

Innovations

Influence of Digital Marketing Strategies and Performance of Youth Managed Small and Medium Enterprises in North- Central Nigeria

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Abstract: *The increasing importance of digital marketing in today's competitive business landscape necessitates a thorough understanding of its impact on the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This study examined youth-managed SMEs in North Central Nigeria, addressing a gap in the literature by analyzing how various digital marketing strategies affect business performance metrics. Specifically, it investigated the effects of search engine optimization (SEO) on profitability and content marketing on sales growth. From a population of 4,250 youth-managed SMEs across six states in North Central Nigeria, a sample size of 365 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Stratified sampling was applied to ensure representation across the different states. A quantitative methodology was used, with surveys conducted to gather data from selected SMEs. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean rating, standard deviation, and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), were employed to test the hypotheses using T-values. Findings revealed that SEO significantly enhances profitability, while content marketing has a substantial impact on sales growth. The study concluded that digital marketing strategies, particularly SEO and content marketing, are essential for improving the performance of youth-managed SMEs in North Central Nigeria. It recommended that these businesses prioritize these strategies to increase profitability and sales growth, thereby attracting and retaining customers.*

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Strategies, Performance, Small and Medium Enterprises, SEO, Content Marketing, Consumer Behaviour*

Introduction

The digital revolution has transformed how businesses operate and interact with customers. It has proven to be an effective and efficient conduit for marketing goods

and services (Okolo, Mmamel, Ilodigwe, Okolo, Oranusi, Ugonna, & Obikeze, 2018). Digital marketing refers to using channels such as websites, search engines, social media, email, and mobile applications to promote products and services (Le et al., 2021; Faruk et al., 2021). These strategies have gained global popularity for their ability to target specific markets, measure performance, and provide a personalized customer experience (Jadhav et al., 2023; Makrides et al., 2023). The development of digital marketing can be traced to the 1990s, with the advent of the internet, marking the beginning of a new era in global communication and business (Faruk et al., 2021; Pawar, 2019). As internet accessibility grew, businesses began leveraging this medium for marketing (Cosmulese et al., 2019). The rise of search engines like Yahoo and Google emphasized the importance of search engine optimization (SEO), which helps improve website visibility in search results (Gregoriades et al., 2021).

Over time, businesses used graphical ads to attract users, although the effectiveness of banner ads decreased with ad-blocking technologies (Kontis et al., 2022). This led to the introduction of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, a model popularized by Google Ads in 2000, allowing businesses to pay only for clicks on their ads (Faruk et al., 2021). Social media marketing soon followed, enabling companies to build brand awareness, foster customer relationships, and drive website traffic through targeted content and advertising. By the late 2000s, the widespread use of smartphones brought about mobile marketing, with businesses optimizing their websites and apps for mobile devices and using location-based ads to reach consumers on the go (Sansern et al., 2022; Harikrishnan & Vinith, 2022).

Digital marketing strategies provide various ways to promote products, engage audiences, and drive growth (Chomiak-Orsa & Liszczyk, 2020; Pascucci et al., 2023). This study focuses on two main strategies: SEO and content marketing. SEO optimizes a website's content and structure to improve its search engine visibility, targeting keywords, creating high-quality content, and enhancing on-page elements to boost search rankings (Jadhav et al., 2018). Content marketing involves producing and sharing valuable content to attract and engage audiences, using blogs, articles, videos, and infographics to build brand awareness and drive traffic (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020; Jadhav et al., 2018).

In today's fast-paced digital era, digital marketing is crucial for business success and growth worldwide (Ikhwan & Setiawan, 2023). For Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), this holds particularly true, as these businesses contribute significantly to Nigeria's economic growth and job creation, representing about 67% of enterprises in the country (Onwuamaeze, 2021). This study focuses on youth-managed SMEs in North Central Nigeria, with performance defined as growth in profitability, sales, and customer acquisition. However, a knowledge gap exists in how these SMEs can best use digital marketing, which may limit their growth

