

EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN ENHANCING BRAND AWARENESS AND CUSTOMERS' ENGAGEMENT FOR E-COMMERCE BUSINESSES IN ONDO CITY, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing brand awareness and customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses in Ondo City, Nigeria. Four (4) research questions guided the study. The research employed a descriptive survey research design. The instrument was validated by two experts. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The population consists 3032 registered businesses in Ondo West Local Government Area (Source: Ministry of Commerce, 2025). The sample size was 110 e-commerce business owners and customers selected through convenience sampling technique. Data were randomly selected from ten (10) e-commerce business owners and one hundred (100) customers. The data collected were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation. The findings revealed that e-commerce businesses in Ondo City actively utilize various digital marketing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), paid advertisements, affiliate marketing, email marketing, and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Pinterest, LinkedIn) to increase visibility, enhance customer engagement, and strengthen brand awareness. Digital marketing was found to play a crucial role in building customer relationships, encouraging referrals, and fostering brand loyalty. However, challenges such as the high cost of digital ads, limited financial resources of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), frequent changes in SEO and social media algorithms, difficulty in analyzing large customer data, and rising customer expectations were identified as significant barriers to effective implementation. The authors recommended, among others, that there should be regular training for business owners on emerging digital marketing trends, and there should be collaboration among e-commerce businesses to share best practices and resources.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Customers' Engagement, Digital Marketing, E-Commerce, Businesses, Strategies.

Introduction

Digital marketing involves engaging customers through digital media in order to create awareness, stimulate interest, and facilitate transactions that meet their needs. Chaffey (2019) describes digital marketing as achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media. This form of marketing focuses on creating value by utilizing online platforms to deliver personalized content and experiences that foster customer relationships, brand awareness, and conversions. The rapid development of the internet has revolutionized the way businesses operate globally, particularly in the realm of marketing. Digital marketing has emerged as a vital tool for businesses to promote their

products and services, as well as engage with their customers. Kannan and Li (2017) opines that digital marketing goes beyond traditional marketing by providing real-time data, more precise targeting, and deeper engagement opportunities. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) opines that the e-commerce sector, which relies heavily on online transactions, has significantly benefited from digital marketing strategies that allow businesses to reach a larger and more diverse audience. This shift towards digital marketing is driven by the growing penetration of the internet and mobile devices, as well as the changing consumer behaviour, with more people preferring to shop online.

E-commerce or electronic commerce, refers to the buying and selling of goods and services using the internet. This concept encompasses a broad range of activities including online retail, electronic payments, internet banking, and online auctions. Laudon and Traver (2021) opines that e-commerce represents more than just the digital sale of goods and services; it includes the entire process of establishing an online marketplace, from consumer interactions to logistical support and delivery systems. Similarly, Turban (2020) defined the e-commerce industry as the use of electronic systems to support the exchange of goods, services, and information, leveraging the global reach of the internet to provide businesses and consumers with more efficient and effective transactional capabilities. This industry encompasses a broad range of sectors, including retail, financial services, travel, and entertainment, and is characterized by continuous innovation in digital technologies. In the e-commerce industry, digital marketing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, email marketing, content marketing, and pay-per-click advertising (PPC) are widely used to increase brand awareness and customer engagement. Kannan and Li (2017) opines that these strategies provide e-commerce businesses with tools to attract potential customers, convert them into buyers, and retain them for long-term relationships.

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods of services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of competitors. Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers are familiar with and can recognize a brand or its products in the marketplace. It also refers to the extent to which consumers are familiar with a particular brand and can recall or recognize it. It is considered a key component of a brand's equity and is foundational for establishing a market presence. Smith (2023) described brand awareness as existing on a spectrum from basic recognition, where consumers are simply aware of the brand's existence, to top-of-mind awareness, where the brand is the first that comes to mind within a particular category. It is a key component of consumer behaviour, as it represents the likelihood that customers will recall or recognize a brand when making purchasing decisions. Brand awareness is critical for e-commerce businesses, as it is often the first step in the consumer journey. Kotler and Keller (2016) opines that a strong brand presence helps businesses differentiate themselves in a highly competitive marketplace and influences purchasing decisions. De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) argues that digital marketing strategies, such as social media campaigns, influencer marketing, and online advertisements, play a crucial role in building and reinforcing brand awareness.

