

**MANAGERS' RATING OF E-MARKETING AS A NEW WINDOW FOR  
DISTRIBUTIVE BUSINESS IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The study was carried out to determine the e-marketing channels adopted for distributive business by small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A descriptive survey research method was adopted. The population of the study consisted of 2256 small and medium scale managers in the State, and a sample size of 695 managers was taken. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was ensured using test re-test technique. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient formula which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.79. Data related to the research questions were analyzed using mean and*

*standard deviation while, z-test analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings arising from the study revealed that e-marketing channel listed were agreed to be adopted by SMEs for their distributive business in Anambra State. It was concluded that e-marketing channels were adopted by SMEs in Anambra State, and the channels helped them to make purchases, sell, distribute and provide sales support services for their products and service. It was also recommended that e-marketing channels should be adapted to a very high extent by SMEs in the State. Provision should be made for training and re-training of SME managers on the use of information and communication technology (ICTs) tools for proper e-marketing adaptation and so on.*

***Keywords: E-marketing, small and medium scale enterprises, e-marketing channels in Anambra State.***

## **Introduction**

As the world becomes ever more connected, keeping up with developments and trends is vital for marketers trying to reach new audiences who are more discerning, fragmented and cynical than ever (Stokes, 2013). Technology and software are changing at such a high rate that it seems almost impossible to keep up with trends. Products and services are evolving and adapting to the online sphere.

Electronic marketing is one of the rapidly growing forms of digital marketing in many developed economies. The American Marketing Association (2013) defined e-marketing as the use of electronic data and applications for planning and executing the conception, distribution, promotion and pricing of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. With regard to larger multinational organizations, often business operations are internationalized; with pre-order and post-order processing occurring over the internet platform in order to expedite transaction processing (Awa, Nwibere & Inyang, 2010). In addition, customer relationships are built and maintained through online activities that facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services in order to satisfy the marketing goals of both parties (Gay, Charlesworth & Esen, 2007).

E-marketing is essentially any marketing activity that is conducted online through the use of internet technologies (Strauss & Frost, 2009). It can be viewed as a modern business practice associated with buying and selling goods, services, information and ideas via the internet and other electronic means. It comprises not only advertising that is shown on websites, but also other kinds of online activities like email and social networking (Chaffey, 2007). Every aspect of internet marketing is digital, meaning that it is electronic information that is transmitted on a computer or similar device, though naturally it can tie in with traditional offline advertising and sales.

The internet and its allied digital marketing tools are fast growing in existing businesses. A recent business to business study (Thompson, 2013) identified a decent number of technical and industrial customers who are using the internet as a main source for generating trade and obtaining product information. As a result, Business to Business advertisers are looking for various ways to exploit the digital channels and connect with customers. Large companies have been using online marketing techniques for many years

since the birth of the internet. In recent years, small and medium scale enterprises have also started adopting online marketing techniques to promote their businesses as well.

E-marketing is ideal for SMEs as it focus on drawing the attention of customers (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012). Thus, e-marketing fosters drawing customers towards SMEs, as deeper audience engagement is possible. In other parts of the world, SMEs have been slower to adopt e-marketing as a distributive channel. The e-marketing strategy variables can be used to create brand awareness, promote offers, provide information, and provide interaction opportunities with consumers and a means to engage with customers (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly recognized as important drivers of socio-economic development all over the world (Kazungu, Ndiege Mchopa, & Moshi, 2014). The importance can be viewed in aspects such as productivity, innovation and employment creation, income generation and distribution, poverty alleviation, training, including labour absorption, ground for the development and upgrading entrepreneurship skills, and are important vehicles for promoting forward and backward linkages in geographically and economically diverse sectors of the economy in many countries. This makes them the backbone of global economic growth (Gupta & Khanka, 2008). While their contributions to the country's development are generally acknowledged, SMEs almost all over the world are facing many obstacles that limit their sustainability. One of the critical obstacles is the adoption of electronic marketing (e-marketing) to facilitate their operational activities. SMEs in developing countries are having doubts on e-marketing adoption as they perceive very high development costs and do not understand how e-marketing can enhance their business performance and sustainability.

SMEs are challenged to compete with large organizations in today's global marketplace. The technologies that can be applied to market SME products and services are relatively simple with the focus on the impact on the customer relationship, as noted by Harrigan (2011). Dockel and Ligthelm, (2012) showed that SMEs are confronted with several issues, sales and marketing being the most pressing. From their studies, the level of importance in descending sequence are sales and marketing at 40 percent, followed by human resources at 15.3 percent, general management at 14,3 percent and operations at 8,6 percent. SMEs must constantly innovate around their existing business processes to survive, especially in their marketing activities (Harrigan, 2011).

