



DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PETROLEUM COMPANIES IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF VIVO ENERGY KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of digital marketing techniques and performance of petroleum companies. Digital marketing techniques examined in this study include; social media marketing, email marketing and search engine optimization. As such the objectives of the study were; to determine the influence of social media marketing on the performance of petroleum companies, to evaluate the effect of email marketing on the performance of the petroleum companies and to examine the impact of search engine optimization on the performance of petroleum companies. Thematic analysis of digital marketing literature was used in determining indicators for the study variables which included; social media marketing email marketing, search engine optimization and performance of petroleum companies. The study employed descriptive survey methodology with a case study. Vivo Energy Kenya was the case study for this paper. Target population for the study included employees serving at Vivo energy corporate communications and marketing departments. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 71 participants to take part in the study. A structured questionnaire was used as the tool for data collection. The study established that; social media marketing played a critical role in positively boosting popularity of petroleum companies. The findings also indicated that email marketing played a positive role in growing customer base by building consumer affiliation by sharing petroleum products information directly to them. Also, the study established that search engine optimization (SEO) was extremely valuable in building visibility of petroleum companies which was critical in developing brand popularity. The study concluded that digital marketing strategy will increasingly become a strong pillar in undertaking product promotions in petroleum marketing. The dimensions of digital marketing notably; social media marketing and search engine optimization will be most critical in driving petroleum products market share in the digital era. The study recommended; budgeting increase on marketing expenditure for digital marketing strategy and increasing capacity amongst marketing staff in petroleum companies on digital marketing and communication skills. The study also recommended for modernization of petroleum companies digital assets in areas of website design, digitization of company logos and social media channels appeal.

Key Words: Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Search Engine Optimization

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INTRODUCTION

Most organizations are increasingly opting to market their products through the digital platform alongside traditional marketing approaches. Advancing technology has mediated the change to digital marketing approach since it has a wider reach and offers shorter feedback time. Girchenko and Ovsianikova (2016), noted that digital marketing has a wider scope since it reaches both the online and the offline audience. Kiradoo (2017), explained that digital marketing is a marketing approach that is employed by almost all sectors to market their products and services. Most people interchangeably use digital marketing and internet marketing, which is inaccurate. Rather, internet marketing forms a part of digital marketing programs. There are a various channel of digital marketing includes; social media (Kiiru, 2018), video games, digital arts, and email (Girchenko & Ovsianikova, 2016). Other forms of digital marketing include marketing through smartphone apps, digital screens, email marketing, social media optimization, and websites.

Digital marketing practices offers a deeper understanding of the market, bring more marketing opportunities, and challenge the known knowledge in marketing. Indeed, the coming up of internet in the 90s injected some fresh ideas into the marketing strategy and brought about new methods of reaching the online customer as much as interacting with the offline customer. The digital marketing practice is still based on the 4ps marketing mix but the organizations using digital marketing have gone deeper to try and understand the customer. This involves tracking the customers' habits online using digital technology and offering services tailored to the customer.

Conversely, the traditional marketing practices could not offer real-time tracking of the customer and relied on marketing research, which often took time, to understand the needs of a certain market segment. According to Kingsnorth (2016), digital marketing means that the traditional marketing mix models, for example, 4ps, need to be aligned to

conform to the requirements of the digital customer with digital tools at their disposal. For instance, currently, a business entity does not need to have a physical office but it is still possible to sell goods online due to the advancement of technology. Additionally, it is very easy for customers to compare prices of the same commodity through digital technology. Therefore, the digital marketing practice tailors the marketing strategy to meet the requirements of the digital customer.

Social media is diverse. It involves social networks, professional sites like LinkedIn, video display sites, and blogging as well as microblogging sites. With the advent of social media, digital marketing has benefitted immensely from the practicality of social networks during marketing activities. Kigsnorth (2016) notes that some primitive forms of social media existed in the 70s, however, the advent of the internet-fueled the development of internet-based social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Rilley (2016), pointed out that social media marketing accords an organization broad options on product branding and influence the customers purchasing behaviour.