Customer engagement refers to the interactions and emotional connection that customers have with a brand, product, or service. Taylor and Anderson (2023) defined customer engagement as a deep, enduring relationship that encompasses both emotional and rational ties between customers and businesses, promoting loyalty, satisfaction, and advocacy. Brodie et al. (2013) tells us that customer engagement involves interacting with customers through multiple digital channels to foster relationships, increase loyalty, and encourage repeat purchases. One critical aspect of customer engagement is its role in shaping customer experiences. Effective customer engagement strategies include personalized content, timely responses on social media platforms, interactive websites, and customer relationship management (CRM) tools. Bowden (2019) opines that engaged customers are more likely to become loyal advocates, as engagement often leads to increased trust, commitment, and emotional attachment to the brand. In the digital era, customer engagement has expanded through various channels, especially on social media, where companies can interact with customers in real-time.

Despite the evident benefits of digital marketing, many e-commerce businesses, especially in developing regions such as Nigeria, face challenges in fully implementing these strategies. Foley and Sutton (2020) reiterated that factors such as inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and the high cost of internet access can hinder the success of digital marketing campaigns. Therefore, evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing brand awareness and customer engagement is essential for e-commerce businesses to make informed decisions on resource allocation and to optimize their marketing efforts for better outcomes. By understanding the impact of these strategies, e-commerce businesses can better tailor their marketing efforts to meet the needs of their audience, improve their brand positioning, and foster stronger customer relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The E-Commerce industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, driven largely by advancements in digital technologies and the increasing use of the internet for shopping and other transactions. However, despite the growing popularity of e-commerce, many businesses, particularly in developing regions like Ondo State, Nigeria, struggle to effectively leverage digital marketing strategies to enhance their brand awareness and customer engagement. While digital marketing offers various tools and channels to promote businesses, the effectiveness of these strategies in driving customer engagement and increasing brand visibility remains uncertain for many e-commerce businesses.

E-commerce businesses in Ondo City face unique challenges, including limited access to reliable internet infrastructure, high competition, and varying levels of digital literacy among both business owners and consumers. These factors make it difficult for businesses to fully capitalize on digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, and content marketing. Additionally, the effectiveness of these strategies in creating lasting brand impressions and fostering meaningful customer relationships is not well understood in this context.

Furthermore, there is limited research on how E-Commerce businesses in developing regions can optimize their digital marketing strategies to achieve better outcomes. Without a clear understanding of which digital marketing strategies are most effective, many e-commerce businesses may continue to struggle with low customer engagement, reduced brand visibility, and poor returns on their marketing investments. This study seeks to address these issues by evaluating the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing brand awareness and customer engagement among e-commerce businesses in Ondo West. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into how e-commerce businesses in this region can improve their digital marketing efforts, better connect with their target audiences, and enhance their overall business performance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing brand awareness and customer engagement among e-commerce businesses in Ondo City, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine:

1. the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo West Local Government.
2. how digital marketing strategies contribute to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses.
3. how digital marketing strategies are used in customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses.
4. the challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo City?
2. How do the digital marketing strategies contribute to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses?
3. How are digital marketing strategies used in enhancing customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses?
4. What are the challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies?

Method

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the conduct of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defines a descriptive survey as a quantitative research method designed to describe trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population by studying a sample systematically.

