DIGITAL MARKETING AND BRAND PERFORMANCE IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN BENIN CITY, EDO STATE

BY

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BENIN CITY.

NOVEMBER 2025

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BEING A RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN PARTIAL

FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B. Sc) DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

NOVEMBER 2025

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DECLARATION

I, NNAMANI MARY OLUCHI of the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Science, University of Benin, Benin City, do hereby declare that this project is entirely my work and composition. All references made to works of other persons have been duly acknowledged

NNAMANI MARY OLUCHI **DATE**

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CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned, certify that this project work was written by NNAMANI MARY OLUCHI in the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Science University of Benin, Benin City.

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(Project Supervisor)

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DR. (MRS) M. E. EHIGIE **DATE**

(Project Coordinator)

DR. D. O. OGBEIDE **DATE**

(Head of Department)

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God for His grace, guidance and wisdom throughout my time spent in school.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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My profound gratitude goes to God for the wisdom, inspiration, strength, direction and guidance during the course of my study. The success of the study wouldn’t have been possible without His mercies and favour.

Special gratitude to my supervisor, Prof J. O. Ejechi for his guidance, advice, support and patience throughout the period of this research work. I also thank the current and past Heads of Department of Business Administration, course adviser and other lecturers whose depth of knowledge I benefited from.

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To my friends and coursemates, Just to mention a few; Charity, Faith, Shalom, Semilore, Favour, Israel, Endurance, Jerry, Gift for their support, love and time shared. Also DLBC and DLCF for moulding and shaping me.

To my leaders, Mr. Everest and Mr. Marvellous may God forever bless you for your care and moral support.

In conclusion, I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the successful contribution of my BSc degree project. I am also indebted to my siblings John Nnamani, Ezekiel Nnamani, Elizabeth Nnamani, Blessing Nnamani and James Nnamani. This achievement is solely not mine but a collective effort, support and encouragement.

May God bless you all. Amen.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of digital marketing on brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City, Nigeria. A quantitative survey of 271 respondents showed a positive and significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance, a positive and significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance, a positive and significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance metrics, a positive and significant relationship between digital marketing adoption and sales growth among SMEs.

The findings enlightens that digital marketing contribute meaningfully to enhancing brand visibility, competitiveness, customer engagement, and business growth. The study contributes to measureable improvements in specific business performance metrics thereby boosting visibility and also strengthening customer relationships.

The study also enlightens that barriers to adoption do not reduce brand performance benefits of digital marketing and suggests that even constrained SMEs can achieve meaningful improvements through strategic digital engagement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In recent times, firms regardless of their classification or industry, are increasingly integrating digital tools into their operations (Boksa, Saroch & Boksova, 2020). Digitalisation is perceived to be a major issue in all aspects of the society, with a key note on the effects it poses on political, economic and social elements (Isensee, Teuteberg, Griese & Topi, 2020). Li, Su, Zhang and Mao (2017) argue that the internet has driven firms to establish interconnected networks of computers, fostering expansion and growth. Digital age has presented various forms of technology which organisations may use to reach their customers better of which social media network (SMN) is among the forms of technology (Olannye & Onobrakpeya, 2017).

The analogy of a brand without an effective digital marketing strategy being akin to a car without tires emphasizes the indispensability of such strategies. Over the years, businesses have transitioned from analogue methods to diverse digital tools to enhance their market presence and increase their customer base. This shift has been significant for both SMEs and large companies (Lee H, Kelly, Lee J, and Lee S, 2001).

Digital tools enhance business competitiveness, enabling SMEs to compete more effectively with larger organisations (Chapman, Fames-Moore, and Szizygeil, 2000). Effective digital marketing strategies are crucial in the current technological age, serving not only to promote products and services but also to build strong customer relationships. Sustainable digital marketing practices help SMEs access broader customer bases, improve productivity, and strengthen their presence in the digital marketplace (Mazzarol, 2015).

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Digital marketing is defined as a method of connecting consumers and producers electronically using interactive technologies such as emails, websites, news groups, interactive television, and mobile communication (Kotler & Armstrong, 2009). It encompasses all marketing efforts that utilise electronic devices or the internet (Alexander, 2019), enabling businesses to disseminate information and engage with users through internet-based applications (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Digital marketing has become central to marketing campaigns across all businesses, as organisations increasingly aim to boost brand productivity, grow customer bases, and increase turnover through effective strategies (Kamal, 2016).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in economic development, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. In Benin City, SMEs contribute substantially to employment creation and income generation, serving as vital components of the local economy. Despite their importance, many SMEs encounter significant challenges in scaling their operations and establishing strong, recognisable brands within competitive markets.

According to Opara and Ekeneme (2021), digital marketing can enhance customer engagement, increase brand awareness, and improve sales performance for small businesses in Nigeria. This study will explore the extent to which small businesses in Benin City are experiencing these benefits and identify the key factors that contribute to their success in digital marketing implementation.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

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Despite the growth of digital platforms, many SMEs in Benin City struggle to leverage digital marketing effectively. Factors such as limited digital literacy, budget constraints, and inadequate understanding of brand performance metrics hinder their ability to compete in the digital era.

Digital marketing has become central to marketing campaigns across all businesses, as organisations increasingly aim to boost brand productivity, grow customer bases, and increase turnover through effective strategies (Kamal, 2016). Digital marketing platforms, including social media applications (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter), email marketing, search engine optimisation, and content marketing, provide SMEs with the tools to reach larger audiences and strengthen their brand presence (Castells, 2010). To effectively leverage digital marketing, businesses need well-organised and user-friendly platforms that continuously attract target audiences (Rowley, 2016). These platforms should enable easy navigation for customers and provide interactive forums for inquiries, technical support, and customer engagement. Rising tools like pay-per-click c, using platforms such as Google Ads and Facebook, also play a crucial role (Rowley, 2016).

This project seeks to investigate the relationship between digital marketing practices and brand performance, providing actionable insights for SMEs in Benin city. It also brings forth several novel features to the current body of knowledge on digital marketing for SMEs. Firstly, it examines the real-world use of new digital marketing technologies and tactics that have been underutilised in the SMEs' environment. Secondly, the study helps to bridge the existing gap between the concept of digital marketing and its application in small and medium sized enterprises and offers guidance for practitioners and policymakers.

According to Uyi-Aigbogie (2019), small businesses in Nigeria face several barriers to the adoption of digital marketing strategies, including lack of infrastructure, inadequate training and education, and low awareness of the benefits of digital marketing However, the adoption of digital marketing practices among SMEs in Benin City has been inconsistent.

The adoption of digital marketing has shown significant benefits for SMEs, including enhanced customer engagement and brand awareness. Digital channels like social media, email marketing, and Search Engine Optimisation help SMEs in Nigeria reach broader audiences and communicate more effectively (Adekunle & Ayeni, 2018). Digital marketing also allows businesses to monitor real-time data on customer behavior and campaign performance, enabling data-driven decision-making and optimisation of strategies (Opara & Ekeneme, 2021). SMEs engaging in digital marketing tend to experience higher sales growth, better returns on assets, increased profit margins, greater customer engagement, and employee growth compared to those that do not adopt these strategies.

Digital marketing has emerged as a transformative solution for enhancing brand visibility, customer engagement, and overall performance. It offers a range of strategies, including social media marketing, search engine optimisation, email marketing, and content marketing, which enable SMEs to reach broader audiences and build meaningful customer relationships.

This study seeks to address this research gap by examining the current state of digital marketing adoption among small-scale businesses in Benin City and identifying the barriers and opportunities for its effective implementation. This study will investigate these barriers (challenges) in the context of Benin City and identify potential solutions to overcome them.

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1.3 Research Questions

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In addressing the identified challenges, the following questions would be addressed:

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i. What are the most commonly employed digital marketing strategies by Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City?

ii. What is the effects of digital marketing on brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City?

iii. How does digital marketing influence key brand performance metrics?

iv. What barriers prevent Small and Medium Enterprises from fully adopting digital marketing?

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1.4 Research Objectives

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Objectives to achieve the aim of this study would include:

i. To identify the common digital marketing strategies used by Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

ii. To identify the effects of digital marketing on brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

iii. To assess the impact of digital marketing on brand performance metrics such as customer engagement, brand awareness, and sales growth.

iv. To examine the challenges Small and Medium Enterprises face in adopting and utilising digital marketing.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

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i. There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

ii. There is no significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

iii. There is no significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance metrics in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

iv. There is no significant relationship between digital marketing adoption and sales growth in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

1.6 Scope of the Study

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The study will focus on SMEs in Benin City across various sectors, including retail, hospitality, and services. The research will analyse digital marketing practices, brand performance metrics, and challenges specific to the local context.

1.7 Significance of the Study

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This study will provide valuable insights into how digital marketing can transform the operations of SMEs in Benin City. By identifying effective strategies and addressing adoption barriers, this research will help SMEs improve their brand performance and competitive edge. Additionally, policymakers and stakeholders can use the findings to develop targeted support programs for SMEs. Business owners can benefit from this study by having valuable insight that will assist them in targeting university students, helping them to optimise their social media strategies and increasing sales. Also, undergraduate students can gain valuable insights and knowledge that can benefit their academic, professional and entrepreneurial pursuits.

Additionally, researchers and practitioners can gain insights into the effective application of digital marketing strategies for Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin city.

According to Uyi-Aigbogie (2019), small businesses in Nigeria face several barriers to the adoption of digital marketing strategies, including lack of infrastructure, inadequate training and education, and low awareness of the benefits of digital marketing. This study will investigate these barriers in the context of Benin City and identify potential solutions to overcome them. According to Opara and Ekeneme (2021), digital marketing can enhance customer engagement, increase brand awareness, amd improve sales performance for small businesses in Nigeria. This study will explore the extent to which small businesses in Benin City are experiencing these benefits and identify the key factors that contribute to their success in digital marketing implementation.

And lastly, the findings of the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on digital marketing and enhance brand performance in the local context.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1 Introduction

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2.1.1 Global Perspectives on SMEs

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are businesses that fall below specific thresholds in terms of employees, revenue, or assets, depending on the country or region, SMEs play a crucial role in economic development, contributing to job creation, innovation, and economic growth.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have varying definitions globally, primarily due to differences in economic structures and industrial development across nations. Despite the lack of a universal definition, certain parameters such as firm size, number of employees, annual turnover, and operational assets are commonly used to classify SMEs (Omotayo et al., 2015; Gbadeyan & Boachie-Mensah, 2016). In developed countries, SMEs often include firms with up to 500 employees, while in developing countries, the upper limit is significantly lower due to resource and market constraints.

