

Digital Marketing Strategy and Customer Patronage of Online Businesses in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study examined the effect of digital marketing on consumers' patronage of online businesses in Nigeria. The research design in the study was survey design because the study involved direct contact with a cross section of the respondents who shared similar features. The population in the study was thirty top online businesses of where five top management staff members were selected as samples from each of the companies using a structured questionnaire and was analyzed using both mean and standard deviation and the hypotheses were tested using correlation and multiple regression analyses. The study was anchored on cue utilization theory. The findings show that social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy and affiliate marketing strategy have positive effects on consumers' patronage. All the proxies for digital marketing strategy have a positive effect on consumers' patronage. Therefore, it was recommended that strategies be used to engage social media operators in order to promote their companies' image on popular social media applications. They should ensure that the consumers' privacy should be at the top on their companies' agenda when using electronic mail strategy as a marketing tool. They should also partner with popular websites to host their company's link page, thereby inviting other internet users to their home page.*

Keyword: Social media, Affiliate marketing, email marketing, strategy, and consumers' patronage

Introduction

Organizations strive to use social media to communicate with their customers in order to generate income, efficiency and reduce costs in doing business (Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Customers these days are no longer passive recipients as they were before. They are now integrated into the digital marketing exchange process and participate in shaping the creation of everything from promotional messages. The massive rise in interactive digital communications enhanced communication between companies and consumers from the traditional Web 1.0 model to the world of highly interactive Web 3.0 (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Consumers today spend several hours every day online. That includes everything from using the web, social media networking, playing video games, listening to music and watching television. Right now, social media is becoming extremely integrated into our daily lives and companies are starting to identify the unique opportunities it offers. The number of internet users worldwide has reached 4.1 billion where 92% of them access the internet from their mobile devices (Alghizzawi, 2019). He also revealed that the number of active social media users was recorded at 3.56 billion. Establishing and maintaining orders with customers at the time of transaction can be expensive. Most consumers collect information about a product or services, and make cost comparisons between an online store and a local store before making a purchase. Digital marketing has become a company's most advanced and important strategy for promoting, advertising and communicating with many online customers (Rotich & Mukhongo, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

It is considered that most business owners and executives in Nigeria do not have a clear understanding of digital marketing for marketing their products. Online businesses today face the daunting challenge of competing competitors. Some organizations are expanding their digital market services to gain a larger share of consumers in Nigeria. Despite digital connectivity providing access to reach and influence customers' choice, there have been challenges for companies to build customer value. Therefore, it has become imperative for online businesses to adopt digital marketing strategies especially in the use of social media, affiliate marketing and email marketing strategy to gain competitive advantage over competitors to improve consumers' patronage. Digital marketing strategies that emphasize and over stretch customer loyalty without initiating customer retention and customer referrals will not be sustainable. Digital marketing strategies need to create a win-win situation with customers in order to achieve organizational goals. This research is therefore borne to determine the impact of digital marketing strategy in improving consumers' patronage of top thirty online businesses in Nigeria (see list of these companies in 3ptechies list).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the impact of digital marketing strategy on consumers' patronage by focusing on online businesses in Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- i. To determine the relationship between social media marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.

- ii. To examine the relationship between email marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
- iii. To determine the relationship between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are stated in the null form to the direction of this study.

- i. H_0 : There is no significant relationship between social media marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
- ii. H_0 : There is no significant relationship between email marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
- iii. H_0 : There is no significant relationship between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers' patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Digital Marketing Strategy

Digital marketing is an all-encompassing term that contains of digital channels, such as content marketing, SEO, email marketing, social media marketing, mobile marketing and so on, to creating innovative strategies for accessing and connect with prospective and existing customers (Deshpande, 2020). Digital marketing strategy is a plan that helps a business achieve its digital goals through carefully selected online marketing channels such as earned, paid, and owned media (Hudson, 2020). Digital marketing strategies are those online marketing strategies management adopts for online competition. In order for digital marketing strategies to contribute significantly to achieving a company's goal, it is necessary to look at certain factors in its implementation (Onobrakpeya & Mac-Attama, 2017). Good internet connectivity facilities have to be on ground. The concept of digital marketing in this study was decomposed into social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy and affiliate marketing strategy.

