

Digital Marketing Strategies and The Marketing Performance of Top 100 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate digital marketing strategies and the marketing performance of Top 100 SMEs in Kenya. The objective of this study was to establish the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the marketing performance of top 100 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. The study employed a regression design. The researcher developed a set of questionnaire for data collection from Top 100 SMEs and 100 SMEs constituted the target population for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to thirty (30) Top 100 SMEs in the Commercial and Trade, Service, Construction and Technology sectors. The study was limited to the SMEs that were in the Top 100 list in 2016. The researcher issued questionnaires to the sampled SMEs and data was collected using the drop and pick method. Quantitative data was collected and analysed by use of regression analysis to establish the significance of correlation coefficient on the association between the variables. The study found that digital marketing strategies had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. 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. The study suggested that there was need for more studies to be conducted on the same subject on other SMEs and cadres of companies for comparative results.

Background

As a result of increased competitiveness and dynamism of the business sector it has become imperative for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to implement the development, management and monitoring of their businesses in an efficient manner so as to increase their marketing performance (Minama, 2016). Ng'ang'a (2016) reports that marketing is a vital endeavor in any business, more so in SMEs since it enables the company to focus on their clients, what they want and need and how to inform them that they have those products so as to enable sales. The success or failure of a business is dependent on whether its marketing endeavors reflect the needs of their clients and the benefits that they stand to accrue from the utilization of their products or services; it is therefore imperative that SMEs employ marketing strategies that are current and responsive to the ever changing needs of their clients (Brenes, Mena & Mulina, 2007).

This study will be guided by two theories, the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) and the innovation diffusion theory. TAM explains the factors that influence the adoption of technology by its intended users, these include perceived usefulness, ease of use, therefore, the ease of usage of digital marketing strategies and the perceptions that SMEs have on their usefulness determines their adoption (Dai & Kauffman, 2001). The innovation diffusion theory states that the decision to adopt an innovation is based on its perceived advantages, how compatible it is to existing systems and processes, how complex it is, the ease of trying it out and if the results of adopting the innovation are easily visible. This model is suitable to this study as it illuminates the digital marketing adoption process and the factors that influence SMEs to adopt digital marketing (Achieng', 2016).

In the continent of Africa, SMEs make up about 90% of all the business entities and are responsible for creating approximately 50% of all the employment in Africa; they make substantial contributions to the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of their countries and are key drivers of most economies (Lee, 2009). SMEs are mostly small enterprises with a proprietor and several employees, they are regulated by the ministry of trade and they are valued between 100 to 5000 dollars. SMEs are the backbones

of many economies worldwide; however they face numerous challenges such as insufficient startup capital, competition from established firms and the influx of cheap goods from countries such as China (Minama, 2016). It is important for them to adopt innovative marketing techniques that will enable them to surmount these challenges and be on a nearly level playing field with their more established counterparts (Lee, 2009).

Digital Marketing Strategies

According to Rowley (2011), digital marketing refers to the usage of digital channels such as the internet to promote, endorse and market a company's products or services. Lee and Kim (2009) report that there are various digital marketing strategies that exist, these include: social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), e-mail marketing, blogs and websites and marketing products and services through online personalities and social influencers; companies can also use other digital marketing strategies such as video advertisements, sponsoring content on more popular websites and carrying out on-line sales such as flash sales. Businesses can utilize these advertisement channels to promote their products digitally to a wider audience and increase their competitive edge; digital marketing strategies also allow businesses to target specific customers with specific marketing strategies depending on their age, social status, preferences and financial capabilities (Ng'ang'a, 2015).

When using digital marketing strategies, companies are also able to save on their marketing costs since digital marketing is significantly cheaper than traditional marketing channels such as billboards, TV advertisements and Newspaper Advertisements; this makes it significant and instrumental to SMEs since most of them are cash strapped and therefore cannot afford traditional marketing (Lee & Kim, 2009). Nonetheless, while digital marketing strategies are cheaper and have a wider reach, companies face new challenges of creating online content and managing these sites and online interactions with their clients; this requires them to gain new skills and competences so to take full advantage of digital marketing (Kithinji, 2014).

In Kenya, SMEs have a high failure rate with about 90% of them not surviving their fifth birthdays as a result of lack of capital, poor business management skills, lack of marketing and poor products or services (OECD, 2012). Nonetheless a good number of Kenyan SMEs have adopted digital marketing strategies especially social media marketing, SEO optimization, sponsored content and website advertising (Nga'nga', 2015). This is a result of the high mobile phone penetration and internet uptake in Kenya leading to a huge number of Kenyans having an online presence and making a lot of online purchases as exemplified by the success of online markets such as Jumia, Olx and Kilimall (Mbugua, 2016).