2.1.2 SMEs in Nigeria

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In Nigeria SMEs are defined by various regulatory and financial bodies, each emphasising specific criteria. However, various government agencies and regulatory bodies in Nigeria have provided some definitions. The National Council on Industrial Standards categorized Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as businesses with a total cost (including working capital but excluding land) of N31 million to N150 million and a staff of 11 to 100 employees in 1992 (Omotayo et al., 2015). According to the Federal Ministry of Industries, a medium-scale firm is one with operating assets of less than N200 million and fewer than 300 employees, while a small-scale enterprise has total assets of less than N50 million and fewer than 100 employees. A small firm is defined by the National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) as one with total assets of less than $10 million, however, it makes no mention of annual income or staff count (SMEDAN, 2014). According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, SMEs is defined as enterprises with annual revenues of less than N100 million and or less than 300 employees.

This research is based on the above mentioned SMEs definitions from the appropriate regulatory authorities in Nigeria.

2.2 Concept of SMEs performance

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2.2.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Performance Metrics

SMEs performance is assessed using quantitative and qualitative metrics.

i. Quantitative Metrics: These include efficiency, financial results, production levels, market share, profitability, and revenue dynamics (Sheehan, 2013; Gupta & Batra, 2016). These metrics provide measurable indicators of business success.

ii. Qualitative Metrics: These encompass goal achievement, leadership effectiveness, customer satisfaction, and innovation in products and marketing (Zimon, 2018; Anggadwita & Mustafid, 2014).

It is not only the study of performance features that is important, it is also relevant to mention that the factors that influence the performance of SMEs are needed to be studied (Odira & Onyia, 2023). These factors highlight the strategic and operational strengths of Small and Medium Enterprises.

2.2.2 Factors Influencing SMEs Performance

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SMEs performance is often influenced by their ability to deploy physical, human, and organisational resources effectively. Lonial and Carter (2015) emphasize that resource constraints necessitate innovative approaches for competitiveness. SMEs need to adopt alternative strategies, including leveraging digital technologies, to overcome limitations and thrive in dynamic market environments. Owirendu (2014) categorised businesses which fall under the umbrella of small and medium scale as follows; Under small scale enterprises there are: firewood supply, packaging of food items, meat retailing, plantain production, restaurant service, small scale poultry raising, rabbit raising, organizing labour squad, operating a nursery school for children, home service, arranging food for parties etc. Under medium scale enterprises are soap production, aua culture/fish farming, chalk making, foam production, nylon production, concrete block production, hair/body cream productions, chemical production, commercial poultry, professional law practice, accountancy, education, food and beverage production among others.

Abbakin (2019) gave a detailed description of the numerous factors affecting the progress of SMEs in Nigeria, these numerous factors are as follows;

i. Financial Factor: It is well known that money is the heart of any business, to start up a business, an initial reasonable amount of money is required. Young Nigerians who try to start up a business usually encounter this problem as the harsh economic environment makes it difficult to save up enough money that would start a business. More still, it is almost impossible to get a loan from the bank to finance a start-up because banks are mostly not ready to take the risk of investing in some start-up that could fail, they rather invest in already established businesses. As a result of this, when start-up businesses come to ask for loans, the banks demand them to provide some unrealistic collateral.

ii. Lack of Technical and Technological Infrastructure: In addition to lack of access to reasonable capital, is shortage of vital technical skills and technological infrastructure. There is poor road network that connects cities thereby making it more difficult to move around while starting up a business. More still, poor internet connection, lousy security systems and non-steady power supply have a devastating effect on SMEs.

iii. Competitions with Foreign Companies: One of the major challenges Nigerian SMEs face is the competition that arise from big foreign companies that establish their businesses in Nigeria. Most known brands which have been long enough in the market and have recorded huge success over the history have invested in the Nigerian markets, this bigger companies pose as a threat to the SMEs because the consumers already believe in their product, also, they have better business strategy and more money to spend on advertisement. Examples of these businesses are; MTN in telecommunication industry, Shoprite in Retail stores sectors, Shell in Oil sector, etc.

iv. Lack of Organizational and Management Skills: Many SMEs are started by young people who just got excited about an idea and decided to set it up and make money out of it. Mostly, these young people do not take into consideration, the fact that they need to hire an expert to help in some aspect of the business, or they do not have the money to hire. They as well do not have the patience to drop everything and try to acquire this knowledge first. As a result of this, many start-ups have collapsed due to poor management.

v. Inability to form Partnership: Most start-ups go into partnership to save their businesses. This is not the case with Nigerian Start-ups. As partnership negotiations are always done by a third party, Most Nigerian young business owners are not educated enough to understand fully what partnership entails, as a result, they decide not to go into it because of the fear of being defrauded.

vi. Human Resource Factor: The type of employees in a business, especially start-ups can influence the success of that business. Therefore, big and rich companies spend money to hire professional human resource personnel's who make sure that they scrutinize and employ the best candidates for the company. In the case of Nigerian SMEs, their lack of huge capital limit their choices of employee's recruitment pattern, as a result of this, they run the risk of employing the wrong people who will eventually collapse their business.

2.2.3 Digital Marketing

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Evolution of Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing entails creating and executing marketing strategies that leverage digital technologies to reach and engage with customers, build brand awareness, generate leads, and ultimately drive sales and revenue (Dave, 2020). With the rapid growth of the Internet and the increasing adoption of digital devices, digital marketing has become an essential component of modern marketing practices (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Digital marketing can also be seen as "the use of digital technologies, media, and channels to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014, p. 87).

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital platforms such as social media, email, search engines, and websites to promote products and services (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Its components include: Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, Email marketing, Mobile marketing (Epps, Govers, & Go, 2009).0

The evolution of digital marketing has been shaped by advancements in technology, changing consumer behaviors, and the growth of the internet. In the early days of the internet, businesses began establishing online presences with websites that provided basic information. As search engines like Google emerged, search engine optimization (SEO) became a key strategy for improving online visibility.

As the internet evolved, online advertising expanded with the introduction of banner ads and pop-ups, while email marketing grew in importance as a direct communication tool for businesses to reach customers. The rise of social media platforms in the mid-2000s revolutionized digital marketing by allowing businesses to interact directly with their audiences, with more advanced targeting options for advertisements. With the advent of smartphones in the 2010s, mobile marketing became crucial, prompting businesses to optimise for mobile devices. Content marketing also surged, as brands focused on delivering valuable content to attract and engage customers. Social media marketing continued to evolve with features like paid ads, influencer marketing, and live streaming.

In recent years, digital marketing has become more data-driven, leveraging big data and analytics to personalise campaigns. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation tools has also streamlined campaign optimisation and customer engagement. Additionally, the rise of voice search and smart devices has led businesses to adapt their strategies for these new technologies.

Key benefits of digital marketing include real-time tracking of campaigns, data-driven insights, and the ability to personalise customer journeys (Hoffman & Novak, 2018). These advantages enable SMEs to achieve significant growth in a cost-effective manner.

Advantages of Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing is beneficial for all businesses. The reason is that it is easy to be personalised and used on targeted market with affordable price and efficient time. The advantages include:

i. Measurable, unlike traditional marketing that is difficult to measure, digital marketing enables businesses to measure their results. For example, it is easy to see how big the audience has been, how many have seen the ad or how many have opened the email.

ii. Flexible, with digital marketing, advertisement can be tailored made. Audience can be segmented and each group of them can be served accordingly by their interests and needs.

iii. Low barrier to entry, traditional marketing could have cost a fortune, making TV ads or billboards needing a lot of money. But digital marketing can be fixed according to the budget of the company.

iv. Reach large audience, as digital marketing is online, it is accessible to people all over the globe.

v. Easy to optimise, after the first campaign it is easy to see what has worked and what has not. Therefore, it can be adjusted and improved for the next campaign.

vi. Improved conversion rates, Digital marketing ease the way for better interaction with the prospects. Reaching target market is easier for businesses, this therefore influence the conversion rate. MacDougall (2018)

Limits of Digital Marketing

A part of preparing for digital marketing campaign is to be aware of restrictions. Some of the drawbacks are:- Restricted by technology, Cyber security and data protection issues, Competitive market due to globalization, and Price sensitivity caused by higher clarity Sina (2018) etc. Cyber security and data protection issues constitutes one of the highest risks in digital marketing especially when businesses are aiming to reach a wide range of the audience. Studies shows that in year 2018 the cost for the data violations for businesses has been over three million, while only in United States the average cost of it for a company could be over seven million. Therefore, it is important for Digital Marketing professionals to be aware of the risks Smith (2019).

The Main Differences between Traditional Marketing and Digital Marketing.

• Traditional marketing communication is unidirectional, meaning, a business communicates about its products or services with a group of people. In digital marketing communication is bidirectional. The customer can also ask questions or make suggestions about the business products and services.

• Medium of communication in traditional marketing is generally through phone calls, and letters. In digital marketing medium of communication is mainly through social media, chat, websites and emails.

• Campaigning takes more time for designing, preparing and launching in traditional marketing, while in digital marketing there is always a fast way to develop an online campaign and carry out changes along its development. With digital tools, campaigning is easier.

• Traditional marketing is carried out for a specific audience throughout from generating campaign ideas up to selling a product or a service. While in digital marketing the content is available for the general public. It is then made to reach the specific audience by employing search engine techniques.

• Traditional marketing is a conventional way of marketing; best for reaching local audience. While digital marketing is best for reaching global audience.

• It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a campaign in traditional marketing, while it is easier to measure the effectiveness of a campaign in digital marketing through analytics. Zazzlemedia (2009).

Some of the applicable forms of digital marketing include:

• **Website:** Internet usage and application has increased tremendously in the last decades as websites have become trusted tools for public communication, extensively serving both private and corporate needs. They are basically structured to intensify the business-to-customer interactions, as a way of engaging brand promotions which is quite synonymous to the objective of digital marketing. Simply put, websites are created by organisations to deliver information in form of advertisement and enlightenment to existing and prospective customers. It influences customer's perceptions of certain brands or products they might be interested in Kolesar and Galbraith (2000).

