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Digital Marketing Strategies and Consumer Purchase Intentions in Nigerian Tech Start-Ups: A Moderated Mediation Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchase intentions among Nigerian tech start-ups using a moderated mediation approach. Specifically, it examined the effects of social media marketing, influencer marketing, online advertising, content marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO). Adopting a quantitative research design, data were collected from 336 consumers and digital marketing personnel of tech start-ups in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. Results revealed that social media marketing and influencer marketing had significant positive direct effects on purchase intention. Social media engagement significantly moderated the relationship between online advertising and purchase intention, while consumer trust mediated the relationships between content marketing, SEO, and purchase intention. These findings underscore the critical roles of engagement and trust in digital marketing effectiveness within an emerging market context. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from Nigeria's tech start-up ecosystem and offers a comprehensive moderated mediation model. Practically, it recommends that Nigerian tech start-ups adopt integrated digital strategies emphasizing interactive engagement and trust-building to enhance consumer purchase intentions and gain competitive advantage.

Keywords: Digital marketing strategies; Consumer purchase intention; Social media marketing; Influencer marketing; Consumer trust; Social media engagement; Nigerian tech start-ups.

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has transformed how businesses communicate, market, and engage with consumers. Over the past decade, digital marketing has emerged as a dominant strategic tool that enables firms to reach global audiences, personalize content, and enhance consumer experiences in real time. Studies show that firms using social media marketing, influencer partnerships, online advertising, content marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) can improve consumer engagement, brand relationships, and purchase-related outcomes compared with firms that rely only on traditional media (Appel et al., 2020; Bresciani et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Digital campaigns increasingly incorporate user-generated content, including reviews, testimonials, and consumer-created videos, because such content can strengthen authenticity, social proof, and consumer confidence in online brand communications (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Phua et al., 2017). The transition to data-driven marketing has also been facilitated by digital platforms that enable firms to track interactions, tailor communication, and improve the relevance of customer engagement activities (Appel et al., 2020; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

In emerging economies, digital marketing has gained traction as both a growth enabler and an innovation driver, helping small and medium enterprises compete more effectively in the global market. However, the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies is not uniform across markets because technological readiness, platform use, consumer trust, and the quality of firm-level implementation influence customer responses (Sharma, 2024; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Consumers frequently rely on social proof, perceived credibility, and opinion leaders when evaluating online brand communications and purchase options. Consequently, trusted influencers, credible branded content, and peer recommendations can shape consumer attitudes, trust, and purchase intentions in digital environments (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Phua et al., 2017). Research increasingly highlights that digital marketing outcomes are influenced by mediating and moderating factors, such as consumer trust, social media engagement, and perceived value of online content (Khan *et al.,* 2024).

Within Nigeria, the rapid rise of technology-driven start-ups has redefined the business landscape, positioning the country as a major player in Africa's digital economy. Nigerian tech start-ups operating in fintech, e-commerce, logistics, and digital services increasingly depend on digital platforms to reach customers, build visibility, and support firm performance (Muhammad et al., 2025; Usman & Sun, 2023). Beyond conventional celebrity endorsement, firms can use micro-influencers whose relatively close relationships with followers may strengthen perceived authenticity, message credibility, and consumer trust (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). User-generated content can also reinforce credibility and community participation by making brand communications appear more transparent and socially validated (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Phua et al., 2017). Nevertheless, digital marketing outcomes can remain inconsistent where firms have limited digital capability, weak strategic implementation, inadequate customer analytics, or difficulty establishing consumer trust (Sharma, 2024; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Within Nigeria's innovation hubs, including Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, such constraints may limit the ability of start-ups to translate online visibility into consumer purchase intention. While some start-ups have achieved significant traction through social media engagement, micro-influencer collaborations, and user-generated content, others struggle to convert digital visibility into actual consumer purchases. These disparities suggest that the relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase intention in Nigeria is complex and conditioned by contextual, cultural, and engagement-related factors.

Existing research indicates that digital and social-media marketing activities can enhance brand engagement, customer loyalty, and purchase-related intentions (Koay et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). However, research focused specifically on Nigerian tech start-ups remains limited in scope and methodological sophistication. Moreover, the present study focuses on consumer purchase intention rather than actual purchase behaviour. Although purchase intention is a recognised antecedent of consumer behaviour, actual purchasing may still be influenced by economic, situational, technological, and psychological constraints (Ajzen, 1991; Hajli, 2015).

