

Digital Marketing Practices and Economic Sustainability of Hotels in Bayelsa State

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Abstract

Hotels as agents of economic transformation are often embroiled in competition. With the emergence of the internet, majority of these hotels now adopt digital marketing platform to contend with competition. The study sought to examine the contributions of digital marketing practices to the economic sustainability of hotels in Bayelsa state. This paper is specifically posed to ascertain the extent of online advertising in ensuring economic sustainability, to examine the influence of email marketing in enhancing economic sustainability and to explore the implication of adopting social media for marketing purposes on the economic sustainability of hotels. The population of study are the entire hotels in Bayelsa state while the assessable population are the ten topmost rated hotels with websites. The cross sectional survey design was employed in this study. Sixty (60) copies of questionnaire were purposefully self-administered on the respondents in their various hotels. From the 60 copies of questionnaire administered, 54 were found usable. This represents about 85% return rate. The collated data were analysed with mean and standard deviation while the formulated hypotheses were tested with the aid of STATA 15 using ordinary least square regression at 0.05 level of significance. The findings shows that all the forms of digital marketing exert positive and significant influence on economic sustainability of hotels. This paper conclude that hotels engagement of digital marketing contribute significantly to its economic sustainability. In the light of foregoing, this paper recommend among others that hotels develop interactive websites and continuously upgrade it to become user friendly.

Keywords Digital Marketing, Email Marketing, Hotels, Online Advertisement, Social Media Marketing, Economic sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Hotels are critical component in the hospitality industry. Generally hotels are recognised as agents for the socio-economic transformation of the society. To tourists and travellers, hotels serve as a home away from home. Hotels operations are generally characterized by stiff competition as a result of the strive for customers' patronage. This spate of competition is heightened as hotel management increase their quest for sales and continuous patronage. Interestingly, hotel management desire for increase in market share is only achievable through aggressive marketing activities. Hitherto, hotel operations were predominantly driven by physical exchange of goods and services. The present realities of technological advancement evident in the emergence of the internet has revolutionized marketing activities as well as other business operations. This evolving development has led firms to adopt electronic media in their conduct of marketing activities.

Contingent upon firms' adoption of the new media, the traditional marketing channels has been altered. Furthermore, the information-based nature of hospitality industry highlights the inevitability of hotels engagement of Internet in its business operations. The internet as an electronic communication medium offers global reach and multimedia capability. To majority of scholars, digital marketing is the new bride in hospitality marketing. In short, the yester years marketing strategy is becoming less efficient in this contemporary times. The reality is that the burst of the internet bubble has led to a reduction in cost, enable firms attract high net worth customers and drastically reduce the dependency on the traditional and more expensive channels of operation. The truth is that hotels deployment of the internet has emerge as an important medium in the promotion of business activities.

Sequel to the internet revolutionizing business transactions and advancement in technology, corporate organisations are left with no option than to embrace digital marketing practice. Today's marketplace reality indicate that firms embrace digital marketing in their desire to contend with competition as well as in their quest for greater market share. The ultimate consequence of firms' adoption of digital marketing as a strategy is to guarantee economic sustainability

As a result of the prominence of digital marketing practice, several scholars have examined this practice from divergent perspectives. Ihunwo and Barasin (2023) Nigeria study of deposit money banks considered digital marketing as a strategic option while Kariru (2022) study of hospitality industry in Kenya was on the adoption and the contribution of digital marketing to national development. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are paucity of study on the contributions of digital marketing practices to the economic sustainability of hotels. This is the gap in literature this study fills.

