



Digital Marketing Strategies and Customer Satisfaction in Selected Small and Medium Enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction is a critical determinant of business sustainability, competitive positioning, and long-term performance among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In the digital era, achieving customer satisfaction depends significantly on digital marketing strategies and effective information diffusion management. Digital marketing strategies encompass social media engagement, content marketing, email marketing, and paid advertising. However, SMEs in Lagos State experience persistent low levels of customer satisfaction. Empirical studies reveal that both constructs can significantly enhance customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study examined the influence of digital marketing strategies and information diffusion on customer satisfaction of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 245 SMEs from three sectors: Advertising and Marketing Agencies, ICT-Based Firms, and Transport and Logistics companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. Total enumeration was adopted. Data were collected from SME owners, managers, and staffs through a validated self-constructed online questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.734 to 0.866. Response rate was 228 (93.1%). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (multiple linear regression) statistics at 5% significance level. The findings revealed that digital marketing strategies had significant influence on customer satisfaction ($Adj.R^2 = 0.293$, $F(4, 223) = 24.559$, $p < 0.05$) of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study concluded that digital marketing strategies and information diffusion are significant determinants of customer satisfaction among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. SME owners and managers should prioritize content marketing and invest in improving information diffusion depth and speed to enhance customer satisfaction. This could be achieved through developing high-quality, customer-relevant digital content, adopting timely communication systems, and strategically integrating digital marketing and information management practices.

Keywords: Content marketing, Customer satisfaction, Digital marketing strategies, Small and medium enterprises

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Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) importance to national growth and development cannot be overemphasized as they have been accepted globally as engines of employment generation, instruments of industrialization and poverty reduction. SMEs provide more than half of all jobs globally and account for about 90% of all businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of most economies. SMEs are recognized to be the key components of productivity,

industrial diversification and poverty reduction in developing countries (World Bank, 2025). By creating jobs and redistributing income among individuals, SMEs promote growth, accounting for over 48% contribution to Nigeria GDP and supporting almost all facets of sustainable development (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Over time, many SMEs have tried to improve satisfaction through better service delivery, faster response times, improved product quality, and more customer-focused engagement. However, these efforts have not always produced the desired results, and declines in

customer satisfaction may indicate that operational improvements alone are insufficient. SMEs are relationship-driven (personal contact) and are closely-held, while small businesses set structures in place as they service more customers. Service quality and customer satisfaction have been accepted as key drivers of SMEs survival and growth in Nigeria (Zakari & Ibrahim, 2021).

Globally, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face significant challenges in achieving high customer satisfaction amid rising customer expectations driven by digital platforms. The proliferation of these platforms has heightened demands for faster service, personalized experiences, and greater transparency, often outpacing SMEs' capabilities (Kahveci, 2025). Although digitalization offers opportunities for improved communication and brand visibility, many SMEs struggle to harness these tools effectively due to inadequate digital literacy, limited technological infrastructure, and insufficient analytics capabilities (Oyedele & Adewale, 2024). In developing economies, structural challenges such as unstable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and low access to finance further contribute to inconsistent customer experiences (World Bank, 2020).

In Europe, SME customer satisfaction is increasingly driven by advanced digital ecosystems, stringent consumer protection frameworks, and rising demand for sustainable and ethically aligned business practices. Western and Northern European SMEs generally leverage mature e-commerce infrastructures, omnichannel engagement tools, and AI-enabled personalization to meet elevated consumer expectations for transparency, speed, and customization (Formisano et al., 2021). However, compliance with regulations such as GDPR and evolving ESG reporting standards often strains limited operational budgets, forcing SMEs to carefully balance innovation with regulatory adherence. While digitally integrated firms consistently report higher retention and satisfaction scores, SMEs in Southern and Eastern Europe frequently encounter fragmented digital adoption, legacy management systems, and cross-border logistical complexities that disrupt service consistency (Lelo & Israel, 2024). Consequently, European SMEs that successfully embed sustainability into their customer value proposition while maintaining agile, data-informed service delivery tend to sustain competitive advantage in highly saturated markets (Setyaningsih & Kelle, 2022).

