

Evolution of Digital Marketing in Africa Amid Covid-19

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Abstract:- Digital marketing is the creation and distribution of content via websites, landing pages, social media platforms, email, and mobile applications. It also refers to the promotion of that content via a range of paid, earned, and owned digital channels, including advertising, content syndication, social, email, text messages, and more. Digital marketing strategies help marketers define goals, target an audience, and develop a digital marketing plan that best reaches that audience. These strategies provide direction for a given campaign or program and a framework for evaluating outcomes. Customers now spend a lot of time on social and digital media for a variety of reasons, from information research to actual product purchases. Marketers are allocating a sizeable portion of the advertising budget to digital marketing in response to this trend. As most countries across the world grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of digital marketing has become central to continued economic and societal activity and to lessening the pandemic's impact. While research on the contribution of digitization to softening the impact of pandemics is limited, emerging evidence is compelling about its accelerating effects across all areas of people's lives and sectors of the economy. This article provides an overview of the current status of research in digital marketing, trends and developments in digital marketing, access and use over time in Africa.

Keywords:- Digital Marketing, Social Media Platforms, Digital Media, Economy, Africa.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is the practice of promoting goods or services using electronic media and digital technology, primarily the Internet but also mobile devices, display advertising, and other digital platforms [1]. Technology advancement and the growth of the digital marketing industry are inextricably linked. Digital marketing first became popular in the 1980s. Incredible advancements were made at this time in a variety of fields, including IT for limitless consumer data storage. Prior to the development of digital marketing, the world was supported by traditional marketing, a mode of advertising that was limited to reaching a semi-targeted audience through a variety of offline promotion strategies. Although these strategies have changed over time, their core components have not. Digital marketing was created as a result of traditional marketing. The latter includes any advertising campaigns that make use of a computer or other electronic device that is online. Nowadays, every social entity, government, business, utilize digital channels such as search

engines, social media, email and other websites in order to connect with current and potential customers or its target to achieve a goal of their marketing plan. With the advent of digitalization, it has been observed that the shopping crowd in the markets gradually decreased, and now it is seen that more and more people shop online for themselves and their families. So, there are numerous advantages to promoting your business online because you want to reach the right audience, and your audience is online [2]. You can reach a larger audience in a shorter time period. Technological advances have resulted in considerable attrition of the customer-base of traditional marketing agencies and departments. People have moved on to tablets, phones, and computers, which are the areas where digital marketers have gained the most ground.

II. EVOLUTION OF AND GROWTH OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Every working professional should be aware with at least the fundamental principles of digital marketing in a world where more than 3.9 billion people use social media on a daily basis. The digital market will soon fully replace current marketing channels that are currently in use. Technological advances have resulted in considerable attrition of the customer-base of traditional marketing agencies & departments. People have moved on to tablets, phones, and computers, which are the areas where digital marketers have gained the most ground. Over the past three decades, marketing has had to keep up and contend with leaps in technology and our relation to it ever since.

These technological advancements have had a big impact on how consumers live their lives and how marketers interact with their clients. Facebook entered the market in 2004 and was soon followed by several other social networking services. People have embraced social media at an exponential rate, changing how people engage and communicate with one another [3]. People have become accustomed to the virtual world since the advent of the internet. Marketers concentrated their emphasis on this market when individuals (such as consumers) moved to the internet or virtual marketplace. The use of digital marketing creates new possibilities for reaching, educating, and engaging consumers as well as for offering and marketing products and services. Future predictions indicate that the technical transformation will continue to be led by digital marketing [4, 5].

