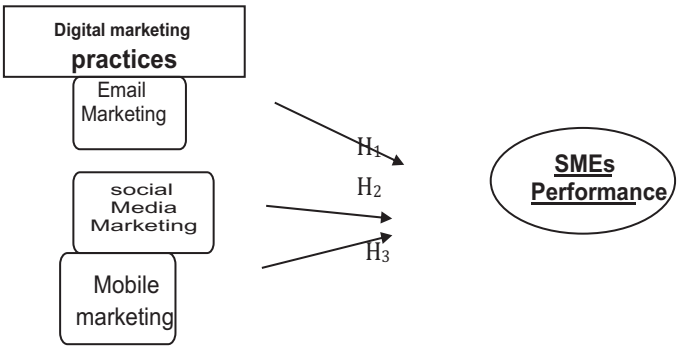
Mobydeen (2021) conducted a study titled: the impact of digital marketing practices on the organizational performance of mobile phone companies in Jordan. Descriptive and quantitative analysis was employed as a research method. Digital marketing practice was dimensioned into Email Marketing, Social Network Marketing, Mobile Phone Marketing and Website marketing. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the selected sample size of (178) employees consisting of those who work as Managers, team leaders, and supervisors, in the telecom companies in Jordan. The data obtained from the study subjects analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyze the questionnaire data. Descriptive statistics are used to draw summaries related to the variables of the current study, including the calculation of means, standard deviations, important levels, one sample test, and the T. test. The significance level is set at 0.05. The results showed that the total of the digital marketing in all of its forms influence the performance of the telecommunication company (as the main dimension) was perceived by the study sample to be present with a mean of 3.652 (SD=0.7224) at a moderate degree. Furthermore, the most important result was that the performance of all telecommunications companies in Jordan has shown a great positive movement in the last five years, which means that the impact of digital marketing on these companies' performance was even very good or excellent.

Chinakidzwa and Phiri (2020) in their study examined the impact of digital marketing capabilities on the market performance of small to medium enterprise (SME) agro-processors in Harare, Zimbabwe. To achieve the study objectives, a mixed sampling approach consisting of quota and stratified sampling approaches was adopted, while a closed-ended questionnaire was distributed through the drop-off & pick-up and interviewer-based methods. The sample of 298 was obtained from SME agro-processors managers and owners. The data was analysed statistically using STATA version 15. Multiple logistic regression was conducted to determine the impact of digital marketing capabilities on market performance. Study findings indicate that digital strategy development & execution, digital market innovation, e-market sensing and leadership capabilities positively influence intermediate market outcomes of customer awareness, customer attitudes, availability, and brand associations. However, only digital strategy development & execution capability was positively associated with final market performance outcomes of sales growth, market share and profitability. These results imply that agro-processors must develop digital marketing capabilities that enable them to

move beyond intermediate market outcomes to attain the primary business objectives of profitability, sales growth and market share. Attaining intermediate market outcomes only is not enough for business sustainability.

Using companies in the Northern Region of Morocco as case studies, Hachimi, Lhassan and Belamhton (2021) evaluated the contribution of digital marketing to business performance. A quantitative survey was carried out among 120 companies in the northern region of Morocco using the PLS path modeling, a method particularly suited for academic development and predictive applications. The directors, sales managers and other executives within companies in the northern region of Morocco constituted the sample. Data was collected from respondents through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested on a sample of 30 respondents to ensure that they fully understood the questions and were not likely to refuse to answer. The final version of the questionnaire, measuring all items (19 items) on a five-point (Likert) scale, was administered to 281 target respondents. For data analysis, exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were two important methods adopted. The exploratory factorial analysis was carried out using SPSS 25 software for the purpose of purifying the items of the research model. In the second step, the confirmatory factorial analysis was carried out using the structural equations method and SMART PLS 3 software leading to the test of the study's hypotheses and validation of the research model. According to the empirical study, it was found that digital marketing has a positive impact on the performance of companies in the northern region of Morocco.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of conflict resolution strategies and sustainable development



