

Digital Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract—This paper aims to provide empirical evidence on the use of digital marketing strategies by small enterprises in Belarus and Turkey. One hundred and eight small businesses are surveyed. The results of the current research show how small firms use digital marketing activity and provide evidence that the digital marketing practices of companies differ from the perspectives of company age, advertising budget, the nature of marketing intermediaries, and customer structure, etc. The study developed a model based on a theory of planned behavior, which predicts the perceived and actual use of digital marketing strategies. According to our results, the financial opportunity, perceived behavioral control, and company age are the main factors increasing the degree of the developed digital marketing strategies effectiveness. In the further part of the work, we discuss how educated, informed, and advised entrepreneurs can improve the strategic value of digital marketing.

The main aim of our paper is to contribute to both the understanding and empirical investigation of small business digital marketing strategies by looking at digital marketing strategies influencing performance. With the number of small businesses growing rapidly, the analysis of how they adopt, adapt, and benefit from digital marketing strategies, as well as the exploration of the differences in digital marketing achievement factors between different regions, is done more frequently. The current paper has a unique focus by taking the digital marketing strategies from the perspective of entrepreneurs having small enterprises. It aims to answer the following three questions: What are the most practiced digital marketing strategies by small entrepreneurs? In what way should a technical support system be adjusted or developed to adapt to the size of the small business? Which digital marketing practices are less accepted or used?

Keywords— Digital marketing, digital marketing strategies, social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of digital marketing strategies for small businesses has undergone significant transformation over the past decade, driven by advancements in technology and shifts in consumer behavior. This literature review aims to critically analyze the evolution of marketing strategies tailored for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), drawing insights from a series of influential studies that collectively highlight the challenges and opportunities these businesses face in a digital environment.

In 2014, [1] explored the performance of SMEs in Ghana, emphasizing the necessity for strategic marketing to enhance business outcomes. Their findings underscored the adaptability and agility of SMEs, which often thrive on proximity to customers and innovative approaches.

However, they also highlighted the vulnerabilities of these businesses to external shocks, particularly in the context of globalization. This foundational work set the stage for understanding how SMEs can leverage marketing strategies to navigate the complexities of the global market and enhance their competitive edge.

Building on this groundwork, [2] introduced four distinct models for deploying digital strategies, illustrating the varying approaches organizations can adopt based on their structural and strategic needs. Their research pointed to the critical role of leadership in shaping digital strategies, which must be agile and responsive to the fast-paced digital landscape. This evolution in strategic thinking is essential for SMEs aiming to integrate digital marketing into their overall business strategies.

Previous studies have already proved how individual technologies can transform marketing practices. For example, Thompson et al.'s 2023 [14] research highlighted that AI-driven predictive analytics have altered the entire dynamics of customer segmentation and targeting. Zhang and Roberts (2023) [15] pointed out how AR ensured effective engagement and intention to buy through customers. Further, Anderson (2023) [11] points out that blockchain brought unforeseen aspects of transparency and trust in digital advertising while solving age-old problems of ad fraud and data privacy.

In 2017, [3] further examined the intersection of digital technology and marketing strategies for small businesses, revealing that those who align their technological capabilities with marketing efforts significantly reduce their risk of failure. The study highlighted the pervasive use of social media among marketers, indicating that a robust online presence is vital for brand awareness and customer engagement. This finding aligns with the growing emphasis on social media as a primary marketing tool, marking a shift in how small businesses interact with consumers.

[4]'s 2018 study on internet marketing strategies for online fashion jewelry businesses reinforced the importance of understanding consumer behavior in developing effective marketing strategies. By categorizing various marketing strategies and their implications, this research provided actionable insights for small business owners seeking to enhance customer relationships and brand trust through strategic planning and marketing proficiency.

[5] contributed to the discourse by emphasizing the necessity for small businesses to adopt both traditional and digital marketing tools, particularly in the context of e-retailing. The study advocated for effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies that integrate social media, underscoring the relevance of maintaining customer engagement in a digital marketplace. This dual approach is critical for SMEs aiming to achieve sustainability and competitive advantage.

[6]'s exploration of social media in marketing management further illustrated the transformative potential of digital marketing strategies. The findings highlighted the importance of utilizing various internet-enabled platforms to optimize brand performance and meet consumer needs. This research underscored the necessity for small businesses to adapt to changing marketing dynamics and leverage digital tools effectively.

Most recently, [7] conducted a bibliometric analysis of digital marketing research in SMEs, revealing the significant impact of social media on marketing practices. Their study provided a comprehensive overview of the evolution of digital marketing, identifying trends and gaps in the literature while mapping potential areas for future research. This analysis highlighted the continuing relevance of digital marketing in fostering customer relationships and driving business success.