• **Pay-per-click:** Pay-per-click ads on the internet are provided by search engines and social media to help customers get access to certain brands as well as make reasonable payment in the process. This service is essential to calculating the number of people who can click on an ad and as well target specific persons based on demographics or locations. Barone (2020). Basically this is a way to ensure customers buy their way to visiting a company's site rather than trying to acquire the visit organically. This allows advertisers to bid on search engine sponsored link and ad placements when someone searches for keywords that are relevant to their business offering

• **Content Marketing:** Content form of digital marketing applies a format that includes engaging various customers by creating and sharing of valuable content. These specific contents are usually disseminated on blogs, videos, E-Books and info graphics. Increase of traffic on the company's website to help brand building is basically responsible for adopting this digital marketing strategy. Content must be relevant and valuable in order to create a profitable action. Content marketing is the center of any kind of digital marketing.

• **Email Marketing:** Email marketing is a powerful marketing channel, a form of direct digital marketing that uses email to promote a company's product and services. Integrating with the marketing automation efforts, it helps customers aware of the latest items and offers. It can also play an important role in the adopted marketing strategy when it comes to lead generation, brand awareness; relationship building or retaining customer across different types of marketing process (Adikesavan, 2014). Email marketing can improve the relationship between the organisation and the customers and promote the reputation of the business and aid customer loyalty.

• **Affiliate Marketing:** Affiliate marketing is a partnership programme that allows individuals to become affiliates and reward their successful referrals to the business. Affiliate marketing is an inexpensive way for business to increase brand awareness and customer base, Brown (2009). It becomes easy to attract customer's attention by engaging in marketing activities. Affiliates in most cases take the risk of marketing brand products and in the process receive commission on each product, Duffy (2005).

2.2.4 Digital Marketing and SMEs Growth

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Digital marketing has a transformative impact on SME growth. By leveraging digital tools, SMEs can enhance customer engagement, generate leads, and boost revenue. Arobo (2022) highlighted the benefits which includes develop brand awareness, boost their visibility, increase sales, increase online conversation rate, reduce their marketing budget, improve customer engagement, influence purchasing decisions, generate leads and track their return on investment.

2.2.5 Social Media Marketing

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Social media marketing is the use of a social media platform to promote a product or service and increase its visibility on the Internet, and it can aid in the development of a social network for exchanging ideas and knowledge (Becker, Nobre, & Kanabar, 2013). On certain social media networks, different communication methods are perceived as more favourable than others. Facebook is known for its robust platform for customer relationship management (Popp et al., 2016); Twitter is known for its ability to communicate brand messages and quick consumer responses in real-time (Culotta & Cutler, 2016); Instagram is a platform for sharing image-based content (Muñoz & Towner, 2017) and YouTube is a platform for sharing videos (Indvik, 2011). According to Salem and Salem (2019), social media allows customers to find useful information about other brands, and if this information meets the customers' expectations for the competitor's product, strong customer satisfaction can develop, leading to the customer choosing or continuing to purchase the item. Social media marketing is incorporating social media into all phases and components of the marketing mix through social media platforms. It aids in the promotion of the organisation's goods and services as well as the brand (Olabanji et al., 2014) One of the unique advantages of social media marketing is that it allows SMEs to adequately teach and illustrate not only the benefits of their products, but also how to efficiently use them through an online platform with the greatest target audience. Traditional media marketing is being phased out in favour of social media marketing by businesses (Omotayo et al., 2015). In recent years, companies that advertise their products through traditional marketing channels such as television and radio have been urging their clients to visit their social media platforms for more information. This is done to further engage the intended market in a dialogue about the company, its product, price, and location. Customers can follow the organization's activities and further engage with the brand by advertising on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which will affect their purchase intention and advocacy to their network of friends. It is against this background that the research wants to find out if social media marketing has any relationship with the growth of SMEs in Benin City, Nigeria.

Social media marketing involves using social platforms to promote brands, engage customers, and achieve business objectives (Becker, Nobre, & Kanabar, 2013). Prominent platforms and their advantages include:

- **Facebook:** Enhances customer relationship management (Hasan, Popp & Oláh, 2016).
- **Twitter:** Facilitates real-time brand communication (Culotta & Cutler, 2016).
- **Instagram:** Promotes image-centric content sharing (Munoz & Towner, 2017).
- **YouTube:** Enables video-sharing capabilities (Rosli, Lokman, Aziz & Hamidi, 2015).

Advantages of Social Media Marketing for SMEs

Social media marketing offers SMEs numerous benefits, including enhanced visibility, brand trust, and customer satisfaction (Salem & Salem, 2018). SMEs can also showcase product benefits and usage to targeted audiences, fostering stronger customer connections (Gbandi & Iyamu, 2022).

Advantages of Social Media Marketing for SMEs include:

i. **Cost-Effective Marketing:** Social media platforms offer affordable advertising options compared to traditional forms of marketing, making it accessible for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote their products and services.

ii. **Increased Brand Awareness:** Social media marketing helps SMEs reach a broader audience, increasing their visibility and making their brand more recognisable among potential customers.

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iii. **Direct Customer Engagement:** Social media enables real-time interaction with customers, allowing SMEs to build relationships, answer questions, and receive feedback directly from their audience, fostering customer loyalty.

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iv. **Targeted Advertising:** With social media tools, SMEs can create highly targeted ads based on user demographics, interests, and behaviors, ensuring they reach the most relevant audience for their products or services.

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v. **Boosts Website Traffic:** Social media platforms provide a way to drive traffic to a company's website through shared content, links, and promotions, increasing potential leads and conversions.

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vi. **Improved Customer Insights:** Social media allows businesses to gather valuable insights into customer preferences, behaviors, and interests, which can inform product development and marketing strategies.

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vii. **Enhanced Credibility and Trust:** By actively engaging with customers and sharing relevant content, SMEs can build credibility and trust, positioning themselves as authoritative figures in their industry.

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viii. **Increased Sales Opportunities:** With the ability to promote products, services, and offers through social media, SMEs can directly influence purchasing decisions and drive sales.

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ix. **Real-Time Marketing:** Social media allows businesses to respond quickly to trends, news, and customer feedback, enabling SMEs to leverage timely opportunities to promote their brand.

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x. **Competitive Advantage:** By establishing a strong presence on social media, SMEs can stand out from their competitors, attracting more customers and gaining an edge in the marketplace.

2.2.6 Transition from Traditional to Social Media Marketing

The shift from traditional marketing methods such as TV and radio to social media platforms has transformed how SMEs interact with customers. Social media enables direct engagement, content sharing, and interactive communication, which are essential for modern marketing strategies (Omotayo et al., 2015).

2.3 Theoretical Review

To provide a strong conceptual foundation, this study is underpinned by several theories that explain the adoption of digital technologies and their impact on business performance, especially among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These include the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI), and the Resource-Based View (RBV).

2.3.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, proposed by Davis (1989), explains how users come to accept and use technology. It posits that two primary factors Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) influence an individual's decision to adopt a technology.

i. **Relevance to the Study**: SMEs in Benin City may adopt digital marketing tools (e.g., social media, SEO, or email marketing) if they perceive them to be useful for improving brand visibility, customer engagement, and ultimately, performance. Conversely, low perceived ease of use may act as a barrier, especially for SMEs with limited digital literacy or technical support.

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ii. **Application**: This theory helps explain why some SMEs in Benin City actively engage in digital marketing while others lag behind, due to variations in perceptions and technological readiness.

2.3.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI)

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Developed by Rogers (1962), the Diffusion of Innovation Theory describes how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread through cultures. The key elements include innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system.

i. **Relevance to the Study**: The DOI theory is pertinent in understanding how digital marketing practices are adopted over time by SMEs in Benin City. Factors like peer influence, market competition, and exposure to successful case studies may accelerate adoption.

ii. **Adopter Categories**: Innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, SMEs fall into these categories based on their willingness to experiment with digital strategies.

iii. **Barriers**: According to this theory, slow diffusion may result from perceived complexity, high initial costs, or lack of observable benefits issues identified in Nigerian SMEs by Uyi-Aigbogie (2019) and Opara & Ekeneme (2021).

2.3.3 Resource-Based View (RBV) of the Firm

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The Resource-Based View, introduced by Barney (1991), posits that firms gain competitive advantage by effectively utilising unique, valuable, and inimitable internal resources. These resources may include tangible assets (capital, infrastructure) and intangible assets (brand equity, digital capabilities, and knowledge).

i. **Relevance to the Study**: SMEs with strong internal capabilities in digital marketing such as skilled personnel, strategic content planning, or digital infrastructure are better positioned to enhance brand performance and gain market share.

ii. **Application**: RBV highlights why some SMEs in Benin City outperform others even when operating in the same market conditions: they possess and leverage critical digital marketing resources more effectively.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Social Media Marketing and SMEs

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Empirical studies highlight the positive impact of social media marketing on SME performance.

Mushi (2024) examined the interconnected nature of digital marketing strategies, encompassing search engine optimisation, content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, influencer marketing, paid advertising, and data analysis and the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Tanzania which encompasses various factors, including sales growth, market share, and market development. A total of 335 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) used a systematic random selection method for data collection. The necessary data was gathered by the researcher using a structured questionnaire. Partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS–SEM) was used in the data analysis process. The results of the study demonstrate a notable correlation between the digital marketing strategies dimension and the SMEs Performance dimensions in Mbeya City. Additionally, the article reveals that there were no observed moderation impacts of dynamic environment on digital marketing strategies and SME performance. The article emphasizes the necessity for entrepreneurs to properly utilize digital marketing strategies. This article provides significant insights for scholars and practitioners interested in utilising digital marketing methods to enhance the performance of SMEs in Tanzania.

Zahara et al (2023) determined the influence of entrepreneurial marketing through digital marketing capabilities on marketing performance in Palu, Indonesia. The population in the study amounted to 21,696 with a total number of samples of 197 SMEs obtained with the Yamane and Isaac formula. The sampling technique in this study went through two stages, namely the Area Sampling Technique and then the Stratified Random Sampling Technique. Hypothesis testing used was path analysis with Smart-PLS software. The results showed that entrepreneurial marketing have positive and significant effects on digital marketing capabilities and on marketing performance. Furthermore, digital marketing capabilities have a positive and significant effect on marketing performance. However, digital marketing is less likely to mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and marketing performance. As practical implications, SMEs should continue to improve their capabilities and sharpen the implementation of entrepreneurial marketing strategies, in order to utilise their resources to find opportunities and create added value for customers, in order to continue to achieve marketing performance in a sustainable manner.

