



DIGITAL MARKETING ADOPTION AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM MAASAI BEADING BUSINESSES IN KAJIADO COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been incorporating digital tools in their operations to stay competitive in their respective markets. Digital marketing has become a need for every business to survive the competition in the global market. This is especially true for businesses in the fashion industry in Kenya. A lot of research has been conducted on the role of digital marketing in the performance of businesses in Kenya, but little has been done on Maasai beading fashion businesses. This study, aimed to investigate the use of digital marketing and business performance of small and medium Maasai beading fashion businesses in Kajiado County. The study used a descriptive research design with a mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The data was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule and a structured observation checklist. A multistage sampling technique was used in the study including: cluster, systematic random and purposive sampling methods. A chi square test of independence at the 0.05 significance level was used to test the relationship between the digital marketing tools; social media marketing, electronic word of mouth and mobile marketing as used by the businesses and their performance. The study found that while there was a significant association between the adoption of digital marketing and performance of the Maasai beading fashion business, it did not show a causative relationship. The study concluded that digital marketing was a significant catalyst in the performance of the beading businesses but was not a sole influence in their performance. The study recommends that the county government and CBOs ought to come up with training programs for Maasai beading fashion businesses to enable them come up with marketing policies that support their digital marketing efforts. In addition, beading entrepreneurs should put effort into intentional and strategic implementation of digital marketing. Finally training providers and development partners should invest providing functional adult literacy training that includes digital skills specific to multilingual communities.

KEYWORDS: SMEs, Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth, Mobile Marketing, Business Performance, Maasai Beading Businesses.

INTRODUCTION

The digital journeys of SMEs have taken on different faces depending on the extent to which they adopted digital tools in their different operations. Businesses and especially SMEs encountered challenges after the Covid-19 pandemic that made it a necessity to move into the digital realm (Page, et al., 2023). In an attempt to stay competitive and relevant in their different market, the Kenyan fashion industry has not been left behind in this move. This is illustrated by Phenny, O., & Jeremiah, N. (2022) in their study of the effects of digital marketing on the performance of the fashion industry in Kisumu County.

The massive adoption numbers of digital marketing over the years, are a testimony to how beneficial a marketing strategy it has been to businesses, their customers and other stakeholders. In comparison to the traditional marketing channels where there has perhaps been a lot of use of printing resources, digital marketing is cost effective since it is paperless according to Kalsi & R. (2022).

The Internet of Things (IoT) has enabled businesses to collect data on their customers. Alnaim et al. (2023) add that the upside to this, is that businesses are able to centrally collect and store this information. This data is then used to predict their customers preferences and future needs (Behzadi, M., & Bakhtiary, J., 2022).

Digital marketing is able to quickly promote their products according to Kalsi & R. (2022). Digital marketing tools are also often used to reach many within a short period of time as illustrated by Balli, A., Bakanlıgı & S. (2023).

According to Bala, M., & Verma, D. (2018) digital marketing provides a platform for customers to interact with the business in real-time. This ultimately fosters a great relationship between the business and its customers as explained by Fatoki (2021).



Digital marketing offers customers, businesses, vendors and other stakeholders the benefit of transparency with information. This includes transparent pricing, which makes sure that pricing information is available online. Bala et al. (2018) suggest that this has greatly improved the relationship between all the parties involved.

Despite so many benefits with digital marketing, there have been some major struggles with the adoption and during its use in businesses. According to Mishra (2022) there is a risk of data loss, data breach and other privacy issues. The risk of hacking sometimes has businesses held at ransom with their data at risk of theft or exposure to others in the same line of business.

While we recognize that digital marketing is significantly cheaper than other channels in traditional marketing, there are still some costs involved in its adoption. These budget constraints in a business can restrict the channels at their disposal for promotion Pandya (2023) adds. Guzana, M., & Msosa, K., (2022) add that due to the need for multiple digital marketing channels, both customers and businesses at times get overwhelmed. Businesses are not able to pick the right mix of tools for their promotion.

In adoption of digital marketing businesses have also experienced challenges in customer satisfaction. This is a very sensitive bit of running a business that sometimes results in bad customer reviews online, Rezende (2021) reports. While word of mouth can be instrumental in the growth and success of a business, it can also be the death of the business.

This study focused on the Dynamic Capability View. Dynamic capability refers to a business' capacity to blend, create and remodel external and internal resources to address a rapidly changing environment as illustrated by Teece, Pisano, and S (2022). This suggests that the business ought to use its core competencies to rework interim competitive positions that can be used to create a long-term competitive edge.

In the case of digital marketing, businesses are able to make use of digital tools to gain competitive advantage in their respective markets. DeLane (2024) highlights that competing with bigger brands in the market can prove to be difficult since they have the man power and financial resources to come up with and execute incredible marketing strategies. Digital marketing tools such as social media, electronic word of mouth, Mobile Marketing among others enable small and medium businesses to level the playing field. These account for the external and internal resources that give businesses that competitive edge in a rapidly changing environment.