Digital marketing in Africa has been documented in reference to digital statistics such as internet users and usage in platforms like Facebook. The use of the internet has evolved rapidly in Africa. The continent had around 570

million internet users in 2022, a number that more than doubled compared to 2015. Nigeria, the most populous African country, concentrates the largest number of users. These amounted to over 100 million in 2022, followed by 76 million in Egypt and 41 million in South Africa [6]. With the advent of social media and development in the web and mobile apps technologies, communication has become much easier than that of past decades [7]. . At the heart of digital experience is owned media: web and mobile sites. When redesigning or rebranding, however, there are a few challenges that need to be overcome. One basic challenge is time. Another challenge is coordinating several marketing activities across diverse systems, channels and markets to provide a seamless experience for users. Ideally, you would be able to easily develop content for campaigns, landing pages and social media and launch it across several channels with a single click. In recent years, improved telecommunication infrastructure and the rising mobile device adoption have boosted internet access in Africa. In turn, the growing internet accessibility has promoted digital activities and services, such as social media, online shopping, and mobile payments. Nevertheless, the continent has not yet achieved its full digital potential. Despite the rising number of users, the internet penetration rate stood at around 43 percent in 2021, below a global average of 66 percent [6]. Digital marketing via social and mobile media has revolutionized the everyday lives of millions of people, leading to the adoption of widespread social media practices and the development of many client connections [8, 9].

The rate of evolution has accelerated as more marketing researchers and experts have focused on digital technology. The sale of distinctive products and services has given way to the introduction of marketing campaigns across digital platforms, and now, the digital marketing model also makes use of digital resources. For more than a decade, social media has been used for a variety of activities, including blogging, video, and photography/photo-sharing on mobile devices [8, 10]. Artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) seem to be replacing conventional marketing strategies, opening up new study opportunities for marketing scholars [8, 11, 12].

III. DIGITAL MARKETING AND ECONOMIC STABILITY

It is without doubt that broadband, digitization and ICT regulation contribute to economic and socio-economic development across the Africa region. As an internet business has a substantial influence on economic growth, digital marketing and economic stability are intertwined. Online sales might potentially have an impact on our economy's expansion and stability. E-commerce is significantly impacted by consumer behavior. E-commerce is expected to grow in popularity over the coming years due to how convenient it is. Instead of fighting this new reality, local companies should welcome it. To place themselves in front of their target consumers, they can utilize digital marketing to create a website and advertising campaigns. Competing against massive businesses is not difficult. All that is required is a competent digital marketing company and a well-planned internet approach [13]. The digital era has brought about considerable improvements in marketing and communications in terms of new channels. Businesses today make an effort to use digital marketing channels in order to provide clients with

the best services available and raise their level of satisfaction. According to the data, several of the four categories—operational strategy factors, environmental factors, and others—had a direct, positive impact on the emergence of a digital marketing skill gap. Environmental factors that affect the lack of digital marketing talent include social and cultural context, religion, technology, and economics. The findings also showed that the skills (Principles of Communication and Forecasting the Future) for the firms had the biggest and lowest skill gaps in digital marketing [14]. While global advertising platforms create unparalleled opportunities to grow the customer base, there is potential to grow business locally by interacting with customers on owned channels. For example, businesses could consider using mobile apps, websites, email, and social media groups or messengers to deliver targeted information and improve conversion rates. The key to unlocking these channels could be growing relevant engagement with customers [2].

IV. DIGITAL MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media may be thought of as a virtual tool that improves social connections. Due to the company's capacity for effective customer engagement, digital marketing strategy has been successful in developing a favorable reputation among customers [15]. Virtually all company owners have utilized digital media to market their goods. To increase customer engagement through digital marketing, marketers must emphasize relationship-based interactions [16]. Marketing professionals have created strategies and techniques to connect with current consumers through the digital media where they spend their time. Because of this, a sizable quantity of scholarly study has been done on many topics, including search engine optimization, social media marketing, affiliate marketing, content marketing, video marketing, and many more [17]. Social media is transforming how companies sell themselves, creating new challenges as well as possibilities [18, 19]. The number of social media users in Africa increased annually in recent years, reaching over 380 million in 2022. North Africa was the region with the highest penetration, with almost 60 percent of the population actively using social media. At the same time, Facebook and WhatsApp were the favorite platforms in Africa's principal economies. In addition to social media, the African population performs various other activities online. For instance, the continent's e-commerce sector has grown strongly in recent years, also due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased demand for home deliveries [6].