Social Media Marketing Strategy

Social media marketing strategy contributes significantly to the achievement of a company's goal, by ensuring that organizations advertise their products or services through paid and unpaid channels on platforms (Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram) where their prospective and existing customers spend most of their time (Deshpande, 2020). Social media marketing strategy is the process by which strategies are developed and adapted to attract website traffic or to attract the attention of consumers on the web using different communication platforms. Staying competitive in today's fast-paced business world requires a strong communication strategy (Erdogmus & Cirek, 2012). Organizations hire social media consultants to determine content and branding offers and their activities on social media so that the hearts and minds of consumers are captured. Activities such as engaging consumers by sharing relevant content on social media, collecting feedbacks and responding intelligently, and ultimately adjusting or developing a marketing strategy from the response web traffic which leading to higher visibility in search engines optimization (Dodokh & Al-Maaitah, 2019). They also argued that social media can be used to track competitors' activities and analyze the potential impact of an online platform helping to grow businesses through developing strategies, such as providing discounts and other offers to attract more customers.

Email Marketing Strategy

Deshpande (2020) describes email marketing is the process of maintaining a database of cold and warm contacts of customers, and sending them email notifications about company products and services. It is an active channel for connecting with existing and potential customers. It involves sending out promotional emails to attract new customers or convincing existing ones to make a purchase (Onobrakpeya & Mac-Attama, 2017). Email marketing helps maintain old and new customers' database, retain existing ones, promote discounted offers, and distribute content. There are different types of email marketing as described below (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015): i. Stand-alone campaign: The main character that these emails usually have is a certain retention period. It is widely used to promote new products or products for one season. ii. Newsletter: The main reason behind the newsletter is to support customer loyalty. They contain useful information for customers which are sent to them at least once a month.

Affiliate Marketing Strategy

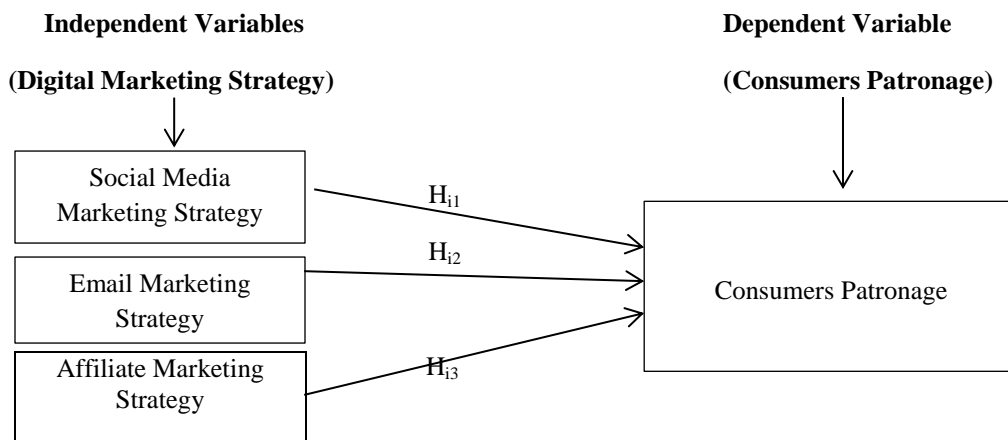
The concept of affiliate marketing is similar to online commission-based marketing. Organizations provide customized communication to partners (Deshpande, 2020). Basically, affiliate marketing promotes other people’s products and affiliates receive a commission every time an affiliate makes a sale or introduces a lead (Chris, 2020). Affiliates receive a specific cut / commission every time someone buys through their custom link. A partner called an affiliate promotes products or services from another company called merchant (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). Affiliate marketing strategy uses banners or links of their websites on a merchant’s website to find and attract buyers to their web page. There are three different ways affiliates participate in commissions (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015). 1. Pay per click: When a customer clicks on a link provided by an affiliate’s website and buys the product from the affiliate merchant they receive a specific commission. 2. Pay per lead: Here the affiliates receive a commission for each person who filling out web-based forms and contact details (email address). Commission fees may also depend on the prices of the product sold or the service you bring to the third category: 3. Pay per sale: the affiliate earns a certain percentage of the price of the product.