Onyango (2016) investigated the influence of social media marketing on the success of Kenyan cut flower exporting businesses. According to the data, social media marketing techniques significantly increased revenue, market share, and profitability. In addition, companies that used digital marketing outperformed those that used traditional marketing methods.

Srinivasan, Bajaj, and Bhanot (2016) investigated the notion of social media marketing and its significance in the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector (MSMEs) using a sample of fifty micro, small and medium firms. According to the findings of the study, social media participation has a significant impact on brand visibility and trust, as well as customer acquisition and retention. The study also found a link between how much time people spend on social media and how much money they make. Yasmin, Tasneem, and

Fatema (2015) investigated the impact of several types of digital marketing on a company's sales. To measure the success of digital marketing, the researchers looked at primary data from 150 organisations and 50 managers who were chosen at random. According to the findings, digital marketing and increased sales have a good association. Omotayo et al. (2015) investigated how social media marketing affects the performance of small businesses. As part of their research, they delivered 150 questionnaires to managers and employees of selected SMEs in the Ota Metropolis. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and the correlation test. Their study revealed that building relationships and networking with other businesses increases brand recognition.

Samat (2020) investigated the effects of social media marketing adoption and competitive intelligence in Malayesia. This study aimed to explore the relationship between the adoptions of social media marketing towards SME performance in Malaysia, focusing on those SMEs within the east coast region of Malaysian peninsula. It also explore the potential relationship between competitive intelligence towards SME performance. A quantitative approach was used to test the hypothesis in order to get reliable results where 400 respondents who were mainly SMEs business owners were selected from Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang. The study found that there was positive relationship between social media marketing adoption with SME performance where a moderate strength of association with SME performance existed. It was also found that competitive intelligence has positive relationship and a moderate strength of association between competitive intelligence and the performance of SME thus supported these hypotheses.

Qalati et al (2022) investigates the effects of technological-organisational-environmental (TOE) factors on social media adoption and its effect on SME performance. Data was collected by generating online survey link. SmartPLS 3.3 was used for the path analysis of 381 SMEs. The findings revealed a significant effect of relative advantage, cost-effectiveness, compatibility, interactivity (technological), entrepreneurial orientation (organisational), and customer pressure (environmental) factors, and an insignificant effect of top management support (organisational) and competitive pressure (environmental) determinants on social media adoption. The study found a significant influence of social media on SME performance. This paper offers several implications for decision-makers, policy-makers, and scholars interested in social media and its use. It builds an empirical, integrated framework for SMEs in developing countries.

Retno (2024) assessed the impact of social media marketing on SMEs' business performance in His study in Indonesia. Quantitative methods were used and data analysis was done using descriptive statistics. Samples were selected using the accidental sampling method. Data collection technique was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 42 SME owners in Palembang, South Sumatera. Findings indicated that 76 percent of respondents used social media for marketing activities. Further investigation reveals that Social media marketing had an impact on annual sales performance ranging from 10 to 30 percent.

Oguh (2023) examined the relationship between digital marketing and the performance of selected small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives analysed the impact of e-mail marketing, content marketing and social media marketing on customer engagement of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. The study applied structured questionnaires to the entire population of 137 respondents. The data generated was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means were used; inferential statistics such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was also used. The findings of the study showed that there was a statistical significant relationship between e-mail marketing and customer engagement, while there was no statistical significant relationship between content marketing, social media marketing and customer engagement of selected small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City. Based on the findings of this study, and in line with its specific objectives, the study recommended that SMEs should use their resources in developing effective e-mail, content and social media marketing strategies that could enhance customer engagement.

Adjaino and Onuorah (2024) studied the impact of digital marketing strategies on the performance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the University of Benin. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to collect data from 50 SMEs through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic information and assess the adoption of digital marketing tools such as social media marketing, affiliate marketing, and online advertising. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and means, were employed to summarize the data, while regression analysis was used to test the relationships between digital marketing strategies and SME performance. The results indicate that 54% of respondents were male, with the majority falling within the 18-25 age group (64%). Most respondents held HND/BSc qualifications (64%) and had less than five years of work experience (72%). Regression analysis revealed a positive and significant impact of social media marketing, affiliate marketing and online advertising ($p = 0.001$) on SME performance. The study concludes that social media marketing, affiliate marketing, and online advertising play pivotal roles in SME success, reinforcing the need for SMEs to embrace digital marketing for sustainable growth. It was recommended that SMEs should be encouraged to leverage social media platforms more effectively, as this strategy significantly improves performance by enhancing customer outreach and engagement.

Agbonifoh and Ozolua (2023) examined digital marketing and small and medium scale enterprises performance in Benin City. Specifically, the research ascertained the effect of social media marketing, email marketing and search engine market in Benin City. The study adopted the survey research design. Convenience sampling was employed to select a sample of 100 SMEs operators in Benin City. Data were derived from primary sources and analysed using simple percentages, means, and multiple regression for the purpose of testing hypotheses formulated. The result showed that social media marketing was positive and significantly related to SMEs in Benin City.

Eleazar and Gloria (2022) investigated the effect of social media marketing on small and medium-sized business growth in Benin City, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design and data was gathered using a specially prepared questionnaire which was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Four aspects of social media marketing were chosen to be studied: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. The population of the study includes all SMEs in Benin City, Nigeria. The study's sample size was 500 selected SMEs. The acquired data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube were all found to have a positive and significant impact on the growth of SMEs. Based on the findings, the study recommended that SMEs be encouraged to embrace social media marketing in order to compete in the global market. Furthermore, it recommended that SME owners should also keep their social media accounts updated with content that educates, informs, and persuades customers to buy their products. In addition, SMEs owners should use social media marketing feedback as a catalyst for innovation and expansion.

Yasmin, Tasneem, and Fatema (2015) investigated the impact of several types of digital marketing on a company's sales. To measure the success of digital marketing, the researchers looked at primary data from 150 organisations and 50 managers who were chosen at random. According to the findings, digital marketing and increased sales have a good association. Omotayo et al. (2015) investigated how social media marketing affects the performance of small businesses. As part of their research, they delivered 150 questionnaires to managers and employees of selected SMEs in the Ota Metropolis. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and the correlation test. Their study revealed that building relationships and networking with other businesses increases brand recognition.

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2.5 Research Gaps and Study Rationale

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Despite the growing adoption of social media marketing by SMEs globally, limited attention has been given to its application and impact on SMEs growth in Benin City, Nigeria. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how SMEs in Benin City leverage social media marketing for business success.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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3.1 Introduction

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This chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate the impact of digital marketing on brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City. It covers the research design, population of the study, sample size and sampling techniques, sources of data, research instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, method of data collection and method of data analysis.

The research methodology is designed to provide a clear and detailed approach to achieving the study's objectives. By following this methodology, the study aims to give valuable and reliable insights into the relationship between digital marketing and brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises.

3.2 Research Design

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This study employs a descriptive survey research design to comprehensively investigate the target population. This design covers the entire research process, including the study's objectives, rationale, geographical scope, required data, sequence of information, study duration, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical techniques (Warewu, 2017). The choice of descriptive survey design is based on the goal of directly obtaining data from respondents, making the survey design particularly suitable. It also serves as a robust foundation for systematically addressing the research questions and objectives.

3.3 Population of the Study

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Benin City is a significant hub for Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria, making it an ideal location for this study. The city's diverse economy and large number of SMEs provides a suitable environment for investigating the impact of digital marketing on brand performance. This study focuses on SMEs operating within Benin City, excluding businesses outside this geographical area.

According to available data, there are approximately 844 registered companies in Benin City. Due to the setbacks in covering this large population a sample size was used.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

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The sample size is determined using an empirical approach to avoid having a sample that is too small, which may not yield meaningful results, or too large, which can result in inefficient use of resources (Zikmund et al ., 2000). For this study, the scientific Yamane (1974) formula was applied due to the known and relatively small population. The formula is specified as $n = N / [1+N(e^2)]$

Where:

n is the sample size

N is the target population

e is the precision error.

In this study, a precision level of 0.05 is accepted, in line with common practices in social science research. Based on a population (N) of 844 the sample size (n) is calculated to be 271.38, which rounds to approximately 271.

By using a simple random sampling technique, a total of 271 respondents were selected from the 844 SMEs in Benin City.

3.5 Sources of Data

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This study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire administered to SME owners and, where necessary, brief interviews with SME owners in Benin City. The secondary data was sourced from business registries, industry reports, academic journals and online databases.

3.6 Research Instrument

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The research instrument for this study is a structured questionnaire designed to collect data from SME owners in Benin City. The questionnaires was divided into two (2) sections.

Section 'A' consists the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as type of business, years of operation, number of employees, ownership structure and annual turnover.

Section 'B' carries the main questions to address the research questions and consist of twenty-five (25) structured questions.

The questionnaire is a five- point rating (Likert scale), starting from strongly agreed (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The questionnaire was designed in such a way that every question in the questionnaire is related to the research questions and objectives of the study. The instrument was administered personally or via online survey tools to the selected sample of 271 SMEs in Benin City.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

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Validity involves the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of inferences made by the researcher on the basis of the data collection (Wallen & Fraenkel 2001). The questionnaire will be reviewed by experts in digital marketing and SMEs to ensure that it covers all relevant aspects of the research topic. The questionnaire will also be pilot- tested with a small group of SME owners to ensure that it is clear, understandable, and relevant to the research objectives.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, A test- retest method was adopted. Twenty- five (25) copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents who were not part of the target population. After a time lag of one week, the instrument was re- administered to the same group of respondents. Thereafter, their responses on the two occasions were collated and correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained, which indicates that the instrument is reliable for the study.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

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The study employed the primary source of data collection which is the use of structured questionnaire. The questionnaires were self administered by the researcher so as to minimise error in the instrument when returned. The questionnaire was distributed to Small and Medium Enterprises that made up the sample size. To increase response rate, follow-ups and reminders were employed.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

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The data collected from the survey will be analysed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. As Denscombe (2006) explains, descriptive statistics involves the transformation of large volumes of raw data into more digestible formats, such as tables, charts, and percentages, which facilitate a clearer understanding of the data. Then inferential statistics will be used to test the relationship between digital marketing and brand performance such as chi-square tests to examine categorical relationships, Pearson correlation analysis to assess relationships between variables and regression analysis to test the research hypothesis.