potential. The study's significance lies in offering insights for youth, investors, practitioners, policymakers, students, and academics on the role of digital marketing in enhancing SME performance in North Central Nigeria. It contributes to existing literature on the impact of digital marketing strategies on youth-managed SME performance in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Despite the potential benefits of digital marketing strategies, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how to apply these digital marketing strategies and this knowledge gap could hinder the growth and sustainability of these businesses, preventing them from fully harnessing the potential of digital marketing to achieve their objectives. Further, several of the youth managed SMEs lacks specific skills and resources, such as knowledge of analysis, content creation, and they are face with resources constraints, limiting their ability to developed and execute effective modern marketing campaigns that would aid their performance. Also, in many parts of the North-Central region, particularly in rural areas, there are challenges in accessing stable and high-speed internet services which impede the adoption of strategies that would expand their market.

Objectives of the study

This research paper aims to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on the performance of youth-managed SMEs in North Central Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

1. Examine the effect of search engine optimization on profitability of youth managed SMEs
2. Assess the effect of content marketing on sales growth of youth managed SMEs,
3. Provide recommendations for youth on how to use digital marketing to improve their performance on SMEs.

In the same vein, the two hypotheses for the study include:

1. search engine optimization has significant effect on the profitability of youth managed SMEs
2. Content marketing has significant effect on the sales growth of youth managed SMEs.

Conceptual Review

Digital marketing strategies and SMEs

A customer's loyalty to a particular e-commerce website and the company's products or services is influenced by the company's digital marketing strategies. The concept of "e-loyalty" further broadens the definition of "brand loyalty" to encompass

customers' actions on the internet. It is seen as an evolution from the traditional marketer-controlled concept to one that is managed by the customer with the help of technological advancements. E-loyalty may be impacted by a number of factors such as quality customer service, speedy shipment, detailed product descriptions, low shipping and handling fees, and trustworthy data protection policies. E-loyalty, or the likelihood of a customer to return to a store's website and make more purchases within a set period of time, may be measured in a number of different ways (Nkpurukwe et al., 2022).

Using efficient digital marketing strategies helps spread positive reviews and recommendations about a product or service online (known as "e-WOM"). It's possible whenever your online content receives feedback or is shared by others. Whether your visitors share your content once or a thousand times, each one is a recommendation to their network of connections. However, electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) refers to voluntary, user-generated forms of promotion. What's more, E-WOM is viewed by some as one of the most successful marketing methods. Users are more likely to trust messages from people they know or have engaged with before when using the internet (Bu, Parkinson, & Thaichon, 2021).

Businesses may get an advantage over their rivals in their field by employing digital marketing methods to boost their brand awareness and customer loyalty. According to Kotler (2003), a well-known specialist in the field of marketing, digital marketing is the application of marketing principles to the process of informing consumers about a company's goods and services via digital channels. In a similar vein, the use of the internet and other kinds of electronic media to promote a business' goods, services, or ideas is an example of digital marketing (Li & Calantone, 2000). Digital marketing practices, as conceived by the writers, involve utilizing internet infrastructure to boost client interaction with a company, which is how the authors arrived at the central idea. According to another definition, digital marketing encompasses both online and offline marketing interactions that take place via electronic platforms including digital platforms, emails, websites, and other components of telecommunication technology.

Increased marketing engagement between a business and its clients is central to digital marketing practices (John, et al, 2019), and this is true regardless of the internet platform in question. The authors believe that digital marketing practices are effective and efficient in serving a firm's large customer base from a central location, and that it enables businesses to strategically align their marketing offerings with the rising demands, expectations, and behaviours of their customers. As a result, the internet, the foundation of e-marketing, has vastly improved over the years, opening up doors that were previously closed to all businesses (Rotich & Mukhongo, 2015).

There have been some interesting developments in the usage of digital marketing practices as a tool for combining marketing operations and improving corporate performance. Its original intent was to assist businesses in maintaining command

over a wide range of marketing initiatives and a sizable clientele. To rephrase, its intended purpose is to give marketers more control. Customers were previously unable to use, share, comprehend, or manage digital marketing practices before the advent of social media and online communities. Internet users now have a tool to share, discuss, inform, and control how they perceive the marketing message together with other people, who appear to be more credible than the company itself, shifting the power from companies to their individual customers (Strauss & Frost, 2001). Consequently, the digital marketing practices and strategies of a corporation can either improve or hinder the likelihood of survival, depending on the effectiveness, efficiency, and substance of the tactics themselves (Strauss & Frost, 2001).