Reddy (2016), defines email marketing as a form of digital marketing which delivers marketing messages to targeted customers via electronic mail platforms like Google, or Microsoft. Stakhovska (2019), explained that email marketing remains one of the oldest and the widely used digital platform by organizations to reach their targeted market with product information and offers. The scholar further notes that marketing departments use email as a one-way communication rather than as a two-way communication channel. This is effective in delivering personalized information to the target customers and urging the customers to follow links to find product offers and close a deal.

To make the organization and a product more visible to the online community, marketers perform search engine optimization. This places the firm or a product on top of the search results when an

individual search for an item online. According to Kingsnorth (2016), search engine optimization enables a brand or an organization to be ranked highly by the search engine hence help in creating brand awareness in the market. Tsuei et al. (2018), explained that search engine optimizations leverage on complex algorithms used by search engines to rank contents where customers can easily see. Thus assist in linking the product to the customer.

Petroleum companies have used digital marketing approaches to sell their products and interact with their customers. A case in point is the British Gas company which used social media to interact with their customers (Kingsnorth, 2016). A report by Vivo Energy (2019), points out that the petroleum firm is setting up its online presence to better market its products and services. Several other petroleum companies in the world have a huge online presence for marketing purposes.

The study was a case analysis of Vivo petroleum limited. According to Vivo Energy (2019), Vivo Energy Plc. is a multinational petroleum company operating in several African countries including Kenya. Vivo Energy is in charge of the Shell-branded petrol stations as well as Engen branded petrol stations in Kenya. The multinational petroleum company was established in 2011 and its core business is to buy and sell fuel as well as other related petroleum products.

Particularly, Vivo Energy sells fuels like super petrol, diesel, kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as well as lubricants for automotive and industrial, under the Shell brand. Besides its products, the petroleum company is positioning itself as the strategic petroleum company in Africa. In that regard, the firm employs traditional and digital marketing techniques to build its brand name besides selling its products in the market. A report by Vivo Energy (2019), noted that the petroleum company has an online presence through social media platforms, websites, and smartphone application that it uses to reach its market in Africa.

The company's digital marketing strategy targets both online and offline customers.

Problem Statement

Digital marketing is a popular marketing strategy globally. Most organizations have embraced digital marketing to connect with their customers and build a brand name. According to Shetty and Maiya (2016), an organization with a digital marketing platform is a global organization since digital marketing platforms offers the widest reach of any marketing approach thus enabling a firm to increase its customer base. Kiradoo (2017), pointed out that in India, digital marketing techniques are employed in most of the sectors to market the products and services. However, some scholars question the extent to which digital marketing strategies currently in use are effective. For instance, De Ruyte et al. (2018), observed that more researches should be carried out to establish the contribution of digital marketing strategies to the company's overall performance. This indicates that there are insufficient studies that measure the impact of digital marketing on organizational performance.

Several studies targeting the use of digital marketing in the SME sector reveal that digital marketing practices have an impact on the growth of the business. A study by Kiiru (2018), targeting the usage of digital marketing in the banking industry in Kenya revealed that digital marketing approaches increased sales revenue. However, few of the studies carried out targeted the impact of digital marketing on the performance of the petroleum industry. Additionally, some of the studies carried out targeted one of the digital marketing platforms hence making them inconclusive and does not show the true picture of the impact of digital marketing practices on performance. Evidence exists that petroleum companies in Kenya are beginning to use digital marketing approaches to boost the company's performance. This presents an opportunity to closely examine how these digital marketing strategies affect the performance of the petroleum companies. Therefore, a gap exists in the study that

this research seeks to fill. To this end, the study was a case study to enable it to investigate how using digital marketing strategies used by Vivo Energy Plc., impacts its performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review of Technology Acceptance Model

Fred Davis proposed the technology acceptance model in 1985. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), holds the premise that when a new technology is developed and deployed to the users, its uptake is mediated by three major factors which include the perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), and the attitude that the user has towards usage (ATU) (Mugo et al., 2017). Over the years, scholars have refined the model to suit its application. Acheampong et al. (2017), explained that a process starting from attitudes to beliefs, and finally planned behaviour determine whether an individual will use a given technology. This indicates that before any technology can be accepted and put into use, the people must first gauge its usefulness, how it will be used, and develop an attitude that will determine whether the technology can be accepted or not.