Acknowledging this limitation, the present study does not claim to measure realized buying behaviour; rather, it provides a necessary analytical foundation for understanding the psychological and engagement-driven mechanisms that precede actual purchases.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide an in-depth examination of how specific digital marketing strategies social media marketing, influencer marketing, online advertising, content marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) influence consumer purchase intentions among Nigerian tech start-ups. It further investigates the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating influence of social media engagement in shaping these relationships. By doing so, the study lays the groundwork for future research that can extend the model to examine actual purchase behaviour, longitudinal effects, and post-purchase outcomes, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of digital consumer behaviour in Nigeria's evolving digital marketplace.

Problem Statement

The statement of the problem centers on the inability of many Nigerian tech start-ups to effectively convert digital marketing activities into meaningful consumer purchase intentions despite the widespread adoption of strategies such as social media marketing, influencer marketing, online advertising, content marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO). Although these firms increasingly utilize digital platforms to enhance visibility and customer engagement, they may still experience weak consumer trust, inconsistent purchase intentions, and low conversion rates where marketing activities are poorly integrated, customer analytics are

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inadequate, and trust-building is not strategically prioritized (McKnight et al., 2002; Sharma, 2024; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Existing research further indicates that consumer trust and social-media engagement are important behavioural mechanisms through which digital marketing activities influence consumer responses and purchase intention (Hajli, 2015; Koay et al., 2021; Voorveld et al., 2018). Contextual challenges, including uneven digital capability, infrastructure limitations, and economic instability, may further reduce the ability of firms to sustain effective digital engagement and competitiveness within Nigeria's evolving digital economy. Furthermore, there remains a significant empirical gap in Nigerian and Sub-Saharan African literature regarding the combined mediating role of consumer trust and moderating role of social media engagement in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase intention, thereby justifying the need for this study.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase intentions in Nigerian tech start-ups: a moderated mediation approach

Specific objectives of the study are to:

i. examine the effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention in Nigerian tech start-ups.
ii. determine the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intention among customers of Nigerian tech start-ups.
iii. assess the moderated effect of social media engagement in a relationship between online advertising and consumer purchase intention.
iv. examine the mediated effect of consumer trust and perceived value in the relationship between content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) and consumer purchase intention.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. **H01:** Social media marketing has no significant effect on consumer purchase intention in Nigerian tech start-ups.

2. **H02:** Influencer marketing has no significant impact on consumer purchase intention among customers of Nigerian tech start-ups.

3. **H03:** Social media engagement does not significantly moderate the relationship between online advertising and consumer purchase intention in Nigerian tech start-ups.

4. **H04:** Consumer trust and perceived value do not significantly mediate the relationship between content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and consumer purchase intention in Nigerian tech start-ups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Digital marketing represents a paradigm shift from traditional marketing practices to a more interactive, measurable, and technology-driven form of communication between businesses and consumers. It encompasses online techniques such as social media marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing, online advertising, and search engine optimization (SEO), which are used to shape consumer perceptions, engagement, and purchase intentions (Appel et al., 2020; Bresciani et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). For tech start-ups, digital marketing provides a relatively cost-effective means of brand positioning, lead generation, customer engagement, and retention in a competitive digital economy (Sharma, 2024; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

Social media marketing has emerged as one of the most dominant forms of digital promotion. It utilizes platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to foster brand-consumer relationships through targeted content, interactivity, and community building. Research shows that interactive posts, visual content, and real-time communication can strengthen brand engagement, perceived authenticity, and consumer purchase intention (Koay et al., 2021; Voorveld et al., 2018; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). In Nigeria's tech ecosystem, start-ups use social media marketing not only for brand awareness but also for feedback collection, customer support, and crowd-based product innovation.

Influencer marketing involves using the credibility, expertise, and social reach of digital content creators to promote brands and products. Influencers can function as opinion leaders whose communications reduce perceived risk, strengthen consumer trust, and shape purchase intention, particularly where followers perceive a strong fit between the influencer, the message, and the promoted brand (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on authenticity, source credibility, audience relevance, transparency, and the perceived sincerity of the endorsement. In the Nigerian context, influencer marketing may be particularly useful to tech start-ups seeking to establish legitimacy and build trust within competitive online markets.