Consumers Patronage

Consumers become more sophisticated, more informed, more knowledgeable and more demanding (Okolo, 2017). Digital marketers need to understand what their customers need and what they want at any given time. They need to understand what is affecting and influencing consumers' behaviour, as well as their major decisions as they purchase goods and services online. Customers often tell their good or bad experiences about a product and / or company to those within their social circles. Satisfied customers are likely to tell up to six people while dissatisfied customers will report their negative experience to at least ten people (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011). Although several researches have suggested that customer satisfaction is the leading driver for repetitive purchase, customer retention, and loyalty (Onobrakpeya & Mac-Attama, 2017). Customer patronage is important for all businesses because it provides marketing management metrics to measure and improve customer service delivery.

Research Model

The researcher model below, illustrates the link between the independent variables (social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy, and affiliate marketing strategy) and dependent variable (consumers patronage). Based on the formulated hypotheses, the researcher has developed a nexus among digital marketing strategies on consumers’ patronage of top thirty online companies in Nigeria. The figure below shows the relationships between the various variables;



Source: Researcher Model

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is embedded in cue utilization theory of Easterbrook (1959), which implies that products or services contain a variety of cues that serve as quality indicators of a product. The theory categorizes cues that help consumers to determine quality as intrinsic and extrinsic to a product or service purchases. In the case of manufactured products, the physical features of the product such as size or shape serves as intrinsic cues, while extrinsic cues include the brand name and price. Cue Utilization Theory is used in this study to evaluate the value of digital marketing tools (social media marketing, email marketing and affiliate marketing) in determining consumers' preference of a website quality, available product information and simple payment system.

Empirical Review

Ayoola and Ibrahim (2020) examined the effect of electronic marketing on customer satisfaction of selected aviation services in Nigeria. The research design was survey design. The population was 18 domestic airlines and six of them were selected as sample due to the number of active airlines in Nigeria. Data from this study were collected from one hundred (100) customers using questionnaire and analyzed using both descriptive (tables, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (regression analysis). The findings show that search engine optimization, social media marketing and email marketing have a positive impact on customer satisfaction in aviation services in Nigeria.

Beenu and Rathika (2019) analyze the impact of customer's attitude towards digital and conventional advertising. Customer's attitude was characterized by a variety of features such as credibility of customers, educating customers, materialism and good commercial advertising. A descriptive study was conducted, 110 samples were selected using convenience sampling technique. The results show that digital advertising has a greater impact than conventional advertising.

Dodokh and Al-Maaitah (2019) studied the impact of social media on organizational performance in Jordanian Dead Sea cosmetic industry. The study contains three dynamic variables: social media for marketing, social media for customer's relations and services, and social media for information accessibility on organizational performance in terms of speed, time to market, cost reduction, and innovation in Jordan. Data was obtained from a sample of 169 managers working in 23 different organizations in cosmetic sector. Structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses. The results have shown that there is a strong positive impact of using social media on organizational performance.

Oluwafemi and Adebisi (2018) examined the influence of integrated marketing communications dimensions on customer loyalty in mobile telecommunication industry. Cross-sectional survey design was used, data were collected from 150 respondents with = 14 copies of the returned questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation and regression), while hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results show a significant relationship between customer loyalty and direct marketing ($r = .375^{**}$); publicity ($r = .514^{**}$); promotion sales ($r = .470^{**}$) and advertising $r = .562^{**}$) respectively. The multiple regression result shows R^2 value of .483, which means that integrated marketing communication dimensions shows 48.3% variance in customer loyalty.

Okolo, Okafor, Obikeze, and Nduka (2018) studied the impact of online advertising on consumer brand awareness and patronage in five selected branches of United Bank for Africa (UBA), Enugu state, Nigeria. The objective was to find out how online advertising influences consumer brand awareness, consumer purchase behaviour and consumer brand of customer connected to the internet. The findings of online advertising have a significantly impact on customer brand awareness of UBA products. Also, it was found that online advertising does not have a significant impact on consumer purchase behaviour.

