



ONLINE ADVERTISING, EMAIL MARKETING, SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION: STRATEGIES FOR SALES IMPROVEMENT BY SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN NIGERIA

Chidiebere Christopher Ufondu

cc.ufondu@unizik.edu.ng

Onyeneke Euphemia Nkiruka

en.onyeneke@unizik.edu.ng

Akudolu Chikerenma Adanma

ca.akudolu@unizik.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study examined online advertising, email marketing, search engine optimization: strategies for sales improvement by small and medium Enterprises in Nigeria. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study used the descriptive Survey research design. 1630 SMES are in the study's area as the study's population. The taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size of the study which is 321 SMEs in Awka South, LGA, Anambra State. A proportionate sample was adopted in deriving the sample from different sectors of SMEs in Awka South. The technique was based on the industrial, service, commercial, and agricultural sectors of SMEs. In drawing the sample using proportionate sampling techniques, 98 SMEs were drawn from the industrial sector, 59 SMEs from the service sector, 85 SMEs from the commercial sector, and 79 SMEs from the agricultural sector. The instrument for collecting data was a structured questionnaire constructed and distributed by the researcher. The questionnaire contained two parts; part I containing items on demography of the respondent and part II containing items covering the research question that is guiding the study. The questions were structured on a 5-point rating scale of Very High extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE). Three experts, two from the Department of Business Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation, validated the instrument. The instrument's consistency was evaluated using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which had an average coefficient of 0.86. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were employed to examine the data, and a t-test was utilized to assess the hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. The difference was considered significant when the p value was discovered to be equal to or less than 0.05 alpha levels, at which point the null hypothesis was rejected. The null hypothesis will be accepted if a p value larger than 0.05 indicates that the difference was not significant. The study result indicated that online advertising, email marketing, search engine optimizations are all utilized sales improvement by SMEs to a high extent and moderate extent respectively. The finding led to the conclusion that online advertising, email marketing, search engine optimizations are important to improve SMEs sales. The study recommended that SMEs should define your campaign objectives before starting any online advertising efforts. Whether it's driving website traffic, generating leads, increasing conversions, or boosting sales, having well-defined goals will help you develop targeted and effective advertising strategies. SME should choose the online advertising platforms that align with your target audience and campaign objectives. Consider platforms like Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, LinkedIn Ads, and others, based on the demographics and interests of your target audience

Keywords: Online advertising, email marketing, search engine optimization, sales improvement



Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are privately owned businesses whose capital, assets, and manpower are limited. These small and medium businesses operate in small production companies like small bakeries, small shops, large shopping malls, small restaurants, etc. According to Susan (2020), he noted that a small and mid-size firm (SME) is a company that has revenues, assets, or staff counts below a specific threshold. The standards for classifying a SME differ between nations and occasionally between industries. Compared to larger companies, small and medium-sized businesses are more actively involved in the expansion of employment. In order to establish a skilled industrial base and industries and a ready service sector that may boost GDP through increased value-added, SMEs can thus produce significant benefits. As a result of the technologies and talents they utilize and develop, marketing has become one of the main techniques used by SMEs.

Marketing is the practice of informing clients of the benefits of a good or service in order to promote its sale. According to Allah (2017), marketing is an integrated, multi-channel (online and offline), customer-centric process used to identify, target, and persuade potential customers to buy your product or service. This process is then repeated as necessary to maximize the ROI (return on investment) after the metrics are analyzed. Due to the one-way nature of historical marketing, which is now progressively becoming two-way due to the use of social media and its influence, SMEs have traditionally used traditional marketing techniques. The term, "traditional marketing" refers to a variety of advertising and marketing strategies. It includes the commercials we see and hear every day, making it the most identifiable sort of marketing. Print, broadcast, direct mail, and telephone are the four main subcategories of conventional marketing techniques. Ramo (2021) defines traditional marketing as a traditional marketing strategy that uses a variety of offline advertising and promotion techniques to reach a semi-targeted audience.

The COVID-19 pandemic epidemic, according to Naveen (2020), has driven numerous enterprises to close, causing an unprecedented disruption of business in most industry sectors. Short-term issues that retailers and brands must overcome include those pertaining to human health and safety, the supply chain, the workforce, cash flow, consumer demand, sales, and marketing. Since the globe is developing and industries are expanding more quickly, it is necessary to inform a wide audience about the company or the product. Because everyone is occupied with their smartphones in this age of technological advancements, whether they are on social media or checking updates, it may be difficult to draw customers' attention to pamphlets, posters, or hoardings. This created a need for digital marketing, which may prevent us from attracting a large number of users.

