IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME) IN BAUCHI METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bauchi metropolis. SMEs remain a vital backbone of economic development, yet many operators still struggle with visibility, competitiveness, and customer engagement in an increasingly digital marketplace. With platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp becoming essential marketing tools, this research investigates how advertising, content engagement, and digital competence influence SME performance. A survey design was employed, targeting 300 SMEs randomly selected from a population of 1,015 registered businesses in Bauchi metropolis. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Findings indicate that social media advertising significantly enhances customer reach and sales growth, while engaging content fosters trust, loyalty, and brand recognition. Furthermore, SMEs with higher levels of digital marketing competence reported improved efficiency and competitiveness. The study concludes that effective adoption of social media strategies is a key determinant of SME performance in Bauchi. It recommends that SME operators invest in professional training, content-driven marketing, and paid advertising campaigns, while government and support agencies should strengthen infrastructure and digital literacy initiatives to boost SME growth in the region. Regression analysis showed that social media advertising had a significant positive effect on SME performance (β = 0.3772, t = 17.921, p < 0.001). Content engagement (β = 0.2977, t = 13.507, p < 0.001) and digital marketing competence (β = 0.2942, t = 14.015, p < 0.001) likewise had significant positive associations with performance. The model explained approximately 72.9% of the variance in SME performance (R^2 = 0.729). In practical terms, these coefficients imply that a one-unit increase in social media advertising, content engagement, or marketing competence corresponds to roughly a 0.3-unit increase in SME performance.

INTRODUCTION

The success of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has grown to dominate the economic development discourses largely owing to the role they play in harnessing innovation, employment, and poverty alleviation. SMEs represent a big proportion of the number of businesses in both the developed and developing economies and they also form the foundation of sustainable growth. However, in this modern digital world, their performance does not only rely on the conventional business practices, but on how they can deal with the changes that are happening in technology and markets.

The utilization of digital marketing is one of the crucial determinants of the performance of SMEs in the current environment. SMEs, especially, have become the overall beneficiaries of social media marketing in terms of creating brand awareness, selling their products to clients, and establishing customer relations (Adeleke & Suraju, 2019). They are commonly known as the drivers of innovation, job creation and agents of poverty alleviation. In a number of economies, SMEs play a significant role as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contributes to, and they also provide most of the non-agricultural employment. As an example, in Nigeria, SMEs encompass more than 80 percent of the businesses and employ approximately 70 percent of the labor force, thus becoming a necessity in terms of the inclusion and economic prosperity.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp are some of the cost effective applications of social media through which SMEs can reach the largest audience and compete with other major companies. Social media advertisement entails paid advertisements whose focus is to reach specific consumers. This is a strategy that has gained popularity among the SMEs in generating brand awareness and fetching customer traffic (Chatterjee & Kar,

2020). It is ensured by content creation and engagement including publishing updates, setting videos, answering questions so that the business could earn respect and loyalty of its customers. Besides, the digital literacy of business owners, as well as their teams with the skills of using the tools of social media to design effective enrolment campaigns, is critical.

The number of social media posts or the consistency of an online interaction of a business also determines the frequency that one wills to stay relevant and visible to all potential customers (Appel et al., 2020).

In Bauchi metropolis, emerging social media usage is finding its favor among the SMEs as they adopt it as a marketing tool. Nevertheless, the role that individual influences such as advertising and content engagement, marketing expertise, and post frequency have on the performance of their business as a whole is unexplored. Despite having the widespread potential to increase customer interactions and business development, actual implementation and performance of social media in SMEs in Bauchi is hindered by factors like poor digital skills and online inconsistency, underdeveloped infrastructure, and insufficient internet connectivity (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). The purpose of the present study is to examine the performance of SMEs in Bauchi metropolis and how this is influenced by social media marketing.

SMEs are important drivers to the economic growth in Bauchi metropolis in terms of employment and alleviation of poverty, and local economic growth. Although social media has emerged as a powerful tool in marketing, most of the SMEs in the region are not making full use of its power to enhance performance. Certain SMEs have set up accounts on social media, but fail to actively engage, write and develop quality content on these platforms and/or place advertisements owing to low digital literacy levels or time constraint and resource limitations (Adeleke & Suraju, 2019).

Among the greatest challenges is the fact that a number of SMEs have failed to utilize digital marketing to their best to create visibility and attract buyers. Even though social media apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are currently popular in Bauchi in terms of social interaction, small-medium enterprises owners lack technical expertise to use these tools as a part of the business process (Ibrahim & Mohammed, 2020). They are therefore unable to access greater markets other than just at their local region.

Another constraint is the fact that, the SME proprietors of Bauchi metropolis are still much reliant on face-to-face marketing, banners and neighborhood presence as the key marketing strategies. As an example, a conventional fashion designer or edible food merchant in Wunti, Yelwa or Gwallameji may have a Facebook or WhatsApp account but would only use it in a conversational manner, with not much regularity and incitement of commercialism. This creates poor online engagement and little effect on customer acquisition. Additionally, poor internet connection, expensive data, limited digital literacy and unorganised digital marketing budgets are the impairing factors to the process of digital marketing strategies implementation. This scenario leads to low competitiveness, shrinking profit margins, and in extreme situations, collapse of SMEs that are unable to stay abreast of the new emerging market requirements.