Online advertising refers to paid digital campaigns delivered through search engines, display networks, or video platforms. Although online advertisements can increase visibility, their influence on purchase intention depends on message relevance, targeting accuracy, platform characteristics, and the extent to which users engage with the advertisement (Voorveld et al., 2018). Irrelevant or excessive advertising may produce avoidance and fatigue, whereas relevant and engaging advertising can improve brand recall and consumer response (Appel et al., 2020; Voorveld et al., 2018). Start-ups with limited budgets often rely on cost-per-click or pay-per-impression models, yet struggle to convert impressions into actual sales due to weak analytics and low personalization strategies.

Content marketing and search engine optimization (SEO) are complementary digital strategies focused on creating valuable, relevant, and consistent content while improving a firm's visibility in online search environments. For start-ups, useful content such as educational articles, product demonstrations, guides, and explanatory videos can support credibility, encourage interaction, and reduce consumer uncertainty (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Consumer trust serves as a mediating mechanism because consumers are more likely to develop purchase intentions when they perceive an online vendor or brand as reliable, competent, and trustworthy (Hajli, 2015; McKnight et al., 2002). Social media engagement, reflected in interactions such as comments, shares, reactions, and discussions, can strengthen the influence of digital marketing communications by increasing consumer involvement and exposure to social proof (Koay et al., 2021; Voorveld et al., 2018). The study therefore integrates trust and social-media engagement into a moderated mediation framework to explain how and when digital marketing strategies shape purchase intention among Nigerian tech-start-up consumers.

Across all these strategies, consumer trust and social media engagement remain central constructs in determining digital marketing success. Consumer trust acts as a mediator a psychological bridge between exposure to marketing stimuli and behavioural response. When consumers trust a brand, they are more likely to translate intention into purchase behaviour (Hussain *et al*., 2021). Social media engagement, on the other hand, serves as a moderator that amplifies or diminishes the influence of digital marketing strategies. High engagement measured through likes, shares, comments, and discussions strengthens the persuasive impact of marketing messages (Wijaya *et al.,* 2024). Therefore, this study integrates these two constructs into a moderated mediation framework to provide a deeper understanding of how and when digital marketing strategies drive purchase intention in Nigerian tech start-ups.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on two complementary theories the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explain the mechanisms linking digital marketing strategies to consumer purchase intentions. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) posits that an individual's adoption of technology is determined by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Within digital marketing, these constructs explain why consumers interact with online advertising and social-media campaigns: they are more likely to use digital channels when they perceive them as useful, easy to use, convenient, and beneficial (Davis, 1989; Sharma, 2024). Digital transformation and technology adoption can also support improved customer interaction and marketing innovation when firms deploy relevant digital capabilities effectively (Bresciani et al., 2021; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). In the Nigerian tech start-up context, TAM helps to explain why consumers respond positively to digital messages that simplify decision-making or demonstrate clear value propositions.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) complements TAM by explaining how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively shape behavioural intentions. Digital marketing strategies may influence attitudes through relevant and persuasive content, shape subjective norms through social proof and influencer endorsement, and enhance perceived behavioural control by making product information and purchase processes easier to access (Ajzen, 1991; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019).When consumers perceive digital channels as trustworthy, socially validated, and easy to use, their purchase intention strengthens.

Together, TAM and TPB provide the conceptual grounding for a moderated mediation model in which digital marketing strategies influence consumer purchase intentions indirectly through consumer trust (mediation) and conditionally through social media engagement (moderation). This theoretical integration allows the study to capture the complexity of digital consumer behaviour within Nigeria’s evolving start-up ecosystem, offering both explanatory and predictive insights.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined relationships between digital marketing activities and consumer purchase-related outcomes. Yadav and Rahman (2017) developed and validated measures of consumer perceptions of social-media marketing activities in e-commerce, while Yadav and Rahman (2018) found that social-media marketing can strengthen customer loyalty. Koay et al. (2021) further demonstrated that perceived social-media marketing activities influence consumer-based brand equity and consumer responses. In the context of start-ups and smaller firms, Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) identified the importance of digital-channel usage in small and medium-sized enterprises, whereas Bresciani et al. (2021) showed that digital transformation can stimulate product, process, and business-model innovation. Sharma (2024) also provides evidence on digital marketing adoption among start-up companies through the Technology Acceptance Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour framework. These studies suggest that the effectiveness of digital strategies depends not only on their adoption but also on the quality of engagement, technological capability, and strategic implementation.