In Asia, SME customer satisfaction reflects a dynamic interplay of rapid digital transformation, cultural service expectations, and pronounced infrastructural disparities across subregions. Developed markets such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore demonstrate high digital maturity, with SMEs utilizing mobile-first platforms, integrated digital wallets, and automated customer support to deliver seamless, real-time experiences (Phan & Kim, 2024). In contrast, emerging economies across South and Southeast Asia present a dual landscape: while widespread smartphone adoption and super-app ecosystems have lowered barriers to digital customer engagement, many SMEs still face inconsistent broadband access, limited cloud analytics capacity, and gaps in digital

literacy (Restrepo-Morales et al., 2024). Culturally, Asian consumers often prioritize relational trust, personalized after-sales support, and brand responsiveness, meaning SMEs that effectively hybridize traditional interpersonal service with scalable digital touchpoints achieve higher satisfaction and repeat patronage. Although regional governments and fintech providers have accelerated digital upskilling and payment infrastructure development, persistent challenges in data integration and cross-platform customer journey mapping continue to limit uniform satisfaction outcomes across Asia's diverse SME landscape (Sanny et al., 2021).

In sub-Saharan Africa, studies have shown that SMEs struggle to maintain customer satisfaction due to gaps in service consistency, product quality, and post-purchase follow-up (Achieng & Malatji, 2022). In Nigeria, Lagos State is the commercial hub, hosting a significant number of SMEs (Olubiyi, 2022). Despite this number of business activity, the state's intense market competition and rapidly evolving consumer behaviours show significant challenges to maintaining customer satisfaction among SMEs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Moreover, despite its strategic importance, many SMEs continue to face significant challenges in achieving consistent, sustainable customer satisfaction, particularly in highly competitive environments characterized by increasing customer choice, rising service expectations, and rapid digital transformation. Empirical evidence suggests that SMEs often struggle to align their service processes with evolving customer needs due to resource constraints, limited technological capabilities, and weak integration of customer-focused strategies. Customers today are more knowledgeable, more specific, and more sensitive to service experiences at all of their touchpoints, which makes it challenging to keep them satisfied (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

Customer satisfaction today goes beyond merely addressing the needs of the customer. It also includes emotional factors such as ease of use and quality interactions. Research has shown that interactive engagement, responsiveness and personalization have a direct impact on satisfaction and loyalty within digitalized markets (Mohanty et al., 2025). Research has shown similar results among African SMEs where satisfaction is increased with pleasing experiences, quick replies, and reliable brand interactions (Al-Hujri et al., 2025). For Nigerian SMEs, customer satisfaction goes beyond being a competitive edge; it is a critical survival mechanism in highly saturated markets marked by shifting consumer preferences and growing competition (Zakari & Ibrahim, 2021). This implies that maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction is essential for Nigerian SMEs to remain viable and competitive, as dissatisfied customers can quickly switch to alternative providers in markets where choices are abundant and brand loyalty is fragile.

Customer satisfaction is critical for SME survival and competitiveness, especially in digitally driven markets where high satisfaction promotes stronger customer retention, positive word-of-mouth, increased spending, and better financial results (Mittal et al., 2023). Ideally, SMEs should

consistently provide services that meet or surpass customer expectations across key satisfaction dimensions such as responsiveness, service convenience, assurance, and reliability (Mugova et al., 2025). However, SMEs in Lagos State experience persistent low levels of customer satisfaction arising from several interconnected challenges. These include resource constraints that limit investment in technology and customer relationship management, limited digital communication capacity, structural barriers such as unstable electricity and poor internet connectivity, and weak integration of customer-focused strategies that hinder systematic measurement and improvement of satisfaction (Kahveci, 2025; Oyedele & Adewale, 2024).