Source: McGaghie, Bordage and Shea (2001)

Research Methodology

The survey research design method was adopted. The target population of this study is 3384 (three thousand three hundred and eighty-four) management and staff of Diamond Web design company, Grace Max Media, Silver Connect Limited, Digital ePlanet Consulting, Esteem Choice, Da-Manager, Shoppima, Datmac Global Services, Simtech Integrated, MyTehla, Digital Connect Solutions, Brangenius, Cifwep, AdHang and Growth Result, that are currently on their payroll regardless of years of experience as at February 2021. The population was drawn from these firms. From informal interviews with a few managers and key personnel who are privy to the employee registers in their respective companies, the population figure is three thousand three hundred and eighty-four (3,384). A sample is the representativeness of the population from which it is drawn if the aggregate characteristics of the sample closely approximate those same aggregate characteristics of the population (Yomere and Agbonifoh, 1999: Mark et al, 2009).

The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamane's formula (Mark et al., 2009) as stated below:

$$\mathbf{n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}}$$

Where: n = The Sample size

N = the population of the study

e = level of significance (0.05)

$$n = \frac{3,384}{1+3,384(0.05)^2}$$

n = 358.

Therefore, 358 were deemed appropriate to form the sample size, having a population of 3,384. A total of 358 were selected.

The sample size of 358 was obtained using Stratified random sampling, the disproportionate type of it. This sampling technique was selected because it ensures that different groups (i.e. the fifteen marketing firms) were adequately sampled and represented, which may facilitate comparison among the groups. Hence, the resulting disproportionate stratified sampling is given as:

Table 2 Disproportionate stratified sampling

Digital Marketing firms	State Located	Population	Proportionate Sample Size
Diamond Web Design	Edo	268	(268/3,384)*358=28
Grace Max Media	Edo	382	(382/3,384)*358=40
SilverConnect Limited	Edo	244	(244/3,384)*358=26
Digital ePlanet	Edo	224	(224/3,384)*358=24
Esteem Choice	Edo	144	(144/3,384)*358=15
Da-Manager	Delta	180	(180/3,384)*358=19
Shoppima	Delta	394	(394/3,384)*358=42
Datmac Global	Delta	206	(206/3,384)*358=22
Simtech Integrated	Delta	297	(297/3,384)*358=31
MyTehlam Agency	Delta	188	(188/3,384)*358=20
Digital Connect	Anambra	144	(144/3,384)*358=15
Brangenius	Anambra	188	(188/3,384)*358=20
Cifwep Digital	Anambra	102	(102/3,384)*358=11
AdHang	Anambra	199	(199/3,384)*358=21
Growth Result	Anambra	224	(224/3,384)*358=24
Total		**3384**	**354**

Source: researchers' computation, 2023

One of the instruments that will be used for data collection is a single set of structured questionnaires which was developed in accordance with generally accepted survey research principles. Dionco-Adetayo (2001) defines a questionnaire as a pre-formulated written set of questions and instructions for respondents to answer by writing out their responses. The questionnaire is divided into three sections (A, B and C) containing questions on respondent's profiles and another closed-ended question pattern on constructs and variables of the study. The 5-point Likert-type rating scaled responses are used for the closed-ended questions. A Likert scale is commonly used to measure attitudes, knowledge, perceptions, values, and behavioral changes. A Likert-type scale involves a series of statements that respondents may choose from in order to rate their responses to evaluative questions (Vagias, 2019).

Validation of Research Instrument

This focuses on ensuring that the measuring instrument is of quality in order to prevent measurement errors. Specifically, the validation of instruments is two-fold involving validity and reliability. This refers to the extent to which the instrument (questionnaire) measures what it is designed to measure. That is its

accuracy in capturing correct responses. (Kumar, 2011).