Participants and Sampling

The population of this study comprise all 3032 registered businesses in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria (Ministry of Commerce, 2025). The sample size was 110 participants consisting of ten (10) e-commerce business owners and one hundred (100) customers selected through convenience sampling technique.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire contained twenty (20) item statements in which the respondent was required to select the most suitable options on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validation and Reliability of Research Instrument

The validity of the research instrument was determined by two experts in the Department of Business Education, and one expert in measurement and evaluation in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. The experts were requested to determine the suitability of the instrument in the areas of content coverage and grammatical expression. The experts made sound judgments, corrections and suggestions which made the questionnaire items reliable and appropriate for the study. Test-retest measurement technique was used to determine the reliability of the research instrument. The questionnaire was administered to a selected group of respondents from the study population on two different occasions, separated by an interval of two weeks. The consistency of their responses was assessed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which yielded a reliability index of 0.73.

Data Collection Procedure

Copies of the questionnaire were personally administered by the researchers to both e-commerce business owners and customers in Ondo City. This facilitated ease and high rate of return.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using statistical tool of mean and standard deviation. The criterion for acceptance or rejection of each item was 2.50. Mean score for an item greater than or

equal to 2.50 ($\bar{x} \geq 2.50$) was considered as "accepted/agreed," while the mean score for an item less than 2.50 ($\bar{x} < 2.50$) was considered as "rejected/disagreed."

Results

Research Question 1: What are the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo City?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Most Commonly Used Digital Marketing Strategies Employed by E-Commerce Businesses in Ondo City.

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	E-commerce business owners used optimizing website content to rank higher in search engine results for relevant keywords	3.82	0.43	Agreed
2	E-commerce business owners run paid ads on search engines	3.56	0.61	Agreed
3	E-commerce business owners employed affiliate marketing to market their goods and services to people	3.58	0.49	Agreed
4	E-commerce business owners make use of email marketing to market their goods and services to people	3.60	0.49	Agreed
5	E-commerce business owners use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Pinterest, and LinkedIn for Social Media Marketing.	3.53	0.58	Agreed
	Weighted Average	3.62		

Note. $\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 1 above shows the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo City. It was agreed that e-commerce business owners used optimizing website content to rank higher in search engine results for relevant keywords with a mean score of 3.82 ($\bar{x} = 3.82$), e-commerce business owners run paid ads on search engines with a mean score of 3.56 ($\bar{x} = 3.56$), e-commerce business owners employed affiliate marketing to market their goods and services to people with a mean score of 3.58 ($\bar{x} = 3.58$). It was also agreed that e-commerce business owners make use of email marketing to market their goods and services to people with a mean of 3.60 ($\bar{x} = 3.60$) and e-commerce business owners use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Pinterest, and LinkedIn for Social Media marketing with a mean score of 3.53 ($\bar{x} = 3.53$). However, based on the value of the weighted average which is (3.62) out of the 4.00 maximum values obtainable, which falls within the decision value for agreed, it can be deduced that the above are the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo City.

Research Question 2: How does the digital marketing strategies contribute to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on How Digital Marketing Strategies Contribute to Improving Brand Awareness for E-Commerce Businesses.

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
6	Digital marketing builds lasting customer relationships for e-commerce businesses.	3.43	0.57	Agreed
7	Digital marketing helps e-commerce businesses create highly targeted campaigns	3.54	0.60	Agreed
8	Satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the brand	3.70	0.52	Agreed

9	Digital marketing creates a long lasting identity for business owners	3.50	0.63	Agreed
10	Digital marketing creates long lasting business trust with customers	3.60	0.50	Agreed
	Weighted Average	3.55		

Note. $\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 2 above shows how digital marketing strategies had contributed to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses. It was agreed that digital marketing builds lasting customer relationships for e-commerce businesses with a mean score of 3.43 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.43), digital marketing helps e-commerce businesses create highly targeted campaigns with a mean score of 3.54 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.54), satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the brand with a mean score of 3.70 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.70). It was also agreed that digital marketing creates a long lasting identity for business owners with a mean of 3.50 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50) and digital marketing creates long lasting business trust with customers with a mean score of 3.60 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.60). However, based on the value of the weighted average which is (3.55) out of the 4.00 maximum values obtainable, which falls within the decision value for agreed, it can be deduced that the above are how digital marketing strategies had contributed to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses.

Research Question 3: How are digital marketing strategies used in enhancing customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on How Digital Marketing Strategies Are Used in Enhancing Customers' Engagement for E-Commerce Businesses.