Performance

Kamalu, Agbaeze, Ckechi, Chinda and Ogbonna (2023) defined performance to a specific entity's method of achieving predetermined goals. Okolo, Obikeze, Mmamel, Okafor and Nmere (2018) remarked that effective and efficient performance leads to improved competitive advantage. Nebo and Okolo (2016) found that insurance firms' performance was significantly improved as a result of timely and effective communication about insurance renewal notices. Well performing organisation achieves its objectives successfully. For this study performance is defined as the improvement in key metrics for youth-managed businesses, with indicators such as profitability and sales growth.

Discussion of the independent and dependent variables:

Search engine optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) can be likened to a sophisticated tool designed to act as a "finder" that visits numerous websites and pages, helping users locate relevant information (Kleinmuntz & Schkade, 2000). Optimizing a website for search engines ensures that a user's query returns the most pertinent results. Consequently, SEO assists marketers by presenting their various programs to the right audiences at the most suitable times and locations. Enhancing an ad's quality score increases its relevance to both users and search engines, thereby improving its ranking on search engine results pages (Sen, 2005).

Content marketing

Content marketing encompasses various forms, including articles, graphics, online tools, e-books, photographs, videos, and more. These materials are distributed to consumers through digital platforms such as websites, product pages, and blogs. Additionally, content includes social media profiles, messages, and groups. As Gedik (2020) describes, "content" refers to a collection of ideas, thematic information, and messages shared in diverse formats, designed for consumption and further distribution over the internet. Content marketing is a strategic marketing

approach that focuses on the creation, dissemination, and promotion of valuable and relevant material with the objective of captivating and engaging a specific target audience. It emphasizes building relationships and establishing trust with the intended audience.

Profitability

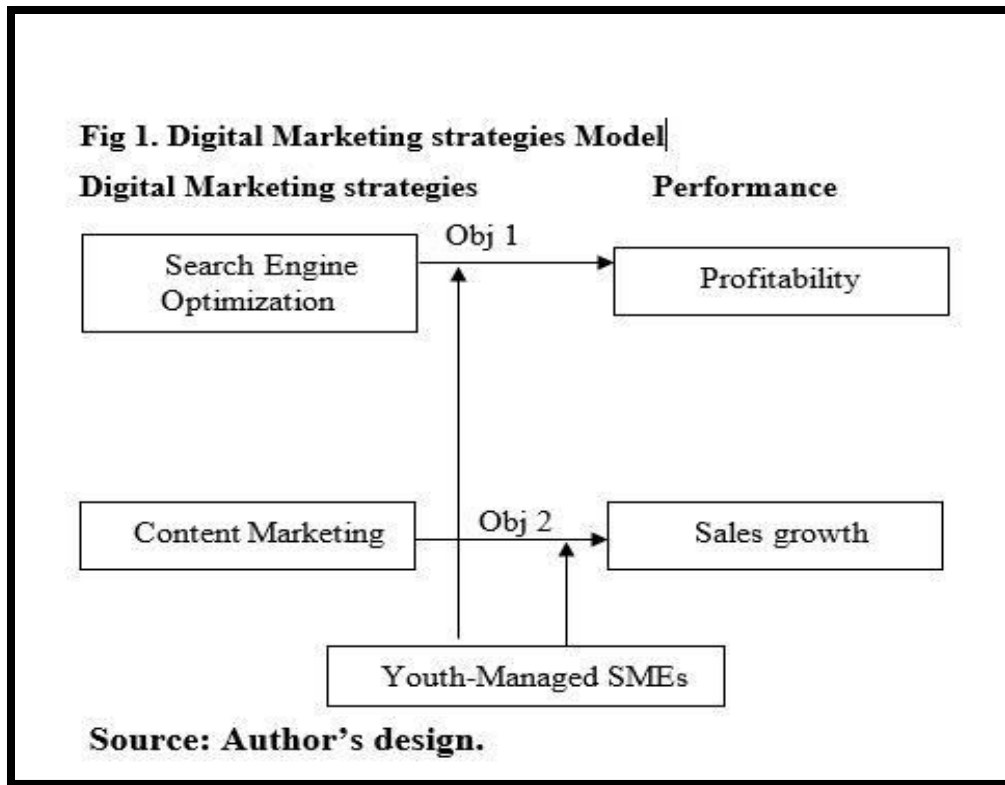
Profitability is defined as “the extent to which a firm realizes a profit in relation to its sales, total assets, and own capital” (Aburime, 2008). It refers to the capacity of SMEs to consistently and adequately generate profits necessary for sustaining and expanding their business activities. Profitability plays a critical role in determining a business's long-term sustainability and its ability to attract investments and secure financing options (Eze et al., 2019). High profitability reflects effective asset management to generate consistent profits, often measured quarterly. Investors prioritize profitability as it impacts return on investment and stock price, making it a key metric for assessing a firm's financial health.

