

EFFECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING
ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISES IN THE
MUNICIPALITY OF BUEA, CAMEROON

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Dr. Nforbi Shalotte Lem épouse Amungwa

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ABSTRACT
EFFECTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING
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This study examines the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in Buea, Cameroon, where SMEs play a pivotal role in Buea's development. Despite broad use and studies on digital marketing, SMEs lack a framework for implementing marketing strategies. This research addresses the gap by investigating the "impact of social media, SEO, and content marketing on the performance of SMEs". The sample included 50 SMEs executives selected via purposive sampling and 399 digital marketing users determined from Amin's (2005) formula. Quantitative data were analyzed with the aid of Spearman's Rho, while qualitative data were investigated using thematic analysis. Finding revealed that SMEs in Buea engaged in digital marketing without a formal plan. Nevertheless, it has a direct positive impact on performance. SMEs are recommended to adopt carefully planned holistic digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, future research should use advanced tools such as marketing analytics and Artificial Intelligence.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Social Media, SEO, SME, Performance

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The complexity in the business environment has challenged most businesses in the world to change their methodology of operations in order to survive. The business environment has changed drastically over the years though the intensity is not the same in all the parts of the world. The political business environment has experienced higher rates of terrorism mostly in African nations caused by poor governance which has resulting to wars, unstable business environment, high rates of taxation etc. The economic variables of the business environment have experienced higher rates of inflation, more restrictions to obtain loans mostly in African nations, high fluctuations in exchange rates etc. In the sociocultural arena, there has been a higher rate of benchmarking of cultural habits noticed in the modes of dressing, eating, lifestyles, religion etc.

In the domain of technology, there has been tremendous advancement as well. From 1990 internet advancement became rapid which induced digital marketing as well. Recently, there has been more concern on the issue of corporate social responsibility across the globe which has prompted most government to protect the environment and check the activities of companies thus, forcing these companies to be accountable towards their activities, ensuring that the stakes of all stakeholders are protected in the course of doing business and not limiting the businesses to think solely about maximizing the stakes of stockholders and major players in the business. Technological advancement has equally changed the way people work; workers are more informed about their rights and privileges as well. These changes in the macro business environment as well as high rate of competition noticed within industries induced by micro external factors have forced many businesses to change their methodology of operations in order to satisfy their consumers and remain in business (Zhang and Watson IV, 2020).

Recently, the dynamisms in marketing have changed drastically; consumers are constantly searching for new products via social media platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. and even getting feedback from other consumers through the same media. As a result, companies are constantly responding to these consumers searched by using influencers to market products and services digitally, developing rich content and constantly optimizing their websites to reach consumers and potential consumers faster (Bala & Verma, 2018)

Some companies have championed the way the internet should be used for marketing purposes such as Google.com, Yahoo.com, Amazom.com, Alibaba.com, Alibaba.com and Youtube.come (Madhu & Verma, 2018). Equally, current studies reviewed that digital marketing strategies utilization is one of the most widely used tactics by businesspeople to reach to consumers via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, Instagram etc, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Content Marketing etc (Bon, 2020). Thus, the use of digital marketing is seen as the new effective way for optimizing marketing possibilities and effectively utilizing marketing budgets to achieve marketing objectives in particular and organizational targets in general.

1.2. Background

The World Bank report has on record that Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in most economies in the world especially in developing countries. “SMEs make up the majority of businesses worldwide and are contributing greatly to reduce the rate of unemployment in the world. SMEs represent approximately 90% of businesses and more than 50% of jobs globally”. (Thala et al, 2021). SMEs contribute up to 40% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of most developing economies. These figures are higher when both informal and formal businesses are considered. Strategic planning is a compulsory requirement for countries seeking emergence. Marketing remains a serious challenge to most SMEs in the world. However, (Quaye

and Mensah, 2019) found out that “SMEs can optimize their marketing results by effectively matching specific marketing resources with unique capabilities of the organization” which unfortunately, is not a very easy task for most small and medium scale businesses to perfectly match organizational resources with capabilities.

Strategic planning is a crucial requirement to achieve organizational objectives for micro, small, medium and large-scale organizations. Equally, most underdeveloped nations believe that emergency and poverty reduction can be achieved via vital strategic plans. Cameroon government crafted a framework to achieve emergence by 2035 with four major objectives: reduction of poverty to socially acceptable level, becoming a middle-income country, acquiring a newly industrialized country status and consolidating democracy and national unity while respecting the country’s diversity (Charlotte, 2013). This can only be possible if businesses are doing well and more than 50% of Cameroon businesses are makeup of Small and Medium Sizes Enterprises therefore, it is essential for these categories of businesses to survive and grow for such realization. However, “a global assessment of the economic performance of Cameroon shows little hope for economic emergence by the date of 2035” (Saidou & Molem, 2017). In other to reverse this prediction, for the goal of the emergence to be realized it is necessary to target macro-economic factors such as: political, economic, sociocultural, technological, ecological and legal factors by developing favorable policies (Saidou & Molem, 2017).

The major objective of SMEs is to create employment for owners, thus, solving the problem of poverty. “Poverty is considered as a socio-economic condition of a person or nation facing lack of means to afford basic physiological needs for mankind such as food, water, shelter, healthcare, electricity, education etc”. (Saidou & Molem, 2017). Thus, the resilience and survival of SMEs is essential for Cameroon attainment of economic emergence by 2035 (Alain, Iso, &

Susannash, 2020). The business environment in Cameroon is extremely complex and difficult. This fact was supported by World Bank findings that placed Cameroon in 166th position amongst 190 countries in the ease of doing business in the world (World Bank, 2019).

SMEs faced many challenges and lack of managerial abilities is amongst the top challenges. Marketing abilities is a subset of managerial abilities which implies that many SMEs in Cameroon face marketing challenges in Cameroon (Scheers, 2011). Good marketing skills help businesses to have a competitive advantage over competitors. Garau (2008) raised the concern that online marketing environment raises a series of opportunities which business owners and managers can exploit and multiple threats that can lead to wasteful adverts and other related marketing expenditures that can increase cost without commensurable return on marketing investment and overall business returns.

It is extremely difficult to explain the concept of marketing due to the complex nature of the subject matter. There is no one standardized definition or explanation of the concept of marketing. However, marketing is believed to be one of the oldest activities of mankind though seen as the most current business discipline (Baker, 1976). Marketing is viewed both as an art and science. As a field of study and profession, marketing has been in a continuous process of transformation from art which is well executed to a career and profession with strong empirical evidence. Marketing has thus followed some scientific methodology in its application of theories and procedures like the methodology applied in the field of natural sciences such as medicine, engineering, architecture etc.

All these fields have been in existence for thousands of years as well. The field of natural sciences has advanced in methodology and application as well as marketing profession and art. (Baker, 2003). Marketing as a profession is a subset of Economics which is considered as the

“mother” of social sciences. Adams Smith one of the sound classical economists introduced the concept of “self- interest” of mankind which implies that man is generally selfish and evaluates his or her interest first in every transaction which indirectly introduces the concept of value to mankind. The classical views associated with the aspect of production of goods and services as well as exchange of these goods and services have completely transformed the concept of marketing (Bowden et al, 2020). Thus, exchange of values is at the center of human evolution. However, the greatest challenge of producers is to ensure that goods produced reach consumers for the purpose of further production or final consumption, and this is where marketing become very essential (Baker, 2003).

The field of marketing has been in existence for many years but not known by the word marketing since Economics and Commerce began (Nixon, 2013). However, most companies did not have a separate department for marketing like Finance, Production, Accounting (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Technological advancement in the world has greatly reshaped the way companies’ research the needs and wants of customers, the ways companies’ position and target customers in the marketplace and space, most especially the way consumer behavior are studied to make timely marketing decisions (Smith, 2023).

The evolution of the concept of Digital Marketing can be traced to the development of the internet. It is relatively easier for information to travel from one continent to another within seconds today. Computing technology changed completely between 1960 to 1980, the “major use of the computer was to calculate and store vital information” (Abbate, 2000). However, over the years computers have been very necessary in processing data used in taking major decisions in organizations. Technological improvement in the world as a whole and in Cameroon in particular has completely transformed the way businesses and marketing in particular is being carried out.

Cameroon has witnessed tremendous shift from analogue to digital systems in most of the sphere of operations which have positively impacted the efficiencies of most organizations in Cameroon (Molem, Akume, & Beri, 2015). In 2015, Cameroon witnessed much advancement in the Telecommunication industry with stiff competition from the major players Orange, Nexttel, MTN and Camtel. MTN launched their 3G and 4G network in this same year and this action increased their income by approximate 14.2%. Equally by 2017, the services of MTN alone covered approximately 93% of the population of Cameroon, as a leader in this industry this equally increased the impact on the population of Cameroon. (Molem, Akume & Beri, 2015).

As result of this improvement of services most marketers shifted from traditional marketing practices to digital marketing to take advantage of the online presence of customers online. The core objective of businesses is to increase shareholders' wealth and to realize this core milestone it is always essential to consider the stakes of all stakeholders in the business. Yadav & Dahhade (2013) shared their views that the best way to attract and retain customers is to ensure their satisfaction. Thus, most companies believe that digital marketing has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction and retention.

1.3 Research Problem

A significant problem with SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon, concerns the lack of digital marketing strategies within the enterprises' strategic framework, as well as the lack of documented linkages between digital marketing initiatives and business performance of SMEs (Wantchami, Ngange, & Efosi, 2020).

Most SMEs are forced to develop innovative strategies to sale their products and services which has caused hostility in most of these sectors. Although SMEs in recent years have increased their marketing efforts and have shifted from the use of traditional marketing efforts (such as

television, placement of banners, bills on walls etc.) to digital marketing, there is still a dearth of research on the use of digital marketing initiatives to achieve business performance of SMEs (Santos, Santos, Dragas, & Posadas, 2022). SMEs faced many challenges in Cameroon including limited resources most especially financial resources, poor infrastructure, most especially road network, poor internet connection, unstable supply of electricity, diverse market dynamics necessitated the researcher to control these variables to investigate the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs (Verma, 2024).

Current, past and related studies have highlighted the vitality of digital marketing in improving competitive growth and sustainable development of SMEs (Verma, 2024). However, this study specifically examines the effect of digital Marketing on the Performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. Most large organizations have adopted the usage of digital marketing easier and faster than small businesses due to resource constraints especially skills and finance faced by Small and Medium Size Enterprises (Lipiäinen and Karjuluoto, 2013).

Cameroon experienced great liberalization of the telecommunication industry in 2015 (Molem, Akume, & Beri, 2015) as a result; most Cameroonians had access to internet and personal smart telephones. Most companies improved their digital presence as well and their return on marketing investment improved and many companies equally achieved their overall targets as well. This statement aligned with the findings of (Jones & Lee, 2022). However, despite, the adoption of digital marketing by most Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality in particular, they still faced sales challenges, inability to know the rate of sales increase as a result of the adoption of digital marketing strategies etc.

It is evident from the presentation above that most SMEs faced stiff competition in the Municipality of Buea which has forced them to develop digital marketing strategies to achieve

sustainable competitive advantage. However, mere engagement in developing and using digital marketing strategies is not sufficient; SMEs must develop rich content, measure digital marketing efforts, use the right media to reach customers. Failure to develop rich content, to use the rich media to market, follow up to ensure that customers and potential customers see their products faster than the products of competitors will normally result in waste of the highest resource available for any organization which is time, money and other related resources. Thus, failure to implement the right digital marketing strategies will likely result in low retention of customers, loss of sales and profits and the overall survival and sustainability of these businesses. It is therefore essential to investigate the effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea.

1.4 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this mixed study was to investigate how digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework and how these initiatives may contribute to the performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. The researcher chose the Municipality of Buea because he has preliminary knowledge in this area, equally a better option should have been Cameroon, but cost constraint limited the researcher to Buea Municipality. Furthermore, the population of Buea is very youthful, and Cameroon population is equally youthful which implies that the result of the studies can easily be applied to all SMEs in Cameroon. This study used a mixed research method since both quantitative and qualitative data was collected via the survey method and the deductive research approach will be used to arrive at results and policies implications.

1.5 Research questions

RQ1. How digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

RQ2. What is the relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

RQ3. How social media marketing strategies influence the sales results in SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

RQ4. How Search Engine Optimization influences brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

RQ5. What is the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

These five research questions were developed from gaps identified from theoretical and empirical literature, which collectively established the link between digital marketing initiatives and the performance of outcomes measured both financially via sales, profitability, return on investment and non-financially through customer satisfaction, employees growth and retention, internal business process, customer trust etc.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Despite considerable literature about the role of digital marketing and its impact on business performance, there is a significant gap about how digital marketing can impact business performance (Moctezuma and Rajagopal, 2016). This study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on the impact of digital marketing on SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

The finding of this study is valuable reference material for major stakeholders in our community; entrepreneurs mostly those in the domain of micro, small and medium size enterprises

in the Municipality of Buea in particular and Cameroon in general, employers and employees mostly especially the Board of Directors (BoDs), students in Cameroon and beyond, the government of Cameroon. Recommendations made by this study is useful to stakeholders to have more insight into digital marketing challenges faced by businesses especially Micro, Small and Medium Size Enterprises. The finding of this work equally enable organizations to evaluate their expenditure on digital marketing both in terms of sales, brand awareness and brand recognition. Furthermore, the result of this work guide business owners in crafting rich content and positioning of their adverts in different social media for maximum impacts.

Most small business face serious marketing challenges with resulting effect of wastage of organizational resources thus, solid foundation in this subject matter equips the researcher and other scholars through the policies developed after the result obtained from this work to boost profit margins of Small and Medium Sizes Enterprises which will results in poverty reduction in Cameroon and the Municipality of Buea in particular.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Business Performance Measurement. Business Performance Measurement is the use of both financial metrics such as sales revenue, profit, return on investment and non-financial metrics such as customers' satisfaction, internal business processes and learning and growth to give big a picture on the concept of business performance measurement (Kaplan and Norton, 1992: Kaplan 2010).

Content Marketing. This is the type of Marketing that involves creating valuable content such as videos, write-ups, social media posts etc. This form of marketing identifies places where consumers visit and send valuable content such as social media pages, online shopping etc. (Niveditta & Padmavathy, 2017)

Digital Marketing. Digital marketing is a major subcomponent of marketing which make use of the internet in marketing, some media use include website, social media, emails etc. as opposed to the traditional marketing method that uses radio, televisions, banners etc. (Niveditta & Padmavathy, 2017). Digital marketing is equally viewed as a type of direct marketing which links consumers and sellers via electronic media using interactive technologies like social media groups, websites, news groups etc. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2009).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Search Engine Optimization is a form of Digital Marketing that focuses on the use of “Key Words” that are used to search for products and services online. (Niveditta & Padmavathy, 2017)

Small and Medium Size Enterprise (SMEs). “Cameroonian law (law n° 2010/001 of April13, 2010) defines an SME as an enterprise with less than 100 employees whose net annual sales revenue does not exceed one billion CFA (EUR 1.5 million). (Sotamenou, 2014)).

Social Media Marketing. Social media marketing is the use social media platforms for marketing purposes which include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, WhatSapp, Business WhatSapp etc. (Niveditta & Padmavathy, 2017).

1.8 Summary

This research titled “Effects of digital marketing on the performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the municipality of Buea, Cameroon is a vital and current topic because of stiff competition faced by most SMEs in Cameroon, particularly the Municipality of Buea. As a result of the aforementioned problems most SMEs have shifted from the use of traditional methods of advertising to the use of digital methods to cope with the stiff competition and remain in business. The main purpose of this topic is to investigate the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in Buea Municipality. The scope of the study is limited to

three major variables of digital marketing strategies which are: Social media, Search Engine Optimization and Content Marketing.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Substantial evidence from past and related studies revealed that all nations in the world develop tactical plans to protect and improve the existence of SMEs due to its vitality to the economy of these nations. SMEs employ approximately 60-70% of the active population of most nations in the world that are both developed and developing nations (Amoah & Amoah, 2018). There is significant advancement in the use of digital technologies by most SMEs, especially digital marketing strategies to influence the buying behaviour of consumers (Nuseir & Alumah, 2020). This section examines various contributions from many scholars on this subject matter and related frameworks, theories and models with the main objective of highlighting the contributions from these scholars and theories, models and framework to this subject area which has helped the researcher to develop the research gap and bring his unique contribution to help SMEs to survive and grow thus, the economy of Buea and Cameroon.

This section is divided into four major sub topics which are: Documentation / inclusion criteria, theoretical framework, past relevant research and literature gap. Theoretical literature focuses on theories, frameworks and models that guide the researcher to establish the existing relationship between digital marketing and the performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises. Past relevant research concentrates on the aspect of related past and current studies on this subject matter and the literature gap section focuses on the unique contribution of this research to the subject matter of digital marketing and performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises.

2.2 Documentation / Inclusion criteria

The main source of information for this research is Google Scholar, the researcher equally made use of some other artificial intelligence tools such as Elicit-The AI Research Assistant and

Youtube to get videos on the explanation of some concepts. The researcher visited the Ministry of Small and Medium Size Enterprises of Buea in Cameroon and read some documents which show the increase in the number of businesses and the classifications of these businesses.

Table 2.1. The nature and sources of references.

Summary of the Nature and Sources of References

Author(s)	Nature of references	Sources
Bon (2020)	Digital marketing	<i>Proceedings of the 11th Annual International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management Singapore</i>
Kaplan & Norton (1992)	Business Performance	<i>Harvard Business Review</i>
Satamenou (2014)	Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs)	<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation</i>
Monono & Zinyemba, (2023)	Municipality of Buea	<i>Archive Scientific Research, Proceedings of Academic Research Community</i>
BBC Newa, 2025	Cameroon	<i>BBC News</i>

Some theories, frameworks and models revealed included: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), (Fred Devis and Richard Bagozzi, 1989), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The Balance Scorecard Model which was developed in the early 1990s by Norton and Kaplan (Gawankar et al., 2018). The 3Cs Framework (Ohmae, 1991) and the POEM Model (Owyang, 2012) etc. These theories and frameworks formed a solid foundation of my understanding of existing theoretical literature of this subject matter.

2.2.1 Management System Theory

The system theory of management is a very broad framework highly used in both life and social sciences. Many scholars have contributed to this concept; however, the theory can be traced back to General System Theory (GST) which was developed by Ludwig von Bertalaffy in 1951. In 1956, Kenneth Boulding wrote an article which provided the foundation for general system theory. The management system theory is built on the foundation of seeing an organization as a set of interrelated parts that work together to achieve a common goals, objectives or target. (Richard A. et al, 1964). The system theory stimulated the thinking of interrelations amongst different departments in organizations such as: marketing, finance, operations, human resources etc working together to achieve organizational goals such as: profit and wealth maximization of shareholders and general satisfactions of stakeholders. Thus, the system theory can serve as a foundation for effective management practice (Fremont & Rosenzweig, 2017).

The system theory is highly used in modern organizations to emphasize the need for interdepartmental relations working for the common good of the entire organization. However, this theory was highly criticized for overemphasizing organizational growth while ignoring interdepartmental conflicts and politics within the organizations (Peery, 1975). Equally, some researchers emphasized the need for simplifications of this approach as the system model in most cases is presented in complex mathematical model (Sushil, 2002). However, despite the limitations, the system theory continues to serve as a useful tool by modern organizations in optimizing their output.

2.2.2 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can be seen as a subset of the system theory of management. The start and useful point of new applications development by companies in the world is general acceptance; unfortunately, most applications general face the constraint of general acceptance by users of these technologies (Venkatesh et al., 2003). It is vital to analyze why end-users might accept or reject new technologies prior to their development. TAM model brought forward by Fred Devis and Richard Bagozzi in 1989 put forward as fact that two major variables that control individual intention to accept and use technology which are: “Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness of the technology” (Devis & Bagozzi, 1989).

Hardware and software components as well as e-learning, e-purchase etc. are all considered as components of technology. Perceived usefulness of technology applications in digital marketing such as: social media Apps which include Facebook, Business WhatSapp, Snap chat, tiktok etc. is the belief that individuals and organizations that possess these applications and effectively use them increase their performance measured in sales volume, customer engagement, increase in number of customer knowledge about the products etc. Equally, perceived ease of use is extent to which individuals believe that they can use minima effort to use the technology applications and obtain optimum results (Venkatesh and Devis, 2003). TAM model emphasized that beliefs are relevance in forming attitudes toward accepting and using technology such as digital marketing Apps.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the different prospective that end users go through in accepting and using technology such as digital applications. System applications designers consider external stimulus in designing applications for end users which are the cognitive responses expected from the system application composed of: Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness of the Applications. Prospective users’ attitude toward using a technological application is vital for any

system application. Thus, when perceived usefulness and ease of use is positive it increases potential and actual consumers affection towards using the application which results in general acceptance of the system demonstrated by the agile positive behavioral response toward the technological applications.

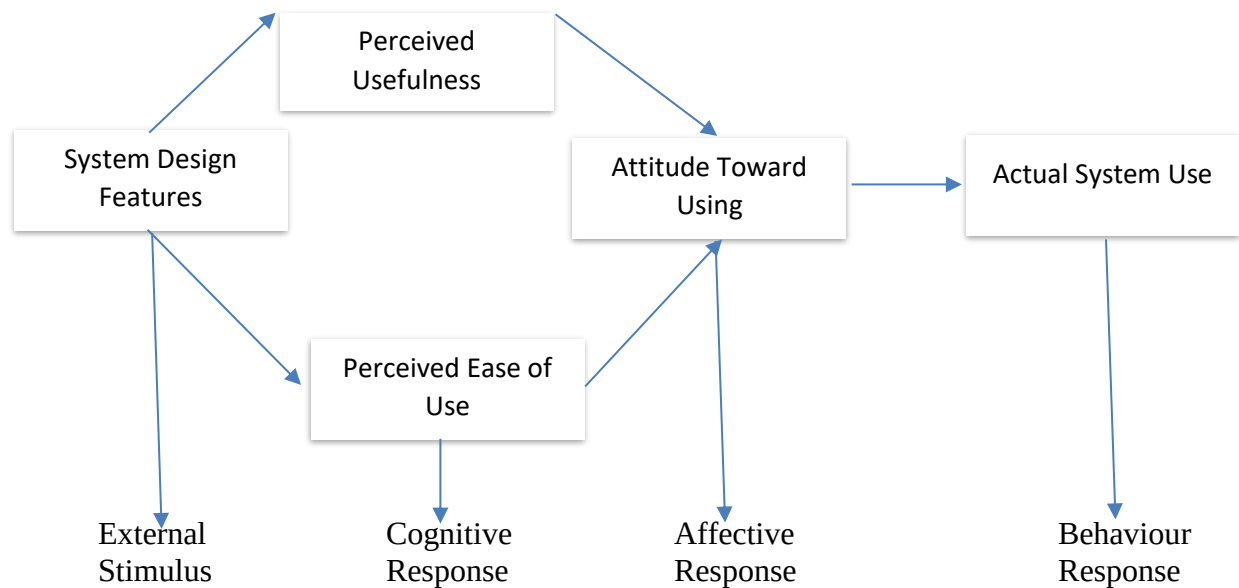


Figure 2.1

Technology Acceptance Model

Source Davis et al. (1989) developed the Technology Acceptance Model to explain how users accept and adopt technology systems.