Digital marketing, a subset of marketing, is the practice of promoting goods and services using the internet and other online-based digital platforms, including mobile phones, desktop computers, and other media and platforms. Digital marketing, according to Alex (2018), is a type of marketing used to advertise and sell goods and services online. Digital marketing tools make it simpler, more effective, and less time-consuming to conduct digital marketing. They support the efficient execution of digital marketing initiatives and make sure the desired target is reached. According to Martin, Radovan, and Malleriak (2019), email marketing is the most popular type of direct marketing at the moment. It is a low-cost but powerful technique of marketing for both potential and current clients. Email marketing is the practice of sending promotional emails to a list of contacts who have specifically agreed to hear from you via email.



Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the visibility of a website or webpage on a search engine results page (SERP) to make a company's website more discoverable (i.e., on the first page/s), thereby driving traffic and sales. Online advertising also known as online marketing, internet advertising, digital advertising, or web advertising is a form of marketing that use the internet to promote products and services to audience or platform users. According to Beth and Steven (2018), Indeed, online advertising is only growing in scope, as new avenues for marketers pop up (think ads delivered through text messages or marketing messages delivered to users in a certain area, known as geo-targeting).

John (2020) asserts that digital marketing tools are effective tools for marketing a business online and bringing organic visitors. As a result of the increased traffic, the company becomes more visible, which boosts sales and revenue. Digital marketing, as opposed to traditional marketing, generates more money since it has a higher return on investment and conversion rate (Abdurrahman, Erna, Anang, and Mohammad, 2021). Digital marketing is accessible and economical, according to Amura (2021). Despite being much more expensive than conventional advertising, it is very effective. It comprises numerous tactics that jointly aid in business growth, such as SEO, social media marketing, pay-per-click, email marketing, etc. The development of SMEs is aided by the improvement of sales through digital marketing.

Sales improvement is an increase in the volume of commercial revenue produced over time by an enterprise firm. You could need to extend your market, ramp up your marketing efforts, roll out new products or services, or enhance customer service in order to boost sales. According to Macy (2020), in order to grow sales, you need a strong sales strategy or plan that identifies key benchmarks. SMEs must employ the appropriate digital marketing techniques if they want to increase sales. This is what inspired the current study on SMEs' use of digital marketing tools for increasing sales improvement by SMEs.

Statemen of the Problem

Managers of small enterprises generally struggle with profitability, early SME failure, low sales turnover, and growth obstacles due to the implementation of digital marketing. Although SMEs have access to digital marketing, even the smallest business finds it challenging to use it to market their product effectively. This is because SMEs lack strategies to implement digital marketing to increase derivative sales, generate profit, and achieve financial growth. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, little to no empirical research has been done to determine the extent to which SMEs are using digital marketing techniques to boost sales. This made it of utmost importance.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the strategies employed by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria to enhance their sales performance, with a particular focus on online advertising, email marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO).

1. Determine the extent to which SMEs in Nigeria utilize email marketing as a strategy for improving their sales improvement among SMEs in Nigeria
2. Evaluate the utilization of search engine optimization (SEO) by SMEs in Nigeria and its impact on sales improvement among SMEs in Nigeria
3. examining the use of online advertising as a strategy for sales improvement among SMEs in Nigeria



Research Questions

To guide this study, three fundamental research questions have been formulated, each aimed at exploring the extent to which specific digital marketing strategies are employed by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria to enhance their sales performance.

1. What is the extent of utilization of email marketing tools for sales improvement of SMEs?
2. What is the extent of utilization of search engine optimization tools for sales improvement of SMEs?
3. What is the extent of utilization of search online advertising tools for sales improvement of SMEs?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of SMEs on the extent of utilizing email marketing for sales improvement with respect to years of existence.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean response of SMEs on the extent of utilizing search engine optimization for sales improvement with respect to years of existence.
3. There is no significant different in the mean response of SMEs on the extent of utilizing online advertising for sales improvement with respect to years of existence.

Methods

Research Design: A descriptive survey design aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon. It helps to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories. It is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample individual. (Siedlecki, 2020). The design is therefore appropriate for this study as it intends to obtain data on the extent of utilizing digital marketing for sales improvement for SMEs

Population of the Study: The population of the study consisted of 1630 registered entrepreneurs who owned small-scale and medium enterprises in Awka South Local Government area. Statistics on the population was obtained from the Department of trade commerce market and wealth creation state secretariat Awka South, Anambra.