This paper seeks to unravel the prominent digital marketing practices applicable in the hospitality industry. The specific objectives of this study are to ascertain the extent of online advertising in ensuring economic sustainability of hotels, to examine the influence of email marketing in enhancing economic sustainability and to explore the effect of social media marketing practices on the economic sustainability of hotels.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Concept of Digital Marketing

To marketing executives, digital marketing is seen as the use of modern technologies to create and deliver more value than the traditional marketing channels. The primary essence of firms' embrace of digital marketing is to improve customers' knowledge and patronage. Chaffey (2013) asserts that globally digital marketing has been recognized as one of the most fascinating developments of the century. In short, digital marketing practices has helped to reshape the traditional marketplace. The truth is that the emergence of digital marketing has altered the activities involved in business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) transactions. The rate at which digital marketing evolved in the 1990s and 2000s has literally altered the ways firms now engage technology in its operations. As a matter of fact, digital marketing has assume unimaginable dominance in the marketplace. This is evident as majority of firms now deploy digital marketing for promotional purposes. The truth of the matter is that the commonality of firms' deployment of digital marketing is hinged on its efficiency. This enhanced marketing efficiency of firms is driven by the holistic adoption of digital marketing resulting in its continuous incorporation into firms marketing plans.

Moreover, Nwadigoha (2021) believes that businesses that aspire to achieve continuous success will need to increase their direct engagement with digital users and create a seamless network of customers and other strategic partners. Similarly, Branstad and Solem (2020) assert

that firms that embraced digital marketing as a strategic fit often experience economic stability and growth.

Digital Marketing Practice

Literature recognize search engine optimization, affiliate marketing, viral marketing among several others as the forms of digital marketing. Chaffey (2008) identified online advertising, email marketing and social media marketing as the most prominent forms of digital marketing. The features of these common forms of digital marketing are examined as follows.

Online Advertising and Economic Sustainability

Online advertising as a digital marketing technique enable corporations visually convey its advertising messages to target audience. These messages are often in the form of text, logos, animations, videos, photographs or other graphics. Experience has shown that Web banner and text advertisings are the most common forms of online advertisement. In fact, online advertisement has emerged as the most powerful advertising methods. Online advertising is considered as the most popular form of digital marketing. Its commonality is anchored on firms' use of the internet for advertisement purposes. Firms leverage on the internet as it serves as a medium for attracting potential customers. The truth is that online advertising facilitates information availability to audience while encouraging customers to make purchase decisions. Online advertising as a marketing strategy rely on the internet to attract web traffic while delivering marketing letters to market targets (Budiman, 2021). In the same vein, Khan and Islam (2017) assert that online advertising facilitates the promotion of products without geographical limitations. Truth be told, online advertising is a critical portion of digital marketing. Online advertising possess the capacity of reaching the users of firms products through numerous online platforms, As a matter of fact, majority of highly reputable firms especially in the hospitality industry are in competition to lead and overwhelm each other. According to Dhore and Godbole, (2019), online advertising has the capacity to create product awareness and increase firms future sales. From the foregoing, this paper hypothesize that;
H₀₁: Online Advertisement has no significant influence on firms' economic sustainability

Email Marketing and Economic sustainability

Email marketing as a digital marketing tool is anchored on seeking approval from target audience. In fact, it is a permission-based marketing medium. This implies that the consent of the recipient of the email must earlier be sought. In this contemporary times, Email serves as a marketing medium for the delivery of electronic sales and marketing messages. Email marketing is essentially concerned with firms' deployment of email for the sole purpose of sending promotional messages to internet users. Email marketing is generally considered as one of the most effective methods of digital marketing (Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed, 2021). Of a truth, email marketing remains one of the most effective digital marketing methods used to distribute orders. Email creates the opportunity for businesses to send messages that meet the needs of the targeted customers (Ugonna et al., 2017). Also, email marketing is helpful in fostering customer relationships and retention. The truth is that firms derive several benefits from the adoption of email for marketing purposes. Prominent among the numerous benefits of email marketing as Chaffey and Smith (2013) identified are the relative low cost of execution and ease of personalization. The foregoing suggest that hotels often deploy email marketing as a digital marketing option because it is cheap, easy to set up and contents based on individuals existing and prospective customers .