Face validity and *Content validity* were the two measures used to establish the validity of measurements. This relates to the judgment that an instrument is measuring what it is supposed to primarily based on the logical link between the questions and the objectives of the study (Kumar, 2011). To satisfy the requirement of face validity, the researcher ensured that each question or item on the research instrument had a logical link with the research objectives. For content validity, the items and questions cover the full range of the issue or attitude being measured in line with the literatures on the five indicators. In addition, two management academics scrutinized the questionnaire items and suggested improvements for phrasing items. After effecting the corrections, it was judged to be adequate in covering the content areas of the study variables.

Reliability of research instrument

Reliability refers to the quality of a measurement procedure that provides repeatability and accuracy (Kumar, 2011). In other words, it is the consistency of the research instrument in producing the same or similar results on repeated trials. An internal consistency procedure was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Firstly, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a sample of 25 individuals who have knowledge of the interplay of digital marketing practices dimensions on business performance. After the data was collected Cronbach Alpha was employed to ascertain the internal consistency. Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test to measure the measurement scale reliability, the internal consistency of the study variables was confirmed. The recommended coefficient value for Cronbach's Alpha test score is set at 0.7 (Kumar, 2011).

Table 3Reliability coefficients of study constructs

Dimension of study constructs	Number of items	Number of cases	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
E-mail marketing	4	25	0.757
Social media marketing	4	25	0.846
Mobile marketing	3	25	0.781
Website marketing	3	25	0.790
Search engine marketing	4	25	0.812
Organizational performance	8	25	0.708

From Table 3, it can be observed that the reliability coefficients are above the 0.7 benchmark. Favorable reliable scores were obtained from all items in general. The estimation reported acceptable internal consistency, thus testifying high reproducibility.

Operational Measurement of Variables

This section explains the tasks carried out by the researcher to bring the independent variable (digital marketing practices) and dependent variable (organizational performance) into a measurable context.

Digital marketing practices operationalization

At the first stage of measurement, digital marketing practices were operationalized in terms of its five proxies (e-mail marketing, social media marketing, mobile marketing, website marketing and search engine marketing) as identified in previous relevant studies. (Mobydeen 2021; Prusty, 2018). Subsequently, three of the five measures were adapted from previous studies and operationalized as follows:

E-mail marketing- click-through rate, conversion, triggered email and growing email list. (Goic, Rojas &Saavedra, 2019).

Social media marketing- social presence, e-wom, engagement and social media followership (Enyioko and Nwokah, 2018).

Mobile marketing- mobile payment, mobile advertising and customer responsiveness capability (Chanthinok and Kaiwinit, 2018; Hopkins & Turner, 2012)

Model Specification for hypotheses

SMEPEF=f (DIGMKT) ..... equation (1)

DIGMKT= (EMLMKT, SOCMKT and MOBMKT)..... equation (2)

$SMEPEF = \alpha + \beta_1 EMMKT + \beta_2 SOMKT + \beta_3 MOMKT + \varepsilon$; ..... equation (3)

Where:

SMEPEF: SMEs performance

EMLMKT: e-mail marketing

SOCMKT: social marketing

MOBMKT: mobile marketing

Results

The data presented and analyzed in the study is of three (3) parts; the descriptive analysis of respondent's profiles with percentage weighting attached. The second is the correlation and regression analysis of the research questions and their respective variables, then the testing of hypotheses formulated for the study. The response rate for this study was 89.4 % by the total number of questionnaires answered and recovered from the field exercise. Three hundred and fifty-eight (358) copies of a single questionnaire were administered to respondents, out of which three hundred and thirty-four (334) representing about ninety-six percent (93.3%) were retrieved while twenty-four (24) were not returned. After assessing the retrieved questionnaire through data preparation, fourteen (14) were rejected due to acts, such as multiple ticking, blank responses, half-way ticking etc. Hence, only three hundred and twenty (320) copies of the questionnaire were usable to achieve the study objectives and testing hypotheses.