Sample/Sampling Technique: The taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size of the study which is 321 SMEs in Awka South, LGA, Anambra State. A proportionate sample was adopted in deriving the sample from different sectors of SMEs in Awka south. The technique was based on the industrial sector, service sector, commercial sector, and agricultural sector of SMEs. In drawing the sample using the proportionate sampling techniques, 98 SMEs were drawn from the industrial sector, 59 SMEs were drawn from the service sector, 85 SMEs were drawn from the commercial sector and 79 SMEs were drawn from the agricultural sector.

Instrument for Data collection: A structured questionnaire created by the researcher with knowledge from the literature review served as the data collection tool for this investigation. It was divided into Sections A and B. While Section B was composed of six clusters, B1 to B3, covering the three study questions, Section A concentrated on the demographic information of respondents, such as gender. The survey was formatted using a 5-point rating system. The options that best indicated the extent to which SMEs use digital marketing tools for sales enhancement had to be checked by the respondents in the corresponding column. Using the following rating scale: Very High extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE), Very Low



Extent (VLE) To determine the face and content the instrument was given to two experts in business education from the Departments of Technology and Vocational Education. The experts were presented with the instrument, purpose of study, and research questions. The items were examined in terms of relevance, language, coverage of the scope of the study, general text format, and suitability. The inputs made by the experts will be taken into consideration in the final production of the instrument. The questionnaire was used by the researcher to gather data. The researcher gave copies of the questionnaire to the responders. provided that the information on the questionnaire pertains to everything that revolves around their study, every respondent was provided full cooperation. Therefore, they were given adequate time to explain how to check or indicate their view on the questionnaire's items. After each exercise, copies of the questionnaire have been collected.

Method of Data Analysis: Arithmetic and standard deviation was used to analyze data collected from the respondents. The level of requirement of the questionnaire items were determined based on the mean ratings of items relative to the real limit of numbers. The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance using t. test, if the probability p-vale for the groups obtained after data analysis is less than or equal to 0.05 at p-vale. It means that there is a significant difference while p-value is greater than 0.05 implying that there is no significant difference.

Research Results

Research question 1: in the opinion of SMEs what is the extent of utilization of email marketing tools for sales improvement for SMEs?

Table 1: Respondents 'mean rating on the extent of utilizing email marketing for sales improvement.

S/N	E-MAIL MARKETING	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Email marketing helps in increasing sales revenue	4.02	.71	High extent
2	Email marketing builds stronger customer relationships	3.95	.81	High extent
3	Emails help to increase brand recognition	3.81	.89	High extent
4	Emails marketing helps to get immediate results	3.63	.82	High extent
5	Email marketing helps to grow the business audience	3.49	.85	Moderately extent
6	Email marketing helps to maintain vendor relationships	3.46	1.0	Moderately extent
7	Email marketing helps to build credibility	3.38	.97	Moderately extent
CLUSTER MEAN		3.67	0.86	Highly extent

Table 1 shows that all the seven-aspect depicting the quality of SMEs have mean ratings ranging from 3.4 and 4.0, which shows that the respondent agreed the extent of utilizing E-mail tools for sales improvement by SMEs involved an increase in sales revenue, building strong customer relationships, increase brand recognition, get immediate results, grow business audience, maintaining vendors relationships and build credibility. The cluster means of 3.6 shows that the extent of quality assurance in utilizing E-mail for sales improvement is highly extent. The standard deviation score for all the items is within the same range except for item no 2.

Research question 2: In the opinion of SMEs what is the extent utilization of search engine optimization tools for sales improvement by SMEs?



Data collected concerning this research question were analyzed and the result is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Respondents 'mean rating on the extent of utilizing search engine optimization for sales improvement. **N=321**

S/N	SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION	Mean	SD	Remark
8	Search engine helps in increasing sales revenue	3.49	1.10	Moderately extent
9	Search engine helps in growing your audience and reach	2.97	.91	Moderately extent
10	It is relatively cheap and cost-effective.	2.82	1.10	Moderately extent
11	It helps in managing your business reputation carefully	2.96	1.16	Moderately extent
12	It helps in developing an integrated strategy to keep your business on track	2.91	1.21	Moderately extent
13	It helps to understand the voice of the consumer	2.73	1.07	Moderately extent
14	It helps to build trust and credibility	3.10	1.26	Moderately extent
CLUSTER MEAN		2.99	1.27	Moderately extent

Table 2 shows that all the seven-aspect depicting the quality of SMEs have mean ratings ranging from 2.7 to 3.4, which shows that the respondents agreed on the extent of utilizing affiliate marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs involved increasing sales revenue, growing audience, and reach, relatively cheap and cost-effective managing business reputation carefully, developing an integrated strategy to keep business track, building, and credibility. The cluster mean of 2.99 shows that the extent of quality assurance in utilizing affiliate marketing for sales improvement was the moderate extent. The standard deviation score for all the items is within the same range except for item no 9.

