

The Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies on Consumer Purchase Decisions Among Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria: A Conceptual Review and Framework

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Abstract

The advent of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed marketing practices and consumer engagement worldwide. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which constitute a significant component of Nigeria's economic structure, increasingly rely on digital marketing strategies to improve brand visibility, engage customers, and encourage purchasing behaviour. Despite the growing acceptance of digital marketing channels such as social media, content marketing, email marketing, and online advertising, there remains a need for a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how these strategies influence consumer purchase decisions within the Nigerian SME context. This paper delivers a conceptual review of the relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase decisions among SMEs in Nigeria. It hinges on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) model, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The study adopts a conceptual/narrative review approach and synthesizes relevant literature together with four recent Nigerian empirical studies, with particular attention to Adeoye et al. (2022), the study most closely aligned with the present outcome variable. The reviewed evidence consistently reports positive and statistically significant relationships between digital marketing dimensions and SME or consumer outcomes. For example, Adeoye et al. (2022) reported $R^2 = 0.428$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.424$) for social media marketing, content marketing, and online advertising in predicting consumer purchase decision,

while other reviewed studies reported R^2 values ranging from 0.155 to 0.787 for related outcomes. The synthesis indicates that direct-effect evidence is substantial but fragmented and does not adequately explain the mechanisms connecting digital marketing exposure with final purchase decisions. The paper therefore proposes a mediated Digital Marketing Consumer Decision (DMCD) framework and a set of research propositions that can be empirically tested in future studies. The framework contributes a mechanism-oriented perspective for understanding digital marketing effectiveness among SMEs in Nigeria and provides practical implications for managers, policymakers, and researchers.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Consumer Purchase Decisions, SMEs, Consumer Behaviour, Technology Acceptance Model, Nigeria, Social Media Marketing.*

1. Introduction

The global digital economy has irreversibly changed how businesses reach consumers and how consumers make purchase decisions. Within this transformation, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) occupy a particularly consequential position, especially in economies like Nigeria, where they constitute the backbone of economic activity. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), as of December 2021, approximately 39.6 million micro, small and medium enterprises operated in Nigeria, collectively contributing approximately 46.32% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounting for 96.9% of all businesses and 87.9% of employment (NBS/SMEDAN, 2021; PwC, 2024). The digital landscape supporting these enterprises has undergone rapid expansion. As of January 2024, Nigeria recorded approximately 103 million internet users, representing an internet penetration rate of 45.5%, a rise from roughly 15% a decade ago (DataReportal, 2024). The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) reported 164.4 million active internet subscribers in Q1 2024, with broadband penetration standing at approximately 43.5% (NCC, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024). These figures represent both a large existing digital audience and a significant growth frontier, making Nigeria one of the most dynamic digital marketing environments on the African continent. As key drivers of economic growth and vitality, SMEs in Nigeria have long played a fundamental role in shaping the nation's economic landscape (Igwe et al., 2013). Nigeria acknowledged as Africa's most populous nation with a thriving SME sector, has consistently depended on these enterprises as the cornerstone of its economy, contributing significantly to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment (Abdullahi et al., 2015). Afolabi (2015) opined that Nigeria is characterized by a vibrant SME sector that serves as the backbone of its economy. In view of this, digital marketing has become an important strategic tool for organizations seeking to improve customer engagement, strengthen brand awareness, and enhance competitive advantage. Digital marketing enables businesses to achieve marketing objectives through the application of digital media, technology, and data-driven communication strategies. Chaffey and Ellis Chadwick (2022), agree that digital marketing provides organizations with innovative communication techniques that facilitate interaction, personalization, customer targeting, and performance measurement. Unlike traditional marketing approaches, digital marketing allows firms to engage consumers in real time, develop long term customer relationships, and respond quickly to changing market conditions. Furthermore, digital technologies support businesses in attracting customers, converting prospects into buyers, and retaining customers throughout the customer lifecycle.

The increasing significance of digital marketing is very obvious among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs play a key role in economic development through job opportunities, innovation, poverty reduction, and entrepreneurial development. However, SMEs often face resource constraints, limited advertising budgets, and strong competition. Digital marketing provides a reasonably cost-effective solution that enables SMEs to reach larger audiences while minimizing marketing expenditures. Studies have shown that digital platforms provide SMEs with opportunities to grow customer interaction, improve brand recognition, and enhance organizational performance. In Nigeria, the rapid infiltration of smartphones, internet access, and social media usage has fast-tracked the adoption of digital marketing strategies among SMEs. Businesses now use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (Twitter) to promote products, engage their customers, and accelerate online transactions. Digital communication channels have exceptionally become attractive because they offer measurable, interactive, and personalized communication opportunities that were largely unavailable through traditional marketing methods. Similarly, consumer purchase decisions have advanced in the digital era. Contemporary consumers are more reliant on digital platforms to search for information, compare alternatives, evaluate products, read reviews, and interact with brands before making purchasing decisions. Therefore, understanding how digital marketing strategies influence consumer behavior has become a key area of academic and practical interest. Consumer buying behavior covers the processes through which individuals identify needs, search for information, weigh alternatives, make purchasing decisions, and evaluate post purchase satisfaction. Digital marketing influences each stage of this process by providing consumers with relevant information, personalized recommendations, social proof, and interactive experiences. Despite the increasing adoption of digital marketing among Nigerian SMEs, existing empirical studies remain fragmented, typically testing two or three digital marketing dimensions against a single outcome variable without examining the psychological mechanisms that connect marketing exposure to an actual purchase decision. The study closest in scope to the present paper is Adeoye, Adesuyi, Asa, and Ilesanmi (2022), which regressed social media marketing, content marketing, and online advertising directly onto consumer purchase decision among SMEs in Oyo State, Nigeria, and found a statistically significant but only moderate combined effect (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.424$). That is, even the Nigerian study whose dependent variable most closely matches this paper's central concern still leaves well over half of the variation in consumer purchase decision unexplained, and does not test why the explained portion holds, no mediating variable is specified or tested in that model. This paper does not, therefore, set out to fill an entirely open gap. It sets out to build directly on Adeoye et al. (2022) and the wider Nigerian evidence reviewed in Section 4, by adding two digital marketing dimensions their model did not test (email marketing and mobile marketing), and by proposing and justifying customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention as the mediating mechanisms that plausibly account for the unexplained variance their model left behind. This paper seeks to address that narrower, sharper gap by reviewing relevant theories and literature, and developing a conceptual, mediated framework that future researchers can test empirically against, and alongside, the Adeoye et al. (2022) baseline.