The current research regarding self-employed SMEs mostly includes cities with more developed digital infrastructure or specific zones in metropolises, so there is a lack of knowledge about the peculiarities and issues of SMEs in smaller cities, such as Bauchi. Most SME owners in Bauchi acknowledge that despite trial and error being their most common approach to digital marketing, most lack the evidence based insights that will guarantee the success of their digital marketing efforts. This can lead them to poor visibility and customer interaction and little growth in business.

It is thus necessary to examine the extent to which various dimensions of social media marketing such as advertising and the engagement of content, marketing skills, and frequency of activities contribute to the SME performance in Bauchi metropolis.

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media marketing strategies on the performance of SMEs in Bauchi metropolis.

The specific objectives of the study are to examine the effect of social media advertising on the performance of small and medium enterprises in Bauchi metropolis, to determine how content creation and customer engagement influence SME performance, and to assess the role of social media marketing skills and competencies in shaping the performance of SMEs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are an essential part of economies in the world because they create jobs, drive innovations, and are also an effective means to economic growth. The success of SMEs can be measured using both the quantitative and qualitative measures that include the growth of the number of customers, revenue or sales turnover increase, improving the market share, brand awareness, customer retention, and sustainable nature of business. In the modern days of digitalisation, these performance outcomes are increasingly being affected by how well the SMEs utilise technology and in that case, social media marketing (SMM), to fuel business missions (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020).

Social media marketing has become a strategic tool through which an SME can drive its results without necessarily causing the high expenditures that are experienced when utilizing traditional marketing. They also engage with SMEs through Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and X (ex-Twitter), through which they are able to create brand awareness and a robust online presence. This exposure enables companies to attract a wider market, and this includes its customers who may not be physically present within the topographical vicinity. These platforms have the capacity to drive profits due to the frequent contact and engagement between businesses and the consumers, hence increasing sales levels and customer bases as well (Okeke & Eze, 2020).

Moreover, SMM allows the SMEs to connect directly with the customers by communicating with them without any lagging time and even working out interactive campaigns. These real-time interactions create customer confidence, augment customer satisfaction and foster loyalty all of which are paramount towards recording healthy business performance over the long term. In comparison with one-way traditional marketing, social media strategies provide the dialogic principle

according to which the business can learn about customer preferences, complaints, inquiries, and respond to them to enhance the level of quality and customer experience (Ali et al., 2021).

Besides customer connection, social media analytics can be used by SMEs to monitor the performance parameters of the campaign, including engagement rate, click through rate, the conversion rate, and the ROI. The measures would give SMEs an opportunity to do a more working marketing plan and invest its resources better. The decision-making that is data-driven will optimize the workflow and guarantee the consistency of the marketing work with business objectives. As such, strategically embracing SMM can mean that enterprises stand a greater chance of recording tangible business performance improvement covered by revenue, market share and brand power (Johnson, 2023).

Finally, social media gives SMEs a competitive edge as it makes it possible to innovate in marketing and product development. The comments obtained via social sites can be used to develop ideas concerning new products or enhance the ones that are already there Further, brand awareness through beauty influencers and viral content can produce the resulting effect at a fraction of the cost compared to traditional media. In combination, such advantages can provide long-term sustainability and resilience particularly valuable to SMEs having to deal with volatile or very competitive environments. Thus, under the correct goal and strategic orientation SMM can be a booster of enhanced SME performance and sustainable business success (Umar & Ayuba, 2021).

Socia Media Marketing (SMM) describes the intentional usage of interactive, networked social websites to create, communicate, provide and co create value with existing and potential customers. Contrary to broadcast media, social sites are also dialog and participatory in nature commenting, sharing, tagging, messaging, live video, and community groups allows real time and two way relationship building and customer feedback as central to marketing practice in the present context. Findings of recent research studies conducted among African and other emerging market SMEs indicates that the interactivity and informativeness of social media contents are always connected to enhanced non financial performance (awareness, engagement, satisfaction) which further correlates to sales growth and other wider measures of performance. According to the study by Ayokunmi et al. (2024), Amegbe et al. (2023), Lawal and Adejuwon (2023), and Oludoyi et al. (2024), the findings of the present research are consistent with the findings described in these studies.

Another common topic in SME literature is that, the presence of social sites reduces barriers of entry compared with the traditional mass media (television, print and billboards) and thus, it enables firms with limited allocations to market their services, experiment with messages, and increase their expenditure at incremental stages only when the outcomes are worthwhile. Nigerian and pan African research findings indicate SMM to marginally have low media expenditure threshold, but high reach, brand visibility and lead generation potential to small companies. The number of available image types in phonological cue analysis was similar between work with the adult (Amegbe et al., 2023; Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023; Nwali & Ntegeeh, 2022).

Structural Equation modeling and survey led in Nigeria and Ghana associates SMM activity content sharing, ad placement, referral/word of mouth process, influencer/community process, and customization to such marketing performance indicators as brand familiarity, consumer satisfaction, repeat purchasing and buyer performance. Although the effect magnitudes differ across industries and intensity of platforms used, the general trend supports the use of SMM as a relevant contributor to the results of the SME. The effects and costs of migration (Amegbe et al., 2023; Ayokunmi et al., 2024; Lawal & Adejuwon, 2023; Oludoyi et al., 2024), or the positivity/negativity (Amegbe et al., 2023; Ayokunmi et al., 2024; Lawal & Adejuwon, 2023; Oludoyi et al., 2024) of migration are related to the number of migration. Greater attention not just more posting is important Surveys indicate that the perceived value and quality of relationship is driven by informativeness (useful, timely, problem solving content) and interactive responsiveness (replying to comments, conversational tone, polls, Q&A) with trust mediating relationships between perceptions and subsequent loyalty and purchase intention. This is due to the fact that they all approximate a certain range of errors in counting the number of individuals/objects belonging to a particular group (Amegbe et al., 2023; Ayokunmi et al., 2024; Lawal & Adejuwon, 2023; Nwali & Ntegeeh, 2022).