Research question 3: In the opinion of SMEs what is the extent utilization of online advertising tools for sales improvement by SMEs?

Table 3: Respondents 'mean rating on the extent of utilizing online advertising for sales improvement

S/N	ONLINE ADVERTISING	Mean	SD	Remark
15	Online advertising helps in increasing sales online revenue	3.94	.99	High extent
16	Online advertising helps to understand your target audience	3.83	.95	High extent
17	Online advertising helps in focusing on customer service.	3.73	.88	High extent
18	It helps to provide a chat feature on your website	3.71	.94	High extent
19	Online advertising helps to showcase your products with high-quality photo	3.93	.92	High extent
20	It helps to find your unique selling proposition	3.59	1.03	High extent
21	Online advertising helps in creating your business content	3.85	.91	High extent
CLUSTER MEAN		3.79	0.95	Highly Extent

Table 3 shows that all the seven-aspect depicting the quality of SMEs have mean ratings ranging from 3.5 to 3.9, which shows that the respondents agreed with the extent of utilizing online advertising tools for sales improvement by SMEs involved in increasing sales online revenue, understanding the target audience, focus on customer services, provide chat feature on the website, showcase the product with high-quality photo and creating business content. The cluster mean of 3.79 shows that the extent of quality assurance in utilizing online advertising for sales improvement was highly extent. The standard deviation score for all the items is within the same range.



Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the respondents' mean rating on the extent of utilizing E-mail marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings of respondents on the level of extent of utilizing E-mail marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence

Years of experiences	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
0-10 years	148	4.09	.60	32	-2.104	0.03	Accept Ho
11 years and above	183	4.18	.96				

The data from the table indicated that there is significant difference between the mean response of the extent of utilizing E-mail marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence ($t = -2.1$, $df = 32$, $p = 0.03 < 0.05$). the hypothesis was rejected indicate that both years of experience do differ significantly in their mean responses on the extent of utilizing E-mail marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the respondents' mean rating on the extent of utilizing search engine optimization tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence.

Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings of respondents on the level of extent of utilizing search engine optimization tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence

Years of experience	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
0-10 years	148	3.35	.56	32	1.396	.16	Accept Ho
11 years and above	183	2.91	.96				

The data from the table indicated that there is no significant difference between the mean response of the utilizing search engine optimization tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence ($t = -1.31$, $df = 32$, $p = 0.16 > 0.05$). the hypothesis was accepted indicate that both years of experience do not differ significantly in their mean responses on the extent of utilizing search engine optimization tools for sales improvement by SMEs.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the respondents' mean rating on the extent of utilizing online advertising marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence (0-10 years/ 11 and above).

Table 6: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings of respondents on the level of extent of utilizing online advertising marketing tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of their years of existence

Years of experiences	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
0-10 years	148	3.05	.56	32	4.27	0.00	Accept Ho
11 years and above	183	4.00	.96				

The data from the table indicated that there is no significant difference between the mean response of the utilizing online advertising tools for sales improvement by SMEs as a result of



their years of existence ($t = -1.31$, $df = 32$, $p = 0.16 < 0.05$). The hypothesis was accepted indicate that both years of experience do not differ significantly in their mean responses on the extent of utilizing search online advertising tools for sales improvement by SMEs

Discussion of Findings

The finding with respect to the first research question revealed the extent of utilizing email marketing tools for sale improvement by SMEs. The findings of this study revealed that email marketing tools are highly required by small and medium-scale enterprises because they help to increase sales revenue, build stronger customer relationships, increase brand recognition, get immediate results, maintain vendor relationships, and grow a business audience. The finding is in agreement with Elrod & Fortenberry (2020), email marketing enables a business to focus on particular consumer segments and display and promote goods and services to them with the aim of informing, reminding, and persuading them to make purchases. The results supported Shirsath's (2020) assertion that email marketing is a powerful tool for connecting with leads, nurturing them, and turning them into customers. He added that email marketing is a powerful tool for establishing relationships with leads, nurturing them, and turning them into customers. It is vital for several marketing tactics, including account-based marketing, inbound marketing, and content marketing.