For this study, data was initially compiled using Microsoft Excel (2016), after which it was analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

By using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital marketing on brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study, focusing on the data collected through the distributed questionnaires. The aim is to analyse and interpret the data in relation to the research objectives and hypotheses outlined earlier. The analysis of the data is presented in two sections, the first section deals with the presentation of results and the second section presents the discussion of the findings.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 4.1: Presentation of the Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of Business:		
- Retail	62	22.9
- Hospitality	56	20.7
- Services	63	23.2
- Manufacturing	49	18.1
- Others	41	15.1
Total	**271**	**100.0**
Years of operation		
- Less than 2 years	88	32.5

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- 2–5 years	67	24.7
- 6–10 years	59	21.8
- Above 10 years	57	21.0
Total	**271**	**100.0**
Number of employees		
- 1–10 (Micro)	99	36.5
- 11–50 (Small)	57	21.0
- 51–200 (Medium)	37	13.6
Total	**271**	**100.0**
Ownership structure		
- Sole proprietorship	82	30.3
- Partnership	79	29.2
- Limited liability company	52	19.2
- Others	58	21.4
Total	**271**	**100.0**
Annual Turnover		
Less than #1million	84	31.0
#1- #5million	64	23.6

#6- #10million	68	25.1
More than #10 million	55	20.3
Total	**271**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

Table 4.1 presents the demographic profile of the 271 SME respondents in Benin City. The variables analysed include the type of business, years of operation, number of employees, ownership structure, and annual turnover. These characteristics provide useful background information on the composition of the sampled enterprises and help explain the context in which digital marketing practices occur.

Type of Business

The results show that the services sector (23.2%) and retail businesses (22.9%) account for the highest proportion of respondents, followed by hospitality (20.7%), manufacturing (18.1%), and others (15.1%). This indicates that the majority of SMEs in Benin City operate within the service-oriented and retail sectors, which are typically customer-focused and more likely to adopt digital marketing strategies such as social media advertising, online sales, and customer engagement platforms.

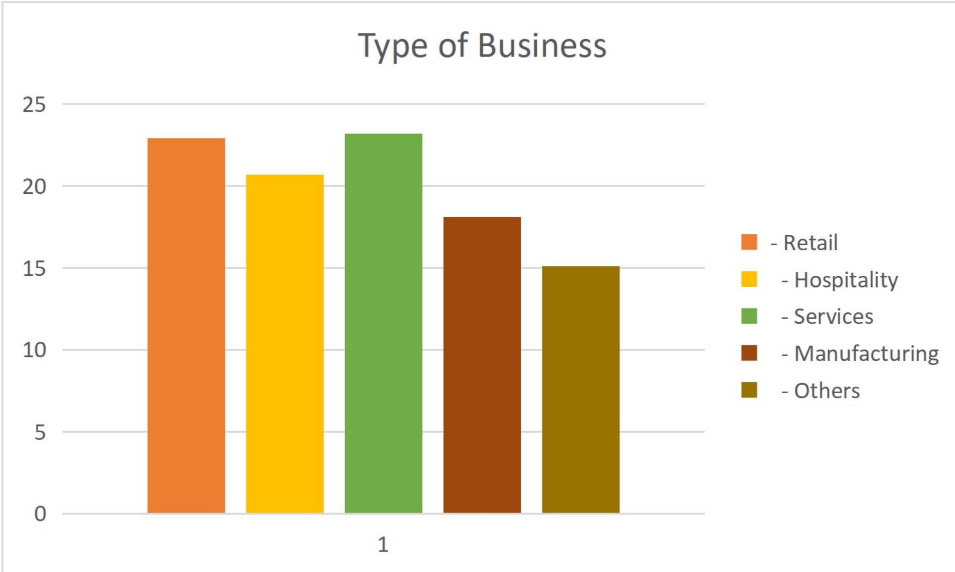

***Figure 4.1:* Distribution of Businesses by Type**

Years of operation

In terms of years of operation, 32.5% of the businesses have been in existence for less than 2 years, 24.7% for 2–5 years, 21.8% for 6–10 years, and 21.0% for over 10 years. This distribution implies that a large proportion of SMEs in Benin City are new or emerging enterprises, reflecting a vibrant and growing entrepreneurial environment.

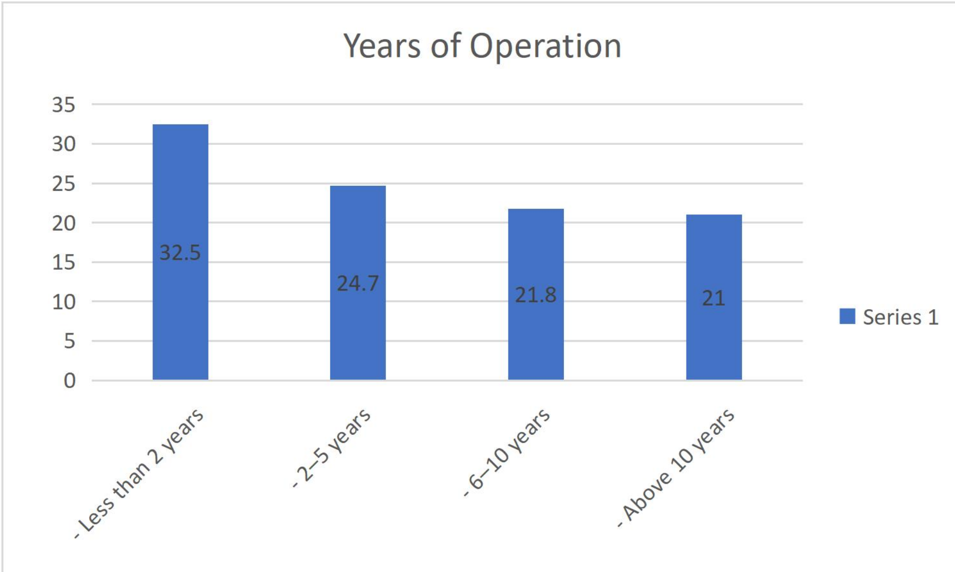

Figure 4.2: Distribution by Years of Operation

Number of employees

The majority of SMEs surveyed are micro enterprises (36.5%) with 1–10 employees, followed by small enterprises (21.0%) with 11–50 employees, and medium enterprises (13.6%) with 51–200 employees. This structure is consistent with national SME statistics, where micro and small-scale businesses dominate the sector. It indicates that most SMEs in Benin City are small-sized, owner-managed operations, which may limit their financial and technical capacity to adopt more sophisticated digital marketing technologies.

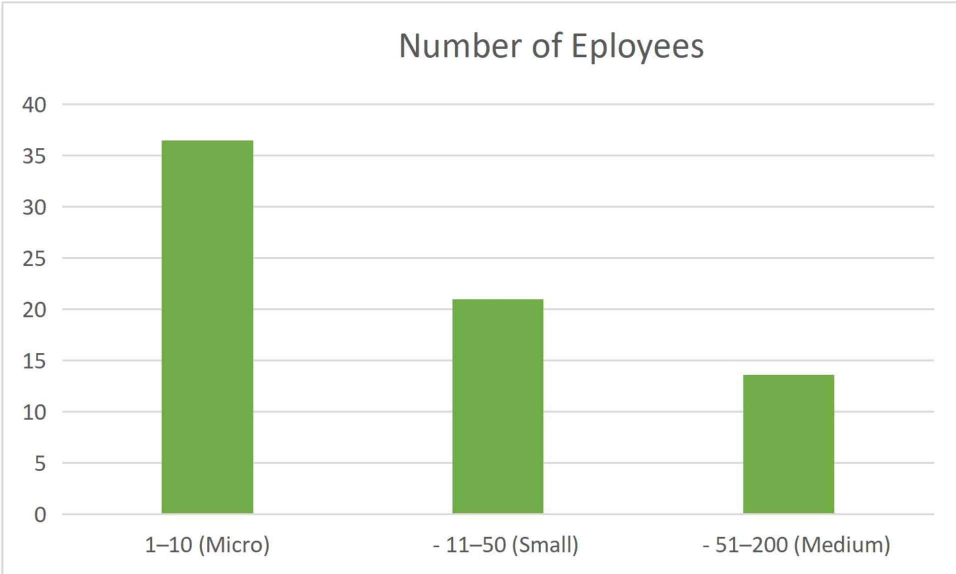

Figure 4.3: Distribution by Number of Employees

Ownership structure

Regarding ownership structure, sole proprietorships (30.3%) and partnerships (29.2%) are the most common forms of business ownership. Limited liability companies account for 19.2%, while others (such as cooperatives or family-owned ventures) represent 21.4%.

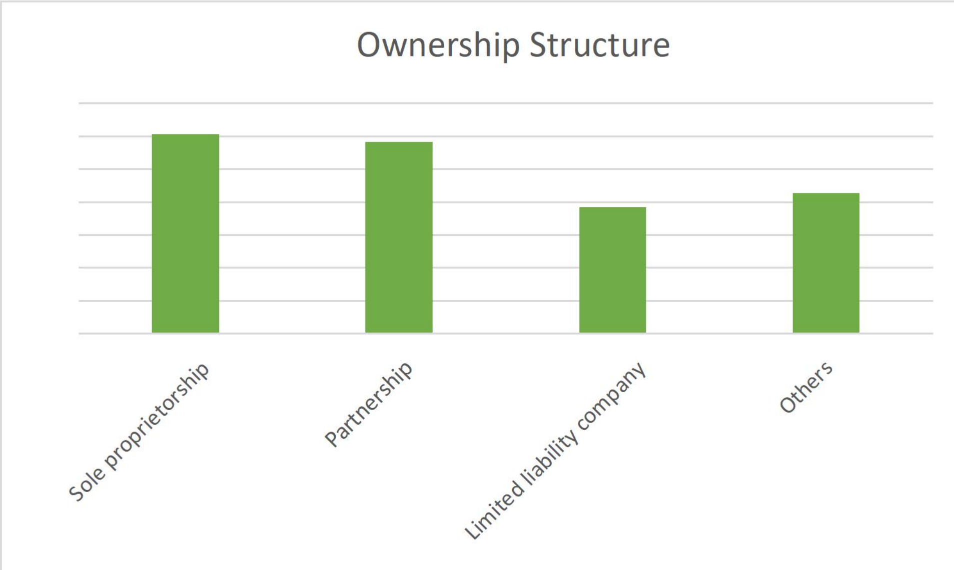

Figure 4.4: Distribution by Ownership Structure

Annual Turnover

The analysis of annual turnover reveals that 31.0% of SMEs have an annual turnover of less than ₦1 million, 23.6% earn between ₦1–₦5 million, 25.1% between ₦6–₦10 million, while 20.3% earn above ₦10 million annually. This indicates that most SMEs in the study area are small-income generating businesses, with limited financial capacity. As such, their approach to digital marketing is likely to focus on cost-effective channels, such as social media and direct online engagement, rather than expensive paid campaigns.

