

# Social Media Marketing and Customer Acquisition: Evidence from Professional Services SMEs in Windhoek, Namibia

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**Abstract:** In today's digital economy, marketing through social media platforms has become essential for business visibility, client engagement, and growth. This study examined the effect of social media marketing on customer acquisition among professional services SMEs in Windhoek, Namibia. A qualitative research design was adopted to gain in-depth insights into SME experiences and perceptions. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 key informants, including business owners, managers, and marketing officers representing various professional services such as accounting, consultancy, and legal firms. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes emerging from the responses. The findings revealed that social media marketing has fundamentally transformed how SMEs attract and engage clients, enhancing visibility, credibility, and client interaction. Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were the most used platforms, while limited budgets, insufficient digital skills, and inconsistent internet connectivity were major barriers to effective implementation. Nonetheless, these challenges encouraged innovation, with SMEs adopting low-cost strategies and learning to use analytics for improved marketing decisions. The study recommends that SMEs integrate digital marketing into their core business strategies, invest in capacity-building for staff, and adopt a balanced approach between organic and paid advertising. Policymakers should also facilitate affordable internet access and provide targeted digital literacy programmes to strengthen SME competitiveness in Namibia's growing digital marketplace.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Marketing, Customer, Acquisition, SME

## I. Introduction

Digital transformation has essentially changed how businesses interact with their customers, how they create value and how they remain competitive. One of the best innovations is in the field of digital marketing that has been identified as an effective and affordable method of product and service advertisement in various markets. Broadly speaking, digital marketing refers to the application of internet-enabled platforms, tools and tactics such as social media, websites, search engines and email messages to access, communicate and convert target audiences (Omar et al., 2020).

Digital marketing offers businesses opportunities to reach clients in a manner never achieved, through its ability to engage clients in real-time with resources that are resource-intensive and location-limited, as well as customise campaigns, and precisely measure the performance effects. In the case of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially those in professional services such as law, consultancy, accounting, and healthcare, digital marketing is increasingly regarded as a necessary tool to be seen, build a reputation, and develop in a highly competitive world (Deku, Wang & Preko, 2024).

Even SMEs are a very important part of any national economies, particularly those in the developing world. They are organizations that have small amount of capital input, small number of workers, and have smaller scale of operation compared to big companies. SMEs are well known in Namibia as job creators, innovators, and socio-economic development drivers. Professional services SMEs hold a special position within this category, since the services provided by these organizations depend more on trust, credibility, and reputation, than on concrete goods (Shehu, 2018).

Digital marketing refers to the strategic exploitation of online platforms to achieve brand recognition, customer interaction and market development; and professional services SMEs, which are small and medium enterprises in Namibia providing products based on knowledge, including consulting, accounting, health, legal and similar expertise. The relationship

between digital marketing and the performance and sustainability of these businesses is of both academic and practical value, as they form part of the economic and social environment of Namibia in general (Scheers, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

However, in the face of extensive documentation of the benefits of digital marketing globally and regionally despite the uptake and implementation of effective digital marketing among the professional services SMEs in Namibia is observed as significant challenge. Although they could capitalize on the potential of electronic instruments to become more visible and to improve relationships with their clients and be more competitive, the fact is that Namibian SMEs have a lack of financial resources, outdated technological infrastructure and low digital literacy. Namibian SMEs are becoming more aware of the benefits of social media marketing however their use of SMME prior to COVID-19 in 2020 were informal, unstructured and ad hoc (Shehu, 2018). As a result, these businesses could not leverage digital platforms to its fullest capability to build lifelong customer engagement. Namibian SMEs were actively using Facebook, email and instant messaging in communication to clients, they, however, were not consolidating these in correlated strategies (Scheers, 2018). The use of ad hoc and low-cost strategies precluded the SMEs from capitalizing on the opportunity to gain market share and thus grow further. Mdluli (2022) on branding in Eswatini are that SMEs cannot fully make use of the prospects provided by digital platforms in an environment where there is no establishment of routine branding practices and formalised emblem actions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of digital marketing on professional services small and medium enterprises in Windhoek Namibia.

#### **Research Objectives**

To examine the impact of digital marketing on the growth and performance of professional services small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Windhoek.

To assess the extent to which professional services SMEs in Windhoek utilise different digital marketing tools and platforms.

To explore the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing digital marketing strategies within professional services SMEs in Windhoek.