Marketing organizations and departments find that the digital technology which they can use to further their marketing agenda has been in existence for quite a while. In this regard, the audience has already determined the usefulness of technology and accepted it. The remaining part is for the companies to go through the TAM process before they can deploy the digital marketing approach to drive their marketing strategy. The TAM is relevant and applicable to digital marketing strategies. For instance, the acceptance of technologically driven marketing practices by firms can be based on the TAM model. According to Mugo et al (2017), the TAM has been used to gauge how users can accept digital technology and use it to further their activities. Secondly, TAM is applicable in studying consumer behaviour. In this regard, Mugo et al (2017) argued that TAM has been previously used

to gauge the intention of the technology users to buy a certain product by observing their online habits. Also, the TAM model is a process where the users of a certain technology first develop an attitude towards a technology before adopting it fully. In this regard, TAM applies to digital marketing.

The TAM model is compatible with social media marketing, email marketing, and SEO marketing approaches. The model enables organizations to choose the appropriate marketing strategy they will use to target a certain market segment. According to Wu and Chen (2017), the perceived usefulness of TAM helps an organization to gauge how a digital marketing strategy can be useful to the firm to achieve its marketing agenda. Likewise, the beliefs that are held by a customer base towards a certain digital technology, for instance, social media, emails, or SEO can be instrumental to the firm in choosing a specific digital marketing practice to deploy for maximum market penetration.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing offers diverse options for marketers to connect with the target market. The recent technological advancement has seen social media sites become popular platforms for marketing activities. Kingsnorth (2016), reports that social media following has increased exponentially in the world thus giving companies access to a huge number of potential customers. On the other hand, Reddy (2016), explained that social media offers business entities an opportunity to influence the purchasing behaviour of social media followers. A study by De Ruyter et al. (2018), appears to support the finding that social media influences the purchasing power of its audience by pointing out that the buying behaviour of the social media users is increasingly getting influenced their interactions in the social network platforms. These studies demonstrate the opportunities that social media portends to the marketing initiatives of the organizations.

The social networks present a ready market for the marketing managers to capitalize on. Kiradoo (2017), pointed out that marketing executives are finding value and efficiency on the social networks only requiring them to tailor their marketing messages to a specific customer demographic. An analysis by Fierro, Arbelaez, and Givalanez (2017), on the usage of digital marketing in the education sector established that the largest consumers of social media information are the youth. This indicates that social media tends to attract a certain group of people than others. On this idea, a study by Stakhovska (2019), pointed out that statistics from several data mining organizations reveal that the number of social media users are likely to hit 3.2 billion users by the year 2021. This finding is vital since it indicates the scope of the social media that marketing organizations can capitalize on to sell their products and services.

Researchers have explored the fact that social media plays a significant role in product branding as well as company brand image. A study by Kiiru (2018), on digital marketing in the Kenyan banking sector established that social network helps an organization to create brand awareness amongst the social media audience. Stakhovska (2019), strengthens the finding by Kiiru (2018), by arguing that social media helps the customers to get more information regarding a product or a service and assist in interacting with the brand at several levels. In this regard, an organization can get feedback regarding the brand within a short period of time. According to Fierro et al. (2017), social media appear to increase brand awareness in the education industry thus making it easier for organizations to market themselves to the social media audience. This considerably reduces the number of funds that an organization can allocate to its marketing activities since social media marketing is cheaper and more accessible as compared to other traditional marketing methods. However, the studies analyzed so far do not seem to bring out how social media affects the profitability of an organization.