Onobrakpeya and Mac-Attama (2017) examined the effects of digital marketing on customer satisfaction of deposits money banks in Nigeria. A sample of 214 employees was taken from selected banks in Warri Metropolis, Delta State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research was adopted, and the statistical techniques used consist of simple percentage, correlation and multiple regression analyses. The findings show that e-mail marketing has a positive impact on customer satisfaction of deposit money banks in Nigeria.

Schwarzl and Grabowska (2015) conducted a theoretical study of the growing importance of online marketing, which including research on the state of the art internet connectivity by analyzing the data provided in several surveys. It also contains a brief overview of online marketing, basic online marketing strategies and how to get new customers while keeping old ones.

Haq (2012) evaluated the attitude of respondents towards affiliate programmes or affiliate marketing, used as a source of information, advertisement and a connecting link between the online marketer and the customer. A survey design was conducted among 300 Indian internet users to find out their attitude towards affiliate marketing programmes and the various factors affecting the usefulness of the programme. The findings of the study showed a positive view of affiliate marketing. This research also found that the stronger predictor of consumer attitude towards affiliate marketing is the usefulness, incentive and perceived trust in the system.

Erdogmus and Cirek (2012) examined the effects of social media marketing on brand loyalty in Turkey. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and a sample of 338 people. The hypotheses were tested via multiple regression analysis. The results of the study showed that customers brand loyalty is positively affected when using social media. Customers prefer to share music, technological-related, and humorous content on social media platforms.

Merisavo and Raulas (2004) evaluated the effects of email marketing on brand loyalty. The data was collected from 890 consumers, who were users of a multinational cosmetics brand and also received regular e-mail messages from advertiser. The results show that regular e-mail marketing has a positive impact on brand loyalty.

Research Method

Research Design

The study used survey research design. The survey design allows for a comprehensive study of organizations that are related in many aspects and the findings are relied upon to generalize a population (Rotich & Mukhongo, 2015). The study covered thirty (30) top online line businesses in Nigeria. The sample size consists of five management and marketing executive of each targeted organization which sum up to be one hundred and fifty (150) employees. A total of one hundred and thirty one (131) questionnaires were properly filled and returned. The returned questionnaires represent 87.3 percent of the total questionnaire issued. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson’s moment correlation and multiple regression analyzes.

To validate the data collection tool, the questionnaire was given to well-known experts in the field of online marketing. This helped to establish the content validity of the instrument.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest method of ten questionnaires was employed. From the computed Cronbach/Coefficient Alpha value .821, .887, .919 and .879 were for social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy and affiliate marketing strategy on consumer patronage, which means that 82.1%, 88.7%, 91.9% and 87.9% of the variance of the scores were reliable.

Hypotheses Testing

The following hypotheses are stated in the null and alternative form to the direction of this study.

- i. H₀: There is no significant relationship between social media marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
H_i: There is significant relationship between social media marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
- ii. H₀: There is no significant relationship between email marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
H_i: There is significant relationship between email marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
- iii. H₀: There is no significant relationship between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.
H_i: There is significant relationship between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers’ patronage on online businesses in Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In this section, the study sought to find out the effect of digital marketing strategy on consumers’ patronage of thirty top online business in Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlation and descriptive statistic between social media strategy (SMS), email marketing strategy (EMS) and affiliates marketing strategy (AMS) on consumers patronage (CP)

		CP	SMS	EMS	AMS
CP	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	131			
SMS	Pearson Correlation	.738**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	131	131		
EMS	Pearson Correlation	.822**	.654**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	131	131	131	131

AMS	Pearson Correlation	.968**	.744**	.792**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	131	131	131	131
	Mean	3.5053	3.4382	3.3481	3.4962
	Standard deviation	.81913	.73382	.72688	.77235

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings show that social media marketing strategy has a positive effect on consumers' patronage ($r = .738^{**}$, $P < 0.01$). The result provided support the alternative hypothesis test result ($r=.000 < 0.05$) showing that social media marketing strategy has a significant relationship with consumers patronage. This is in line with Ayoola and Ibrahim (2020) and Dodokh and Al-Maaitah (2019) stated that social media marketing strategy makes a way to reach customers and provide product information to them at any location that reduces the time to search for product details. However, the finding contradict Okolo, Okafor, Obikeze, and Nduka (2018) research, which states that online advertising has no significant effect on consumer behaviour.