New platforms integrate control screens (reach, engagement rates, click throughs, conversions, and sentiment) that SMEs can access in many cases at no additional cost to measure campaign effectiveness, filter audience's response patterns, and improve content. In the case of developing country SMEs (Kenya and Nigeria samples), adoption research indicates that the ability to read and use the measures distinguishes the higher performers; in this case organizational learning capability further enhances the performance benefits once firms institutionalize the data usage. The presence of food and somewhat similar to the presence of money, food also provides an individual with satisfaction and satisfaction with oneself (Oyewobi et al., 2021).

By sharing branded or experience based content, the firms get increased exposure via peers. Dimensions like word of mouth/ referral marketing and community engagement have been associated with the enhanced awareness and in some cases, enhanced patronage. Whilst virality is hard to estimate, shareable, relatable or utility driven content can increase response to viral propensity. The program can be started by those who are recently divorced and their children (Ayokunmi et al., 2024; Ilesanmi & Oyedepo, 2023; Nwali & Ntegeeh, 2022).

Paid social advertising tools offer the possibility of micro targeting based on location, interests, language and behavioral signals abilities which can make them especially appealing to SMEs requiring prolific spending. Empirical data of the Nigerian-based SMEs relates bespoke messaging and segment-based targeting to an improved sales trend and customer retention rates. The cost-effective differentiation analysis (derived by the low cost of entering the market) and products are just some of the examples (Lawal & Adejuwon, 2023; Oludoyi et al., 2024).

Research-practice matching: ad hoc posting can never achieve long-term results. These benefits apply to SMEs whose social goals can be expressed in terms of awareness vs. leads vs. loyalty, identified target audiences, content schedules, role clarity of platforms, assignment of resources as well as KPIs measured over time. The similarity in cross

platform branding and integration with the rest of marketing activities enhances performance. The educational content optimized is the same as those being optimized overall (HubSpot, 2022; RockContent, 2024; Unity Connect, 2023).

The new requirement to learn is the continued introduction of new things in updates, the appearance of new types of content (Reels, Shorts) and social commerce opportunities, as well as the changing nature of users of these social media. Practitioner data reflects small firms shifting mix and creative style as each platform changes; failure to adapt generally results in losses in reach. Researchers also observe that the performance payoff of SMMinvestments occur as a mediating factor between the organizational learning capability and managerial support. According to identivated facts (Oyewobi et al., 2021; RockContent, 2024), it is possible to state that the result of constant inflation is the decline of real wages.

Most of the current empirical research is concentrated in larger cities in Nigeria (Lagos, Ibadan, South West states), however the cost savings learnings, awareness dividends, interactivity-born trust, analytics reciprocity and reachability are transmissible to secondary urban centers where mobile web traffic is on a rise. The SMEs based in Bauchi region can utilize the benefit of localized language/content, geo targeted advertisements, WhatsApp Business broadcast list and community influencer tie in to surpass the shortcomings in traditional media availability and reach beyond local catchments. The reason is that the answers to the question would be essential elements of the plan of measurements and the tests that one might conduct (Amegbe et al., 2023; Lawal & Adejuwon, 2023; Nwali & Ntegeeh, 2022; Oludoyi et al., 2024).

Social media marketing (SMM) has come to be one of the revolutionary forms of marketing in the digital era. It entails incorporation of the different social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp, in advertising products and services. The goal is not only advertising but also to establish relationships and dialogue with customers (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). SMM provides businesses with the means of engaging and communicating with the consumers in real time and have a two-way communication channel, which facilitates customer satisfaction and loyalty (Appel et al., 2020).

It is also very cost-effective which one of the main benefits of SMM remains. The traditional tools and techniques of marketing that include TV and radio advertisements, or billboard advertisements are costly especially to the small businesses. SMM, in its turn, enables companies to contact thousands of potential customers without having to spend finances. That is why it is especially popular with Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), as they usually have minimal marketing budgets (Adeleke & Suraju, 2019).

Moreover, SMM ensures the measurement of the results since there are analytical tools inbuilt on social mediums. The examples of metrics that businesses are able to track include reach, engagement, click-through rates, and conversions. Such metrics provide guidelines in making intelligent choices and models in improving and streamlining marketing efforts as per the actual performance (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). The other major aspect of SMM is that it has the ability to be viral. When customers share the company content it increases the reach of the business by exponent or more. Viral marketing does not only elevate brand awareness but also credibility since people will be more willing to trust their peers than adverts (Tafesse & Wien, 2021).

In a region such as Bauchi metropolis where the conventional methods of marketing do not hold a lot of water or are not easily accessible, SMM has the potential of filling the chasm that exists with regards to marketing. Through social platforms, such businesses are in a position to reach both the neighbourhood and even overseas clients by overcoming the influence of geographical distances (Okeke & Eze, 2020). Moreover, SMM makes it possible to get direct feedback of customers. Comments, reviews, and messages will help the businesses understand consumer preferences, concerns, and the level of their satisfaction. This feedback cycle proves to be priceless in product development and improvement of services (Appel et al., 2020). SMM helps in targeted marketing as well With the use of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, it is possible to target potential customers according to location, personal interests, and preferences. This helps to deliver marketing messages to the right individuals, hence raising the conversion chances (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, to make the most out of SMM, SMEs have to create a unified strategy. Irregular or unregular posting probably will not produce worthwhile results An effective plan that contains goals, audience analysis of the targeted people, content creation, and scheduling, as well as performance tracking is needed (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). Besides, the social media algorithms and trends keep changing, and it is imperative that businesses keep up with them. What may have worked one year ago will not necessarily be effective today Ongoing learning and redesign contribute to the keep of relevancy and competitiveness in terms of social media space (Tafesse & Wien, 2021).