Businesses may suffer from the improper use of digital marketing or from practitioners who lack the necessary skills [20]. As a result, companies need to develop their social media skills. Focus should be placed on how businesses may match their digital marketing strategies to their overarching business objectives [21]. Social media marketing may promote brand loyalty, consumer happiness, perceived value, co-creation, and positive attitude when done strategically [22, 23]. Moreover, social media has provided marketers with new ways to learn more about their audience through research into online communities, user-generated content, and electronic word-of-mouth interactions [24]. Several factors might affect the strategies and tactics used in digital marketing. For instance, several studies examined the effect of new legislation on digital marketing. Moreover, social media marketing research is starting to focus on emerging regions,

where there is a lower adoption rate of social media marketing than in industrialized nations [25].

V. SCARCE INTERNET INFRASTRUCTURE IN AFRICA

Although internet penetration and accessibility are increasing on the continent, a striking divide between African countries and regions is still evident. The internet penetration rate varies substantially across regions, from a peak of 66 percent in Southern Africa to a low of 24 percent in Central Africa. Significant gaps in internet access are also found within each region. In Northern Africa, over 80 percent of Moroccan households have internet access at home, compared to 60 percent in Egypt and only 14 percent in Mauritania. Moreover, gender gaps are still present at a country level. Benin, Tanzania, and Liberia showed a particularly critical situation, recording the largest differences between men's and women's internet access – to the disadvantage of the female population [6]. As traditional media is more reliable than social media platforms, several businesses in these emerging nations still rely on it for their product and service advertisements [26].

Despite some rapid progress in recent years, the internet and telecommunication infrastructure in Africa remains scarce and underdeveloped, mainly due to inadequate investments. Compared to most other world regions, fiber networks have a limited reach in Africa. In 2020, only 56 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population lived within 25 kilometers of an operational fiber optic network node. In the same year, the 4G technology had reached around 62 percent of African households. However, there were again great discrepancies across regions, with penetration rates varying from about 60 percent in West and East Africa to almost 90 percent in Northern Africa. Increasing mobile broadband coverage is a key challenge on a continent where most web traffic is generated by mobile phones [6].

VI. E-COMMERCE GROWTH IN AFRICA

Digital sales are the next horizon of business growth for all consumer facing businesses in Africa, but only a fraction of this potential has been tapped. With competition increasing daily, those players that can make digital a strategic priority and systematically build the digital function in their organizations are likely to pull ahead, whether they are digital natives or not. E-commerce in Africa has been rapidly expanding in recent years. Africa's online shoppers amounted to almost 390 million in 2022, rising from less than 140 million in 2017. Furthermore, e-commerce users on the continent were estimated to grow significantly in the coming years, reaching over 435 million by 2023 (Figure 1). In the last five years, the share of Africans who choose to buy goods and services online has more than doubled; that's about 10% of the entire population on the continent. And while this shift has largely been as a result of the pandemic, it's becoming clear that even as economies return to a semblance of 'normal', online sales are here to stay. The market opportunity for African businesses here is significant. Online sales in Africa are growing at around 25%, year-on-year, one of the highest rates in the world with more than 10 million people starting to buy online each year. Yet online sales in most organizations are only at the beginning of their growth trajectory. Additionally, the fintech industry also grew

together with the rising internet penetration. Indeed, online financial services have great growth potential on a continent where around half of the population is unbanked [6].

While bigger organizations have mostly prepared to take their sales and operations digital and have the necessary infrastructure in place to make this shift, few businesses have scaled digital sales as yet. We can see this in the numbers. In Europe, the digital sales landscape is so competitive that banks will pay, on average, about 25% of profit per client to attract a client. However, in Africa, competition is still low enough that banks can attract clients, spending no more than 10% of the profit on that client [2].

