

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PLATFORMS ON SALES PERFORMANCE OF SAFARICOM PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY, KENYA

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Abstract: Technology is rapidly changing, and companies in the telecommunications industry must remain adaptable to remain competitive. When it comes to spreading brand awareness in the appropriate target market, marketers today face a constant challenge. In recent years, the digital market and marketing techniques have evolved dramatically, and they continue to evolve to meet the needs of today's addressable market. Based on this, this study examined the influence of social media marketing platforms on sales performance of Safaricom Public Limited Company, Kenya. Employment of descriptive research design was done. Safaricom Plc's marketing department, was the study population. The study's population consisted of 100 sales managers and 2000 sales representatives from the marketing department of the organization. To ensure that all respondents are adequately represented, they were divided into two groups using a stratified sampling technique. A simple random sampling method was used to select the respondents. There were 210 respondents in the sample, with 10 sales managers and 200 sales representatives. A questionnaire in a structured form was used in collecting data. Airtel Kenya was the organization where pilot study of 34 participants was done to evaluate the questionnaires' validity and reliability. Validity was tested using content validity through engaging the supervisor to evaluate the contents of the questionnaire. Reliability was tested using Cronbach alpha test where a 0.8 alpha value was sought. Further, the study carried out inferential analysis that include; correlation and multiple regressions analysis to establish how each variable influences the other. Social media marketing platforms was found to have a positive and significant influence on the sales performance. It was concluded that Safaricom has used social media marketing channels to increase revenue, attract traffic to websites, promote its brand, and form long-term relationships with its consumers. The study recommended that Safaricom has to figure out which social media channel their target audience spends the most time on.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing Platforms, Sales Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent and internet acceptance within industry has removed the barriers of time, distance, and communication, transforming the world into a small village. Major changes are taking place in the way businesses are being designed for success in today's economy (Kannan, 2017). According to Yasmin, Tasneem, and Fatema (2018), the coming of digital advertising from 1990s and 2000s has drastically changed the way in which utilization by the organization on marketing their brands and promoting them through these advanced innovations. According to Yasmin, Tasneem, and Fatema (2018), digital marketing campaigns are booming and flourishing as computerized discussions become progressively incorporated within the daily advertisement methods, and as persons use advanced devices against the virtual stores. As a result, digital marketing strategies around the world are fundamentally changing and will continue to change the mindset of marketing and performance in global markets.

The sector of marketing through digital platforms has come up with various channels of digital marketing that are assisting the marketers to reach the intended audience and thus become attracted to their products and services they are advertising (Chaston & Mangles, 2015). In addition, Chaston and Mangles (2015) recognize that digital marketing creates a need for a product to establish a strong online presence and produce an image that is relevant to the platform used and their vision and mission. Sheth and Sharma (2017) point out that because digital media is everywhere, consumers can have data anytime at any point. Internet use continues to grow globally, as digital becomes the most important source of competitive profit in both B2C and B2B marketing. As a result, much emphasis has been placed on the great opportunities offered by digital marketing.

According to Kuster and Canales (2018), organizations want to increase sales to increase their resources and market size. Because of market rivalry, a few techniques are being created to maintain after attracting customers to increase sales and thus remain on a profitable path. Marketing development, on the other hand, depends on the marketing skills of business organizations. As a result, the marketing concept is based on the idea that the app helps to improve business performance. In addition, marketing is considered a business test to determine the impact of its use on key business entities such as market share and sales growth. As a result, organizations ought to develop to ensure market survival and remain relevant to a competitive market.

According to Waghmare (2016), India's leading advertisers are now starting to advertise online. Indian businesses are also interested in promoting their products or services online. At the moment, the financial sector is at the forefront of online advertising, accounting for nearly half of total online advertising in India. According to Khan and Mahapatra (2019), a large population with steadily increasing purchasing power has resulted in the emergence of an exceptionally large and lucrative market. This bodes well for the Indian advertising industry, which is now making use of the gains from the internet in enhancing their growth. It could be argued that the role of digital marketing has aided India's development.

According to Is-haq (2019), reception of digital marketing instruments, for example, email, full site design improvement, per-click installment, and internet publicizing can considerably expand the sales of Nigerian telecommunications companies. Though, in order for these companies to maintain improved sales in the sector, they must utilize more than one advanced instrument as a feature of their marketing strategy. According to Olowe, Moradeyo, and Babalola (2015), it is critical for Nigerian telecommunications companies to understand whether digital marketing will contribute to increased product sales in a competitive environment, impact their business through product promotion, and increase sales.