Marketing Performance

Since a substantial amount of time, money and effort is spent on marketing endeavors, it is important for the marketing department to show the effects of their efforts on the company's bottom line and business strategies (Kithinji, 2014). These effects are normally measured using the number of sales, number of website visitors, and customer's brand awareness levels. It is also important to measure the results of a marketing campaign, how effective the campaign was, the company's market share, the satisfaction of a firm's customers, the awareness that the customer has about the company and the benefits of marketing activities as compared to their cost (Achieng', 2016). Marketing performance is measured by the number of visitors to a website, number of clicks on an advert, the amount of time spent on the website, the number of sales closed as a result of digital marketing and the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness, customer loyalty, engagement and satisfaction (Eagelman, 2013).

Measuring a company's marketing performance enables the management of the company to quantify the gains gotten from marketing activities and to also optimize their marketing strategies to meet the needs of their clients (Gilaninia *et al.*, 2011). Measuring marketing performance allows a company to align their marketing strategies accordingly, to increase their competitive edge and to anticipate and therefore avert the marketing strategies of their competitors (Eagelman, 2013). It is only through the measurement of the performance of a company's marketing gains that a company can be able to craft a new strategy and grow its revenues while achieving its objectives (Wang & Chang, 2013).

SMEs in Kenya

In Kenya, SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) are defined as firms, businesses or industries that do not employ more than nine people and whose total annual revenue is less than 500,000 shillings (GOK, 2012). While there is no comprehensive government record of SME's in Kenya, Makori (2014) estimates that there are about 7.5 million enterprises that contribute to 4% of Kenya's GDP as of the year 2014; these enterprises create approximately 80% of new jobs in Kenya and form 95% of businesses in the county.

These SMEs are found in the food, small manufacturing, transport textile, communication, agriculture, beauty and other small enterprises; they form the backbone of the Kenyan economy through creation of employment and stimulating the economy. While thousands of SMEs are formed in Kenya every year, 40% of them fold within the first year, 80% will fold within 5 years and 96% will be non-existent in 10 years; the OECD attributes this to lack of funds, limited knowledge, and poor managerial skills, lack of business structures coupled with poor product / service quality (2012).

The growth of digital marketing can be attributed to the exponential

increase in the number of internet users in the world and more so here in Kenya; at the moment, the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) reports that there were approximately 19 million internet subscribers in Kenya in the year 2016 and that many of them accessed social media sites and online sales platforms nearly on a daily basis (CAK, 2016).

KPMG launched the top 100 SMEs competition in Kenya in the year 2008, in the year 2009 in Uganda and in the year 2010 in Tanzania. The aim of this competition is to point out excellent SMEs in Kenya and encourage entrepreneurship in Kenya (Kithinji, 2014). For a company to be selected among the top 100 SMEs, it has to fill out a questionnaire that outlines its governance, structure and financial position, the top SMEs are selected with respect to their financial management, its structure, sustainability and governance. A top 100 SME is one that has excellent growth in its revenues, has growing profits, it sufficiently liquid and provides good returns to stakeholders; these are companies that continuously increase their market share, strengthen their financial position and provide good returns for its owners (Makori, 2014).

Research Problem

The increase in the adoption of digital marketing strategies such as Social Media, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Display adverts and websites can be attributed to increased internet penetration, cheap internet enabled phones and integration of ICT with most daily activities (Wang & Chang, 2013). Kithinji (2014) reports that digital marketing is relatively cheaper and its results are easier measure since the data on views, clicks and hours spent on websites is easily available and therefore effectiveness more measurable. Achieng' (2016) reports that the usage of digital marketing strategies by Kenyan SMEs is moderate, standing at about 30% and they face challenges such as lack of fund to set up websites, lack of technical knowhow to manage these strategies and limited knowledge on digital content development.

SMEs have to contend numerous challenges such as lack of capital and stiff competition from more established firms which hinder them from being profitable, growing and staying in business (McIntire, 2012). While increased marketing activities might be able to help them surmount these challenges, these activities are expensive and require specialized knowledge that these SMEs do not have. This inability to market their goods and services has led to numerous negative impacts on SMEs especially on their sales volumes, customer service, market awareness, branding and product and service promotion. These effects can also be felt on a macro level by the employees that work in these companies and the economies that they operate in due to loss of employment and taxes.