It was observed that the respondents were made up of 189 males, representing 59.1% of total responses, while 131 respondents were female, representing 40.9% of total responses. This is an indication that the male gender is much more employed in SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria than their female counterpart. The age distribution of respondents shows that 135 respondents representing 42.3% are between the ages 18 to 28 years, 116 respondents representing 36.3% are within the age bracket of 29-39 years, 45 respondents representing 14% are within the ages of 40-50 years, while 24 respondents representing 7.4% are above 50 years of age. What can be deduced from this information is that the majority of SME employees are in the prime of their youth, while few are middle-aged.

About half of the respondents (42.5%) are in a conjugal relationship, while 108 representing 33.7% of the total respondents are not married. 64 representing 20%respondents are not so lucky with marital relationships due to the fact that they are either divorced or separated. The remaining 12(3.8%) of the total respondents had been bereaved of their spouse. On the highest educational qualification of respondents, 58 representing 18% got WAEC certificate,74 representing 23.1% had OND/NCE as their highest qualification, the majority of the respondents 129 representing 40.4%, had HND/BSC, 49 respondents representing 15.5% had MBA/M.Sc. as their highest qualifications, and 10 respondents representing 3% had other qualifications aside the ones previously mentioned.

In terms of a number of the period the firms have been in operation, the

majority of SMEs business (i.e. 163 firms, representing 50.9%) in Nigeria's southern region are aged 4 years and above, 111 (34.7%) firms are between 1 to 3 years while the rest 46 firms representing (14.4%) are still below a year in operation. Thus, it can be inferred that many firms of the total respondents sampled have years of experience in the SME industry. Finally, in terms of the geographical location of firms, Delta States with 122 (38.1%) had the largest number of firms, closely followed by Edo States with 115 (36%), while 83 (25.9%) firms from Anambra States presented employees who made the final cut in the sample.

Analysis of Data

This section is concerned with analyzing the primary data sourced from the field survey in order to determine the pattern of responses using simple percentages depicted and regression analysis approach to examine the relationship that existed among variables.

Table 5: E-mail marketing measures (EMKT)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	U(1)		SD (2)		D (3)		A(4)		SA (5)	
	In my firm…….	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
1	Customers that receive emails usually click on the links contained in a given email advertisement or offer.	25	7.8	30	9.4	59	18.4	107	33.4	99	30.9
2	Several customers have actually transacted with the firm based on the email messages they received in the past.	15	4.7	42	13.1	56	17.5	120	37.5	87	27.2
3	Customers do request transaction notifications and marketing offers through earlier emails sent to them.	-	-	63	19.7	78	24.4	102	31.9	77	24
4	The list of customers on the firm email list has been on the increase in recent times.	12	3.7	52	16.3	39	12.2	112	35	105	32.8

Source: Analysis of Field Survey, 2023

The descriptive pattern of response in Table 5 for the e-mail marketing sub-scale on the first questionnaire item shows that 206 (64.4%) of the respondents agree to the question (Customers that receive email usually click on the links contained in a given email advertisement or offer),89 (27.8%) disagree to it and the remaining 25 (7.8%) were indecisive. With respect to the second question, the majority of the respondents 207 (64.7%) concur that several customers

have actually transacted with the firm on the basis of email messages they received in the past, 98 (30.6%) hold a contrary view and the remaining 15 (4.7%) could not make a choice.

On the third item on the e-mail marketing sub-scale, a sizeable number of respondents, 179 (55.9%) of the total respondents agree with the question (Customers do request transaction notification and marketing offers through earlier emails sent to them) while 141(44.1%) disagree to it. When asked if the list of customers on the firm email list has been on increase in recent times, 217 (67.8%) of sampled employees agree to it, 91(28.4%) disagree to it and the remaining 12(3.7%) are undecided