The findings also revealed that email marketing strategy was found to have a positive impact on consumers' patronage ($r = .822^{**}$, $P < 0.01$). The findings provided support for the result of alternative hypothesis two ($r=.000 < 0.05$) that stated there was a correlation between email marketing strategy and consumers' patronage. This is in line with the findings of Ayoola and Ibrahim (2020) and Merisavo and Raulas (2004) which states that email marketing have a positive effect on customer satisfaction by reducing their search for product information. What this means is that customers value regular communication through email because it brings value to them.

In addition, the result of the regression analysis revealed that affiliate marketing strategy had a positive impact on consumers patronage ($r = .968^{**}$, $P < 0.01$). The findings provided support for alternative hypothesis three ($r=.000 < 0.05$) that stated there was a correlation between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers patronage. The finding is consistent with Haq (2012) who stated that there is a positive relationship between affiliate marketing strategy and consumers' satisfaction level. The implication of this finding is that search engine marketing creates customer satisfaction when they easily find product information and transacting online or offline.

The results of the correlation analysis include all digital marketing indicators that have shown positive correlation coefficient values among the indicators.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.973 ^a	.946	.945	.19297	.946	738.485	3	127	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), AMS, SMS, EMS

From the model summary on table 2, showed that digital marketing strategy explains (.946) 94.6 percent of the variability of consumers' patronage. While 5.4 percent could be explained by other variable not captured.

Table 3: Fitness of the Model

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	82.497	3	27.499	738.485	.000 ^a
	Residual	4.729	127	.037		
	Total	87.226	130			

a. Predictors: (Constant), AMS, SMS, EMS

b. Dependent Variable: CP

Table 3 exhibited that digital marketing strategy statistically significantly predict consumers patronage, $F(3, 127) = 738.485$, $p < .0005$ this implies that the regression model is a good fit of the data.

Table 4: Multi Regression analysis for components of digital marketing and consumers' patronage

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.225	.288		-2.546	.012
	SMS	.220	.035	.218	.564	.000
	EMS	.363	.039	.345	4.228	.000
	AMS	.891	.041	.840	21.652	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CP

The results from the multiple regression analysis in table 4 showed the effect of digital marketing strategy on consumers' patronage. The three decomposed variables of digital marketing strategy: social media marketing strategy (SMS) ($\beta = .218$, $P < 0.01$), e-mail marketing strategy (EMS) ($\beta = .345$, $P < 0.01$) and affiliate marketing strategy ($\beta = .840$, $P < 0.01$) exhibited significant positive effect on consumers patronage (CP).

The general equation to predict CP = $X_0 + X_1\text{SMS} + X_2\text{EMS} + X_3\text{AMS} + X_n$

CP = $-2.225 + (.220 \times \text{SMS}) + (.363 \times \text{EMS}) + (.891 \times \text{AMS})$

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of digital marketing strategy on consumers' patronage of top thirty online businesses conducted in Nigeria. The study was based on cue utilization theory. A conceptual model was developed to guide the research. The proxies for measuring digital marketing strategy are social media marketing strategy, email marketing strategy and affiliate marketing strategy. The result of the correlation and regression shows that the three proxies of digital marketing strategy has a positive impact on consumers patronage of online businesses in Nigeria, as this responds to research objectives and formulated hypotheses. Therefore, it can be concluded that digital marketing strategy has a positive effect on consumers' patronage of online businesses in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study from the hypotheses tested, it is recommended that online businesses in Nigeria should do the following;

Establish a strategy for engaging social media operators to promote their companies image on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and more.

They should ensure that consumer privacy should be at the top of their corporate list when using electronic mail strategy as a marketing tool. This is because consumers tend to respond positively to marketing activities they grant permission to than to the once that violates their privacy.

They should also partner with other popular website to host a link page for their website and other online users to invite customers for patronage.

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