#### **Empirical Literature**

The impact of digital marketing on professional services of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The digital marketing has radically changed the business operations of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in the professional services industry where visibility, reputation, and relationship with the clients are critical to the competitiveness of the business. Research in Namibia including Shehu (2018) shows that the use of social media in SMEs has changed the informal use to a more formal connection, which boosts the client interaction and confidence in the brand. Nonetheless, Scheers (2018) notes that even though Facebook, email, and instant messaging platforms have become used widely, they are not always linked to larger strategic purposes, which restricts their potential effects on growth and acquisition of customers.

In Africa, there is a similar trend recorded. In Eswatini, Mdluli (2022) determined that branding and competitiveness of service-based SMEs relies heavily on their strong digital presence. Studies conducted in Kenya by Olonde (2017) and Ngochi and Kihara (2019) revealed that digital marketing leads to enhancing sales and expansion of market share, whereas Kasimu (2017) reported that SMEs with a well-planned digital marketing strategy prevail over others, who use traditional marketing strategies. These results are indicative that the systematic implementation of digital marketing improves sales, competitiveness, and brand visibility, which are implications that are of great interest to professional service SMEs in Windhoek.

In other regions other than Africa, emerging market research reflects the same results. Junaidi (2020) defined that search engine optimisation and digital advertisement are the most effective methods to promote e-service sales, and Deku, Wang, and Preko (2024) set that digital marketing is an effective approach to customer acquisition and profitability without a huge investment. On the same note, Omar et al. (2020) and Umar, Sugiharto, and Hartanto (2020) emphasize that digital marketing training helps the SMEs develop focused campaigns and better communicate, thus enhancing performance and

competitiveness. Together, all these studies underline the fact that digital competence and capacity building are key to the success of SMEs in professional services.

Digital marketing helps in branding and long term sustainability as well. According to Mdluli (2022), credibility and reputation are essential when providing professional services, and the notion of digital tools and branding strategies create a feeling of trust and long-term development. Luko and Havolli (2024) suggest that digital marketing can allow SMEs to diversify their products, lower the cost of marketing, and enhance the decision-making process using data analytics. Furthermore, the literature by Oklander et al. (2024) and Remmang et al. (2024) demonstrates that digital tools contribute to the resilience of SMEs in times of crisis and their ability to stay in touch with customers and sustain operations during emergency situations, like war or economic disruption.

Reputation and trust play an important role in the employment of law, consultancy, accounting, and healthcare fields. Such platforms as LinkedIn offer the visibility and chances to be a thought leader (Nuseir, 2018). In Nigeria, Gbandi and Iyamu (2022) observed that social media marketing created a sense of credibility when directly interacting with the consumer, whereas Salhab (2024) attributed the enhancement of innovation, customer service, and profitability to digital marketing. Additional research by Ufondu et al. (2025), Kithinji (2014), and Rao and Rajeswari (2020) also emphasize that marketing in the digital field through SEO, e-mail, and online advertising can save marketing expenses, increase coverage and inclusive business development.

Irrespective of these benefits, there are contextual issues in Namibia. According to Shehu (2018) and Scheers (2018) SMEs in Windhoek tend to use digital tools during strategic planning inconsistently which restricts their effectiveness. Besides, infrastructural barriers like the inability to access internet, low digital literacy, and access to finances, are barriers to full use of digital marketing. Therefore, though digital marketing has a huge potential in the career of SMEs in the field of professional services in Windhoek, it has to rely on a formalized approach, digital skills training, and support infrastructures to realize the potential.

#### **The extent to which professional services SMEs utilise various digital marketing tools and platforms.**

The adoption of digital marketing devices and platforms by SMEs in the professional services sector has been a topic of focus in recent studies in line with the growing importance of digitalisation in the current business landscape. Shehu (2018) discovered that in Namibia, despite the awareness of the importance of social media marketing, SMEs do not have strategies, which limits the success of their promotions. The most frequently used systems were Facebook and WhatsApp since they were cheap and accessible. Likewise, Scheers (2018) has indicated that Namibian SMEs used the cheap feature of communication tools including email, mobile messaging, and Facebook regularly but had little or no experience with sophisticated tools such as LinkedIn or Instagram. This shows that professional services SMEs in Windhoek are using the digital tools but in a very informal way and only to the platforms that are readily available.