In the start-up environment, Chakraborti, *et al.,* (2022) observed that resistance to digital marketing adoption among small firms often arises from limited digital literacy, poor analytics capability, and weak strategic orientation. Conversely, Harb and Al Khasawneh (2024) demonstrated that social media marketing adoption significantly improves customer satisfaction and firm performance among small and medium enterprises, while Bruce *et al.* (2025) further showed that social media usage enhances start-up performance through the mediating role of brand image. These findings suggest that the success of digital strategies in start-ups depends not only on usage but also on the quality of engagement and brand positioning.

Beyond direct effects, research identifies trust and engagement as important mechanisms linking digital marketing to consumer behaviour. Hajli (2015) found that social-commerce constructs can influence consumers’ intention to buy, while McKnight et al. (2002) established validated dimensions of trust that are central to e-commerce decision-making. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer message value and credibility shape consumer trust in branded social-media content. In addition, Voorveld et al. (2018) demonstrated that engagement with social media and social-media advertising differs by platform type, while Koay et al. (2021) highlighted the role of consumer perceptions of social-media marketing activities in shaping brand-related outcomes. Although these studies offer important insights, fewer studies have simultaneously examined consumer trust as a mediator and social-media engagement as a moderator in the relationship between multiple digital marketing strategies and consumer purchase intention among Nigerian tech start-ups. This gap supports the development of a context-sensitive moderated mediation model.

However, most existing studies have been conducted in developed or Asian economies, leaving a geographical gap in Sub-Saharan Africa. Usman and Sun (2023) noted that while digital platform strategy moderates start-up performance globally, local consumer behaviour, infrastructural limitations, and cultural contexts significantly shape digital marketing effectiveness in countries like Nigeria. Despite this, few empirical studies have employed an integrated moderated mediation approach that simultaneously considers the mediating role of consumer trust and the moderating role of social media engagement in the digital marketing purchase intention relationship. This underscores the need for a context sensitive model tailored to Nigeria's emerging digital economy and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative research design utilizing a descriptive and explanatory survey approach. This facilitated the collection of quantifiable data from a defined population and the examination of relationships among variables. The explanatory component supported the testing of causal and interaction effects involving digital marketing strategies, consumer trust, social media engagement, and consumer purchase intention. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data at a single point in time, thereby providing a snapshot of the relationships among the study variables. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) were used to analyze the moderated mediation model because of their suitability for examining complex mediation and moderation effects (Awuor et al., 2023; Bruce et al., 2025).

The study was conducted in Nigeria, focusing on tech start-ups located in major innovation hubs namely Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. These hubs represented the largest concentration of tech ventures within Nigeria's digital economy, including fintech, e-commerce, logistics, software, and digital service firms. The selected locations provided a dynamic environment characterized by high digital penetration and a diverse consumer base suitable for assessing the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchase intention (Sharma et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2025).

The target population comprised consumers and digital marketing personnel within Nigerian tech start-ups. This captured both consumer perception-based and organizational perspectives regarding digital marketing effectiveness. According to National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA, 2024), Nigeria hosts over 500 registered tech start-ups employing approximately 15,000 workers and serving millions of digital consumers. The study population included consumers who had engaged with or purchased from Nigerian tech start-ups through digital platforms such as websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms, as well as digital marketing personnel responsible for managing marketing strategies and campaigns within selected firms.

A multistage sampling technique was adopted for the study. In the first stage, Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt were purposively selected because of their high concentration of technology start-ups. In the second stage, the selected start-ups were stratified according to sectors such as fintech, e-commerce, and digital services. In the third stage, systematic random sampling was used to select firms within each stratum, after which consumers were randomly selected. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula:

formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence),
- $p = 0.5$ (population proportion estimate),
- $q = 1 - p$,

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- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error).