In a research done by Danhil *et al.* (2014) on the influence of the adoption of Social media marketing by SMEs in Thailand established that it had a constructive impact on the marketing performance of the SMEs through increased sales and improved brand image. Datelink and Bick (2013) researched the effect that social media marketing had on the marketing strategies of SMEs in South Africa; the study found that social media had a huge impact on their marketing strategies and formed the bulk of their marketing activities. Lee (2009) examined the impact of digital marketing on the baking industry in Latvia and established that it increased their market share and improved the adoption of their internet banking products by their customers.

In a study carried out by Nga'nga' (2015) on the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on banks in Kenya found that

it increased the economic performance of the banks through increasing the awareness of consumers on the financial products that the banks offer. Mbugua (2016) studied the marketing strategies adopted by SMEs in Kenya and their impact on the performance of those SMEs; the study revealed that marketing had a positive effect on the performance of SMEs. Kithinji (2014) also studied the impact of internet marketing on SMEs in Kenya and established that it led to increased revenues and market share; there was also an improvement in the company's image and the recognition of their brands.

While studies have been done on the effectiveness of digital marketing, internet marketing and marketing strategies in Kenya (Nga'anga', 2015; Minama, 2016; Kithinji, 2014), no study has been done on their effectiveness on the marketing performance of SMEs. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following question: what is the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the marketing performance of SMEs in Kenya?

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to establish the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the marketing performance of top 100 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya

Literature Review

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was proposed by David Fred in 1986, this model helps in the explanation and prediction of the behavior of the users of new technology; this model is an addition of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and explains how external variables such as attitude, beliefs and intention of use influence the behavior of users of technology (Dai & Kauffman, 2001). The theory posits that what determines usage of a new technology system is affected either directly or indirectly by the user's attitude, intentions and the user's perception of the usefulness of the system and its ease of use (Davila *et al.*, 2003).

Over time, TAM has evolved and the original model has been extended into TAM2 to include aspects of social influence such as image, subjective norms and voluntariness into the explanation of perceived usefulness; cognitive instrumental processes such as result demonstrability, job relevance and output quality are also included in the TAM2 model (Davila *et al.*, 2003). This new model has been tested in both mandatory and voluntary settings and the results strongly supported it since it led to 60% user adoption; this study will adopt TAM2 together with TAM as the baseline model (Davis & Venkatesh, 2000).

David and Venkatesh (2000) assert that the degree to which the person trusts that a system will advance their performance at work will determine if the individual will adopt the system or not, also the more the individual perceives the technology to be easy to use, the more accepted the technology will be by the users; conversely, if a technology is perceived to be complex or difficult to use, then its adoption rate will be slow.

This theory is suitable to this study since digital marketing is a fairly new phenomenon worldwide, these strategies are mostly simple and easy to use by those who are technologically savvy (Minama, 2016). However, TAM asserts that the adoption of a technology, in this case digital marketing, is determined by the perception that the user has on its usefulness and ease of usage (Davis & Venkatesh, 2000). Therefore, the ease of usage of digital marketing strategies and the perceptions that SMEs have on their usefulness determines their adoption and effectiveness as opposed to the continued usage of traditional marketing strategies (Minama,

2016; Davis & Venkatesh, 2000).

Innovation Diffusion Theory

The term diffusion refers to the process through which innovations spread to their intended users over time in the society; in this case innovations refer to technologies, ideas, practices or products that are alien to the society and which are spread and shared through communication by members of the society (Rogers, 2009). The adoption of innovations is not a one-time occurrence, instead it happens in the following successive stages: knowledge about the innovation, persuasion to adopt the innovation, decision to adopt or not to adopt the innovation, adoption and implementation of the innovation and confirmation (Rogers, 2009).

According to Rogers (2009), the decision to adopt an innovation is based on its perceived advantages, how compatible it is to existing systems and processes, how complex it is, the ease of trying it out and if the results of adopting the innovation are easily visible. This model is suitable to this study as it illuminates the digital marketing adoption process and the factors that influence SMEs to adopt digital marketing. Kithinji (2014) reports that the advantages of using digital advertising include increased brand awareness, increased sales and improved customer relations. Digital advertising is not completely compatible with traditional marketing but both can be used concurrently, additionally digital marketing might be too complex for the older generation but this hurdle can be overcome by hiring qualified digital marketers (Minama, 2016). Further, the results of the adoption of digital marketing are visible by SMEs and they include increased sales and brand awareness, reduced advertising costs, access to new markets and improved customer relations (Nga'anga', 2015).

