INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON MARKETING PRACTICE IN THE COVID-19 ECONOMY: A STUDY OF THE ULTIMATE CONSUMERS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research investigated the influence of digital marketing on marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy with a particular reference to consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Two hundred and eighty-eight (288) respondents which formed the sample size of the study was determined using Topman's formula and copies of a validated and reliable research instrument were administered to the respondents. The stated hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance using multiple regressions with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The study found out that there is a significant and positive relationship between social media marketing, content marketing, display advertising, mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. Again, the study disclosed that there is no significant relationship between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. The study recommends that businesses and individuals should pay undivided attention to matters that have direct connection to social media marketing, content marketing, display advertising and mobile marketing, since they have proven to enhance marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy in the study area. We further recommend that there should be enough emphasis on the efficacy of search engine marketing, so that attention of businesses and individuals can tilt towards that area of digital marketing platform.

Keywords: *social media marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, display advertising, mobile marketing, marketing practice*

INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is talked about today as a result of the emergence of technology and its attendant advancements. To this end, Dash and Chakraborty (2021) averred that virtually every activity of human beings has been digitalized. This is prevalent mainly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. Again, sophisticated gadgets have been manufactured by firms such as mobile phones, tablets, PCs and PDAs (Omer, 2021), and they aid individuals as well as firms to interact, share information and entertain each other on the internet. According to Dash and Chakraborty (2021) digital marketing experienced remarkable improvements in the 2000s and it has succeeded in making customers to rely heavily on web-based networking media in their daily activities, as stated earlier. Coviello et al., (2001) posited that digital marketing utilizes the internet and other interactive technologies to establish a robust dialogue between the firm and its target markets. However, in the words of Choudhary and Neeraj (2023), digital marketing entails the practice of creating the awareness of products or services with the use of digital channels and technologies. For American Marketing

Association (AMA) digital marketing remains the utilization of digital channels, platforms, and devices like social media marketing, search engines marketing, email marketing, content marketing, display Ads, video marketing, mobile marketing etc., to connect with customers, prospective consumers and other notable stakeholders, and accomplish a marketing objective (Rajkumar et al., 2019). According to Garg et al., (2020) digital marketing creates the platform for consumers to interact as well as have access to products and services anywhere in the world through the internet, with low cost involvement. It equally enhances the sale of products and services on the world scene by marketers who explore the digital marketing platforms. In the same vein, consumers to a very great extent consider digital marketing as a helpful tool that they can employ to resolve some salient questions they ask, as it provides adequate information that could lead to the answers they sought for in a record time.

Consequently, Rajkumar et al., (2019) aver that digital marketing has delved into non-internet channels that provide digital media like mobile phones (SMS and MMS), callback, and on-hold mobile ring tones and this has helped to differentiate digital marketing from online marketing. It is a known fact that in the year 2020, that individuals, firms and governments witnessed the outbreak of COVID-19 in the towns and cities of the countries of the world. This incident led to total shutdown of some economies and people where ask to maintain social distancing to avoid contracting and spreading of the deadly Corona virus (COVID-19). As a result of this ugly scenario, these individuals, firms and governments elected or relied heavily on digital marketing/online marketing platforms to order for products and services at the expense of purchasing from the open markets that require one's physical presence. This situation became the new normal, as people now order goods and services online, as well as makes payments through the online payment platforms. This arrangement created room for the products and services that are ordered to be delivered at the doorsteps of the customers and payments made on delivery of those items, depending on the terms and conditions of the service from the provider. However, it is noteworthy to deduce that despite the fact that we no longer hear and experience the devastating effect of the corona virus (COVID-19), making of purchase online has increased tremendously because consumers can now attest to the fact that the practice is convenient, cost-effective and a modernized way of purchasing goods and services.

Consequently, despite the inherent benefits of these digital marketing platforms with respect to online purchase of goods and services, majority of the consumers in Abia State still purchase heavily in the open markets, even at the peak of the deadly disease. In the light of the foregoing, the researcher deemed it necessary to carry out an in-depth empirical study on the effect of digital marketing (social media marketing, search engine marketing, content marketing, display advertising and mobile marketing) on the marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy, with a particular reference to the consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of digital marketing on the marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy, with a particular attention to the consumers in Abia state, Nigeria. The specific objectives which will guide the study include the following below;

a) To determine whether there is any statistically significant and positive relationship between social media marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

b) To ascertain if there is any statistically significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

c) To assess the extent of the significant relationship that exists between content marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

d) To find out whether there is any relationship between display advertising and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

e) To examine if there is any significant and positive relationship between mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses have been formulated in this study in their null form and would guide the study. These research hypotheses will be tested at 5% level of significance. They are;

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant and positive relationship between social media marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