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Gap

The rapid digitalization of business actions has changed marketing practices across industries. Organizations increasingly invest in digital marketing strategies to improve customer interactions, strengthen brand visibility, and influence purchasing behavior. For SMEs in Nigeria, digital marketing signifies an opportunity to overcome traditional marketing limitations and compete

more effectively in dynamic business environments. Though, despite increased adoption of digital marketing tools, uncertainty remains regarding the extent to which these strategies influence actual consumer purchase decisions. Evidence suggests that while many consumers actively engage with digital content, such engagement does not always translate into purchase behavior. Factors such as trust concerns, digital literacy gaps, perceived risk, internet accessibility, privacy concerns, and online fraud continue to affect consumer willingness to make online purchasing decisions in Nigeria. Also, businesses often struggle to pinpoint which digital marketing strategies generate the greatest influence on consumer behavior. Existing research has mostly focused on isolated or narrow combinations of digital marketing dimensions, social media marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, or online advertising, tested two or three at a time against a single outcome variable, without developing an integrated conceptual explanation of how these variables collectively influence consumer purchase decisions through the psychological states that plausibly stand between exposure and purchase. Even where the Nigerian evidence base has directly examined consumer purchase decision, as in Adeoye et al. (2022), the resulting model leaves more than half of the variance in that decision unexplained and does not specify, or test, why the explained portion holds. This points to a problem of mechanism, not merely of scope. It is not enough to know that digital marketing dimensions correlate with purchase decisions, what remains poorly understood is the sequence of engagement, trust, and intention through which that correlation is thought to operate. Consequently, there remains a specific, mechanism level gap regarding how digital marketing strategies translate into consumer purchase decisions among SMEs in Nigeria, one that direct effect regression models such as Adeoye et al.'s (2022) are not designed to close. Addressing this gap is important for improving theoretical understanding, informing business practice, and guiding future empirical research. This study therefore carries out a conceptual review that extends the Adeoye et al. (2022) baseline and the wider Nigerian evidence reviewed in Section 4, and proposes a mediated framework that explains the relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase decisions within the Nigerian SME sector.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The aims and objectives of the study are to:

1. To review the concept and dimensions of digital marketing strategies among SMEs.
2. To examine the concept of consumer purchase decisions in the digital environment.
3. To analyze the theoretical foundations explaining the relationship between digital marketing and consumer behavior.
4. To synthesize existing Nigerian empirical evidence on digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions, and to identify specifically what the most directly comparable study (Adeoye et al., 2022) leaves unexplained.
5. To develop a mediated conceptual framework, incorporating customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention as intervening mechanisms, that extends the Adeoye et al. (2022) direct effect model of digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions among SMEs in Nigeria.
6. To propose directions for future empirical research that can test the proposed mediated framework against the existing direct effect baseline.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the major digital marketing strategies employed by SMEs?
2. How do digital marketing strategies influence consumer purchase decisions?

3. Which theoretical perspectives best explain the relationship between digital marketing and consumer behavior?
4. What does the existing Nigerian empirical evidence, particularly the direct effect model reported by Adeoye et al. (2022), leave unexplained about digital marketing's influence on consumer purchase decisions?
5. What mediated conceptual framework can account for that unexplained variance and extend the relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase decisions among SMEs in Nigeria?

1.4 Contribution and Significance of Study

This study contributes to theory by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model, the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) model and the Theory of Planned Behavior into a cohesive framework for understanding consumer responses to digital marketing strategies. It also contributes to the growing literature on digital marketing in emerging economies by providing a contextualized viewpoint on Nigeria's SME sector.

Practically, the findings will help SME owners and marketing practitioners in understanding how digital marketing activities influence consumer attitudes, intentions, and purchasing decisions. The study can also guide policymakers in promoting digital transformation initiatives that support SME competitiveness and sustainable economic growth. Finally, the proposed conceptual framework provides a foundation for future empirical studies seeking to test the relationships identified in this review.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Marketing and the Nigerian SME Context

Chaffey and Ellis Chadwick (2022) define digital marketing as the application of digital technologies to support marketing activities aimed at acquiring, retaining, and developing customer relationships. It is the act of using digital technologies, internet-based platforms, and electronic communication channels to promote products, services, and brands while aiding interaction between organizations and consumers. Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing enables firms to engage customers through interactive, measurable, and personalized communication processes. Buttressing on this, Armstrong and Kotler (2021) say it encompasses any form of direct connection between a company and its customers using digital media, emphasizing the interactive and personalized nature of digital communication relative to traditional advertising. The increase in internet technologies has changed the marketing landscape, thereby letting businesses move beyond one way communication towards interactive engagement. Through websites, social media platforms, search engines, mobile applications, email marketing, and online advertising, organizations can speak directly with their target audiences and get immediate feedback. This transformation has improved firms' ability to understand consumer needs, personalize communication, and enhance customer experiences.

The relevance of digital marketing practices is further amplified in emerging economies like Nigeria, where rapid mobile penetration and increasing internet usage have transformed consumer behavior (Abdullateef & Salawudeen, 2020; Adebajo et al., 2020). In view of this, digital marketing allows SMEs to overcome geographical and financial barriers, reaching a broader audience with minimal investment. However, the effectiveness of these practices depends on the enterprise's digital literacy, infrastructure, and understanding of consumer engagement strategies (Oghojafor et al., 2021). Scholars have emphasized that successful digital marketing is not merely

about adopting technology but about integrating it into a coherent strategy that aligns with consumer expectations and business goals (Salawudeen et al., 2020; Tuten & Solomon, 2023). Digital marketing is mostly valuable to SMEs because it provides cost effective opportunities to reach large audiences without the substantial financial commitments associated with traditional advertising channels such as television, radio, and print media. Subsequently, SMEs increasingly rely on digital marketing strategies to improve competitiveness, customer acquisition, and business performance. This literature identifies different major dimensions of digital marketing that influence consumer behavior and organizational performance.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is the purposeful use of social media platforms like Facebook Instagram Twitter, and TikTok to advertise products, engage customers, and build brand communities (Olusanya et al. 2025). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) have become important marketing channels because they smoothly help with direct communication between businesses and consumers. Social media marketing enables organizations to create content, engage customers, respond to inquiries, collect feedback, and foster long term relationships. Through social media engagement, businesses can increase brand awareness, improve customer trust, and influence purchasing behavior. Recent studies indicate that consumers increasingly rely on social media platforms for product information, peer recommendations, customer reviews, and purchasing inspiration. The effectiveness of social media marketing is largely attributed to its interactive nature. Unlike traditional advertising, social media allows consumers to actively participate in conversations, share experiences, and contribute user generated content. Such interactions often enhance consumer trust and positively influence purchase intentions. For SMEs, social media marketing provides a relatively affordable method of market penetration and customer engagement. By leveraging social media tools, SMEs can compete with larger organizations despite limited marketing budgets.