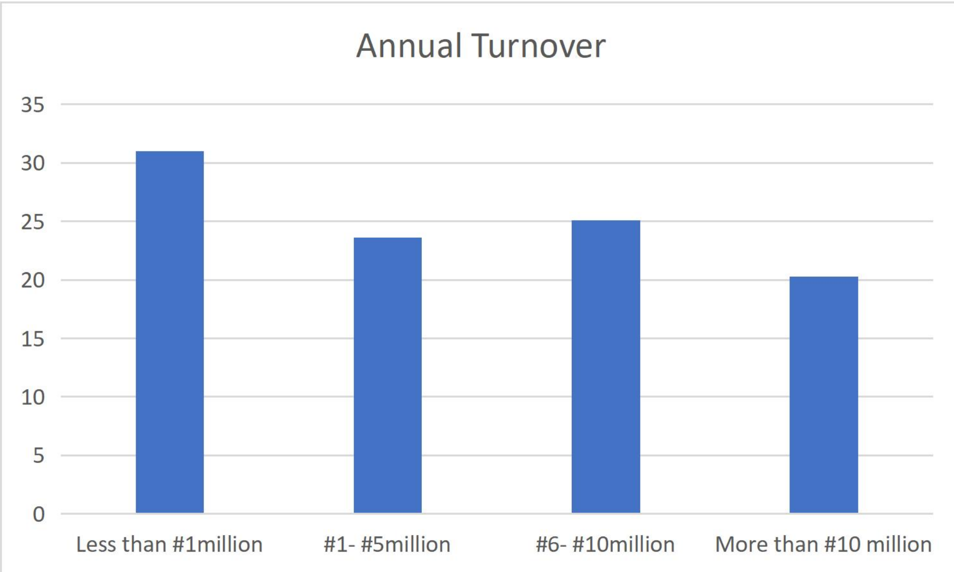

Figure 4.5: Distribution by Annual Turnover

Overall, the demographic profile of respondents shows that most SMEs in Benin City are young, small-sized, service-oriented businesses managed as sole proprietorships or partnerships, with modest annual turnover. These characteristics reflect a sector that is highly adaptive but resource-constrained, suggesting that the adoption and effectiveness of digital marketing depend largely on affordability, accessibility, and managerial awareness.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

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This section discusses the descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage and mean) of the independents and dependent variables.

Table 4.2: Digital Marketing Strategies Used.

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S/N	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1.	My SME effectively utilises social media for marketing purposes.	79 (29.15%)	71 (26.20%)	66 (24.35%)	55 (20.29%)	--	3.64
2.	Email marketing is a key component of digital marketing strategies.	85 (31.37%)	78 (28.78%)	64 (23.62%)	44 (16.24%)	--	3.79
3.	My digital marketing efforts are well-aligned with my business goals.	111 (40.96%)	90 (33.21%)	70 (25.83%)	--		4.15
4.	My digital marketing strategy is regularly reviewed and updated.	76 (28.04%)	77 (28.41%)	54 (19.93%)	--	64 (23.62%)	3.61
5.	Digital platforms have brought more effectiveness to my business.	75 (27.68%)	79 (29.15%)	59 (21.77%)	58 (21.40%)	-	3.63
	Overall mean for Digital Marketing Strategies	85.2 (31.4%)	79.0 (29.2%)	62.6 (23.1%)	52.3 (11.6%)	64.0 (4.7%)	

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

Table 4.2 presents responses from 271 SMEs in Benin City regarding their use and perception of digital marketing strategies. The results reveal that 29.15% of the respondents strongly agreed and 26.20% agreed that their businesses effectively utilize social media for marketing purposes, giving a combined agreement of 55.35% and a mean score of 3.64. This indicates that more than half of the SMEs are actively leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to promote their products and services, although some are yet to fully maximise these platforms.

Similarly, 31.37% strongly agreed and 28.78% agreed that email marketing is a key component of their digital marketing strategy, with a mean of 3.79, showing that a large proportion of SMEs recognise the importance of email marketing in customer engagement and retention.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (40.96% strongly agreed and 33.21% agreed) indicated that their digital marketing efforts are well-aligned with their business goals, resulting in a mean score of 4.15. This suggests a strong level of strategic awareness among SMEs, as many are intentional about ensuring that their digital marketing activities support their overall business objectives.

However, responses regarding the regular review and updating of digital marketing strategies were more varied, as only about 56.45% agreed while 23.62% disagreed, with a mean score of 3.61. This implies that although SMEs are aware of the need to update their strategies, many do not do so frequently, possibly due to resource limitations or lack of technical expertise.

Similarly, 56.83% of respondents agreed that digital platforms have brought more effectiveness to their business operations, with a mean of 3.63, reinforcing the perception that digital tools enhance visibility and efficiency.

The overall mean values of 31.4% for strongly agree and 29.2% for agree, compared to only 11.6% disagreement, indicate that most SMEs in the study area hold positive perceptions toward digital marketing. On average, the mean score of 3.76 suggests a high level of adoption and satisfaction with digital marketing strategies.

Table 4.3: Effects of Digital Marketing on Brand Performance.

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S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1	Digital marketing has significantly improved my brand's online visibility.	84 (31.0%)	82 (30.3%)	56 (20.7%)	49 (18.1%)	—	3.78
2	Digital marketing is effective in driving sales for my SME.	65 (24.0%)	69 (25.5%)	41 (15.1%)	53 (19.6%)	43 (15.9%)	3.34
3	My customer engagement has improved due to digital marketing.	63 (23.2%)	63 (23.2%)	40 (14.8%)	55 (20.3%)	50 (18.5%)	3.18
4	Digital marketing has improved my brand's competitiveness.	80 (29.5%)	72 (26.6%)	64 (23.6%)	55 (20.3%)	—	3.72
5	My brand's reputation has been positively impacted by digital marketing.	77 (28.4%)	80 (29.5%)	49 (18.1%)	65 (24.0%)	—	3.65
	Overall mean for Digital Marketing on Brand Performance.	74 (27.2%)	73 (27.0%)	50 (18.5%)	55 (20.4%)	31 (11.5%)	

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

From Table 4.3, it can be seen that a significant proportion of the respondents (31.0% strongly agreed and 30.3% agreed) indicated that digital marketing has significantly improved their brand's online visibility, yielding a mean score of 3.78, which suggests that many SMEs recognise the role of digital tools in enhancing visibility and exposure to a wider audience. Similarly, 24.0% strongly agreed and 25.5% agreed that digital marketing is effective in driving sales for their businesses, with a mean of 3.34, implying that while some SMEs experience tangible sales growth from digital platforms, others may not yet be fully realising its potential.

In terms of customer engagement, 23.2% of respondents strongly agreed and an equal 23.2% agreed that their customer interactions have improved through digital marketing, with a mean score of 3.18. This moderate mean value indicates that although digital marketing facilitates better communication with customers, its full potential for engagement may not yet be fully tapped by many SMEs. Furthermore, 29.5% strongly agreed and 26.6% agreed that digital marketing has improved their brand's competitiveness, resulting in a mean of 3.72, which highlights that SMEs view digital strategies as vital tools for staying relevant and competitive in the modern business environment.

Likewise, 28.4% of respondents strongly agreed and 29.5% agreed that digital marketing has positively impacted their brand's reputation, with a mean score of 3.65, showing that many businesses appreciate the credibility and brand value that come with an active digital presence. On the whole, the overall mean response shows that 27.2% strongly agreed and 27.0% agreed with the positive influence of digital marketing on brand performance, while only 20.4% disagreed and 11.5% strongly disagreed. This pattern demonstrates that more than half of the SMEs believe digital marketing contributes positively to their online visibility, sales growth, customer engagement, competitiveness, and brand reputation, affirming its crucial role in enhancing overall brand performance.

Table 4.4: Influence on Brand Performance Metrics.

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S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1	Digital marketing has significantly increased my website traffic.	69 (25.5%)	74 (27.3%)	64 (23.6%)	64 (23.6%)	—	3.55
2	My social media engagement metrics have improved due to digital marketing.	94 (34.7%)	64 (23.6%)	53 (19.6%)	—	60 (22.1%)	3.67
3	Digital marketing has improved my sales conversions.	98 (36.2%)	91 (33.6%)	82 (30.3%)	—	—	4.06
4	Customer retention has improved due to digital marketing.	70 (25.8%)	78 (28.8%)	66 (24.4%)	57 (21.0%)	—	3.59
5	Digital marketing has helped me better understand my target audience.	106 (39.1%)	96 (35.4%)	69 (25.5%)	—	—	4.14
	Overall mean for Influence on Brand Performance Metrics.	88 (32.3%)	81 (29.7%)	67 24.7%	31 11.3%	6 2.1%	

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

The results on the influece of digital marketing on brand performance metrics, as presented in Table 4.4 show that the majority of respondents perceive digital marketing as having a strong positive impact on their business outcomes. A considerable proportion of respondents (25.5% strongly agreed and 27.3% agreed) indicated that digital marketing has significantly increased their website traffic, with a mean score of 3.55, suggesting that online promotional activities have helped many SMEs attract more visitors and potential customers to their websites. Similarly, 34.7% strongly agreed and 23.6% agreed that their social media engagement metrics have improved due to digital marketing, while 22.1% strongly disagreed, giving a mean score of 3.67. This implies that most SMEs recognise digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as effective tools for boosting customer interaction and visibility, although a few still struggle with consistent engagement.