TAM model is useful to this research as it focuses on ease of use and usefulness of technological application. Pears and Shield's (2019) added much contributions to the concept of behavior modification, they included the aspect of Artificial Intelligence (AI) which added much value to the concept of TAM in the domain of trust, especially in the aspect of data security which remain a serious delimitation in the full utilization of new technologies in digital marketing. Equally, the work of Pears and Shield (2019) highly positively impacted the concept of ease of use of technology which is a serious consideration in accepting technology applications by

demonstrating that behavior can be modify and resistance of changes can be overcome once trust is assured. Equally, Pierre et al. (2016), carried out research to ascertain the Challenges of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Cameroon using a sample of 100 businesses of these categories and found out that these categories of business faced significant challenges of resources when they wish to survive and grow, thus proper utilization of resources is pivotal to sustainability of Small, which emphasizes the need to properly diagnose the ease of use and usefulness of digital technological applications prior to its implementation.

TAM model was built on certain assumptions which challenged the applications of this theory in modern businesses in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon and beyond some of which include: Firstly, the main determinants for accepting or rejecting technology applications are: perceived usefulness and ease of use which are beliefs sets, however, creators of digital marketing applications technology may see their applications to be users friendly and very useful but actual end users of these applications may not share the same belief sets since these two major variables are very subjective. This constitutes a major reason for failure of most digital applications after introduction.

TAM equally assumes that technology purchasers plan their behavior and make rational decisions before purchase which is not true since human beings are different thus, have different rationality for their decisions and this is evident in the number of individuals who purchase recent technology prior to purchase before studying their usefulness and ease of use such as i-phones. TAM however, remain a very useful framework for investment in digital marketing applications such as Facebook Pages, Websites, Business WhatsApp, YouTube Sites etc. used by most small businesses in Cameroon in general and the Municipality of Buea in particular if the above limitations are controlled in application.

2.2.3 The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

This theory was developed by Venkatesh et al in 2003. “The major objective for developing new technologies is for users use” (William et al 2005). However, it becomes extremely frustrating when users do not adopt and accept innovations in technologies. The major objective of this model was to bring alternative views on user and innovation acceptance of technological applications. “Four major variables directly determine the behavior of users towards accepting innovations in according to UTAUT which includes: Performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions.” (Venkatesh et al, 2003). They equally added that these variables are influence both positively and negatively by age, gender, experience and voluntariness of use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology took into consideration eight different theories/models in building the conclusion of this model which include: “Motivational Model (MM), The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), A Combined Theory of Planned Behaviour/Technology Acceptance Model (C-TPB-TAM), The Model of PC Utilisation (MPCU), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory”. (William et al, 2015).

This theory suggests that actual use and adoption of technology is a direct function of four key variables which are: Performance and effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions which include: gender, age, experience and voluntariness. These constructs directly affect behavioral intents which influence the use of technology. (Venkatesh et al., 2003)

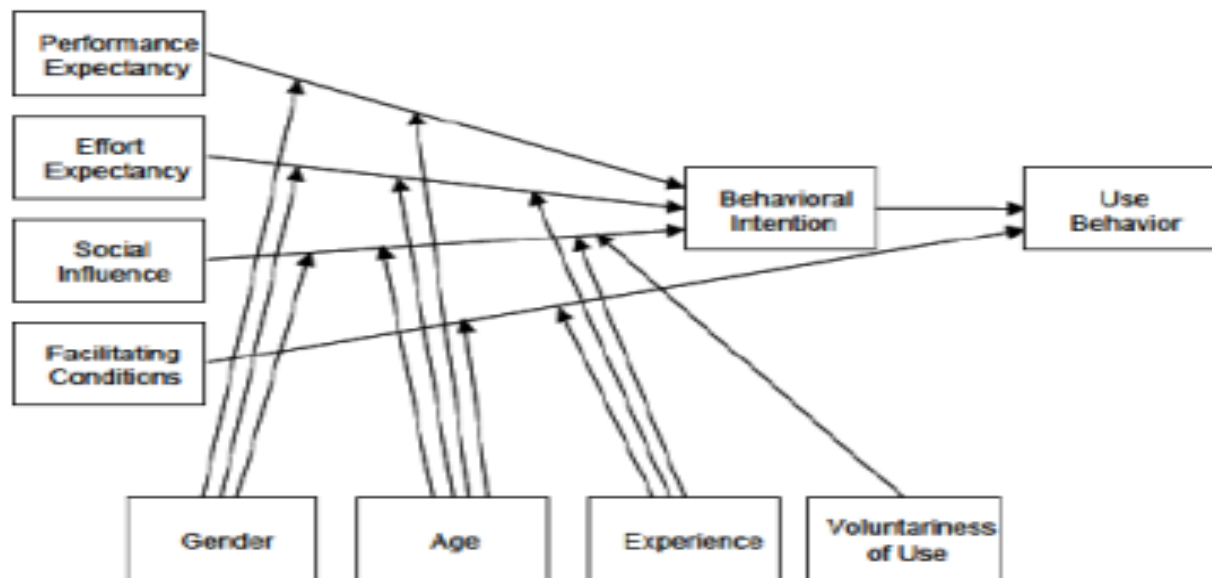


Figure 2.2

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

Source: Venkatesh et al (2003), “Users Acceptance of Information Technology, toward a unified view”, *MIS Quarterly*, 27(3), pp. 425-478

Performance expectancy is associated with employees' belief of the result based on the application of the technological system. When the degree of expectancy is high the intention to use technological applications in digital marketing such as Facebook, Business WhatsApp, Youtube etc. increases. Equally, when performance expectancy of employees reduces the intention to use these Apps equally reduces. Effort expectancy is measured by the degree which users of information technological applications expect to use effort to get the required results. When the expected effort is minimal to get results, users of technological applications will easily accept and use the technology systems and vice versa.

Equally, social influence is vital in adopting and using system applications in digital marketing. This implies that digital marketers can segment customers and potential customers according to different social strata and develop different digital Applications for these different

groups for effective adoption and acceptance. Furthermore, facilitating conditions are very vital, these conditions are determined by the degree to which users of technological applications believe that facilitating conditions such as training, extra motivation for using these technological applications are available. When these facilitating conditions are available users of these Apps will easily accept and adopt permanent behavior towards using these applications and vice versa. Collectively the three main variables which are: performance expectancy, effort expectancy and social influence significantly affect the behavior intention and use of technological application and facilitation conditions significantly affect use of technology and behavior intention. Furthermore, the moderating variables which include gender, age, experience and voluntariness of use influence the behavioral intention of users and thus users' behavior. (Venkatesh et al., 2003)

The UTAUT theory is useful in this study because the theory guides SMEs in understanding different aspects of consumer behavior toward technology, especially their expectations thus, guide them in forming behavior intention and using technology (William et al, 2015). Equally, this model has given a guide to segment customers on different variables such as social class, lifestyle, personality, education level etc. before developing and using technology.

Despite the uses of the UTAUT theory, this theory has some limitations which limit its universal applications. Venkatesh et al use just few organizations as a sample size and did not consider any developing nation in drawing conclusions which limited the results gotten and the universal application of this theory. Equally, (Hung et al, 2007) insisted that the value of P in the analysis was not explained which could bring different results. Thus, based on some of these criticisms Teo (2011) highly questioned the usefulness of this model. However, the model gives a guide of universal acceptance and rejection of technological innovation in digital marketing.

2.2.4 The Balance Scorecard (BSC) Framework

The Balance Scorecard Model was developed in 1996 by Drs. Robert Kaplan and David Norton (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). The main objective of this model was to introduce an aspect of balance in measuring the performance of businesses. Initially most organizations measured the performances of their businesses or Strategic Business Units (SBUs) with the use of financial metrics only but Norton and Kaplan in 1996 introduced the aspect of non-financial metrics to give organizations a holistic approach to organization's performance measurement and management (Kaplan and Norton, 1996, Taticchi, Cagnazzo & Brun, 2010). This Model was voted as one of the most innovative metrics used in measuring business performance by Harvard Business Review (Kaplan, 2009).

Norton & Kaplan classified the aspects used in measuring performance into the non-financial and financial metrics. This implies that they maintained financial perspective as a vital component in measuring the performance of organizations but added three other components which are non-financial: these included: customers perspective measure by the rate of customer satisfaction, retention, complaints rate etc. Learning and growth which focuses on aspects of employees' growth in knowledge, rate of acceptance of new ideas such as technological applications etc. and Business Processes such as reduction in aspect of placing and receiving orders etc. (Gawankar et al., 2018).

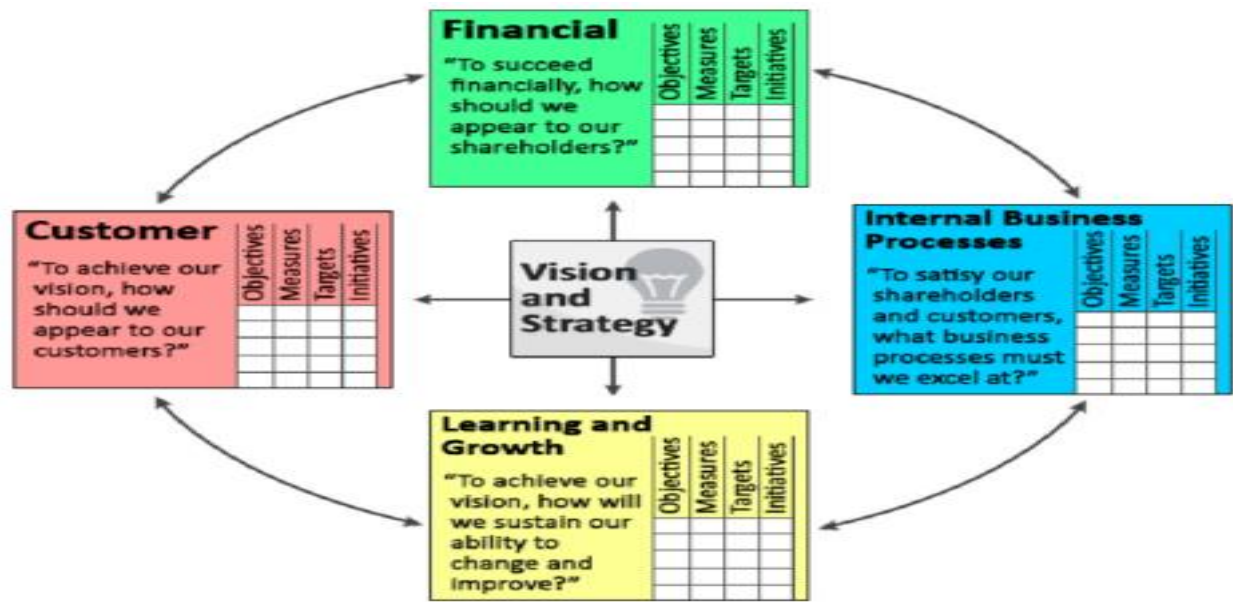


Figure 2.3

Four Perspective of Balanced Scorecard

Source: Kaplan and Norton. 1996., Focusing Your Organization on Strategy with the Balance Scorecard. Harvard Business Review on Point, 2nd Edition.

The four perspectives of the Balance Scorecard are not used solely as a performance management tool but rather as a strategic management tool by most organization both multinational organizations and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. Most organization general start their strategic management processes by developing the organizational missions and vision after which a proper environmental scanning is done with the help of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, used to understand the general business environment, PESTEL (Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, Technological, Environmental or Ecological and Legal Factors) and Michael Porter Five Forces are used to understand the macro and micro external business respectively. Resource Audit model equally used to understand the internal business environment. After proper understanding of the business environment, strategies are developed for departmental as well as organizational overall objectives known as corporate

objective (Kevan & Richard 2005). The above variables are used to understand the customers and to develop winning strategies for the organizations.

Learning and growth perspective of BSC focuses on aspects of employees' skills. Employees remain a vital resource to organizations mostly in knowledge base organizations. With the introduction and advancement in technology there is need for employees to adapt easily with organizational values, culture and need for more flexible communication. Improvement of the aforementioned variables is an indicator of increased performance and vice versa on this perspective of growth.

Business processes focus on internal business process which are sub divided into two major aspects: Primary and support business processes. Primary business activities add value direct to organizations via primary activities or main activities of the organization such as transformation of raw materials to finished products while support processes do not add value and revenue to businesses directly but are critical in achieving organizational objectives. Improvement in business processes increases organizational performance and vice versa (Kevan & Richard, 2005).

Customers are considered by many scholars and business owners as the most vital stakeholders in a business. Customer perspective in the BSC framework focuses on the relevance of customer satisfaction to business sustainability. Customers always evaluate products purchased after consumption, if the products exceed their expectations they are satisfied and delighted and if the products do not meet up with their expectations they are dissatisfied. (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Customers' satisfaction is crucial for the survival and sustainability of any business. When customers are satisfied with the services of businesses or products it is viewed as better performance businesses and vice versa.

Many businesses today use the Balance Scorecard both as a strategic management tool and metric use in measuring the performance of organizations (Kaplan, 2009). This model is very vital for this study because of the following vital points: Firstly, because most small businesses faced major problems in measuring their performance which this framework act as a guide to these businesses to measure their performance, equally, small businesses focuses on financial metrics as they key aspect of measuring performance which gives limited view on the true value of business performance. Furthermore, the major perspective amongst the four perspectives of Norton and Kaplan BSC model is customer perspective. The key of implementing digital marketing strategies by organizations is to delight customers thus, increased in sales. Advancement in technology and globalization has led to stiff competition in all business sectors especially small and medium size enterprises. Most organizations today are focusing on differentiation strategy as compared to cost leadership thus a shift to the attributes used in measuring performance to facilitate the business performance measurement. (Bourne et al., 2000).

The Balance Scorecard Metric, though very useful failed to look at certain vital aspects of performance measurement such as the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aspects. CSR is mostly viewed to be practice by Multinational Organizational but it remains the responsibility of all businesses to practice social responsibility aspects in their own small way to protect the entire ecosystem for all. Equally, the balance scorecard does not mention soft aspect of building long term performance such as the implementation of strong organizational culture which is vital to the sustainability of organizations. Despite the major limitations outlined above this model has given the researcher a pointer on aspects of measurement of organizational performance which the researcher has used to measure the performance of businesses in the Municipality of Buea.

2.2.5 The 3 Cs Model

The 3Cs model was developed by Dr. Kenichi Ohmae in 1982. The model offers strategic overview of the essential factors needed by organizations to perform well in any sector. These essential factors are Customers, Competitors and Company or Corporation. Corporation must have the right combinations of these variables to achieve maximum result in their chosen line of business. (Ashibambo, 2020). The primary aim of model is to help companies gain sustainable competitive edge over competitors in any industry by perfectly combining the elements of the 3Cs. (Ohmae, 1991)

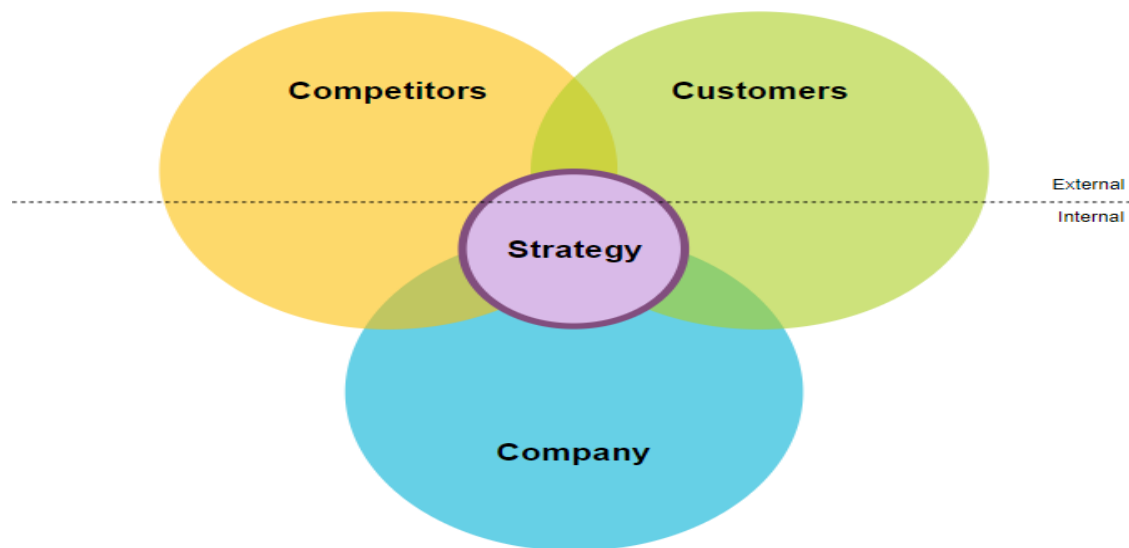


Figure 2.4

Dr. Kenichi Ohmae's 3Cs Model]

Source: Ohmae K., 1991. The mind of a strategist. The Art of Japanese Business, McGraw-Hill.

Customer Based Strategies

Businesses in the 21st. century have shifted from focusing on shareholders wealth maximization to stakeholders' interest protection (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Thus, instead of focusing only to increase the wealth of shareholders which might be short run companies are engaging on building sustainable wealth for stockholders by taking the interest of major

stakeholders such as the government, suppliers, customers, competitors etc. into consideration when taking business decisions.

However, amongst the many stakeholders outlined above customers remain the key since they bring revenue to the business. Thus, customers must be perfectly segmented, targeted with the right strategies in order to receive maximum impact, thus customer needs must be perfectly researched before production can commence and customer behavior must be constantly studied to analyze variances in behavior in order to develop winning strategies. Some of the customer-related strategies used by companies include segmentation, targeting and position and re-segmentation of customers after change in behavior is noticed by marketers (Ohmae, 1991).

Companies or Companies Based Strategies

A company perfectly falls within the internal business environment; thus, any corporation can change this factor and adapt to situational changes in the business environment as opposed to macro environmental factors like competitors that businesses can only adapt to these factors since they cannot reduce or increase the number of competitors in these businesses thus, emphasizing the need for organizations to build on their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. Most importantly the strengths of the company must improve continuously since most competitors are always eager to benchmark companies via their strengths as a means of frustrating the company. (Ohmae, 1991)

Competitors-Based Strategies

According to (Ohmae, 1991), companies can achieve sustainable competitive advantage in their sector by looking at sources of differentiation which can either be in terms of price or quality. This is in line with the work of Michael Porter in his 3 generic strategies model. It is essential to know competitors' strategies in order to benchmark and develop better strategies such as:

- How are the engagements of competitors on social media?
- What are the price and value proposition as compare to your chosen organizations 'price and value propositions?

The 3Cs framework developed by Kenichi Ohmae is very useful in this work since it analyses customers, competitors and company which are vital inputs used in developing digital marketing contents based on different segments of customers, analyzing competitors' social media strategies to benchmarked and develop superior strategies and studies the companies with various frameworks such as resource audit model to know companies core competencies and capabilities before developing strategies

2.2.6 The POEM Model

POEM is an abbreviation which stands for "Paid, Owned and Earned Media used by all forms of organizations such as micro, small, medium and large organizations including multinational organizations to increase the visibility of their organizations. It is obvious that marketing processes are shaped by the interaction between buyers and sellers. Advertising has been considered as a powerful tool designed by organizations to inform, persuade, remind and reinforce the behavior of consumers toward pre purchase, purchase and post purchase behavior (Sunderara, 2018). Advertising has become a major tool in shaping the behavior of consumers in highly technological changing environment. Initially, advertisement was seen purely as paid form of persuading the public and directing potential customers towards purchase and owned form of visibility purely taking place on platforms own by businesses such as social media pages of organizations, organizations websites and "earned" advertising are those that has gained credibility of the general public and the public can share such information as news items. (Stephen & Galak, 2012)

The main use of POEM model (Figure 2.5.) was used in this study to help in classifying digital marketing advertisement into Paid, Owned and Earned Media. This can guide in budgeting and evaluating these three variables to ascertain the best form for unique product and integrating these three to gain maximum results. Equally, if an organization has in mind to increase the aspect of earned media the organization can increase the service quality of the business to exceed customers' expectation which they can earn more public sensitization of products quality thus better words of month (Hall, 2014).

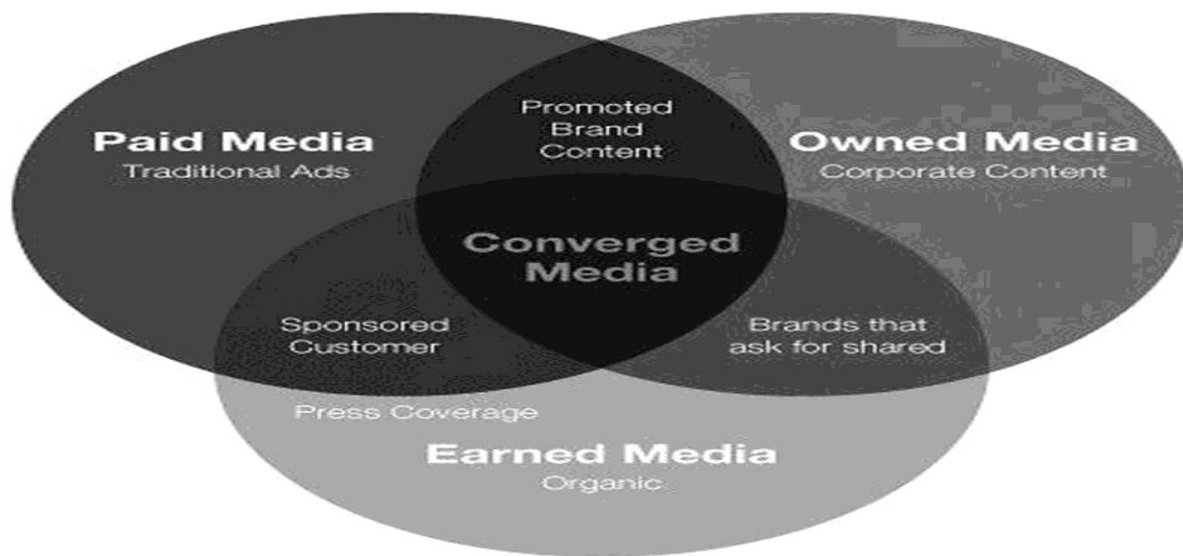


Figure 2.5
[The POEM Model]

Source: Owyang J., 2012. Altimeter report: Paid + owned + earned = converged media.