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
11	Explaining product usage helps build trust and boosts engagement by adding value.	3.57	0.53	Agreed
12	Quick, direct messages with exclusive offers or updates ensure customer attention.	3.43	0.56	Agreed
13	Interactive posts and campaigns encourage customers to participate and share, increasing their involvement with the brand.	3.59	0.58	Agreed
14	Encouraging customers to create and share content, such as photos or videos of them using the products, fosters a sense of belonging	3.50	0.55	Agreed
15	Offering referrals bonuses keeps customers motivated to engage repeatedly.	3.44	0.53	Agreed
	Weighted Average	3.51		

Note. $\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 3 above shows how digital marketing strategies are used in enhancing customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses. It was agreed that explaining product usage helps build trust and boosts engagement by adding value with a mean score of 3.57 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.57), quick, direct messages with exclusive offers or updates ensure customer attention with a mean score of 3.43 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.43), interactive posts and campaigns encourage customers to participate and share, increasing their involvement with the brand with a mean score of 3.59 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.59). It was also agreed that encouraging customers to create and share content, such as photos or videos of them using the products, fosters a sense of belonging with a mean of 3.50 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.50) and offering referrals bonuses keeps customers motivated to engage repeatedly with a mean score of 3.44 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.44). However, based on the value of

the weighted average which is (3.51) out of the 4.00 maximum values obtainable, which falls within the decision value for agreed, it can be deduced that the above are how digital marketing strategies are used in enhancing customers' engagement for e-commerce businesses.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Challenges that E-Commerce Businesses Face in Implementing Digital Marketing Strategies.

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
16	High Cost of Ads making it harder for smaller businesses to compete.	3.42	0.62	Agreed
17	Small and medium-sized e-commerce businesses often struggle to allocate sufficient funds for digital marketing campaigns.	3.18	0.73	Agreed
18	Changes in search engine optimization (SEO) or social media algorithms can drastically reduce visibility and traffic.	3.19	0.82	Agreed
19	Managing and analysing vast amounts of customer data to derive actionable insights is challenging.	3.08	0.89	Agreed
20	Customers demand fast responses, seamless navigation, and quick deliveries, which adds operational pressure	2.73	1.12	Agreed
	Weighted Average	3.12		

Note. $\bar{x}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 4 above shows the challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies. It was agreed that high cost of ads making it harder for smaller businesses to compete with a mean score of 3.42 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.42), small and medium-sized e-commerce businesses often struggle to allocate sufficient funds for digital marketing campaigns with a mean score of 3.18 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.18), changes in search engine optimization (SEO) or social media algorithms can drastically reduce visibility and traffic with a mean score of 3.19 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.19). It was also agreed that managing and analysing vast amounts of customer data to derive actionable insights is challenging with a mean of 3.08 ($\bar{x}$ = 3.08) and customers demand fast responses, seamless navigation, and quick deliveries, which adds operational pressure with a mean score of 2.73 ($\bar{x}$ = 2.73). However, based on the value of the weighted average which is (3.12) out of the 4.00 maximum values obtainable, which falls within the decision value for agreed, it can be deduced that the above are the challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies.

Discussions

The study examined the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing brand awareness and customer engagement among e-commerce businesses in Ondo City, Nigeria. The findings from this study revealed the most commonly used digital marketing strategies employed by e-commerce businesses in Ondo City. It was revealed that e-commerce business owners consistently optimize their website content to improve ranking in search engine results for relevant keywords. Similarly, running paid advertisements on search engines, engaging in affiliate marketing, utilizing email marketing and social media marketing as a prominent practice, with platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Pinterest, and LinkedIn being used effectively to reach wider audiences were all revealed as commonly used strategies. The findings agree with Thomas et al. (2024) who found out that successful digital marketing requires an in-depth understanding of online consumer behaviour and

the application of tailored strategies.