Email advertising, also known as email marketing, is considered as a powerful e-marketing tool for hoteliers since it creates direct revenue opportunities for past, present and future guests. However, as emails might be unsolicited, senders should either offer recipients an opt-out option or get their prior consent. In fact, experience shows that permission-based email

marketing is one of the most cost-effective and efficient marketing tools available. Arising from the foregoing, this paper hypothesize that,

Ho₂: Email Marketing has no significant influence on firms' economic sustainability

Social Media Marketing and Economic sustainability

According to Alex-Onyeocha and Iwuagwu (2015), firms deploy social media for marketing purposes on the basis of its capacity to trigger viral communications among consumers across online communities. This medium has the potential to generate promotion-related contents. Moreover, Bermeo-Giraldo, Valencia-Arias; Ramos de Rosas; Benjumea-Arias and Villanueva-Calderón(2022) consider the use of social media for marketing purposes as a new generation marketing tool. To the scholars, social media possesses the potential to elicit customers' attention and demand greater participation. On the other hand, Key (2017) describe this new marketing media as an empathy driven communication tool that focus on young consumers as well as consumers belonging to higher age bands.

Social media marketing has been adjudged as the new trend in business operation. Indeed it is a fast-growing way to effectively and efficiently reach targeted audience. Bansal et al., (2014) assert that social media channels are engaged to promote products patronage. Social media channels are in various forms. Prominent among these include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, and You Tube. These platforms assist marketers to have robust conversations with customers. Social media enable customers explore websites and other applications designed to permit seamless dissemination of content rapidly and in-real time. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) opine that social media remain a group of internet-based applications meant for web 2.0 technology and enables creating and exchanging content.

Social media is effective for marketing purposes by attracting contents or required content given in website. With the attraction of contents, it encourage readers to share their views with respect to the brand and organisation across the social network. In the hospitality industry, social media has become a veritable source for marketing products and other facilities. Ultimately, social media serves as a bridge between users and visitors. It also help in service provider- customers interactions. In fact, social media is able to achieve this objective through online sharing of information and opinions. The truth is that the various online networking sites has opened up vista of opportunities for advertisement and evaluation to hotels. These activities has the capacity to enhance business opportunities. Interestingly, literature acknowledge the numerous benefits that accrue to firms that adopt social media for marketing purposes. These benefits among others include building relationships with customers, generation of leads and audience, cost effective marketing and contending with competition. Consequent to the emergence of social media, hotel managers has found new form of technologies that could help to enhance business operations as well as increase patronage.

Social media marketing as a digital marketing strategy is reputed for creating customers awareness. It also has the capacity to reach potential customers while building community of loyal customers. In spite of the unique roles of social media for marketing purposes, Charlesworth (2015) warn that firms should not entirely rely on social media to achieve its marketing objectives. This the author believe could lead to third-party control of a firm's digital marketing activities. To harness the inherent potentials in the deployment of social media while minimising third party control, it behoves on the organisations to build websites that incorporate the commonly used social media platforms. Arising from these, this paper hypothesize that;

Ho₃: Social media marketing has no significant influence on economic sustainability

Drivers of Digital Marketing

A cursory review of extant literature reveals firms' adoption of digital marketing as a marketing option is predicated upon technological evolution and turbulence in the business environment. These notwithstanding, Adunchezor and Akenade (2021) identified socio-economic factors as the main propelling forces that shape customers' preference for digital marketing. The researchers specifically identified social influence, innovations and development factors, government regulations and laws and natural disasters as the features that impact on shoppers' willingness to adopt an innovation. The foregoing implies that firms' engagement of digital marketing is essentially shaped by political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental forces. In spite of the foregoing, this paper explore the roles of technology and environmental forces in facilitating firms' adoption of digital marketing.