The process of Content creation and user engagement is the key aspect of an SMM. The information, pictures, videos, and other media created by business, published on such platforms as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X (previously Twitter) are called content. Engagement, conversely, is all user actions that any of this content produces, including likes, shares, comments, story hits, saves, even direct messages. In the case of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), being able to create engaging and highly interactive content is very vital in helping them attract, engage, and maintain their targeted audience (Ali, Omar, & Abu Bakar, 2021). Content of high degree of quality is quite imperative in creating brand credibility and consumer confidence. Informative, relevant, and visually-appealing content will make customers view the business as professional and trustworthy. The perception plays a significant role in customer loyalty and repeat patronage and in the long-run development of the business (Nwachukwu & Nwankwo, 2020).

The use of visual media, including product images, infographics, and reels as well as short-format videos, continues to gain increased interaction rates as compared to text-based postings. According to recent research, algorithms used by such platforms as Instagram and Tik-Tok prioritize the content that maintains high levels of interaction, therefore, increasing visibility and reach (Johnson, 2023). Therefore, SMEs will need to explore the possibility to invest into a graphic design software, video-editing software, or even seek out freelance content creators to make their online presence more graphic (Okolo, Yusuf, & Ibrahim, 2022).

In addition, original, emotionally-compelling content can be a better driver of engagement. Gen Z and Millennial consumers are more willing to be associated with brands that openly communicate their values, cultural association, and behind-the-scenes honesty (Umar & Ayuba, 2021). Consequently, SMEs ought to include stories, customer testimonials, and live updates in their approach to spreading content to strengthen and increase the possibility of sharing.

SMM skills and competence encompass knowledge, capabilities, and the experience of making use of the social media platforms in terms of business expansion. Examples of such skills are creation of content, specific knowledge related to various platforms, expertise in advertising, targeting of intended audience, analyzing and interpreting analytics, and communicating. In terms of small and medium-sized companies, at least locally to Bauchi metropolis, having social media competent workforce can be a significant boost to marketing efforts (Taneja & Toombs, 2021).

The ability to manage various social m1edia is a competitive core competence. The platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok, have different features, their demographics, and means of engagement. It is necessary to understand these differences and approach them strategically to make the most out of them (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). Content development is one of the major areas of competence. This encompasses general graphics insertion, footage editing, writing an interesting caption, and storytelling in tandem with brand messages. Companies that are not equipped with such skills usually end up producing content of low qualities, this can result in lack of engagement and bad brand impression (Pulizzi, 2022).

Tracking of performance and analytics are also some of the skills in social media marketing. Platforms have different insight information like impression, engagement levels, and follower growth. An analysis of these measures can guide SMEs to design appropriate measures to check on its implementation, and make the relevant modifications. Businesses that lack analytical abilities might end up spending their resources on useless campaigns (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020).

Acumen with respect to paid advertising on social media is becoming relevant. Being able to know how to set up and manage advertisements, define target groups, allocate funds and measure performance can make or break an ad campaign. This involves technical expertise, and most SMEs do not have experience and quality training (Tuten & Solomon, 2019).

Another issue of competence is social media crises management. Business establishments will have to know how to deal with unfavorable reviews or community backlash in a professional manner. This includes acting timely, having a positive tone and taking remedial measures where applicable. Crisis handling may result in reputational damage due to poor handling (Okeke & Eze, 2020).

Skills in managing the community, including being responsive after messages and comments and creating interaction are also essential. Such activities foster customer trust and loyalty that leads to repeat purchases and make a customer a promoter (Trainor et al., 2019). A trend of continuous learning is a feature of social media competence. The online environment is dynamic, and the platforms constantly update their algorithms, develop additional functions and alter fashion in the content they offer. Those SMEs that make an investment in continuous training have a better chance of staying competitive and innovative (Okeke & Eze, 2020).

Social media competence is also a process of strategic planning. Clear objectives, defining key performance indicators (KPIs), and aligning social media initiatives with bigger business objectives have the effect of making sure that resources are utilized well. The activities of the social media with no strategic thinking can grow unorganized and unfruitful (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

In the study, Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is used as the theoretical foundation of the research. TAM highlights 2 important pre-determinants of technology adoption; which are; Perceived usefulness and Perceived ease of use. When SMEs in Bauchi metropolis consider Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram as potential platforms to improve business performance, customer engagement and competitiveness, they will use them as tools in the context of their social media marketing practices. Findings like those of Alalwan et al. (2017) conclusively indicate a high level of motivation into adoption of perceived value, which entails real-time communications and cost-effective advertising.

The perceived ease of use is also very important especially in areas that lack digital literacy. Most SMEs in Bauchi use those with simpler and mobile-friendly layouts that do not require a lot of technical abilities like Facebook Pages and WhatsApp Business. This will eliminate the digital gap and will make prolonged usage possible. Canva and InShot are some of the tools, which facilitate the content creation process and allow SMEs to conduct their digital marketing independently of professional assistance. But all these perceptions can greatly be affected by plenty of external factors like the availability of the internet and electricity, and the cost of these services. The researchers have found that infrastructure issues also minimize the perceived usefulness and ease of use, creating the necessity to establish more government interventions as well as digital literacy programs that can enhance adoption (Yakubu et al., 2020).