A recent study by Google India (2012) showed that in India over 40 percent of SMEs use internet for advertising and over 58 percent of SMEs use their website to generate direct business leads. It was also found that SMEs which used online medium are more cost effective than traditional marketing. Hence the internet is one of the fastest growing medium, SMEs would benefit by spending on online marketing compared to traditional marketing. According to Vuuren and Groenewald (2007) the creation of the SME sector plays an important role towards contributing to the economic growth of an economy and averting the low gross national product, high unemployment and levels of poverty in countries. In this regard, adoption of electronic marketing strategies has the potential to contribute to the exponential growth of the SME sector. However, despite its potential as a marketing tool, actual use of e-marketing has not met with expectations (Elliot & Boshoff, 2007).

According to Awa, Nwibere and Inyang (2010), e-marketing presents a virtual marketplace within which firms buy, sell, distribute and provide sales support for their products and services. The authors further posited that business enterprises can also

develop custom-made products and services that meet the precise needs of consumers. This in turn, culminates in high returns for businesses. The adoption of e-marketing enables businesses to promote their products and services to the public through advertisements, e-mails and mobile phone competitions (Chaffey, 2007). E-marketing is a diverse area with many tools to bring customers to the SMEs' products and services. In this study, there are different e-marketing distributive channels which can be adopted by SMEs for business profitability such as: search engine, email marketing, mobile marketing, affiliate marketing, online advertising, viral marketing and social media marketing.

Search engine marketing, whether search engine optimization (SEO) or pay-per-click (PPC) advertising starts with customer intent (Stokes, 2013). Existing customer data can indicate where to focus search engine marketing efforts, especially when it comes to analyzing how well a Website caters for the intent indicated by a customer's search term. Search engine marketing includes paid and natural search engine activities. Search engine optimization is a marketing technique used to increase the visibility of the website so that people can see a site at the top of organic search results. A search engine, like Google or Yahoo, is a specialized kind of database containing software programs (called spiders or robots) that discover sites on the web and then order them based on relevance to a particular search query. Search engines continuously crawl the web using these spiders to index information in their database. Information is also cross-referenced between websites (created by links) to create a spider web of information in search engine databases. As search engines crawl websites, they use special mathematical formula called search algorithms, which help to organize, file and rank information in order of relevance to a particular search query. Each search engine uses different search methodologies and will therefore not necessarily return the same search results.

Email marketing is a form of direct marketing that delivers commercial and content-based messages to an audience (Kotler, 2012). It is extremely cost effective, highly targeted, customizable on a mass scale and completely measurable – all of which make it one of the most powerful digital marketing tactics. Email marketing is a tool for building relationships with potential and existing customers through valuable content and promotional messages (Vipat, 2013). It should maximize the retention and value of these customers, ultimately leading to greater profitability for the organization as a whole. A targeted, segmented email database means that a brand can direct messages at certain sectors of their customer base in order to achieve the best results.

Mobile marketing can be defined as a set of practices that enable organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network (Stokes, 2013). Mobile devices are important to consider in any marketing strategy. Marketers use mobile devices as additional channels to communicate a message, sell, promote, build and maintain customer relationships. Mobile marketing can be conducted through: Short Message Service (SMS), Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) banner advertisements, mobile TV and bluetooth. Text messaging enables information to be sent to groups of customers quickly and conveniently in much the same way as e-mail, making it an increasing popular e-marketing channel. Moreover, the development and growth of Third Generation (3G) mobile phones had led to superior connection speeds, Wi-Fi connectivity and the increase of mobile internet browsing by users all over the world (Stokes, 2013). One of mobile's powerful characteristics is its ability to stitch media together – especially online and offline marketing channels, since the mobile device can be physically located

in the real-world space, and access the digital world at the same time. Mobile is also excellent in CRM and customer support, where it provides an always-on, always accessible channel to answer queries, resolve issues and reward customers. The mobile device cannot be ignored as an important tool in any marketing campaign.

Online advertising is largely visual, making it an ideal channel for promoting brand imagery and making people familiar with its colours, logo and overall feel (Walsh, 2013). Creating customer demand is a three-step process: inform, persuade and remind. Customers cannot want what they do not know about. Advertising needs to convince them about what they should want and why they should want it. Online advertising provides a great way to communicate the unique selling points (USPs) of products, helping to stimulate demand and reminding customers about the product and why they want it (Cendrowski, 2012). Online advertising covers advertising in all areas of the Internet – ads in emails, ads on social networks and mobile devices, and display ads on normal websites. The main objective of display advertising is to raise brand awareness online. It can also be more interactive and therefore less disruptive than traditional or static online advertising, as users can choose to engage with the ad or not. Online advertising can be targeted to physical locations, subject areas, past user behaviours, and much more.