Digital Marketing Strategies and Marketing Performance

Digital marketing strategies refers to the strategies that companies employ in order to advertise their products and services and improve the experience of their clients through digital channels; these channels include social media, e-mail, websites, banner ads, blogs, mobile phone applications and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (Jalang'o, 2015). According to Tuten (2014), digital marketing has become an important component of many organizations' marketing mix due to an rise in the amount of persons accessing the internet and the digitization of many aspects of day to day life such as shopping, education, government services and communication; this digital migration gives marketers and organizations access to a large pool of potential customers in diverse locations. Moreover, digital marketing has enabled organizations to communicate with their customers almost instantly and get an intimate knowledge of their desires, difficulties and complaints which increases communication between customers and companies which leads to increased brand loyalty and customer satisfaction (Tuten, 2014).

Park and Park (2010) report that display advertising includes both banner advertisements and pop up advertisements that appear on the web pages that potential customers are visiting, these advertisements are relatively cheaper than conventional adverts and are easy to create. Furthermore, companies can improve the ranking of their websites in various search engines like Google and Yahoo when individuals search for information that pertains to them; this is known as Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and is done using keywords that the search engine user has keyed in to determine the relevance of a website to the needs of its user

(Park & Park, 2010).

Empirical Literature Review

Minama (2016) studied the impact of internet marketing on the performance of SMEs in Kenya using a descriptive survey of 100 SMEs in Nairobi. The study established that internet marketing was instrumental in increasing the sales of SMEs and improving their brand awareness and customer service. The study also established that internet marketing improved both the overall and financial performance of the surveyed SMES and recommended that more SMEs should adopt internet marketing and improve their overall marketing activities in order to survive in the increasingly competitive Kenyan economy.

Nga'nga' (2015) studied the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the performance of commercial banks in Kenya. The study was descriptive and employed self-administered questionnaires to survey 43 banks in Kenya and established that these banks used social media, websites, display adverts, e-mail marketing and mobile applications as their digital marketing strategies. The study also established that digital marketing enabled these banks to reduce their advertising costs, communicate with their clients faster, reduce inefficiencies and track their marketing performance more easily since all the data on the marketing campaigns was easily available. Additionally, the study established that digital marketing improved the overall performance of the surveyed banks due to increased customer base, increased market share and increased profits.

Odongo (2014) did a study to investigate the usage of social media marketing in the electronics industry in Kenya. The study design was descriptive and the researcher used questionnaires to survey 49 companies that deal with electronics. The study established that many electronics companies used Facebook, twitter and YouTube to market their products, brands and manage their relationship with their customers. The main challenges faced were lack of corporate control on social media pages and lack of clear success measurement parameters. The study recommended the creation of a clear social media strategy and the targeting of specific customers so as to increase social media uage success.

Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional research design in nature as it intended to establish the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on the marketing performance of SMEs in Kenya. This study critically examined the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the effect of digital marketing strategies on the marketing performance of top 100 SMEs in Kenya. This research was interested in KPMG's top 100 SMEs for the year 2016.

The respondents of this study were SMEs in the trade and commerce sector, construction, service industry and technology. The study used the Garg and Kothari (2014) suggestions that a sample of between 10 and 30 percent is sufficient for analysis for small populations, defined as populations of less than 10,000 respondents. The study sampled 30% of the respondents, and therefore the sample size for the study was 30. This study utilized primary and secondary data, primary data was collected using structured questionnaires while the secondary data was obtained from a review of literature that pertains to digital marketing and marketing performance. The questions in the questionnaires were based on a Likert type scale so as to measure the degree and extent of the different variables that would be under study.

Study Findings

The study sought to determine the influence of Websites and Blogs on the marketing performance of Top 100 SMEs in Kenya. The study findings established that 40.7% of the respondents agreed that Websites and Blogs increased their market share, 40.7% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.7% disagreed while 3.7% strongly disagreed. 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 findings also indicate that 44.4% percent strongly agreed that Websites and Blogs increased the number of unique visitors to their social media pages 37.0% agreed, 11.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.7% disagreed while 3.7% strongly disagreed. 44.4% agreed that Websites and Blogs increased the number of clicks on their display adverts, 33.3% strongly agreed, 14.4% neither agreed nor disagreed, did 3.7% disagree while 3.7% strongly disagreed. Moreover, the findings indicate that 37.0% of the respondents agreed that Websites and Blogs increased their brand recognition, 29.6 % strongly agreed, 29.6% neither agreed nor disagreed while 3.7% disagreed. 51.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that Websites and Blogs improved customer experience and customer satisfaction, 40.7% agreed while 7.4% neither agreed nor disagreed.

