Leveraging on Digital Marketing Technology to Enhance the Profitability of Oil Palm Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Edo State Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the potential of leveraging digital marketing technologies to enhance the profitability of oil palm Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Edo State, Nigeria. Oil palm is a crucial sector in the Nigerian economy, but MSMEs within this industry face challenges such as limited market access, low productivity, and inadequate infrastructure. This research aims to: Identify the specific digital marketing tools and strategies that can be leveraged to improve the profitability of these MSMEs; examine the relationship between online marketing campaigns (email marketing, social media ads) and the growth of MSMEs in Edo State. The study utilizes the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as its theoretical framework, focusing on the perceived usefulness and ease of use of digital marketing technologies among oil palm MSMEs. Data was collected through questionnaire in a survey to understand the current state of digital marketing adoption among oil palm MSMEs and its impact on business performance. The study found out that, there is statistically significant relationship between digital marketing technology adoption and the profitability of MSMEs. It was therefore concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between online marketing campaign and productivity of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State on the metrics used to measure the relationship. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, development organizations, and MSMEs in the oil palm sector in Nigeria.

Keywords*: Digital marketing, oil palm, MSMEs, Profitability, Digital Technology Adoption*

Introduction

Nigeria is a prominent player in the global oil palm industry, with the crop serving as a cornerstone of its agricultural sector (FAO, 2020). The industry provides livelihoods for millions, especially in rural areas, and contributes significantly to the national economy (CBN, 2018). Edo State is a key oil palm producing region, where the crop is integral to the local economy (NIFOR, 2017).Growing or expanding the oil palm Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sub-sector of the economy is one key strategy to achieve economic growth and development. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) scalability (growth or expansion) have become an area

of concern for economic growth in developing economies (Asare, 2017). People use the term in reference to computer or other technological systems, but those in business also use the word to describe the adaptability of a company (Thibodeaux, 2015) in today's fast-paced business environment where the focus on customer satisfaction is at an all-time high (Mariwala, 2017). Scalability is essential in that it contributes to competitiveness, efficiency, reputation and quality. Small businesses must be particularly mindful of scalability because they have the biggest growth potential and need to maximize the return with resources (Thibodeaux, 2015).

Aside from the financial implications of traditional media marketing, social media marketing allows businesses to connect directly with their customers and reach millions of people to promote their products. The way producers and their customers conduct businesses has changed. Most SMEs find creating customised messages for various platforms to be simple. As a result, social media is an important tool for any business because it allows them to communicate with customers, listen to them, and learn from them in a more efficient and timely manner while using less resources than traditional communication methods (Grewal and Levy, 2020).

As an important component of the business environment and a significant contributor to economic growth, MSMEs are essential in delivering more inclusive globalisation and growth, however, they are lagging behind in the adoption of digitalization and technology.

This research outlines the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions that guide this study. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the research for MSMEs, policymakers, and the broader Nigerian economy.

MSMEs play a critical role in the economic development of Nigeria. They are major contributors to job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), MSMEs account for over 90% of businesses in the country and contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Emmanuel, et al. (2023) posits that due to the recent dynamism of the business environment, the nternet has become a major hub for marketing goods and services. In this context, digital technologies are emerging as innovative tools for carrying out business operations and have led to increased competition.

Statement of problem

Despite their importance, MSMEs in Nigeria face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability. These challenges include limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of managerial skills. In recent years, however, digital technologies have emerged as a potential game-changer for MSMEs.

By adopting digital tools, MSMEs can improve their operational efficiency, reach a wider customer base, and enhance their marketing efforts. For instance, e-commerce platforms allow them to sell their products online, while social media provides a cost-effective way to connect with customers and build brand awareness.

The potential benefits of digital marketing adoption for MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria, are the focus of this study. Edo State, with its burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit and growing tech ecosystem, presents a compelling case for examining the relationship between digital marketing and MSME growth.

Many businesses operate with limited market size while conducting transactions in high-risk conditions, they also lack proper documentation which limits their access to opportunities and credit. Optimizing online approaches will tend to help expand market reach, reduce payment risk, automate and keep records, and also ensure proper distribution of funds all of which will help accelerate growth and profitability. The Significance of Oil Palm in Nigeria

Nigeria is a major player in the global oil palm industry. The crop is a significant contributor to the agricultural sector, providing livelihoods for millions of Nigerians, particularly in rural areas. Oil palm production is concentrated in specific regions, including Edo State, where it forms a crucial part of the local economy.

Despite the potential of the oil palm sector, MSMEs in the industry face numerous challenges that hinder their profitability. These include:Limited access to finance: Small-scale oil palm farmers often lack access to credit to invest in improved farming practices, processing equipment, and marketing. Low productivity: Traditional farming methods and lack of access to quality inputs result in low yields. Poor infrastructure: Inadequate transportation and storage facilities lead to post-harvest losses. Market volatility: Price fluctuations in the oil palm market can significantly impact the profitability of MSMEs. Limited market access: Small-scale producers often struggle to reach wider markets due to lack of information and resources.