Affiliate marketing is selling your products or services via publishers and in return, giving back a commission on a sale or when a certain target is met. The concept is built upon a win-win-win monetizing model, where all parties (i.e. advertisers, publishers and consumers) get to be happy (Capilnean & Turan, 2015). Brands and agencies reach the right customer segment, publishers get their well-deserved commissions and customers get relevant adverts. Affiliate marketing provides a new route to market for online businesses. Online affiliate marketing is widely used to promote e-Commerce websites, with the referrers being rewarded for every visitor, subscriber or customer provided through their efforts. It is a useful tactic for brand building and acquisition (Vipat, 2013). Affiliates carry advertising (from banner advertising to product listings) and generate incremental sales that may otherwise end up with your competition.

Viral marketing as a form of marketing involves the exponential spread of a marketing message by online word of mouth (sometimes referred to a “word of mouse”). A major component of viral communication is the meme – a message that spreads virally and embeds itself in the collective consciousness. Viral marketing uses email to transmit a promotional message to another potential customer (Sana Rehman in Kaur, Pathak & Kaur, 2015). It is very useful in reaching a large number of people rapidly like a computer virus. Viral marketing is closely tied to social media, since social media platforms and their sharing functionality are the main way that a message is able to “go viral” online.

Social media has made an indelible mark on the web landscape and, concurrently, on marketing tactics. Social media marketing involves using peer recommendations, sharing, building brand personality and addressing the market as a heterogeneous group of individuals (Stokes, 2013). It also uniquely encourages customers to create content and buzz around a product themselves. Through social media marketing, managers of SMEs can target their audience precisely and very specifically, resulting in a much higher return on investment and a higher click-through rate to their website or product pages. Social media tools are relatively easy to use, cheaper than traditional media and do not require specialized technical skills. This means that anyone can learn to use them effectively.

Implementing e-marketing by small business enterprises can change both the shape and nature of business all over the world. The increased usage of the Internet and

other electronic marketing channels in electronic transactions might create not only a lot of opportunists for small business enterprises but also can eliminate a lot of its threats.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Small and medium scale enterprises and e-marketing are simultaneously increasingly becoming part of the economies of both developing and developed countries. The adoption of e-marketing positively influences business profitability (Matikiti, Afolabi & Smith, 2012). It plays an important role in innovation, advancement and sustainable development worldwide. Despite the growing consciousness and enthusiasm for electronic marketing, only a few SMEs are exploiting their substantial benefits (Awa et al., 2010). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria have not performed creditably well and hence have not played the expected vital and vibrant role in the economic growth and development of Nigeria. This situation has been of great concern to the government, citizenry, operators, practitioners and the organized private sector groups. It is evident that small business failure can result from either a lack of marketing, or poor marketing practice. This leaves them to be more vulnerable to competitive threat. Whereas many studies have looked at the determinants of internet adoption by SMEs and factors affecting SME growth including marketing separately, this study therefore is focusing at managers' rating of e-marketing as a new window for distributive business in Anambra State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the managers' rating of e-marketing channels adopted for distributive business by small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The various e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs
2. The challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What e-marketing channels are adopted by SMEs for their distributive businesses?
2. What are the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of managers on various e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.
2. There is no significance difference in the mean responses of managers on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.

### **Methods**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The researchers considered this design appropriate for this study since it intended to collect data from managers or owners of SMEs in Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of 2256 small and

medium scale managers in the three senatorial zones of Anambra State who registered with the State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Technology (1481 small and 838 medium). The sample of this study comprised 695 managers made up 444 small and 251 medium were selected through randomization from each stratum. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire tagged “E-Marketing a New Window for Distributive Business” (EMNWDB). The instrument was validated by three experts in business education and one in marketing. Their comments enhanced the content validity of the instrument.

Test re-test method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument, and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the reliability of the instrument. The analysis yielded a co-efficient of 0.79 indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. The questionnaire was structured on a five-point rating scale with response categories as “Very High Extent”; “High Extent”; “Moderate Extent” “Low Extent” and “Very Low Extent”. The administration of the instrument was carried out personally by the researchers with the aid of five research assistants. All copies of the questionnaire distributed were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Data collected regarding the research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) while the z-test was used to analyze the hypotheses. In order to determine the adoption of e-marketing by SMEs, a decision rule based on a mean rating between 4.50-5.00 was adopted by SMEs managers to a very high extent, an item with mean rating of 3.50-4.49 was adopted at a high extent and an item with 2.50-3.49 was adopted at a moderate extent. Furthermore, an item with mean rating of 1.50-2.49 and 0.50-1.49 was adopted by SMEs managers to a low and very low extent respectively. In testing the hypotheses, a null hypothesis was accepted where the calculated z value is less than the critical value of z, it means that there is no significant difference and the hypothesis will not be rejected. Conversely, where the calculated z value is equal to or greater than the critical z value, it means that there is significant difference and the hypothesis will be rejected.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1:**

What e-marketing channels are adopted by SMEs for their distributive business?