Technological Evolution: Technology in simple term is any device be it electrical or mechanical that has the capacity to facilitate the performance of a task. Interestingly, due to the changing users' demographics and new uses, the state of technology keep changing. In fact, the turbulence in the technological environment keep challenging existing business models. This challenge is predicated upon emerging technologies. One of such changes is firms' deployment of internet as a medium of marketing. Literature recognize digital marketing as an emerging avenue that enable firms take advantage of information and communication technology. The emergence of the internet have resulted in firm unrestricted access to actual and potential customers. However, Lovelock (2001) observed that the aspiration of most firms is to ensure that the deployment of technological applications is to their advantage.

Disruptions of Business Environment: The state of any business environment is largely determined by the peaceful conduct of economic activities. The truth is that business activities thrive more in a peaceful environment. However the occurrence of war, increase rate of kidnapping and outbreak of natural disasters often lead to the disruption of peace (Ewanlen & Gabriel, 2021). These events has untold consequences on business activities. Consequently, business managers have to device strategies to contend with these challenges. From marketing perspective, these challenges would result in the interruption of marketing operations. These interruptions result in the alteration of the traditional marketing mode of operations. Literature recognise digital marketing as the most recent option available to marketing managers. This new medium enable firms cope with the disruption in the business environment. Evidence has shown that the greater the environmental disruption the more innovative marketing managers are in seeking for a cost efficient medium to reach the target audience.

Theoretical Framework

There are plethora of researches that attempt to explain the underpinning theory surrounding customers' adoption of emerging technologies. Prominent among these theories is the Davis, Bogozzi and Warshaw (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). In the view of the researchers, the essence of TAM is to explore the forces that influence customers' acceptance of computing technologies. In other words, TAM help to explain the behaviour and the demographics of the customers that embrace these emerging computing technologies. The primary concern of TAM is an assessment of the technology perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness connotes customers' perception that the use of a technology will result in improved patronage while perceived ease of use refers to the extent to which customers expect the technological platform to be user friendly (Davis, 1989).

It is very apparent that consumers understanding of technology adoption process is very complex. Literature attest to the fact that technological adoption processes is a dynamic aspect of modern marketing practice. A critical review of the process reveals that a consumer must of necessity pass through the stages of knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation in the process of technology adoption. Sequel to technological advancement and

the dynamic nature of technologies, the crucial issue in the adoption of technological devices is the speed at which consumers will accept these technologies. Operationally, these issues revolve round the availability and complexity of technology, ease of use, consumers' expectation and privacy of personal information.

METHOD

This study adopted a cross sectional survey method as its research design. The population of study are the entire hotels in Yenagoa Bayelsa state. The accessible population consist of the ten topmost rated hotels with online presence evident by the ownership of websites in Yenagoa. A sample size of 60 respondents was obtained from the selection of six top executives that has sufficient knowledge of digital marketing practices in each hotel. Sixty (60) copies of structured questionnaire were self-administered on purposefully selected senior managers in the hotels. The questionnaire were administered to the respondents in their various offices. The drop and pick later method was employed. Out of the 60 copies administered, 56 were returned while 54 were found usable. This represents 85% return rate.

The self-developed questionnaire consist of respondents' demographics and the common digital marketing practices of online advertising, email marketing and social media marketing. The proposed questionnaire was pilot-tested in October 2022 in other lower rated hotels though with internet presence located in Yenagoa. Findings from the pilot survey was incorporated into the final questionnaire before administration. A cronbach alpha test was conducted to ascertain the instrument extent of reliability. The test shows an alpha coefficient of 0.851. In fact, the alpha value is above the tolerable threshold of 0.6. This implies that the research instrument is sufficiently reliable enough to consistently report its findings. The respondents were expected to use a 5 point Likert type of scale of Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree(5). With the aid of STATA software, the data collected were analysed with mean and standard deviation while the formulated hypotheses were tested with ordinary least square regression method at 5% level of significance.