The findings are also in consonance with Foued (2021) one of the most cutting-edge tactics and marketing strategies used nowadays is email marketing. The distribution and transmission of electronic communications with the highest level of accuracy and precision is also made possible by contemporary information and communication technology. Email marketing efforts also aid in boosting sales in electronic stores and effectively and lawfully targeting clients. The survey also found a significant difference between the items on respondents' mean judgments of the extent to which SMEs used email marketing tools to increase sales depending on how long they had been in business (0–10 years/11 and above).

The findings with regard to the second research question revealed the extent of utilizing search engine optimization tools for sale improvement by SMEs shows that small and medium-scale enterprises are in need of search engine tools for sale improvement because it helps to increase sales revenue, grow audience, is inexpensive and cost-effective, to keep business on track, and builds trust. The findings were in line with Sami's study from 2023, which found that SEO is crucial for small businesses because it can raise their profile and credibility, draw in targeted customers, improve user experience, and keep them one step ahead of the competition.

The results supported Shibli's (2021) assertion that search engine optimization is a technique for boosting both the caliber and volume of organic traffic to your website. If done correctly, it can provide your company with the exposure it needs through relevant, unpaid search engine results. The study also showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the respondents' mean ratings on how much SMEs use online marketing tools to increase sales depending on how long they have been in business (0–10 years/11 and above).

And lastly, the findings on the third study question indicated that small and medium-sized businesses are largely dependent on online advertising marketing techniques for increasing sales. The findings were in line with a study by Emeh, Ahaiwe, and Okoro (2019), which claimed that online advertising is the impersonal, compensated presentation and promotion of products, services, and ideas via the Internet. According to Nazli et al. (2018), the expansion of media and communication networks has changed the commercial landscape of advertising. As a result, an online advertisement is now a crucial strategy for boosting a company's profit margin. The results



are consistent with Hanif et al.'s (2018) findings that, despite the fact that most businesses do not consider acquiring market share without advertisements, online advertisements are among the most important marketing strategies available in the modern digital environment. They claimed that the impact of improved communication technology on the advertisement factor, which adds value to the buyer's choice, is causing the style of marketing research to become more modernized in the contemporary period. The survey also showed that there is a substantial difference between the items on respondents' mean evaluations on the extent to which SMEs use online marketing tools to increase sales as a result of their years of existence.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that digital marketing tools, specifically social media marketing, search engine optimization, and online advertising, have a positive impact on sales improvement for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Email marketing was found to be a significant factor that greatly influenced SMEs' sales improvement. Similarly, search engine optimization was identified as a significant tool for enhancing SMEs' sales. Furthermore, online advertising tools were found to be highly effective in boosting sales for SMEs. In summary, this study concludes that the utilization of digital marketing tools, including social media marketing, search engine optimization, and online advertising, plays a vital role in driving sales improvement for SMEs. Email marketing allows businesses to communicate directly with their target audience. By utilizing email marketing tools, businesses can reach out to customers who have explicitly expressed interest in their products or services, allowing for highly targeted communication. This direct and personalized approach increases the chances of engaging customers and driving sales. SEO tools help businesses optimize their websites and content to improve their search engine rankings. The visibility of businesses and their products is increased through higher ranks in search engine results pages (SERPs), leading to a higher influx of organic traffic. The study's implications suggest that improved online visibility and increased organic traffic can significantly contribute to sales improvement.

Recommendations

From the research findings and conclusion, the following recommendation is made;

1. SMEs should utilize SEO tools to identify relevant keywords and phrases that align with your products, services, and target audience. Conduct comprehensive keyword research to uncover high-volume, low-competition keywords that have the potential to drive targeted traffic to your website. Incorporate these keywords strategically into your website content, Meta tags, headings, and URLs.
2. SME should define your campaign objectives before starting any online advertising efforts. Whether it's driving website traffic, generating leads, increasing conversions, or boosting sales, having well-defined goals will help you develop targeted and effective advertising strategies.
3. SME should choose the online advertising platforms that align with your target audience and campaign objectives. Consider platforms like Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, LinkedIn Ads, and others, based on the demographics and interests of your target audience



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