Sales growth

Sales growth, accompanied by investments in new production assets, signifies a company's expansion in response to increased demand for its products or services (Janssen, 2009). According to Dobbs and Hamilton (2007), growth is defined as an increase in size over a specific period. This can include the introduction of new products and services, the development of new markets and customer bases, the opening of additional locations, and the strengthening of existing ones.

Theory for the study

The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) is a hybrid of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Both theories are effective in conceptualizing TAM, particularly through its two key constructs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU is the belief that using a specific system will enhance job performance, while PEOU reflects the perception that utilizing a system will be effortless. Applying this theory to the current study on the relevance of digital marketing strategies, PU and PEOU significantly influence the adoption rate of tools like search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing. These factors ultimately shape consumers' willingness to engage with a specific marketer. Therefore, the TAM model has been incorporated into this study to explore the connection between digital marketing practices and the performance of youth-managed SMEs.



Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design, a non-experimental approach involving the collection of data from a sample of participants at a single point in time. This design provides a snapshot or cross-section of a population's characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, or other variables of interest. Given the scope of this study, which explored the influence of digital marketing strategies on the performance of youth-managed SMEs in North-Central Nigeria, a cross-sectional approach was deemed appropriate for efficient data gathering. Since SME performance can fluctuate due to various internal and external factors, this design captures performance at a specific moment, offering valuable insights into the prevalent level of SME performance during the study period.

Population of study

The population of the study comprises youth who manage SMEs in North-Central Nigeria. The accessible population is 4,250, covering the six states in the region. Population data was obtained from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) collaborative 2019 report. The criteria for selecting the small and medium-scale firms that participated in this study are as follows: the SME must be operational within the state metropolis, registered with the state SMEDAN office, have a minimum of two years of operations, be registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), demonstrate willingness to participate in the survey, and, most importantly, be

owned or managed by a youth. According to the Nigeria National Youth Policy (2019) and the African Youth Charter, a youth is defined as an individual between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

S/N	States	Number of Registered SMEs
1	Nasarawa State	679
2.	Benue State	875
3.	Kogi State	392
4.	Kwara State	780
5.	Niger State	486
6.	Plateau State	1038
Total		4250

Source: States Smedan office, 2024

Sample size determination

A sample population in research refers to a group of elements, or a single element, from which data are obtained. It is crucial for the researcher to define as specifically as possible the characteristics of the sample used in the study. LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2006) describe a sample population as a portion of the research population selected for the purpose of the study. When dealing with people, a sample can be defined as a set of respondents selected from a target population for the study.

To determine the study sample, Taro Yamane's (1967) formula was employed. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population of the study

e = Tolerable error (5%)

$$n = \frac{4250}{1+4250(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{4250}{1+4250(.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{4250}{11.625}$$

$$n = 365$$

Therefore, the study sample size is = 365. In determining the sample proportion for the distribution of instrument, the study used Bowley's proportionality formula.