H_{03}: Content marketing does not significantly relate with marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria

H_{04}: There is no relationship between display advertising and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

H_{05}: There is no significant and positive relationship between mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

This subsection of this study was dedicated to the review of the concepts that are relevant to the study at hand. They are showcased below:

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing, also known as internet marketing or web-based marketing has to do with the use of the internet and related digital technologies to achieve marketing goals and promote marketing activities such as the delivery of quality services, supply chain management and customer relationship (Liam, 2020). In the same vein, digital marketing equally entails the use of electronic devices (computers) to connect with consumers or customers. These devices include tablets, mobile phones, etc. and they have succeeded in

eliminating classical marketing techniques and thereby expanding marketing blends. According to Al-Azzam and Al-Mizeed (2021), digital marketing has been proven to be a new marketing method and offers new opportunities for firms to do business. Again, it is a technology revolution form of marketing which offers businesses with new ideas in the business environment.

Consequently, Rai (2018) maintained that the conspicuous development of digital marketing has enhanced the way and manner brands and businesses use digital technologies and channels for their marketing activities. Maha and Ranj (2016) aver that digital marketing campaigns are becoming more efficient and effective given the fact that digital platforms are progressively or increasingly integrated into marketing plans and daily life, thereby making people to use digital devices instead of going to physical stores. Hence, digital marketing assists the marketing practitioners to make their products available for users through litany of digital channels such as E-mail marketing, social media marketing, online advertising, mobile marketing, etc.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing can be seen as a new tendency and fast-growing way of reaching to the preferred targeted markets effectively, efficiently and effortlessly. According to Omenugha (2018), it is a digital platform that allows individuals and businesses to launch and form social networks through mutual conversation and engagement with other users. Therefore, Social media channels are used to encourage the sale of the products of a business (Bansal et al., 2014). Moreso, the general forms of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. These social media platforms assist marketers, as they strive to have robust conversations with consumers/customers. Social media platforms equally explore websites and applications designed to allow customers to disseminate content rapidly, effortlessly, efficiently, effectively and in-real time. Social media remains a group of internet-based applications meant for web 2.0 technologies and enables creating and exchanging content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Choudhary and Neeraj (2023) social media marketing encompasses the advertising and promotion of goods and services on the various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube etc. It also involves the creation of organic content, paid advertising, influencer partnerships and community engagement.

Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing involves strategies that aid the modification of a website's architecture and content to boost the rankings of the website. According to Kikasu et al., (2023) search engine marketing remains an effective and efficient tool or method that ensures an increase in website's rating on search engines such as Google and by extension attracts high-quality visitors to the site. Therefore, when a firm invests heavily on search engine marketing, it can lead to an increase in brand awareness and the attendant revenue surge. It also consists of the promotion of websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs). It is made up of search engine optimization (SEO) techniques and paid search advertising like Google Ads (Choudhary & Neeraj, 2023)

Content Marketing

Content marketing has to do with the planning, creation, distribution, sharing and production of content via several channels like social media, blogs, websites, podcasts, applications, press releases, and print publication (Kikasu et al., 2023). In the same vein,

content marketing involves the creation and distribution of top-notch and important content that draw the attention and interact with a target audience. This content can take the form of blog posts, articles, infographics, eBooks, whitepapers etc. The major aim of this content marketing is to entertain, educate and proffer solution to the envisaged problems of a specified target audience.

Display Advertising

In the words of Kikasu et al., (2023) display advertising/banner advertising entails a kind of paid web advertising that has to do with a professionally produced picture or a photo and words. And when the target audience clicks on the picture, photo or words, they will be directed to the main land page. Display advertising can be seen as those visual advertisements that normally appear on websites, mobile apps, or social media platforms. They take the form of static images, animated graphics or videos etc. (Choudhary & Neeraj, 2023).