Table 6: Social media marketing measures (SMKT)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	U(1)		SD (2)		D (3)		A(4)		SA (5)	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
5	Customers can easily find my firm social media accounts on most social media platforms.	-	-	59	18.4	55	17.2	92	28.8	114	35.6
6	People are usually interested in talking about my firm campaign or brand on social media platforms.	28	8.7	70	21.9	87	27.2	102	31.9	33	10.3
7	Whenever contents shared on my firm social media accounts, it generates several interactions with users	-	-	40	12.5	88	27.5	86	26.9	106	33.1
8	The followership my firm social media accounts are attracting is encouraging and commendable.	22	6.9	58	18.1	57	17.8	95	29.7	88	27.5

Source: Analysis of Field Survey, 2023

The descriptive pattern of response in Table 6 for social media marketing indicated that on the fifth questionnaire item 206 (64.4%) of the respondents agree that customers can easily find my firm social media accounts on most social media platforms, and the rest majority 114 (35.6%) answered in disagreement. On the second item on the sub-scale that people are usually interested in talking about my firm campaign or brand on social media platforms, about half of the respondents (42.2%) answered in affirmative, 157(49.1%) held a contrary view, while 28 (8.7%) could not make a choice.

With regards to the seventh question on the questionnaire, 192 (60%)

respondents agree that whenever content is shared on their firm social media accounts, it generates several interactions from users and the remaining 128 (40%) disagree with it. When asked if the followership their firm social media accounts are attracting is encouraging and commendable183 (57.2%) of sampled employees concur with it, 115 (35.9%) answered otherwise while the remaining 22(6.9%) were indecisive..

Table 7: Mobile marketing measure (MMKT)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	U(1)		SD (2)		D (3)		A(4)		SA (5)	
	In my firm…….	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
9	Customers can easily make deposits and pay for products through the firm's mobile app or USSD on their phones.	-	-	33	10.3	40	12.5	120	37.5	127	39.7
10	Customers get important advertisement and update on their mobile device regularly	15	4.7	77	24	49	15.3	89	27.8	90	28.1
11	My firm responds to customer enquiries and queries initiated through mobile devices in the shortest possible time.	10	3.1	32	10	87	27.2	96	30	95	29.7

Source: Analysis of Field Survey, 2023

The descriptive pattern of response in Table 7 for the mobile marketing sub-scale showed that on the ninth questionnaire item, 247 (77.2%) of the respondents agree that customers can easily make deposits and pay for products through the firm's mobile app or USSD on their phones and 73 (22.8%) disagree to it. When asked if customers get important advertisement and update on their mobile device regularly 179 (55.9%) of the respondents affirmed to it, 126 (39.4%) answered in disagreement while 15 (4.7%) were undecided.

Concerning the eleventh questionnaire item, 191 (59.7%) sampled individuals concur that their firm responds to customer enquiries and queries initiated through mobile devices in the shortest possible time, 119 (37.2%) answered otherwise and the remaining 10(3.1%) were indecisive

Table 8: Measures of organizational performance (EJP)

S/N	Questionnaire Items	U(1)		SD (2)		D (3)		A(4)		SA (5)	
	Customer perspective	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
19	My firm customer retention rate has improved.	4	1.2	35	10.9	56	17.5	116	36.3	109	34
20	My firm delivers on its value proposition to customers.	6	1.9	27	8.4	47	14.7	128	40	112	35
	Internal business perspective										
21	In my firm internal processes are streamlined.	-	-	13	4.1	67	20.9	115	35.9	125	39.1
22	In my firm innovation is part of the service delivery process.	-	-	60	18.8	77	24	35	10.9	148	46.3
	Learning and growth perspective										
23	My firm organization climate support its strategy	12	3.7	27	8.4	55	17.2	137	42.8	89	27.8
24	My firm invests in management development programs	15	4.7	26	8.1	37	11.6	140	43.7	102	31.9

Source: Analysis of Field Survey, 2023

The descriptive pattern of responses in Table 8 for measures of organizational performance showed a high agreement rate for the various measures of the construct. As regards customer perspective, 225(70.3%) of the total respondents agree that their firm customer retention rate has improved, 91(28.4%) disagree with it while 4(1.2%) are undecided. 240(75%) of sampled individuals concur that their firm delivers on its value proposition to customers 74(23.1%) disagree with it and 6(1.9%) are undecided.