Furthermore, 36.2% of respondents strongly agreed and 33.6% agreed that digital marketing has improved their sales conversions, with a mean of 4.06, which indicates a generally high level of satisfaction with digital marketing's contribution to turning potential leads into actual customers. Similarly, 25.8% strongly agreed and 28.8% agreed that digital marketing has improved customer retention, yielding a mean of 3.59, suggesting that digital tools and communication strategies are helping businesses maintain long-term relationships with their clients. In addition, the highest ratings were recorded for understanding target audiences, where 39.1% strongly agreed and 35.4% agreed that digital marketing has helped them better understand their customer base, giving a mean score of 4.14. This demonstrates that SMEs are leveraging digital analytics and online interactions to gain insights into customer preferences and behaviors.

On the overall, the mean percentages indicate that 32.3% of respondents strongly agreed and 29.7% agreed with the positive influence of digital marketing on their brand performance metrics, while only a small fraction disagreed (11.3%) or strongly disagreed (2.1%).

Table 4.5: Barriers to Digital Marketing Adoption

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S/N	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
1.	The lack of digital marketing skills is a significant barrier to the adoption in my SME.	58 (21.4%)	72 (26.6%)	48 (17.7%)	46 (17.0 %)	47 (17.3 %)	3.37
2.	My SME faces significant challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies due to limited budget.	80 (29.5%)	66 (24.4%)	68 (25.1%)	57 (21.0 %)	-	3.69
3.	My SME lacks the necessary technical infrastructure to support digital marketing efforts.	60 (22.1%)	71 (26.2%)	48 (17.7%)	46 (17.0 %)	55 (20.3 %)	3.30
4.	The rapidly changing nature of digital marketing is a barrier to the adoption for my SME.	66 (24.4%)	61 (22.5%)	57 (21.0%)	40 (14.8 %)	47 (17.3 %)	3.39
5.	Regulatory or compliance issues hinder my ability to adopt digital marketing strategies.	65 (24.0%)	65 (24.0%)	52 (19.2%)	37 (13.7 %)	52 (19.2 %)	3.37
	Overall mean for Barriers to	66	67	54	45	50	

	Digital Marketing Adoption	(24.3%)	(24.7%)	(20.1%)	(16.7 %)	(18.5 %)	

Source: Researcher's Compilation (2025)

From Table 4.4, it can be noted that a considerable number of respondents (58 strongly agree and 72 agree, representing 43.5% in total) believe that the lack of digital marketing skills poses a significant barrier to adoption, with a mean score of 3.37, indicating a moderate level of agreement. Similarly, 80 respondents strongly agree and 66 agree (53.9% combined) that limited budgets constitute a major challenge in implementing digital marketing strategies, reflected in the highest mean value of 3.69.

Technical infrastructure also appears to be a constraint, as 60 respondents strongly agree and 71 agree (48.5% in total) that their SMEs lack the necessary facilities to support digital marketing efforts, yielding a mean of 3.30. Moreover, 66 strongly agree and 61 agree (46.8% collectively) that the rapidly changing nature of digital marketing makes it difficult for SMEs to keep up, with a mean of 3.39. Finally, regulatory and compliance issues were also identified as barriers, as 65 respondents strongly agree and 65 agree (45.8% combined) that such factors hinder their ability to adopt digital marketing strategies, with a mean of 3.37.

4.4 Regression Analysis Result

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A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies and barriers to adoption on brand performance among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City. The regression results are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Model Summary

Statistic	**Value**
Multiple R	0.217
R Square (R^2)	0.047
Adjusted R Square	0.040
Standard Error	0.561
Observations	271

The results in Table 4.6 reveals that the model explains approximately 4.7% ($R^2 = 0.047$) of the variation in brand performance among SMEs. Although the coefficient of determination is relatively low, it indicates that the predictors of digital marketing strategies and barriers to adoption collectively account for a modest proportion of changes in brand performance.

Table 4.7: ANOVA Results

Source	**df**	**SS**	**MS**	**F**	**Sig. F**
Regression	2	4.1856	2.0928	6.6426	0.0015
Residual	268	84.4344	0.3151		
Total	270	88.6199			

The ANOVA result in Table 4.7 shows that the F-statistic ($F = 6.642$, $p = 0.0015$) is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that the overall regression model is valid and that digital marketing strategies and barriers to adoption jointly exert a statistically significant influence on brand performance among SMEs in the study area.

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Table 4.8: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t	p-value	Decision
(Constant)	2.9485	0.2265	13.016	0.000	Significant
Digital Marketing Strategies	0.1391	0.0538	2.587	0.010	Significant
Barriers to Adoption	0.0909	0.0485	1.875	0.062	Not Significant

The regression equation can therefore be expressed as:

Brand Performance = 2.948 + 0.139(Digital Marketing Strategies) + 0.091(Barriers to Adoption)

The coefficient of digital marketing strategies ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.010$) indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship with brand performance. This implies that an increase in the adoption or quality of digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, email campaigns, and search engine optimisation is likely to improve the brand performance of SMEs in Benin City.

On the other hand, the coefficient for barriers to adoption ($\beta = 0.091$, $p = 0.062$) is positive but not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that while the presence of barriers (e.g., limited technical know-how, inadequate infrastructure, or high costs) may affect digital marketing implementation, their direct influence on brand performance is weak in this study.

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The findings indicate that digital marketing strategies play a crucial role in enhancing the performance of SMEs' brands in Benin City. SMEs that actively utilise various digital marketing tools and platforms tend to experience improved market visibility, customer engagement, and sales performance. Although barriers to adoption exist, their effect is not statistically strong enough to significantly reduce brand performance. Overall, the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 6.64$, $p = 0.0015$), confirming that digital marketing factors collectively contribute meaningfully to explaining variations in brand performance among SMEs in the study area.

Correlation Matrix

The Table 4.9 represents the correlation matrix between the effects of brand performance, digital marketing strategies, and barriers to adoption of digital strategies in the study area.

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Table 4.9: Correlation Matrix

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	Effects_on_Brand_performance	***Digital_Marketing_Strategies***	***Barriers_to_Adoption***
Effects_on_Brand_performance	1		
Digital_Marketing_Strategies	0.186358	1	
Barriers_to_Adoption	0.153099	0.238944	1

The correlation result in Table 4.9 reveals that digital marketing strategies and brand performance have a weak positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.186. This suggests that as SMEs implement more digital marketing strategies, their brand performance tends to improve slightly, although the relationship is not strong. Similarly, barriers to adoption show a weak positive correlation of 0.153 with brand performance, indicating that while challenges exist, they have only a modest influence on how well digital marketing contributes to overall brand success.

The relationship between barriers to adoption and digital marketing strategies is also positive, with a correlation of 0.239, implying that SMEs experiencing more barriers tend to have limited digital marketing adoption, or that increased adoption may help reduce perceived barriers.

Overall, the positive but weak correlations among the variables indicate that while digital marketing and adoption challenges are related to brand performance, their effects are minimal, and other external or organisational factors may have a stronger impact on brand outcomes.

Pearson Correlation

Pearson Correlation was also used in this study to understand the relationships digital marketing strategies and its effects on brand performance.

Table 4.10: Pearson Correlation

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Coefficient (r)	0.186358
N	271
T statistic	3.111001
Degree of Freedon(df)	269
P VALUE	0.002065

The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.186 indicates a weak positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance among SMEs. This means that as digital marketing strategies improve, brand performance tends to increase slightly. With a sample size (N) of 271 and degrees of freedom (df) of 269, the calculated t-statistic is 3.111. The corresponding p-value of 0.002 is less than the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance is statistically significant.

In other words, even though the correlation is weak, the result is significant enough to conclude that digital marketing strategies have a real, positive effect on brand performance among SMEs in the study.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

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The following hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance:

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Benin City.

From Table 4.10 (Pearson Correlation), the correlation coefficient between digital marketing strategies and brand performance is $r = 0.186$, with $p = 0.002 < 0.05$. This indicates a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance. The regression coefficient for digital marketing strategies ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.010$) in Table 4.8 also confirms that digital marketing strategies significantly predict brand performance.

The decision is to reject the null hypothesis based on the conclusion that there is a significant positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand performance among SMEs in Benin City.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

The ANOVA results in Table 4.7 ($F = 6.642$, $p = 0.0015$) show that digital marketing (in combination with barriers) has a statistically significant effect on brand performance. The model summary ($R^2 = 0.047$) indicates that digital marketing variables collectively explain 4.7% of the variation in brand performance.

The decision therefore is to reject the null hypothesis based on the conclusion that digital marketing significantly influences brand performance among SMEs in Benin City.

Hypothesis three: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance metrics in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

From Table 4.4, SMEs reported positive outcomes of digital marketing on specific performance metrics such as website traffic (mean = 3.55), social media engagement (mean = 3.67), sales conversion (mean = 4.06), customer retention (mean = 3.59), and understanding target audience (mean = 4.14).

These consistently high mean scores (mostly above 3.5) indicate that digital marketing directly enhances measurable performance outcomes. The overall mean agreement of 62% (SA + A) and the significant correlation result ($p = 0.002$) support that digital marketing affects brand performance metrics positively.

The decision is to reject the null hypothesis seeing that there is a significant relationship between digital marketing and brand performance metrics among SMEs.

Hypothesis four: There is no significant relationship between digital marketing adoption and sales growth in Small and Medium Enterprises in Benin City.

From Table 4.3, 49.5% (24.0% SA + 25.5% A) of SMEs agreed that digital marketing is effective in driving sales, though the mean (3.34) suggests a moderate impact. In Table 4.4, 36.2% strongly agreed and 33.6% agreed that digital marketing improved sales conversions, with a high mean score (4.06) indicating a strong positive influence on sales performance.

Regression results also support that digital marketing strategies significantly predict overall performance outcomes ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.010$), which include sales growth.

Hypothesis four is therefore rejected since there is a significant relationship between digital marketing adoption and sales growth among SMEs.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

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The findings revealed that digital marketing strategies have a significant positive influence on brand performance. Although the relationship was not very strong, it was statistically meaningful, indicating that digital marketing contributes substantially to how well brands perform. This suggests that as SMEs increase their use of digital marketing tools and strategies, their brand recognition, visibility, and competitiveness are likely to improve.