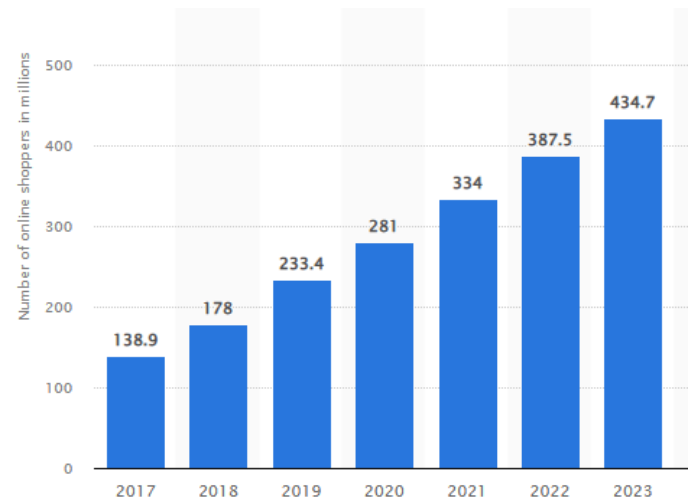


Fig 1. Number of e-commerce users in Africa 2017-2023.

Source; [6].

This growth was due to several factors, including demographic trends as well as the increasingly higher levels of internet penetration. On the continent, online retail generates the highest revenues in Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya. Jumia, Konga, takealot.com, and Kilimall are among the leading online marketplaces, all local websites. Founded in Nigeria in 2012, Jumia was the most popular e-commerce platform by number of visitors. The number of online shoppers in Africa is forecast to increase in the coming years to exceed 500 million by 2025 [6]. As of 2022, cash was the main payment method used in online retail in Egypt, and Nigeria, and South Africa, accounting for 67 percent, 66 percent, and 40 percent of the total, respectively. On the other hand, cash was not that prevalent in Kenya, where 44 percent of e-commerce payments occurred by card, and 19 percent by bank transfer. In Morocco, most digital buyers used card-based payments (37 percent) and bank transfer (26 percent).

The majority of the transactions in Africa occur in cash. Most countries on the continent rely significantly on cash, which is frequently used also in informal economies. Since credit cards are still not common in Africa, other payment methods are usually preferred. The same applies to online retail. When purchasing online, customers often use cash-on-delivery payments. Despite country-specific differences, cash remains the leading payment method in Africa. Nevertheless, the use of mobile money has been growing significantly in recent years. In 2019, Africa was the leading region by number of mobile money accounts worldwide. This payment method represents a huge potential for digital payments in a

continent where a limited share of the population owns a bank account.

VII. DIGITAL MARKETING, THE FUTURE OF COMMERCE

Today digital marketing has disrupted industries and changed the way businesses reached out to customers. The main difference between traditional and digital marketing is the latter's ability to track data about user behavior and campaign performance in real-time. Digital advertising has become one of the most indispensable marketing tools worldwide. But even though this new and dynamic form of advertising has experienced a considerable upswing in many parts of the world, the digital ad space is becoming more consolidated and competitive every year. Emerging technologies are transforming sustainable development across all sectors and industries. However, these constantly evolving technologies also carry the risk of widening the societal and economic gaps between those who are connected and those who are not. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that when one needs connectivity for education, for work and for health services, the importance of connectivity is further elevated [27].

Digital marketing deals primarily with business mathematics, where it is necessary to calculate how much each user action costs: a click, an application, or a sale. Once a business learns to measure key metrics, it becomes possible to efficiently manage channels and campaigns using these precise metrics. To build reliable analytics, organizations could consider building effective data tracking and storage systems and ensuring regular reporting that can give everyone involved a clear picture of digital sales status. It is equally important to build cross-functional teams that include analysts so all participants can access data at any time and use this effectively to leverage customer insights to drive further sales [2]. The main thing is to make digital a strategic priority for your business and then work towards consistently building a digital function in the organization, characterized by advanced market competencies and flexible methods of operation. This could allow you to attract the largest number of customers while achieving a good return on investment in marketing.

VIII. ENGAGE GLOBAL EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

Global advertising and social media platforms such as Google, Bing, and WhatsApp are disproportionately dominant across Africa, and tapping into the expertise of global specialists working with these channels will be key. For example, in South Africa, the share of search queries on Google is 94%, followed by Bing at 5.12%. Google dominates the search market in Nigeria and Kenya, too, at 98.6% and 97.7%, respectively, according to Global Web Index (GWI) digital marketing research for African countries. Among social media platforms, WhatsApp is the most popular for networking at 93.2% in South Africa, 93% in Nigeria, 96.5% in Kenya, 83.9% in Ghana, and 73.7% in Morocco, usually followed by Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Investing in developing proprietary teams of digital customer acquisition specialists that understand these channels is likely to be a key competitive edge. Fortunately, as remote working formats have become more common following the pandemic, recruiting global talent has become easier for African

organizations. This can be particularly important, given that there can be a lack of specialist talent in African countries [2].