Recent additions to TAM support the inclusion of other constructs e.g. facilitating conditions, trust, and social influence which are particularly pertinent to the SMEs within Bauchi. Open access to the digital devices, support communities, and cheap internet is a plus on adoption, whereas trust issues such as internet frauds and data security usually act as a barrier. The other component that contributes to adoption in collectivist societies is social influence, which is mainly influenced by peer recommendations and success stories which also form bandwagon effect among SMEs. Moreover, previous experiences and digital literacy influence future use behaviour, and an encouraging outcome will solidify the adoption and a poor one make the user reluctant.

A few studies examined the effect of social media marketing of SME performance in various parts of the world. Alalwan et al. (2017) documented the effectiveness of Facebook ads targeting improving brand awareness and conversion rate in Jordan, and Nkosi and Mahlangu (2020) revealed that usage of influencers and appealing visual content helps SMEs in South Africa to attract the attention of the youth. On the same note, Adeleke and Suraju (2021) found out that SMEs in Lagos could use paid advertisements on WhatsApp and Instagram to improve their customer engagement and conversions. Back in Europe, Felix et al. (2020) reported that brand loyalty was supported on the premise of customer engagement

through comments and polls, and, along the same lines, Ahmad et al. (2019) showed that the frequent posting and fast reaction rate was what fostered repeat purchases amidst Malaysian SMEs. In Nigeria, Okeke and Eze (2021) showed that content that is appealing to the eye drove customer retention and brand recall.

The other category of researches pointed towards impact of digital competency and skills in attaining favourable marketing results. Ogunyemi and Odetayo (2020) and Ibrahim and Aljarah (2020) had the same finding where SMEs that have strong digital capabilities had an enhanced audience targeting, campaign effectiveness and sales conversions. In their turn, Olaleye and Adebayo (2021) also revealed that the digital skills gap of Nigerian SMEs was considerable and the adoption of social media could not be made much effective because of it, which also indicates the necessity to implement policy-based training and education programs. According to Chatterjee and Kar (2020), frequent posting and responding were also key elements to success in engagement strategies. This was seconded by also demonstrating that regular content postings by SMEs registered increased customer inquiries and sales (Musa & Hassan, 2021). The same was proven by Boateng and Ofori (2021) who highlighted that the success of long-term customer engagement depends on adequate two-way communication and interactive campaigns.

Content approach and its match with the larger corporate objectives were also most significant areas in social media performance of SMEs. Research findings such as that of Kwayu et al. (2019) indicated how an SME could receive better customer retention and sales when there is co-alignment in social media strategies and brand missions. According to the research conducted by Mensah and Azumah (2020), quizzes and live videos, which are interactive types of content, created better customer relations when compared to a regular post. Maina and Gichuki (2020) stressed the use of storytelling as the technique to develop emotional involvement and brand loyalty. The barriers to adoption still exist especially in underserved areas. According to Salihu and Mohammed (2022), in Northern Nigeria, poor internet infrastructure, cultural aspersion, and inadequate training hold back the effective use of social media hence the need to improve the internet infrastructure and initiate digital literacy programs to fully realize the benefit of social media to SMEs.

The above independent variables interact with the dependent variable that is SME Performance. The measurement of the SME performance entails indicators like the growth of the customer base, revenue generation, enhanced visibility of the brand, and competitiveness in the market.

Social Media Advertising involves the well-planned application of adverts in social media including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to get consumer attention in the market and influence consumers towards a particular product or service to purchase. The advantage of this type of advertising to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is that this advertising platform is cheap and has a high audience reach, and it is targeted. The algorithms that these platforms apply make it possible to subdivide the audience by demographic, interests, and online behavior traits, thereby making the campaigns more effective. In Bauchi metropolis where old fashioned marketing might be restricted by volume and cost, social media advertisements might create high awareness. Such ads also offer quantifiable outcomes, enabling SMEs to monitor the amount of hits, click-through-rates and conversions. These data can lead to real-time campaign adjustments to improve performance. The more the people see and read about a product and the more they interact with it, the more are the chances of it selling and being remembered. Thus, social media advertising should not be viewed as a promotional tool, rather a performance enhancing strategy. Through this, the effect is set to impact positively on the performance in revenue, customer acquisition and positioning of the SME.

Content Creation and Engagement: This should involve creating, generating and posting worthwhile and interactive content on social media platforms to create conversation and build connections with present and potential customers. In the case of SMEs, this would involve visuals, videos, infographics, blog posts and real-time responses which appeal to their target customers. Relevant content will attract but also encourage likes, comments, shares, etc. that will organically increase the brand visibility. Such things as relatable and culturally relevant content can increase trust and familiarity among the local consumers greatly in the business environment of Bauchi.