On the second measure of organizational performance; internal business perspective 240(75%) of the total respondents concur that in their firm internal processes are streamlined while the rest 80 (25%) hold a contrary viewpoint. 183(57.2%) of the total respondents agree that in their firm innovation is part of the service delivery process while the remaining 137(42.8%) disagree with the statement. With regards to the third measure of organizational performance; the learning and growth perspective 226 (70.6%) of the total respondents agree that their firm organization climate supports its strategy, 82(25.6%) disagree with it while 12(3.7%) are undecided. When asked if their firm invests in management development programs 242(75.6%) of the entire employees sampled answered affirmatively, 63(19.7%) answered otherwise and 15(4.7%) could not make a choice.

Table 9: Descriptive characteristic Data collected

variable	mean	p50	max	min	N
mobmkt	3.8375	4	5	1	320
socmkt	3.9	4	5	1	320
emlmkt	3.996875	4	5	2	320
smepef	4.028125	4	5	2	320

Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata version 13.0)

Table 9 shows the descriptive properties of the data set used for the analysis, the constructs have a maximum value of 5 indicating that the respondents strongly agree at some point for all the questions asked, while the minimum of 1 for the constructs except web marketing, search engine marketing and organizational performance of selected SMEs which had a minimum of 2. On average, the respondent chooses 4 (often). The descriptive statistics Table further shows that the sample size of 320respondents was sampled (n = 320)

Table 12: Normality Test

Skewness/Kurtosis tests for Normality

Variable	Obs	Pr(Skewness)	Pr(Kurtosis)	adj chi2(2)	joint Prob>chi2
mobmkt	320	0.0000	0.0005	47.58	0.0000
socmkt	320	0.0000	0.0002	47.40	0.0000
emlmkt	320	0.0000	0.0083	31.51	0.0000
smepef	320	0.0000	0.0337	27.12	0.0000

Source: Researcher's computation(using Stata version 13.0)

The result of the normality test was shown in Table 12 which shows that all the variables are normally distributed at 5% level of significance. Hence, any recommendations made to a very large extent would represent the characteristics of the thorough population of the study.

Table 13: Correlations among the Variables

	mobmkt	socmkt	emlmkt	smepef
mobmkt	1.0000			
socmkt	0.3632	1.0000		
emlmkt	0.4860	0.5862	1.0000	
smepef	0.4729	0.5969	0.8069	1.0000

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)
Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata version 13.0)

The result in Table 13, reveals that there is a positive correlation analysis involving the dimensions of digital marketing and organizational performance. For instance, e-mail marketing has a weak positive correlation with social media marketing (r=0.3476), mobile marketing has a moderate positive correlation with web marketing (r=0.5958) and search engine marketing has a strong positive correlation with organizational performance(r=0.7166). Overall, dimensions of digital marketing maintained a positively correlation with organizational performance.

Table 14: Reliability test of study's variables

Item	Obs	Sign	item-test correlation	item-rest correlation	average interitem covariance	alpha
mobmkt	320	+	0.7340	0.4994	.4198831	0.8536
socmkt	320	+	0.7770	0.5981	.3953272	0.8004
emlmkt	320	+	0.8736	0.7681	.335593	0.7258
smepef	320	+	0.8732	0.7652	.3328501	0.7259
Test scale					.3709133	0.8238

Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata version 13.0)

The result in Table 14, reveals the measurement scale reliability. The internal consistency of the study variables was confirmed because the threshold of 0.7for Cronbach's Alpha test score was met.