The above figure illustrates how the three areas overlap to produce different results (Owyang, 2012). Paid media include Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc. used by organizations to increase their visibility. Large organization sponsors Ads on Flipchart, Google Ads such as Paid Links, Paid Content etc. Earned media are both organic and non-paid which include publicity generated through recommendations (likes, shares, comments, replies, re-tweets, favorite). When users engage in the above examples it

normally induced traffic which further increase brand visibility. Equally owned media which are considered the intangible assets of organizations include the company website, social media Pages such as Facebook Page, Mobile Apps, Blogs, organic content such as video images, infographics and post increase organizations visibility. Fill and Turnbull (2019) in their book, Marketing Communication commonly refers to as promotion mix present the POEM model as one way of classifying the different media used by organizations to increase the visibility of their organizations.

There POEM Model is very vital to all forms of organizations. However, each component of POEM model has both merits and demerits. The merit is that organizations can easily control this form of advert while the major disadvantage is constraint in enabling the general public to believe in this form of adverts. However, most Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) lack the necessary resources and capabilities to maximize their investment in Paid form of adverts. Owned media which include brand website, social media pages, mobile applications etc. are normally costly to develop and maintain; however, this comes with ownership which constitutes a major intangible asset to the organization. These three media are needed by organizations to optimize their visibility thus, increase possibilities of high revenue via sales and potential for future sales through intense informative adverts.

2.2.7 Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Theory

Many scholars are of the view that CRM was developed in the 90th and 20th century by Lehtinen et al 2007. Some scholars are equally of the view that CRM should be referred to as “Customer Relationship Marketing” (Buttle, 2009). Both views accepted that modern marketing has shifted from transactional marketing to relationship marketing with the major concern of businesses building sustainable relationship with current customer while attracting new customers

mostly via current customers' recommendations. The major weakness of transactional marketing is the aspect of focusing on short term goal which does not build business sustainability.

However, building sustainable relationship with customers which is the goal of relationship marketing which equally aligned with overall organizational objective is based on building customers or client's loyalty which comes with so much responsibility since customers must be satisfied to trust a business and remain loyal to the business. This implies that "CRM include employees, company, processes, IS/ICT with the main goal to maximize customer satisfaction" (Dohnal, 2002). Employees are pivotal in building positive relationship with customers thus, employees' satisfaction is a necessary requirement for organizations, equally, the right employees should be chosen with the right organizational policies, processes, information and Communication Technology in order to delight the customers and gain their loyalty.

The theory is very necessary for this work because many SMEs are investing heavy in digital marketing Apps such as Facebook, Websites, Business WhatSapp, Tiktok, Youtube etc. in order to keep track of customers' transactions, complaints, engagement level, unique preferences etc. The core benefit of all these endures is build and sustains relationship with customers. Effective customer relationship management comes with benefits such as increase in sales, less budget spent on advertisement since most of the customers are loyal and credible marketers via their recommendations to other customers etc. However, the application of this concept is very challenging since customers' needs are constantly changing and businesses are forced to constantly research, strategize and reposition their products in the minds of both current and potential consumers.

2.3 Empirical Literature

Past researchers on this subject matter were consulted for the past 15 years all over the world, Cameroon and Buea in particular. The research topic “Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprise” is a current and relevant topic and many scholars have written much on this subject matter. Most of the findings revealed that digital marketing has a positive significant effect on performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (Vermal, 2024). However, Nuseira (2020) accepted the results of the above scholars and many other scholars on the direct positive significant relationship between digital marketing and the performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises but suggested that environmental factors can seriously affect the results. Some of the major scholars that have taken studies on this subject area include:

Verma, (2024), carried out research on “The Impact of Digital Marketing Adoption on Firm Performance: A Case of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in India” the research used the secondary methodology to collect and analyze secondary data collected. This method is less expensive compared to the primary source of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher accessed online journals and libraries to collect her data, upon analyzing the findings revealed that “the adoption of digital marketing among SMEs in India has led to much improvement in the performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the India”. (Verma, 2024). Based on the result obtained from this work, the researcher advised the government of India to encourage SME digitization efforts via efforts such as: grants to SMEs on digital marketing specific investments, training programs to SMEs on utilization of digital marketing Apps, improvement of internet connectivity etc. The researcher, however, did not provide methods used in analyzing her data but her work is highly related to current studies and finding of current

studies will be used to compare and appreciate results of this work which will give room for solid recommendations.

Wantchami, Ngange, & Efosi (2020), researched on “Nexus of Social Media Marketing and Small-Scale Business Performance in Buea, Cameroon”. A qualitative method of research methodology was used to carry out this investigation. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique with the main rationale of collecting data from experienced respondents in digital marketing. A total of 15 participants were used for this research, owners and managers of small and medium scale businesses in the Municipality of Buea.

The finding of the above-mentioned research revealed that social media marketing has been used by these categories of businesses to build customer relationships, increase sales volume and create brand awareness for business operators in the Municipality of Buea. However, the application of this finding is limited since the researcher used only 15 samples which is not an adequate representation of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. One objective of this study is to investigate the effect of social media marketing on the sales of SMEs in Buea, finding of this work is a relevant guide to compare results obtained since this study is meant to solve the major problem of limited sample size used in this study.

Tatenda, Tafadzwa & Tawanda (2023), researched on the Analysis of “the impact of digital marketing in enhancing the marketing performance case of Medical Aid Companies in Zimbabwe”. The research primary motives for this investigation were to “examine the impact of digital marketing on the performance of social media marketing, mobile marketing, SMS marketing and the use of Search Engine Optimization in carrying out marketing on the Performance of Medical Aid Companies in Zimbabwe. The researchers used cross sectional survey and collected data from 30 participants in the Capital City of Zimbabwe, Harare. All the 30

participants were owners of Medical Equipment companies in Harare. The researchers used questionnaires as instruments for data collection in this study via Google platform. The data collected were analyzed with the aid of SSPS. Likert Scale was used to attribute vitality to the different data sets. The results gotten from the analysis indicated that digital marketing implementation positively impacted the performance of Medical Aid Companies in Zimbabwe. The finding of this work equally increased the relevance of this topic and equally emphasized the vitality of investing in digital marketing platforms to increase organizational visibility.

Claude & Kabor (2023) carried out a research on “the effect of Financial Technology on Small and Medium Size Enterprises Performance in Cameroon amid COVID -19 Recoveries, the Mediating Effect of Financial Literacy”. The researchers used quantitative research method and survey was used to collect data from small business owners.

The researcher used SMEs owners and managers in the city of Yaounde and Douala mostly to carry this research. The researchers collected 381 data and analyzed the data with Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation. The result of this research showed Fintech services has affected the performance of SMEs positively in Cameroon. The researcher thus, recommended that SMEs should adopt Fintech solutions to increase the performance of these categories of businesses in Cameroon. This research is highly connected to the current study because Fintech organization is a category of SMEs and uses digital technology in reaching out to clients to present their services in Cameroon. However, 90% of the study came from two cities that is Douala and Yaounde thus, generalizing the result to the whole nation is not a good practice which this current research has taken such limitation and limited his study in the city of Buea, Cameroon.

Ngoasong (2018) researched on the topic “Digital entrepreneurship in a resource –scarce context: A focus on entrepreneurship digital competencies in Cameroon”. The researcher used a

quantitative method and interviews were used an instrument to collect data. The method of interview used for this study was the semi-structure and samples of 16 digital entrepreneurs in Cameroon were used for this investigation. The finding of this study indicated that “Entrepreneurial Digital Competencies influence the entry choices of start-up. The major weakness with this study was the aspect of small sample size and even the methodology of choosing the small sample size. Thus, the results might have been different if the right sample size were used. However, his work has highlighted the vitality for start-up companies to embrace digitalization which marketing is a major component for such realization.

Bunpis & Haron (2014), researched on “the influence of Content Marketing on Customer brand engagement towards online herbal cosmetic stores in Thailand. The researchers concentrated their studies on analyzing documentary content. Equally, they made use of available literature on this subject matter in Thailand. The main reason for this study was stiff competition noticed in this sector in Thailand. The result of this study indicated that rich content enhanced willingness of customers to engage with suppliers of such products which influence more online purchase and increased the revenue of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Thailand. This research is similar to this study because this sector is facing stiff competition in the Municipality of Buea thus, the results gotten can be apply entrepreneurs in this sector in the Municipality of Buea to

Little work has been done on this subject matter in the Municipality of Buea which is the major gap that this research wishes to fill. Equally, the combine analysis of the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea with these three major independent variables (Social Media, Content Marketing and Search Engine Optimization) had not been studied to see the effect on the performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea which is capture with sales revenue, brand recognition and awareness. Equally, businesses in the Municipality of Buea

face internal challenges demonstrated by lack of a business plan thus, marketing plan and digital marketing plan, lack of strategy, skills and a system of operation (*Christopher & Mfondo , 2018*), this implies that finding of this work will obvious give a direction to major aspect on the skills, direction and system to be put in place with respect to digital marketing which will obviously provide some of the solutions on the challenges of faced by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

The literature review section of this work focused on theoretical and empirical literature. The researcher started by building up theories and frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model that emphasized the need for SMEs to consider the ease of use and perceive value of their digital marketing applications in building up digital marketing strategies. Equally, the Balanced Scorecard Model was used to consider the different aspects of measuring performance that incorporated both financial and non-financials metrics. Most of the empirical literature reviews on the effect of digital marketing and performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprise review that digital marketing strategies such as social media, content marketing and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) significantly positively affect the performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.

However, some authors equally review that different business environments equally produce different results. Other authors equally indicated that digital marketing investment wastes companies' resources if not well planned and executed. (Edelma, 2010). Thus, these uncertainties amongst scholars, couple with stiff competition and internal challenges faced by SMEs like lack of business plan, thus marketing plan, digital marketing plan, strategy and a system of operation (*Christopher & Mfondo, 2018*) has provoked the researcher to investigate the effect of digital marketing on the performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea.

2.4 Summary

This chapter reviews major documentations used in the study, theoretical and empirical literature on the research topic “The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Buea Municipality, Cameroon. The theoretical foundation was built on key models and theories which includes: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the Balanced Scorecard, as well as the 3Cs Framework and the POEM model. These frameworks collectively emphasize technology adoption, strategic positioning, and performance measurement using both financial and non-financial indicators. Empirical literature included both global and local studies over the past 15 years. Most of the studies indicated positive significant relationship between digital marketing and performance of SMEs. Verma (2024) and Wantchami et al. (2020) highlight the effectiveness of digital tools like social media in improving business outcomes, though limitations such as small sample sizes and methodological gaps were noted. Despite strong evidence of positive relationships, gaps remain—particularly in Buea Municipality—where limited localized studies and inadequate integration of key digital marketing variables (social media, content marketing, and SEO) exist. Additionally, internal challenges such as lack of strategic planning and digital skills hinder SME performance. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of how digital marketing affects SME performance in Buea, offering practical insights to improve business strategies.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to investigate “The Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon”. A descriptive survey design was used to carry out this study and both quantitative and qualitative data were used in the process.

A significant problem identified with SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon, was the lack of digital marketing strategies within the enterprises’ strategic framework, as well as the lack of documented linkages between digital marketing initiatives and business performance of SMEs (Wantchami, Ngange, & Efosi, 2020).

Most SMEs are forced to develop innovative strategies to sell their products and services which has caused hostility in most of these sectors. Although SMEs in recent years have increased their marketing efforts and have shifted from the use of traditional marketing efforts (such as television, radio, placement of banners, bills on walls etc.) to digital marketing, there is still a dearth of research on the use of digital marketing initiatives to achieve business performance of SMEs (Santos, Santos, Dragas & Posadas, 2022). SMEs faced many challenges in Cameroon including limited resources most especially financial resources, poor infrastructure, most especially road network, poor internet connection, unstable supply of electricity, diverse market dynamics necessitated the researcher to control these variables to investigate the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs (Verma, 2024).

Current, past and related studies have highlighted the vitality of digital marketing in improving competitive growth and sustainable development of SMEs (Verma, 2024). However, this study specifically examines the effect of digital Marketing on the Performance of SMEs in the

Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. Most large organizations have adopted the usage of digital marketing easier and faster than small businesses due to resource constraints especially skills and finance faced by Small and Medium Size Enterprises (Lipiäinen and Karjuluoto, 2013).

Cameroon experienced great liberalization of the telecommunication industry in 2015 (Molem, Akume, & Beri, 2015) as a result; most Cameroonians had access to internet and personal smart telephones. Most companies improved their digital presence as well and their return on marketing investment improved and many companies equally achieved their overall targets as well. This statement aligned with the findings of (Jones & Lee, 2022). However, despite, the adoption of digital marketing by most Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality in particular, they still faced sales challenges, inability to know the rate of sales increase as a result of the adoption of digital marketing strategies etc.

It is evident from the presentation above that most SMEs faced stiff competition in the Municipality of Buea which has forced them to develop digital marketing strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. However, mere engagement in developing and using digital marketing strategies is not sufficient; SMEs must develop rich content, measure digital marketing efforts, use the right media to reach customers. Failure to develop rich content, to use the rich media to market, follow up to ensure that customers and potential customers see their products faster than the products of competitors which normally resulted in waste of the highest resources available for any organization which is time, money and other related resources. Thus, failure to implement the right digital marketing strategies resulted in low retention of customers, loss of sales and profits and the overall survival and sustainability of these businesses. It is therefore, essential to investigate the effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea.

The following subtopics were reviewed to achieve the results of the methodology of this research: Research methods and design, population and sample, data collection, processing and analysis, limitations and ethical assurances. Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as instruments for data collection, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from selected Small and Medium Size business operators, managers, sales and marketing executives as well as customers and clients of these businesses using stratified random and purposive sampling techniques.

3.2 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this mixed study was to investigate how digital marketing initiatives were implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework and how these initiatives contributed to the performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. The following research questions presented below were answered to achieve the objective of the research.

RQ1. How digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

RQ2. What is the relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

RQ3. How social media marketing strategies influence the sales results of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

RQ4. How Search Engine Optimization influences brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

RQ5. What is the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

3.3 Research Design

This study made use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods thus, a mixed research method was used to collect data used for this study. Research design revealed the main plan which illustrates how various data related to specific problems were collected and analyzed in this research process. This implies that a research design provides a blueprint used by the researcher in conducting the research, it provides a structural plan used to collect, analyze and interpret the data collected for specific research problems, Nworgu (2006). Thus, the research design guides the researcher in formulating various specific research questions and objectives. The survey research design was used in this research process since data were obtained from a selected size of the population, analyzed, interpreted and results were generalized for the entire population which is the Municipality of Buea in particular and Cameroon as whole and to greater extent the research recommendations helped small and medium size businesses in the world since the research finding will be published. Three main approaches were used in this study which are: quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. Qualitative approach focuses on categorical data that emphasized on descriptive statistics used to take informed decisions, though subjective as compared to quantitative data that uses numerical values which are very objective but has a serious limitation of availability and accuracy since the data is difficult to collect (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). The quantitative approach relies on the principle of verifiability that means proof, confirmation, corroboration or substantiations. It focused on measurement, which is assignment of numerical events according to rules (Lem & Gerald 2020). Mixed research approach which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this study.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher seek to answer the following quantitative research questions “To what extent does the use of digital marketing influence the

overall performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality Cameroon in terms of customers acquisitions, sales, brand awareness and profitability”? These questions clearly addresses the major problems faced by SMEs in Buea Municipality which were low sales, limited profit margins, weak brand recognition despite the huge daily efforts directed on digital marketing. Thus, answers to the aforementioned questions provided specific impact of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon. Equally, the researcher equally asked the following qualitative research questions in order to have categorical answers on the following aspects of digital marketing in the Buea Municipality. What are the main challenges face by SMEs in adopting digital marketing strategies? Which digital marketing strategies produce optima results? What aspects influence budget allocation by SMEs in the different spheres of digital marketing in Buea Municipality? These qualitative questions are equally major challenges faced by most SMEs in Buea Municipality despite the constant applications of digital marketing strategies by these categories of businesses in the Municipality of Buea.

The subject matter of the research topic “The Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon” is very complex thus, quantitative data alone as well as qualitative data alone could not have provided a full picture of this situation rather a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data gave a full interpretations of the situation thus, a mixed research design were used to used and accurate result of this situation were obtained. (Creswell & Clark, 2018)

The following reason account for the chosen research topic. Buea is one of the major cities in Cameroon and was the capital of Southern Cameroon under the British Southern Cameroon from 1992 to 1961. In 1961 Southern Cameroon voted to join with the Republic of Cameroon via UN-organized plebiscite in 1961 and Southern Cameroon and the French Cameroon became the

Republic of Cameroon. Currently, Buea is the capital of Southwest Region of Cameroon, Julius (1996). The estimated population of Buea inhabitants as of 2025 stood at 57,797 inhabitants, Chislennost (2025). Buea is the hub of professional and vocational higher education in Cameroon. The University of Buea was the only English state university in Cameroon created in 1992 and the second English state university called the University of Bamenda was created in 2018 that is 18 years after the creation of the University of Buea (Njeuma, 2003). Buea was and is still the hub of English Higher education in Cameroon, the main reason for the youthful nature of the inhabitants of Buea. The main reason for choosing Buea as the case study of this research was because of the youthful nature of the city and most small business owners, managers, and sales executives are using digital marketing strategies to communicate their products values to both current and potential customers.

Furthermore, most startup businesses in Buea are using digital marketing platforms such as Facebook, SEO, online ads to introduce their products and services to the market. This topic connect two vital variables. The independent variable which is digital marketing and dependent variables performance of SMEs measure by sales, customer engagement and SMEs profitability. Organizational Sample. The organizational sample for this research study included vocational and higher institutions, agribusiness centers, stationeries shops, events center, bar and restaurant, fitness centers, micro financial institutions and IT shops. The selection of these businesses was not random but guided by very crucial reasons.

First, these businesses made up majority of businesses operating in Buea. The inclusion of these diverse businesses enhanced the representativeness of the sample which equally allowed diverse variations of digital marketing structures, plans, implementations and evaluations. Furthermore, these businesses have contributed to the highest rate of employment in the

Municipality of Buea, many young graduate start their professional lives in these enterprises. In addition, these sectors show great variations of digital marketing adoption, ranging from very active users, moderate users and mere engagement in digital marketing services. For examples IT shops, fitness and events centers are classified as high users while vocational and agribusiness centers have just few digital marketing services. Equally, most of these businesses are highly competitive and customer center. These has encouraged them to adopt digital marketing platforms like social media, online advertising and mobile marketing as means of achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

3.4 Population and Sample

Internal and External Stakeholder Population and Sample

Qualitative data

Internal Stakeholder Population. The targeted internal stakeholders for this study consisted of 3,122 registered small and medium size enterprises and approximately 1,000 unregistered SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. (Buea Municipality Council, 2024; Ministry of Small and Medium Sized –Enterprise, 2024)

Internal Stakeholder Sample. 50 small and medium sizes enterprises executives were purposively chosen to represent all SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. This sample allowed the researcher to carefully collected structured qualitative data within the research time. Equally, analysis via thematic analysis provided better results with cautiously chosen data. The balance of vast quantitative data and carefully chosen qualitative data provided better results that aided policy recommended to major stakeholders. Selected executives were chosen based on their exposure to digital marketing exposures on platforms such as social media, SEO and Mobile Marketing. Furthermore, representative were designed to capture diversity of SMEs which enabled the

researcher to select services, hospitality, education, real estate etc. Equally, SMEs executives were selected based on the experiences of owners, digital marketers, sales and marketing managers and other vital aspects like growth and businesses that were lacking behind in terms of visibility and other performance metrics like sales, profitability and customer engagement. In addition to the points mentioned above, if a census is not well managed, a sample can provide better results with more reliability than a census.

Qualitative data

External stakeholder population. The number of the targeted stakeholders who were inhabitant of Buea, Municipality were 57,797. This figure constituted the population of the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

External stakeholder sample. The external participants of this study consisted of customers and clients of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, with a total sample size of 399 respondents.

This sample size was estimated from Amin (2005). The formula stated below by Amin (2005) was used.

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

Where:

- N = Total population size
- n = sample population size
- e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal

In this situation the margin of error (e) is 5%.

$$\text{Sample size (n)} = \frac{57797}{1 + 57797(0.05)^2} = \frac{57707}{1 + 57797(0.0025)} = \frac{57797}{145.4925} = 397.3$$

This implies that sample size (n) is approximately 397.

However, after rounding up to the nearest whole number, the final sample size for this research was 399 respondents. The quantitative population of this study was made up of Customer and clients of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Amin's (2005) formula was used to determine the sample size for external participants because it is an excellent formula for large number estimation of sample size. There was no official records on the exact number of digital marketing users in Buea Municipality therefore, the estimated population of 57,797 inhabitants of Buea Municipality (Chislennost, 2025) was used as the population parameter for sample size determination. The estimate provided a better basis for obtaining a representative sample of external respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria. Furthermore, this method of estimation provided a simple statistical reliable data. Moreover, by using a margin of error of 5% this method ensures that the sampling error was minima thus, 95% confidence level. Thus, finding using Amin (2005) ensures that the findings were statistically reliable, generalizable and suitable for developing conclusions on content marketing and customer engagement which was a major independent variable of the study "The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

Qualitative data collected with the use of semi-structure interview as an instrument of data collection; therefore, interview guide served as the primary data collection instrument and questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data for this study. Qualitative data were collected from company managers, sales managers, directors and owners of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. Generally, an interview is a planned and purposeful discussion between two and more people (Kahn and Cannell, 1957). The main use of the interview was to gather valid and reliable information from a planned persons in this case Managers, Owners, Directors, Marketers,

Supervisors and Digital Marketers of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. Generally, there exist standardized and non-standardized types of questions, for the purpose of this study only the purely standardized type of interview was used. Predetermined and standardized or identical set of questions were used to ascertain patterns of digital marketing strategies used by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. The researcher mostly used face-to-face interviews to get reliable information of respondents.