Social Media Marketing Skills/Competence Social Media Marketing Skills/Competence can be described as the understanding of the social media, digital literacy, and strategic abilities of the SME owners or employees to use the social media as a marketing channel to drive promotional and customer engagement activities. These are the abilities to produce an optimized content, measure the performance metrics, conduct paid ads, and manage social accounts and comprehending the platform algorithms. Among the SMEs in Bauchi, the need to undergo formal training is a common problem that makes exploitation of social media potential difficult. The more digital competent an individual is, the more prepared he/ she is to plan, implement and analyse marketing campaigns effectively. Skilled users are able to read analytics to enhance targeting and delivery of messages achieving better conversion and engagement rates. Moreover, the online relation management and customer feedback skills are also necessary and are key to building up credibility and trust. Developing competence in these topics would make individuals more confident, and they would be less resistant to using the digital tools. By extension, the relevance of digital activities and corporate performance depends directly on the competence related to social media marketing. SMEs that develop this ability are most likely to grow at a faster rate and to retain competitive advantage in the digital markets.
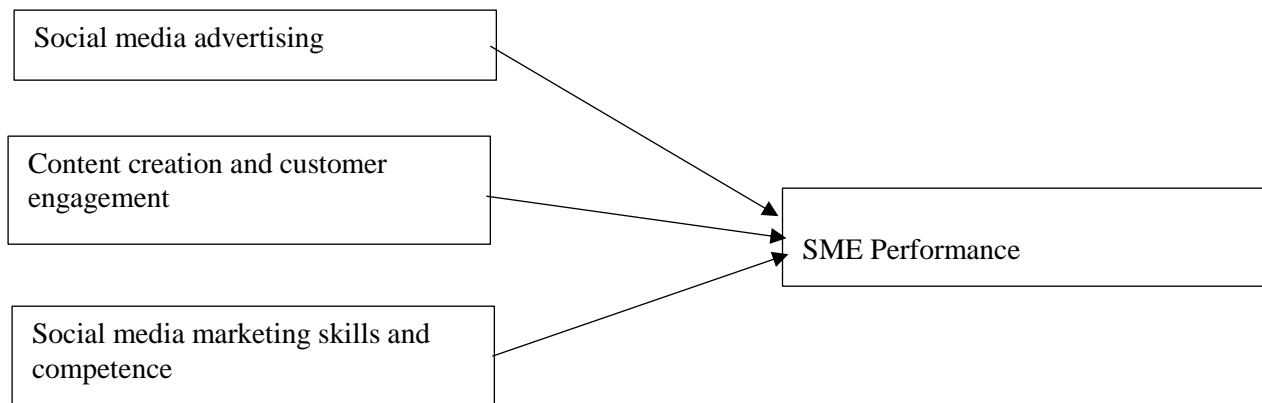
The study seeks to analyze the impact of social media advertising on the performance of small and medium enterprises in Bauchi metropolis, examine how content creation and customer engagement affect SME outcomes, and assess the contribution of social media marketing skills and competencies to the overall performance of these businesses. Taking into account the theoretical analysis and previous empirical results, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01}: Social media advertising has no significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Bauchi metropolis.

H_{02}: Content creation and engagement have no significant impact on SME performance.

H_{03}: Social media marketing skills and competence do not significantly affect the performance of SMEs.

The conceptual framework will organize the research in determining the level at which each of the dimensions of social media marketing can influence the performance of the SMEs in Bauchi metropolis.

Source: Hartman (2017)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design used was survey research design, which was appropriate since it required standardization and measurable data collected in the study and that a wide number of the respondents were involved. This was a good statistical tool in analyzing the behavioral trends and association of variables in the field. The unit of analysis was comprised of registered SMEs operating within the Bauchi metropolis totaling 1,015 SMEs that were trading and manufacturing as of January 2025, as listed in the registry of the Bauchi State Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

A crude random sampling method was applied to ensure each of the SMEs had an equal opportunity of participation, which curbed bias and added representativeness. The total population size was estimated as 300 SMEs in accordance with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table stating that this sample size is fairly large and will be able to give us an accurate representation of the total population. Data was obtained using structured questionnaires comprising of two parts-Part A was the demographic part and part B the part that dealt with the research variables-the purchase intention, purchase frequency, brand loyalty and preference of products. To guarantee reliability, the questionnaire was subjected to face validity by the specialists to be able tell whether it is clear or not and to test whether it is relevant or not.

The SPSS version 30.0 was used to analyze data. Demographic data and response were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was used because this type of inferential statistics was utilized to test hypotheses and find out the impact of input variables on consumer patronage.

RESULTS

Social media advertising has no significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Bauchi metropolis.

Table 1. Regression Result Table for H_{01}

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	-0.2446	0.152	-1.605	0.110	Not Significant
Social Media Advertising	**0.3772**	0.021	**17.921**	**0.000**	**Significant**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Regression analysis Table H01 indicates that social media advertising has a good, and significant impact on SME performance (beta = 0.3772, t = 17.921, p = 0.000 <0.05). This implies that SME performance will change by a difference of 0.377 units in the use of social media advertising per change of a unit. The model R 2 value of 0.729 indicates that, 72.9% of the variation in SME performance can be attributed to the predictors, which is strong evidence of relationship between social media advertising and performance. The statistical significance of the F -statistic (F = 247.1, p < 0.001) indicates that the model is reliable. These results indicate that SMEs that spend on paid social media advertising, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp marketing campaigns, have better performance, business presence, and reach of customers. Thus, the null hypothesis (H01) is rejected, the conclusion can be made that social media advertising can contribute greatly to the performance of the SME in Bauchi metropolis.