Using Bourley's proportional allocation formula:

$$n = \frac{n(n)}{N}$$

Sample size distribution and allocation of instrument

S/N	States	Number of Registered SMEs	Sample distribution Proportion
1	Nasarawa State	679	$679/4250 \times 365 = 58$
2.	Benue State	875	$875/4250 \times 365 = 75$
3.	Kogi State	392	$392/4250 \times 365 = 34$
4.	Kwara State	780	$780/4250 \times 365 = 67$
5.	Niger State	486	$486/4250 \times 365 = 42$
6.	Plateau State	1038	$1038/4250 \times 365 = 89$
Total		4250	365

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2024

Sampling techniques

The study employed a probability sampling technique, specifically stratified sampling, due to its advantages that align with the study's objectives and context. Youth-managed SMEs within the North-Central geopolitical zone encompass a diverse range of sizes, industries, and structures. Stratified sampling enabled the division of this heterogeneous population into distinct strata based on relevant criteria, such as firm size or industry type, ensuring that each stratum was adequately represented in the study.

Data collection

The questionnaire was designed using a funneled approach with two major sections. Section A captured the demographic information of the respondents, while Section B focused on the variables of the study. A self-designed instrument was adopted and structured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (1), agree (2), undecided (3), disagree (4), to strongly disagree (5). The questionnaire addressed SMEs' digital marketing strategies, the level of adoption of these strategies, and their performance.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 30 SMEs. It was administered in English, Nigeria's official language, to facilitate comprehension and uniformity among respondents.

Reliability results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Search Engine Optimization	0.782
Profitability of Youth Managed SMEs	0.712
Content Marketing	0.889
Sales Growth of Youth Managed SMEs	0.764

Source: Field work 2024

Data analysis

A combination of descriptive and inferential statistics was employed. Descriptive statistics, namely mean rating and standard deviation, were utilized to examine the responses to the survey questions. For hypothesis testing, the Structural Equation Model (SEM) path modeling approach was employed. This involved the application of Smart PLS (v3.2) software. The findings from the data analysis were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses using T-value in line with the research objectives. The results of the data analysis were presented in tables and path coefficient nodes to provide a clear and concise summary of the findings.

Findings and discussion**Digital marketing strategies of SEO and performance of youth-managed SMEs in north-central Nigeria****Respondents' opinions on search engine optimization**

S/N	Search Engine Optimization	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	STD
1.	Our business effectively utilizes search engine optimization techniques to enhance online visibility.	103 (28%)	169 (46%)	42 (12%)	33 (9%)	18 (5%)	3.838	1.0862
2.	Our business website has gained increased traffic.	125 (34%)	121 (33%)	50 (14%)	53 (15%)	16 (4%)	3.786	1.1899
3.	We regularly monitor and adjust our SEO techniques to improve our online	134 (37%)	148(41%)	33 (9%)	31 (8%)	18 (5%)	3.953	1.1146

	visibility.							
4.	SEO has positively impacted our website's ranking on search engine results pages.	135 (37%)	92 (25%)	58 (16%)	61 (17%)	18 (5%)	3.729	1.2515
5.	Our organisation consistently invests resources to enhance our SEO efforts and stay competitive in online searches.	121 (33%)	148 (41%)	37 (10%)	35 (10%)	23 (6%)	3.847	1.1690
	Grand mean/std						3.831	1.1622

Source: Field work, 2024

Respondents' opinions on profitability of youth-managed SMEs

S/N	Profitability of Youth Managed SMEs	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	STD
6.	Our business has consistently achieved good return on investment.	129 (35%)	115 (32%)	51 (14%)	51 (14%)	18 (5%)	3.794	1.2000
7.	Our return on assets has seen a steady increase in the last three financial years.	156 (43%)	124 (34%)	33 (9%)	30 (8%)	22 (6%)	4.000	1.1695
8.	Our business has shown consistent growth over time.	136 (37%)	84 (23%)	58 (16%)	65 (18%)	21 (6%)	3.688	1.2921
9.	We actively explore innovative ways to enhance the profitability of our youth-managed SME.	126 (35%)	139 (38%)	41 (11%)	42 (12%)	16 (4%)	3.857	1.1607
10.	Our business has offered bonuses based on gain made from	132 (36%)	114 (31%)	50 (14%)	50 (14%)	19 (5%)	3.805	1.1948