Mobile Marketing

It is a known fact that mobile marketing is the broadest, cheapest, fastest and actual marketing channel that enables users to earn information and features of attractive goods easily with the possibility of completing the transaction process without physical presence of the buyer to the place of goods (Alam et al., 2015). It creates the leeway or atmosphere for consumers to be aware of their purchasing decisions (Tiffany et al, 2018). Mobile marketing consists of exciting interactive communication mode channels between firms and consumers. To this end, Mohamed et al., (2016) revealed that mobile marketing remains a group of practices that ensures that firms communicate and interact with their audiences interactively and relevantly through any available device or mobile network.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study
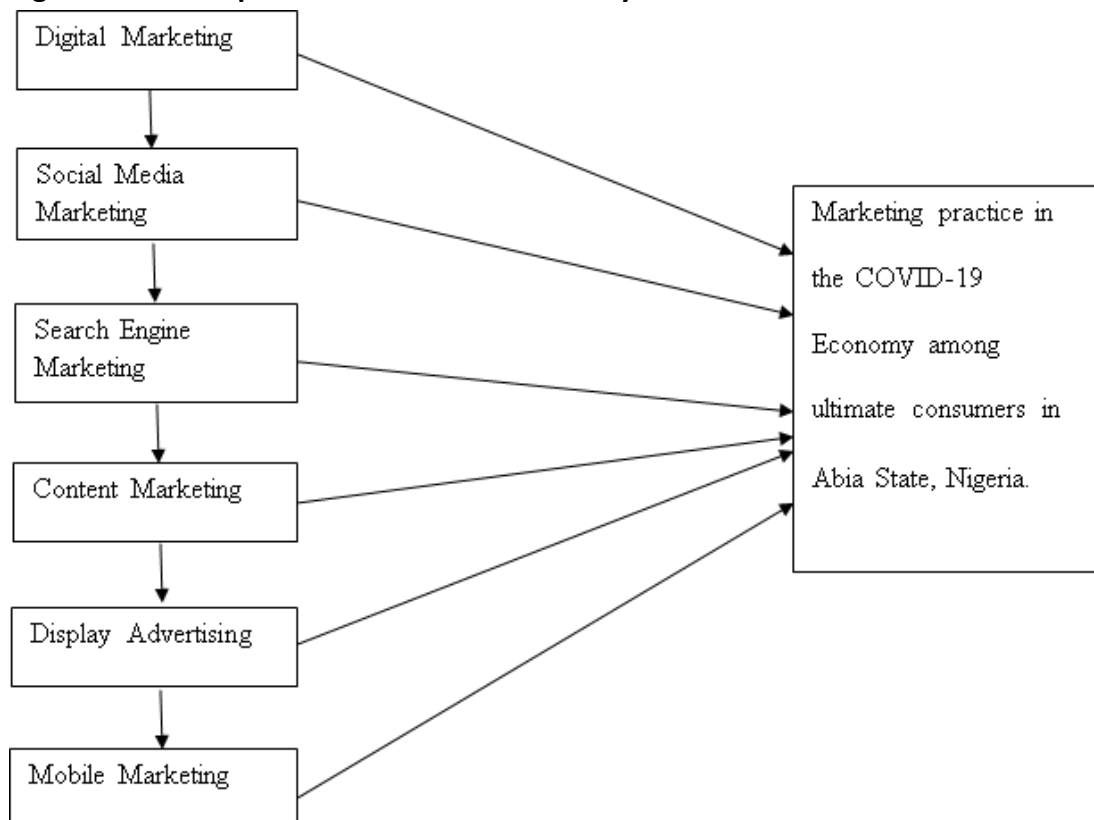
Source: *Researchers' Conceptualization, 2024*

Theoretical Framework

So many theories have direct connection to the study of digital marketing business efficiency such as the theory of social network, theory of technology adoption/acceptance and theory of reasoned action. Whereas the theory of reasoned action propounded by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) remains one of the most broadly studied and applied method to the explanation of planned behaviours of people and the factors influencing the implementation of those behaviours, the theory of technology adoption/acceptance was propounded by Rogers (2003) and it is meant to determine or examine the adoption of technology in various businesses. Hence; this study is anchored on the theory of adoption of technology (TAM) and it would enable the interested audience of this study examine the adoption/acceptance of these digital marketing channels by ultimate consumers in Abia State – Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is survey. According to Okpara et al., (2021), the survey design is usually used to access and analyze the views, reactions and opinions of a large number of people on a limited topic, hence it is used here. The study was conducted in the two key cities of Umuahia and Aba, in Abia State - Nigeria. The choice of the study area is easily justified, given that they are a twin hub for population density, industrial, educational and commercial presence, as well as a cosmopolitan lifestyle, which relatively conduces to research.

The target population of the study includes consumers who engage in online purchases of goods and services in Umuahia and Aba in Abia State. Therefore, the population of the study is unknown or infinite and selected through convenience non-probability sampling method; hence, the sample size of 288 respondents were determined using Topman's formula, and out this number, 263 respondents returned their completed copies of questionnaire accurately filled and found usable, while 25 copies of questionnaire were wrongly completed and found unusable. Again, well-structured questionnaire of 5 point Likert scale was adopted and administered to the respondents with the help of trained research assistants.