While there is a growing body of research on the application of digital technology in agriculture, studies specifically focused on the oil palm sector, especially in Nigeria, are limited. This research gap highlights the need for a comprehensive investigation into the potential of digital marketing to enhance the profitability of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State

.**Objectives of the Study**

Based on the identified challenges and research gap, the study aims to:

i. Identify the specific digital marketing tools and strategies that can be leveraged to improve the profitability of these MSMEs.
ii. Examine the relationship between online marketing campaigns (email marketing, social media ads) and the growth of MSMEs in Edo State.

By addressing these research questions, the study will contribute to the development of sustainable and profitable oil palm value chains in Nigeria.

Statement of hypothesis

Ho: Online marketing campaigns (email marketing, social media advertisements, content marketing, search engine optimization) has no significant relationship with the growth of oil palm value chains in MSMEs in Edo State

Scope of study

The scope of this covered all oil palm value chains in MSMEs in Edo State whether they have adopted digital marketing technology to grow their businesses or not. It covered the three senatorial districts of the state and all the 18 Local Government Areas.

Literature Review

Concept of Oil Palm value chains in MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria

Oil palm is one of the agricultural products that plays important role in the composition of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. The oil palm industry, neglected over the past decades despite its potentials to stimulate economic growth, has thankfully been a beneficiary of the Nigeria apex bank's intervention programmes aimed at repositioning agriculture. The status of the plantation company is still controlled by private companies at 53.12%, followed by community plantation at 40.28% and state plantations at 6.61%. increasing the area of oil palm plantations is also followed by an increase in the area of non-productive plants, where the area of oil palm plantation that have not provided maximum productivity because the age of the plants that are above 25 years. Old palm oil plants will not provide high yields or income to farmers, but also will not provide a balance between the cost incurred with the results showed.

The apex bank altogether hopes to cultivate 350,000 hectares of oil palm by 2028 by funding oil palm majors and SME that meet funding requirements for plantation development and mill construction. This is expected to close the supply gap and enable the industry to meet local demand, improve local processing quality standards and conserve foreign exchange of about $500 million annually. The CBN also seeks to develop a framework for the inclusion of smallholder farmers given their potential as well as facilitate stakeholder engagement towards supporting the industry. Furthermore, the CBN interventions are expected to increase production from 1,250,000 million metric tons to 2,500,000 million metric tons by 2026. The bank's intervention in the oil palm sector will be able to unleash the potential of the value chain with accompanying support for the economic diversification plan as well as the industrialization aspiration of the country (This Day, 2023). The replanting oil palm program is an effort to develop plantation by replacing old or unproductive plants with new plants, both in whole or in stages. The program planned by government is to target 185 thousand hectares of independent smallholders to be replanted. To make the program a success, the government provides funding of 25 million per hectare to farmers through the Palm Oil Financial Management Agency(FMA) and the Ministry of Agriculture with the consideration that the plant has exceeded the economic age of 24 years.

CBN has revolutionised agricultural practice whereby smallholder farmers who hitherto could not approach commercial banks for loans, are now being granted credit facilities in the forms of inputs like seedlings, fertilizer and herbicides. The data shows that in 2018 only 11.554 ha or 6.24 percent of the targeted land area has been replanted. Oil palm replanting should have been carried out as a whole, but only a small percentage of farmers who have done replanting. This can be caused by several problems faced by farmers, in general, oil palm farmers do not want to replant their plants due to several factors, one of which is fundamental is the concern of losing the main source of

income during the period of immaturity. Besides, limited capital and access to sources of capital and external factors are suspected to influence farmers in replanting. Online marketing campaign

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, online marketing has become essential to any successful marketing strategy. Businesses reach their target audiences and increase brand awareness and sales with the right online marketing campaign. Successful online marketing campaigns have captured the public's attention and generated significant buzz.

An Online marketing campaign is a well-planned and coordinated effort to promote a product, service, or brand to a specific audience through online or digital channels. It entails using various tactics, such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Pay-Per-Click (PPC), social media marketing, email marketing, and content marketing. This is done to achieve marketing objectives such as lead generation, website traffic, brand awareness, and sales growth. The residue obtainable in the process of palm kernel oil extraction otherwise called palm kernel cake is used as livestock feed. Palm kernel oil is used in vegetable oil and soap making. Palm kernel shells are also useful as energy source and industrial raw materials such as mosquito coils , foot mat, feeds for pigs etc. A graphic of an oil palm and its fruit is shown in the Figure below.

Figure 2: Oil Palm and its fruits. Source: Osaghae, 2014; Ajani et al 2012

The High Payoff Input Model

The inadequacy of policies based on the conservation, urban-industrial impact, and diffusion models led, in the 1960s, to a new perspective that the key to transforming a traditional agricultural sector into a productive source of economic growth is investment designed to make modern high payoff inputs available to farmers in poor countries. Peasants, in traditional agricultural systems, were viewed as rational, efficient resource allocators (Siagian, 2018).