However, some executives were constraint by their physical availability and were contacted through the telephone and thus, telephone interview. This method provided the opportunity for the researcher to receive immediate feedback from these executives and generally most executives prefer to speak on such topic rather than writing (Saunders, Lewish & Thornhill, 2007). Equally, executives who receive possible questions via post and other social media platforms were reluctant to answer the questions since the urgency was not provided, physical presence always emphasized the vitality of the research to the participants. Further, interview methods enabled respondents in the interview process and helped them elaborated deeply on digital marketing initiatives in the Municipality of Buea and various relationships between components of digital marketing like SEO, social media etc. has on performance variables like sales, customer engagement etc. There were different ways that digital marketing impacted businesses therefore interview gave these executives time to explain these different patterns to the researchers. Most importantly, the interview motivated executives SMEs to give honest opinion on this subject. However, data from interviews was very complex to analyze but once analyzed effectively, interview remain a very effective tool which extracted better data thus, better analysis and recommendations.

The main instrument that was used to collect quantitative data was questionnaire. Stratified Random Sampling techniques were used to collect data from the customers or clients. The main reason for using stratified random sampling was to ensure that all the different strata of the population size were represented in the population. First, businesses in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon were classified into different start-up capital structure. Equally, the businesses were classified as registered and non-registered businesses. Private schools were equally included, that is both basic, secondary and higher institution, these schools fall under the category of social entrepreneurship whose main objective in theory is to solve social needs of the society but in practice they are highly involved in digital marketing and wealth maximization of shareholders.

These businesses were further classified as urban and rural areas businesses of Buea Municipality. Furthermore, businesses were classified based on the number of years of their existence, in this respect information was collected from the Ministry of Small and Medium Size Enterprises for a period of ten years that is from 2014 to 2024 of the number of businesses registered. The researcher equally had information for businesses that have existed for more than 10 years. Furthermore, the researcher collected statistics of businesses which had existed for this period without registration. This classification was very vital for this study as it permitted the researcher to evaluate how successful enterprises and companies have implemented patterns of marketing strategies over the years. This classification was used to collect information from customers and clients of these enterprises and companies using stratified random sampling. This classification revealed a lot of sensitive information to the researcher. Different marketing strategies used at different stages of Product Life Cycle (PLC). For example, at the introductory stage of a product, the key aspect is to create awareness and at the maturity stage most businesses develop different marketing content to reinforce their messages to their loyal customers, constantly

reminding them that their choices are the best. Thus, this classification helped the researcher to know how different digital marketing strategies used differently across different stages of the Product Life Cycle.

Furthermore, it enabled the researcher to ascertain the different ways businesses benefited from digital marketing strategies at different stages of product life cycle. Thus, at the end of this study, the researcher was able to derive how digital marketing strategies benefited small and medium size enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon at various stages of product life cycle and recommend best strategies to be apply by these companies at various stages of Product Life Cycle. The main reason for using stratified random sampling was to ensure that all the different strata of the population were included in the study. Equally, different categories of businesses due exist such as hospitality which comprises of hotels, snacks, nightclubs etc., retail businesses, education, real estate etc. All these different categories of businesses were easily represented by using stratified random sampling. Thus, these different categories of businesses increased data reliability which was key in providing relevant information to the researcher.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher manually prints some of the questionnaires and randomly distributes them to different sectors customers such as entertainment, real estate, fashion, education etc. Customers or clients who were available immediately provided immediate response were highly appreciated while others were not available were given time to response to the questionnaires at the stipulated timeline was a week and the researcher or data collector collected the questionnaires later. Two data collectors were hired to collect quantitative data with the researcher. Firstly, the data collectors were trained by the researcher, and emphasis was focused on the main purpose for the research which was purely for academic purpose. Equally, some questionnaires were sent to target groups

of customers or of Small and Medium Size Enterprises through the phone mostly in WhatsApp groups and individually to some customers using google forms. Though, the researcher sent these questionnaires to target groups such as fashions, real estate, education and entertainments groups, the participants were not known beforehand thus, a stratified random sampling still applied in this situation. The process of sending questionnaires electronically was to ensure flexibility and to target mostly customers who were using digital marketing platforms to purchase, give feedback and recommend customers of these products to other potential customers.

Qualitative data processing for this study was processed by converting audio into written text. The transcribed data were sorted according to research questions and interview themes. All-important statements and themes are based on sub questions in each of the research questions. The interview was completed; the interview was transcribed verbatim that is word –for –word into a normal text using the Otter.ai software to ensure accurate transcription and to equally cross-check. The qualitative data collected via the interview was transcript to words manually and with the use of software. This software was chosen because of its high security level, and it equally have built in system of Microsoft Store to easily transcript audios to words. This software support both online and offline functionality. The researcher started by collecting various responses from sales executives and other executives which were organized and similar responses were grouped on one sub-topic such as challenges faced by SMEs in executing marketing strategies, marketing strategies platforms used by these businesses, budget as well as methods used by these businesses to measure the effectiveness of these digital marketing initiatives. After presentation of the data collected, thematic were analyzed from the various data collected. Firstly, pattern of responses were noted as well as themes. Equally, content analysis were used to ascertain the frequency of idea appearance and used words.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The formula to calculate Multiple Response Set (MRS.) for this research is presented as follows. For the conceptual component having X labelled $X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots, X_i$ indicators since one component is neutral and the study having a sample size (n) using a Likert Scale at four levels L1, L2, L3 and L4 computing MRS for each of the Likert Scale level follows the steps described on the table below (Lem & Gerald, 2020)

Table 3.1: Mathematical expression used for Calculating Multiple Response Set (MRS)

Conceptual Component	L1	L2	L3	L4	N
X_1	$n_{L1} X_1$	$n_{L2} X_1$	$n_{L3} X_1$	$n_{L4} X_1$	$N X_1 = n_{L1} X_1 + n_{L2} X_1 + n_{L3} X_1$
X_2					$N X_2$
X_3					$N X_3$
X_4					$N X_4$
X_5					$N X_5$
X_6					$N X_6$
X_7	$n_{L1} X_7$	$n_{L2} X_7$	$n_{L3} X_7$	$n_{L4} X_7$	$N X_7$
Aggregate (MR A)	$n_{L1} X_1 + \dots + n_{L1} X_7$	$n_{L2} X_1 + \dots + n_{L2} X_7$	$n_{L3} X_1 + \dots + n_{L3} X_7$	$n_{L4} X_1 + \dots + n_{L4} X_7$	$N_{\text{responses}} = \sum (n_{L1} X_1 + \dots + n_{L1} X_7) + (n_{L2} X_1 + \dots + n_{L2} X_7) + (n_{L3} X_1 + \dots + n_{L3} X_7)$
	$\frac{n_{\text{responses}} L1}{N_{\text{responses}}} * 100.$	$\frac{n_{\text{responses}} L2}{N_{\text{responses}}} * 100.$	$\frac{n_{\text{responses}} L3}{N_{\text{responses}}} * 100.$	$\frac{n_{\text{responses}} L4}{N_{\text{responses}}} * 100.$	$\% L1 + \% L2 + \% L3 = 100.0$

The Spearman's Rho was used to measure the relationship between content marketing and brand awareness and customer engagement in the Buea Municipality. The data that was collected for this study were ordinal data, which made Spearman's Rho suitable thus, could easily assess the strategies implementation and the Performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

Conceptual formula for calculating Spearman's Rho

$$\text{Spearman's rho} = 1 - \frac{6 \sum D^2}{N(N^2 - 1)}$$

Where;

Σ =Summation

D=difference in rank

N=Number of observations

The Spearman's was used to measure the strength or weakness between content marketing and brand awareness and customer engagement in the Municipality of Buea. Spearman's Rho was appropriate for this analysis because the research uses ordinal data which were collected with the aid of Likert Scale questionnaire which was appropriate for measuring the strength and direction of association between variables (Pallant, 2022). Furthermore, Spearman's coefficient ranging from -1 to 1, which gives a deep and clear understanding how data was related and this relationship were easily explained to policies makers of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, like the owners, Board of Directors (BODs) and the government representatives such a Mayors, Governors via major recommendations of the findings etc. The relationship between digital marketing strategies and the performance of SMEs all over the world has a higher probability of not having a normal distribution thus, Spearman's Rho was likely to use since it could easily handle skewed distribution of data (Field, 2013).

Effect Size of Correlation and Association

0.00	No correlation
0.01-----0.10	Negligible correlation
0.11-----0.20	Weak correlation
0.21-----0.40	Moderate correlation
0.41-----0.60	Relatively strong correlation
0.61-----0.80	Strong correlation

0.81-----0.99 Very strong correlation

1.0 Perfect correlation

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis was used for this study because it provided flexible and very rigorous approach to analyzing qualitative data collected via interview. Equally, thematic analysis provides easy methods for interpreting qualitative data thus, findings of the research were easily presented to decision makers since similar ideas were grouped into themes and themes were represented into dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8 Research Limitation

This topic is contemporary and relevant to business operators and other stakeholders in the domain of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, however, despite the strengths and current relevant of this research, the research still has some limitations which to an extent limit the universal applications of the recommendations that are proposed by the researcher as well as various mitigating strategies employ by the researcher to ensure that the mentioned limitations are overcome to an extent to expand the relevance of this research results.

First, the chosen scope of study is the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. This scope should have been extended to Cameroon in order to easily apply the results of the study to the entire country. However, there is great limitation of cost and other resources. Vital data are very necessary to ensure full reliability of this study and it is extremely difficult to have accurate data within this time period. Equally, internet available is a serious constraint in Cameroon as a whole and Buea in particular. Thus, Buea Municipality was carefully chosen to mitigate the aforementioned limitation since the population is very youthful, with many formal and

unregistered businesses engaging daily in digital marketing strategies. This implies that the research results can be easily apply to the entire nation and beyond.

The close-ended items of the questionnaires were exhaustive due to the need to ensure that the instrument were short and attracted the interest of respondents. This implies that some vital indicators related to some variables were considered in the study. However, information that were gotten via open-ended questions and interview guides supplemented the aforementioned weaknesses.

Equally, most small and medium size enterprises had serious deficiency when it comes to collecting and keeping vital data such as digital marketing expenditures, different strategies digital marketing strategies implement at different stages of product life cycle. However, the researcher did not rely on single source of data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to mitigate the deficiency from a single source.

Furthermore, most respondents were not willing to give out sensitive information especially digital marketing information since they were afraid that competitors could easily have access to such information and competitors could easily benchmark them. No business want her strategies to be known by her competitors. Multiple sources of information as well as the full reason for this research work mitigated the aforementioned limitation an extent. Performance measurement in relationship to digital marketing strategies implemented by a firm may be very challenging especially when customers' needs and wants are not perfectly identified and the right customers or clients not targeted. This is because right digital marketing implemented might still produce negative outcomes which gave a reflection of poor methods or strategies which was not necessarily the case.

However, stratified random sampling chose provided many different criteria of businesses as well as qualitative data selected via purposive sampling equally mitigated most of the aforementioned weakness. Most Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon lack the funds to invest consistently in digital marketing thus, making it difficult to identify pattern of digital marketing strategies. Most marketing efforts in the business world pay in the long run and consistency is a key variable in evaluating the effectiveness of any chosen strategy. Equally, most small business owners and executives lack the funds and experience to hire experts in this domain thus, wrong digital marketing strategies might be implemented. To mitigate the aforementioned problem, a purposive sampling technique was use in this study where the researcher purposively chose experts that were well knowledgeable on this topic after thorough research by the researcher.

3.9 Ethical Assurance

To ensure originality of this work, all past research, books and articles consulted and used in this work were duly referenced. Equally, a formal letter was sent to all authorities to have access to data and related materials, and approval were received from these bodies before various data were collected such as the Head of Service from One -Stop -Shop Limbe where businesses in South West Region commerce their registration process

Equally, the researcher developed a formal letter and present to various institutions as a formally procedures to gain access to some authorities such as the Directors, Owners of Businesses, Managers and others related with Digital Marketing and Sales of Company in order to gain access to both qualitative data via interview guide and secondary data such as sales figures of companies. This letter was duly signed by SSBM administrators.

Equally, the purpose of this research was clearly stipulated that the finding of this work was meant purely for academic purpose and not for other related reasons since some authorities were skeptical that the information could be used for tax purposes and other related reasons. The researcher promised to make public the findings of the research which could help current and future businesses.

Furthermore, the researcher respected the opinions of authorities who refused to participate in the study and those who requested financial compensation to motivate them to give useful information. This ensures that just the right information was collected for this research purpose. Individuals forced to participate in the research process have a tendency of providing bias data which could be detrimental to the research. Equally, an informed consent form was designed and fully signed by the researcher, emphasizing the purpose of the research and ensuring participants that they were completely free to avoid questions that can harm them physically, financially and emotionally.

This chapter simply looked at the research methodology that was how data were collected, processed, analyzed and how findings were presented. The chapter consists of the following subchapters: Research method and design, population of the study and sample, data collection procedures, processing and analysis, limitation of the study and ethical assurances. This study targeted both registered and non-registered businesses in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon as well as customers of these businesses. Purposive sampling was used to select some owners, managers and owners of SMEs in Buea Municipality while the stratified random sampling was used to get the opinions of some customers on this subject matter. Structured questions and semi-structured interview were the main instruments used by the researcher to collect data for this study. Both interview guide and questionnaires were validated by my supervisor. This increased the

validity of the data that were collected. Data were analyzed both by descriptive and inferential statistics. Spearman's Rho correlation was used to analyze the questionnaires and the qualitative data were analyzed with the aid of thematic analysis. This chapter concluded by acknowledging the ethical standards respected in carrying out the research as well as possible limitations of the research and methods applied to mitigate the limitation to ensure universal applications of findings of the study

3.10 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological structure used to examine the effect of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. It began by highlighting the research problem, emphasizing that increasing competition has induced many SMEs to adopt digital marketing strategies for survival, growth, and sustained performance. This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data thus, a mixed research was implemented to broaden the scope of data collection and enhance the reliability of findings as well as the quality of recommendations. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaires were administered to SME customers and clients in Buea, while interviews provided in-depth insights into the perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by SME executives. For data analysis, the study employed Multiple Response Set analysis to handle questions with multiple answers. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's Rho) was used to assess the relationship between digital marketing variables, particularly digital content usage, and SME performance indicators such as brand awareness and customer engagement. In addition, thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data to identify key patterns and themes. This chapter equally presented certain limitations, including the study's geographical restriction to Buea Municipality and constraints related to time and financial resources. Despite these limitations, the

choice of Buea was justified due to its vibrant SME sector and increasing adoption of digital technologies. Lastly, the study adhered to strict ethical standards by ensuring proper referencing and conducting data collection in a responsible and transparent manner.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter elucidates a complete analysis and interpretation of data collected from Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to ensure objectivity in analysis and interpretation. The analysis employed aligned with research questions, objectives and methodology presented in chapter three. The results were presented using summarizes from qualitative data and tables which further enhances comprehension. Each research question was analyzed with unique method and hypothesis were tested in unique situations.

4.2 Results

Table 4.1
Categories of Criteria for Internal Stakeholders

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	13	26.0
	Male	37	74.0
	Total	50	100.0
Age Group	25 – 40	18	36.0
	41 – 55	23	46.0
	Above 55	9	18.0
	Total	50	100.0
Work EXPERIENCE	4 - 7 years	22	44.0
	8 - 11 years	25	50.0
	Above 12 Years	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0
Level of Education	Bachelor	21	42.0
	HND	4	8.0
	A' LEVEL and Below	8	16.0
	Master's/MBA/Related	14	28.0
	PhD	2	4.0
	Total	50	100.0

Table 4.2**The Personal Interview Schedule for Internal Stakeholders**

Participant s ID	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview (Mins)	Complete Participants Profile	Signed Partici pant Conset	Interviewed Performed	Job Position (Owner, Manager, Director, Employee, etc)
SME – 001	2/10/2026	30	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 002	2/15/2026	25	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Proprietor/Ow ner
SME – 003	2/5/2026	35	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Digital Marketer
SME – 004	2/20/2026	30	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Manager
SME – 005	2/12/2026	40	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Business Development Manager
SME – 006	2/18/2026	45	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 007	2/25/2026	32	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Manager
SME – 008	2/8/2026	36	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Marketer
SME – 009	3/1/2026	38	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Marketing Team Lead
SME – 010	2/14/2026	41	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Marketing Team Member
SME – 011	2/22/2026	33	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Digital Marketer
SME – 012	2/28/2026	44	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 013	2/17/2026	37	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Marketer
SME – 014	2/9/2026	39	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Marketing Team Lead
SME – 015	2/19/2026	43	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Marketing Manager
SME – 016	2/26/2026	34	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	IT Manager
SME – 017	3/2/2026	36	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Director
SME – 018	2/13/2026	42	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Manager

SME – 019	2/23/2026	31	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Manager
SME – 020	2/16/2026	44	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Brand Manager
SME – 021	3/5/2026	40	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Chief Marketer
SME – 022	2/1/2026	35	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 023	2/7/2026	38	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 024	2/11/2026	42	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Proprietor
SME – 025	2/21/2026	39	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 026	2/27/2026	36	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Store Manager
SME – 027	3/3/2026	41	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Salon Manager
SME – 028	2/6/2026	33	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 029	2/24/2026	37	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 030	2/29/2026	44	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Shop Manager
SME – 031	3/6/2026	35	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 032	2/3/2026	43	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Operations Manager
SME – 033	2/4/2026	40	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Proprietor
SME – 034	2/2/2026	36	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 035	3/7/2026	45	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Store Manager
SME – 036	2/9/2026	38	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 037	2/19/2026	42	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Event Manager
SME – 038	2/26/2026	30	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Pharmacist
SME – 039	3/8/2026	34	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Farm Supervisor
SME – 040	2/13/2026	44	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Sales Manager
SME – 041	2/17/2026	37	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner

SME – 042	2/23/2026	40	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Owner
SME – 043	2/27/2026	43	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Bank Manager and Head of Marketing
SME – 044	3/9/2026	35	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Bar Manager
SME – 045	2/28/2026	41	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Supervisor
SME – 046	2/21/2026	33	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 047	3/10/2026	39	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	IT Technician
SME – 048	2/14/2026	44	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner
SME – 049	2/11/2026	37	Yes	Yes	Face-to-Face	Fitness Instructor
SME – 050	3/12/2026	42	Yes	Yes	Phone Call	Owner

Table 4.3

Demographic Statistics for Internal Stakeholders

S/N	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Work experience (Years)
SME – 001	Male	42	Bachelor	8
SME – 002	Male	45	Master's	11
SME – 003	Male	38	Master's	6
SME – 004	Female	36	HND	5
SME – 005	Male	44	A'LEVEL/ or Below	9
SME – 006	Male	47	Master's	10
SME – 007	Male	39	Bachelor	7
SME – 008	Female	41	A' LEVEL or Below	6
SME – 009	Female	37	HND	5
SME – 010	Male	43	Bachelor	8
SME – 011	Male	40	A' LEVEL or Below	7
SME – 012	Male	46	A' LEVEL or Below	11
SME – 013	Male	44	PhD	9

SME – 014	Female	38	Bachelor	6
SME – 015	Male	49	Master's	12
SME – 016	Male	41	MBA	8
SME – 017	Male	45	A'LEVEL	10
SME – 018	Female	39	Bachelor	7
SME – 019	Male	48	Master's	11
SME – 020	Male	42	A'LEVEL	9
SME – 021	Male	44	Master's	10
SME – 022	Male	43	Bachelor	7
SME – 023	Female	37	A'LEVEL	6
SME – 024	Male	46	Bachelor	9
SME – 025	Male	44	A'LEVEL	8
SME – 026	Male	41	Bachelor	7
SME – 027	Female	35	Master's	5
SME – 028	Male	48	Bachelor	10
SME – 029	Male	45	Bachelor	9
SME – 030	Male	38	Master's	7
SME – 031	Male	42	HND	6
SME – 032	Male	47	MBA	11
SME – 033	Female	36	Bachelor	5
SME – 034	Male	40	Bachelor	8
SME – 035	Male	49	Master's	12
SME – 036	Female	37	Bachelor	6
SME – 037	Male	44	Bachelor	9
SME – 038	Male	50	PhD	15
SME – 039	Male	41	Bachelor	7
SME – 040	Male	46	Master's	10
SME – 041	Female	39	Bachelor	6
SME – 042	Male	43	Bachelor	8
SME – 043	Female	38	Master's	7
SME – 044	Male	45	Bachelor	9
SME – 045	Male	40	HND	6
SME – 046	Male	48	Bachelor	10
SME – 047	Male	42	Master's	8
SME – 048	Female	36	Bachelor	5
SME – 049	Male	39	Bachelor	7
SME – 050	Female	47	HND	9

Table 4.4**Gender Distribution**

Gender	Frequency
Male	37
Female	13
Total	50

Table 4.5**Education Qualification by Gender**

Education Level	Frequency
Bachelor	15
Master's	10
MBA	2
PhD	2
HND	2
A'LEVEL / Below	6
Total	37

Education Level	Frequency
Bachelor	6
Master's	3
HND	3
A'LEVEL / Below	1
MBA	0
PhD	0
Total	13

Table 4.6**Education Distribution (All Respondents)**

Education Level	Frequency
Bachelor	21
Master's	13
MBA	2
PhD	2
HND	5
A'LEVEL / Below	7
Total	50

Summary of Demographic Findings

- Bachelor's degree holders dominate the sample (21 out of 50).
- Males are the majority (74%).
- Females are concentrated in Bachelor's and HND, with no MBA or PhD recorded.
- Higher degrees (MBA & PhD) are relatively rare in the dataset.