	each financial year							
	Grand mean/std						3.829	1.2034

Source: Field work, 2024

The study found that the majority of youth-managed SMEs in the North-Central region of Nigeria had adopted digital marketing strategies to some extent. Specifically, the mean rating value of $3.831 > 2.50$ with a standard deviation of $1.1622 < 1.291$ indicates a high rate of acceptance of the constructs of search engine optimization. Similarly, the mean rating of $3.829 > 2.50$ with a standard deviation of $1.2034 < 1.291$ shows a high rate of acceptance of the constructs related to the profitability of youth-managed SMEs. The analysis revealed an R-value of 63%, indicating the variability in the profitability of youth-managed SMEs due to the adoption of search engine optimization. The study found a significant positive and strong association between the variables, with a T-value of 7.444 and a path coefficient for search engine optimization. This supports the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, suggesting a positive influence of search engine optimization on the profitability of youth-managed SMEs in North-Central Nigeria.

Respondents' opinions on content marketing

S/N	Content Marketing	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	STD
11.	Our firm adapts content marketing based on audience feedback.	132 (36%)	150 (41%)	35 (10%)	30 (8%)	18 (5%)	3.954	1.1081
12.	Our organisation considers content marketing as a crucial strategy for engaging our target audience.	148 (41%)	83 (23%)	58 (16%)	54 (15%)	20 (5%)	3.765	1.2694
13.	We consistently produce high-quality and relevant content to meet our audience's needs.	131 (36%)	144 (39%)	36 (10%)	35 (10%)	18 (5%)	3.917	1.1277
14.	Our content marketing efforts effectively showcase our products/services and	120 (33%)	124 (34%)	51 (14%)	54 (15%)	16 (4%)	3.774	1.1880

	their benefits.							
15.	Our firm places significant emphasis on creating valuable content for our target audience.	134 (37%)	146 (40%)	34 (9%)	32 (9%)	18 (5%)	3.948	1.1156
	Grand mean/std						3.872	1.1617

Source: Field work, 2024

Respondents' opinions on sales growth of youth managed SMEs

S/N	Sales Growth of Youth Managed SMEs	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	STD
16.	Our youth-managed SME has experienced consistent sales growth in recent years.	145 (40%)	91 (25%)	61 (17%)	52 (14%)	16 (4%)	3.825	1.2204
17.	Sales growth is a direct result of our youth-managed SME's effective sales strategies.	133 (36%)	133 (36%)	42 (12%)	32 (9%)	24 (7%)	3.880	1.1853
18.	We closely monitor sales metrics to assess the success of our youth-managed SME.	171 (47%)	99 (27%)	30 (8%)	52 (14%)	13 (4%)	4.003	1.1951
19.	Sales growth is a key indicator of customer satisfaction for our youth-managed SME.	137 (38%)	127 (35%)	44 (12%)	44 (12%)	12 (3%)	3.908	1.1410
20.	Our youth-managed SME actively seeks opportunities to drive sales growth through innovation.	136 (37%)	100 (27%)	57 (16%)	50 (14%)	21 (6%)	3.771	1.2360
	Grand mean/std						3.877	1.1956

Source: Field work, 2024

The study also found that the mean rating of $3.872 < 2.50$ and a standard deviation of

Variables	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha
Search Engine Optimization	0.723	0.722	0.628	0.831
Profitability of Youth Managed SMEs	0.712	0.754	0.513	0.712
Content Marketing	0.781	0.711	0.618	0.856
Sales Growth of Youth Managed SMEs	0.763	0.727	0.547	0.895

$1.1617 < 1.291$ suggest that youth-managed businesses adopted content marketing based on audience feedback. Content marketing was considered a crucial strategy

for engaging their target audience by consistently producing high-quality and relevant content to meet their audience's needs and increase sales growth. With a mean rating value of $3.819 > 2.50$ and a standard deviation of $1.277 < 1.291$, the analysis revealed an R-value of 74% in the variability of sales growth of youth-managed SMEs due to the adoption of content marketing, indicating a strong and positive association between content marketing and sales growth. The significance of this relationship is further supported by a T-value of 22.468, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96, showing strong evidence of the effect of content marketing on the sales growth of youth-managed SMEs in North-Central Nigeria

Measurement scale index on the influence of digital marketing strategy on performance of youth-managed SMES in north-central, Nigeria.