The findings further indicated that the respondents generally agreed with the following statements: Websites and Blogs have increased our market share ($M=2.48$, $SD=0.893$); Websites and Blogs have enabled access to new markets and customers ($M=1.58$, $SD=0.747$); Websites and Blogs have increased the number of clicks on our display adverts ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.000$); Websites and Blogs have increased the number of unique visitors to our social media pages ($M=1.85$, $SD=1.027$); Websites and Blogs have increased brand recognition($M=2.07$, $SD=0.874$) and Websites and Blogs have improved customer experience and customer satisfaction ($M=1.56$, $SD=0.641$).

Descriptive Statistics for Display Ads and the Marketing Performance of Top 100 SMEs

The study sought to determine the influence of Websites and Blogs on the marketing performance of Top 100 SMEs in Kenya. The findings of the study indicate that 44.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that Display Ads increased the number of unique visitors to their website/blog, 40.7% agreed while 14.8% neither agreed nor disagreed. 40.7% strongly agreed that Display Ads increased the number of unique visitors to our Social Media pages, 40.7% agreed while 18.5% were neutral. Further, the study indicated 48.1% of the respondents agreed that Display Ads increased their sales volumes, 25.9% strongly agreed, 14.8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7.4% disagreed while 3.7% disagreed.

The study findings also indicated that 33.3% of the respondents agreed that Display Ads increased their market share, 29.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, 22.2% strongly agreed, 7.4% disagreed while 7.4% strongly disagreed. Further, the study established that 37.0% of the respondents agree that Display Ads enabled access to new markets and customers, 22.2% strongly agreed, 22.2% neither agreed nor disagreed, 11.1% strongly disagreed while 7.4% disagreed. Moreover, the study also established that 33.3% of the respondents Display Ads increased their brand recognition, 25.9% agreed, 25.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7.4% disagreed while 7.4% strongly disagreed.

The study findings also indicate that the respondents generally agreed with the following statements: Display Ads have increased

the number of unique visitors to our website/blog ($M=1.70$, $SD=0.724$); Display Ads have increased the number of unique visitors to our Social Media pages ($M=1.78$, $SD=0.751$); Display Ads have increased our sales volumes ($M=2.15$, $SD=0.1027$); Display Ads have increased our market share ($M=2.44$, $SD=1.155$); Display Ads have enabled access to new markets and customers ($M=2.48$, $SD=1.252$) and Display Ads have increased our brand recognition ($M=2.30$, $SD=1.235$).

Regression Analysis Findings

To determine the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the study conducted regression analysis. The dependent variable was marketing performance while the independent variables were social media, search engine optimization, websites and blogs and display adverts. The study found that social media, search engine optimization, websites and blogs and display adverts explained a significant proportion of variance in marketing performance, $R^2= .758$. This implies that 75.8% of the proportion in marketing performance can be explained by social media, search engine optimization, websites and blogs and display adverts. Other factors not covered by this study therefore contribute to 24.2%.

Discussions

This section presents the summary of the findings that were obtained in the study and presented in the previous chapter. The study found that the respondents agreed that social media usage increased their customer engagement, improved their complaint resolution and improved the experience and satisfaction of their customers. Further, the respondents also agreed that the usage of social media led to increased sales, enabled access to new markets and clients, increases brand recognition and strengthens customer loyalty. The study determined that social media usage had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. The findings showed that 21.2% of the marketing performance of SMEs could be explained by social media usage.

The findings of the study indicate that the respondents agreed that SEO increased the number of unique visitors to their websites, increased the number of clicks on their adverts, enabled access to new markets and increased the number of unique visitors to their social media pages. However, the study established that the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that SEO increased their market share. The study also established that SEO had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. The findings showed that 16.7% of the marketing performance of SMEs could be explained by search engine optimization.

The study established that the respondents agreed that Websites and blogs increased market share, enabled access to new markets and customers and increased the number of unique visitors to social media pages. Moreover, the findings of the study indicate that websites and blogs led to an increase in the number of clicks on adverts, improved brand recognition and increased customer satisfaction. The study also determined that websites and blogs had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. The findings showed that 20.6% of the marketing performance of SMEs could be explained by websites and blogs.

The findings of the study indicate that the respondents agreed that display adverts increased the number of unique visitors to their websites and social media pages, increased their sales volumes and increased their market share. Further, the findings of the study indicate that majority of the respondents agreed that websites

and blogs enabled access to new markets and customers and also improved their brand recognition. The study also determined that display adverts had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs. The findings showed that 45.8% of the marketing performance of SMEs could be explained by websites and blogs.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made in the study; that Social Media usage had a significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs; that marketing performance was dependent upon social media usage; and that the search engine optimization affects marketing performance. Finally, the study, concluded that the usage of display adverts improved marketing performance and that the usage of display adverts had a positive effect on the marketing performance of SMEs.

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