Other similar trends have been detected in Africa. In Eswatini, Mdluli (2022) noted that SMEs in professional services usually rely on Facebook and Twitter to brand and be visible and not advanced customer interaction. In Kenya, Olonde (2017) and Ngochi and Kihara (2019) determined that social media and websites were widely used as promotion tools, but less commonly, such tools as search engine optimisation (SEO), Google Ads, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems were used because of costs and lack of skills. These researches suggest that free or cheap digital marketing tools are more popular among SMEs in sub-Saharan Africa, and there is little usage of sophisticated or expensive advertising techniques.

The research evidence all over the world confirms that although most SMEs are starting with the social media as an entry point, more success is experienced in diversified digital strategies. As Junaidi (2020) revealed, investment in the sphere of SEO and online advertisement would be more beneficial, whereas Deku, Wang and Preko (2024) proved that SMEs that had greater digital presence, including websites and email marketing, showed better customer acquisition results. Equally, Omar et al. (2020) established that a combination of digital strategies, which included social media, websites, and email campaigns, enhanced the performance of the whole business. The findings in this document create a case to support the need of professional service SMEs in Windhoek to go beyond social media and use various platforms to access larger audiences.

Trend platform-specific differences can also display changes toward credibility-building and professional networking tools. Nuseir (2018) emphasized the importance of LinkedIn to consultants and legal practitioners in the UAE as a place of knowledge sharing and networking with clients. Similarly, Gbandi and Iyamu (2022) and Salhab (2024) have stated that SMEs that used LinkedIn, websites, and Twitter had higher rates of brand loyalty and client relations compared to those

who used Facebook or Instagram only. The professional adoption of such platforms may increase credibility and trust among clients in the case of Windhoek based SMEs.

Email marketing and SEO are also important tools since they are cost-effective and high-impact tools. Research by Ufondu et al. (2025), Kithinji (2014), and Rao and Rajeswari (2020) found that a combination of websites, SEO, and email marketing makes customers loyal, repeat business, and inclusive to grow. Nevertheless, more sophisticated solutions such as paid advertising and analytics are not fully used because of the lack of technical skills and digital competency (Umar et al., 2020; Remmang et al., 2024).

The capacity-building and training are therefore key predictors of tool use. Umar et al. (2020) and Deku et al. (2024) had discovered that those SMEs that had formal training in digital marketing embraced a wider scope of tools, such as analytics and integrated campaigns. The scope of such training is limited in Namibia where professional services SMEs are likely to depend on simple and low-cost solutions. However, research by Loku and Havolli (2024) and Sareen and Rani (2024) declares that multi-platform approaches that integrate social media, email, websites and SEO are always better in terms of their performance, customer interaction, and competitive edge.

All in all, it can be concluded that the empirical evidence indicates that as much as professional services SMEs in Windhoek have started adopting digital tools, the adoption is on a small scale and cost-based. Going beyond simple usage of social media by means of strategic diversification, training and acquisition of more sophisticated tools such as SEO, web pages and analytics has enormous potential in terms of improving their online marketing performance and customer acquisition results.

**The challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of digital marketing strategies within professional services SMEs.**

There are great opportunities as well as challenges of digital marketing practices by professional services SMEs. Digital platforms have the benefits of being cheap and easy to access, which provides avenues of visibility and interaction and acquisition of customers on the positive side. Nonetheless, the lack of finances, insufficient infrastructure and low digital literacy levels still stand in the way of the full achievement of these opportunities. As described by Shehu (2018), in Namibia, most SMEs in Windhoek did not have a formalised strategy in their social media marketing, and instead, the marketing practices were reactive as opposed to proactive. The same was also observed by Scheers (2018), who reported that Facebook and WhatsApp are dominating in SME marketing because of their minimal cost, yet lack of expertise and financial resources hinders the adoption of more advanced digital tools. Other similar trends have been witnessed across Africa. Mdluli (2022) discovered that the SMEs in Esawatini do not have resources and skills to build the consistent branding strategy, whereas Olonde (2017) has found the same limitation in Kenya, where the high advertising costs and the lack of digital literacy hinder the use of such tools as SEO and online advertising. Ngochi and Kihara (2019) recommended that the challenges may be reduced by investing in digital training and cost-effective tools. Adoption is also complicated by structural barriers like poor internet facilities. Rao and Rajeswari (2020) noted that the low rate of connectivity and access to technology discourages the application of high-level, data-driven marketing-related solutions in developing economies. Poor internet connectivity still limits the sustainability of digitally-based campaigns in Namibia though persistent ICT investments in Africa are slowly changing this situation. Another huge obstacle is still digital illiteracy.