IX. DIGITAL MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has propelled digital progress. Although there hasn't been much research on how digitalization might help to lessen the consequences of pandemics, new data is persuasive concerning its benefits. In response to COVID-19, 25% of the companies in sub-Saharan Africa accelerated the use of digital technology and boosted expenditures in digital solutions. The crisis has emphasized the critical need for ubiquitous digital access to guarantee that people can be contacted, that they can keep informed, and that they can work and communicate, even if digital change has also advanced in some regions of Africa. E-commerce purchase and delivery platforms (e.g. UNDP, in partnership with Jumia Uganda, has launched an online platform to enable small- and medium-sized businesses to connect with consumers. Moreover, Africa is well known as a leader in digital payments and the pandemic has had an important impact on the necessity and growth of digital payments [27].

Due to pandemic restrictions, people are increasingly purchasing online, which has made business owners more open to the phenomena. Due to the epidemic, digital marketing has significantly changed over the last several years. Although the presence was felt at the beginning of the decade, its necessity became unavoidable after 2015. With sales revenues anticipated to increase by millions of pesos, e-commerce platforms are anticipated to dominate these online shopping platforms. Online business transactions have already been converted by technology into an endless marketplace where maintaining a business has grown simpler and more efficient for both sellers and customers. COVID-19 epidemic had shown the value of internet buying [28]. One of the many benefits of an online business is its low-cost yet efficient capacity to draw customers throughout the day. The act of promoting and selling goods and services online using digital and virtual environments is known as online marketing.

The rapid development of digital media has made room for fresh avenues for advertising and promotion. This has caused the development of computerized promotion to proceed quickly, along with the introduction of devices that provide access to upgraded media. Web-based advertising, online showcasing, or web marketing are terms that are widely used to describe advanced marketing. Over time, especially in particular nations, the phrase "computerized promotion" has come to be widely accepted. Customers may visit promotional website pages using mobile devices thanks to flexible web marketing [29]. COVID-19 pandemic has pushed consumers and businesses alike to adopt digital services and technologies, thus accelerating digital transformation in consumer behavior and business activity by several years (Figure 2). In general, the pandemic has increased demand for digital reliance across the board, and this result is likely to remain in the "new normal" as the utility of more plentiful data and the continually declining cost of using that data influence how businesspeople, policymakers, and professionals make decisions. Yet, the pandemic is only one factor influencing present patterns. Other important factors are social well-being, ongoing economic growth, demographic changes, and climate responsibilities.