4.2 Results

Qualitative data

RQ1. How digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

Table 4.7

Codes and Themes for RQ1

Sub-question	Codes Identified	Description	Theme
Q1. Can you briefly describe your business and what it does?	vocational and higher institutions, agribusiness centers, stationeries shops, events center, bar and restaurant, fitness centers and IT shops	Businesses range across retail, services, hospitality, healthcare, and agriculture sectors. Most are micro or small enterprises operating in the Molyko, Muea, Doduma and Great Soppo areas.	Diverse SME landscape in Buea Municipality
Q2. Who is responsible for marketing?	Owner/proprietor only, Manager only, Marketing team, Digital marketer, Outsourced service, Business development unit, Multiple staff (owner + employees)	Marketing responsibility is highly centralized. In 60% of cases, the owner or manager alone makes marketing decisions. Only larger enterprises have dedicated marketing teams.	Centralized marketing decision-making

Q3. Do you have a formal digital marketing program?	No formal program (most common), Yes with yearly plan, Yes with quarterly plan, Yes with monthly plan, Loose/Informal plan, Activity plan only	The majority (70%) have no written digital marketing program. Those with plans often do not follow them strictly. Programs are rarely organized by responsibility, date, and budget.	Lack of formal digital marketing planning
Q4. How are resources allocated?	No regular allocation, Each time strategy is brought on board, Yearly basis, Monthly basis, Weekly basis, After six months, From surplus after expenses, From daily sales, Per event basis	Resource allocation is predominantly ad-hoc and reactive. Few businesses have fixed budgets. Allocation often depends on available surplus, stock levels, or specific events rather than strategic planning.	Ad-hoc resource allocation
Q5. What methodologies are used to agree on implementation?	Manager/owner decides alone, Discussion/meeting, Expert opinion, Customer feedback, Competitor observation, Past sales data, Head of marketing presents to manager/board, Family discussion, Trial and error	Decision-making methods are largely intuitive and non-systematic. Formal processes (presentations, approvals) exist only in businesses with dedicated marketing teams. Most rely on owner judgment or informal discussions.	Informal, intuition-based decision-making
Q6. Who is involved in digital marketing?	Only marketing department, Only manager/owner, Only expert/outsourced person, Entire organization, Marketing team + some employees	Digital marketing is typically isolated rather than integrated. Only 15-20% of businesses involve the entire organization. Most restrict involvement to owners, managers, or marketing personnel.	Limited organizational involvement in digital marketing

Themes and Sub-Themes in Evaluation of Findings

Theme 1: Lack of Formal Digital Marketing Planning

Most enterprises in Buea Municipality do not have a structured, documented digital marketing program organized by responsibility, date, and budget.

Table 4.8**Supporting Evidence –Lack of Formal Digital Marketing Planning**

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 002	"No"
SME – 005	"No"
SME – 012	"The business don't have a digital marketing program... marketing activities such as Facebook post and advertisement are planned informally based on sales need, promotional period and funds availability"
SME – 022	"No we don't have any formal digital marketing program in place"
SME – 023	"We have a loose digital marketing plan that we update every three months"
SME – 024	"No we have never written down any digital marketing program"

Theme 2: Ad-hoc Resource Allocation

Financial and other resources for digital marketing are not allocated on regular, predictable bases (annually, monthly, and weekly). Instead, resources are provided reactively.

Table 4.9**Supporting Evidence: Ad-hoc Resource Allocation**

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 004	"No. But we respond to digital marketing events but we have a marketing budget"
SME – 005	"Resources are allocated each time a marketing program is brought up"
SME – 008	"Weekly bases"
SME – 010	"After six months"
SME – 012	"Resources are not allocated on a fixed annual monthly basis, funds are allocated when need be"
SME – 022	"Resources are only set aside when we have surplus money after feeding the birds"

Theme 3: Centralized and Isolated Marketing Responsibility

Digital marketing decisions and activities are concentrated among owners, managers, or specific marketing personnel, with limited involvement from the broader organization.

Table 4.10**Supporting Evidence: Centralized and Isolated Marketing Responsibility**

Participant ID	Quote
SEM – 002	"The proprietor"
SME – 004	"Only the manager's responsibility"
SME – 006	"The manager, and CEO"
SME – 015	"Yes, via their head of departments"
SME – 016	"Entire organization, headed by marketing team"
SME – 018	"Only the marketing though employees are encouraged to share on their personal platforms"

Theme 4: Informal Decision-Making Methodologies

Enterprises rely on intuition, observation, and informal discussions rather than data-driven or structured methodologies to agree on program implementation.

Table 4.11**Supporting Evidence: Informal Decision-Making Methodologies**

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 001	"The Manager and board decide with expert opinion"
SME – 005	"Question not understood" (indicating lack of formal process)"
SME – 006	"We must collaborate with each other"
SME – 012	"Observation of customer behavior, previous sales performance, competitor activities and personal judgment of the boss"
SME – 022	"We just discuss as a family and decide based on what our regular customers tell us"
SME – 024	"I just look at what my competitors are doing and try to copy them"

RQ2. What is the relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

Table 4.12

Codes and Themes for RQ2

Sub-question	Codes Identified	Description	Theme
Q1. What is the major type of digital marketing strategy implemented?	Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok), SEO, Online advert, Email marketing, Google My Business	Social media is the dominant strategy (98% of enterprises). Facebook and WhatsApp (mobile marketing) are most common. Few businesses use SEO, email, or Google My Business.	Social media dominance
Q2. What motivated you to choose this method?	Highest audience/reach, Low cost/affordable, Easy to use/simple, Trend in economy, Customer preference, Direct interaction, Visual appeal	Primary motivations are audience reach and cost. Secondary motivations include ease of use and ability to show visual content (especially for fashion, food, and beauty businesses).	Reach and affordability as key drivers
Q3. What major changes in SME performance after implementation?	Increased sales, Better visibility/awareness, More customer inquiries, Reduced waste/unsold stock, More repeat customers, Appointment-based bookings	Most common improvement is increased sales. Others include brand visibility, customer inquiries, and operational efficiencies (e.g., reduced waste for perishable goods).	Positive performance improvements across multiple metrics
Q4. Does digital marketing budget have a significant effect?	Yes (strong positive), Yes to some extent, Yes but expert knowledge also vital, No direct impact, Yes even small budget matters	Over 90% affirm budget has positive effects. Several note that expert knowledge, content quality, and strategy matter alongside budget. Even small budgets (e.g., 2000-5000 CFA) produce noticeable results.	Budget matters, but not in isolation
Q5. What indicators measure digital marketing success?	Sales volume/rate, Number of inquiries/calls, Website/physical visits, ROI/conversion rate,	Sales and inquiries are most common indicators. Others include engagement metrics, walk-in customers, and bookings. Few use	Sales-driven measurement with limited sophistication

	Number of followers/engagements, Profitability, Customer feedback	formal ROI or conversion tracking.	
Q6. What is the overall impact on SME growth in Buea?	Positive impact, Increased sales, Brand visibility, More customers, Waste reduction, Helps SMEs compete, Very positive for most	Overwhelmingly positive. Specific benefits include reaching customers outside immediate neighborhoods, reducing waste, and enabling SMEs to compete with larger businesses.	Digital marketing as an enabler of SME growth

Themes and Sub-Themes in Evaluation of Findings

Theme 1: Social Media Dominance as the Primary Digital Marketing Strategy

The vast majority of SMEs in Buea rely exclusively on social media platforms, with Facebook, WhatsApp (mobile marketing), Instagram, and TikTok being the most common. Few enterprises use SEO, email marketing, or Google My Business.

Table 4.13

Supporting Evidence: Themes and Sub-Themes in Evaluation of Findings

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 001	“Social media”
SME – 004	“Social media most especially Business WhatsApp”
SME – 005	“Social media, mainstream media and online advert”
SME – 012	“Social media marketing especially Facebook marketing and WhatsApp promotion”
SME – 022	“We use WhatsApp mostly to broadcast prices to our existing customers”
SME – 027	“Video marketing on TikTok and Instagram”
SME – 032	“Facebook and Google My Business”

Theme 2: Reach and Affordability as Key Motivators

SMEs choose digital marketing methods primarily because they are affordable and reach large audiences. Secondary motivations include ease of use, direct customer interaction, and visual appeal for certain products.

Table 4.14

Supporting Evidence: Reach and Affordability as Key Motivators

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 001	“Highest audience”
SME – 004	“Very simple to use with high rate of ROI”
SME – 012	“Easy to use, affordable, widely used by students and many others in Buea”
SME – 016	“Less costly and more effective in locality”
SME – 022	“It was the cheapest option”
SME – 027	“We chose video because hairstyles look better in motion”

Theme 3: Positive Performance Improvements across Multiple Metrics

SMEs report a range of positive performance changes after implementing digital marketing, including increased sales, better visibility, more customer inquiries, reduced waste, and operational efficiencies.

Table 4.15

Supporting Evidence: Positive Performance Improvements across Multiple Metrics

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 002	"Improved profitability"
SME – 005	“Sales increase, enhanced customer satisfaction, reduced waiting time and queues”
SME – 006	"Increased the influx of customers and demand"
SME – 012	“Increase in customer awareness, higher sales volume, more customer inquiry”
SME – 022	"More repeat orders and less unsold eggs"
SME – 031	"No longer throw away unsold bread at the end of the day"
SME – 034	"Takeaway orders doubled"

Theme 4: Budget Matters, But Not in Isolation

The overwhelming majority of SMEs confirm that digital marketing budget has a significant positive effect on initiatives. However, many note that expert knowledge, content quality, and strategic implementation are equally or more important.

Table 4.16

Supporting Evidence: Budget Matters, But Not in Isolation

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 001	"Yes but expert knowledge more vital"
SME – 009	"Yes, of course but specialized knowledge equally"
SME – 014	"If we target it. However, expert opinion is with the best option"
SME – 018	"Yes. Positive relationship when implemented properly"
SME – 022	"Yes definitely when we spend more on boosting messages we get more bulk orders"
SME – 031	"Yes even 1000 francs spent on data brings five or six extra customers"

Theme 5: Sales-Driven Measurement with Limited Sophistication

SMEs primarily measure digital marketing success through sales volume, customer inquiries, and walk-in traffic. Few use formal metrics like ROI, conversion rates, or customer acquisition cost.

Table 4. 17

Supporting Evidence: Sales-Driven Measurement with Limited Sophistication

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 001	"Rate of visit to our website and physical location"
SME – 002	"Improved or increased sales"
SME – 003	"ROI, conversion click through rate" (rare example of sophistication)
SME – 012	"Number of online inquiry, increase in walk-in customer, sales volume, number of followers"
SME – 022	"Number of calls received per week and how many cartons of eggs are booked online"

SME – 031 “Number of calls we receive between 3pm and 6pm”

Theme 6: Digital Marketing as an Enabler of SME Growth in Buea

The overall impact of digital marketing on SME growth in the Buea Municipality is overwhelmingly positive. Specific benefits include reaching customers outside immediate neighborhoods, reducing waste, enabling competition with larger businesses, and transforming business models.

Table 4.18

Supporting Evidence: Sales-Driven Measurement with Limited Sophistication

Participant ID	Quote
SME – 002	"Positive impact and more awareness of brand"
SME – 012	“Positively contributed to SME growth in Buea by increasing visibility, attracting more customer, improve sales performance”
SME – 024	“Helped many SMEs in Buea become known outside their immediate neighborhood”
SME – 027	“Transformed small salons in Buea from roadside to appointment based”
SME – 033	“Completely changed the friperie business in Buea from hidden shops to popular destinations”
SME – 034	“Helped restaurant SMEs increase takeaway sales without expanding their seating space”

RQ3. How social media marketing strategies influence the sales results in SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

Table 4.19

Codes and Theme for RQ3

Sub-question	Codes Identified	Description	Theme
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Q1. What is the main social media platform used and why?	WhatsApp (low cost, simple, direct reach), Facebook (large audience, older crowd), Instagram (visual, professional, hashtags), TikTok (organic reach, viral potential)	Platform choice is strategic based on business type. WhatsApp dominates for existing customer communication. TikTok used for discovery. Facebook for broad reach. Instagram for visual products.	Platform selection driven by business needs and audience location
Q2. Do you have specific strategies to encourage engagement and repeat purchases?	Consistent posting, Product photos/videos, Promotional offers/discounts, Quick response to messages, Comedians/influencers, Voice notes in pidgin English, Before/after photos, Trending topics, Games and comedy, Customer testimonials	Strategies focus on visual proof, local language, social proof, and timely engagement. Few use sophisticated retention strategies beyond discounts.	Visual and relational engagement strategies dominate
Q3. Do you post frequently to attain specific objectives?	Daily posting, Multiple times per week, Peak season posting (back-to-school), Morning/evening specific times, When new stock arrives	Posting frequency is generally high but inconsistent. Objectives include brand awareness, sales generation, waste reduction (perishables), and customer retention.	High posting frequency with mixed strategic intent
Q4. What methods are used to track sales generated via social media?	Asking customers directly, Unique phone numbers, Discount codes, Point of sale (POS) systems, Customer referrals tracking, Website/conversation tracking, Facebook pixel, Notebook/manual tracking	Tracking is predominantly informal and manual. Few use automated tools. Most rely on simple questioning at point of purchase.	Informal sales tracking with limited sophistication

Q5. Does social media influence sales volume?	Yes (strong positive), Yes to some extent, Yes absolutely, Strongly agree	Over 95% affirm positive influence. Several note it has "huge," "big," or "very much" impact. Only one expressed skepticism.	Overwhelmingly positive perceived influence on sales
Q6. What are the main difficulties faced when marketing online?	Poor internet connectivity, High data costs, Limited budget, Lack of expertise, Customer trust issues (fraud), Unstable electricity, Low engagement rates, High competition, Fake accounts/scammers, Negative comments	Difficulties span infrastructure (internet, electricity), financial (budget, data costs), capacity (expertise), and market (trust, competition, fraud).	Multi-dimensional barriers to effective social media marketing

Themes and Sub-Themes in Evaluation of Findings

Theme 1: Platform Selection Driven by Business Needs and Audience Location

SMEs strategically choose platforms based on their specific business context, target audience, and product type. WhatsApp is favored for its low cost and direct customer reach. Facebook is chosen for its large user base and older demographic. Instagram is preferred for visual products (fashion, food, events). TikTok is used for organic reach beyond existing followers.

Table 14. 20

Supporting Evidence: Platform Selection Driven by Business Needs and Audience Location

Participant ID	Platform	Reason
SME - 006	Facebook	"Because it is used by almost everyone"
SME - 012	Facebook	"Because of large number of users in Buea especially students and working class"
SME - 017	WhatsApp (Mobile marketing)	"To minimize cost"
SME - 022	WhatsApp (Mobile Marketing)	"Because it doesn't require much data and customers respond quickly"
SME - 023	Instagram	"Because it allows us to show before and after setups"

SME - 024	Facebook	“Because it has an older crowd that actually pays for printing services”
SME - 027	TikTok	“Because it pushes our videos to people who do not even follow us”
SME - 033	TikTok	“Because it pushes our videos to people who have never bought second hand before”

Theme 2: Visual and Relational Engagement Strategies Dominate

SMEs employ a range of strategies to encourage engagement and repeat purchases, with emphasis on visual content (photos, videos, before/after comparisons), relational approaches (quick responses, voice notes in pidgin English), and promotional tactics (discounts, contests, influencer collaborations).

Table 14.21

Supporting Evidence: Visual and Relational Engagement Strategies Dominate

Participant ID	Strategy	Quote
SME – 004	Games and comedy	"We motivate them via games and comedy"
SME – 012	Promotional offers	“Product photos are posted, promotional offer, price discount, and respond quickly to customer message”
SME – 018	Bloggers/influencers	“We mostly use bloggers and motivate them for sharing our adverts”
SME – 019	Comedians	“We use comedians to provoke them and advertise better”
SME – 022	Voice notes in pidgin	“We send voice notes in local pidgin English to explain our prices and delivery days”
SME – 023	Reels/timelapse	“We create short reels showing decoration setup from start to finish”
SME – 027	Process videos	“We film the complete process of a braiding style from start to finish”
SME – 032	Before/after photos	“We post before and after photos of dirty houses and cleaned houses side by side”

Theme 3: High Posting Frequency with Mixed Strategic Intent

Most SMEs post frequently, ranging from daily to multiple times per week. Posting times are often strategic (morning for bread/fish, afternoon for lunch, evening for bars). Objectives

include brand awareness, sales generation, waste reduction (perishable goods), and customer retention.

Table 14. 22

Supporting Evidence: High Posting Frequency with Mixed Strategic Intent

Participant ID	Frequency	Objective
SME – 012	“Frequently especially during peak period like back-to-school”	Maximize reach during high-demand periods
SME - 022	"Every morning around 6am"	Reach customers before market opens
SME - 027	"At least one video every day"	Maintain visibility and algorithm favorability
SME - 031	"Every afternoon around 2pm"	Sell remaining bread before evening
SME - 033	"At least five videos every day"	Maximize TikTok reach and viral potential
SME - 034	"Every morning at 10am"	Capture lunch order market

Theme 4: Informal Sales Tracking with Limited Sophistication

The majority of SMEs track sales generated from social media using simple, low-cost methods: asking customers directly, using unique phone numbers, offering discount codes, or manually recording in notebooks. Few use automated tools like Facebook pixels, POS systems, or spreadsheets.

Table 4. 23

Supporting Evidence: Informal Sales Tracking with Limited Sophistication

Participant ID	Tracking Method	Quote
SME - 001	Point of Sale	"Point Sales"
SME - 003	Facebook Pixel	"Pixel on Facebook"
SME - 012	Customer questioning	“Asking customer question how they knew about the business”
SME - 018	POS and CRM	“Point of sales (POS) system, and customer relationship management”

SME - 020	Links and conversation trackers	"Using links, trust, conversation trackers"
SME - 022	Direct questioning	"We simply ask every caller how they got our number"
SME - 023	Unique phone number	"We use a unique phone number only for social media inquiries"
SME - 037	Notebook tracking	"Track it in a notebook"

Theme 5: Overwhelmingly Positive Perceived Influence on Sales

Nearly all SMEs (over 95%) affirm that social media strategies positively influence their sales volume. Responses range from "yes" to "very much," "absolutely," "huge influence," and "strongly agree." Only one participant expressed skepticism (SME - 011 "Not really").

Table 4. 24

Supporting Evidence: Overwhelmingly Positive Perceived Influence on Sales

Participant ID	Response	Quote
SME - 005	Yes	"Yes"
SME - 006	Yes	"Yes"
SME - 013	Strongly agree	"Strongly agree it has an influence on sales"
SME - 018	Yes	"Yes, social media greatly influences the sales volume of organizations"
SME - 023	Yes strongly	"Yes strongly without social media we would still be relying only on word of mouth"
SME - 027	Yes absolutely	"Yes absolutely without TikTok we would have half the customers we have now"
SME - 029	Huge influence	"Yes it has a huge influence especially for early morning and late night trips"
SME - 033	Very much	"Yes very much without TikTok we would be selling only to our regular neighborhood"
SME - 047	Very much	"Yes very much without Google My Business we would only get referrals"

Theme 6: Multi-Dimensional Barriers to Effective Social Media Marketing

SMEs face multiple interconnected difficulties when marketing online. These span infrastructure (poor internet connectivity, unstable electricity), financial (limited budget, high data costs), capacity (lack of digital marketing expertise, time constraints), and market challenges (customer trust issues due to fraud, low engagement, high competition, fake accounts, negative comments).

Table 4. 25

Supporting Evidence: Multi-Dimensional Barriers to Effective Social Media Marketing

Participant ID	Barrier Category	Participant Quotes
SME – 001	Infrastructure	"Low connectivity, Internet connection is poor. Unstable electricity which makes editing and uploading very difficult"
SME – 003	Financial	"Budget constraint and payment gateway"
SME – 004	Capacity	"Time and expertise knowledge"
SME – 020	Trust/Fraud	"Buyers face difficulty to trust online vendors due to the high traits of scam and fraud"
SME – 006	Competition	"Too many competitors to bypass"
SME – 005	Engagement	"Lack of engagements from potential and actual customers"
SME – 033	Negative feedback	"Jealous people who leave bad comments"

RQ4. How Search Engine Optimization influences brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

Table 4. 26

Codes and Themes for RQ4

Sub-question	Codes Identified	Description	Theme
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Q1. Does your business use SEO in advertising your products online?	Yes (full SEO), Yes (basic SEO), No, No (no website)	Approximately 40-45% use some form of SEO. Most use basic techniques (keywords, location tags, and hashtags). Few use full website-based SEO. The majority (55-60%) do not use SEO at all.	Low SEO adoption with basic implementation among users
Q2. How vital is SEO in increasing your business brand awareness online?	Very vital/strong impact, Quite vital, Helps visibility and credibility, Not vital, No idea/I don't know, Not relevant for my business	Among SEO users, vitality is rated high to moderate. Among non-users, many view SEO as irrelevant or not vital for their specific business type (farms, bakeries, taxis, corner shops, market traders).	Divided perceptions of SEO vitality
Q3. Do businesses that appear higher in search results get more trust and brand recognition?	Yes (strong agreement), Yes definitely, Maybe for big companies, No opinion, Not relevant for my business	Approximately 75% agree or strongly agree that higher search ranking correlates with trust and recognition. However, many non-users believe this applies only to "big companies" or certain business types.	Widespread belief in SEO-trust connection, but not universally applied
Q4. What is the main challenge faced in implementing SEO?	Lack of technical knowledge, Limited financial resources, High cost, No website, No time, Difficulty obtaining reviews, Keeping up with changes, Regulatory restrictions	Challenges are multi-dimensional: capacity (knowledge, time), financial (cost, limited resources), and technical (no website, parameter setting), and market (reviews, trust issues).	Significant implementation barriers across multiple dimensions
Q5. Are you of the opinion that investment in SEO is profitable for organizations?	Yes (very profitable), Yes (in long run), Yes but strategically, Partially, No, Not applicable, No opinion	Approximately 60% believe SEO is profitable (especially for B2B, IT, visual-product businesses). 25% say no or not profitable for their business type. 15% have no opinion or say not applicable.	Divided opinions on SEO profitability, often business-type dependent

Themes and Sub-Themes in Evaluation of Findings

Theme 1: Low SEO Adoption with Basic Implementation among Users

Only a minority of SMEs in Buea use SEO, and those who do typically employ only basic techniques such as adding keywords to social media bios, using location tags, and including relevant hashtags. Full website-based SEO is rare.

Table 4. 27

Supporting Evidence: Low SEO Adoption with Basic Implementation among Users

Participant ID	SEO Usage	Quote
SME – 001	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 003	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 008	No	"Noo"
SME – 0012	Basic	"Yes in a basic way such as relevant key word on Facebook pages but not in a high way"
SME – 017	No	"No"
SME – 019	No	"No, we use Facebook, email, normal messages"
SME – 022	No	"No we have never used SEO"
SME – 023	Basic	"We use basic SEO by adding location tags and relevant keywords in our captions"
SME – 024	No	"No I don't use SEO I don't even have a website"
SME – 027	Basic	"We use very basic SEO by adding hashtags like Buea braids and Molyko hair"
SME – 032	Yes	"Yes we use basic SEO by writing detailed service descriptions on our Facebook page"
SME – 035	Basic	"We use basic SEO by writing Buea building materials in our page name"
SME – 040	Yes	"Yes we use SEO on our website to rank for school furniture in Buea"
SME – 047	Yes	"Yes we use SEO on our website to rank for computer repair Buea"

Theme 2: Divided Perceptions of SEO Vitality

Perceptions of SEO's importance vary sharply between users and non-users. SEO users generally rate it as "very vital" or "quite vital," emphasizing its role in visibility and credibility.