2.3 Content Marketing

Content marketing is the creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent content designed to attract and retain a clearly defined audience. The primary objective of content marketing is not direct selling but rather to grow trust, credibility, and long-term customer relationships. Content marketing includes: blog articles, educational videos, infographics, podcasts, case studies, customers testimonials, industry reports etc. In many Nigerian urban centers, foreign products still enjoy a perception of superior quality over locally made alternatives. However, well-crafted content anchored on originality, creativity, or local identity can gradually reshape this perception. Abuh (2025) found that digital storytelling and active brand engagement online changed how young consumers viewed Made-in-Nigeria clothing brands, while Uzoaku et al. (2025) reported that the perceived credibility and relatability of influencer content significantly increased willingness to purchase locally made fashion items. This suggests that content marketing does not necessarily act on consumers instantly, rather, it works gradually beneath surface level reactions, shaping attitudes and perceptions that later translate into purchase decisions. In the context of SMEs, content marketing can support customer education, enhance brand visibility, and strengthen organizational reputation. As consumers increasingly seek information online before making purchasing decisions, content marketing has become an essential component of modern marketing strategies.

2.4 Email Marketing

Email marketing involves the use of electronic mail to communicate promotional messages, newsletters, product updates, and personalized offers to a targeted list of subscribers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Despite the advent of newer digital platforms, email marketing remains one of the most widely utilized digital marketing tools due to its relatively low cost and high level of measurability and return on investment. Successful email marketing campaigns are built on segmentation, personalization, and automation, allowing businesses to deliver relevant content based on consumer preferences, purchase history, and engagement levels (Salawudeen & Suleiman, 2018; Tuten & Solomon, 2023). Personalized emails have been shown to increase open rates, click through rates, and conversion rates, thereby enhancing both customer acquisition and retention (Kotler et al., 2023). In Nigeria context for SMEs, email marketing offers an effective mechanism for customer retention, relationship management, and repeat purchases. Through regular communication, businesses can reinforce customer loyalty and encourage long-term patronage.

2.5 Online Advertising

Online advertising is paid promotional activities conducted through digital platforms. These advertisements may appear on websites, search engines, social media platforms, mobile applications, and video sharing platforms.

Online advertising offers several advantages over traditional advertising methods, including:

- Audience targeting
- Real-time performance measurement
- Cost efficiency
- Behavioral tracking
- Personalization

Digital advertising enables organizations to reach specific demographic groups based on age, location, interests, browsing behavior, and purchasing history. Such targeting capabilities improve marketing effectiveness and increase the likelihood of influencing consumer purchase decisions. Research suggests that online advertising contributes significantly to brand awareness, product recognition, and purchase intention when consumers perceive advertisements as relevant, informative, and trustworthy.

2.6 Customer Engagement in Digital Marketing

Customer engagement is the psychological and behavioral interactions that occur between consumers and brands through digital platforms. Engagement can take various forms, which are: likes, comments, reviews, recommendations, direct messages, online discussions etc.

Engaged consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward brands, exhibit higher levels of trust, and make purchasing decisions. Customer engagement serves as an important mechanism through which digital marketing activities influence consumer behavior.

Digital platforms have significantly expanded opportunities for customer engagement by enabling real time communication and interactive experiences. Businesses that actively engage customers often experience improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy.

2.7 Consumer Purchase Decisions

Consumer purchase decision refers to the process through which individuals select, purchase, use, and evaluate products or services to satisfy needs and wants. According to consumer behavior

theory originally articulated by Kotler and Keller (2016) and subsequently refined by Armstrong and Kotler (2021), purchase decision process comprises of five stage which includes:

1. **Problem Recognition:** The consumer identifies a need or desire.
2. **Information Search:** The consumer seeks information about available solutions.
3. **Evaluation of Alternatives:** Different products or brands are compared.
4. **Purchase Decision:** A choice is made regarding the preferred product.
5. **Post-Purchase Evaluation:** The consumer assesses satisfaction after consumption.

In the digital era, this decision-making process has become increasingly non-linear, with consumers moving fluidly between stages, influenced by a continuously shifting mix of digital touchpoints. Hidayat, Anas, and Diwasasri (2023) demonstrate that consumers now actively participate in online activities ranging from communication to opinion sharing and information distribution, all of which exert influence on purchase decisions across communities. Chen and Lin (2022) found that viral and user-generated content, a key output of social media marketing, materially shapes consumers' evaluation of alternatives and purchase intent, particularly for low-to-moderate-involvement product categories common in the SME retail space.

Digital marketing influences each of these stages by providing information, facilitating comparisons, reducing uncertainty, and strengthening brand relationships. Through reviews, ratings, testimonials, and social interactions, consumers obtain information that shapes their purchase intentions and final decisions.

2.8 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria

SMEs represent one of the most important sectors of the Nigerian economy. They contribute significantly to employment generation, entrepreneurship development, poverty reduction, and economic diversification. According to reports by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), SMEs account for a substantial proportion of business establishments and employment opportunities in Nigeria.

Despite their economic importance, Nigerian SMEs face persistent structural challenges. PwC's MSME Survey (2024) reveals that 67% of surveyed SMEs reported a decrease in product and service demand during the survey period, with 38% attributing this to the high cost of products driven by inflationary pressures and 36% citing the low purchasing power of consumers. Macroeconomic headwinds, including naira devaluation, headline inflation of 28.92% recorded in December 2023, and rising energy costs, compound the competitive difficulty (PwC, 2024). Against this backdrop, cost-effective digital marketing channels represent a vital means of customer acquisition and retention for resource constrained SMEs. The digital marketing adoption literature specific to Nigerian SMEs highlights a growing but uneven landscape. Bollweg et al. (2020) documented the slow adoption of digital marketing by SMEs globally and recommended research on tailored adoption strategies, while Rafinda (2021) identified insufficient business knowledge and digital literacy as key barriers to effective deployment. In the Nigerian context, Ajayi et al. (2024) examined marketing innovation and performance among SMEs in Oyo, confirming that digital marketing capability is increasingly a differentiating factor for SME performance.

Beyond these market specific pressures, Nigerian SMEs continue to contend with structural challenges that shape the extent to which they can adopt and benefit from digital marketing, including:

- Limited access to finance
- Inadequate infrastructure

- Intense competition
- Marketing constraints
- Technological limitations

Digital marketing provides SMEs with opportunities to overcome some of these challenges by expanding market reach, improving customer communication, and reducing promotional costs. Consequently, understanding the relationship between digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions is particularly important within the SME context.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theories:

1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
2. The Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action model (AIDA)
3. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

These theories provide a strong foundation for explaining how digital marketing strategies influence consumer attitudes, intentions, and purchasing behavior.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model remains one of the most extensively applied theoretical frameworks in digital marketing research. TAM proposes that two primary factors determine an individual's willingness to use technology:

- **Perceived Usefulness:** This is the degree to which an individual believes that using a technology will improve performance or outcomes.
- **Perceived Ease of Use:** The degree to which an individual believes that using a technology requires minimal effort.

According to TAM, when consumers perceive digital platforms as useful and easy to use, they are more likely to engage with digital marketing content and adopt online purchasing behaviors.

Within this study, TAM explains how consumers' perceptions of digital marketing platforms influence engagement, trust, purchase intention, and ultimately purchase decisions.