The findings from this study revealed how digital marketing strategies contribute to improving brand awareness for e-commerce businesses in Ondo City. It was revealed that digital marketing helps build lasting customer relationships for e-commerce businesses. Similarly, it was revealed that digital marketing enables the creation of highly targeted campaigns, encourages satisfied customers to recommend the brand, and contributes to forming a long-lasting business identity. Furthermore, digital marketing was found to play a key role in building trust between business owners and their customers an essential factor in enhancing overall brand perception and loyalty. These outcomes demonstrate that digital marketing is not only a promotional tool but also a strategic means of building strong, recognizable, and trustworthy brands within the e-commerce space. The findings agree with Dhiyah et al. (2024) who found out that effective digital marketing strategies enhanced brand awareness and profitability of e-commerce companies.

The findings from this study revealed how digital marketing strategies are used to enhance customer engagement for e-commerce businesses in Ondo City. The study revealed that explaining product usage helps build trust and adds value, thereby boosting customer engagement. Similarly, the study revealed that sending quick, direct messages with exclusive offers or updates captures customer attention and maintains their interest in the brand. It was shown that interactive posts and campaigns encourage customers to participate and share content, which increases their involvement and strengthens their connection with the brand. Furthermore, encouraging user-generated content such as photos or videos of customers using the products was found to foster a sense of belonging among consumers. Offering referral bonuses also emerged as a strategy that keeps customers motivated and engaged over time.

These findings indicate that e-commerce businesses actively employ digital marketing techniques not only to promote products but also to create meaningful and sustained customer engagement. The findings agree with Batra, Ahuja, and Bansal, (2021) who found out that email marketing and search engine optimization were effective in improving brand awareness, while content marketing significantly enhanced customer engagement.

The findings from this study revealed the major challenges that e-commerce businesses face in implementing digital marketing strategies in Ondo City. The study revealed that the high cost of digital advertising makes it difficult for smaller businesses to compete effectively. Similarly, small and medium-sized e-commerce businesses often struggle to allocate sufficient funds for digital marketing campaigns, limiting their ability to scale or sustain consistent online presence. The study also revealed that frequent changes in search engine optimization (SEO) and social media algorithms can significantly reduce visibility and web traffic, making it harder for businesses to maintain engagement. Furthermore, managing and analysing large volumes of customer data to extract meaningful insights was highlighted as a considerable challenge. Lastly, it was agreed that increasing customer expectations such as the demand for fast responses, smooth website navigation, and quick deliveries places additional operational pressure on e-commerce businesses. The findings agree with Charlesworth (2018) who emphasize the importance of personalized marketing, particularly through email marketing and retargeting, in fostering customer engagement and repeat purchases.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that digital marketing strategies have a positive effect on the growth and sustainability of e-commerce businesses in Ondo City when effectively utilized. If properly channelled, digital marketing can significantly enhance brand awareness, foster stronger customer engagement, and support long-term customer relationships. E-commerce businesses that strategically implement digital tools such as SEO, social media marketing, email campaigns, and affiliate programs are more likely to achieve increased visibility, customer loyalty, and business success. However, attention must be given to the challenges identified such as

high costs, algorithm changes, and operational pressures so that these do not hinder the effective deployment of digital marketing strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. E-commerce business owners should endeavor to undergo regular training on emerging digital marketing trends and tools to enhance their skills in managing online campaigns and engaging customers effectively.
2. Government and relevant stakeholders should endeavor to provide support such as subsidies or grants to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to help reduce the financial burden of running digital advertisements and acquiring digital marketing resources.
3. E-commerce businesses should endeavor to invest in data analytics tools and expertise to effectively manage and interpret customer data, which will aid in making informed marketing decisions.
4. Businesses should endeavor to stay updated on changes in search engine and social media algorithms, and adapt their strategies accordingly to maintain visibility and online reach.
5. Efforts should be made to meet customer expectations through responsive communication, easy-to-navigate websites, and timely delivery services, thereby strengthening customer satisfaction and retention.
6. E-commerce businesses should endeavor to collaborate through forums or associations to share best practices, pool resources, and gain access to wider marketing opportunities.

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