Customer satisfaction measures a customer's present evaluation of service delivery, representing the extent to which perceived service meets or exceeds customer expectations (Mugova et al., 2025). Drawing from the SERVQUAL model, satisfaction can be measured using four key indicators: responsiveness, service convenience, assurance, and reliability of service. Responsiveness reflects customers' perceptions of the willingness and promptness of a firm in providing services (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Service convenience is an individual's perception of time and energy expenditure related to the purchase or use of goods and services offered (Berry et al., 2002). Assurance embodies the knowledge, courtesy, and credibility of service providers, coupled with their demonstrated ability to inspire trust and confidence among customers (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Reliability of service represents the ability of an organization to perform the promised service dependably and accurately from the outset (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction plays a central role in scholarly discourse on the performance and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises in Nigeria. In its most basic form, scholars describe it as the extent to which consumers believe that a company's goods or services have sufficiently satisfied or surpassed their needs, wants, and expectations, leading to an emotional state of satisfaction, pleasure, or delight after consumption (Olubiyi, 2022; Umukoro & Momoh, 2021; Zakari & Ibrahim, 2021). This emotional aspect is important because it defines satisfaction as a psychological response that influences customers' opinions about a business beyond any particular transaction, rather than just a cognitive assessment of product performance. Bukola et al., (2019) are of the view that satisfaction in the Nigerian SME context embodies the customer's overall sense of being valued, respected, and well-served an experience that transcends product quality to encompass the entire relational dynamic between the customer and the enterprise.

Researchers further conceptually define customer satisfaction in Nigerian SMEs as a relational rather than a transactional concept. Instead of seeing satisfaction as a one-time evaluative judgment, as is commonly assumed in other studies, the most dominant conceptualization of satisfaction in

Nigerian SMEs is as a continuous relational state that grows or decays with each successive service interaction (Adejuwon & Buttle, 2022; Olowo & Kolapo, 2025). This relational concept of satisfaction is particularly important in Nigeria's business environment, given that interpersonal trust, social networks, and community reputation influence how customers judge enterprises. Umukoro and Momoh (2021) opined that in Nigerian SMEs, satisfaction is associated with how customers are treated humanely, arguing that "courtesy, competence, and responsiveness are at the heart of building deep satisfaction. This positions customer satisfaction less as meeting a technical performance standard and more as cultivating a sense of mutual respect and relational commitment between the SME and its customers.

Digital Marketing Strategies in Nigeria

Digital marketing strategies represent a fundamental shift in how businesses, particularly SMEs, engage with customers, create value, and achieve competitive advantage in increasingly digitally-mediated marketplaces. In the Nigerian context, digital marketing has become increasingly essential due to rapid internet penetration growth, mobile technology proliferation, and the widespread adoption of social media platforms for communication, commerce, and entertainment (DataReportal, 2025). Scholars are of the view that for Nigerian SMEs, digital marketing strategies provide opportunities to overcome traditional marketing barriers including limited budgets, geographic constraints, and restricted access to mass media channels by offering cost-effective tools for reaching target audiences, building brand awareness, and fostering customer engagement at scales previously unattainable for small businesses (Okwudiri et al., 2025). The ability to create meaningful customer interactions is important to the success of digital marketing strategies for Nigerian SMEs, and social media engagement is emerging as one of the most important mechanisms for initiating, sustaining, and turning these interactions into quantifiable business outcomes (Afolayan et al., 2024).

Social media engagement represents a critical dimension of digital marketing strategy, encompassing the interactive exchanges and relationship-building activities between SMEs and their customers across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Scholars contend that effective social media engagement extends beyond the broadcasting of promotional messages to include responsive communication, community building, encouragement of user-generated content, and authentic dialogue with customers and prospects (Abah et al., 2026). This distinction between one-way promotional broadcasting and two-way interactive engagement is conceptually significant the latter fosters the relational dynamics of trust, perceived responsiveness, and emotional connection that underpin customer satisfaction and loyalty. Abah et al. (2026) are of the view that SMEs which prioritize interactive and dialogue-driven social media engagement are better positioned to cultivate enduring customer relationships than those that treat social media purely as an advertising channel. In the Nigerian SME context, where interpersonal trust and community reputation

significantly shape customer evaluations, social media engagement therefore functions as a relational infrastructure that sustains ongoing customer-enterprise dialogue and deepens satisfaction over time (Jatto et al., 2025).