Content creation and engagement have no significant impact on SME performance
Table 2. Regression Result Table for H_{02}

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	-0.2446	0.152	-1.605	0.110	Not Significant
Content Engagement	**0.2977**	0.022	**13.507**	**0.000**	**Significant**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table H02 indicates that Content creation and engagement have a strong positive impact on SME performance (B = 0.2977, t = 13.507, P = 0.000 < 0.05). The implication of this finding is that an increment of one unit in the level of effective content creation and engagement efforts (regular posting, visually appealing designs, and posting interactive information) would cause a 0.298-unit improvement (assuming other factors held constant) in the performance of SMEs. With the R 2 value of 0.729 being high, content engagement is an essential part of the model explaining performance differences. The model is also validated by significant F-statistic (F = 247.1, p < 0.001). This result shows that SMEs that use creative and attractive social media contents form better relationships with the customers and gain their loyalty as well as retention. Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis (H02) is rejected confirming that the content creation and engagement has significant effect on SME performance in Bauchi metropolis.

Social media marketing skills and competence do not significantly affect the performance of SMEs
Table 3. Regression Result Table for H03

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	-0.2446	0.152	-1.605	0.110	Not Significant
Marketing Skills/Competence	**0.2942**	**0.021**	**14.015**	**0.000**	**Significant**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As seen in Table H03, social media marketing skills and competence have a statistically significant relationship with performance of the SMEs (I = 0.2942, t = 14.015, p = 0.000 < 0.05). This shows that each unit increase that SME operators or staff exhibit in their social media competence brings about 0.294-unit improvement in the business performances, with other factors held constant. The model shows that the total variation in SME performance is explained by 72.9 percent and this result is justified by the F significance (F = 247.1, p < 0.001). The results indicate SMEs that have learnt to work with digital tools (Canva, Meta Ads Manager), understand the algorithms of social media, and can analyze social media metrics are in better situation to both target customers, minimise costs, maximise their profitability. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H03) must be rejected in favour of the conclusion that social media marketing skills and competence are critical towards improving SME performance within the metropolis of Bauchi.

DISCUSSIONS
The findings of the current research indicate that social media marketing (advertising, content engagement, and marketing competence) are positively correlated with the performance of SMEs in Bauchi metropolis in line with previous literatures.

The descriptive analysis indicated high level of agreement between the respondents on the positive impacts of social media advertisement on the performance of the SMEs. The scores ranged between 4.05 and 4.35 on a 1-7 scale, and there was a strong sense that paid advertisements via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp enhanced brand visibility (M = 4.28), customer inquiries (M = 4.22) and overall performance (M = 4.30). They also said that targeted advertising (M = 4.08) and analytics tracking (M = 4.05) were valued as means of amplifying marketing and increasing its efficiency. This affirms the argument that in Bauchi, SMEs use cost-efficient social media advertisements to gain coverage and reach sales.

The regression analysis indicated the social media advertising to have a significant positive impact with the association being 0.3772 and t-value being 17.921 (p < 0.05). Requiring no more than two attempts, the model was able to explain 72.9 percent of the variance in performance (R 2 = 0.729), reflecting the high likelihood of it. These results are consistent with previous research by Alalwan et al. (2017), who stated that targeted ads tools created by Facebook increased brand recognition and sales of Jordanian SMEs. As in the case of Nkosi and Mahlangu (2020), who acknowledged the power of visually appealing advertisement in connecting with youthful viewers, Adeleke and Suraju (2021) also concluded that sponsored posts had a great impact on increasing customer inquiries among SMEs in Lagos. This research, thus, establishes the fact that advertising through social media plays a pivotal role in fuelling growth in SMEs in Bauchi metropolis.

Secondly, it was found that content creation and engagement through visuals and interactions can lead to significant trust, loyalty and repeat purchases (2977, p < 0.05). Means were higher on content creation and involvement with values that ranged between 4.15 and 4.33, showing that not only do respondents use visually appealing content (M = 4.30) or video/infographic (M = 4.33) or customer feedback (M = 4.20) with regular frequency, but they are also consistent in involving audiences. The SMEs stated that such plans enhanced customer confidence (M = 4.18), buyback (M = 4.15), and customer loyalty (M = 4.21). This shows that content-based engagement has not only managed to capture the audience but also build long term customer relations that are essential in the growth of SMEs.

The results of regression analysis indicated that there exists significant positive relationships between content engagement and SME performance (beta = 0.2977, t = 13.507, p < 0.05) with the models explaining 72.9 percent of performance variance (R 2 = 0.729). Such a finding is in line with Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2020), who attributed the interactive nature of engagement techniques to enhanced emotional customer relationships in European small and mid-sized enterprises. Likewise, Ahmad, Bakar, and Musa (2019) demonstrated that in the case of Malaysian SMEs, frequent posting and timeliness of response were related to repeat purchases. In Nigeria, Okeke and Eze (2021) discovered that the creativity of content like videos and testimonies increased the retention of brands. Therefore, coherent and interesting content creation plays a significant role in SME improvement by instilling the trust and repeat visits.

This corroborates Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2020), who established that polls and comments are engagement strategies that boost consumer loyalty among European SMEs. On the same note, Ahmad, Bakar, and Musa (2019) emphasized that the total number of posts made and the responsiveness to customer feedback increases repeat purchases,

which aligns with our evidence that the customer feedback-modified content improves retention. Okeke and Eze (2021) have also highlighted the capacity of engaging visuals, especially videos, and testimonials in enhancing brand recollection in Nigeria- a finding that is replicated in this study in terms of emphasizing the use of appealing visuals and storytelling. Mensah and Azumah (2020) also demonstrated how interactive functionalities such as quizzes and live videos enhance online communities, which is evidenced in our case through the fact that customer engagement is a factor that promotes loyalty and repeat visitations.