RESULT/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Presentation of Result

Table 1: Respondents Profile

Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	34	63
Female	20	37
Age Bracket		
<i>Below 30 years</i>	21	39
<i>31-35 years</i>	17	31.5
<i>36-45 years</i>	10	18.5
<i>46-55 years</i>	4	7
<i>Above 55 years</i>	2	3
Marital Status		
Married	15	27.7
Single	25	46.3
Engaged	9	19
Separated	4	7
Rank		
Senior Manager	10	18.5

Unit Manager	34	63
Front Office Manager	10	18.5
Work Experience		
Below 5 years	15	27.7
5-9 years	25	46.3
Above 10 years	14	26

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Sixty three (63) percent are male while 37 percent are female. Twenty one (21) persons below 30 years are the most common while respondents above 55 years are the least(2). With respect to respondents' marital status, single is the most dominant with 25 persons representing 46% closely following is the married (15) representing about 28% while the least is the separated (4). Similarly, Unit managers (34) were the most frequent (63%) among respondents rank. The least frequent (18.5%) are the front office managers. With respect to work experience, respondents that have spent between 5- 9 years are the most dominant (25) representing about 47% while those that have spent above 10 years are the least (26 %).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Digital Marketing Practices and Economic sustainability

Variables	Mean	Standard Dev.	1	2	3	4
Economic Sustainability	3.962	.754	1			
Online advertisement	3.893	.691	.721**	1		
Email Marketing	3.917	.821	.421**	.401**	1	
Social Media Marketing	4.107	1.001	.801**	.762**	.697**	1

Table 2 reports that social media marketing has the highest mean score (4.107). Closely following is economic sustainability (3.962) while online advertisement shows the least mean score (3.893). In the same vein, Table 2 reveals that standard deviation vary from 0.754 to 1.001. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient was engaged to ascertain the strength of the relationship between the various forms of digital marketing and economic sustainability of hotels in Yenagoa. The study found a positive relationship between the economic sustainability and the various forms of digital marketing. The study in particular report that social media marketing exhibit a very strong (.801**) relationship with economic sustainability. In the same vein, online advertisement shows a moderately strong (.721**) relationship with economic sustainability while email marketing reports a weak (.421**) relationship with economic sustainability.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 3: Summary of Regression Analysis

Var.	Coeff.	T- Val	Prob.
OA	0.618	5.34	0.000
EM	0.691	7.58	0.001
SMM	0.704	6.81	0.002
Prob.			0.000
R ²			0.787
Adj. R ²			0.743

Source: STATA Version 15.0

Table 3 reports an R-square value of 0.787. This implies that a unit change in the independent variables can account for about 79% change in the economic sustainability of hotels in Yenagoa. Furthermore, the adjusted R² of 0.743 indicate that a unit change in the independent variable can account for a 0.74

unit change in hotels economic sustainability. This implies that the adoption of digital marketing does not solely contribute to the economic prosperity of a firm. In addition, results in Table 3 further shows significant relationship between Online Advertisement (OA) Email marketing (EM) and Social Media Marketing (SMM) with a p-value of 0.000, 0.001 and 0.002 respectively. The foregoing implies that a unit change in online advertisement, email marketing and social media marketing could result in 0.618unit, 0.619 and 0.704 unit respective changes in economic sustainability. In the same vein, the regression analysis reports a p-value of 0.000 indicating that the model is fit for use in the interpretation of the relationship even at 99% level of confidence.

Hypothesis One

Ho₃: Online advertisement has no significant influence on economic sustainability

From Table 3, online advertisement (OA) reports a T value of 5.34 and a p value of 0.000. This result implies the rejection of null hypothesis and an acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. The implication of this finding is that firms' deployment of online advertisement as a digital marketing option significantly influence economic sustainability of hotels.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₃: Email marketing has no significant influence on economic sustainability

In Table 3, email marketing (EM) reports a T value of 7.58 and p value of 0.001. The consequence of a p value of 0.001 implies a rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternate. The implication of this result is that hotel engagement of email as a marketing tool influence significantly its economic sustainability. The inference that can be drawn is that increase usage of email for marketing purposes would yield an increase in a firm's economic sustainability.