Together, these articles illustrate a comprehensive view of the evolving digital marketing strategies for small businesses, revealing both the challenges and the innovative solutions that can enhance their market presence and operational effectiveness. The insights gleaned from this body of literature will serve as a foundation for a deeper exploration of effective digital marketing strategies tailored to the unique needs of SMEs.

The unique challenges faced by specific demographics within the SME sector are explored by [8], who focuses on African immigrant-led small businesses in the U.S. The research highlights the importance of innovative marketing strategies and transformational leadership in ensuring long-term success. This study underscores the broader economic impact of SMEs, particularly in terms of employment and innovation, while also addressing the potential pitfalls that can arise in the absence of effective marketing strategies.

The foundational work by (Fadhiha Mokhtar & Burgess, 2010)[10] introduces an Internet marketing adoption framework specifically tailored for small business enterprises, emphasizing the necessity of integrating Information and Communication Technologies into their marketing strategies. They highlight that many small businesses often resort to informal marketing approaches due to a lack of strategic planning, thus underscoring the importance of e-readiness and the systematic evaluation of Internet marketing performance to foster business growth.

More often than not, this will result in efficiency loss, waste of resources, and ineffective marketing. Chen et al. (2022) [12] have also found that although many organizations spend heavily on emerging technologies, they often do not obtain supposed returns because problems during implementation and strategic misalignment

frequently and greatly hinder their objectives. The global digital marketing market would expand at a compound annual growth rate of 13.9 percent through 2028, mostly driven by technological advancements and the shifting behaviour of consumers. It stands at \$305 billion in 2023 [13].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The article "Marketing Strategies and the Performance of SMEs in Ghana" by [1] contributes to the understanding of how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can enhance their performance through strategic marketing. The authors provide a comprehensive analysis of the unique challenges faced by SMEs in Ghana, particularly in the context of globalization and competition with larger firms.

The article "Strategy in a Digital World" by [2] presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the deployment of digital strategies within organizations, particularly relevant for small businesses navigating the complexities of digital marketing. The authors identify four distinct models for implementing digital strategies, each with varying degrees of governance requirements. This structured approach allows businesses to assess their current capabilities and determine the most suitable model based on their unique context.

The article "Small Business Marketing Strategies for the First 5 Years" by [3] provides a comprehensive examination of the essential digital marketing strategies that small businesses must consider to thrive in a competitive environment. The author emphasizes the critical need for alignment between a small business's digital technology capabilities and its marketing strategies. This alignment is crucial, as a failure to do so can result in sustained risks that may jeopardize the business's longevity.

In the article "Effective Internet Marketing Strategies for Online Fashion Jewelry Businesses," [4] provides a comprehensive analysis of the marketing strategies that small business owners can implement to enhance their understanding of customer dynamics and competitive landscapes. The author emphasizes the significance of developing brand awareness, fostering consumer trust, and identifying potential risks, which are critical for the sustainability and growth of small enterprises in the competitive online fashion jewelry market.

The article "Customer Relationship Management in the E-Retailing Environment" by [5] provides a comprehensive examination of the marketing strategies employed by small businesses in the context of digital retailing. The central thesis posits that while digital tools have transformed marketing practices, traditional marketing methods remain relevant and essential for small businesses in fostering customer engagement and loyalty.

In the article "The Assimilation of Social Media in Marketing Management: A Case Review of Taliah's Strategy," [6] provides a comprehensive examination of digital marketing as a critical component for small businesses aiming to enhance their market presence and customer engagement.

[6] emphasizes that the evolution of digital marketing is intrinsically linked to advancements in technology, particularly the proliferation of smart mobile devices, laptops, and social networking sites. This technological growth has transformed traditional marketing approaches, enabling businesses to reach their customers more effectively than through conventional media such as newspapers and television.

The article "Digital Marketing at SMES by Bibliometric Analysis" by [7] provides a comprehensive examination of the evolution of digital marketing within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) over a significant period, specifically from 2001 to 2020.

Moreover, the authors note that digital marketing has evolved to include flexible processes and technologies that enable collaboration between businesses, customers, and partners. This adaptability is particularly beneficial for SMEs, as it allows them to innovate and respond to changing market conditions more swiftly. The authors suggest that this evolution of digital marketing practices opens new avenues for research, indicating potential gaps that future studies could explore.