Regarding the cost of using social media for marketing purposes, relevant studies note that social media is a cheap method of digital marketing since an organization does not need to incur a lot of expenses to benefit from social media. Cost is an important factor in performance since high costs eat into the profitability of a firm. On this respect, Wang and Kim (2017), pointed out that social media expenses incurred by an organization during its marketing activities should be treated as investments and not costs. In this manner, it would be easier for organizations to get value from social media and help it to boost the firm's performance. Several other scholars support this idea, for instance, Addou (2020), and Phan (2019), explain that treating digital marketing expenses as investments rather than costs helps the organization realize value for its marketing activities.

An analysis by Reddy (2016), established that social media marketing is cost-effective both on getting the marketing messages out and getting feedback from the audience. Apart from engaging with a bigger consumer base within a short period, the study by Reddy does not explain how embracing social media marketing can be beneficial to the organization in terms of performance. A study conducted by Tafesse and Wien (2018), noted that social media marketing positively contributes to the performance of the marketing department in the organization. This can be remotely linked to organizational performance, though the study is not quite about this fact. This appears to be an area that has been overlooked by many scholars. De Ruyter et al. (2018), suggested that scholars should deeply analyze the impact of social media, not only on digital marketing but also on the overall performance of the organizations. True to the finding of De Ruyter et al (2018), most of the studies analyzed in the section dwell more on how social media assist in marketing activities but does not explore how the interaction of social media and marketing strategy impact the performance of an organization. This leaves a gap in the study that this

research seeks to fill. Additionally, the studies analyzed in the section revealed important variables regarding the acceptance and usability of social media technology for marketing purposes. This links with the theory of Technology Acceptance Model.

Email Marketing

Email marketing is not a new phenomenon. Desai (2019), explained most business entities use email marketing to send important information to their customer regarding pricing, events, promotions, subscriptions, or simply to lead the customer to the company website. It is a useful tool when an organization wants to reach a certain group of customers. The place of email marketing in digital marketing practices is well documented, however, the role of email marketing in boosting the company performance is a subject of study by several scholars.

There is a significant connection between email marketing and the growth of a business entity. A study by Bodoine (2020), carried out in Cameroon Jumia established that a host of digital marketing practices played a role in the growth of an organization. Despite the study analyzing several digital marketing channels, it was clear that Email marketing contributed directly to the growth of Jumia in Cameroon. This can be attributed to the fact that Email marketing is more precision-based than other marketing strategies that target the masses. This means that Email marketing allows firms to send tailored marketing messages to specific customers (Desai, 2019). Quantifying the personalization factor of email marketing indicates that email marketing has a higher return on investment than any other digital marketing strategy (Addou, 2020). However, most organizations have not discovered the effectiveness of email marketing and tend to overlook it in their marketing strategies. The downside of such a move results in firms missing important marketing opportunities and using more expansive marketing channels that negatively impact the performance of the firm.

Email marketing, like other digital marketing platforms, is cost-effective thus offers an opportunity for an organization to make profits from its ventures. Phan (2019), noted that email is cost-effective in that for every Euro spent on emails, it could return up to 28 euros. When compared to other digital marketing channels, the scholar noted that paid advertising returned double the amount invested. This implies that Email marketing is very effective when an organization wants to improve its performance and cut advertising costs. An investigation by Shirazi (2017) and Jeshurun (2018) supported the argument put forward by Phan (2019), that email marketing is cost-effective since it increases the effectiveness of the marketer. This implies that marketing activities based on email can better the performance of an organization. Given that these studies were carried out on other sectors in the economy other than the petroleum industry, there is need therefore to ascertain whether email marketing can improve the performance of firms in the petroleum industry.

Studies have shown that email marketing boosts customer satisfaction. An analysis by Njoku and Chiana (2019), established that a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and email marketing as well as between successful marketing outcomes and email marketing. The finding of this study implies that email marketing can lead to better organizational performance. Further findings by Njoku and Chiana (2019), established that email marketing led to increased stock turnover, brought in higher revenues, and promoted customer satisfaction. This indicates that email marketing holds good prospects for the company that opted to deploy it as a marketing strategy.