The regression analysis further confirmed that digital marketing strategies significantly predict brand performance, meaning that businesses that adopt structured and consistent online marketing approaches tend to perform better than those relying solely on traditional methods. This finding is consistent with the studies of Sharabati et al. (2024) and Mushi (2024), who both reported that social media campaigns, email marketing, and online advertising enhance the visibility and overall performance of SMEs. Similarly, Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) established that integrated digital marketing approaches positively influence competitiveness and customer reach among Nigerian SMEs.

The analysis also indicated that digital marketing has a measurable effect on overall brand performance when combined with other influencing factors such as barriers and operational challenges faced by SMEs. Although digital marketing does not account for all variations in performance, its impact remains statistically significant, implying that it is an important component among the many factors influencing SME success. This observation aligns with the findings of Nwoko and Obi (2024), who discovered that social media and content marketing significantly affect SME performance in Nigeria. It also corroborates the study of Olonde (2017), who emphasized that online marketing drives growth and competitiveness among small businesses in Kenya.

When examining specific performance metrics, the study found that digital marketing positively influences key indicators such as website traffic, social media engagement, sales conversion, customer retention, and understanding of the target audience. The general agreement among respondents suggests that digital marketing improves measurable performance outcomes, supporting the notion that digital tools not only increase brand visibility but also strengthen tangible aspects of brand growth. This result agrees with the findings of Sharabati et al. (2024) and Malik (2023), who established that digital marketing tools enhance customer interaction, engagement, and conversion—core elements of performance measurement and evaluation.

The study also confirmed that the adoption of digital marketing significantly contributes to sales growth among SMEs in Benin City. Most respondents agreed that digital marketing has improved their sales performance and overall business growth. Evidence from this research suggests that enterprises that adopt digital marketing record better sales outcomes, improved customer acquisition, and greater market reach. This finding supports the reports of Malik et al.

(2023) and Sharabati et al. (2024), who found that the use of digital marketing significantly increases sales performance, customer acquisition, and market expansion for small enterprises.

Overall, the findings indicate that digital marketing is a vital driver of SME performance in Benin City. The consistent rejection of all hypotheses confirms that digital marketing strategies, adoption, and implementation have significant relationships with brand performance, brand performance metrics, and sales growth. This underscores the importance of digital transformation for SMEs seeking to enhance competitiveness in today's technology-driven business environment. However, the study also suggests that the potential of digital marketing among SMEs has not been fully maximised, possibly due to limited technical skills, inadequate financial resources, and inconsistent marketing practices.

The results therefore highlight the need for increased training, awareness, and supportive policy frameworks to help SMEs harness the full benefits of digital marketing. When effectively utilised, digital marketing can enable businesses to reach wider audiences, improve brand visibility, strengthen customer loyalty, and achieve sustainable growth.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter contains the summary of findings, conclusion, policy recommendations based on the findings of the study, suggestions for further studies, and contribution to knowledge.

5.2. Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis and evaluation of the research data, the key findings of the study are summarised as follows:

i. Adoption and Utilization of Digital Marketing Strategies

Findings show that SMEs in Benin City generally have positive attitudes toward digital marketing, with a notable level of adoption across several platforms. About 55.35% of SMEs actively utilise social media for marketing purposes, with a mean score of 3.64, while 60.15% recognize email marketing as a vital part of their overall strategy (mean = 3.79). Furthermore, 74.17% of respondents confirmed that their digital marketing efforts are strategically aligned with their business goals (mean = 4.15). However, only 56.45% regularly review and update their marketing strategies, suggesting gaps in continuous improvement practices. Overall, a mean score of 3.76 indicates a strong level of satisfaction and a positive perception toward digital marketing adoption among SMEs.

ii. Effects of Digital Marketing on Brand Performance

The study found that digital marketing has a significant positive influence on various dimensions of brand performance among SMEs. A majority (61.3%) agreed that digital marketing has improved their brand visibility (mean = 3.78), while 49.5% reported enhanced sales performance through digital channels (mean = 3.34). Additionally, 46.4% of SMEs experienced improved

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Formatted[Christopher Ofregbe]: Normal, Space After: 0 pt, Line spacing: Double customer engagement (mean = 3.18), and 56.1% indicated that digital marketing provided them with a competitive advantage (mean = 3.72). Moreover, 57.9% of respondents acknowledged that digital marketing efforts had positively impacted their brand reputation (mean = 3.65), confirming its overall effectiveness in strengthening brand presence and perception.

iii. Influence on Brand Performance Metrics

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Results indicate that digital marketing contributes to measurable improvements in specific business performance indicators. Over half of the SMEs (52.8%) reported significant increases in website traffic (mean = 3.55), and 58.3% observed enhanced social media engagement, although 22.1% strongly disagreed (mean = 3.67). The highest agreement was recorded in sales conversions, where 69.8% of respondents confirmed improved conversion rates (mean = 4.06). Additionally, 54.6% experienced better customer retention (mean = 3.59), while 74.5% gained deeper insights into their target audiences (mean = 4.14). These findings affirm that digital marketing not only boosts visibility but also strengthens customer relationships and understanding.

iv. Barriers to Digital Marketing Adoption

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Despite its benefits, several barriers limit the effective adoption of digital marketing among SMEs in Benin City. Budget limitation emerged as the most prominent challenge, with a mean score of 3.69 and 53.9% of respondents citing inadequate financial resources as a key constraint. Skill deficiency was another major issue, as 43.5% of SMEs lack adequate digital marketing expertise (mean = 3.37). Furthermore, 48.5% of respondents reported insufficient technical infrastructure (mean = 3.30), while 46.8% struggled to keep up with the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies (mean = 3.39). Additionally, 45.8% identified regulatory compliance as a hindrance (mean = 3.37). These barriers collectively impede the optimal utilisation of digital marketing tools and strategies.

v. Statistical Relationships and Significance

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The statistical analysis established that digital marketing has a measurable and significant effect on brand performance. The model fit indicated that digital marketing factors account for approximately 4.7% of the variation in brand performance ($R^2 = 0.047$). The regression results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between digital marketing and brand performance ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.010$), implying that improvements in digital marketing strategies directly enhance business outcomes. Conversely, the barriers to digital marketing showed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship ($\beta = 0.091$, $p = 0.062$), suggesting that while challenges exist, they do not entirely hinder performance improvements. A weak but significant positive correlation ($r = 0.186$, $p = 0.002$) was also observed between digital marketing strategies and brand performance. Overall, the regression model was statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistic (6.642, $p = 0.0015$), confirming the reliability of the model.

5.3. Conclusion

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The findings of this study conclusively demonstrate that digital marketing strategies exert a statistically significant positive influence on brand performance among SMEs in Benin City. Despite the relatively modest correlation strength ($r = 0.186$), the statistical significance ($p = 0.002$) confirms that digital marketing efforts contribute meaningfully to enhancing brand visibility, competitiveness, customer engagement, and ultimately business outcomes.

The study reveals a sector characterized by both opportunity and constraint. SMEs in Benin City demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for digital marketing adoption, with over half actively utilising social media and email marketing, and most reporting tangible improvements in brand performance metrics such as website traffic, sales conversions, and customer understanding.

However, the sector dominated by micro enterprises, sole proprietorships, and businesses with annual turnovers under ₦5 million presents challenges to sustained digital marketing implementation. Budget limitations emerge as the most pressing barrier, followed closely by skill deficiencies and inadequate technical infrastructure.

Importantly, the finding that barriers to adoption do not significantly reduce the brand performance benefits of digital marketing suggests that even constrained SMEs can achieve meaningful improvements through strategic and cost-effective digital engagement. This is encouraging and indicates that solutions need not be expensive to be effective; rather, they should be focused, intentional, and aligned with business objectives.

In conclusion, digital marketing is not merely an option for Benin City's SMEs, it is increasingly a necessity for maintaining competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth. The evidence from this study provides a clear mandate for stakeholders to work collectively in addressing the barriers while capitalising on the demonstrated benefits of digital marketing adoption. With appropriate support and commitment, SMEs in Benin City can effectively leverage digital marketing as a powerful driver of brand performance and business success.

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5.4. Recommendations

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Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. For SME Owners and Managers

SME owners and managers in Benin City should prioritise strategic digital investment despite budget limitations, as findings from the study reveal that even modest engagement with digital tools significantly improves brand performance. In addition, SMEs should make use of analytics and measurement tools to track campaign performance, understand customer behaviour, and make informed, data-driven decisions that foster continuous improvement and better return on investment.

ii. For Government and Policy Makers

Government and policy makers play a pivotal role in enabling the digital transformation of SMEs. There is a need for deliberate investment in digital infrastructure to enhance internet accessibility, reliability, and affordability, especially in Benin City and its environs. The government should also implement skills training programs that offer subsidised or free digital marketing and technology education for SME owners and employees to address skill deficiencies identified in the study. Finally, establishing SME support centers equipped with advisory services, mentorship, and access to affordable digital marketing platforms would greatly enhance SMEs' ability to thrive in the digital economy.

iii. For Digital Marketing Service Providers

Digital marketing service providers should develop affordable service packages tailored to the needs of micro and small enterprises. It is recommended that marketing agencies create customised solutions suited to the unique operational realities of service-oriented and retail businesses, which constitute the majority of SMEs in Benin City. In addition, the inclusion of local language support in customer service and online platforms would enhance accessibility and encourage adoption among SME operators with limited digital literacy.

iv. For Business Associations and NGOs

Business associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can significantly strengthen SME digital transformation through knowledge sharing initiatives such as regular workshops, webinars, and networking events focused on digital marketing best practices. Furthermore, these organisations can engage in collaborative advocacy with government agencies and private sector stakeholders to push for policies and support systems that promote widespread digital marketing adoption. Through sustained collaboration, business associations and NGOs can serve as vital intermediaries in fostering a more digitally empowered SME ecosystem.

5.5 Contribution to Knowledge

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This study enlightens that digital marketing efforts contribute meaningfully to enhancing brand visibility, competitiveness, customer engagement, and ultimately business outcomes.

The study found that digital marketing has a significant positive influence on various dimensions of brand performance among SMEs thereby confirming its overall effectiveness in strengthening brand presence and perception.

This study found that digital marketing contributes to measurable improvements in specific business performance indicators thereby boosting visibility and also strengthening customer relationships and understanding.

The study also advances the understanding that barriers to adoption do not significantly reduce the brand performance benefits of digital marketing, suggests that even constrained SMEs can achieve meaningful improvements through strategic and cost-effective digital engagement.

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