They remained poor because, in most poor countries, there were only limited technical and economic opportunities to which they could respond. The new, high payoff inputs, as identified by Schultz, can be classified into three categories: The capacity of public and private sector research institutions to produce new technical knowledge; The capacity of the industrial sector to develop, produce, and market new technical inputs; The capacity of farmers to acquire new knowledge and use new inputs effectively.

The enthusiasm with which the high payoff input model has been accepted and translated into an economic doctrine has been due in substantial part to the success of efforts to develop new high-productivity grain varieties suitable for the tropics. New high-yielding wheat and corn varieties were developed in Mexico, beginning in the 1950s, and new high-yielding rice varieties in the Philippines in the 1960s. These varieties were highly responsive to industrial inputs, such as fertilizer and other chemicals, and to more effective soil and water management.

The high returns associated with the adoption of the new varieties and the associated technical inputs and management practices have led to rapid diffusion of the new varieties among farmers in several countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The impact on farm production and income has been sufficiently dramatic to be heralded as a "green revolution." The significance of the high payoff input model is that policies based on the model appear capable of generating a sufficiently high rate of agricultural growth to provide a basis for overall economic development consistent

with modern population and income growth requirements. As interpreted generally, the model is sufficiently inclusive to embrace the central concepts of the conservation, urban-industrial impact, and diffusion models of agricultural development. The unique implications of the model for agricultural development policy are the emphasis placed on accelerating the process of development and propagation of new inputs or techniques through public investment in scientific research and education. The high payoff input model, as developed by Schultz, remains incomplete as a theory of agricultural development (DFID, 2019).

Typically, education and research are public goods not traded through the market place. The mechanism by which resources are allocated among education, research, and other alternative public and private sector economic activities is not fully incorporated into the Schultz model. The model does treat investment in research as the source of new high-payoff techniques. It does not explain how economic conditions induce the development and adaption of an efficient set of technologies for a particular society. Nor does it attempt to specify the processes by which factor and product price relationships induce investment in research in a particular direction.

Conceptual framework

Definition of MSMEs

In the global context, the term "SMEs" encompasses a broad spectrum of definitions. The concepts 'small and medium scale enterprise, small and medium enterprises, small and medium scale Industries, micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are some of the terms that are used interchangeably to describe small and medium business organizations. The heterogeneous nature of these group of businesses makes it possible for different countries to set guidelines for defining MSMEs within the fixed co-ordinate of their national boundaries. Their guidelines for defining MSMEs are often based on number of employees, turnover, cost of establishment or asset base. Below is a table of synthesis about the different approaches to MSMEs definition (Nicolescu and Ciprian (2008).

Different approaches to the MSMEs notion

The table below is an indication of various approaches to defining MSME concepts. The criteria used include economic sphere and number of indicators used. MSMEs are defined by using the employees' numbers, turnover and capital. Other definitions took into consideration characteristics like activity domain, organisation form, technical endowments, profitability and their turnover. These approaches support multi-dimensional and differentiated criteria which points out the enterprise as a complex system due to their dynamic and adaptive nature within the socio-economic spectrum.

MSMEs notion

S/N	Approach categories		
	Criteria	Names	Dominant characteristic
	Economy sphere	General	Establish different defining criteria of small and medium enterprises for all activity sectors.
		Differentiate	Using various criteria of delineation of MSMEs in taking into consideration the field of activity: transport, telecommunications, trade, etc.
	Number of indicators used	Uni-dimensional	Using in the definition of MSMEs a single indicator. The most common indicator is the number of employees.
		Multi-dimensional	Define the size of MSMEs based on several indicators. The most commonly used are the number of employees, turnover and capital.

Source: Nicolescu and Ciprian (2008)
World Bank (2015) defines MSMEs as those enterprises with a maximum of 300 employees and 15 million dollars in annual revenue and 15 million dollars in asset. The Inter-American Development Bank defines MSMEs as having a maximum of 100 employees and less than 15 million dollars in revenue.

The European Commission (2005) defines MSMEs as the category of micro, small and medium sized enterprise and is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million Euros and / or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million Euros. Micro, Small and medium enterprises are thus defined as firms with 10 to 250 employees and more than 10 million Euros or annual balance sheet total.

Egypt defines MSMEs as enterprises having more than 5 and fewer than 50 employees, Vietnam considers SMEs to have between 10 employees and 300 employees.

In Nigeria, various definitions had been suggested taking cognizance of the timing and the state of the economy. Suggested definitions categorize SMEs into micro, small and medium sized industries. SMEDAN (2013) definition adopts a classification based on dual criteria, employment and assets (excluding land and buildings).

Online marketing campaign

A good online marketing campaign achieves its objectives while providing a positive user experience to the target audience. Here are some key elements that contribute to the success of an online marketing campaign: A digital marketing campaign must have marketing objectives that are specific, measurable, and aligned with overall business goals; Defining the target audience: Knowing who the campaign is aimed at and tailoring your message to that audience is critical. Moreover, understanding their pain points, interests, and behavior is all part of this strategic approach: Selecting appropriate digital channels, crafting content, and defining messaging and offers. Moreover, selecting appropriate marketing tactics that align with the target audience is also vita. Quality content: Relying on copywriting, visuals, video, and other interactive elements, to capture audience's attention and keep them engaged. Using the same message across all digital channels creates a unified experience for the audience, strengthens brand recognition, and fosters trust. Effective Calls to Action (CTAs): CTAs prompt the audience to take action, such as filling out a form, making a purchase, or subscribing to a newsletter and analytics and optimization: The campaign ought to be continuously monitored, tested, and optimized based on data and feedback to ensure the best possible return on investment.