In the digital marketing context, TAM explains both the SME operator's decision to adopt digital marketing tools and the consumer's decision to engage with digitally marketed products (Davis, 1989; Theoharakis & Mylonopoulos, 2022). For Nigerian SMEs, TAM's explanatory power is particularly relevant given the documented variability in digital literacy and infrastructure quality. When consumers perceive digital platforms as easy to navigate and the products promoted thereon as clearly useful and credible, their behavioural intention to purchase is significantly strengthened. Conversely, poor user experience, driven by slow loading times, confusing interfaces, or unclear product information, can suppress purchase intent irrespective of the quality of the underlying product.

The Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action, Model (AIDA)

The Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action model (AIDA), provides a sequential framework for understanding how marketing communication moves a consumer from initial brand awareness to a completed purchase transaction. First articulated by Strong (1925) and subsequently developed in marketing literature, AIDA maps naturally onto digital marketing strategies, social media marketing and SEO principally serve the awareness and interest stages. Content marketing and email campaigns cultivate desire, and targeted promotional offers, simplified checkout

experiences, and influencer endorsements catalyze action. The AIDA model has been operationalized in the Nigerian context to assess digital advertising effectiveness.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior was developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991 as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action. TPB proposes that behavioral intentions are influenced by three key factors:

- **Attitude Toward the Behavior:** An individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a behavior.
- **Subjective Norms:** Social pressures or influences affecting behavior.
- **Perceived Behavioral Control:** The extent to which individuals believe they can successfully perform a behavior. According to TPB, consumers are more likely to make purchases when they possess positive attitudes toward products, receive favorable social influence, and believe they have the resources and ability to complete the transaction. Digital marketing influences these determinants through persuasive communication, customer reviews, influencer recommendations, social proof, and interactive engagement. Thus, TPB provides a useful framework for understanding how digital marketing activities translate into consumer purchase intentions and actual purchasing behavior.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This paper adopts a conceptual review design rather than an empirical survey or experimental design. The study synthesizes existing conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to explain how digital marketing strategies may influence consumer purchase decisions among Nigerian SMEs and to develop a framework that can be subjected to future empirical testing.

3.2 Data and Literature Base

The analysis is based on the literature cited in the submitted manuscript, comprising foundational works on digital marketing and consumer behaviour, theoretical contributions, studies of SME digital marketing adoption and performance, and four recent Nigerian empirical studies selected for detailed comparison. The focal studies examine digital marketing in relation to SME performance, consumer buying behaviour, purchase intention, and consumer purchase decision. No primary respondent data were collected for this paper.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The literature was synthesized thematically around:

- I. Major digital marketing strategies
- II. Consumer purchase decision processes
- III. Theoretical explanations of technology use and behavioural intention, and
- IV. Nigerian empirical evidence.

The four focal empirical studies were compared in terms of variables, units of analysis, samples, research designs, statistical techniques, and reported explanatory power. The points of convergence and methodological divergence were then used to identify the research gap and formulate the proposed conceptual relationships.

3.5 Framework Development

The proposed framework was developed by integrating the mechanisms emerging from the literature with the Technology Acceptance Model, AIDA, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention are positioned as intervening mechanisms between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase decisions, while Nigerian contextual conditions are recognized as factors that may moderate the effectiveness of digital marketing.

4. Results: Synthesis of the Reviewed Evidence and Conceptual Framework

Empirical Evidence from Nigerian Studies

4.1 Empirical Review

Although digital marketing has become a prominent area of academic inquiry in Nigeria, empirical findings on its influence on consumer behaviour and SME outcomes remain scattered across studies that differ distinctly in their dependent variables, sampling approaches, and statistical techniques. This section reviews four recent Nigerian studies in detail, evaluates their findings against one another, and uses the points of agreement and disagreement among them to justify the conceptual framework proposed later in this paper.

Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) examined the combined influence of five digital marketing components: social media marketing, e-mail marketing, search engine marketing, mobile marketing, and internet marketing, on the performance of SMEs in Oyo State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, the study drew a sample of 397 SMEs through the Taro Yamane formula and convenience sampling, of which 374 questionnaires (94.2%) were validly retrieved and analyzed with multiple regression in SPSS 25. The result showed that the five digital marketing components jointly explained 63.2% of the variance in SME performance ($R^2 = 0.632$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.627$; $F(5,368) = 126.662$, $p < .001$), and every individual component was a significant positive predictor: social media marketing ($\beta = 0.241$), e-mail marketing ($\beta = 0.150$), search engine marketing ($\beta = 0.440$), mobile marketing ($\beta = 0.801$) and internet marketing ($\beta = 0.572$), all at $p < .001$. Mobile marketing emerged as the single strongest predictor, a finding the authors linked to the proliferation of smartphones among Nigerian SME operators and their customers.

It is worth noting, however, that this study measured SME performance rather than consumer purchase decisions directly. Its value to the present review lies chiefly in confirming, from the supply (business) side, that the same five digital marketing dimensions this paper is concerned with have measurable payoffs when Nigerian SMEs deploy them.

Adelakun, Bature and Bello (2025) moved the unit of analysis closer to the consumer by examining the effect of three digital marketing practices: mobile marketing, online affiliate marketing, and email marketing, on consumer buying behaviour among SMEs in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. A sample of 338 SME owners/managers was derived using Taro Yamane's formula, and 299 questionnaires (88.5%) were retrieved and analyzed. Because the authors ran three separate simple linear regressions rather than a single multiple regression, each predictor's explanatory power can be compared directly: mobile marketing accounted for 18.7% of the variance in consumer buying behaviour ($\beta = 0.432$, $R^2 = 0.187$, $F(1,297) = 68.42$, $p < .001$), online affiliate marketing accounted for 15.5% ($\beta = 0.394$, $R^2 = 0.155$, $F = 54.36$, $p < .001$), and email marketing produced the strongest single effect, accounting for 19.5% of the variance ($\beta = 0.443$, $R^2 = 0.195$, $F(1,297) = 72.18$, $p < .001$). All three hypotheses of no effect were therefore

rejected. The authors attributed email marketing's edge to its capacity for personalization and its comparatively low technical barrier to entry for resource constrained SMEs, while noting that online affiliate marketing's relatively weaker performance likely reflects the informality and lack of standardized agreements that still characterize Nigeria's influencer marketing ecosystem.

Eyika and Aliyu (2026) provide the most theoretically ambitious of the four studies by explicitly separating purchase intention from purchase behaviour and mapping each onto a distinct digital marketing communication dimension, drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. Working with customers of seven Made-in-Nigeria small enterprises in FCT-Abuja, the authors used Cochran's (1977) formula to compute a base sample of 384, inflated by a 20% non-response allowance to 461; 397 questionnaires (86%) were returned. Two regression models were tested. First, social media marketing was regressed on purchase intention and produced an unusually strong effect ($R = 0.776$, $R^2 = 0.603$, $F(1,395) = 602.894$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.776$), meaning social media marketing alone explained roughly 60% of the variance in consumers' intention to buy local goods. Second, content marketing was regressed on actual purchase behaviour and produced an even stronger effect ($R = 0.887$, $R^2 = 0.787$, $F(1,395) = 540.809$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 0.887$), explaining close to 79% of the variance in reported buying behaviour. Both null hypotheses were rejected. These effect sizes are considerably larger than those reported in the two studies above, which is most plausibly explained by the simple (bivariate) regression design used, the tighter product category focus (Made-in-Nigeria goods specifically, rather than SME output or buying behaviour in general), and the conceptual closeness between the "content marketing" construct as operationalized in that study and the purchase behaviour items it was regressed against. The comparatively large R^2 values should therefore be read with some caution rather than treated as directly comparable in magnitude to the multiple regression R^2 values reported by Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) or Adeoye et al. (2022).