Post Regression Diagnostic Test

Test for Heteroskedasticity

```
Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity
         Ho: Constant variance
         Variables: fitted values of ORGP

         chi2(1)      =     3.73
         Prob > chi2  =   0.0534
```

Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata versio n 13.0)

The result for the test for heteroskedasticity shows that the variation between the dependent and independent variables is homoscedastic, in that there is no heteroskedasticity problem (5.97(0.1145)). Implying that the model is free from the presence of unequal variance. This further indicates that our probability values for drawing inferences on the level of significance are reliable and valid. Thus, validating the OLS results, hence, the regression results can be used to test the formulated hypotheses.

PRDT Test

```
Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity
         Ho: Constant variance
         Variables: fitted values of smepef

         chi2(1)      =     0.01
         Prob > chi2  =   0.9221

Ramsey RESET test using powers of the fitted values of smepef
       Ho:  model has no omitted variables
                  F(3, 313) =      3.54
                   Prob > F =      0.0150
. estat vif

    Variable |       VIF       1/VIF
-------------+----------------------
      emlmkt |      1.75    0.570528
      socmkt |      1.54    0.648381
      mobmkt |      1.33    0.754499
-------------+----------------------
    Mean VIF |      1.54
```

Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata version 13.0)

The result shows the test for variance inflation factor test (VIF); the mean VIF value is reported 1.54 which is less than the benchmark value of 10 point to the absence of multicollinearity.

Ramsey Regression Equation Specification Error Test (RESET)

The results obtained from the test for Ramsey regression equation specification error test, the probability value of 0.0150, implying that the model has no omitted variables