Examples of good online marketing campaigns

Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be"

This campaign debuted in January 2019 and aimed to address societal issues such as toxic masculinity and sexual harassment and encourage men to be better role models for future generations. Though derided for being overly political and unfair in its portrayal of all men as perpetrators of toxic behavior, the campaign nevertheless generated a lot of attention. Moreover, it sparked important discussions about men's roles in promoting positive social change.

What makes this campaign different? The campaign includes a short film that depicts various forms of toxic masculinity, such as bullying, sexual harassment, and sexism. Moreover, the film also depicts men standing up to these behaviors and taking positive steps to promote a more positive and respectful culture.

Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke"

Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign was created to encourage people to share a Coke with their friends and loved ones and establish a connection with the brand. Coca-Cola expanded the campaign by adding new names, personalized messages, and even augmented reality experiences to their bottles and cans. Moreover, share a Coke was launched in Australia in 2011 and has since expanded to over 100 countries worldwide.

What makes this campaign different? It was targeted so people shared photos of their personalized Coca-Cola bottles and cans on social media, creating a lot of buzz around the brand. Moreover, it also helped the company increase sales and strengthen its brand identity.

Dove's "ShowUs"

Dove's "ShowUs" campaign was launched in 2019 in collaboration with Getty Images and Girl Gaze. The campaign aimed to promote a more diverse and inclusive portrayal of women in media and advertising. The campaign included over 5,000 images of women. Moreover, they were of various ages, races, sizes, and abilities and from various religious and cultural backgrounds.

What makes this campaign different? Dove's digital marketing campaign is inspired by research that found 70% of women don't feel represented in media and advertising. Moreover, the campaign aims to change this by portraying women more accurately and diversely and promoting positive body image and self-esteem.

ALS' "Ice Bucket Challenge"

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge was a viral social media phenomenon during the summer of 2014. It encouraged people to dump a bucket of ice water on themselves, record a video, and challenge others. This campaign raises awareness and funds for ALS or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. The campaign garnered widespread attention. Moreover, many celebrities, politicians, and public figures, including Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, and Mark Zuckerberg, participated. On Twitter, the hashtag #IceBucketChallenge was used over 1.2 million times. Also, videos of the challenge were viewed over 10 billion times.

What makes this campaign different? Its success is attributed to its simple yet fun and engaging concept, the power of social media to spread awareness, and people's emotional connection to the cause. The ice bucket challenge demonstrates how social media can be useful in raising awareness and funds for a worthy cause.

Red Bull's "Stratos"

In 2012 Red Bull launched the "Stratos" campaign to promote its energy drink. The campaign included a record-breaking high-altitude skydiving jump. Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner did this from a capsule suspended by a helium balloon at 24 miles. This included a live broadcast and social media promotions.

What makes this campaign different? Regarded as one of the 21st century's most successful and innovative marketing campaigns, "Stratos" was a huge success. It stressed Red Bull's brand values of adventure, excitement, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible. Moreover, it further demonstrated the power of creating memorable and inspiring content that emotionally connects with people. Other notable extreme sports events and athletes include the Red Bull Air.

The Role of Digital Technology in Agriculture

The agricultural landscape is undergoing a transformation due to digital technology. These tools offer solutions to the challenges faced by oil palm MSMEs. Digital platforms can enhance productivity, facilitate market access, improve financial inclusion, and provide crucial information to farmers (Erenstein et al., 2015).Digital marketing has emerged as a potent tool for businesses of all sizes to expand their reach, build brand recognition, and boost sales. By harnessing digital

platforms, MSMEs can effectively promote their products and services, engage with customers, and gain a competitive edge (Chaffey et al., 2019).

Online marketplaces and growth of MSMEs

Online marketplaces create customer engagement. Online marketplaces provide the greatest possible value for customers and stakeholders in ways unachievable with traditional brick-and-mortar Commerce models. They Provide One-Stop Shopping by giving customers product depth and expanded assortments they want. Customers find virtually everything they expect to buy. They allow sellers to offer products in their core categories, openly showcasing alternative sellers and prices. They also create deep customer relationships.

Online Marketing and Marketplace

Online Marketing

Online marketing, a subset of digital marketing, involves promoting products or services through the internet. It encompasses a broad spectrum of strategies and tactics aimed at attracting, engaging, and retaining customers. The core goal is to build brand awareness, generate leads, and drive sales.

Components of Online Marketing:

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising: Paying for ads to appear at the top of search engine results.

Social Media Marketing: Utilizing social platforms to engage with audiences and promote products.

Content Marketing: Creating valuable content to attract and retain customers.