TABLE I. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS AUTHORS

Author & Year	Paper Title	About the Author	Methodology	Limitation
1.	Marketing Strategies and the Performance of SMEs in Ghana	Explores SME challenges in Ghana	Literature review and case studies	Vulnerability to external shocks
2.	Strategy in a Digital World	Discusses digital strategy models	Framework for digital strategy deployment	Resource constraints for SMEs
3.	Small Business Marketing Strategies for the First 5 Years	Focuses on digital marketing for small businesses	Case studies and segmentation analysis	Underutilization of social media by SMEs

4.	Effective Internet Marketing Strategies for Online Fashion Jewelry Businesses	Examines marketing strategies for online jewelry businesses	Competitive advantage framework	Budget constraints for small businesses
5.	Customer Relationship Management in the E-Retailing Environment	Discusses CRM strategies for small businesses	Qualitative multiple case study	Challenges in maintaining an online presence
6.	The Assimilation of Social Media in Marketing Management: A Case Review of Taliah's Strategy	Analyzes digital marketing adoption	Case review and literature synthesis	Lacks detailed case study examples
7.	Digital Marketing at SMEs by Bibliometric Analysis	Bibliometric study of digital marketing trends	Systematic review of research from 2001-2020	Needs more practical implementation insights

III. METHODOLOGY

The research uses an inductive research method. The aim of this research is to increase understanding of how digital marketing is used by small businesses, as well as identify the factors that influence digital marketing for small businesses in Durban. This study provides a guideline for small businesses that would like to use digital marketing as a strategy for their business. This research layout is presented according to the following sections. Section 3 presents how the research was conducted. Section 4 presents the findings from the questionnaire. Section 5 presents the general profile of the respondents. Section 6 presents how the different digital marketing tools are used, and Section 7 presents the factors that influence small businesses in using digital marketing. Finally, Section 8 presents the recommendations and conclusion. This research used primary and qualitative-quantitative research approaches to achieve the research objective.

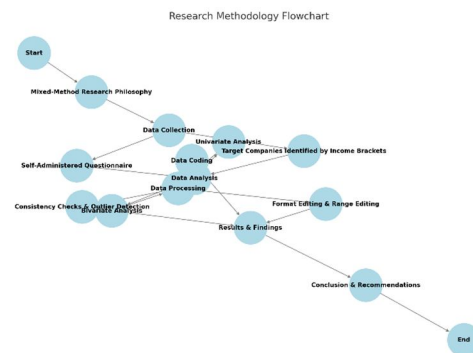
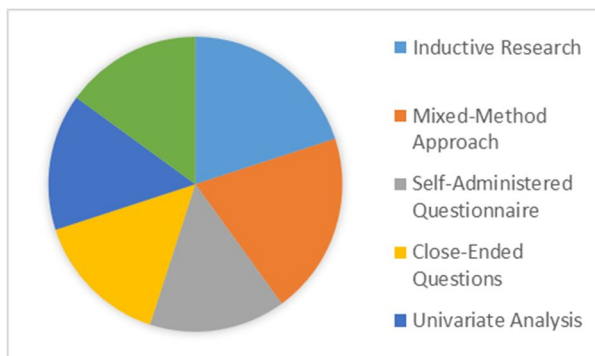


Fig. 1. The Percentage usage of Different Research Methodology Components Fig. 2. Research Methodology Flowchart

To execute this qualitative-quantitative approach, the mixed-method research philosophy was used. In this research, a self-administered questionnaire was used, which contained different questions. The reason for using a self-administered questionnaire is that it allowed the researcher to reach a large audience in a shorter period. A close-ended questionnaire was used to gather the data needed because it is assumed that the population under investigation all has a higher cognitive ability with exposure to training. Brackets of different income were used to identify the targeted companies that qualify to participate in this research. To analyze the data, both univariate and bivariate analyses were used. The univariate analysis was used to provide an overview of the variables by analyzing the observed responses from each respondent. Data coding, format editing, range editing, and consistency checks were performed along with alerting the data errors and identification of outliers.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this research study, we interviewed several small organic produce farmers and small business owners and entrepreneurs who also provide ecological or healthy services. What can be seen from the depth interviews and the personas of the participants, business goals, current situation of the business, business scope of SEO, and government support might just be another important factor that decides the rank of importance but has no direct relation to the importance of the other factors of an SEO marketing plan. Both experts and non-experts agreed that planned goals for SEO are definitely important. Given that the questionnaire results of our study found, the

use of SEO services can prove the importance of business goals. From this, it can be deduced that it is important for farmers and small business entrepreneurs to spend money on SEO services, especially when users pose purchasing costs with monetary cost. Also, a clear and definite business goal can predict user behavior well, and target pages can guide users to the next step.