Test of Hypotheses

Table 15: Digital marketingdimensions (independent Variable) on organizational performance (dependent Variable)

```
  Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =     320
---------+------------------------------           F(  3,   316) =  224.07
   Model |  135.193832     3  45.0646106           Prob > F      =  0.0000
Residual |  63.5530432   316  .201117225           R-squared     =  0.6802
---------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.6772
   Total |  198.746875   319  .623030956           Root MSE      =  .44846

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
  smepef |      Coef.   Std. Err.      t    P>|t|     [95% Conf. Interval]
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
  mobmkt |   .0751493   .0314467     2.39   0.017     .0132778    .1370207
  socmkt |    .170759   .0378251     4.51   0.000     .0963382    .2451798
  emlmkt |   .6695692   .0427377    15.67   0.000     .5854829    .7536556
   _cons |   .3975952   .1480696     2.69   0.008     .1062684     .688922
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance
Source: Researcher's computation (using Stata version 13.0)

Ho_1: Email marketing has no significant positive relationship with the performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria

The regression result output in Table 15 shows that e-mail marketing **d**imension of digital marketing practices has a significant positive relationship with organizational performance (Coef. 0.0751, p = 0.017), the p-values for e-mail marketing is less than 0.05, hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate, which state that e-mail marketing has a significant positive association with performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria.

Ho_2: There is no significant positive relationship between social media marketing and the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. The regression result output in Table 15 reveals that the social media marketing dimension of digital marketing practices has a significant positive relationship with organizational performance (Coef. 0.1707, p = 0.000), the p-values for the social media marketing variable are less than 0.05, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate, which state that there is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing and performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria.

Ho_3: Mobile marketing has no significant positive relationship with the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. The regression result output in table 15 indicates that the mobile marketing dimension of digital marketing practices has a significant positive relationship with the organizational performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria (Coef. 0.6695, p = 0.000), the p-values for mobile marketing are less than 0.05, hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate, which states that mobile marketing has a significant positive association with performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

The test of the hypotheses above showed that the e-mail marketing **dimension** of digital marketing practices has a significant positive relationship with organizational performance (Coef. 0.0751, p = 0.017), the p-value for e-mail marketing is less than 0.05. This led to the acceptance of the formulated alternate hypothesis, implying that the two variables move in the same direction such that when e-mail marketing is on the increase, there is an increase in the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. Similarly, when e-mail marketing is on the decrease, there is a decrease in the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. This finding is in alignment with Aljumah, (2020) position that when carried out under proper planning email marketing remains an effective strategy to approach the audience to gain maximum results. Similarly, according to Merisavo and Raulas (2004), customers appreciate regular communication through e-mail

because it brings value to them by providing and helping them engage in repeat purchases which generate guaranteed streams of revenue for the organization continually.

The result shows that the social media marketing dimension of digital marketing practices has a significant positive relationship with organizational performance (Coef. 0.1707, p = 0.000), the p-values for the social media marketing variable are less than 0.05, therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate, which state that there is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing and performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria. What this means is that when there is a rise in the usage of social media marketing, there is also growth in organizational performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. The finding is supported by Aluri et al. (2016) discovery that if managers consider feedback from social media and develop their marketing strategy accordingly, they are likely to improve in quality and influence the perception of customers in a way that will boost the performance of the organization. Furthermore, Pan and Chious (2011) stressed that the e-word of mouth on social media reviews helps consumers in their purchase decisions and meeting the marketing goals of the organization. The regression result output in Table 15 indicates that the mobile marketing dimension of digital marketing practices has a significant positive association with organizational performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria (Coef. 0.6695, p = 0.000), the p-values for mobile marketing are less than 0.05, hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate, which states that mobile marketing has a significant positive association with performance of SMEs in South-South and South East Nigeria. This implies that when mobile marketing is increasing, there is an increase in the performance of SMEs in South-South and South-East Nigeria. This is in consonant with Chanthinok and Kaiwinik (2021) findings that the personalization advertising flexibility focus which is an integral part of mobile marketing has positive influences on individual customer service, competitive advantage, and firm performance. This is further supported by Xu, (2007) statement that the effectiveness of mobile devices makes it possible to reach consumers throughout the day, which provides marketers with an avenue to tap into their demographics using the information derived thereof to strengthen customer relationships and improve satisfaction level which eventually will favor the organization bottom line.

Conclusion

Engagement and contact between customers and companies is the primary

goal of digital marketing. This can be done by creating digital media so that the end-users must take action in order to view or receive the intended message. It is important to note that traditional marketing techniques and fundamental marketing principles are not invalidated by digital marketing. Applying fundamental ideas and picking up new rules are the keys to success in the digital age. However, as digital marketing relies on technology, which is constantly changing and evolving, the same may be expected of its techniques. In a similar vein, the dynamic nature of the digital market requires digital marketers to stay up with these changes by keeping an eye out for new developments and trends. Social media provides a platform for companies to extend marketing campaigns to vast audience all over the world even in remote places. More so, facilitating online purchases induces consumers into repeat purchases which results when there are satisfied. Online communities provide an avenue for users to share experiences and information among themselves. With continuous interaction, members become familiar with themselves cultivating by some level of trust.

Email marketing remains an effective strategy to approach the audience to gain maximum results. It has been observed that emails to users may provide better responses with instant replies due to interest in the business. Customized offers and effective communication encourage customers to remain and repeat purchases by establishing a long-term relationship that generates guaranteed streams of revenue for the organization continually. E-mail marketing helps companies keep in touch with their customers regularly at a low cost because customers appreciate regular communication through e-mail which brings value and satisfaction to them by providing them with relevant information and by reducing their efforts to search for information. The study demonstrated the core tactics that are pivotal in the implementation of digital marketing strategies and the profound impact they have on the success or otherwise of the organization at large.

Recommendations

1.To get favorable responses from existing customers, marketing-oriented email should be designed in such a way the subject line is simple; and the content is engaging and persuasive while adding necessary links to the company's home page websites.

2. Adequate social marketing goals should be established first which resonates with the organization's targeted audience, and subsequently, efforts should be made to carry out social media audits, tracking performance while adjusting

the strategy accordingly.

3. To drive leads and sales, efforts should be made to find out the most preferred way consumers want to connect with the company through their mobile appliances and appropriate promotion should be targeted at them based on preference too

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