Non-users often dismiss SEO as "not relevant" for their specific business type, including farms, bakeries, taxis, corner shops, market traders, and pharmacies.

Table 4.28

Supporting Evidence: Divided Perceptions of SEO Vitality

Participant ID	Perception	Quote
SME – 003	Very strong impact	"It has very strong impact"
SME – 005	Increases visibility and credibility	"It increases visibility and credibility of our business brand"
SME – 012	Helps appear in search	"It helps the business to appear on online search, making it easier for customer to recognize the brand"
SME – 022	Not relevant	"I don't think it matters for a small farm like ours"
SME – 025	Not necessary	"I don't think it is necessary for selling frozen food"
SME – 026	Not vital	"Not vital at all because our customers search by walking around not by Google"
SME – 027	Very vital	"It is very vital because people search for salons near them on TikTok and Instagram"
SME – 029	Not vital	"Not vital at all for a taxi service"
SME – 031	Not relevant	"Not relevant for a small bakery"
SME – 034	Not vital	"Not vital because our customers are local and already know us"
SME – 038	Not vital	"Not vital because people search for pharmacies by walking not by Google"

Theme 3: Widespread Belief in SEO-Trust Connection, But Not Universally Applied

Approximately 75% of SMEs agree that businesses appearing higher in search results are more trusted and have higher chances of brand recognition. However, many non-users believe this principle applies only to "big companies" or certain business types, not to their own SME.

Table 4. 29**Supporting Evidence: Widespread Belief in SEO-Trust Connection, But Not Universally Applied**

Participant ID	Belief	Quote
SME – 001	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 003	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 005	No (skeptical)	"No"
SME – 006	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 012	Yes	"Yes the business are seen as most credible and trust worthy"
SME – 017	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 018	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 022	Conditional	"Maybe for big companies but not for us"
SME – 023	Yes	"Yes I believe businesses that appear at the top look more professional"
SME – 024	Conditional	"I think maybe for online stores but not for service businesses like mine"
SME – 027	Yes	"Yes definitely businesses that appear first get more trust and more bookings"
SME – 032	Yes	"Yes definitely businesses that show up first on Google look more trustworthy to homeowners"
SME – 035	Yes	"Yes definitely higher search results make people trust that you are a real business"
SME – 040	Yes	"Yes definitely companies that appear on the first page of Google are seen as more reliable"

Theme 4: Significant Implementation Barriers across Multiple Dimensions

SMEs face multiple, interconnected challenges when attempting to implement SEO.

These span technical knowledge gaps, financial constraints, infrastructure limitations, time constraints, and market-specific challenges (reviews, trust).

Table 4. 30**Supporting Evidence: Significant Implementation Barriers across Multiple Dimensions**

Barrier Category	Participant ID	Quote
Technical knowledge	SME – 003	"Setting all the parameters in the SEO plugin"
	SME – 012	"Lack of technical knowledge"
	SME – 023	"We lack the technical knowledge to optimize our Instagram and website properly"
	SME – 027	"The biggest challenge is knowing which hashtags and keywords to use"
	SME – 030	"The biggest challenge is understanding how to rank on Instagram search without paying"
Financial constraints	SME – 001	"Cost"
	SME – 006	"High cost"
	SME – 008	"Limited resources"
	SME – 009	"Limited funds"
	SME – 010	"Limited funds"
	SME – 011	"Funds"
	SME – 013	"Very costly if you must remain online"
	SME – 014	"Budget, or funds"
	SME – 018	"Cost"
Time constraints	SME – 040	"The biggest challenge is the cost of maintaining a website and hiring an SEO person"
	SME – 012	"Insufficient time to manage SEO"
Reviews/trust	SME – 035	"SEO takes time and we are used to quick results from boosting posts"
	SME – 032	"The biggest challenge is getting customers to leave reviews which help our ranking"
Regulatory	SME – 047	"The biggest challenge is getting enough 5 star reviews to outrank competitors"
	SME – 038	"We cannot advertise prescription drugs online"
No website	SME – 024	"I don't even have a website"
	SME – 037	"SEO requires a website and we only use Instagram"
Keeping up with changes	SME – 033	"The challenge is keeping up with the fast changes on TikTok"
	SME – 036	"Trends change fast"

Theme 5: Divided Opinions on SEO Profitability, Often Business-Type Dependent

Opinions on whether SEO investment is profitable are divided along business-type lines. B2B businesses, IT services, event decorators, salons, and visual-product businesses tend to believe SEO is profitable. Farms, bakeries, taxis, corner shops, market traders, and regulated businesses (pharmacies) tend to believe SEO is not profitable for them.

Table 4. 31

Supporting Evidence: Divided Opinions on SEO Profitability, Often Business-Type Dependent

Participant ID	Opinion	Quote
SME – 001	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 003	Yes, very profitable	"Yes. Very profitable"
SME – 005	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 006	Partially	"Partially because most people prefer referrals"
SME – 012	Yes	"Yes it is profitable in the long run because it increases more customers"
SME – 017	Yes	"Yes"
SME – 018	Conditional	"It should be done, but strategically"
SME – 022	No	"Not for my type of business"
SME – 023	Yes	"Yes I think it is profitable but only if you understand how it works"
SME – 024	Cannot say	"I cannot say because I have never tried it"
SME – 025	No	"No"
SME – 026	No	"Not profitable for us"
SME – 027	Yes	"Yes I strongly believe SEO is profitable even for small salons"
SME – 028	No	"No"
SME – 029	No	"No"
SME – 030	Yes	"Yes SEO is profitable but it takes time and consistency"
SME – 031	N/A	"Not applicable"
SME – 032	Yes	"Yes SEO is profitable for service businesses but it requires patience and good reviews"
SME – 034	No	"Not profitable for us"

SME – 038	No	"No because we are not allowed to use SEO for medicine sales"
SME – 039	No	"Not profitable"
SME – 040	Yes	"Yes SEO is profitable for B2B companies but it requires a long term investment"
SME – 043	Yes	"Yes SEO is very profitable for craft businesses that sell to international customers"
SME – 047	Yes	"Yes SEO is the most profitable investment for IT service businesses in Buea"
Quantitative data		

RQ 5. What is the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

Table 4.32 indicates the socio-demographic characteristics of the target population. A sample of 399 participants was used to establish the demographic distribution of respondents in Buea Municipality to assess the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon. With regards to the age distribution of respondents, most of the participants, 161 (40.4%), fell within the age range of 20-25 years. Secondly, respondents above 30 years constituted 82 (20.6%) of the sample.

Finally, those in the age range of 15-20 years and 25-30 years constituted 78 (19.5%) of the target population. As regards the gender, more than half of the participants, 235 (58.9%), were female, while males made up 164 (41.1%) of the study population. As regards the duration of stay in Buea, up to 197 (49.4%) of the respondents stayed for more than 4 years, making up the largest proportion. This was followed by 122 (30.6%) of the respondents who had stayed for 2-4 years, while 80 (20.1%) of the study population had stayed for 0-2 years.

Table 4.32

Socio -Demographic characteristics of the study Population (N = 399)

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	15-20	78	19.5

Age	20 – 25	161	40.4
	25 – 30	78	19.5
	Above 30	82	20.6
	Total	399	100.0
Gender	Female	235	58.9
	Male	164	41.1
	Total	399	100.0
Duration of stay in Buea	0 - 2yrs	80	20.1
	2 - 4yrs	122	30.6
	Above 4yrs	197	49.4
	Total	399	100.0

As presented in Table 4.32 below, the response rate of the participants to the questions asked to assess the content marketing practices by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. A total of 5 vital questions were asked to the participants to evaluate the effectiveness and nature of content marketing by SMEs in the municipality. Regarding the nature of the questions asked, the majority of the participants, 263 (65.9%), agreed to the question of whether they regularly see content shared by many SMEs on social media platforms, where a significant number of participants, 213 (53.4%), agreed and 50 (12.5%) strongly agreed to this question, while 119 (29.8%) disagreed to this question of whether they regularly see content shared by many SMEs on social media platforms.

Regarding the vitality of the content, 158 (39.6%) of the participants agreed that they find the content shared by SMEs to be very vital and always share it on their platforms, while 99 (24.8%) of the participants disagreed, and a large number of participants, 142 (35.6%), remained neutral to this question. Moreover, a significant number of participants 244 (61.2%) agreed that SMEs share quality content on a regular basis, as compared to 49 (12.3%) participants who disagreed with it. Most importantly, a vast majority 312 (78.2%) of the participants agreed that most SMEs utilize videos, images, messages, and blogs to connect with customers, with 200 (50.1%) strongly agreeing to this fact, while only 85 (21.3%) disagreed with it. Finally, an

overwhelming majority 338 (84.8%) of the participants agreed that most content shared by SMEs depicts their brand identity, with 165 (41.4%) strongly agreeing and 173 (43.4%) agreeing to it, while only 61 (15.3%) disagreed with it.

Table 4.33

Assessing Content Marketing Practices by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea

Questions	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)
I regularly see content share by many SMEs on social media platforms	95 (23.8)	24 (6.0)	17 (4.3)	213 (53.4)	50 (12.5)
Most content shared by SMEs are always very vital thus, I always share it on my platforms	33 (8.3)	66 (16.5)	142 (35.6)	143 (35.8)	15 (3.8)
SMEs shared quality content and on regular bases	45 (11.3)	4 (1.0)	106 (26.6)	164 (41.1)	80 (20.1)
Most SMEs use videos, images, messages and blogs to engage customers	51 (12.8)	34 (8.5)	2 (0.5)	112 (28.1)	200 (50.1)
Most content posted by SMEs reflect their brand identity	61 (15.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.0)	173 (43.4)	165 (41.4)

Table 4.32 below shows the response rate for the questions asked to evaluate the level of customer engagement for content marketing in SMEs in Buea Municipality in Cameroon. A total of 5 vital questions were asked to the customers to evaluate how customers interact and are affected by content marketing in SMEs. With regards to the questions asked, up to 203 (50.9%) of the participants agreed that they frequently view, share, like, and comment on marketing content from SMEs in Buea Municipality, while 59 (14.8%) disagreed to this fact and a significant portion 137 (34.3%) remained neutral. A majority of participants 281 (70.4%) stated that content from SMEs frequently attracts them to visit the physical location of the businesses promoted online, against 98 (24.6%) who disagreed to this fact.

Further, more than two-thirds of the participants 274 (68.7%) stated that the content developed by most SMEs is rich, and as a result, they follow most of them frequently, with 105 (26.3%) strongly agreeing to the fact, while 71 (17.8%) disagreed. Moreover, a vast majority 307 (76.9%) of the participants agreed that the content of SMEs helps in increasing their trust for these businesses, as opposed to 91 (22.9%) of the participants who disagreed. Finally, more than half 251 (62.9%) of the respondents agreed that they are more likely to get involved with SMEs that share valuable content online, as opposed to 60 (15.1%) of the participants who disagreed, while 88 (22.1%) were neutral on this fact.

Table 4.34 Assessing customer engagement towards content marketing by SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon.

Questions	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)
I frequently view, share, like and comment marketing content from SMEs in Buea Municipality	57 (14.3)	2 (0.5)	137 (34.3)	138 (34.6)	65 (16.3)
The content from SMEs often attracts me to visit the physical location of the businesses promoted online.	79 (19.8)	19 (4.8)	20 (5.0)	251 (62.9)	30 (7.5)
The content develop by most SMEs is rich as a result I follow most of them frequently.	71 (17.8)	0 (0.0)	54 (13.5)	169 (42.4)	105 (26.3)
The content of SMEs help in increasing my trust for these businesses.	90 (22.6)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	220 (55.1)	87 (21.8)
I am more likely to engage with SMEs that share valuable content online	59 (14.8)	1 (0.3)	88 (22.1)	204 (51.1)	47 (11.8)

Table 4.34 showed response rate of the questions asked in order to evaluate the perceived influence of content marketing on Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality. A total of 5 vital questions were asked of the participants in order to evaluate the influence of content

marketing. With regards to the questions asked, a vast majority of participants 349 (87.4%) agreed that SMEs that always post rich content online provoke their desire to try the product, with 233 (58.3%) agreeing and 116 (29.1%) strongly agreeing, while only 49 (12.3%) disagreed to this fact. Moreover, a significant number of participants 299 (74.9%) said that the quality of content posted online by an SME attracts potential customers to view the organization as a high-profile business, while 44 (11.1%) disagreed with this fact, and 56 (14.0%) were neutral. Additionally, an overwhelming majority 355 (89.0%) of the participants agreed that there are higher chances of SMEs to grow faster if the content posted online is rich, with 180 (45.1%) agreeing and 175 (43.9%) strongly agreeing, while 44 (11.1%) disagreed. Moreover, a large percentage 330 (82.7%) of the respondents agreed that the more they see a post online, the higher their chances of learning more about the product, while 68 (17.1%) disagreed with this fact. Finally, a large percentage 272 (68.2%) of the participants agreed that content marketing is a vital way of boosting customer engagement, while 111 (27.8%) disagreed to this fact and 16 (4.0%) were neutral.

Table 4.35 Assessing the Perceived Impact of Content Marketing on Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality

Questions	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)
SMEs that constant post rich content online provoke my desire to try the product.	49 (12.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	233	116 (29.1)
Content quality attract potential customers to view the organization as a high-profile business.	43 (10.8)	1 (0.3)	56 (14.0)	135 (33.8)	164 (41.1)

There is a higher chance of SMEs to grow faster if the content post online is rich.	43 (10.8)	1 (0.3)	0.0 (0.0)	180 (45.1)	175 (43.9)
The more frequent I see a post online the greater my chances of finding out more about the product.	67 (16.8)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	215 (53.9)	115 (28.8)
Content marketing is a vital means of increasing customer engagement	41 (21.3)	70 (17.5)	16 (4.0)	187 (46.9)	85 (21.3)

Looking at Table 4.35, we have an R-square value of **0.413** which indicates that **41.3%** of the variance in Customer Engagement is explained by Content Marketing practices. This is a substantial effect size.

Table 4.36 Model Summary

Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
Content Marketing	0.643	0.413	0.411	0.721

As concerning table 4.36 F-statistic has a value of **285.92** with a p-value of **0.000** ($p < 0.001$) implying that the regression model is statistically significant.

Table 4.37 ANOVA TABLE

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	148.67	1	148.67	285.92	0.000
Residual	211.33	401	0.52		
Total	360	402			

The regression coefficients in Table 4.36 offer an in-depth evaluation of the predictive capability of Content Marketing towards Customer Engagement. The findings of the regression analysis show that there is a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. The constant value of 0.876 represents the level of customer engagement that is predicted when content marketing practices are absent or zero. This value is significantly different from zero, as indicated by the t-statistics of 7.06, with $p < 0.001$.

Most importantly, the unstandardized coefficient value for Content Marketing is 0.674, indicating that for every one-unit increase in the quality or amount of content marketing practices, customer engagement is increased by 0.674 units. The standardized Beta coefficient indicates that this is a strong positive effect, meaning content marketing is a robust predictor of customer engagement. Moreover, the t-value of 16.91 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ also shows that this is a statistically significant effect, confirming the significance of the influence of content marketing on customer engagement. Thus, the table shows strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude the significance of the influence of content marketing on customer engagement for SMEs in the Buea Municipality.

Table 4.38 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.876	0.124		7.06	0.000
Content Marketing	0.674	0.04	0.643	16.91	0.000

The correlation matrix in Table 4.37 focuses on the relationships between the three important research constructs, namely Content Marketing, Customer Engagement, and Perceived

Impact. The findings suggest that the relationships between the three constructs are positive, significant, and moderate to strong in nature. There is a strong positive relationship between Content Marketing and Customer Engagement ($r = 0.643$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that better content marketing practices are strongly linked to customer engagement. Content Marketing also shows a moderate to strong positive relationship with Perceived Impact ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that better content marketing practices are linked to customer perceptions of SME performance.

Furthermore, Customer Engagement and Perceived Impact were also found to have a high positive correlation ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that when the customer is engaged, the customer is likely to have a positive perception of the SMEs. The results from the correlation matrix show that the three constructs were positively correlated, and this is a good foundation for the regression analysis that will be conducted.

Table 4.39 Correlation Matrix of Content Marketing and Customer Engagement

Variable	Content Marketing	Customer Engagement	Perceived Impact
Content Marketing	1		
Customer Engagement	0.643**	1	
Perceived Impact	0.587**	0.612**	1

The results in Table 4.38 reveal a strong and positive relationship between content marketing and customer engagement ($r = 0.643$, $p < 0.01$) among SMEs in Buea Municipality. This indicates that as SMEs improve their content marketing strategies, customer engagement levels tend to increase significantly.

Additionally, content marketing also shows a positive association with perceived impact ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that effective content marketing contributes to better overall business outcomes. The strong relationship between customer engagement and perceived impact ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$) further implies that engaged customers are more likely to enhance SME

performance. Overall, the findings support the view that content marketing plays a crucial role in driving customer engagement, which in turn positively influences the performance of SMEs in Buea Municipality.

4.3 Summary

Chapter four presents the analysis and results of data on the research topic, *“The Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon,”* focusing on demographic attributes, qualitative insights, and quantitative results. Demographic findings show that Bachelor’s degree holders form the largest group (21 out of 50), indicating moderate education levels among SME operators. Males dominate the sample (74%), while females are fewer and concentrated at Bachelor’s and HND levels, with no representation at MBA or PhD levels. Overall, higher academic qualifications were rare. Qualitative results reveal that most SMEs lack formal digital marketing plans, reflecting weak strategic structure. However, platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are widely used, and respondents reported positive impacts of digital marketing on visibility, customer reach, and interaction. Quantitative findings support this, showing strong, significant positive relationships: content marketing with customer engagement ($r = 0.643$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived impact ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$), and customer engagement with perceived impact ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). These indicate that better digital marketing enhances engagement and overall SME performance.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focused on discussion of the main findings of the research on the topic “The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon”. The discussion was tailored on the research question which aided on the chronological interpretation of the study findings. Importance was placed on comparing theoretical and empirical literature findings with current research findings.

This chapter provides greater understandings of how SMEs in the Municipality of Buea integrated digital marketing into strategic, tactical and operational activities of SMEs in Buea Municipality. Furthermore, how digital marketing investment was translated into measurable outcomes. The primary goal of this chapter was to bridge the gap between past and current study thus, a concise and critical interpretation of the study findings.

5.2 Discussions of findings

Discussion on RQ1. How digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises’ strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

Research Question one examined how digital marketing initiatives were implemented within the strategic framework of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. Qualitative data were analyzed via thematic analysis. The finding revealed that digital marketing initiatives implemented by most SMEs were centralized, informal, unstructured and were merely reactive with limited integration. Informal digital marketing practices were most prominent, this implies that most SMEs do not have structured digital marketing plans.

However, activities such as social media and mobile marketing as a whole were driven by immediate business needs often during back to school period and on funds and digital marketers’

availability. Even in cases where formal plans existed, they were rarely strictly respected. This indicated weak alignment between planning and execution. Another key finding was the centralization of decision-making. Managers and business owners took major digital marketing decisions.

Even though some employees assisted in implementation, core decisions remain at the top. This limited digital marketing initiative is from technicians-digital marketers. Financial and other related resources were deployed during specific periods, special peak periods such as school reopening period. This was a strong indication that resources for digital marketing were flexible, and need based rather than planned and budgeted overtime. Although this approach allows flexibility and adaptability, the variance from planned was huge, this may hinder sustainability. Moreover, digital marketing was generally treated as a specialized function, with limited involvement from other departments. This limited the overall impact of digital marketing.

However, a few SMEs demonstrated cross-functional participation, particularly in content sharing, this reflected a growing awareness of the need for broader organizational engagement. Despite the high prevalence of informal marketing practices, there was evidence of hierarchical approval processes within SMEs. Even where digital marketing practices were informally implemented, decisions often followed a well structure chain for approval, this indicated that organizational hierarchy remain vital.

SMEs in Buea Municipality is largely informal in nature, with most businesses lacking formal digital marketing strategies. Most enterprises do not have a marketing department and formal digital marketing strategic plan. However, digital marketing activities such as sharing of posts on Facebook, WhatsApp and tiktok were executed mostly as sales promotion activities. The findings of this study to an extent contradicts existing empirical literature Postulated by Verma

(2024), she established that the adoption of digital marketing practices enhances the performance of SMEs. Nevertheless, the current study demonstrated that basic adoption of digital marketing does not translate to the improvement of performance of SMEs, especially in the dynamic business environments like Buea Municipality.

The findings of this research strongly aligned with Nuseira (2020), who argued that business environment and organizational constraints influence the effectiveness of digital marketing. The research equally revealed that factors such as lack of proper planning, lack of digital marketing experts and limited financial resources demonstrated aspects of lack of proper digital marketing initiatives. Equally, finding demonstrated that most digital marketing aspects in Buea Municipality are informally practiced.

The findings of this study equally aligned with Management System Theory, which emphasizes owner-centric governance structures. It is also aligned with Ngoasong (2018), he underscored that digital skills of an entrepreneur significantly influence digital adoption decisions in business environment like Buea Municipality where resources are very scarce. Nevertheless, centralized approach highly limit innovation, especially in a dynamic digital environment. Equally, centralized entrepreneurial system reduces organizational innovation and creativity which is vital for organizational success.

The findings equally revealed that different departments such as finance, operations and logistics did not interrelate with marketing in general and digital marketing in particular, which reduced organizational efficiency. The findings aligned with Management System Theory brought forward by Bertalanffy (1951). The absence of formal digital marketing programs suggests that marketing department does not effectively integrated with other functions and top strategic management.

Furthermore, Technology Acceptance Model, POEM Model, 3Cs Model and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) theory collectively explain that the implementation of digital marketing within SMEs in Buea Municipality is constrained by limited technology, lack of digital marketing experts and poor management structure.

