

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON CUSTOMER PATRONAGE IN THE NIGERIAN PETROLEUM DOWNSTREAM SECTOR: A STUDY OF AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract: *The Nigerian petroleum downstream sector plays a critical role in the economic development of the country, with a significant impact on both local and national economies, with increasing competition and a rapidly changing digital landscape, companies in this sector are increasingly turning to digital marketing strategies to engage customers, boost brand visibility and drive sales. The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage of the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. To achieve this objective, the main source of data was through primary source with the use of questionnaire. The researcher adopted the survey research design approach and data were collected from 323 respondents drawn from the petroleum firms' customers' base. A total number of 314 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved in useable form representing 97.2 percent of data analyzed using the Simple Regression Model (SRM). Data generated from the study were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics and hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that digital marketing strategies had significant influence on customer patronage of the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. Thus, the study recommended that petroleum marketers in the state should increase investment in social media marketing platforms by allocating more resources to maintain active social media profiles, regularly posting content that is relevant to customers' needs and interest.*

Keywords: *Digital Marketing Strategies, Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Customer Patronage.*

Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has significantly transformed marketing practices across industries, including the petroleum sector. Digital marketing-encompassing tools such as social

media, email campaigns, search engine optimization (SEO), and mobile advertising – has become an essential strategy for reaching, engaging and retaining customers in today's competitive environment (Kotler et al., 2022). In the downstream petroleum sector, where customer loyalty and product accessibility are crucial, digital marketing offers a modern pathway to increase visibility, promote offers and influence consumer behavior.

In Nigeria, the petroleum downstream sector, which deals with the distribution and retail of refined petroleum products, is increasingly embracing digital channels to connect with customers and improve service delivery (Nwachukwu & Okoro, 2023). Despite its potential, many operators still rely heavily on traditional marketing methods, which may limit their competitiveness in a digital-first economy. Understanding the impact of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage is therefore essential for growth and sustainability in this sector.

Akwa Ibom state is one of Nigeria's leading oil-producing regions, presents a strategic location for such a study due to its growing urban population and expanding digital infrastructure. Evaluating how digital marketing influences consumer decisions in the region will offer practical insights into marketing effectiveness within the downstream petroleum space (Effiong & Udo, 2023).

The study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage in the Nigeria petroleum downstream sector, using Akwa Ibom State as a case study. The findings aim to guide petroleum marketers in adopting effective digital approaches that boost customer loyalty, customer patronage, market reach and overall competitiveness

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread adoption of digital marketing across various sectors, the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector has been relatively slow in fully leveraging digital strategies to enhance customer engagement and patronage. Many petroleum marketers still rely heavily on traditional marketing methods such as radio ads, billboards and word-of-mouth, which often lack the personalization, reach and interactivity that digital platform offer (Nwachukwu and Okoro, 2023). This slow adoption occurs at a time when consumer behavior is increasingly shaped by digital interactions, especially in urban centers like Akwa Ibom State where internet and smartphone penetration is on the rise.

The gap between the potential benefits of digital marketing-such as improved brand visibility, customer feedback, loyalty programs and targeted advertising-and its actual usage in the petroleum retail market raises concerns about missed opportunities to attract and retain customers in a highly competitive environment. Moreover, there is limited empirical research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of these digital strategies within the context of Nigeria's downstream petroleum sector, especially at the state level.

This study is therefore motivated by the need to critically examined whether current digital marketing effort employed by petroleum marketers in Akwa Ibom State are effective in driving customer patronage, without this understanding businesses risk underutilizing digital tools, while consumers may continue to experience poor engagement and service delivery.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives therefore include to:

- Examine the influence of social media marketing on customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.
- Ascertain how content marketing influences customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

This study attempt to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What is the influence of social media marketing on customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.
- To what extent does content marketing influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses where postulated to guide the study

Ho₁: Social media marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Ho₂: Content marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Review of Related Literature

THE CONCEPT OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing has redefined how businesses connect with consumers by integrating technology into promotion, communication and service delivery. It encompasses tools such as social media, websites, email marketing, mobile marketing and digital advertising to attract and retain customers (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). In the petroleum downstream sector-where competition is stiff and differentiation is minimal-digital marketing offers a pathway to enhance visibility, customer interaction and loyalty.

In Nigeria, digital space is becoming more relevant as consumer behavior shift toward online engagement. Nwachukwu and Okoro (2023) assert that the use of digital platforms enables

petroleum marketers to communicate service updates, build brand identity and respond swiftly to customer inquiries. This responsiveness contributes significantly to customer trust and continued patronage.