Umar, Sugiharto, and Hartanto (2020) emphasized that not all SMEs know how to design and manage online campaigns as they cannot do it without technical skills. This has proven to be a challenge especially in professional services and professional services are in areas of law, consulting, and healthcare and not marketing. However, research indicates that training and capacity-building programs have a strong positive effect on the capacity of SMEs to embrace and adopt digital marketing (Umar et al., 2020). Adoption is also discouraged because of financial constraints. As Deku, Wang, and Preko (2024) and Gbandi and Iyamu (2022) observed, SMEs tend to view digital marketing as a costly, unpredictable business strategy in terms of expenses and the promised returns, particularly paid advertising and professional web development. Nevertheless, the ones that invested in the low-cost and well-thought-out digital projects were making quantifiable returns in terms of sales, customers and profitability. Organisational blindness is also an obstacle; as Shehu (2018) and Mdluli (2022) discovered, numerous SMEs do not have long-term digital plans and turn digital marketing into an auxiliary element instead of a key business operation. On the other hand, companies that integrate digital marketing in their general strategies as Loku and Havolli (2024) found are more flexible, differentiated and resilient.

Resistance to adoption is also caused by culture. Salhab (2024) discussed that the historical dependence on the word-of-mouth predetermines the unwillingness of some SMEs to adopt digital tools. However, this resistance is slowly fading

away as more people embrace the use of digital. Ufondu et al. (2025) discovered in Nigeria that the conversion rate of customers of SMEs that utilized email and search engine optimization campaigns was high, which demonstrates the transformative power of online communication. Most importantly, the digital marketing approach is also resilient during crisis. Oklander et al. (2024) and Remmang et al. (2024) demonstrated that SMEs in Ukraine and Indonesia used digital tools to maintain operations during disruption. In addition to survival, digital marketing provides better branding and credibility. Mdluli (2022) and Nuseir (2018) pointed to such platforms as LinkedIn to develop professional image and networks with clients. Junaidi (2020), Omar et al. (2020), and Sareen and Rani (2024) support the idea that multi-platform solutions, which include integration, enhance customer satisfaction and their ability to enter the market. Finally, professional services provided to SMEs in the city of Windhoek send by digital marketing is an opportunity to change and challenge. These firms will be able to overcome financial, infrastructural, and educational obstacles and use digital tools both to make their companies more competitive and reliable in terms of their brands and to enter regional and even global markets.

## **II. Theoretical Framework**

The TPB can serve as a strong and well-established theoretical basis to explain the responses of professional services SMEs to digital marketing techniques in adoption and usage. TPB was developed by Ajzen (1991) and it assumes that the behavioural intention of an individual is determined by three main constructs, including the attitude to the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which in turn affect the probability of the behaviour being manifested. When applied to digital marketing, TPB allows studying how owners of SMEs and managers acquire the intention, establish the attitude, and exercise the belief in control that eventually drives them to make a decision to use and apply digital marketing understanding (Ključnikov et al., 2025). Precisely, attitude represents how much the owners of SMEs feel that digital marketing is useful or helpful to the business. Subjective norms are used to understand the social influence or expectations of others, clients and competitors about the adoption of digital marketing. On the other hand, perception of behavioural control is the level of self-belief that SMEs have about their performance to introduce and operate digital marketing when resources, skills, and technology are available. The intention to adopt is shaped by these constructs, and it becomes actual digital marketing behaviour.

TPB has been empirically proven to be applicable to SME digital adoption in various developing-country settings. Indicatively, Bruce et al. (2023) looked at Ghana based SMEs and realised that perceived behavioural control and subjective norms were strong predictors of intention to adopt digital marketing, but attitude was not. Their research article also confirmed a positive correlation between the actual application of digital marketing and sustainable growth of SMEs. This result means that though the owners of these SMEs might not have strong positive attitudes to digital marketing, they may still adopt them based on their perceived access to resources and social requirements. This observation is especially applicable to the professional service SMEs in Windhoek, where poor resource availability and peer pressure determine the level and character of digital marketing adoption (Bruce et al., 2023). Additional theoretical evidence on the relevance of TPB is based on meta-analyses and studies into regional behaviour. Leong et al. (2023) applied TPB to social commerce and in this case, the combinations of TPB constructs along with contextual variables including social support explained a significant percentage of the behavioural intention and actual use. Even though their work is not restricted to SMEs, the adaptability and explanatory capabilities of TPB in technology-based environments are highlighted. On the same note, Ključnikov et al. (2025) conducted a review of the firm-level adoption literature and refuted the peripheral role of subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, as well as the attitudes in predicting technological adoption, innovation investment, and strategic decision-making in SMEs in various settings. Overall, the Theory of Planned Behavior offers a detailed approach to the study of the cognitive and social processes that will underlie the digital marketing adoption of professional services SMEs in Windhoek. The focus on perceived control and normative influence of the behavioural intention makes it particularly relevant to the interpretation of the behavioural intention and actual utilisation in those situations when resource constraints and peer expectations play a role.