Adeoye, Adesuyi, Asa and Ilesanmi (2022) is the Nigerian study whose dependent variable, consumer purchase decision, most directly matches the outcome variable of the present conceptual paper, and it is accordingly treated as the empirical anchor for the framework proposed in Section 6. The authors administered a validated questionnaire to 581 owner managers of SMEs across selected Local Government Areas in Oyo State, Nigeria, of which 412 responses were usable after data cleaning. A multiple regression of three digital marketing dimensions: social media marketing, content marketing, and online advertising, on consumer purchase decision produced a moderate but statistically significant model ($R = 0.654$, $R^2 = 0.428$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.424$; $F(3,409) = 101.989$, $p < .001$). All three predictors were individually significant: social media marketing ($B = 0.827$, $\beta = 0.421$, $p < .001$), content marketing ($B = 0.466$, $\beta = 0.212$, $p < .001$), and online advertising ($B = 0.216$, $\beta = 0.101$, $p = .041$), yielding the regression equation $CPD = 8.040 + 0.827SMM + 0.466CNM + 0.216ONA$. Social media marketing was, by a wide margin, the strongest of the three predictors, consistent with the emphasis subsequent studies (Adelakun et al., 2025; Eyika & Aliyu, 2026) place on social platforms as the primary entry point through which Nigerian SME customers first encounter promotional content. Importantly, the Adjusted R^2 of 0.424 means that 57.6% of the variance in consumer purchase decision was left unexplained, an indication that digital marketing dimensions alone, without accounting for intervening psychological states such as engagement, trust, or intention, cannot fully account for why Nigerian consumers ultimately buy from SMEs. This gap is precisely what the mediated framework proposed in Section 6 of the present paper is designed to address.

4.2 Cross-Study Comparison

Read together, the four studies converge on one central point. Every digital marketing dimension tested across all four studies: social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, online affiliate marketing, online advertising, search engine marketing, and internet marketing, was found to have a statistically significant, positive relationship with either an SME level outcome (performance) or a consumer level outcome (buying behaviour, purchase intention, or purchase decision). None of the four studies reported a null or negative finding for any digital marketing dimension examined. This consistency across different cities (Oyo, FCT-Abuja), different sampling frames (SME owners in three studies, end consumers in one), and different statistical techniques (multiple regression in two studies, simple regression in two) lends reasonable confidence to the proposition that digital marketing exerts a genuine, non-trivial influence on both business performance and consumer behaviour within the Nigerian SME sector. At the same time, the studies disagree, sometimes sharply, on which dimension matters most and by how much. Mobile marketing was the strongest predictor in Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) but only the second strongest of three predictors in Adelakun et al. (2025), email marketing was not tested at all in Adeoye et al. (2022) or Eyika and Aliyu (2026) yet emerged as the single strongest predictor where it was tested (Adelakun et al., 2025), and social media marketing's explained variance ranged from a modest 21 -24% contribution within a five predictor model (Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023) to over 60% in a bivariate model isolating it as the sole predictor of purchase intention (Eyika & Aliyu, 2026). This variation is unsurprising once methodological differences are taken into account. Bivariate regressions, of the kind used by Eyika and Aliyu (2026) and, in effect, by Adelakun et al. (2025), will typically inflate the apparent explanatory power of a single predictor relative to a multiple regression that must share variance among several correlated predictors, as in Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) and Adeoye et al. (2022). None of the four studies reports variance inflation factors or other multicollinearity diagnostics, which is a further reason to interpret the individual beta coefficients with some caution given that social media marketing, content marketing, and online advertising are conceptually and practically overlapping activities that Nigerian SMEs frequently deploy together rather than in isolation.

A second point of disagreement concerns what digital marketing is ultimately being measured against. Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) measured SME performance, a firm-level, largely financial construct, Adelakun et al. (2025) and Eyika and Aliyu (2026) measured consumer-level buying behaviour and purchase intention respectively, and only Adeoye et al. (2022) measured consumer purchase decision as such. Because these outcome variables are conceptually distinct, a firm can improve its performance metrics without a corresponding shift in individual consumer decision-making, and a consumer can form a strong purchase intention that does not convert into completed behaviour, direct numerical comparison across the four studies' R^2 values is not fully warranted. What can be said with more confidence is that, across the Nigerian SME literature, digital marketing dimensions consistently explain somewhere between roughly one-fifth and two-thirds of the variance in the outcome under study, with the remainder attributable to factors the reviewed studies did not model, among them trust, perceived risk, infrastructure quality, and macroeconomic conditions, all of which this paper's conceptual framework and its contextual moderators (Section 6) attempt to accommodate.

4.7 Evidence on Social Media Marketing

Across the four studies reviewed, social media marketing is the digital marketing dimension most consistently associated with strong, statistically significant effects, whether the outcome examined

is SME performance (Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023), purchase intention (Eyika & Aliyu, 2026), or purchase decision (Adeoye et al., 2022, where it was the strongest of three predictors). This is broadly consistent with the wider literature: Olusanya et al. (2025) found that social media engagement significantly predicted brand visibility and customer engagement among Nigerian high-tech brands, although their sample was drawn from a different product category and cannot be generalized directly to small-scale, locally owned enterprises. Taken together, the evidence suggests that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp function, for many Nigerian SMEs, as the primary gateway through which consumers first become aware of a brand, which is consistent with the AIDA model's positioning of social media at the awareness and interest stages of the consumer decision journey (Section 3.2). However, the reviewed studies also caution that a social media presence alone is not sufficient. Both Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023) and Adeoye et al. (2022) note that social media marketing worked best in combination with other digital marketing dimensions rather than as a stand-alone activity, which supports this paper's argument that customer engagement, rather than exposure alone, is the operative mechanism linking social media activity to purchase-related outcomes.

4.8 Evidence on Trust, Purchase Intention, and Purchase Behaviour

Only Eyika and Aliyu (2026) empirically separated purchase intention from purchase behaviour, and their finding that content marketing had an even stronger relationship with actual purchase behaviour ($\beta = 0.887$) than social media marketing had with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.776$) is one of the more theoretically interesting results in the Nigerian literature reviewed here. It suggests that, once a consumer's interest has been captured, sustained and substantive content, product storytelling, demonstrations of craftsmanship, and culturally relevant messaging, may do more to convert that interest into an actual transaction than the initial exposure that generated awareness in the first place. This is consistent with the sequential logic embedded in this paper's proposed conceptual framework, in which engagement and trust are positioned as necessary intervening states between exposure to digital marketing and the final purchase decision, rather than digital marketing exposure translating into purchase decisions directly. None of the four studies reviewed here formally measured brand trust as a mediating variable, which is itself a notable gap. The mediating role that this paper assigns to trust remains, at the time of writing, empirically untested within the Nigerian SME literature and is proposed here as a testable proposition (Section 7) rather than an established finding.