In Akwa Ibom State, urbanization and digital literacy are on the rise, digital marketing tools such as social media and SMS alerts have proven effective in attracting and retaining fuel customers. Effiong and Udo (2023) in their study revealed that marketers who consistently engage customers' online-sharing updates on fuel availability, promo offers and station locations-record higher levels of customer loyalty and repeat visits.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE

Social media marketing has emerged as a vital component of modern marketing strategies, particularly in industries striving to maintain competitive advantage through customer engagement and loyalty. Kotler, et al., (2022) posit that social media platforms enable firms to build interactive relationships with customers, fostering brand awareness and influence brand decisions. In the context of the petroleum downstream sector, where brand differentiation is often limited, social media offers a unique opportunity for firms to engage customers through promotions, feedback and digital storytelling.

In Nigeria, the growing penetration of smartphones and internet access has increased the relevance of social media in consumer-brand interactions. Nwachukwu and Okoro (2023) observed that petroleum marketers who leverage platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp tend to experience higher levels of customer engagement and repeat patronage. These platforms allow firms to announce product availability, prices, promotional offers and service updates in real time, which enhances transparency and trust among consumers.

Specifically in Akwa Ibom State, where urbanization and tech adoption are on the rise, social media has become an accessible channel for consumers to interact with petroleum marketers. Effiong and Udo (2023) in their study found that independent petroleum marketers who consistently post fuel availability updates, customer reward programs and safety tips on their social pages reported better customer retention rates than those relying solely on traditional methods.

Despite these advantages, challenges remain. Poor digital strategy, inconsistent content and limited technical expertise often hinder the effectiveness of social media marketing among smaller petroleum operators (Obong and Ekanem, 2022). Nevertheless, the evidence suggest that with proper implementation, social media marketing can significantly enhance customer patronage by improving communication, building brand loyalty and fostering customer satisfaction in the Nigeria's downstream petroleum sector.

CONTENT MARKETING AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE

Content marketing has gained prominence as a strategic approach to attracting and retaining customers by delivering valuable, relevant and consistent content. Pulizzi and Rose (2022) postulates that content marketing involves the creation and distribution of information that resonates with target audiences, building trust and encouraging customer loyalty over time. In the petroleum downstream sector, content marketing can include safety tips, energy-saving advice, updates on fuel availability and corporate social responsibility activities shared through blogs, websites and social media.

In the Nigerian context, content marketing remains underutilized, especially among petroleum marketers who often lack the digital infrastructure to support regular content creation (Nwachukwu and Okoro, 2023). However, marketers that apply content-driven strategies report improved customer engagement and stronger brand loyalty. Effiong and Udo (2023) noted that when petroleum brands share informative and engaging posts-such as daily fuel price updates, customer rewards stories and service guides-on digital platforms, they witness increased customer traffic and more frequent patronage.

In Akwa Ibom State, a region with a growing digitally aware population, content marketing has been shown to influence customer choices. Edem and Bassey (2022) found that petrol stations that use storytelling and informative posts about their services tend to get stronger customer trust and word-of-mouth referrals. The study highlights that customers in the state are more likely to patronize brands that consistently share helpful and transparent content online.

Despite its benefits, challenges such as poor content planning, lack of digital literacy and limited investment in content tools hinder full adoption in the sector (Obong and Ekanem, 2022). Nevertheless content marketing remains a promising tool for improving brand visibility and customer retention in the Nigerian petroleum industry.

CUSTOMER PATRONAGE

Customer patronage refers to the repeated purchase behavior or loyalty of consumers toward a particular brand or service provider. It is often influence by factors such as service quality, pricing, marketing strategies, convenience and brand reputation (Kotler, et al., 2022).

In the competitive landscape of Nigeria's petroleum downstream sector, where multiple marketers offer similar products, understanding what drives customer patronage is essential for market survival and growth.

In Nigeria, factors such as fuel availability, honesty in fuel measurement, price stability and marketing communication significantly influence where customers choose to buy petroleum products (Effiong and Udo, 2023). With the rise of digital platforms, customers are now more informed and selective, often engaging with brands that are responsive and transparent online.

Akwa Ibom State, with its expanding urban centers and rising digital usage, present a unique setting for observing customer patronage trends. Edem and Bassey (2022) noted that petroleum marketers in the state who actively engage with customers through digital platforms and provide consistent updates often experience increased customer retention and brand loyalty. Their study revealed that customer patronage is closely tied to trust, convenience and brand visibility, all of which can be enhanced through effective digital marketing strategies.

However, Obong and Ekanem (2022) pointed out that poor customer experience, lack of communication and inconsistencies in product availability continue to threaten customer loyalty in the sector. As competition intensifies, petroleum marketers must not only deliver quality service but also create meaningful digital connections with their customers to sustain patronage.