Third, the findings in this study ($\beta = 0.2942$, $p < 0.05$) on the impact of the SMM competence and skills about the SME performance are consistent with Ibrahim and Aljarah (2020) who indicated that SMM training led to improved campaign performance and targeting accuracy. The analysis indicated that there were high mean scores (4.12 to 4.32) using indicators that depicted social media skills and competence. Answers were consistent that the participants are proficient in managing advertisements (M = 4.25), working with tools such as Canva and Meta Ads manager (M = 4.28), and data analysis of campaigns (M = 4.20). Ongoing training (M = 4.12) and skill advancements (M = 4.23) also appeared to be key to better customer targeting and to improving business efficiency. It means that well-competent SMEs will have the opportunity to streamline marketing performance and lower expenses.

Regression analysis revealed that social media skills had a significant influence on the SME performance (B = 0.2942, t = 14.015, p <0.05) with $R^2 = 0.729$. The results are in line with those provided by Ibrahim and Aljarah (2020) since the better digital competence of SMEs leads to better marketing results. Similarly, Ogunyemi and Odetayo (2020) revealed that training of the staff on digital platforms increased customer acquisition and sales. On the other hand, Olaleye and Adebayo (2021) and Salihu and Mohammed (2022) featured the problem of skill shortages in Nigerian SMEs, thus, promoting the need to organize digital literacy courses. In Bauchi therefore, digital capabilities remain a critical factor of SME success regarding utilization of social media marketing. Along the same lines, Ogunyemi and Odetayo (2020) found that SMEs that invested in staff training performed better than their rivals in terms of customer acquisition and conversion to sales, which is also consistent with our finding that competence-driven efficiency gains outperformed other efficiency drivers. On the other hand, Olaleye and Adebayo (2021) demonstrated a digital skills deficiency among SMEs in Nigeria that hampered the content quality and targeting which explains why competence and skills are essential to the full potential of social media. The results in this study support their recommendation of capacity-building efforts in underserved regions such as Northern Nigeria that is reported by Salihu and Mohammed (2022), as lacking infrastructure and training to adopt social media.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aims to investigate how social media advertising impacts the performance of small and medium enterprises in Bauchi metropolis, to explore the influence of content creation and customer interaction on SME performance, and to evaluate the importance of social media marketing skills and competencies in enhancing the success of these enterprises. The conclusion of this undertaking comes to the view of social media marketing, as an essential factor that contributes to the success of SMEs within Bauchi metropolis, as it is a cheap and strong element in enhancing business performances in a digitalizing world. The results emphasize the importance of online platforms that provide SMEs with high competitive advantages and possibilities to increase customer base and attain sustained growth even within a small amount of resources. With the help of digital channels, SMEs can access larger markets in a more efficient and precise way overcoming the traditional marketing barriers.

To start with, paid social media advertisement increases the ability of SME to reach customers and sell their products. The possibility to use targeted advertisement on the Web pages such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp enables smaller companies to focus their marketing campaign on demographic groups and geographic locations. Such a focused strategy will not only raise brand recognition but also result in more relevant customer requests and lead to a greater conversion rate. Consequently, the SMEs will record better sales performance and profitability and will spend less on marketing as compared to conventional advertising methods.

Secondly, content creation and interactive posts play a key role in developing customer loyalty, recognition and repeat customers. The research proves that visually based content in the form of videos, infographics, and testimonials, combined with regular engagement in comments, polls, and direct messages helps SMEs and their customers form stronger relationships. Besides solidifying customer trust, this increased engagement also promotes repeat purchases therefore securing customer retention and long-term sustainability of the business. Interaction and customer centrism of the content is also necessary in acts of differentiating SMEs through competition and to ensure that the contents remain relevant in a market that continues to evolve.

Finally, social media marketing expertise and competence ensure SME owners will be empowered to use digital tools, optimize campaigns, and obtain more improved results. Mastery of tools such as Canva, Meta Ads Manager and social media analytics will allow SMEs to create quality content, manage their advertisements effectively, and analyze useful data-driven insights to make iterative improvements. The digital competence makes SMEs operators make knowledgeable marketing decisions, enhance accuracy in the targeting, and streamline unnecessary inefficiency in implementing campaigns. This way, SMEs that are more proficient in terms of social media marketing are in a better place to capitalize on the use of digital platforms to advance their businesses in terms of business competitiveness and expansion.

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed. SME owners should allocate a portion of their marketing budgets to paid social media advertising, particularly by using tools such as Facebook Ads Manager to target specific customer segments. This approach can help optimize advertising expenditure and improve returns on investment. In addition, SMEs should maintain a consistent content posting strategy that includes videos, infographics, and interactive messages. Content should be tailored to customer interests, and feedback should be actively solicited to

strengthen brand loyalty and improve customer retention. Entrepreneurs and employees also need formal training in social media marketing, analytics, and digital content creation. Such training can be delivered through partnerships with marketing agencies, local training institutes, or government-led programs to address existing skill gaps. Furthermore, SMEs should align their social media marketing objectives with broader business goals so that online campaigns directly support sales growth, customer service, and brand development. At the policy level, government and business development agencies should play a supportive role by offering subsidized training programs and improving essential infrastructure, such as reliable internet access, to enhance SME competitiveness.

Future research can build on these findings in several ways. Scholars may examine the effects of platform-specific strategies, such as TikTok or LinkedIn marketing, on SME performance. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term impact of social media adoption on SME sustainability. Further research may also explore how demographic factors, including age and gender, moderate the outcomes of social media marketing initiatives. Finally, investigating the barriers to digital adoption among rural SMEs would provide valuable insights for targeted policy interventions aimed at reducing the digital divide.

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