## **III. Methodology**

Guided by an interpretivist research philosophy, the study assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective experiences of SME owners and managers. A qualitative case study design was adopted to explore digital marketing practices within their real-life context, supported by an inductive research approach that allows theory to emerge from the data. The population comprised professional service SMEs in Windhoek, from which a purposive sample of 15 firms was selected based on their engagement with digital marketing. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by field notes, enabling participants to share in-depth insights into perceived opportunities, challenges, and business impacts of digital marketing.

Data analysis focused on identifying emerging themes, while trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability measures, including triangulation, member checking, thick description, and reflexivity. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed through informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, with data securely stored and participants given the right to withdraw at any time. Overall, the methodology was designed to generate rich, contextualised insights into digital marketing adoption among professional service SMEs in Namibia, while adhering to established qualitative research and ethical standards.

#### **IV. Data analysis and discussion**

The data analysis reveals that digital marketing – particularly social media – has fundamentally transformed how professional services SMEs in Windhoek attract, engage, and build trust with clients. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have shifted from supplementary tools to core strategic functions, enhancing visibility, credibility, and client acquisition. SMEs reported expanded geographic, demographic, and sectoral reach, including clients beyond Windhoek and younger, digitally oriented audiences. Both organic content and modest paid promotions contributed to increased enquiries and brand recognition, demonstrating that digital marketing offers cost-effective scalability and enables SMEs to compete with larger firms while strengthening professional legitimacy.

The findings further show that not all digital platforms serve the same purpose, and SMEs are increasingly strategic in aligning platforms with their business goals, target markets, and resource constraints. Facebook and Instagram were mainly used for broad visibility and engagement, LinkedIn for professional networking and B2B credibility, and websites as anchors of legitimacy and conversion. SMEs exhibited varying levels of digital maturity, ranging from reliance on organic posting to experimentation with paid advertising and analytics. Importantly, organic and paid efforts were viewed as complementary rather than opposing strategies – organic content building long-term trust and paid campaigns delivering faster, more measurable results when resources allowed.

Despite these opportunities, SMEs face persistent challenges in implementing digital marketing effectively, particularly limited time, skills, finances, and internet infrastructure. Inconsistency in posting, high data costs, and lack of dedicated marketing personnel constrained sustained engagement. However, many SMEs demonstrated adaptive and innovative responses, such as leveraging free analytics, hashtags, location tagging, WhatsApp, and authentic behind-the-scenes content to maximise impact with minimal resources. Overall, the findings suggest that digital marketing success among professional services SMEs in Windhoek depends less on resource abundance and more on strategic application, learning, and adaptability, signalling a gradual progression toward greater digital marketing maturity.

#### **V. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study demonstrates that digital marketing has become a critical driver of visibility, credibility, and client engagement for professional services SMEs in Windhoek. Social media platforms – particularly Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn – are no longer peripheral tools but central strategic resources that enable SMEs to compete with larger firms through authenticity, creativity, and direct interaction rather than financial strength alone. SMEs use platforms selectively based on purpose and audience, with Facebook and Instagram supporting broad exposure and community engagement, LinkedIn facilitating professional and B2B networking, and websites serving as anchors of legitimacy and lead conversion. Digital marketing has also expanded SMEs' geographic and demographic reach beyond Windhoek, allowing them to attract younger and regionally dispersed clients through storytelling, testimonials, and targeted campaigns.

Despite these opportunities, SMEs face persistent challenges such as limited staffing, high data costs, unstable internet connectivity, and inadequate technical skills, which affect content consistency and optimization. However, many firms respond adaptively by leveraging free analytics, reusing content, employing WhatsApp for client interaction, and testing small-scale paid promotions. These lean and innovative practices show that digital marketing effectiveness depends less on financial investment and more on strategic application, flexibility, and learning. Overall, the findings conclude that even in resource-constrained contexts, professional services SMEs in Windhoek can achieve meaningful growth, client acquisition, and competitive positioning through consistent, creative, and well-targeted digital marketing strategies.

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