According to Ng'ang'a (2016), marketing is a significant undertaking in any business, especially in telecommunications companies in Kenya, since it permits an organization to zero in on their clients, what they need and need, and how to tell them they have those items so they can sell. The achievement or disappointment of a business is dictated by whether its advancing undertakings reflect the necessities of its clients and the profits it will make from its products or services; it is therefore important that Kenyan telecommunications companies apply current and responsive exhibiting frameworks to the changing necessities of their clients.

Compared to different times, sales performance defines collection styles in terms of revenue. This can take a way of giving consumers the product or the service they want. A service has any function or benefit provided from one part to another that is intangible and does not cause ownership of anything (Plank & Reid, 2016). Marketing and sales alignment, according to Magandini and Tendai (2015), is critical for any successful organization. The company benefits from developing a common language and establishing respect and trust between the sales and marketing teams. As a result, each department must understand what the other is doing while encouraging open communication, which results in shared agendas.

Essentially, sales performance is a result of the implementation of a strategic role by marketers with a certain attitude, behavior, and work ethic, such as professionalism or aggression (Spiro & Rosann, 2016). According to Baldauf, Cravens, and Piercy (2018), sales performance consists of two concepts: the sales force's behavior and the results acquired by traders. The performance of a sales force is a level at which retailers can perform tasks or perform efficiently, responsibly, and efficiently.

A digital marketing strategy is a way in which organizations markets a product or a service through digital technologies such as the internet (Eagleman, 2016). Digital marketing strategies, according to Gupta and Aggarwal (2018), enables firms to target a certain segment of customers by using a particular marketing method in regard to age groups, socialization, preference and their financial capability. Companies that use digital marketing strategies can also save

money on marketing because digital marketing has a significant cost maximization compared to traditional channels of marketing. According to Holliman and Rowley (2019), various digital marketing strategies exist, including social media marketing platforms, content marketing strategy, email marketing strategy, and affiliate marketing, which will form the basis of this study.

According to Barefoot and Szabo (2016), social media marketing forums is a process in which strategies are developed and used to drive website traffic or gain online consumer attention through various social media platforms. Social media marketing is a new and developing way for organizations to effectively arrive at designated clients. According to Gurau (2018), social media marketing is the utilization of online media stages to advance the business and its items. As a result, by empowering clients to impart messages to impacted individuals, web-based media promoting has presented another idea of descriptive and trusted distribution on social media and mass marketing.

Safaricom Public Limited Company (PLC) is a Kenyan publicly traded mobile network operator based in Nairobi, Kenya. It is a significant broadcast communications supplier in Kenya and is one of the most productive organizations in the Middle East and Central Africa. PDAs, portable exchanges, buyer gadgets, online business, distributed computing, information, music web based, and fiber optic administrations are for the most part accessible in the organization. With an estimated 35.6 million subscribers, Safaricom has controlled about 64.5 percent of the Kenyan market since 2020. Safaricom has 69.2 percent in the voice market and 92.2 percent in the SMS market (Safaricom PLC, 2020).

Safaricom PLC has begun a journey of digital transformation, rethinking and digitizing its operations, products, and services to enable its customers' digital lifestyles. Marketing, customer service, and sales are among the operations that have been digitized by the company and have been synchronized with new digital models. As more of its customers go online, there is a greater emphasis on online marketing; increased use of self-service channels such as the mySafaricom App (+700k daily users), Voice Biometrics (+1.5m enrollment), Chatbot (102k unique users), and the launch of sales force automation in over 200,000 outlets. As a result of all of this, agile working methods have emerged (Safaricom PLC, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Technology is rapidly changing, and companies in the telecommunications sector must remain adaptable in order to stay competitive. Among the trends confronting the telecommunications industry are continued strong growth in the need for connectivity, high competitiveness, continuous security challenges, and continuous innovation in devices and services, customer expectations, and cost savings (Amah, Ogunnaike, Ayeni & Ojo, 2017). To meet the changing needs of its customers, Safaricom has been diversifying its services and product offerings. However, increased competition from other mobile telecommunications firms has caused Safaricom to fall short of its sales targets. According to the Safaricom 2020 report, Safaricom's headline market share of customers has steadily declined from a high of 70% in FY17 to an estimated 65% in FY19.