4.9 Synthesis of Empirical Evidence

Collectively, the four studies establish reasonably strong, converging evidence that digital marketing dimensions are positively and significantly associated with both SME performance and consumer level outcomes in Nigeria. They also, taken together, expose three limitations that motivate the conceptual contribution of this paper. First, none of the four studies tests an integrated model that treats social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, and online advertising as simultaneous predictors of consumer purchase decision specifically. Each study instead combines a subset of two to five dimensions, and only one (Adeoye et al., 2022) regresses directly onto consumer purchase decision. Second, none of the four studies tests customer engagement, brand trust, or purchase intention as mediating variables between digital marketing exposure and the ultimate outcome, despite each study's discussion section gesturing informally toward such mechanisms. Third, all four studies are cross-sectional and confined to specific Nigerian cities (Oyo State or FCT -Abuja), none employs longitudinal data or extends

beyond these two geographic clusters, which limits the extent to which their findings can be generalized to Nigeria's more rural or northern SME markets. These three gaps directly inform the identified research gaps in Section 5 and the mediated conceptual framework proposed in Section 6.

4.10 SMEs and Digital Marketing Adoption

Beyond the four core studies reviewed above, the wider literature on SME digital marketing adoption in Nigeria and other developing economies consistently highlights the benefits, and the constraints, of digital marketing adoption. SMEs frequently face limited marketing budgets and constrained market access, and digital platforms offer a comparatively affordable alternative to traditional advertising. Studies show that SMEs utilizing digital marketing strategies frequently report improvements in customer acquisition, customer retention, brand awareness, and business performance (Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023; Bollweg et al., 2020). However, adoption remains uneven because of factors such as:

- Limited digital skills
- Financial constraints
- Technological barriers
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Cybersecurity concerns

These challenges are particularly relevant within developing economies such as Nigeria and form part of the contextual moderators incorporated into the conceptual framework proposed in Section 6.

4.11 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature and the theoretical foundations of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains the mechanisms through which digital marketing strategies influence consumer purchase decisions among SMEs in Nigeria.

The framework suggests that digital marketing strategies influence consumer purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention.

Independent Variable

Digital Marketing Strategies

Dimensions:

- Social Media Marketing
- Content Marketing
- Email Marketing
- Online Advertising

Mediating Variables

- **Customer Engagement:** Customer engagement represents the degree of interaction and participation between consumers and brands through digital platforms. Digital marketing activities create opportunities for consumers to interact with brands through likes, comments, shares, reviews, and discussions.

- **Brand Trust:** This refers to consumers' confidence in the reliability, credibility, and integrity of a brand. Trust reduces perceived risk and increases the likelihood of purchasing behavior.
- **Purchase Intention:** Purchase intention refers to the consumer's willingness and readiness to purchase a product or service. It serves as a critical predictor of actual purchase behavior.

Dependent Variable

- **Consumer Purchase Decision:** Consumer purchase decision represents the final action taken by consumers after evaluating available alternatives and deciding to purchase a product or service.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



The framework assumes that effective digital marketing strategies enhance customer engagement. Increased engagement strengthens trust in the brand, which subsequently improves purchase intention and ultimately influences consumer purchase decisions.

This framework integrates insights from TAM and TPB by recognizing that technological interactions influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, which eventually shape purchasing behavior. Building on the three theoretical foundations reviewed above and the empirical literature synthesized in Section 2, this study proposes the Digital Marketing Consumer Decision (DMCD) Framework for Nigerian SMEs. The framework integrates five digital marketing strategies with the five-stage consumer decision making process, identifies theoretical linkages, and incorporates a set of moderating contextual factors unique to the Nigerian environment.

Framework Architecture

The proposed framework is based on the premise that digital marketing activities create opportunities for meaningful interactions between businesses and consumers. Through social media campaigns, content creation, online advertisements, and personalized communication, businesses can increase consumer awareness and engagement. As engagement increases, consumers become more familiar with the brand and are more likely to develop trust. Trust subsequently reduces uncertainty and perceived risk associated with purchasing decisions. When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to develop positive purchase intentions, which ultimately increase the likelihood of actual purchase behavior. Consequently, customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention function as important mechanisms through which digital marketing influences consumer purchase decisions.

4.8 Research Propositions

Unlike empirical studies that formulate hypotheses for statistical testing, conceptual studies often develop propositions that can guide future empirical investigations. Based on the reviewed literature and theoretical foundations, the following propositions are advanced:

Proposition 1

Digital marketing strategies positively influence customer engagement among consumers of SMEs. This proposition is supported by literature indicating that digital platforms facilitate interaction, communication, and relationship-building between consumers and businesses.

Proposition 2

Customer engagement positively influences brand trust.

Consumers who actively engage with brands through digital platforms are more likely to develop trust and confidence in those brands.

Proposition 3

Brand trust positively influences purchase intention.

Consumers are more likely to express willingness to purchase products and services when they trust the organization promoting them.

Proposition 4

Purchase intention positively influences consumer purchase decisions.

Consumers who demonstrate strong purchase intentions are more likely to complete actual purchasing transactions.

Proposition 5

Digital marketing strategies indirectly influence consumer purchase decisions through customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention.

This proposition reflects the central argument of the conceptual framework and provides a basis for future empirical validation.

Proposition 6

Social media marketing exerts the strongest influence on consumer purchase decisions among digital marketing strategies employed by SMEs.

Given the widespread adoption of social media platforms among Nigerian consumers, social media marketing is expected to play a particularly significant role in influencing purchasing behavior.

Proposition 7

The effectiveness of digital marketing strategies is strengthened when consumers perceive digital platforms as useful and easy to use.

This proposition derives from the Technology Acceptance Model and highlights the importance of user perceptions in determining digital marketing effectiveness.

Proposition 8

Positive consumer attitudes and favorable subjective norms strengthen the relationship between digital marketing exposure and purchase intention.

This proposition is derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior and emphasizes the role of behavioral factors in consumer decision-making.

4.9 Theoretical Contribution

The proposed framework contributes to existing literature in several ways.

First, it extends the direct -effect model reported by Adeoye et al. (2022) by widening the set of digital marketing dimensions considered (adding email marketing and mobile marketing) and by proposing a mediated pathway to account for the substantial variance in consumer purchase decision their model left unexplained.

Second, it integrates digital marketing, consumer behavior, and SME research into a unified conceptual model.

Third, it combines the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior to provide a more comprehensive explanation of consumer responses to digital marketing activities.

Fourth, it identifies customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention as important mechanisms that explain how digital marketing strategies influence purchasing behavior, mechanisms that none of the Nigerian studies reviewed in Section 4 tested directly.