Over the years, there has been a lot of research and information acquired on digital marketing; (Kawira, Mukulu, & Odhiambo, 2019) (Tien et al., 2020)(Phenny, et al., 2022). However, there is barely any information on Maasai beading fashion businesses, how they run and the type of marketing they employ to reach their target audience. The *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* states that digital maturity of a business goes hand in hand with its performance (Herman, 2022). Therefore, this study sought to examine the performance of Maasai beading fashion businesses in regards to their adoption of digital marketing tools.

METHODOLOGY

This study applied a descriptive research design since it was resourceful in observing and comparing data, while allowing room for both qualitative and quantitative data. This design used a mixed methods approach, specifically, a convergent parallel design. This approach improved the depth of understanding the variables under investigation as well as the validity of the study.

The respondents of the study were 60 women from registered co-operatives of women dealing in Maasai beading fashion in Kajiado County. The study applied a multistage sampling technique for data collection. This involved cluster sampling, systematic random sampling and purposive sampling. Cluster sampling to group the co-operatives based on their geographical locations, systematic random sampling to select co-operatives guided by a calculated interval and finally purposive sampling was used to identify two key informants within each selected group. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule and a structured observation checklist as the research instruments. The instruments measured the digital marketing tools used by Maasai beading fashion businesses as well as their financial and non-financial performance.

Validation of the study instruments was done through the use of the pre-test, which assisted in the designing and revising the research instruments. The reliability of the instruments was tested using the inter-rater agreements, specifically the Cohen' Kappa.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the demographic data collected such as; gender, age and education levels, location of the enterprise, length of operation of the business and products sold by the businesses. A chi square test of independence at the 0.05 significance level was used to test the relationship between the digital marketing tools used by the businesses and their performance. Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Age Distribution of Business Owners

Age	Frequency (N)	Cumulative Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
31-40	20	20	33.9
41-50	18	38	30.5
51-60	13	51	22.1
61-70	5	56	8.5
20-30	3	59	5
Total	59		100

Age Distribution of Business Owners

The results as illustrated in Table 1 demonstrate that 33.9% of the respondents were between the age of 31 and 40, followed by 41-50 years who represented 30.5% of the respondents and finally respondents between 51-60 years making up 22.1%. These three groups made up a majority of the respondents (51). On the other hand, only 8.5% of the respondents between 61 and 70 years and 5% were between the age of 20 and 30. These results were an indication that majority of the respondents are part of the economically active age bracket in Kenya.

Table 2. Level of Education and Training of Participants

Level of Education	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
No formal education	13	21.7
Formal Education	40	66.6
Non-formal education	7	11.7
Total	60	100

Level of Education and Training of Participants

The findings on Table 2, show that the highest level of education of the business owners was formal education with 66.6% of the respondents having attained this level. The respondents having no formal education represented 21.7% while those with non-formal education were the least at 11.7%.

Digital Marketing Adoption

Table 3. Types of Digital Marketing Tools in Use

Tools	Frequency (N)	Level of Use
WhatsApp	24	1
Facebook	15	2
TikTok	5	3
Mobile Marketing	5	3
Instagram	1	4

Ranking Key: 1- Most Used, 4- Least Used

Types of Digital Marketing Tools in Use

The findings in Table 3 show that WhatsApp was the most commonly used digital marketing tool with 24 respondents using the tool. This was followed by Facebook with 15 respondents reporting regular use. TikTok and mobile marketing both ranked third with 5 respondents reporting the use of each of the tools. Instagram was the least used digital marketing tool with only 1 respondent reporting using it to market her beaded products.

Table 4. Acquisition Channels

Acquisition Channels	Level of Use	Frequency (N)
Referrals through Word of Mouth	1	60
Referrals through Electronic word of mouth	2	41
Social media	3	27

Ranking Key: 1- Most Used, 2- Moderately Used, 3- Least Used

Acquisition Channels

The findings as shown in Table 4 indicate that 60 of the businesses acquired new customers through traditional word of mouth, making this channel the most used. There were 41 businesses that acquired new customers through referrals from electronic word of mouth. Finally, 27 of the businesses were able to get new customers through social media platforms, such as; Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram

Business Performance

Table 5. Employee Numbers in the Maasai Beading Fashion Businesses

Employee Numbers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	49	81.7
1-5	8	13.3
6-10	1	1.7
11-15	2	3.3
Total	60	100

Employee Numbers in the Enterprises

Table 5 shows that 81.7% of the businesses had no employees, while only 13.3% had up to 5 employees, only 1.7% of the businesses had between 6 and 10 employees. Finally, the businesses that had the largest number of employees (11-15) employees represented 3.3% of Maasai beading fashion businesses. This is an indication that a majority of the Maasai Beading Fashion Businesses are still run as sole proprietorship enterprises.