Furthermore, variables identified in the study from the various reviews in the literature include marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria (dependent variable) and digital marketing (independent variable) were measured using five constructs; Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Content Marketing, Display Advertising and Mobile Marketing. The Data collected were initially edited to detect and correct any errors and omissions to make sure that there is consistency and completeness. To this end, the edited data were coded and analyzed through the use of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression analysis with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The ANOVA was specifically used in order to ascertain the overall goodness of fit of the model.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The sample size of the study is 288 respondents who copies of questionnaire were administered to and 263 respondents completed their copies of questionnaire appropriately and returned them. The researchers found these returned copies of questionnaire usable for the study. The results of the regression analysis are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.746[a]	.557	.548	.80249	1.190

a. Predictors: (Constant), MM, SMM, CM, SEM, Das

b. Dependent Variable: MP

Source: SPSS version 23.0 computation

Table 1 above disclosed the summary of the model. The R^2 value of 0.557 which shows the goodness of fit of the model is statistically significant. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.548 is also statistically significant which indicates that after taking into cognizance the number of regressors; the model explains about 55% of the variations in marketing practice. Again, the absence of serial auto correlation is indicated by the Durbin Watson value of (1.190), which is larger than the lower bound in tables and within the acceptable limit.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	207.930	5	41.586	64.575	.000[b]
	Residual	165.507	257	.644		
	Total	373.437	262			

a. Dependent Variable: MP

b. Predictors: (Constant), MM, SMM, CM, SEM, DAs

Source: SPSS version 23.0 computation

Table 2 above showed the analysis of variance of the model. The F-statistic which measures the overall goodness of fit and linearity of relationship in the model at 64.575 and its probability of 0.000 is statistically significant at all levels of significance. This indicates that there was a simultaneous linear relationship between the dependent variable (Marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy), and all the explanatory variables (Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Display Advertising and Mobile Marketing) combined.

Table 3: Coefficients

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.171	.427		12.118	.000
	SMM	.188	.050	.187	3.791	.000
	SEM	.084	.046	.088	1.819	.070
	CM	.286	.042	.314	6.745	.000
	Das	.322	.044	.361	7.361	.000
	MM	.456	.045	.473	10.131	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MP

Source: SPSS version 23.0 computation

The regression equation of the model can be shown thus;

MP = 5.171 + 0.188SMM + 0.084SEM + 0.286CM + 0.322DAs + 0.456MM.

Test of Hypotheses

Five hypotheses were formulated for the study. These hypotheses are tested below on the results obtained from the regression model in table 3.

Hypothesis one: There is no statistically significant and positive relationship between social media marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

The regression model in table 3 showed that the coefficient of social media marketing is positive. This conforms to the a priori expectation which specified that there is a significant and positive relationship between social media marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria. The T-value of the coefficient of SMM at 3.791 with a probability of 0.000 is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant and positive relationship between social media marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

The regression model results from table 3 showed that the coefficient of search engine marketing (SEM) is positive. This conforms to the a priori expectation of the model that states that there is significant relationship between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria. However, T-Value for the coefficient of SEM at 1.819 with a probability of 0.070 is not statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three: Content marketing does not significantly relate with marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

The regression model in table 3 disclosed that the coefficient of content marketing (CM) is positive. This conforms to the a priori expectation which specified that content marketing relate to marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria. The T-value of the coefficient of CM at 6.745 with a probability of 0.000 is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis that content marketing does not significantly relate to marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Four: There is no relationship between display advertising and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

The regression model in table 3 disclosed that the coefficient of display advertising (DA) is positive. This conforms to the a priori expectation which specified that there is a relationship between display advertising and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. The T-value of the coefficient of (DA) at 7.361 with a probability of 0.000 is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Thus, we reject

the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between display advertising and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Five: There is no significant and positive relationship between mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

The regression model in table 3 revealed that the coefficient of mobile marketing (MM) is positive. This conforms to the a priori expectation which specified that there is a significant and positive relationship between mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. The T-value of the coefficient of (MM) at 10.131 with a probability of 0.000 is statistically significant at 5% level of significance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant and positive relationship between mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study found out that hypotheses one, three, four and five have a significant and positive relationship between social media marketing, content marketing, display advertising, mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. These findings validate the findings of Mohamed et al. (2016); Omenugha, (2018); Choudharg & Neeraj (2023) and Kikasu et al. (2023). However, the study revealed that in hypothesis two, there is no significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria. This finding invalidates the finding of Kikasu et al. (2023).

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, we can conclude that there is a significant and positive relationship between social media marketing, content marketing. Display advertising, mobile marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy among consumers in Abia State, Nigeria while there is no significant relationship that exists between search engine marketing and marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy in Abia State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusion of this study, we recommend that businesses and individuals should pay undivided attention to matters that have direct connection to social media marketing, content marketing, display advertising, and mobile marketing, since they have proven to enhance marketing practice in the COVID-19 economy in the study area. Again, we also recommend that there should be enough emphasis on the efficacy of search engine marketing, so that attention of businesses and individuals can tilt towards that area of digital marketing platform.

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