Source: Field work 2024

Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) result for discriminant validity

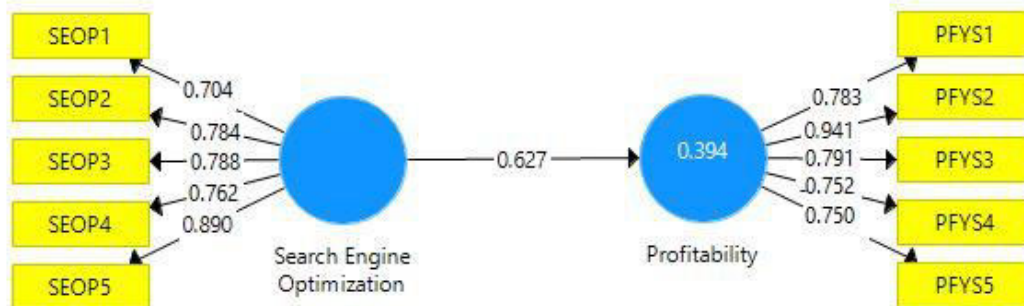
Constructs	Search Engine Optimization	Profitability	Content Marketing	Sales Growth
Search Engine Optimization				
Profitability	0.734			
Content Marketing	0.679	0.64		

Sales Growth	0.71	0.685	0.739	
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Source: Field work 2024

Fig. 2]

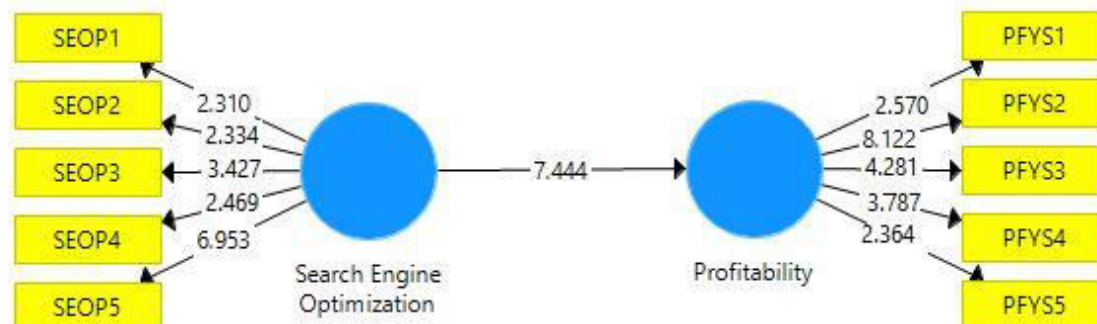
Hypothesis 1 Search engine optimization had significant effect on profitability of youth managed SMEs.



Structural Model linking Search Engine Optimization and profitability of Youth managed SMEs

Source: SmartPLSv3.3 Output, 2024

Fig. 3



Significance of the Structural Model linking Search Engine Optimization and profitability of Youth managed SMEs

Source: SmartPLSv3.3 Output, 2024

Significance of the Structural Model linking Search Engine Optimization and profitability of Youth managed SMEs

Source: SmartPLSv3.3 Output, 2024

Search engine optimization had a significant effect on profitability ($p < 0.05$, $R = 0.627$, $R^2 = 0.394$, $T = 7.444$), indicating that youth-managed SMEs should prioritize SEO to improve customer satisfaction, product knowledge, brand awareness, brand loyalty, user engagement, website engagement, and annual sales, which in turn improves profitability.

Fig 4

Hypothesis 2

Content marketing had significant effect on the sales growth of youth managed SMEs.