Marketers today face an ongoing challenge when it comes to distributing product awareness in the appropriate target market. There has been a challenge in the identification of the best suitable targeted segment by the marketers since there is continuous growth of the number of those who are using the internet every day who have varying needs at any given time (Mbithi, 2017). According to Jovicic, Li, and Richardson (2018), most advertisers are now facing the challenge of making their product stand out in the sea of information available online. This is due to the fact that new technologies and strategies differ in their application and impact, posing new challenges for modern marketing and sales leaders. This ultimately leads to the difficulty of conducting a product awareness campaign or finding new customers. Digital markets and marketing strategies have changed dramatically in recent years, and they continue to evolve to meet the needs of today's market that can cope. As a result, it is important for their advertisers to keep up with these changes.

Onyango (2016) investigated how digital marketing strategies affects performance and discovered that the digital marketing strategies used by the flower firms correlated strongly their performance. However, the study context was Kenyan cutflower exporting firms. The findings of Is-haq's (2019) study on the relationship between digital marketing and sales improvement show that SMEs adoption of digital marketing tools like emails, search engine optimization, per-click payment, and online advertising significantly increased their sales. However, the study context was in Nigerian Small and Medium Enterprises. Kasimu (2017) study focused on how performance of the top 100 small and medium enterprises was affected by the digital marketing strategy and discovered that their performance was significantly affected by the strategies adopted in marketing their products. However, the study used a purposive method to select respondents, which may have resulted in sample bias. The studies mentioned above were conducted in various study contexts and with various methodologies. As a result, the purpose of this research was to determine the influence of social media marketing platforms on sales performance of Safaricom Public Limited Company, Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Katz and Blumer proposed the theory of uses and gratification in the years 1974. Some fundamental assumptions underpin the theory. One is that the audience is envisioned as being active. The assumption is based on the idea that viewers are goal-oriented and use media sources to help them achieve their goals. Another assumption in the process of mass communication is that the audience member takes the initiative in connecting need gratification and media. As a result, people use media more effectively than the media uses them. The other assumption is that the majority of the media's goals can be derived from data provided by individual audience members. The research seeks to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of customer preferences on social media by employing theory.

The theory of uses and gratification explains how organizations use media to gratify their needs; how customers understand the motivations for media behavior; and the identification of functions or consequences that flow from needs, motives, and behavior (Mishra, Heide & Cort, 2008). The use of this approach, according to Oliveira and Martins (2019), aids in understanding why organizations actively seek or use a specific media to meet a common need. It is also considered that the audience plays an active role in media choice; individuals want, engage, and use the media to meet specific needs. Social media attracts users by providing value or gratification through its content.

The customer's desire to use any social media channel would be linked to the satisfaction obtained from using the channel. As a result, the social media channel with the most users would have a higher gratification, which is associated with increased sales performance for Safaricom Plc. As a result, the content must be designed in such a way that it adds value to individual consumers in order to foster an increased level of involvement and improved sales performance for the organization.

Empirical Literature Review

Kagondu (2018) conducted a study on the impact of social media marketing on supermarket sales in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Facebook Advertising, Instagram Advertising, and Twitter Advertising were variables used. A descriptive design was done, with 135 retail establishments in Nairobi City County serving as the study population. Baseline data from a structured questionnaire were used. Analysis of data collected was done using descriptive methods. The study discovered that most supermarkets accepted the use of social media marketing, and that respondents' frequent use of various social media platforms had a substantial influence on sales performance.

Chepkemoi, Zakayo, and Koima (2018) conducted a study investigating the impact of Facebook as a competitive platform for communication marketing for SMEs operating with Nakuru, Kenya. Facebook was one of the study variables. The population comprised of 350 registered small businesses in Nakuru CBD. The sample size for the study was 78 small businesses which were randomly selected. Key data was gathered using structured questionnaires. According to these findings, Facebook as a communication tool for client obtaining is a significant piece of building client connections.

Sufian *et al.* (2020) investigated the impact of social media marketing on small online business sales performance. The sample contains 150 respondents who own small online businesses who have become or are uninformed about launching a social media marketing platform for their Malacca-based business. Customer feedback do not directly affect the sales performance; however, communication has, content sharing do not directly affect the sales performance but customer relationships do directly affect the Malacca's small online business operations, according to the research findings.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Employment of descriptive research design was done. Safaricom Plc's marketing department, was the study population. The study's population consisted of 100 sales managers and 2000 sales representatives from the marketing department of the organization. To ensure that all respondents are adequately represented, they were divided into two groups using a stratified sampling technique. A simple random sampling method was used to select the respondents. There were 210 respondents in the sample, with 10 sales managers and 200 sales representatives. A questionnaire in a structured form was used in collecting data. Airtel Kenya was the organization where pilot study of 34 participants was done to evaluate the questionnaires' validity and reliability. Validity was tested using content validity through engaging the supervisor to evaluate the contents of the questionnaire. Reliability was tested using Cronbach alpha test where a 0.8 alpha value was sought. Further, the study carried out inferential analysis that include; correlation and multiple regressions analysis to establish how each variable influences the other.