The computation produced an estimated sample size of 384 respondents, which was adjusted to 420 respondents to account for non-response and proportionally distributed across firms and consumers.

Data collection involved both physical and online survey administration. Physical questionnaires were administered to employees of tech start-ups located in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, while online surveys were distributed through Google Forms and email platforms to Nigerian digital consumers. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and ethical principles such as voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the study.

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and SmartPLS software packages. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to analyze demographic data. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables, while multiple regression analysis was employed to test the direct effects of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchase intention. Mediation analysis was carried out to examine the indirect effect of consumer trust, whereas moderation analysis tested the interaction effect of social media engagement. Furthermore, moderated mediation analysis was performed using Hayes PROCESS Macro Model 14 to simultaneously examine mediation and moderation paths. This analytical approach aligned with existing literature on digital marketing behaviour models (Li et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed to consumers and digital marketing personnel of selected Nigerian tech start-ups located in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. Out of these, 336 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 79.97%, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalization of findings. The high response rate indicated strong participation and improved the reliability of the study findings.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	192	57.1
	Female	144	42.9
	Total	**336**	**100.0**
Age Category	18–25 years	81	24.1
	26–35 years	153	45.5
	36–45 years	71	21.1
	46 years and above	31	9.2
	Total	**336**	**100.0**
Educational Qualification	Diploma/NCE	49	14.6
	Bachelor’s Degree	179	53.3
	Master’s Degree	83	24.7
	Doctorate Degree	25	7.4
	Total	**336**	**100.0**
Frequency of Online Purchases	Rarely	41	12.2
	Occasionally	85	25.3
	Frequently	146	43.5
	Very Frequently	64	19.0
	Total	**336**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results showed that male respondents constituted the majority (57.1%), while females accounted for 42.9%, indicating relatively balanced gender participation in the study. The majority of respondents were between 26–35 years (45.5%), suggesting that digitally active young adults dominated engagement with Nigerian tech start-ups. Most respondents possessed at least a bachelor's degree (53.3%), implying a relatively educated consumer and workforce population. A significant proportion of respondents frequently engaged in online purchases (43.5%), reflecting high digital consumption behaviour.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social Media Marketing	4.12	0.73	1							
2. Influencer Marketing	3.98	0.81	.612**	1						
3. Online Advertising	3.87	0.77	.541**	.503**	1					
4. Content Marketing	4.06	0.69	.648**	.596**	.522**	1				
5. SEO	3.91	0.75	.510**	.468**	.594**	.627**	1			
6. Consumer Trust	4.01	0.71	.682**	.591**	.517**	.701**	.655**	1		
7. Social Media Engagement	4.15	0.66	.711**	.603**	.628**	.594**	.548**	.639**	1	
8. Purchase Intention	4.22	0.72	.734**	.681**	.603**	.716**	.669**	.758**	.702**	1

$p < 0.01$

The descriptive statistics showed high mean scores across all constructs, indicating favorable perceptions toward digital marketing strategies among respondents. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all variables. Consumer purchase intention exhibited the strongest correlation with consumer trust ($r = .758$, $p < 0.01$), followed by social media marketing ($r = .734$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that trust and interactive digital communication are critical drivers of consumer behavioural intention.

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 3: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Marketing	5	0.742–0.861	0.887	0.912	0.675
Influencer Marketing	4	0.718–0.844	0.861	0.899	0.643
Online Advertising	4	0.731–0.857	0.853	0.891	0.651
Content Marketing	5	0.752–0.883	0.901	0.926	0.714
SEO	4	0.721–0.848	0.869	0.903	0.668
Consumer Trust	5	0.771–0.891	0.913	0.934	0.742
Social Media Engagement	4	0.748–0.872	0.881	0.914	0.690
Purchase Intention	5	0.764–0.903	0.918	0.939	0.756

The factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming indicator reliability. Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values were above 0.70, demonstrating internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity.