Theoretical Framework

In this section the theory considered relevant for this study was;

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Fred Davis (1986)

This model was developed to explain and predict users' acceptance of new technologies. The model proposes that two major factors influence a person decision to adopt and use technology:

- Perceived usefulness (PU): The degree to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their performance or make a task easier.
- Perceived ease of use (PEOU): The degree to which a person believes that using the technology will be free of effort.

TAM suggests that when people perceive a technology as useful and easy to use, they are more likely to accept and adopt it. This model has been widely applied in studying technology use across various sectors, including marketing and consumer behavior.

In this study, TAM helps to explain both marketers' adoption of digital tools (like social media and content marketing) and customers' willingness to engage with these tools.

- For marketers: If digital marketing platforms are perceived as useful for reaching customers and increasing visibility-and are also easy to implement- they are more likely to be adopted.
- For customers: If digital marketing platforms (e.g., fuel station updates on Instagram, promo alerts via WhatsApp) are seen as helpful and easy to use, they are more likely to influence customer decisions and patronage.

Review of Empirical Studies

Etuk, Akpan and Awah (2025): The influence of online reviews on brand perception and customer engagement in service marketing in Nigeria. The method of data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study revealed that online reviews significantly influence brand perception and customer engagement. The findings indicate that positive online reviews

enhance brand credibility and consumer trust, while negative reviews can deter potential customers unless effectively managed. They recommended that Nigerian service firms should adopt proactive digital reputation strategies, including real-time engagement, authenticity assurance and tailored response mechanisms, to enhance consumer confidence and brand loyalty.

Obong and Ekanem (2022): Social media usage and marketing effectiveness among SMEs in Akwa Ibom State. The method of data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study revealed that petroleum marketers in Akwa Ibom State increasingly adopted social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X and WhatsApp) for marketing purposes. The study also revealed a significant relationship between the use of social media and customer patronage. The study indicated that 70% of the customers surveyed were more likely to visit a fuel station that had an active social media presence. They recommended that petroleum marketers should not only focus on increasing the content of their social media post but they should also improve the quality and relevance of content.

Edem and Bassey (2022): Content marketing strategies and customer loyalty among fuel retailers in Akwa Ibom State. The method of data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study revealed that content marketing strategies such as educational blog posts, fuel saving tips, environmental benefit of using specific fuel types and other relevant information significantly influenced customer loyalty among fuel retailers in Akwa Ibom State. They recommended that fuel retailers should invest in creating high quality informative content that addresses customer pain points; provides value and enhance the overall customer experience.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The researcher utilized a survey research approach for this study, collecting data on both the independent and the dependent variables from various petrol firms in Akwa Ibom State. This method allowed for meaningful interaction with a large number of the firms customers in the area.

Population of the Study

The study's target population included all petrol firms' customers in Akwa Ibom State, making the Population effectively limitless.

Sampling and the Sample Size determination

Since the population size for the study was infinite, sample size for this study was determined using the Topman Formula at 5% level of tolerable error.

The formula is given as

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot pq}{e^2}$$

Where n = required sample size

z = the value of z-score associated with the degree of confidence is 95% confidence level being 1.96 from the Z-score table.

p = 0.7 decimal (positive)

q = 0.3 decimal (negative)

e = acceptable tolerance level of error (stated in percentage points)

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{Z^2 \cdot pq}{e^2} \\ &= \frac{1.96^2 \cdot (0.7 \times 0.3)}{0.05^2} \\ &= \frac{3.8416 \times 0.21}{0.0025} \end{aligned}$$

$$= \frac{0.806736}{0.0025}$$

$$= 322.6$$

$$= 323$$

Therefore, the sample size of the study was 323.

Sampling Procedure

The study employed a convenient sampling technique to distribute the research instrument. This method involved selecting respondents who were willing to participate and easily accessible to the researcher.

Methods of Data Collection

The data analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics. A simple regression analysis was conducted to assess how digital marketing strategies influences customer patronage. All hypotheses were tested at a significance level of $P > 0.05$.