4. FINDINGS

The descriptive results on social media marketing platforms are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Social Media Marketing Platforms

	M	SD
Cost reduction assists organizations to provide goods/ services to customers at lower prices.	4.21	0.79
Cost reduction allows the organization to offer more products and services at the same price.	3.64	1.36
A successful online interaction with a customer transforms the customer from a reader to a buyer.	4.01	0.99
Interactivity allows marketing managers to identify target markets by providing instant feedback on products and services.	4.56	0.44
Brands that cultivate a strong customer service culture improve internal communication.	4.74	0.16
When a company takes a customer-centric approach, it shows in every interaction.	3.84	1.16
Overall score	4.17	0.83

The aggregate score of 4.1 as presented in Table 4.3 indicated that social media marketing platforms was agreed by the respondents that it influences sales performance of Safaricom Public Limited Company, Kenya which closely deviated from the mean by 0.83. This finding corresponds with the findings of a study done by Kagundu (2018) on the impact of social media marketing on supermarket sales in Nairobi City County, Kenya and discovered that most supermarkets accepted the use of social media marketing, and that respondents' frequent use of various social media platforms had a substantial influence on sales performance.

The respondents strongly agreed that brands that cultivate a strong customer service culture improve internal communication (M=4.74, SD=0.16) and that interactivity allows marketing managers to identify target markets by providing instant feedback on products and services (M=4.56, SD=0.44). The findings collaborates with Chepkemoi, Zakayo, and Koima's (2018) research that aimed at investigating the impact of Facebook as a competitive platform for social media marketing in SMEs in Nakuru CBD, Kenya and Facebook was found as a communication tool for client procurement is a significant piece of building client connections.

The respondents agreed that cost reduction assists organizations to provide goods/ services to customers at lower prices (M=4.21, SD=0.79), a successful online interaction with a customer transforms the customer from a reader to a buyer (M=4.01, SD=0.99), when a company takes a customer-centric approach, it shows in every interaction (M=3.84, SD=1.16) and that cost reduction allows the organization to offer more products and services at the same price (M=3.64, SD=1.36). The results are related to the Sufian *et al.* (2020) study that investigated the impact of social media marketing on small online business sales performance and found that customer feedback do not directly affect the sales performance; however, communication has, content sharing do not directly affect the sales performance but customer relationships do directly affect the Malacca's small online business operations

5. RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 2: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.434 ^a	0.789	0.772	1.416

Source: Research Data (2022)

Table 2 shows that the coefficient of correlation was 0.772. This indicates that digital marketing strategies explain about 77.2% variations ($R^2 = 0.772$) in sales performance with the remaining 22.8% described by factors not included in the model.

Coefficient of Determination of the Variable

Table 3: Coefficient of Determination of the Variable

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.704	0.271		2.597	.000
	Social media marketing platform	.552	.090	.405	6.133	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

As indicated in Table 3, the beta coefficients: social media marketing platform, $\beta_1 = 0.552$ ($t = 6.133$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficients are significant ($p < 0.05$). Thus, the equation predicting the influence of the components of the social media marketing platform on sales performance took the form:

$$Y = 0.704 + 0.552X_1$$

Where Y = Sales Performance and X_1 = Social Media Marketing Platform

Further, it was observed that the regression model presented two implications; first, holding the social media marketing platform at zero, the sales performance of Safaricom Public Limited Company, Kenya would be 0.704 units; second, a unit change in social media marketing platforms results in a 0.552 change in sales performance.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that Safaricom has used social media marketing channels to increase revenue, attract traffic to websites, promote its brand, and form long-term relationships with its consumers. Safaricom has been able to engage with its target demographic more directly thanks to social media marketing. In addition, by understanding its consumers' interests, opinions, and demands, Safaricom has been able to get superior market insights.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that Safaricom has to figure out which social media channel their target audience spends the most time on. Make the most of live videos, as they are becoming increasingly popular among brands looking to engage their consumers. Create a brand story to aid in the development of an emotional bond between the brand and its target market. To increase brand visibility, the organization should use the appropriate hashtag.

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