Table 6. Monthly Sales

Monthly Sales (Ksh.)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
251,000 - 300,000	4	6.7	6.7
201,000 - 250,000	1	1.7	8.4
101,000 - 150,000	1	1.7	10.1
51,000 - 100,000	13	21.6	31.7
Less than 50,000	41	68.3	100
	60	100	

Monthly Sales

The findings in Table 6 show that 68.3% of the beading businesses, a majority, made less than Ksh. 50,000 in monthly sales. It was also evident that only 31.7 % made over Ksh. 50,000 in monthly sales.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Table 7. Test of the Relationship between Digital Marketing Tools and Business Performance

Digital Marketing Tool	χ^2	p-value	df	Decision
Social Media Marketing	13.13	0.0003	1	Significant
Electronic Word of Mouth	4.78	0.03	1	Significant
Mobile Marketing	3.28	0.07	1	Not Significant

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to statistically examine the existence of a relationship between adoption of social media and performance of Maasai beading fashion businesses. The test was done using categorized monthly sales as an indicator of performance of the businesses, while the adoption was broken down into categories of high adopters and low adopters.

The Chi-Square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the adoption of social media marketing and performance among Maasai beading fashion businesses in Kajiado County ($\chi^2 = 13.13$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). The Chi-Square test revealed no statistically significant association between the adoption of mobile marketing and business performance among Maasai beading fashion businesses in Kajiado County ($\chi^2 = 3.28$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.05$). The Chi-Square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the adoption of electronic word-of-mouth and performance among Maasai beading fashion businesses in Kajiado County ($\chi^2 = 4.78$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$).



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between the adoption of social media marketing as well as electronic word of mouth and the performance of Maasai beading fashion businesses (See Table 7). On the other hand, the study findings revealed no statistically significant relationship between adoption of mobile marketing and the performance of Maasai beading fashion businesses (See Table 7). Businesses categorized as high adopters of digital marketing are more likely to report higher monthly sales in comparison to low adopters. These findings are supported by Tajvidi, R., & Karami, A. (2021) who indicate that digital engagement plays an important role in influencing a business' positive outcomes.

This relationship suggests that digital marketing tools boost market visibility and customer reach, which eventually contributes to increased sales performance as supported by Mohamed (2025). As revealed by the respondents, the active use of digital marketing tools positions a business to access wider markets beyond their local communities.

In comparison, the businesses that were classified as low adopters were found to primarily rely on traditional marketing strategies such as referrals through word of mouth. While these methods have sustained the businesses through basic operations, they limit opportunities for expansion of the businesses and higher revenue generation. Studies (Ayokunmi, et al., 2022) corroborate that SMEs using digital tools in their operations tend to outperform those relying on traditional approaches.

Additionally, the findings further imply that adoption of digital marketing acts as an enabling factor in boosting of business growth, rather than being a sole determinant of a business' performance. The relationship between adoption of digital marketing and performance of these businesses was impacted by other influences such as consistency in usage of the platforms, education levels of business owners, business size, digital skills and market access. These findings align with findings by Wu et al. (2024) who note that the effectiveness of digital marketing is likely influenced by complementary factors such as the entrepreneur's level of education and digital skills, frequency and consistency of online engagement as well the ability to strategically utilize different platforms.

These results are consistent with existing literature (Ayokunmi et al., 2022 ; Pellegrino, A., & Abe, M., 2023) which reveals the role of digital marketing in enhancing competitiveness, market access and performance among SMEs. In conclusion, the study establishes that improved and effective adoption of digital marketing, can significantly improve the performance of Maasai beading businesses, particularly in terms of sales and market expansion.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that demographic aspects such as education levels, geographic location and gender play a substantial role in the adoption and use of digital marketing among the businesses. The businesses also mainly run as small scale enterprises which are often defined by informality, fair financial returns and low employment numbers.

Adoption of digital marketing among Maasai beading fashion businesses remains low, irregular and unplanned with businesses mainly relying on WhatsApp and electronic word of mouth instead of organized digital efforts. The study also concludes that the adoption of digital marketing among the businesses had benefits such as improved business visibility, better access to new customers, improved communication but did not convert into quantifiable financial benefits. There are also constraints to the adoption of digital marketing among the businesses which include; skill and knowledge gaps, fraud and infringement fears as well as financial constraints.

The study concluded that there is a substantial relationship between the adoption of digital marketing and the performance of Maasai beading fashion businesses in Kajiado County. This relationship is not a causative one but shows that digital marketing has the potential to improve the performance of businesses if implemented strategically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the County Government and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) design and implement training programs on coming up with marketing policies that support adoption of digital marketing by the Maasai beading fashion business owners.

In addition, there is a need for creation of supportive policies that encourage the use of digital marketing tools in the beadwork industry. These policies could support inexpensive internet access, protection of intellectual property of cultural fashion designs and communal digital hubs.



Business owners are encouraged to be more intentional with the use of digital marketing tools for their businesses. Collective digital presence by the cooperatives will also relieve the pressure of individual marketing efforts, especially for those who are unable to do it on their own.

Further research may expand into; Factors affecting the adoption of digital marketing among small and medium Maasai beading fashion businesses as well as resource constraints and the adoption of digital marketing among Maasai beading fashion businesses

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