Email Marketing: Sending targeted emails to nurture leads and drive conversions.

Affiliate Marketing: Partnering with others to promote products for a commission.

Online Marketing Funnel: Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action

The online marketing funnel represents the customer journey from initial awareness to purchase. Effective marketing strategies focus on moving customers through each stage of the funnel.

Online Marketplace

An online marketplace is a digital platform that connects buyers and sellers to facilitate transactions. It acts as a virtual intermediary, providing a space for sellers to list their products or services and buyers to discover and purchase them. The characteristics of Online Marketplaces include among others: Multi-sided platforms which serves both buyers and sellers; Product or service variety that offers a wide range of products or services to customers; Online market place help in building trust through secure payment and transaction processes. Customers are able to reviews and rate the quality of the product. It also enables buyers to evaluate products and sellers.

There are different types of Online Marketplaces, they include: Consumer-to-consumer (C2C); eBay, Craigslist, Business-to-consumer (B2C); Amazon; Alibaba; Business-to-business (B2B): Alibaba; ThomasNet

Theoretical Review

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Technology acceptance model provided the theoretical base for the study. Technology acceptance model is a theoretical construct developed by Fred Davis in 1989 cited in Agbo, (2015).

The Technology Acceptance Model was created to investigate the adoption and levels of diffusion of new technology at the individual level, as well as to better understand computer usage behaviour among people. TAM is a term that describes how a user reacts to new technology. TAM identifies elements that may have an impact on how a user adopts and uses technology (Olasanmi, 2019).

According to Agbo (2015), the theory is an information system theory that illustrates how prospective or potential users of a new technology or information system come to accept and use it. Technology acceptance model postulates that when a new information system like the digital media, is introduced, the likelihood that the target users will readily adopt it is consequent upon two major factors, the perceived utilities and perceived ease-of application. The former refers to the extent to which a user thinks the new technology would be useful to him while the latter is the extent to which he hopes that use of the new technology would be simple and free from constrains.

In the model, Fred Davis presupposes that there is a relationship between an individual's propensity to accept and use a new technology and his perceptions of the system. According to him the attitudes or behaviours of users towards a new technology is determined by its perceived usefulness and ease of application.

Technology acceptance model is relevant to this study because the rise of search engines, advanced mobile devices and interfaces, peer to peer communication vehicles, e-mails, content creation and online social networks have extended marketers' ability to reach buyers in contemporary times Paquette (2013). The model essentially will help establish whether SME's owners have accepted or are applying the use of e-mail marketing, content marketing and social media platforms in promoting their activities or sales.

Empirical review

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of digital marketing on SME performance across various sectors (e.g., Chaffey et al., 2019; Kumar & Yadav, 2016).

These studies have shown that effective digital marketing strategies can:

Increase market reach and customer base: Social media platforms, search engine optimization (SEO), and online advertising can help MSMEs reach a wider audience and connect with potential customers beyond their immediate geographic location (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Enhance brand visibility and awareness: Digital marketing channels provide a cost-effective platform for building brand awareness and creating a strong online presence (e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Improve customer engagement and loyalty: Interactive platforms like social media allow MSMEs to engage with customers, build relationships, and foster loyalty (e.g., Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Increase sales and revenue: Effective digital marketing campaigns can drive website traffic, generate leads, and ultimately increase sales and revenue for MSMEs (e.g., Chaffey et al., 2019).

Reduce marketing costs: Compared to traditional marketing methods, digital marketing can often be more cost-effective, allowing MSMEs to reach a wider audience with a smaller budget (e.g., Kumar & Yadav, 2016).

While research on digital marketing in agriculture is growing, studies have shown its potential to:

Improve market access for farmers: Online platforms can connect farmers with buyers, reduce information asymmetry, and facilitate access to new markets (e.g., e-agriculture platforms, online marketplaces).

Enhance market intelligence: Digital tools can provide farmers with access to real-time market information, including prices, demand, and competitor activities (e.g., use of weather apps, market price data platforms).

Improve communication and collaboration: Digital platforms can facilitate communication and collaboration among farmers, cooperatives, and other stakeholders in the agricultural value chain (e.g., online forums, social media groups).

Promote sustainable agriculture: Digital technologies can be used to promote sustainable agricultural practices, such as precision agriculture and climate-smart agriculture (e.g., use of remote sensing, IoT devices).

Oduntan and Isere (2022) investigated theoretically and empirically how micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria have fared over the period 1990 to 2020 using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) technique. The results showed that access to electricity and cellular subscription had a positive and statistically significant impact on MSMEs' contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They encouraged MSMEs to embrace digital marketing to improve their organizational performance while also recommending that government should improve access to electricity to boost businesses in the country.

Eleaza Chibuzor Gbandi and Gloria Osare Iyamu (2022) investigated the effect of social media marketing on small and medium-sized business growth in Benin City, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross sectional research design and data was gathered using a specially prepared questionnaire which was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Four aspects of social media marketing were chosen to be studied: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube. From their findings, they urged government and other stakeholders to encourage MSMEs to embrace social media marketing in order to compete in the global market. They also recommended that SME owners should keep their

social media accounts updated with content that educates, informs, and persuades customers to buy their products. In addition, they averred that SME owners should use social media marketing feedback as a catalyst for innovation and expansion.