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	SMM	IM	OA	CM	SEO	CT	SME	PI
Social Media Marketing	0.821							
Influencer Marketing	0.612	0.802						

Online Advertising	0.541	0.503	0.807					
Content Marketing	0.648	0.596	0.522	0.845				
SEO	0.510	0.468	0.594	0.627	0.817			
Consumer Trust	0.682	0.591	0.517	0.701	0.655	0.861		
Social Media Engagement	0.711	0.603	0.628	0.594	0.548	0.639	0.831	
Purchase Intention	0.734	0.681	0.603	0.716	0.669	0.758	0.702	0.869

The square roots of the AVEs were greater than the inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Table 5: Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H01	SMM → PI	0.381	7.842	0.000	Rejected
H02	IM → PI	0.294	5.916	0.000	Rejected
H03	OA × SME → PI	0.227	4.631	0.000	Rejected
H04	CM/SEO → CT → PI	0.312	6.403	0.000	Rejected

The structural model results indicated that social media marketing significantly influenced consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.381$, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, influencer marketing exerted a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.05$). The interaction between online advertising and social media engagement significantly predicted purchase intention, confirming the moderating effect of social media engagement. Furthermore, consumer trust significantly mediated the relationship between content marketing, SEO, and purchase intention.

Table 6: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value
SRMR	< 0.08	0.054
NFI	> 0.90	0.931
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.049
Chi-square/df	< 3.0	2.117

The model fit indices demonstrated acceptable model adequacy and supported the robustness of the structural model.

Moderation Analysis

Table 7: Moderation Effect of Social Media Engagement

Variable	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Online Advertising	0.284	0.041	6.927	0.000
Social Media Engagement	0.318	0.046	6.854	0.000
OA × SME Interaction	0.227	0.049	4.631	0.000

The moderation analysis revealed that social media engagement significantly strengthened the relationship between online advertising and consumer purchase intention. Specifically, higher levels of social media engagement amplified the effectiveness of online advertising campaigns in influencing consumer behavioural responses. This finding suggests that active engagement through comments, shares, likes, and digital interactions increases the persuasive impact of online advertisements.

Mediation Analysis

Table 8: Mediation Analysis Results

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Decision
CM → CT → PI	0.214	0.176	0.390	0.102	0.241	Significant
SEO → CT → PI	0.189	0.136	0.325	0.084	0.212	Significant

The mediation analysis demonstrated that consumer trust significantly mediated the relationships between content marketing, SEO, and consumer purchase intention because the bootstrapped confidence intervals did not include zero. The findings indicated that content marketing and SEO enhanced purchase intention indirectly through increased consumer trust. This result is consistent with trust-based explanations of online consumer behaviour, which propose that consumers are more likely to form favourable purchase intentions when digital interactions and vendor information create perceptions of reliability, competence, and integrity (Hajli, 2015; McKnight et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital marketing strategies significantly influence consumer purchase intentions among Nigerian tech start-ups. Specifically, social media marketing and influencer marketing were found to exert strong positive effects on purchase intention, while online advertising becomes more effective when reinforced by active social media engagement. Furthermore, the study established that consumer trust plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and purchase intention, indicating that credibility and perceived value are central to converting digital interactions into actual buying interest. The findings underscore the importance of an integrated digital marketing approach that combines engagement, trust-building, and strategic content delivery to enhance consumer responsiveness in the competitive tech start-up ecosystem .

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Nigerian tech start-ups should prioritize investment in social media marketing by creating interactive and engaging content that encourages user participation, as this significantly enhances consumer purchase intentions.

2. Firms should strategically collaborate with credible influencers whose audience aligns with their target market to improve brand visibility and trust, thereby increasing the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.

3. Start-ups should design online advertising campaigns that actively stimulate social media engagement (likes, shares, comments), as engagement strengthens the impact of advertising on consumer behaviour.

4. Management should focus on building consumer trust through high-quality content marketing and effective SEO practices that enhance transparency, credibility, and visibility, ultimately driving purchase intention.

Limitations

This study is limited by its cross-sectional research design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among the study variables. The data were collected at a single point in time, making it difficult to capture changes in consumer behaviour and digital marketing effectiveness over time. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to provide deeper insights into how digital marketing strategies influence purchase intention across different time periods. Because the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time, the observed relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than definitive evidence of causal effects

Additionally, the study focused primarily on selected digital marketing variables within Nigerian tech start-ups, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or geographical contexts. Other relevant factors such as cultural influences, economic conditions, and technological infrastructure were not extensively examined. Future research should incorporate a broader range of variables and comparative studies across industries or countries to enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings.

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