Finally, the framework provides a foundation for future empirical studies seeking to test, and compare against the Adeoye et al. (2022) baseline, digital marketing effectiveness among SMEs in Nigeria and other emerging economies.

Table 1. Core DMCD Framework Structure

Component	Constructs	Role in the Model	Expected Relationship
Independent variable	Social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, online advertising, mobile marketing.	Digital marketing inputs used by SMEs.	Expected to increase engagement and influence downstream consumer responses.
Mediators	Customer engagement, brand trust, purchase intention.	Psychological and behavioural mechanisms linking exposure to decision.	Expected sequential positive relationships.
Dependent variable	Consumer purchase decision	Final consumer outcome	Expected to increase as mediated mechanisms strengthen.
Contextual factors	Digital infrastructure quality, consumer digital literacy, trust/security perceptions, macroeconomic conditions.	Potential moderators	Expected to strengthen or weaken digital marketing effectiveness.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual pathway: Digital marketing strategies → Customer engagement → Brand trust → Purchase intention → Consumer purchase decision.

5. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this paper supports the broad claim that digital marketing has moved from a supplementary communication tool to a strategic business capability for Nigerian SMEs, but a closer, critical reading of the four empirical studies discussed in Section 4 suggests a more layered picture than that broad claim implies on its own.

The first point worth stressing is that the Nigerian evidence base is strong on association but largely silent on mechanism. Ilesanmi and Oyedepo (2023), Adelakun et al. (2025), Eyika and Aliyu (2026), and Adeoye et al. (2022) all demonstrate, with reasonably robust sample sizes and response rates, that digital marketing dimensions correlate significantly with either SME performance or consumer-level outcomes. None of them, however, tests why this relationship holds. Each study's discussion section gestures toward engagement, trust, or credibility as plausible explanations, but none operationalizes these constructs as mediating variables in its regression model.

This is not a minor omission: Adeoye et al.'s (2022) finding that digital marketing dimensions jointly explain only 42.8% of the variance in consumer purchase decision (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.424$) means well over half of the variation in why Nigerian consumers ultimately buy from SMEs is left unexplained by exposure to marketing activity alone. The conceptual framework proposed in Section 6 of this paper, which positions customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention as sequential mechanisms between digital marketing exposure and final purchase decision, is offered as one plausible account of what that unexplained variance might represent, and it is deliberately framed as a set of testable propositions (Section 7) rather than a settled finding.

Second, the studies disagree on which digital marketing dimension matters most, and this disagreement is at least partly a methodological artefact rather than purely a substantive one. Where a dimension was tested in isolation using simple regression, as with content marketing in Eyika and Aliyu (2026), its apparent explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.787$) was far higher than when comparable dimensions were tested jointly within a multiple regression model, as in Adeoye et al. (2022), where content marketing's independent contribution ($\beta = 0.212$) was considerably smaller once social media marketing and online advertising were entered alongside it. This pattern is consistent with shared variance among correlated predictors, a possibility none of the four studies formally investigated through multicollinearity diagnostics.

Practitioners and future researchers should therefore treat single predictor effect sizes reported in the Nigerian literature with some caution, and should be wary of concluding that any one digital marketing channel is universally "the most important" without accounting for how many other channels were controlled for in the same model.

Third, the reviewed literature is more confident about digital marketing's effect on business-level performance than on the granular, psychological stages of individual consumer decision-making. Only one of the four studies (Adeoye et al., 2022) measures consumer purchase decision directly, the others measure SME performance, consumer buying behaviour, or purchase intention, constructs that are related but not interchangeable. A firm can report improved performance metrics, such as higher sales volume or wider reach, without this necessarily reflecting a uniform shift in how individual consumers reason through the awareness-to-purchase sequence described by the AIDA model (Section 3.2).

This paper's insistence on separating the independent variable (digital marketing strategies) from the mediating psychological states (engagement, trust, intention) and the final dependent variable

(purchase decision) is intended to correct for this conflation, and is consistent with the one Nigerian study, Eyika and Aliyu (2026), that did distinguish between intention and behaviour and found that they are not driven identically by the same digital marketing dimension.

Fourth, the integration of the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior in this paper's framework is a genuine theoretical contribution precisely because the reviewed empirical studies do not test either theory directly. They measure regression relationships between marketing activities and outcomes without reference to perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes, or subjective norms as such. TAM explains why a Nigerian consumer with patchy internet connectivity or limited digital literacy might disengage from an otherwise well designed digital marketing campaign, regardless of the campaign's content quality, TPB explains why a consumer who finds a platform easy to use might still not purchase, if social pressure or perceived lack of control (over payment security, delivery reliability, or product authenticity, concerns documented in the wider adoption literature; Adebajo et al., 2020; Oghojafor et al., 2021) works against the purchase decision. Neither mechanism is visible in a bivariate or even a multiple regression of marketing activity on an outcome variable; both become visible only once mediating psychological constructs are built into the model, which is the specific contribution this paper's framework is intended to make.

Finally, all four studies reviewed here are geographically concentrated in Oyo State and FCT-Abuja, and all rely on cross-sectional survey data collected through convenience or purposive sampling of consumers or SME owner managers who were reachable at a single point in time. This is a reasonable and common approach for exploratory Nigerian SME research, but it means the reviewed evidence base cannot speak to whether digital marketing's influence on purchase decisions holds steady over time, or whether it generalizes to Nigeria's northern, rural, or peri-urban SME markets, where infrastructure quality, digital literacy, and trust in online transactions plausibly differ.

For Nigerian SMEs specifically, this suggests that digital marketing success is unlikely to depend on online presence alone, it depends on the quality of the resulting customer relationship, and the practical implication is that SMEs adopting digital marketing tools should treat engagement quality, responsiveness, and content credibility as outcomes to be managed deliberately, not as automatic by-products of simply being present on a platform.

5.1 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

Despite the growing body of Nigerian literature on digital marketing and consumer behaviour reviewed in Section 4, several specific gaps remain, the most important of which concerns this paper's relationship to the study closest to it in scope.

5.2 Position Relative to Adeoye et al. (2022)

Adeoye, Adesuyi, Asa, and Ilesanmi (2022) is, to date, the Nigerian study whose research question and dependent variable most closely resemble those of the present paper: both are concerned with how digital marketing strategies shape consumer purchase decisions among Nigerian SMEs. This paper does not claim to be the first to examine that relationship, and it is important to be explicit about what Adeoye et al. (2022) already established and what it did not. Their multiple regression of social media marketing, content marketing, and online advertising on consumer purchase decision ($R^2 = 0.428$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.424$) confirmed that these three dimensions matter, and identified social media marketing as the strongest of the three. It did not, however, test email marketing or mobile marketing, both of which other Nigerian studies reviewed in Section 4 (Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023; Adedokun et al., 2025) found to be significant, and in one case the

single strongest, predictors of related outcomes. Nor did it specify or test any mediating variable to explain the 57.6% of variance in consumer purchase decision its model left unaccounted for. This paper's contribution is therefore best understood as a targeted extension of Adeoye et al. (2022): widening the set of digital marketing dimensions under consideration, and proposing a mediated pathway, customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention, as a plausible explanation for the variance their direct-effect model could not capture.