Oyeniyi, and Ayanlake, (2021) examined the impact of internet marketing on SMEs' performance amid COVID-19. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 138 respondents from a total of 1021 MSMEs registered with SMEDAN. They found out that internet marketing devices (Direct mail, Website, Bulk SMS, Networking, Virtual magazine, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Linkedln, Blog, and Instagram) have a positive relationship with MSMEs' performance. The results also indicate that opportunities to expand and grow, improve customer service, and find new customers, and need to keep up with existing competitors are the most factors influencing the adoption of internet marketing.

They further noted that the lack of network infrastructure is ranked as number one that hinders the adoption of internet marketing among MSMEs surveyed. The implication of this finding is that if the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria could sensitize the MSME operators on how to make use of internet marketing strategy, the survival of the sector in the midst of globalization and COVID-19 surge is guaranteed.

Arobo (2022) carried out a study which was to investigate the value and influence of digital marketing on the competitive participation of small and medium-sized establishments in the business environment. This study applies a qualitative research approach which involved five (5) companies which operate as MSMEs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, to help provide the primary data, where respondents to the best of their abilities, provided important information that helped in conducting this study. Secondary data/information relevant to the study was also gathered through peer-reviewed articles, journals and websites. The study concludes with the view that digital marketing is identified as creative and an efficient method of acquiring, growing and maintaining customer relationships. Online platforms such as websites, industry-specific outlets and forums, have been identified to be the most beneficial for MSMEs. It further recommends that newly established and existing SMEs should adopt digital marketing because of the huge benefits they can gain in creating brand awareness, and building brand trust amongst customers.

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Amin (2021) carried out a study on how digital marketing, which is represented by two proxies, affects business performance. Sixty-three (63) owners/managers of medium-sized businesses in Abuja responded to the survey questionnaire, which was conducted using a simple random sampling technique. The data was analyzed using inferential statistical tools, notably Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results of the study revealed that the two constructs of digital marketing investigated were positively and significantly correlated to business performance. Furthermore, the regression study revealed that both social media and e-mail marketing are highly significant to the model, with 53.8 percent of the variance in the dependent variable explained by the variance in the independent variables. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that social media marketing was the more often used digital marketing construct, explaining more to the model than e-mail marketing. Further research was proposed as recommendations.

Internet marketing strategy has been acknowledged by scholars, marketers, researchers as a veritable tool for the expansion of SMEs operations. According to Ladokun (2019), the use of internet marketing has offered opportunities for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in both developed and developing countries to expand their customer base, build communication with customers and related partners in a more cost-effective way.

The widespread use of internet marketing facilitates greater opportunities to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of firms. It is widely recognized that Information and Communication

Technologies (ITCs) such as the internet are rapidly expanding and have affected the way businesses are performed and the way organizations compete. Adheesh (2017) also argues that e-marketing adoption helps to increase and improve corporate performance that; with the rapid growth of online business globally, SMEs could benefit greatly from the available opportunities that e-marketing affords them.

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Kawira, Mukulu and Odhiambo (2019) examined the effect of digital marketing on the performance of MSMEs in Kenya. The study was guided by positivism research philosophy. It utilized a descriptive survey design. The study population included 8,526 licensed MSMEs in Tharaka-Nithi County. Stratified sampling and random sampling techniques were employed to arrive at the study sample. Data was collected using questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed using both the descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics included frequency distributions, mean and measures of dispersion while the inferential statistics were t-test, multiple regression analysis, Karl-Pearson correlation coefficient and F-test. The findings of this study revealed that digital marketing accounted for 38.8% of the variation in performance of MSMEs.

The study further showed a strong positive correlation between digital marketing and performance of MSMEs. The descriptive findings on digital marketing and performance of MSMEs ascertained that a majority of MSME's owners and managers that utilized digital marketing perceived the performance of their firms to be growing. The bivariate regression findings further revealed that digital marketing had a significant positive effect on the performance of MSMEs. This study recommends that owners/managers of MSMEs in Kenya should embrace digital marketing as a strategy towards improved performance. Embedded on the high mobile phone penetration and improved internet connectivity in Kenya, coupled with vibrant and easy to use social media platforms, entrepreneurs in Kenya should position such tools for marketing purposes.

Despite its potential, the oil palm sector is fraught with challenges for MSMEs. Key issues include limited access to finance, hindering investments in improved farming practices, processing equipment, and marketing (World Bank, 2019). Low productivity due to traditional farming methods and inadequate inputs further compounds the problem (IFAD, 2015). Poor infrastructure, particularly in terms of transportation and storage, leads to substantial post-harvest losses (Akinnifesi et al., 2010). Market volatility and limited market access, exacerbated by lack of information and resources, pose additional hurdles for small-scale producers (Olayiwola et al., 2015).