Sources of Data

The main source of data employed in this study was the primary data source. The primary data source was a structured questionnaire which was served on respondents. The questionnaire was made up of two sections: section “A” generated data on demography, while section “B” was made up of two sub-sections which were the independent variable (digital marketing strategies) and the dependent variable (customer patronage).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

Test of Hypothesis One

Social media marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Model Summary of the Influence of Social Media Marketing on Customer Patronage of petroleum downstream sector

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std.Error of the Estimate
1	.811 ^a	.817	.755	.81690

a. Predictors (constant), Social Media Marketing

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Analysis of Variance of the Influence of social media marketing on customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	1582.735	1	1748.957	2572.813	.000 ^b
1 Residual	621.582	313	3.593		
Total	2204.317	314			

a. **Dependent Variable:** Customer Patronage

b. **Predictors:** (Constant), Social Media Marketing

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The regression in table 1 shows that the coefficient of the constant terms (that is, the explanatory or predictor) variable. Social Media Marketing has R-value of (.811) which indicates a positive relationship between the explanatory variable and the criteria variable. The R-square, the coefficient of determination value is (.817). This means that 81.7 percent of the variation on the Customer Patronage can be explained from the independent variable (Social Media Marketing). The table also shows the adjusted R-square for the model as (.755). But adjusted R-square is very useful in multiple regression analysis where it adjusts the R-square by the number of predictor values in the model. This adjustment allows the easy comparison of the explanatory power of the models with different numbers of independent variables. The F-ratio in the ANOVA table shows the overall regression effect in the model. The F-ratio value is 2572.813 which is significant at 0.000 and is less than 0.05 percent level of significance. Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and accept that Social Media Marketing contribute towards Customer Patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2

Content marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Model Summary of Content Marketing on Customer Patronage of petroleum downstream sector

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.779	.849	.813	.57391

a. Predictors: (Constant), Content marketing

Analysis of Variance of the Influence of Content Marketing on Customer Patronage of petroleum downstream sector

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	1885.712	1	1773.957	2468.741	.000 ^b
1 Residual	792.629	313	6.583		
Total	2678.341	314			

a. **Dependent Variable:** Customer Patronage

b. **Predictors:** (Constant), Content marketing

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The regression result in table 2 revealed that the regression coefficient of R-value is (.779) which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship existing between Content marketing and Customer Patronage in the petroleum downstream sector. The model summary table shows that the R-Square regression coefficient is (.849), which indicate that Content marketing accounts for 84.9 percent of the total variation on the Customer Patronage of the petroleum downstream sector in the study area. The ANOVA table shows the F-ratio for the regression model which indicates the statistical significance of the overall regression model. The F-ratio value is 2468.741 which is statistically significance at 0.000 level, since the probability value (P-V=0.000) is less than 0.05 percent, we reject the null hypothesis and upheld the alternative. This means that there is a significant influence of Content marketing on Customer Patronage in the petroleum downstream sector.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis of this study states that social media marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. The findings of the study revealed a significant influence of social media marketing on customer patronage of petroleum

downstream sector. The F-ratio in the ANOVA table 1 shows the overall regression effect in the model. The F-ratio was 2572.813 which was significant at 0.000 and was less than 0.05 percent level of significance. This is in consonance with the study of Obong and Ekanem (2022) who found out that there was a significant relationship between the use of social media and customer patronage.

The second hypothesis of this study states that content marketing does not significantly influence customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. The findings of the study revealed a significant influence of content marketing on customer patronage of petroleum downstream sector. The F-ratio in the ANOVA table 2 shows the overall regression effect in the model. The F-ratio was 2468.741 which was significant at 0.000 and was less than 0.05 percent level of significance. This is in consonance with the study of Edem and Bassey (2022) which revealed that content marketing strategies such as educational blog posts, fuel saving tips, environmental benefit of using specific fuel types and other relevant information significantly influenced customer loyalty among fuel retailers in Akwa Ibom State.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

The main thrust of this study has been presented in the preceding sections. This section is concerned with the summary of major findings. The study investigated the influence of digital marketing strategies on customer patronage in the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide this study and all the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance through the use of simple regression analysis. The two null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative hypotheses accepted. This resulted from the fact that the regression results were all significant, the computed F-values for all the two hypotheses show statistical significance of the overall regression model, this means that there was statistical significant influence of Digital Marketing Strategies such as (Social Media Marketing and Content Marketing) on Customer Patronage in the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

To achieve the objectives, a survey research design was used to reach out to the respondents of the petrol firms. The population of the study was infinite. The Topman sample size determination formula at 5% level of tolerable error was used to determine the sample size of 323. The convenience sampling technique was employed in the administration of the research instrument for the study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were established.

- Social Media Marketing has significant influence on customer patronage in the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

- Content has significant influence on customer patronage in the Nigerian petroleum downstream sector in Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that petroleum marketers in the state should:

- Increase investment in social media marketing platforms by allocating more resources to maintain active social media profiles, regularly posting content that is relevant to customers' needs and interest.
- Enhance content quality and consistency by focusing on producing high-quality, engaging and informative content that resonates with their target audience. This could include promotional offers, fuel-saving tips, updates on fuel availability and customer testimonials. Additionally, they should ensure that content is posted consistently to maintain visibility and relevance.

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