5.3 Fragmented Research Focus

Beyond the specific case of Adeoye et al. (2022), the wider literature reviewed in Section 4 examines individual or small subsets of digital marketing dimensions in isolation, and no single Nigerian study has yet tested social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, and online advertising jointly against consumer purchase decision. Limited attention has therefore been devoted to developing an integrated framework that explains how the full range of digital marketing strategies collectively influence consumer purchase decisions.

5.4 Geographic Concentration

All Four Nigerian studies reviewed in Section 4 are drawn from Oyo State or FCT-Abuja. While this gives reasonable confidence that the findings hold within Nigeria's southern and central commercial corridors, none of the reviewed studies extends to northern, rural, or peri-urban SME markets, where infrastructure quality, digital literacy, and trust in online transactions plausibly differ. The generalizability of both the existing empirical findings and the framework proposed in this paper is, for now, correspondingly limited.

5.5 Inadequate Theoretical Integration

The reviewed empirical studies test regression relationships between marketing activities and outcomes without reference to the Technology Acceptance Model or the Theory of Planned Behavior. Few studies attempt to integrate either perspective, let alone both, into a framework capable of explaining digital marketing's influence from both a technological adoption and a behavioural intention standpoint.

5.6 Limited Conceptual and Mediated Models

Although the empirical evidence reviewed in Section 4 generally supports a relationship between digital marketing and consumer behaviour, none of the reviewed studies provides, or tests, a conceptual framework illustrating the psychological pathway through which digital marketing translates into a purchase decision. This study seeks to address this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates digital marketing strategies, customer engagement, brand trust, purchase intention, and consumer purchase decisions, positioned explicitly as an extension of, rather than a replacement for, the Adeoye et al. (2022) baseline.

5.7 Need for Future Empirical Validation

Existing research emphasizes direct relationships while overlooking potential mediating and moderating variables. Future studies are therefore needed to empirically test the mediated mechanisms proposed in this paper, ideally using the same or an extended set of digital marketing dimensions as Adeoye et al. (2022), so that the explanatory gain from adding mediators can be assessed directly against that existing baseline.

Limitations

This study is conceptual in nature and therefore does not include primary data collection or statistical testing. Consequently, the proposed relationships remain theoretical and require empirical validation. In addition, the review focuses primarily on the Nigerian SME context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings.

6. Conclusion

This study reviewed existing Nigerian literature on digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase decisions among SMEs, with particular attention to Adeoye et al. (2022), the study closest in scope to the present paper, and proposed a mediated conceptual framework that extends their direct-effect model. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the paper argues that digital marketing influences consumer purchase decisions indirectly through customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention, mechanisms that help account for the substantial variance in consumer purchase decision that direct-effect models such as Adeoye et al.'s (2022) leave unexplained.

The review demonstrates that digital marketing provides SMEs with significant opportunities to improve competitiveness, expand market reach, and strengthen customer relationships. However, the effectiveness of digital marketing depends on the quality of consumer interactions and the extent to which digital platforms are perceived as useful, credible, and trustworthy. The proposed framework contributes to the digital marketing literature by integrating theoretical perspectives and identifying mechanisms that can be examined in future empirical research. It also provides practical guidance for SME managers seeking to improve digital marketing effectiveness in emerging economies.

6.2 Practical Implications and Recommendations

Based on the review, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. SMEs should adopt integrated digital marketing strategies that combine social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, and online advertising.
2. Businesses should prioritize customer engagement through interactive and value driven digital content.
3. SME managers should invest in activities that strengthen brand trust, including transparent communication, timely customer support, and secure online transactions.
4. Policymakers should continue supporting digital transformation initiatives through improved internet infrastructure, digital literacy programmes, and SME capacity building.
5. Future researchers should empirically test the proposed conceptual framework across different industries and regions within Nigeria.

Future Research

Future studies should examine the proposed framework using quantitative methods such as Structural Equation Modelling or PLS-SEM. Researchers may also investigate the moderating effects of demographic characteristics, digital literacy, and industry type on the relationships among digital marketing strategies, customer engagement, brand trust, purchase intention, and consumer purchase decisions. Comparative studies involving other emerging economies would further enhance understanding of digital marketing effectiveness across diverse contexts.

6.3 Suggested Empirical Validation of the Framework

Although this paper is a conceptual review, the proposed framework can be empirically tested in future studies. Outlines below are a methodological approach that researchers may adopt to validate the conceptual model.

1. **Research Philosophy:** A future empirical investigation may adopt the positivist research philosophy, which assumes that objective reality can be measured using scientific methods. Positivism is appropriate because it enables researchers to test relationships among digital marketing strategies, customer engagement, brand trust, purchase intention, and consumer purchase decisions using quantitative techniques.

2. **Research Design:** A cross-sectional survey research design is recommended. This design allows data to be collected from consumers at a single point in time and is appropriate for examining relationships among variables within the proposed conceptual framework. Survey research has been widely applied in studies investigating consumer behaviour and digital marketing because it facilitates the collection of standardized data from relatively large samples.

3. **Target Population:** The target population should comprise consumers who have purchased products or services from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria using digital platforms such as:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- WhatsApp Business
- TikTok
- Company websites
- E-commerce platforms.

Respondents should have prior experience interacting with SMEs through digital marketing channels.

4. **Sampling Technique:** A multistage sampling approach may be adopted. First, major commercial cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kano, and Ibadan may be selected. Second, SMEs operating in sectors such as retail, fashion, food services, beauty, education, hospitality, and technology may be identified. Finally, consumers with prior online purchasing experience may be selected using purposive or convenience sampling.

5. **Sample Size:** Future researchers may determine sample size using established statistical formulas such as those proposed by Yamane (1967) or Cochran (1977), depending on the study population. To improve statistical power, a sample of 300–500 respondents are recommended.

6. **Data Collection Instrument:** Primary data may be collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of six sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic Information
- **Section B:** Digital Marketing Strategies
- **Section C:** Customer Engagement
- **Section D:** Brand Trust

- **Section E:** Purchase Intention
- **Section F:** Consumer Purchase Decision

Each construct may be measured using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Measurement items should be adapted from validated scales reported in previous digital marketing and consumer behaviour studies.

Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire should undergo expert review to establish content validity.

Construct validity may be examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Internal consistency reliability may be assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with values of 0.70 or above considered acceptable.

Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) may also be computed to assess convergent validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis may proceed in four stages:

1. Descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' characteristics.
2. Correlation analysis to examine relationships among variables.
3. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the conceptual framework.
4. Mediation analysis to examine the roles of customer engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate because it accommodates complex conceptual models and latent constructs while requiring fewer assumptions regarding data distribution, and is well suited to mediation-heavy models of the kind proposed in this paper (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

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