Content marketing represents another critical dimension of digital marketing strategy, defined as the practice of creating, publishing, and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, ultimately driving profitable customer action (Bubphapant & Brandão, 2024). Unlike traditional advertising, which interrupts consumers with unsolicited promotional messages, content marketing is premised on the idea that customers are more likely to engage with and trust enterprises that provide genuinely useful information, education, or entertainment. Also, email marketing constitutes an important dimension of digital marketing strategy, enabling SMEs to communicate with customers and prospects through targeted, personalized messages delivered directly to their inboxes. Scholars are of the view that email marketing remains one of the most cost-efficient digital communication channels available to SMEs, owing to its capacity for precise audience segmentation, personalized messaging, and measurable engagement outcomes (Isibor et al., 2025). Equally, paid advertising represents a further dimension of digital marketing strategy, encompassing promotional activities for which enterprises pay to display advertisements across digital platforms and channels. This includes search engine marketing through platforms such as Google Ads, social media advertising on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, display advertising on websites and mobile applications, and video advertising on platforms such as YouTube (Ustik et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The SERVQUAL model, grounded in the notion that service quality reflects the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions, aligns strongly with how digital marketing strategies shape customer satisfaction for SMEs. Because digital marketing affects customers before, during, and after service encounters through messaging, branding promises, online customer support, website/app usability, content quality, and responsiveness SERVQUAL provides a clear framework for translating those digital touchpoints into

service-quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Lin et al., 2026). For example, consistent and accurate online information and fulfillment processes support reliability; fast replies via chat, email, or social media improve responsiveness; credible branding, guarantees, and expert content strengthen assurance; personalized recommendations and tone of communication enhance empathy; and well-designed digital interfaces and visuals contribute to tangibles (Aflah & Abraham, 2025). Its relevance is that it helps SMEs not only measure overall satisfaction declines, but also determine whether gaps are being created (or reduced) by digital marketing practices such as overpromising in ads, under-delivering in customer experience, or using ineffective channels thereby guiding more targeted improvements to both service delivery and digital strategy (Ismail & Shah, 2026).

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 245 SMEs from three sectors: Advertising and Marketing Agencies, ICT-Based Firms, and Transport and Logistics companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. Total enumeration was adopted. Data were collected from SME owners, managers, and staffs through a validated self-constructed online questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.734 to 0.866. Response rate was 228 (93.1%). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (multiple linear regression) statistics at 5% significance level.

Restatement of Hypothesis

The hypotheses were tested in line with the variable operation and conceptual framework specified in chapter three at a 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis: Digital marketing strategies have no significant influence on customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis one was tested with multiple linear regression analysis. Digital marketing strategies conceptualized using social media engagement, content marketing, email marketing, and paid advertising. The result and conclusions of the regression analysis are reported in Table 4.6

Table 4.7 Multiple regression analysis on digital marketing strategies and customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 47.684 | 2.386 | | 19.988 | .000 |
| | Social Media Engagement | -.041 | .187 | -.023 | -.217 | .828 |
| | Content Marketing | 1.033 | .191 | .578 | 5.421 | .000 |
| | Email Marketing | -.037 | .096 | -.026 | -.387 | .699 |
| | Paid Advertising | .012 | .136 | .007 | .085 | .932 |

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

$$R = 0.553 \quad R^2 = 0.306 \quad Adj.R^2 = 0.293 \quad f(4, 223) = 24.559$$

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2026

Table 4.6 indicates that digital marketing strategies had a significant influence on customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria ($Adj.R^2 = 0.293$, $F(4, 223) = 24.559$ $p < 0.05$). It showed the summary of the results for the multiple regression analysis of the effect of digital marketing strategies on customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The result showed that of all the sub-variables of digital marketing strategies, only content marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction ($B = 1.033$, $t = 5.421$, $p < 0.05$) while social media engagement ($B = -.041$, $t = -.217$, $p > 0.05$), email marketing ($B = -.037$, $t = -.387$, $p > 0.05$), and paid advertising ($B = .012$, $t = .085$, $p > 0.05$) which have negative/positive but not significant effects on customer satisfaction. This implies that content marketing is an important factor that can be prioritized as it can positively affect customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State.