Email marketing requires a company to package its messages in an attractive manner that captures the attention of the audience. Several studies are done concerning email marketing message packaging establish that social media can be a slippery ground for firms and may end up hurting the performance of the organization rather than making it better. A

study by Brock et al. (2016) observed that Tobacco companies in the United States often used HTML based emails to their target customers which were quite attractive and appealing to the customers but the study further reports that up to 65% of the emails did not elicit a reaction from the targeted customer. This implies that email marketing may not be as easy to use since it can be beginner by the targeted customer or flagged as spam mail and blocked hence defeating its purpose. Conversely, Todor (2016), noted that email marketing requires firms to carry out data gathering activities of its customer base and learn their buying habits before bombarding them with marketing email for better success. The scholar supports the argument that if email marketing is done right, then the rewards for the organization could be huge. In terms of performance, Todor (2016), notes that email marketing allows firms to win over more customers besides enabling a business entity to close more business deals than other digital marketing channels. This finding has been echoed by other studies analyzed in this section for example Chan (2019), Njoku and Chiana (2019), and Shirazi (2017).

The studies analyzed in Email marketing allude to the fact that email marketing could be more profitable to firm since it has a higher rate of return on investment. Additionally, the study found that email marketing is less costly and more personalized hence enabling the firms using it to close more business deals. However, it appears that fewer studies has been done regarding to use of email marketing in petroleum industry making its effects on the performance of the petroleum firms unexplored, hence this study will be instrumental in filling that gap in literature.

Search Engine Optimization

A study carried out by Bayes, Santos, and Wildenbeest (2015), explained that SEO provides a different way of marketing where internet search providers rank websites using a unique algorithm so that when an internet users searches for a product online, the results displayed will contain some adverts for products from some companies.

Giomelakis and Veglis (2015), adds that SEO marketing practice capitalizes on the fact that large number of internet users are likely to click on the top ranked results displayed after a search.

Consequently, firms invest in SEO marketing to promote brand visibility and presence of website. Similarly, a study by Tseui et al. (2020), explained that SEO marketing practices noted that machine learning helps the search engine to establish frequently visited websites and boost their visibility while low volume websites are listed among the last pages in a search. Regarding marketers use of SEO, Kingsnorth (2016) argued that most marketing entities overlook using SEOs as it appears complex and hard to implement. However, SEOs are among the best methods of carrying out digital marketing that can be used by digital marketers. These studies however focus more on the workings of the SEO and not on its impact on company performance resulting from its deployment by marketing firms and departments.

It can be deduced from various studies that SEOs are cheaper alternative to traditional marketing practices. For instance, a study by Fierro et al. (2017), noted that search engines promote visibility of a webpage without having to incur much costs. This can contribute to the profitability of a firm since the marketing costs would reduce in the long run. Bhandari and Bansal (2018), noted that organizations use SEO to boost brand visibility and invariably gain a market share. Gaining a bigger market share would mean that the organization is performing better in the market and that it has a competitive edge over its competitors. By extension, this would imply that SEOs enhances the performance of an organization.

A study by Loftipanah (2016), on the impact of SEO on visibility and recognition of online academic journals noted that SEO managed to make the journals visible and also increased the number of citation and downloads of the same journals. This is a classic example of how SEO can improve the visibility and engagement of a brand. However, an organization must be able to monetize the

interactions that occur due to SEO for its performance to peak. Bhandari and Bansal (2018), further explained that digital marketing platforms like SEO allows an organization to leverage on the power of information to sell their products. This arises due to the fact that information drives the people to the internet and the ability of the marketing companies to display their products amidst the information searched by the customer counts as a plus to marketing performance.

Other studies indicate that due to the low cost of SEO marketing, an organization can be able to reduce the product price, increase its sales volume, and better its performance. For instance, a study conducted by Iskandar and Komara (2018), established that a single point increase in Google Insight for search resulted in a 3% price offer price markdown. This indicates that indeed SEO can reduce the discount price of a commodity. On the same note, the analysis by Loftipanah (2016), on the cost of SEO noted that SEOs can be deployed at a lower cost by marketing companies thus allowing the firm to get value for its products at the market. The two studies on cost arrive at almost a similar conclusion, that low costs associated with SEO portends high product value to the company. This implies that firms can be able to offer products at a lower cost with compromising on its quality when they opt for digital marketing approach of SEO.