Gaps in Existing Literature:

Limited Research on Oil Palm MSMEs in Edo State: Most studies on digital marketing in agriculture have focused on other crops or regions. Research specifically examining the impact of digital marketing on the profitability of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State is limited.

Lack of Contextual Specificity: Existing research may not fully capture the unique challenges and opportunities faced by oil palm MSMEs in Edo State, including limited internet access, digital literacy, and infrastructure constraints.

Need for Empirical Studies: While some studies have explored the potential of digital marketing in the Nigerian agricultural sector, more empirical research is needed to quantify the impact of specific digital marketing interventions on the profitability of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State.

Focus on Specific Digital Marketing Tools: Research should investigate the effectiveness of specific digital marketing tools and platforms (e.g., social media marketing, search engine optimization, e-commerce platforms) in enhancing the profitability of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State.

Methodology

The study will employ descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by administering a questionnaire to a sample of people.

The population of this study will comprise of two thousand six hundred and seventy-seven (2,677) owner/managers of MSMEs operating in Edo State as reported by Small and Medium Enterprises Agencies of Nigeria (SEMDAN) 2017.

The sample size was obtained through Taro Yamane's formula which is given as;

n =   N

            1 + N (e)2

 Where: n = Sample size

 N = Total Population

e = sampling error (0.05) or 5%

Where N = 2677

Substituting in the formula, we have

 n =   2677

        1+2677 (0.05)2

n =   348

Hence, the sample size of the study is 348

However, an attrition rate of 5% is added to the above figure to now bring the sample size to 365.

Simple random sampling technique was adopted for the administration of questionnaire to the 365 MSME operators/mangers in Edo State.

Primary source of data was used in extracting useful information for the study. The primary source of data consists of questionnaire distributed to MSME operators/managers in Edo State.

A structured questionnaire will be developed and administered to the respondents. The instrument will adopt a five-point Likert scale. Each item on the Likert scale will be rated. The scale will be anchored as follows: Neutral=0, strongly disagree=2, disagree= 3, agree= 4, strongly agree=5. The questionnaire will be designed according to the objectives of the research study. Part A will incorporate personal data, part B will ask questions relating to social media marketing, part C will ask questions relating to online marketplaces, part D will ask questions relating to online marketing campaigns and part E will ask questions relating to growth of MSMEs.

The data collected was verified for completeness and correctness then coded, analyzed and interpreted. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used in the analysis of data. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages and means, were used for data analysis.

Inferential statistics such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in analyzing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the hypotheses at 5% level of significance.

Data Analysis

Both the independent and dependent variables were analysed. Different sets of questions anchored on five-point Likert scale ranging from; Neutral=0, strongly disagree=2, disagree= 3, agree= 4, strongly agree=5 was used to measure the variables. The frequency and percentages were used to present the data.

Organization has adopted online marketing campaign (email marketing, social media advertisements, content marketing, search engine optimization) for the marketing of its goods/services

	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	7	1.9
Strongly disagree	14	3.8
Disagree	185	50.7
Agree	111	30.4
Strongly agree	48	13.2
Total	365	100.0

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

Table above showed organisations that adopted online marketing campaigns such as email marketing, social media advertisements, content marketing, search engine optimization etc for marketing their goods and services. 185 or 50.7% disagreed, 14 or 3.8% strongly disagreed while 111 or 13.2% agreed and 48 or 13.2% strongly agreed.

The adopted online marketing campaign (email marketing, social media advertisements, content marketing, search engine optimization) has helped organization achieve its goals

	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	14	3.8
Strongly disagree	19	5.2
Disagree	175	47.9
Agree	118	32.3
Strongly agree	39	10.7
Total	365	100.0

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

Table above indicated MSMEs that adopted online marketing campaign which are helping them to achieve their organizational goals. 175 or 47.9% disagreed, 19 or 5.2 strongly disagreed while 118 or 32.3% agreed and 39 or 10.9% strongly agreed. 14 organisations or 3.8% were undecided.

Table 4.15 The adopted online marketing campaign (email marketing, social media advertisements) has caused some setbacks for our organization

	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	33	9.0
Strongly disagree	69	18.9
Disagree	236	64.7
Agree	21	5.8
Strongly agree	6	1.6
Total	365	100.0

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

Table above displayed MSMEs that adopted online marketing campaign that caused them some setbacks. 236 or 64.7% of respondents disagreed, 69 or 18.9% others strongly disagreed while 21 or 5.8% agreed and 6 or 1.6% strongly agreed.

Hypothesis Testing

Correlation between organization adoption of online marketing campaigns (email marketing, social media advertisements, content marketing, search engine optimization) and the growth of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State.

Independent variable	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significant level	Remark
Organization has adopted online marketing campaign for the marketing of its goods/services	0.863^{**}	P<0.000	Significant

Source: Computed by the Researcher (2024)

From Table, the correlation coefficient (r) of organization that has adopted online marketing campaign for marketing their goods and services is 0.863** at a significant level of P<0.000.

For testing the hypothesis, the correlation coefficient should be significantly different from zero. Since the Correlation/relationship between social media platforms adoption and the growth of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria was significant, and also statistically different from zero as indicated, as indicated in the Table , the hypothesis was rejected.