Hypothesis Three

Ho₃: Social media marketing has no significant influence on economic sustainability

As seen in Table 3, social media marketing (SMM) reports a T- value of 6.81 and a p value of 0.003. This finding suggest the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternate hypothesis. The consequence of a rejection of the null hypothesis is that firms' use of social media for marketing purposes significantly influence its economic sustainability. Furthermore, the outcome of the study implies that further deployment of social media will positively influence the firms' economic sustainability.

Discussion of Findings

The overall outcome of this study implies that digital marketing practices significantly influence economic sustainability of hotels. The study in particular report that online advertisement strongly influence hotels economic sustainability while email marketing exhibit weak but exert significant influence on hotels economic sustainability. Furthermore, firms' deployment of social media for marketing purposes reports a strong and significant influence on hotels patronage. These findings except email marketing are in conformity with the study a priori expectation that firms' adoption of digital marketing significantly influence hotels economic sustainability. Several empirical evidence corroborates these findings. Specifically, Ihunwo and Barasin (2023) study of Nigeria's financial sector report that firms' engagement of digital marketing strategies has a positive and significant relationship with service performance. In the same vein, Njoku; Udodirim and Onyemachi (n.d.) Abia state study found a positive and significant relationship between digital marketing platforms and the sustenance of selected small and medium enterprises. Furthermore, the finding affirms Hassan (2019) study that reports SMEs adoption of the various forms of digital marketing significantly influence sales. Similarly, Amoah and Jibril (2021) found that firms that deploy social media for advertisement purposes report a significant improvement in its financial records, business innovation, customers' attraction as well as market share.

With respect to the weak influence email marketing exert on hotels economic sustainability, the most probable reason could be associated with the fact that email marketing effectiveness is hinged on its ability to elicit potential customers consent before its deployment. Experience has shown that people are negatively disposed to unsolicited messages as it always seen as an invasion of privacy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hitherto, business transactions were conducted in brick and mortar surroundings. Today, the emergence of the internet has revolutionize business activities. Coming on the heels of the internet is digital technology. The entrance of digital technology has transform business landscape. The adaptation of digital technologies is without restrictions to marketing practice. Scholars recognise the enormous contributions of digital technologies to marketing practice. Prominent among such contribution is the economic transformation of the society. Digital marketing practices is also reputed for connecting buyers and sellers together thereby creating a vast communication network that is more efficient than the traditional marketing channels.

Arising from the enormous potentials accruing to firms that integrate digital technology into its marketing plans, hotels has learnt to kotow towards adopting digital marketing as a competitive strategy. This study attempt to explore the contributions of the deployment of digital marketing towards the economic sustainability of hotels. The influence of online advertisement, email marketing and social media marketing reported to be more frequently embraced in the hospitality industry were examined. The study found that all these digital marketing forms significantly contribute to the economic sustainability of hotels. More importantly, the study report that online advertisement and social media marketing exert greater influence than email marketing on the economic sustainability of hotels. This paper advocates that management in the hospitality industry should place more emphasis on those outlets that contribute positively to the firms' bottom line while seeking for other avenues that would enhance firms' economic sustainability.

From the foregoing, these following recommendations are averred in this study.

- (1) Firms should develop a more interactive and use friendly websites that has the capacity to attract more traffic and ultimately increase patronage.
- (2) Government should encourage every firm to incorporate digital technologies into their business operation. This can be achieved through the enactment of appropriate legislations that could culminate in the digital transformation of the economy.
- (3) Government should honestly play its statutory role in business through the provision of enabling environment. Government in particular should increase her investment in infrastructural development as that would enhance business effectiveness.

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