Search engine Bhandari and Bansal (2018), optimization offers diverse revenue streams to an organization. In this regard, noted that as long as SEOs make the company and its products more visible, an organization can continue receiving substantial revenues from SEO linked marketing initiatives. However, information regarding the impact of SEO on company performance appears to be scanty. This indicates that studies carried out on SEO mostly focused on its application rather on the impact that SEO has on organizational performance. Regarding, the use of SEO in petroleum industry, no information could be gotten from the online search of journals regarding the same. This implies that less studies have been carried out on the role of

SEO in company performance. Consequently, the findings of this study will be beneficial in bridging the gap that exists in literature.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey methodology with a case study design. The target population for the study included active senior and middle level management employees at Vivo Energy Kenya. The targeted employees were drawn from two departments which included the corporate communications and marketing departments. Knowledge and understanding of digital marketing and communication formed the rationale used in deciding the target population. Employees at the two Vivo energy department's corporate communications and marketing were well versed in digital marketing strategy. Similarly, the study employed purposive sampling approach in selecting the actual participants for the study. This enabled handpicking of participants who had practical skills in application of digital marketing techniques of social media marketing, email marketing and search engine optimization. A sample of 71 respondents were selected to participate in the study. A structured questionnaire with four sections and closed ended questions relating to; social media marketing, email marketing and search engine optimization and the performance of petroleum company's was used as the tool for data collection. Indicators for the independent variables notably; social media marketing, email marketing and search engine optimization and the dependent variable performance of petroleum company were extracted from extensive thematic analysis of past literature centering on the performance of digital marketing and market performance of petroleum companies.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Correlation Analysis

The study performed Pearson correlation test between the independent predictor variables versus dependent predicted variables. The three independent variables notably; search engine

optimization, email marketing and social media marketing against the performance of petroleum companies.

The results in table 1 highlighted the Pearson's correlation test between social media marketing strategy versus performance of petroleum

companies. The test deduced, r-value of 0.563, with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). The results implied that a positive correlation exists between social media marketing and the performance of petroleum companies which is significant at 0.01 significance level.

Table 1: Correlation Test for Social Media Marketing and Company Performance

		Social media marketing	Petroleum company performance
Social media marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.563**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	71	71
Petroleum company performance	Pearson Correlation	.563**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	71	71
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The results in table 2 highlighted the Pearson's correlation test between email marketing and performance of petroleum companies. The test registers, r-value of 0.658 and a p-value of 0.000 (P

< 0.01). The results implied that a strong positive correlation exists between email marketing and performance of petroleum companies which statistically significant at 0.01significance level.

Table 2: Correlation Test for Email Marketing and Company Performance

		Email Marketing	Petroleum Company performance
Email Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.658**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	71	71
Petroleum Company performance	Pearson Correlation	.658**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	71	71
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The results in table 3 highlighted the Pearson's correlation test between search engine optimization and the performance of petroleum companies. The test deduced an r-value of 0.704 and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.000$). This outcome

indicated that, a strong positive correlation exists between search engine optimization and the performance of petroleum companies which is statistically significant at 0.01 significance level.

Table 3: Correlation Test for Search Engine Optimization and Company Performance

		Search Engine Optimization	Petroleum company performance
Search Engine Optimization	Pearson Correlation	1	.704**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	71	71
Petroleum company performance	Pearson Correlation	.704**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	71	71
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Discussion

The study established positive correlation between social media marketing and performance of petroleum companies ($R= 0.563$, $P = 0.000$, $p<0.01$). This outcome showed that for every positive increase recorded in social media marketing it triggers a positive change in the petroleum company's performance. This results indicate that, positive changes such as increased use of social media marketing in promotion of petroleum products positively boosts the performance of the petroleum company with increased market share and more customer base. The study findings are consistent with submissions of Reddy (2016) and Ruyter et al. (2018) who established that social media marketing wielded significant effect in driving consumer perception on product preference. Similarly, the findings are also supported in Kingsnorth (2016) who found that social media platforms attract huge base of potential customers which underscores the value of social media marketing in driving product brand appeal amongst consumers.