The R value of 0.553 supports this result and it indicates that digital marketing strategies components have a moderate positive relationship with customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State. The coefficient of multiple determination $Adj. R^2 = 0.293$ indicates that about 29.3% variations that occur in the customer satisfaction of SMEs can be accounted for by digital marketing strategies while the remaining 70.7% changes that occur is accounted for by other variables not captured in the model. The predictive and prescriptive multiple regression models are thus expressed:

$$CS = 47.684 - 0.041SME + 1.033CM - 0.037EM + 0.012PA + U_i \quad \text{--- Eqn(i) (Predictive Model)}$$

$$CS = 47.684 + 1.033CM + U_{ii} \quad \text{--- Eqn(ii) (Prescriptive Model)}$$

Where:

CS = Customer Satisfaction

SME = Social Media Engagement

CM = Content Marketing

EM = Email Marketing

PA = Paid Advertising

From the predictive model, only content marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction, hence, this variable should be prioritized. This is why it is included in the prescriptive model. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that holding digital marketing strategies at constant zero, customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State will still have a positive baseline value of 47.684.

The prescriptive model indicates that when digital marketing strategy (content marketing) is improved by one-unit, customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State would also increase by 1.033 units, and vice versa. This implies that a strategic increase in quality content marketing efforts would lead to a substantial increase in customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State.

The F-statistic $F(4, 223) = 24.559$ at $P < 0.05$ indicates a significant overall fitness of the model and the significance in

predicting the effect of digital marketing strategies on customer satisfaction of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact of digital marketing strategies on customer satisfaction, was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the level of digital marketing strategy adoption of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria is high. Content marketing recorded the highest level of adoption, followed by social media engagement and paid advertising, while email marketing emerged as the least adopted strategy. This finding is in agreement with Okonkwo et al., (2025), whose study of SMEs in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria found that content marketing significantly enhanced market reach ($\beta = 0.721$) and that social media advertising meaningfully influenced sales growth, confirming that content-driven and social strategies dominate SME digital marketing practice in the Nigerian context. The high level of adoption of social media engagement further corroborates the findings of Anukwe et al., (2025), whose research across the five states of South-East Nigeria established that interactive social media content and responsiveness strongly influence customer satisfaction and loyalty among SMEs. The comparatively low adoption of email marketing, however, is consistent with the contextual observations of Nyagadza (2023), who noted that while email marketing maintains strong global performance with the global market valued at USD 7.5 billion in 2020 and projected to reach USD 22.16 billion by 2025 its effective deployment requires sustained investment in personalization and audience targeting capabilities that many SMEs in developing economies are yet to fully develop. This finding is further supported by Muraina et al., (2025), who found that among Nigerian SMEs, social media facilitates better communication channels compared to traditional media and that customers reported the highest satisfaction with social media-based interactions, which explains the relatively weak uptake of email-based approaches.

Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates that digital marketing strategies exert a significant and measurable influence on customer satisfaction among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. By effectively utilizing social media engagement, search engine optimization, targeted online advertising, and responsive digital communication channels, SMEs can better align their service offerings with consumer expectations, foster brand trust, and enhance post-purchase experiences. This finding highlights the critical role of digitalization in a market characterized by high mobile penetration and rapidly evolving consumer preferences, confirming that a strategic digital presence is no longer optional but a fundamental driver of competitive advantage and sustained customer loyalty for Nigerian SMEs.

Recommendation

In light of these findings, SME owners and managers in Lagos State should systematically integrate data-informed digital marketing practices into their core business strategies, prioritizing platforms and content formats that resonate with their target demographics. This entails investing in customer analytics tools, training staff in digital engagement techniques, maintaining consistent brand messaging across online channels, and actively monitoring customer feedback to iteratively improve digital touchpoints. Concurrently, government agencies, industry bodies, and financial institutions should facilitate this digital transition by offering affordable training programs, subsidized technology adoption grants, and clear regulatory guidelines on data protection, thereby creating a supportive ecosystem that enables SMEs to sustainably leverage digital marketing for enhanced customer satisfaction and long-term business growth.

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