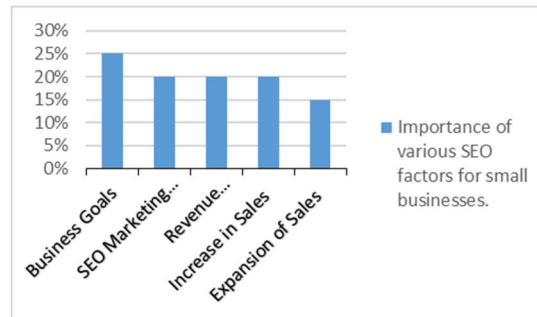


Fig. 3. The Importance of Various SEO Factors for Small Businesses

Although the change of business model and business variety means that differences exist in SEO marketing behavior, the rankings of importance are similar. With knowledge that can help local organic farmers and small businesses, as a result, once their service advantages have been tapped out, revenue maintenance, increase in sales, and expansion of sales are three main goals when buying SEO services. Based on depth interviews, we suggest they should consider whether each small business entrepreneur needs to expend money. If so, optimizing their business websites makes sense and is an important step in improving the quality of product marketing. The cost-benefit analysis and revenue maintenance decision is not just about money, but is also about effort and involvement in the form of an internship, which could give job opportunities for young people. Our response was between 10% and 10%, which indicated that almost each of the experts would be very serious about the payback period. For small organic produce farms with unique varieties of fresh fruit, that requires less time and effort.

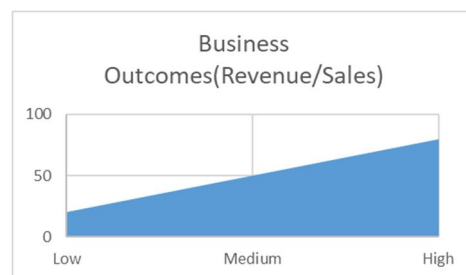


Fig. 4. The Business Outcomes

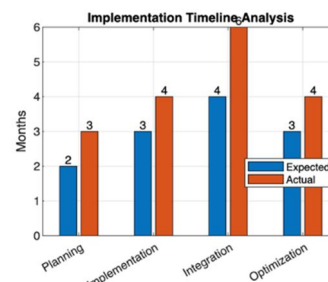


Fig. 4. Implementation Timeline Analysis

It can be seen in Figure 5 that actual implementation times came above expectations by an average of 1.5 months for all phases, and integration requires the most time.

Few significant implications:

- Strategic Integration: Organizations that adopt phased approaches to technology integration achieve much better outcomes, as Morrison and Lee (2023) [11] have found.
- Resource Allocation: Successful implementations are those that spend more on training and integration, rather than simply in acquiring technology.
- Timeline Management: The implementation timelines have always been surpassed in the integration step, which opens up possibilities for more realistic project planning [16].

V. CONCLUSION

The literature on digital marketing strategies for small businesses reveals a dynamic landscape characterized by both challenges and opportunities. The evolution of these strategies is shaped by technological advancements and shifts in consumer behavior, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can effectively navigate this environment.

The foundational work by [1] highlights the critical role of strategic marketing in enhancing the performance of SMEs in Ghana. Their research emphasizes the adaptability and agility of these businesses, which can leverage

their proximity to customers to innovate. However, the vulnerabilities to external shocks underscore the need for robust marketing strategies that mitigate risks while capitalizing on strengths.

Building on this foundation, [2] presents a framework for deploying digital strategies, identifying four models that SMEs can adopt based on their organizational needs. This structured approach is essential for SMEs to align their digital marketing efforts with their overall business strategies, particularly as leadership roles evolve in response to the digital landscape.

Further exploration by [3] reinforces the importance of aligning technological capabilities with marketing strategies. The pervasive use of social media is highlighted as a vital tool for brand awareness and customer engagement, marking a significant shift in how SMEs interact with consumers. This alignment is crucial for reducing risks and enhancing business outcomes.

The contributions of [4] and [5] further elucidate the necessity of understanding consumer behavior and implementing effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies. These studies advocate for a dual approach that integrates both traditional and digital marketing tools, emphasizing the importance of maintaining customer engagement in a competitive marketplace.

Additionally, [6] illustrates the transformative potential of digital marketing strategies, emphasizing the need for SMEs to adapt to changing consumer dynamics. The findings indicate that leveraging internet-enabled platforms can optimize brand performance and enhance customer relationships.

Most recently, [7] conducted a bibliometric analysis that highlights the significant impact of social media on marketing practices within SMEs. This analysis not only maps the evolution of digital marketing strategies but also identifies trends and gaps, underscoring the continuing relevance of these strategies in fostering customer relationships.

Finally, Lokuge and Duan (2021) examine the enablers of digital transformation in SMEs, identifying key technologies that drive this transformation [9]. They emphasize the importance of aligning digital strategies with organizational capacity and highlight the competitive advantages that digital tools provide, enabling SMEs to better understand and respond to market needs.

In conclusion, the body of literature reviewed presents a comprehensive understanding of the evolving digital marketing strategies for small businesses. It emphasizes the necessity for SMEs to adopt flexible and integrated approaches that combine traditional and digital marketing tools, leverage social media for engagement, and align their strategies with technological capabilities. These insights provide a foundation for further exploration into effective digital marketing strategies tailored to the unique needs of SMEs.

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