Decision:

Null hypothesis rejected while alternative hypothesis was accepted, hence online marketing campaign adoption affect the growth of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria.

Overall, from the results, the study can conclude that digital marketing adoption significantly affect the growth of MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria. On the strength of this result (r=0.742, r=0.8722, r=0.863 where P<0.000), this study reject that Digital marketing adoption (social media, online

market place and online marketing campaign) do not have significant effect on growth of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria.

When compared to traditional physical marketing, the choice of digital marketing has led to growth of your business (i.e., increase in employees and/or annual turnover)

	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	7	1.9
Strongly disagree	13	3.6
Disagree	57	15.6
Agree	166	45.5
Strongly agree	122	33.4
Total	365	100.0

Fig 2: When compared to traditional physical marketing, the choice of digital marketing has led to growth of your business (i.e., increase in employees and/or annual turnover)
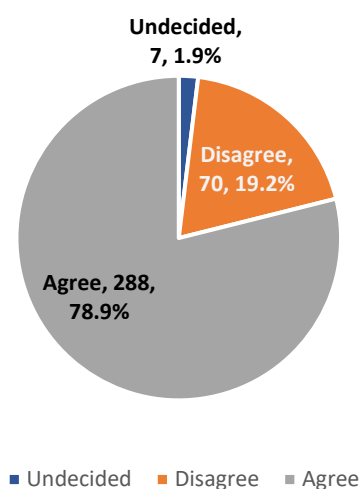
Source: Filed Survey (202
Fig 2. Source: Authour's computation (2024)

Table above showed MSMEs who adopted digital marketing technology and experienced growth in terms of number of employees and annual turnover as opposed to those who did not. Table 4.16 and Figure 2 revealed that 288 or 78.9% respondents agreed, while 70 or 19.2% disagreed.

Adoption of digital marketing has led to the growth in the number of employees of your organisation

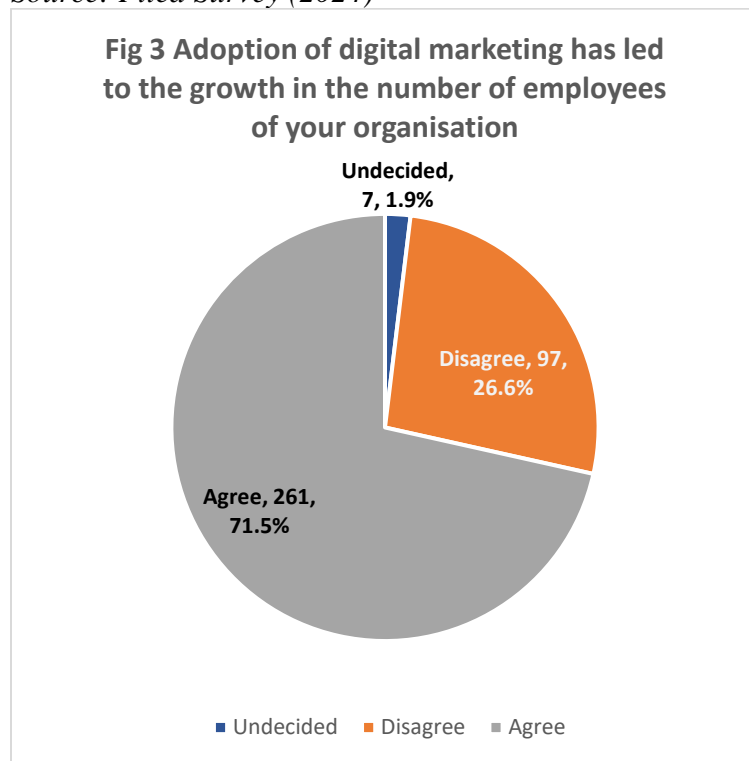|	Frequency	Percent
Undecided	7	1.9
Strongly disagree	12	3.3
Disagree	85	23.3
Agree	172	47.1
Strongly agree	89	24.4
Total	365	100.0

Source: Filed Survey (2024)

Fig 3. Source: Authour's computation (2024)

The table and figure showed MSMEs which experienced growth in the number of employees as a result of their adoption of digital marketing technology. A total of 71.5% were in agreement while 97 or 26.6% disagreed.

Finding

The study examined the relationship between adoption of digital marketing technology and the growth of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria. The study found out that there is statistically significant relationship between digital marketing technology adoption and the profitability of

MSMEs. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, development organizations, and MSMEs in the oil palm sector in Nigeria. The findings revealed that Online marketing campaign adoption has significant effect on the growth of MSMEs in Edo State, Nigeria.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, It was therefore concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between online marketing campaign and productivity of oil palm MSMEs in Edo State on the variable based on the variables used to measure the relationship

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

  I.   MSMEs should put all the necessary number of efforts and resources towards developing online marketing campaign to increase the growth of oil palm value chain.
 II.   The Federal and Edo State Governments should continue to provide support and create the enabling environment to enable oil palm MSMEs to adopt digital marketing technology to boost their businesses.

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