Data collected in response to the first research question were analyzed and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Mean responses of respondents on the e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs for their distributive business N = 695**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>E-marketing channels</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Remark</b>
1	Search engine High Extent		3.79 0.89	
2	E-mail marketing Extent	3.66	0.90	High
3	Mobile marketing Extent	3.17	0.54	High
4	Affiliate marketing High Extent	3.69	0.83	
5	Online advertising High extent	3.71	1.02	

6	Viral marketing	3.79	0.89	High
Extent				
7	Social media marketing	3.58	0.43	High
Extent				
	<b>Mean of Means</b>	<b>3.75</b>		<b>High</b>
<b>Extent</b>				

The result of the study in Table 1 shows that all the e-marketing channels are used by managers of SMEs for their distributive business in Anambra State. The mean of means revealed that respondents accepted all the items as e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs for their distributive business to a high extent with a mean score of 3.75.

**Research Question 2:**

What are the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business?

Data collected in response to the third research question were analyzed and presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Mean responses of respondents on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business N = 695**

S/N	Challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs	Mean	Standard Deviation Remark
1	Inadequate communication infrastructure	4.23	0.73
	High Extent		
2	ICT knowledge limits the adoption of e-M	3.91	0.86
	High Extent		
3	Absence of regulatory framework to guide e-M	4.06	
	0.78 High Extent		
4	High cost for development of internet connectivity	4.13	
	0.83 High Extent		
5	Inaccessibility of internet limits the adoption of e-M	4.71	
	0.87 High Extent		
6	High internet access prices limits the adoption of e-M	3.89	
	0.91 High Extent		
7	Disclosing company information	3.89	0.91
	High Extent		
8	Poor supply of electricity	3.75	0.84
	High Extent		
9	Security threats	4.02	
	0.84 High Extent		
10	Limited financial resources	3.76	
	0.90 High Extent		



**Mean of Means  
High Extent**

**3.68**

Data in Table 2 show that all the respondents used for the study agreed with these items as challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs in distributive business in Anambra State. The mean of means revealed that respondents accepted all the items as challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs in their distributive business to a high extent with a mean score of 3.68.

**Testing the Hypotheses**

**Null Hypotheses One**

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of managers on various e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.

**Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations and z-test for managers on various e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.**

Source Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	$\alpha$
<b>Decision</b>							
Small Enterprise	444	3.16	.41		693	0.38	1.96
				0.05	NS		
Medium Enterprise		251	3.61	.17			

Table 3 shows that the z-calculated of 0.38 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 693 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value is less than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies, therefore, that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on the e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of their business. The null hypothesis was therefore, accepted while the alternate hypothesis was not retained.

**Null Hypotheses Two**

There is no significance difference in the mean responses of managers on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.

**Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations and z-test for managers on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of the business.**

Source Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	$\alpha$	Decision
Small Enterprise	444	2.82	.41		693	1.38	1.96	
				0.05	NS			
Medium Enterprise		251	2.84	.17				

Table 4 shows that the z-calculated of 1.38 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 693 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated value is less than the z-critical value, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies, therefore, that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of their business. The null hypothesis was therefore, accepted while the alternate hypothesis was not retained.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The result of the analysis showed that all the e-marketing channel listed were agreed to be adopted by SMEs for their distributive business in Anambra State of Nigeria. It serves as a powerful tool and methodologies used for promoting products and services. The findings of this study tallied with the findings of Bakeman and Hanson (2012) who found out that e-marketing channel helps the SMEs focus on drawing the attention of customers. Further, the result of the first hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on the e-marketing channels adopted by SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of their business.

The result of the second research question showed that the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs included the fact that SMEs in developing countries have doubts on e-marketing adoption as they perceive very high development costs and do not understand how e-marketing can enhance their business performance and sustainability. The findings of this study agreed with the findings of Dockel and Ligthelm, (2012) that SMEs are confronted with several issues, sales and marketing being the most pressing. Finally, the test of the second hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on the challenges of e-marketing practices of SMEs involved in distributive business in Anambra State on the basis of size of their business.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that e-marketing channels are adopted by SMEs in their distributive business in Anambra State. Furthermore, e-marketing enable SMEs buy, sell, distribute and provide sales support for their products and services through electronic marketing. Despite the benefits of e-marketing, SMEs in Anambra State are challenged with inadequate communication infrastructure, high cost for development of internet connectivity, poor supply of electricity and so on.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were proffered:

1. e-marketing channels should be adapted by SMEs in the State. This will enable them reach out to a wider market and customer.
2. Provision should be made for training and re-training of SME operators on the use of information and communication technology (ICTs) tools for proper e-marketing adaptation.

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