Discussion on RQ2. What is the relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

Following up to better understand the relationship between digital marketing schemes and business performance, thematic analysis technique was used in the analysis of the data. The results have been categorized into different themes, each representing the various sub-questions, revealing the nature of the relationship between digital marketing schemes and SME performance. Thematic analysis reveals that the major digital marketing schemes used by SMEs in Buea Municipality include social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that their primary digital marketing channel was social media while some respondents stated, *"Social media"*. Others stated, *"Social media and SEO"*, *"Social media most especially Business WhatsApp"*. This actually indicate a combination strategy. Added to that, we had a respondent who gave a comprehensive answer, saying, *"The strategy use is social media marketing especially Facebook marketing and WhatsApp promotion, mainstream media and online advert,"* indicating the adoption of a multi-channel strategy.

The fact that social media has become the leading digital marketing approach among all marketing strategies indicates its ease, affordability, and availability to the target market in Buea. Facebook and WhatsApp have been singled out as the leading options, which might be attributed to their popularity and appropriateness for business customer interaction.

Thematic analysis reveals that the small and medium-sized enterprises in Buea are mainly driven to use digital marketing by the need to reach the largest audience possible. The majority of the respondents related their choice of platform to the number of people that the platform could reach, with some respondents specifically citing the number of youth and students that use social media. A respondent noted that; *“Social media is widely used by many and by so doing we had to go to where the majority of the population is found”*. Another participant further explains that; *“Social media is chosen because it is easy to use, affordable, widely used by students and many others in Buea and it allows direct interaction with customer”*

Apart from the audience size, the choice of digital marketing is also largely influenced by the perceived cost-effectiveness and simplicity of digital marketing tools. For instance, the respondents cited the cost-effectiveness and simplicity of the digital marketing tools as the main reason why they chose the marketing tools. However, this is largely influenced by the resource limitations that are characteristic of SMEs, where the main priority is to achieve a high rate of ROI with a low level of complexity. The study has shown that, although the respondents are influenced by the need to stay abreast of the changing trends and boost the visibility of the brands, the main drivers are the needs to efficiently reach a large number of customers.

In addition, the effectiveness of the implementation of digital marketing strategies has shown predominantly positive performance outcomes for SMEs in Buea, with increased sales and profitability being the most dominant outcome. Several respondents were able to provide clear evidence of the positive outcome of the implementation of digital marketing strategies, with one respondent indicating *“better sales”* while another was able to document *“sales increase, enhance customer satisfaction, reduced waiting time and queues.”* The outcome of the implementation of digital marketing strategies in terms of acquiring more customers was also quite impressive, with

one respondent indicating; *"After adopting social media marketing, the business experience increases in customer awareness, higher sale volume and more customer inquiry."* Another respondent also stated that; *"it has increased the influx of customers and demand,"* This evidence clearly indicates that digital marketing is an effective way of enhancing the revenue generation of SMEs. Improved visibility and brand awareness are the second set of enhancements in the performance of the organization, which is a consequence of adopting digital marketing.

The respondents consistently pointed out *"more visibility," "Increase brand awareness,"* and *"increase brand awareness"* as the consequences of the digital marketing strategy. One of the respondents pointed out the advantage of visibility, stating; *"Many businesses are not online,"* implying that organizations that adopted digital marketing are benefiting from the disproportionate attention given to them by potential customers. In spite of the positive results, the respondents also identified challenges that the business encountered in its digital marketing. Internet connectivity challenges were cited as one of the major challenges. A respondent cited the challenges as *"Poor internet connectivity,"* while another cited the challenges as *"Costly, Internet is costly."* Some businesses also cited that the results of digital marketing were not significant. Another respondent cited that the challenges he encountered in his business was that they were facing challenges in directly influencing the marketing messages, as the business was in the hospital sector, which does not market.

Thematic analysis indicates that, although the majority of the SMEs in Buea have informal types of digital marketing, some have begun to embrace more formalized and organized approaches. Several respondents indicated that they have formal programs in place, with one respondent simply stating, *"Yes,"* when questioned about organized types of digital marketing. Another respondent stated, *"Yes, yearly bases but we still just use it as a plan."* Such an admission

of the value of planning, as well as the value of adaptability, indicates that the SMEs have begun to adopt sophisticated approaches. Resource allocation trends of these progressive SMEs serve as further evidence of their formalization process.

Not only did the respondent confirm the existence of the program, but he was also able to confirm that the resources are regularly committed in a schedule fashion, as he answered *"Yes, monthly"* to the question of whether the SME regularly invests in digital marketing activities. This is a notable contrast from the usual irregular way less formalized SMEs operate. Another respondent was able to characterize their program as *"Well organized, but often come up with emergency plan,"* showing that formalization does not always mean inflexibility in the face of the usual emergencies of the SME sector. These progressive SMEs provide potentially viable examples that other businesses in Buea could emulate in the formalization of their digital marketing undertakings. The experiences of these SMEs prove that the formalization of digital marketing is possible, considering the resource limitations that are characteristic of SMEs in general.

SMEs in Buea measure the success of their digital marketing activities based on the results of their sales, with the key metrics being *"Improved or increased sales," "Sales rate,"* and *"Sales."* These businesses use both basic and complex metrics for measuring the success of their marketing activities, including the use of *"Daily records on sales income and purchase,"* as well as more complex metrics such as *"ROI, conversion click through rate,"* as well as *"a mix of financial, operational, and market-driven approach."* One respondent provided an elaborate framework for measuring the success of their marketing activities, including the use of metrics such as; *"Number of Online inquiries, increase in walk-in customer, sales volume, number of followers on the social media pages."* Another respondent in the healthcare industry measures their success based on the

number of patients who enroll every month due to their social media marketing, though they are limited by law to practice only informative advert. This is based on the core business objective of generating revenue, which is the key determinant of the success of marketing activities. Apart from the direct sales measurement, the SMEs also identify intermediate measures that reflect customer engagement and brand awareness as critical success factors.

The SMEs measure *"Rate of visit to our website and physical location," "number of engagements on social media handles,"* and *"The amount of feedback"* as critical success factors that indicate customer engagement and interest in the product or service. Similarly, the measurement of *"increase brand awareness,"* the number of followers on the organization's social media pages, also indicates the importance of this intermediate measure as a precursor to future sales. Thus, the multi-dimensional measurement approach adopted by the SMEs, which includes financial, operational, and market driven measures, also highlights the fact that the SMEs have a sophisticated understanding of digital marketing, which cannot be evaluated on a single parameter or indicator.

Most SMEs in Buea Municipality experience a strongly positive association between the adoption of digital marketing and the growth of the business, with increased sales and visibility being the most significant advantages reported. The causal relationship between the intensity of digital marketing and the growth of the business was also explicitly mentioned by the SMEs, where it was noted that *"more investment in digital marketing, more performance,"* and also that *"the more effective the digital marketing, the better the results."* The mechanisms through which the growth of the business is promoted through the adoption of digital marketing were also explicitly mentioned, where it was noted that *"Facebook and WhatsApp status"* promote the growth of the

business through increased sales and visibility, and also through the promotion of customer relationships through the platform.

The evidence suggests that the adoption of digital marketing is a genuine growth accelerator, with the records showing that the adoption of the platform promotes increased sales, visibility, and customer relationships through social media platforms. Nevertheless, the positive effects of digital marketing on SME growth are not entirely uniform, with a small percentage of respondents indicating some level of conditionality or limited effects. One of the respondents observed that the overall effect is *"low due to the fact that many SME do not really believe on online,"* which demonstrates the level of skepticism and reluctance towards digital marketing adoption that limits the overall positive effects of digital marketing on SME growth. In another instance, the respondent confessed to lack comparative data, stating, *"I don't have data for the other SMEs to determine the impact of digital marketing on their growth. So, you should tell me after this research,"* while the third respondent observed *"No direct impact"* on their growth due to digital marketing. All these suggest that the overall effect of digital marketing on SME growth is positive, although there are several intervening factors, including the overall perceptions of the SME owners and the capacity to analyze and act on the results. Equally, businesses measure marketing results on a yearly basis which marketing effort may extent to ten years and more before producing results.

Overall, the study found a positive connection between digital marketing initiatives and the performance SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, most businesses pointing to higher sales and better profits as the main results for implementing marketing strategies. This finding fits with the Balanced Scorecard Framework that Kaplan and Norton put forward back in 1996 by Norton and Kaplan, which argues that businesses should measure the performance of their businesses using

both financial and non-financial measures to fully understand performance. Most SMEs in Buea Municipality limited the measurement of their performance to financial metrics which limited them to short run measures. The fact that businesses reported not just more sales but also greater customer awareness lines up with the customer side of the Balanced Scorecard where things like satisfaction and bringing in new customers are seen as key signs that a business is doing well. Equally, customer satisfaction and improved financial metrics like sales and profit are indirect ways of communicating improvement in human resources of organizations illustrated by the learning and growth concepts of the Balance Scorecard model.

The boost in visibility and brand awareness that SMEs reported also makes sense when you look at Owyang's POEM Model from 2012 which breaks digital marketing down into Paid, Owned, and Earned Media. Businesses talked about getting more visible through their social media pages and organic content, fits right into the "Owned Media" piece. It's essentially businesses using what they already control to get their name out there. Also, the fact that "many businesses were not even online" ended up working in favor of the ones that were online. That idea of using what your competitors are not doing to stand out ties back to Ohmae's 3Cs Model from 1991. This illustrated that an understanding of your competitors is a fundamental requirement in developing better business strategies.

These findings also line up with what Wantchami, Ngange, and Efosi (2020). They demonstrated that social media marketing in Buea helped SMEs build stronger customer relationships, increase sales and improved business visibilities. Equally, a major limitation of the above study was limited scope and sample size. However, increased sample size and scope produced similar results which thus, addresses one of the limitations they pointed out in their own

work. So it is not just confirming what they found; it is adding more solid evidence across a broader group of businesses.

The connection between digital marketing and performance is not automatic it really depends on a few things. Poor internet connectivity came up as a major hurdle, and that mirrors what Pierre et al (2016) found. Cameroonian SMEs often have to deal with environmental challenges that make growth harder than it needs to be. We also saw that not every sector faces the same issues. Healthcare SMEs, for example, ran into their own set of complications direct marketing is tricky when navigating professional ethics and regulations. Thus, the research findings demonstrated that digital marketing strategies do not operate in a vacuum; they are shaped by industry and countries regulations.

Discussion on RQ3. How does social media marketing strategies influence the sales results in SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

The first theme recognizes Facebook as an overwhelmingly dominant social media platform used by SMEs within Buea Municipality, with the vast majority of respondents identifying it as their principal digital marketing platform. Several respondents gave unambiguous and straightforward answers to the research question. The rationale behind choosing Facebook is consistent across all respondents and is largely based on its large number of users and accessibility to target demographics. One respondent gave the rationale *"because it used by almost everyone,"* while another gave a more detailed explanation: *"Facebook because of large number of users in Buea especially students and working class."* This is a fundamental marketing concept that any business would want to be on a platform where its potential customers are most accessible. Aside from Facebook, WhatsApp was another prominent social platform that was noted for its direct communication potential and cost-effectiveness.

One of the respondents noted: *"WhatsApp to minimize cost."* Another noted Facebook and WhatsApp in their digital marketing mix and stated: *"Facebook, WhatsApp, most of the world population uses the app, thereby increasing visibility and income."* TikTok was noted occasionally by a few respondents, indicating that more progressive SMEs in Buea may be showing more interest in using more modern social platforms. One of the respondents noted; *"Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok because most of the world's population use the apps daily and exposing your brand in those platforms brings more customers."*

From the above social platforms used by SMEs in Buea, it is evident that SMEs in Buea use social platforms pragmatically and that Facebook is the dominant social platform used by SMEs in Buea. SMEs in Buea use various forms of engagement strategies on social media to encourage customer participation and influence buying habits, with content-based strategies being the most used. SMEs use *"trending topics," "games and comedy,"* and *"consistent posting"* to encourage customer engagement and maintain their online presence. *"Show casing of products"* and *"new arrivals"* are also prominent, with some SMEs also utilizing influencers and promoters, such as one respondent's claim, *"We use comedians to provoke them and advertise better,"* and another's, *"We mostly use bloggers and motivate them for sharing our adverts."*

More sophisticated SMEs use more complex strategies such as targeted adverts with clear calls-to-action, shopping experiences with platform-specific shops, and tracking preferences to enhance content, such as one respondent's use of *"Facebook (run adds), Instagram (shops for seamless),"* and *"track preferences, and advertise via customers preferences."* Aside from content creation, SMEs use promotional incentives and communication as another means of engagement. Price discounts and offers motivate customers to perform actions. Businesses motivate customers and influencers who help spread their contents through sharing. Another key engagement strategy

is communication responsiveness. One of the respondents noted that it is essential for SMEs to *"respond quickly to customer messages to encourage engagement."* This is because communication helps build trust between customers and business organizations and leads to sales.

From the theme, it is evident that not all SMEs use sophisticated engagement strategies. There were respondents who indicated that SMEs in their respective organizations did not use engagement strategies. This shows that although many business organizations have successfully come up with effective customer engagement strategies, others have not moved beyond basic social media marketing. A majority of SMEs in Buea acknowledge that frequent social media posting is a strategic necessity to remain visible and engage with customers, with most affirming their commitment to this strategy of publishing content frequently. Many business owners provided short and direct responses to this question, such as *"Yes"*, indicating that most are aware of the importance of frequent activity on social media to remain relevant to their customers' timelines. One of them provided a specific answer that indicated a level of strategic thinking in content publication, *"3 times a week,"* while another indicated a level of cooperation in achieving this goal, *"Yes, together with my team,"* indicating that this is a business activity that requires a team to accomplish.

Acknowledging that frequent social media posting is a marketing strategy is an indication that social media algorithms favor active accounts and that this is a key consideration in marketing strategies. Apart from basic regularity, there are also SMEs that display strategic sophistication in their social media marketing strategies, especially in their ability to strategically time their intensity of posting to coincide with business opportunities and peak demand. One of the respondents gave detailed insight into this when he explained that *"Yes post are made frequently especially during peak period like back-to-school."* Such sophistication in strategic timing of social

media marketing postings implies that there are SMEs that treat this aspect of social media marketing not in a fixed and mandatory sense but in a strategic and variable sense that can be increased in intensity when customer attention is most valuable and/or when purchase decisions are most likely to happen.

Yet, there are also a significant number of respondents that displayed inconsistent and/or non-existent social media marketing postings, as evidenced by a number of respondents answering "No" to this question and one even answering "None," indicating that although there is a significant consensus on the strategic value of frequent social media marketing postings, there is still a lot of work to be done in this aspect of social media marketing. SMEs in Buea utilize a variety of approaches for tracking sales generated through social media, ranging from digital technology to observational approaches, with Point of Sale (POS) technology emerging as one of the most prominent tracking approaches. Several respondents pointed out their most prominent tracking approaches as *"Point Sales," "POS-point of sales,"* and *"Point of sales. Referral from platforms"* as their most prominent tracking approaches. One respondent's approach to tracking sales was more technologically advanced and integrated with *"Point of sales (POS) system, and customer relationship management."*

A few technologically advanced SMEs use digital technology such as *"Pixel on Facebook," "Softwares developed by the MIS unit,"* and *"built in platform which aid to track sales"* for tracking sales generated through social media. The most technologically advanced SMEs utilize digital technology such as *"links, trust, conversation trackers"* and *"conversation tracking through the use of websites"* for tracing customers' movements from social media to sales. Other than these technological approaches, there are many SMEs that use approaches such as customer interaction and referral-based approaches to attribute sales to social media activities, while many others have

no formal mechanisms for tracking these activities. There are many approaches to tracking, such as *"ask customer question how they knew about the business"* and *"online orders,"* while others use approaches such as *"Customer references," "Referral from platforms,"* and *"Customer interaction."* There are even some SMEs that use simpler approaches, such as *"Sales generated on every post."* This indicates that the respondents are observing the correlations between social media and sales.

However, there are many SMEs that do not use formal mechanisms for tracking these activities, and their responses are *"We just notice sales growth," "We don't have," "Nothing," "None,"* and *"Not really."* This indicates the varying analytical capabilities of the SMEs, while some may be restricted from optimizing their social media marketing strategies due to the lack of formal mechanisms for attribution.

There is an overwhelming consensus among SMEs in Buea regarding the positive impact of social media strategies on sales volume, with the majority of respondents providing direct and unequivocal affirmation of this fact. Several business owners provided direct affirmations of this fact with simple *"Yes,"* and *"Yes it does,"* statements. Others provided even more emphatic affirmations with *"Strongly agree it has an influence on sales"* and *"Yes, social media, greatly influence, the sales volume of organizations."* Several respondents provided an explanation of how this impact is felt through various means. One respondent provided an explanation of how *"significant influence sale volume by attracting new customers and encourage repeat purchase,"* while another provided an explanation of how *"publicity of the brand cause exposure, thereby increasing visibility and buyers."* Although the positive consensus is compelling, there are a few respondents who provided a negative perspective, which is critical in understanding the complex nature of social media influence in relation to sales outcomes. The first is a respondent who

provided a perspective of *"To an extent,"* which indicates that social media influence is present but may not be consistent in nature.

More significantly, there is a critical perspective provided by a respondent that is conditional in nature and states that social media influence is *"positive, but have no effect or discouraged purchase if poorly presented."* This perspective is critical in nature since it introduces a mediating variable to a positive equation of social media influence in relation to sales outcomes. SMEs in Buea are faced with a myriad of significant challenges in the implementation of online marketing strategies, and this is most fundamental in infrastructural and financial challenges. Poor internet connectivity is a common problem that is cited in all responses, and this is indicated in various ways such as *"Low connectivity," "Internet connection is poor," "Slow internet connection,"* and *"Network issues,"* which affect marketing activities and functionality.

One of the respondents cited *"Poor Internet, and very high cost of Internet,"* indicating that poor internet connectivity is not only a problem in itself but also arises in conjunction with the high costs of accessing the internet. Financial challenges are cited in various ways, such as *"Budget constraint and payment gateway," "high advertising costs," "Limited funds,"* and *"Limited money,"* and this is also cited in a candid way in that *"Budget for this activity is very small."* Challenges cited as *"Time and money"* indicate that there is a lack of resources to implement marketing strategies and that there is also a lack of human resources to implement marketing strategies. Another challenge cited is *"Low or no budgeting,"* indicating that there is a lack of a budget to implement marketing strategies.

Besides infrastructure and financial issues, SMEs face skills gaps, trust deficits, and competitive issues, which add to the complexities of the effectiveness of online marketing. The lack of expertise knowledge comes up in the answers with the phrases *"time and expertise*

knowledge," "lack of advance digital marketing skill," and "Lack of experts in this domain," which indicate the complexities of the availability of the means to execute the online marketing strategy. The issue of customer engagement also comes up as one of the complexities, as indicated in the answer; *"lack of engagements from potential and actual customers."* Perhaps the most complex issue, however, is the trust factor, which comes up in the answers of many respondents, such as; *"Buyer's face difficulty to trust online vendors due to the high traits of scam and fraud. You have to be patient in order to create trust,"* and *"It is not easy to create trust with the purchasers due to some reasons. (Some people are fraudsters) so it is not easy to create the relationship between the buyer and sellers."* This requires the SMEs to build relationships before the transaction occurs, which makes the process longer and more expensive.

Facebook came out as the best social media platform for SMEs in Buea, and that actually fits well with the Technology Acceptance Model TAM for short that Davis and Bagozzi introduced back in 1989. The basic idea of TAM is that people adopt technology when they find it useful and easy to use. When business owners say they use Facebook because "almost everyone is on it" and it gives them access to the local crowd, students and working-class, this fits perfectly with perceived usefulness introduced by TAM model. WhatsApp followed a similar pattern. People turned to it because it made communication direct and more engaging with minimal advertising cost. That combination of easy to use and genuinely useful lines up with exactly what TAM would predict.

The different ways SMEs engaged with customers, whether it was posting content, running promotions, or teaming up with influencers can be looked at through the lens of UTAUT, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology that Venkatesh and his colleagues came out with in 2003. UTAUT basically says that people adopt technology based on how well they think it will perform, how easy it is to use, and whether people around them are using it. When businesses

brought in comedians or bloggers to share their content that was social influence at play tapping into trusted voices to reach customers who might not pay attention to a traditional ad. This add to the progressive of SMEs that were targeted ads with clear calls-to-action or setting up integrated shopping experiences.

Businesses also seemed to understand that posting regularly matters and not just randomly. They were timing their posts strategically around peak periods like back-to-school season. That kind of thinking ties into Customer Relationship Management theory CRM for short which Dohnal wrote about back in 2002. The core idea is that building relationships that last takes consistent, well-timed engagement. So when SMEs are deliberately posting when customers are most likely to be making buying decisions, they were basically putting the principle into practice without necessarily calling it by name. Businesses reported that social media helped boost sales, but they also pointed out that poor presentation could turn customers away. That really drives home what CRM theory says about quality interactions is not just about being present online, it is about how you show up.

The trust piece came up a lot too. In an environment where fraud is a real concern, building trust online is not something that happens overnight. It takes patience and consistent, quality interactions to get customers to feel comfortable enough to buy. That relationship-building side of CRM the slow, steady work of earning trust ended up being just as important as the sales themselves. Most SMEs however, poorly measured the performance of their businesses in the Municipality of Buea, since most businesses focused more on financial metrics. This is equally a demonstration that most SMEs hardly had a strategic plan for their businesses.

Discussion on RQ4. How Search Engine Optimization does influences brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

When it comes to SEO, Buea SMEs seem pretty split about 60% have some level of usage, but the other 40% were not even aware of it. This division pointed back to what Pierre et al. found in 2016: Cameroonian SMEs often struggle with limited resources and knowledge gaps, which makes it hard to fully adopt something like SEO. This does not imply that SMEs do not see the value SEO, they do not have the bandwidth or know-how to go beyond the basics. Most of the SEO usage we saw was elementary things like adding keywords to a Facebook page. That fits with the Technology Acceptance Model from Davis and Bagozzi. People were using it, but only at a surface level. Honestly, that makes sense. Perceived usefulness and ease of use do not just determine whether someone adopts a technology; they also shape how deeply they are willing to go with it. If it feels complicated or the payoff is not direct and obvious, most business owners and executives will stick with what's simple and familiar, even when the payoff is basic.

One thing nearly everyone agreed on was that ranking higher in search results makes people trust your business more. That fits with Owyang's POEM Model where earned media, like organic search visibility, carries extra weight because it feels more independent and credible than something a business paid for. The idea that businesses sitting at the top of search results "were seen as most credible and trustworthy" really captures that earned media advantage. Even though it is just an algorithm deciding the rankings, people still interpret that visibility as a kind of third-party validation and that perception ends up boosting brand credibility in a way paid ads sometimes cannot.