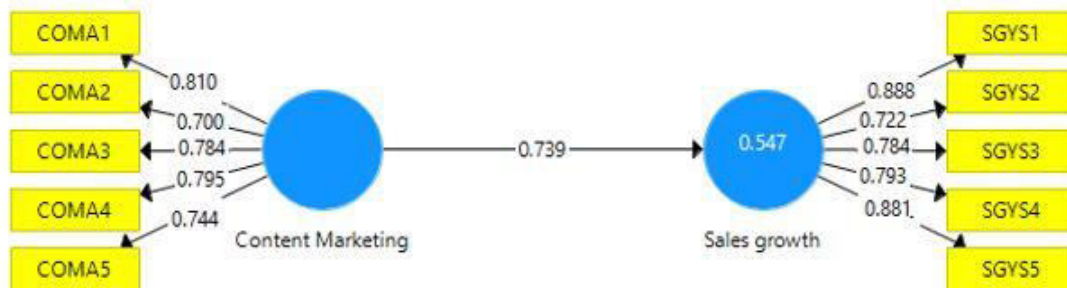
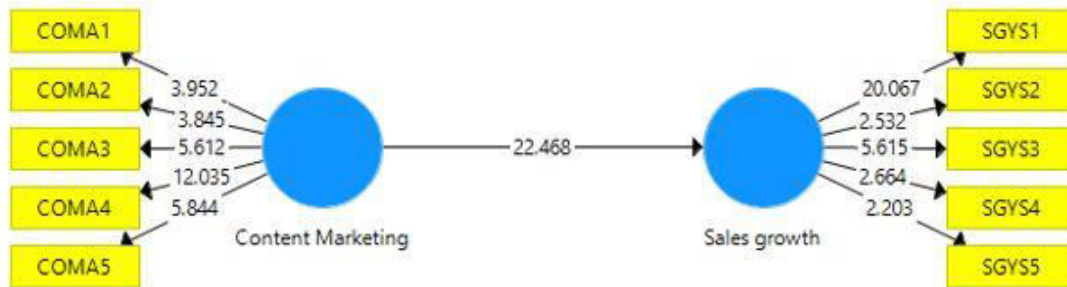


Fig.5

Structural Model linking Content Marketing and Sales growth of Youth managed SMEs

Source: SmartPLSv3.3 Output, 2024



Significance of the Structural Model linking Content Marketing and Sales growth of Youth managed SMEs

Source: SmartPLSv3.3 Output, 2024

Content marketing significantly influenced sales growth with a strong positive relationship ($p < 0.05$, $R = 0.739$, $R^2 = 0.547$, $T = 22.468$), suggesting that adopting effective content marketing can positively impact customer engagement and trust, fostering loyalty and boosting sales performance.

Summary of SEM results and findings

Hypothesis	Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁	Search engine optimization - >Profitability	0.627	7.444	0.000	Accept
H ₀₂	Content marketing - >Sales growth	0.739	22.468	0.000	Accept

Source: field work, 2024

The study found that SMEs need to adopt digital marketing strategies to enhance their performance, particularly by youth-managed enterprises. These strategies include search engine optimization, content marketing. The research emphasizes the importance of investing in digital marketing to create awareness of their products, generate more leads, and increase customer traffic by distributing valuable content. Additionally, youth-managed SMEs should attend annual conferences to update their skills and knowledge alongside other professional experts in digital marketing. Moreover, SMEs should consistently evaluate their digital marketing strategies to ensure effectiveness. This can be done by monitoring website traffic, email open rates, social media engagement, and conversion rates, as well as utilizing keyword research and improving site quality to enhance visibility and attract more customers.

Conclusion

This study concludes that search engine optimization significantly enhances the profitability of youth-managed SMEs by improving financial performance. Content marketing also had a strong and positive relationship with the sales growth of youth-managed SMEs, leading to an increase in their sales performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Youth-managed SMEs in North-Central Nigeria should prioritize search engine optimization by optimizing their websites for search engines, utilizing keyword research, and improving site quality to enhance visibility and attract more customers, thus boosting profitability.
2. Youth-managed SMEs should invest in creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, ultimately driving profitable customer actions and boosting sales growth.
3. Youth-managed SMEs should continuously monitor and evaluate their digital marketing strategies to ensure they remain effective.

4. Future research should explore the remaining five regions in Nigeria for a comparative study analysis.

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