The study found that a positive correlation exist between email marketing and performance of petroleum companies. This indicates that, increased utilization of email strategy for running petroleum products promotions positively increases the petroleum's market performance. The findings are supported in studies by Brock et al. (2016), Jeshurun (2018), Phan (2019) who agreed that email marketing was valuable in building direct connections between promoters and potential customers and consumers. Direct interaction boosted by email marketing increases aspects of brand association and trust amongst consumers and potential customers thus effective in growing product market share.

The study established a strong positive correlation between search engine optimization and the performance of petroleum companies ($R=0.704$, $P = 0.000$, $P < 0.01$). This result indicates that a positive cumulative increase in deployment of SEO strategy for digital marketing, results in positive increase on

the performance of petroleum companies in regard to market growth and brand popularity amongst prospective consumers. The findings of this study are backed by Bhandari and Bansal (2018), Fierro et al. (2017) Loftipanah (2016), who established that SEO wielded significant effect in driving brand visibility within a market. The studies are in agreement that boosting visibility through SEO presented a unique platform for boosting brand popularity and enhancing prospects for brand loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that social media marketing had gained significant popularity amongst petroleum marketers in the past two decades. Internet penetration had played a substantial role in boosting the popularity of digital marketing strategies notably; social media marketing, email marketing and search engine optimization. Collectively, social media marketing had grown in preference amongst petroleum marketers, drawn by the increasing popularity of the social media channels, drawing huge numbers of users from different generations and demographics. The study also concluded that, utilizing social media marketing was cost effective in comparison to traditional ways for marketing. This had resulted in creating a level playing field for marketing campaigns targeted at consumers of petroleum products such as fuels, cooking gas, lubricants etc. The study concluded that, email marketing remained a great resource for sharing valuable corporate information to potential consumers whether individual or corporate. Email marketing strength lies in its ability to handle and facilitate sharing of information in large files in diverse multimedia and digital formats. The study also concluded that search engine optimization wields a significant effect in driving the digital visibility of petroleum brands in the likes of Vivo energy. Visibility of petroleum brands is found to be directly synonymous with brand popularity. Petroleum companies that command space in digital spaces enjoys similar popularity in other digital spaces such as the social media. This boosts

brand visibility and increased prospects for petroleum consumer preference when deciding on purchasing petroleum products.

The study made the following recommendations;

- Petroleum companies should increase the finance allocation for their digital marketing programs in effort to enhance quality and volume of digital marketing programs.
 - Petroleum companies should commit all efforts towards the expansion of the marketing teams with focus on capacity building and advanced training on digital marketing skills.
 - Boosting petroleum brands digital appeal by modernizing aspects such as logos, trademarks and company slogans to high definition digitally shareable for easy use in social media promotions, email marketing and SEO campaigns.
 - Petroleum companies should upgrade their digital platforms such as websites to be modern and dynamic and integrating cutting edge interactivity modules for customer engagement. These websites should have links connected to the social media packages for ease reach by prospective customers.
- Marketers tasked with developing content and material for sharing across digital spheres including websites, social media and email should simplify important information relating to petroleum products for easy read and understanding by targeted customers.
 - Petroleum companies should hire talented and qualified professionals in areas of public communication and digital marketing to be tasked with full time obligations for executing the digital marketing strategy. These experts should have capacity to run frequent information updates in all digital platforms relating to petroleum products, effectiveness and prompt interaction with potential customers over the social media platforms.
 - Petroleum companies should utilize their digital pages, and social media handles in promoting other valuable campaigns such as; sharing tips on road safety, promoting information on safe use of petroleum products amongst motorists, tips on executing first aid etc.

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