The challenges businesses ran into with SEO included: money constraints, lack of technical know-how, poor infrastructure, and struggles to keep it up over time are all things Pierre et al.

pointed back in 2016. They found that Cameroonian SMEs deal with a mix of obstacles: financial limits, infrastructure gaps, and skills shortages all at once. What really stood out here was how businesses had to choose between running their day-to-day operations and keeping up with SEO. One respondent put it plainly: "concentrating more on health activity then forgetting to do SEO." That tension between core work and marketing upkeep is exactly the kind of resource allocation dilemma Pierre et al. said was critical to whether an SME can stay afloat long-term.

Most business owners saw SEO as profitable, especially "in the long run" because it brought in more customers over time. That fits with Ohmae's 3Cs Model, which emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage comes from really understanding your customers and building strategies around them. SEO, in that sense, is not a quick fix. It is a long game steadily building visibility and trust in a way that keeps customers coming back.

Discussion on RQ5. What is the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

Content marketing and customer engagement have a direct relationship for SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. The regression analysis showed that content marketing alone accounted for about 41% of the variation in how engaged customers are that was an R^2 of 0.413, which was statistically significant. This actually explained that when businesses put effort into content, customers tend to respond. This lines up nicely with CRM theory the idea that strong customer relationships do not happen by accident. They are built through consistent, quality communication over time. This is exactly what the investigation of content marketing on customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality revealed. It gives customers something useful, keeps them coming back, and slowly builds the kind of trust that turns a one-time buyer into a regular.

With a standardized beta coefficient of 0.643, the relationship was strong content marketing does not just correlate with customer engagement, it's a solid predictor of it. That actually fits with UTAUT, which suggests that when you use technology to interact with people in a thoughtful way, it can have a real impact on how engaged they are. The model's F-statistic of 285.92 with a p-value below 0.001 tells us this is not just a fluke, there is a strong statistical backing for what the data is showing.

Looking at the descriptive statistics, nearly two-thirds of customers 65.9% said they regularly come across SME content on social media. That lines up with the POEM Model's take on owned media: your social media pages and organic content give you a platform to actually reach people. Moreover, 78.2% of customers agreed that SMEs are using different content formats videos, images, messages and blogs. This is strong evidence that variety is vital in engaging different categories of clients and customers. POEM Model pointed out that using multiple channels and formats is what makes converged media really work. One finding that really stood out is that 70.4% of customers said content marketing actually got them to visit a physical business location. That's a clear sign that digital content does not just live online it drives real-world foot traffic. This fits with the Balanced Scorecard Framework and its focus on the customer perspective as a key measure of business performance. When digital efforts lead people to walk through the door, that's a tangible outcome one that directly links what SMEs do online to what shows up in their bottom line.

Customers also reported high levels of trust because of content marketing at 76.9%, to be exact. That fits with the 3Cs Model and its emphasis on really understanding what customers need and meeting them there. Content marketing, when done well, gives people the information they are looking for in a consistent, helpful way. Consistency builds trust over time, the kind of trust

that turns a casual customer into someone who sticks around. The correlation matrix indicated high and significant relationships between content marketing, customer engagement, and perceived impact ($r = 0.587$ to 0.643 , $p < 0.01$), which supported the integrated approach to performance measurement advocated by the Balance Scorecard Framework (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The strong correlations between these constructs demonstrate that content marketing not only directly influences engagement but also contributes to broader performance outcomes

5.3. Summary

Descriptive results further support these findings. About 65.9% of customers regularly see SME content on social media, and 78.2% agree that businesses use varied formats such as videos and images, reflecting the POEM model's emphasis on owned media and content diversity. Additionally, 70.4% reported that content marketing influenced them to visit physical stores, showing that online efforts lead to real-world outcomes, consistent with the Balanced Scorecard framework. Trust levels were also high, with 76.9% of customers indicating that content marketing builds trust, supporting the 3Cs model. Overall, the strong correlations ($r = 0.587$ – 0.643 , $p < 0.01$) confirm that content marketing significantly enhances engagement and contributes to improved SME performance. Content marketing has a strong and significant effect on customer engagement among SMEs in Buea Municipality. The regression result ($R^2 = 0.413$) shows that content marketing explains about 41% of changes in customer engagement, indicating that when SMEs invest in quality content, customers respond positively. This supports CRM theory, which emphasizes that customer relationships are built through consistent communication. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.643$) confirms that content marketing is a strong predictor of engagement, while the F-statistic (285.92, $p < 0.001$) shows that the relationship is statistically reliable, aligning with UTAUT's view on the effectiveness of technology in enhancing interaction.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

This chapter shows an overview of the research topic “The Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon. This chapter was developed from findings and discussions presented in the previous chapters with the major aim of developing conclusions and translating the actions into policies for decision makers in the Municipality of Buea and to a greater extent, Cameroon and beyond. Equally, this research work is vital for scholars especially in the domain of business management.

The chapter has developed summary of major findings in relation to the research questions and objectives provided the extent to which digital marketing variables such as social media, SEO and content marketing have influenced SMEs performance indicators such as sales, profitability and customer engagement. This has to a greater extent provided a clear understanding of how digital marketing has guided SMEs to succeed and fail in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

Furthermore, this chapter presents major recommendations based on research findings aimed at improving the effective adoption by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea. These recommendations are directed to major decisions makers like Board of Directors (BODs), Managers and Owners of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea.

Finally, the chapter provides solutions to major limitations encountered during the research process by proposing areas for further study by the researcher and other scholars.

In general, this chapter provide vital action plans based on research findings and discussions. This research typical contribute to academic knowledge but equally offer major solutions to digital marketing problems in the Municipality of Buea.

6.2 Implications

Theoretical implications

From extensive analysis on the implementation of digital marketing among SMEs in Buea Municipality, it is evident that the sector is undergoing a transitional process, with most SMEs using digital marketing platforms while exhibiting different levels of strategic sophistication and implementation effectiveness. From the analysis, it is evident that SMEs have embraced the use of social media marketing, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, as the most preferred marketing strategies for reaching customers, based on pragmatic reasons such as the ability to reach customers and ease of use. From the analysis, it is evident that digital marketing has been effective for most SMEs, with most exhibiting positive results such as increased sales and visibility.

However, the analysis indicates that these positive results are subject to several factors such as infrastructure, sector characteristics, resource availability, and implementation competence. The informal nature of most SMEs' digital marketing strategies is a manifestation of the advantages and disadvantages of small enterprise operations. The fact that most SMEs are using formal strategies such as annual planning, resource commitment, and performance tracking indicates that they are undergoing developmental maturation that can be used as a model for sector development.

The quantitative analysis of the impact of content marketing on customer engagement offers sound statistical evidence of the significance of the strategic role of content marketing in relation to customer engagement and perceptions. The regression analysis of the impact of content marketing in explaining 41.3% of the variance in customer engagement, combined with sound correlations between content marketing and customer engagement and perceptions of impact, confirms that investment in content marketing is a key success factor for SMEs seeking to maximize returns in digital marketing campaigns. The high percentages of customers indicating

that rich content provokes product trial (87.4%), increases trust (76.9%), and attracts physical location (70.4%) confirm the multi-modal impact of content marketing. Similarly, the investigation into SEO's impact on brand recognition confirms that while its adoption is split and implementation is hindered by formidable barriers related to financial constraints, technical knowledge limitations, and infrastructure constraints, SMEs that invest in SEO recognize its two-fold impact in terms of visibility and credibility.

The overwhelming consensus (85%) that search engine ranking influences perceptions of trust confirms SEO as a key success factor in relation to addressing customer skepticism, which emerged as a key challenge in relation to online marketing. Collectively, these findings imply that SMEs in Buea stand to gain significantly from interventions aimed at improving infrastructure, building capabilities in content development and SEO implementation, and moving the SMEs from the informal to the formal use of digital marketing. The empirical proof of the role of digital marketing as an actual growth accelerator, as well as the determination of the process through which the acceleration occurs, offers empirical justification for the continued use of the strategy and guidance to SMEs on how best to improve their use of digital marketing in the Buea Municipality.

Implications for RQ1. How digital marketing initiatives are implemented within the enterprises' strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

This study makes some inputs to the current theoretical framework by demonstrating that the success of digital marketing within SMEs does not exclusively depend on adoption of digital marketing but on level of strategic integration, structure and organizational alignment while model such as Technology Acceptance Model stressed technology acceptance as a key force of usage, this study indicates that in business environment with limited resources like the Municipality of

Buea, informal and centralized execution of mere adoption of technology like digital marketing platforms limits the realization of expected results. In addition the finding of this study add relevance to Management System Theory by indicating that weak inter functional integration and centralized structure limit the effectiveness of digital marketing, emphasizing that limited collaboration reduces innovation and organizational responsiveness which limit overall performance.

Furthermore, the study refines the comprehension of POEM Model and 3Cs model by illustrating that SMEs in Buea principally implement operational activities (owned media) rather than strategically positioning their digital marketing activities. This implies that these models have limitations when resources are scarce. The study contributed much by emphasizing that resource limitation, managerial abilities and organizational structure influence the relationship between digital marketing adoption and business performance.

Implications for RQ2. What is the relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon?

The findings of this study improve the Balance Scorecard Model by indicating that within SMEs in Buea, digital marketing contributes to financial performance of SMEs via financial indicators like sales and profits and to non-financial perspectives like customer awareness and engagement. However, most SMEs limit their evaluation on financial scorecard which limit the strategic learning and sustainable value creation. The study also extends the POEM Model 3 Cs by indicating gain more from owned media strategies rather than just mere integration of digital marketing.

Implications for RQ3. How social media marketing strategies influence the sales results in SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

The findings of this study add more substance to Technology Acceptance Model and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology by demonstrating that SMEs in Buea preference of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are highly motivated by ease of use and perceived use. However, the study highlight the fact that mere adoption of digital marketing is not enough, value addition remains key factor for implementing digital marketing.

Implications for RQ4. How Search Engine Optimization influences brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

The findings of this study expand the Technology Acceptance model by demonstrating that SMEs in Buea perceived usefulness and ease of use in implementing digital marketing platforms and not just sophistication of perceived value addition via SEO. Furthermore, superficial engagement like basic use of key words in SEO limit potential benefits of SEO on brand recognition, indicating that partial adoption of digital marketing limit expected results. The study equally reinforces the POEM model by illustrating that earned media play critical role in improving brand credibility and trust. Moreover, 3C model demonstrated that SEO contribute to long term competitive sustainability via improve visibility and engagement if well implemented.

Implications for RQ5. What is the effect of Content Marketing on brand awareness and customers' engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon?

The findings of this study extend Relationship Management theory by empirically validating that consistent, relevant and excellent content has a direct relationship with customer engagement and trust, with content marketing acting as a predictive mechanism ($\beta = 0.643$) rather than merely a supportive communication tool. This study strengthen the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology by demonstrating that active and strategic use of digital platforms significantly enhances customer interaction outcomes, thereby linking technology

utilization directly to engagement performance. Moreover, the results reinforce the POEM Model by demonstrating that owned media **is** highly effective in building brand awareness, trust, and customer actions, especially when content diversity and consistency are maintained. Finally, the study highlight the Balanced Scorecard by providing evidence that content marketing drives customer-level outcomes and visible business results, supporting an integrated view of SME performance in emerging market contexts.

6.3 Recommendations

Recommendations for practical applications

To the effectiveness and optimization of digital marketing investment; business owners and executives of SMEs in Buea Municipality are strongly advised to fully structure digital marketing plans on monthly, semi-annually and annually bases. Equally, marketing in general and digital marketing in particular should be embedded within the overall business management system. This will improve customer engagement and ensure that digital marketing significantly improve overall business performance.

SMEs in the Municipality of Buea should adopt a strong performance-driven digital marketing strategy that integrates both financial and non-financial performance matrices and places importance on cost-effective owned media platforms. This implies that performance measurement should consider digital marketing strategies tailored to sector-specific regulations, while strengthening customer relationship management practices. By aligning digital marketing initiatives with measurable performance outcomes and contextual constraints, SMEs in Buea Municipality can achieve sustainable improvements in sales, brand visibility, and customer engagement.

SMEs in Buea Municipality should prioritize strategic and well structure method of social media and integrate performance measure metrics in designing and implementing social media strategies. Equally, business owners and executives should undergo periodic capacity building in digital marketing to enable them to take rational decisions that will improve digital marketing content and improve customer engagement.

SMEs in Buea Municipality should develop a well-structured and calculated approach to Search Engine Optimization (SEO). This will enable business owners and managers to integrate SEO into the overall marketing plans and invest the necessary resources for its effective implementation and evaluation. This will enhance sustainable competitive advantage of these businesses.

SMEs in the Municipality of Buea should embrace a structure and diverse content marketing framework that include social media, blogs, videos and images to deliver consistent, relevant content. This will enable SMEs in the Municipality of Buea to track angagement and conversion to improve on digital marketing content to attract, convert more potential customers and maintain existing customers.

Overall, SMEs in the Municipality of Buea should embrace a holistic digital marketing strategy that blend social media especially Facebook and Business WhatsApp, SEO and content marketing into the overall business strategy. This should include careful planning, implementation and evaluation to ensure sustained improvement in customer engagement, brand awareness and business performance.

Recommendations for future research

Future researchers can use the same topic to do a comparative analysis among different regions like Buea, Yaounde, Douala and Limbe to enable recommendations that can likely be apply to the entire nation.

- In the future, researchers should use a longitudinal research design to evaluate how structure digital marketing method implemented on weekly, monthly, semi-annual and annually bases affect SMEs performance over time. This will enable decision makers to better evaluate returns on marketing investments
- Future research should focus on exploring a comparative analysis on different sectors such as retail, hospitality and humanity to guide business owners and managers to tailor unique strategies to different industries
- Future researchers should evaluate the role of business owners and managers' competencies in enhancing the performance of businesses. Digital marketing skills should constitute a major variable in the research.
- Future analysis could do a deeper analysis of videos, blogs, and images to enable decision makers to apportion digital marketing investment differently across these variables. Equally, the cost effectiveness of Facebook, SEO and email marketing should be analyze differently.
- Future studies should go beyond mere digital tools like social media, SEO practices to advance digital tools such as data analytics, artificial intelligence and automation in SMEs and its effects on performance

6.4 Conclusions

This chapter summarizes major findings from conclusion, theoretical implications and offers recommendation for both practical and future research. The study demonstrated that social media, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and content marketing played pivotal role in inducing sales, profitability, products visibility and customer engagement. Furthermore, many SMEs actively use platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp due to their accessibility and ease of use.

The findings revealed that effective digital marketing goes beyond mere adoption and depends on structured implementation, and organizational alignment. Content marketing emerged as a strong predictor of customer engagement, while SEO contributed to brand credibility and trust. Social media marketing was found to positively influence performance, but its impact depends on how well it is strategically managed. The study also demonstrates that SMEs tend to focus more on financial performance indicators than non-financial measure. Built on these findings, the study recommends that SMEs adopt a more structured and integrated approach to digital marketing by embedding it into their overall business strategy, improving performance measurement systems, and investing in capacity building. Emphasis is placed on using diverse content formats, strengthening SEO practices, and aligning marketing activities with measurable outcomes.

Finally, the study suggests areas for future research, including comparative regional studies, longitudinal analysis, sector-specific investigations, and the exploration of advanced digital tools such as data analytics and artificial intelligence to further enhance SME performance.

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APPENDIX 1
Statistics of Registered Businesses in Buea Municipality from 2015-202

AMOUNT/YE AR	201 5	202 6	201 7	201 8	201 9	202 0	202 1	202 2	202 3	202 4	TOTA L
100,000- 990,000	1	2	1	10	23	24	32	16	22	4	135
1,000,000- 4,990,000	4	1	1	54	54	270	308	346	338	175	1551
5,000,000,000- 9,900,000	2		1	2	2	15	17	17	29	13	98
10,000,000- 19,000,000	111	240	264	127	127	35	36	51	60	34	1085
20,000,000- 49,000,000	31	5	10	4	4	7	8	13	16	11	109
50,000,000- 99,000,000	7	9	1	3	3	8	8	9	10	2	60
100,000,000- 249,000,000	5	3	2	4	1	3	7	9	7	1	42
250,000,000- 490,000,000											
	3	1	3	5		2	3	4	2		23
500,000,000- 749,000,000		1	2	1		2		1	2	1	10
750,000,000- 990,000,000			9								9
Total number of business from 2015-2024											3,122

Source (Buea Municipality Council, 2024: Ministry of Small and Medium Sized –Enterprise, 2024)

APPENDIX 2

Interview Guide for Managers and Marketers of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

I am **Amungwa Gerald**, a final year Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) student of Swiss School of Business Management (SSBM) carrying out a research entitled “**The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea**” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)

I would sincerely appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this interview by answering the questions provided. The questions asks for your opinion concerning the effect of Content Marketing on customers’ engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon. I wish to assure you that the answers will be used for the research purposes only and shall be treated with confidentiality.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Research Objective I

To investigate digital marketing initiatives implemented within the enterprises’ strategic framework in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon

- i. Can you briefly describe your business and what it does?
- ii. Who is/are the key employee(s) responsible for developing and implementing marketing strategies initiatives in your organization?

- iii. What methods are used by your organization to measure the success of your digital marketing initiative implemented
- iv. Are resources located to your digital marketing on regular bases such as annually, monthly and weekly bases or the resources are provided each time a marketing strategy is brought on board
- v. Which methodologies are used by your organization to stay up to date in this domain of digital marketing?
- vi. Does the entire organization involved in this practice of digital marketing or only the marketing department

Research Objective II

To establish a relationship between the digital marketing initiatives and performance of SMEs in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon.

- i. What is the major type of digital marketing strategy implemented by your organization over the past years (social media, email marketing, SEO and online advert)?
- ii. What motivated you most to choose the above method for your digital marketing strategy?
- iii. Explain the major changes in your SME performance after implementing the above major digital marketing strategy?
- iv. Does digital marketing budget have a significant effect on digital marketing initiative?
- v. What are the indicators use by your organization to measure the digital marketing success rate?
- vi. What is the overall impact of digital marketing on SMEs business growth in the Municipality of Buea?

Research Objective III

To find out how social media marketing strategies influence the sales results of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon

- i. What is the main social media platform used by your organization and why?
- ii. Do you have any specific strategy use in these platform(s) to encourage potential and actual customer to engage or continue their purchase?
- iii. Do you post frequently to attain any specific objective?
- iv. What methods are used by your organization to track sales generated by your organization via social media?
- v. In your opinion does social media strategies actual influence the sales volume of your organization?
- vi. What are the main difficulties faced by your organization when marketing online?

Research Objective IV

To find out how Search Engine Optimization (SEO) influence brand recognition of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon

- i. Does your business use SEO in advertising your products online?
- ii. How vital is SEO in increasing your business brand awareness online?
- iii. Do you think businesses that appear higher in search results are more trusted thus, higher chances of more brand recognition
- iv. What is the main challenge faced by your organizations in implementing SEO?
- v. Are you of the opinion that investment in SEO is profitable for organizations?

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire to Customer of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea

Dear Respondent,

I am **Amungwa Gerald**, a final year Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) student of Swiss School of Business Management (SSBM) carrying out research entitled “**The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea**” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). I need your kind assistance in completing the questionnaires. The questionnaire asks for your opinion concerning the effect of Content Marketing on customers’ engagement of SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon. I wish to assure you that the answers will be used for the research purposes only and shall be treated with confidentiality.

Thanks for cooperation.

Instructions: Tick (✓) on any of the option provided or boxes against each item and provide explanations where necessary. **SA** – Strongly Agree, **A**- Agree, **D** – Disagree and **SA** – Strongly Disagree.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your age range? 15-20 ☐ 20- 25 ☐ 25-30 ☐ 30 and above ☐
2. What is your sex? Male ☐ Female ☐
3. How long have you been living in Buea? 0-2years ☐ 2-4years ☐
4 years and above ☐

Section B

Research Objective 5: To investigate the effect of Content Marketing on customers’ engagement of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) in Buea Municipality.

Section (i) Assessing Content Marketing Practices by SMEs in the Municipality of Buea

No	Items	Response Options				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I regularly see content share by many SMEs on social media platforms					
2	Most content shared by SMEs are always very vital thus, I always share it on my platforms					

3	SMEs shared quality content and on regular bases					
4	Most SMEs use videos, images, messages and blogs to engage customers					
5	Most content posted by SMEs reflect their brand identity					

Section (ii) Assessing customer engagement towards content marketing by SMEs in Buea Municipality, Cameroon.

No	Items	Response Options				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I frequently view, share, like and comment marketing content from SMEs in Buea Municipality					
2	The content from SMEs often attract me to visit the physical location of the businesses promoted online					
3	The content develop by most SMEs is rich as a result I follow most of them frequently					
4	The content of SMEs help in increasing my trust for these businesses					
5	I am more likely to engage with SMEs that share valuable content online					

Section (iii) Assessing the Perceived Impact of Content Marketing on Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Buea Municipality

No	Items	Response Options				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	SMEs that constant post rich content online provoke my desire to try the product					
2	Content quality attract potential customers to view the organization as a high profile business					
3	There is higher chances of SMEs to grow faster if the content post online is rich					

4	The more frequent I see a post online the greater my chances of finding out more about the product					
5	Content marketing is a vital means of increasing customer engagement					

Section (iv)

In your opinion what is “The effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea”

.....
.....
.....

Thanks for your cooperation

APPENDIX 4



Date: 04/08/2025

SWISS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT (SSBM) – GENEVA

To Whom It May Concern,

Subject: RESEARCH ATTESTATION

The Director of International Programmes at the Swiss School of Business and Management (SSBM) Geneva, hereby attests that the student **AMUNGWA GERALD**, is undertaking a research study in view of a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) at the Swiss School of Business and Management (SSBM)-Geneva, Switzerland, with research on the topic “**The Effect of Digital Marketing on the Performance of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Municipality of Buea, Cameroon**”.

To this effect, SSBM appeals to all persons, authorities and organisations solicited by the candidate to assist in providing the student with the relevant information and data that may be needed for the study. The realisation of this study shall go a long way to contribute to the development of Cameroon’s business landscape while boosting research not only in Cameroon but Africa as a whole. We promise that any information and data obtained and treated in this study shall strictly remain confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely

Dr. NYIAWUNG Marcellous NKWETTA
Director of Programmes – SSBM GENEVA

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'NYIAWUNG', written over the printed name and title of the Director of Programmes.