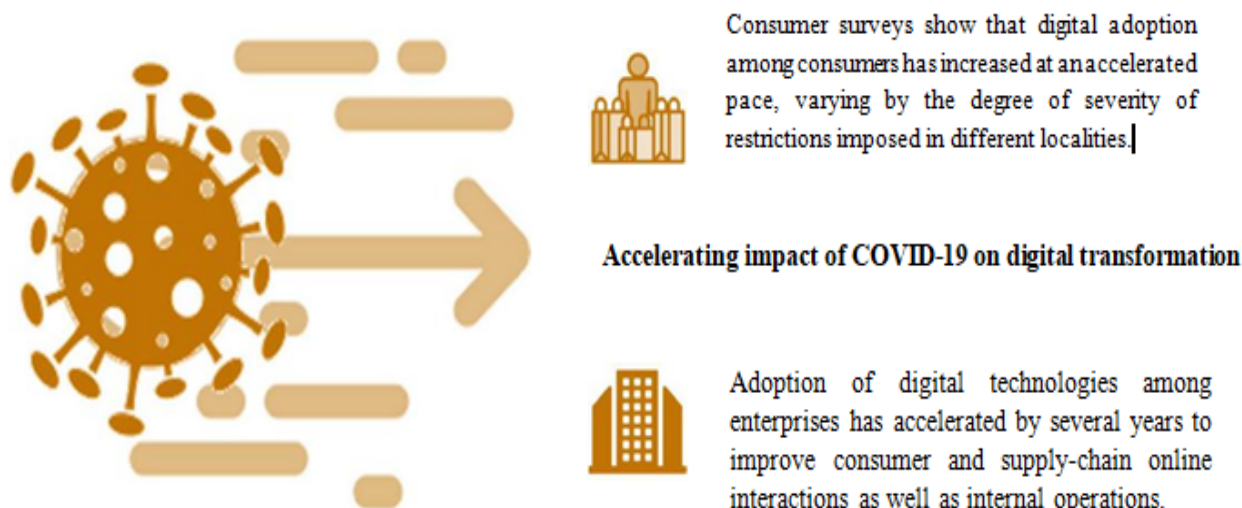


Fig 2: Accelerating the impact of COVID-19 on digital transformation [27].

While the COVID-19 pandemic had positive effects for digital development, it also caused a spike in demand and network congestion on both mobile and fixed networks as people shifted to working from home and using more online entertainment and educational resources, highlighting areas that need more attention. There were evidence of network stress in Africa and South America, including worse video quality, more traffic migrating to secondary content delivery network (CDN) sites and indirect links, and longer network round trips. According to the report, despite these problems, operators' actions (such adding capacity, reducing bandwidth, or capping video bitrates) and the ultimate stability of network traffic did enable networks to return to their pre-COVID-19 performance levels very soon [27].

X. PROBLEMS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing poses special challenges for its purveyors. The number of digital channels is growing quickly, so digital marketers need to stay on top of how each one operates, how users interact with it, and how best to utilize it to promote their goods and services. Furthermore, because recipients are being assaulted with more and more competing advertisements, it is getting harder to hold their attention. It may be difficult for digital marketers to understand the enormous amounts of data they collect and then use that data to inspire new marketing initiatives. The difficulty of efficiently obtaining and utilizing data emphasizes the need for a marketing strategy based on a profound understanding of customer behavior in digital marketing. Even though they are working largely through global channels, African businesses ignore the local context at their own peril, especially if they are looking to scale across the continent. Each African market has subtle differences in consumption and channel behavior, which need to be considered when planning digital marketing campaigns. The high concentration of internet and social media users, coupled with device penetration, makes it imperative to leverage paid and organic search, social, and display advertising as effective means to reach consumers.

XI. CONCLUSION

In most aspects of ICT infrastructure, access, and use, the African continent has continued to see modest development. Rapid advancement is mostly hampered by a lack of substantial and inexpensive connection. Traditional marketing and communication strategies have been replaced by digital ones. The gap in digital marketing abilities is influenced by social, cultural, religious, technological, and economic factors. Internet advertisements are getting more and more prevalent. It is possible to characterize how businesses see the advantages and objectives of digital marketing. Using the internet for marketing is known as online marketing. Digital marketing makes use of digital technology to provide marketing channels. The success of a firm depends on having a strong internet presence. Digital marketing communication has number of characteristics that make it the preferred communication alternative of modern era. The impact of digital marketing communication has been significant in categories like electronics, fashion, online music and games and many others. The world, with the increasing number of internet users, rural population joining the digital revolution, decreasing data prices, internet enabled cheap priced devices and overall enthusiasm around digital platforms, technology and devices; has put itself on the surging trend in terms of digital statistics. The COVID-19 epidemic has only made a number of issues worse, though. The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant influence on Africa, driving people to adopt digital services and technology (where access to the internet was accessible), quickening the digital transition, and shifting perceptions of cutting-edge network technologies like 5G. Due to a shift in people's behavior towards working from home and using more online resources for pleasure and education, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in demand and network congestion on both mobile and fixed networks, exposing areas that need greater attention. As the window of opportunity continues to open for digital sales on the continent, we can expect competition for banks, retail, telecoms, logistics, and more, to intensify in the race to develop their digital business and transfer of familiar services to the digital field. To pull

ahead, there are five key principles that African businesses could consider to develop a robust digital marketing function and claim their space at the vanguard of the digital sales frontier.

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