

THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL DISTRUST ON DIGITAL MARKETING: A STUDY OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Digital marketing is becoming increasingly popular in Nigeria, mainly due to the rapid development of new technologies related to the Internet. Concerns about security, privacy, data leak, and trust have affected consumers' unbridled enthusiasm for the digital marketplace. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the presence of digital manipulations. Thus, the present study examines the effect of digital distrust on attitudes toward digital marketing among civil servants. Two hundred and twenty-eight employees of the Ebonyi state government were sampled from different ministries, departments, and agencies. The respondents completed a self-report measure of digital distrust and attitude towards digital marketing. The simple regression analysis revealed that digital distrust positively predicts digital marketing. The implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: digital distrust, attitudes, digital marketing, undergraduate

Introduction

The use of digital marketing strategies is becoming increasingly popular in today's Nigerian society (Ayegba et al., 2017; Izogo, 2012; Gabriel et al., 2016; Ifeanyichukwu, 2016; Nwankwo et al., 2019; Ogbuji & Obot, 2018; Okon et al., 2016; Olasanmi, 2019; Olusoji et al., 2015). The trend has recently become ubiquitous in consumer behavior (Nwaizugbo & Ifeanyichukwu, 2016). Perhaps, shopping from home and one's convenience is an advantage to prospective consumers due to the opportunity to search for various products and make a purchase regardless of distance (Husain & Adamu, 2014). Thus, digital marketing reflects widespread online buying and selling of goods and services facilitated by the Internet. It entails using the Internet for marketing, identification, payment, and delivery of goods and services (Awulika & Okolie, 2020). This indicates that digital marketing is web-based, without physical contact between the seller and buyer (Aminu, 2013; Ling et al., 2010). Thus, consumers interact in a virtual environment via the website interface. Perhaps, shopping through the Internet describes a technological innovation that enables small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to compete on the same level as their larger counterparts (Edwin et al., 2014).

The trend has ~~contributed significantly to improving~~significantly improved global economies' growth, development, efficiency, and productivity (Joseph, 2019). Perhaps, digital marketing has attracted substantial international research attention in the recent decade (Asiedu & Dube, 2020; Etminani-Ghasrodashti & Hamidi, 2020; Ha, 2020; Ijaz & Rhee, 2018; Jain & Kulhar, 2019;

Melović et al., 2021; Ofori & Appiah-Nimo, 2019; Rahman et al., 2018; Svatosova, 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). Conceivably, digital marketing continues to grow across every society due to innovations in internet technologies. The advancement in digital technologies has altered consumers' shopping patterns and has rapidly evolved into a global phenomenon. Thus, social media use and digital marketing have become a daily routine for most people worldwide (Alalwan, 2018). In particular, technology firms and mobile apps have taken over the market ecosystem, reinforced by a unified online payments model. Data strengthen this rapidly growing platform.

However, sensitivities about data breaches, digital disinformation and manipulation, cybercrimes, and the activities of hackers have combined to create a modern trust issue relative to e-commerce. Digital distrust describes a psychological state close to untrustworthiness for digital transactions fueled by negative expectations and beliefs and encompassing feelings of uncertainty (McKnight & Choudhury, 2006). Privacy, security, and trust concerns have tempered consumers' passion for digital marketing. Thus, customers are increasingly becoming aware of online information manipulation. The deficiency in digital faith constrains e-commerce, particularly concerning consumer protection. Perhaps, automated algorithms, big data, blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence offer new solutions and risks (Ryan, 2019). Consequently, questions regarding the accuracy of online information, the authenticity of the goods, and financial safety are in many consumers' minds, shaping their attitudes toward digital marketing.

Attitudes are psychosocial constructs encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses towards any aspect of an individual's socio-world. Consumers' attitude toward digital marketing reflects their appraisal, likeability, rejection, and actions relative to online shopping. Thus, attitudes toward digital marketing describe an individual's positive or negative feelings about completing a transaction online (Chiu et al., 2005; Schlosser, 2003). Numerous factors have been found to influence consumers' attitudes towards online purchases. For instance, product delivery, previous experience, price, convenience, websites design, security, search engines, promotion, reliability, and trust determines consumer's attitudes to shopping online (Alatawy, 2018; Dani, 2017; Datta & Acharjee, 2018; Gamage & Jayatilake, 2019; Gaudel, 2019; James, 2012; Kochar & Kaur, 2018; Narges et al., 2011; Reddymurali, 2014; Shah & Tiwari, 2021; Zuroni & Goh, 2012). However, the present study examines distrust in the cyber ecosystem as a psychological variable determining consumer feelings and behavior toward online purchasing.

A growing insinuation suggests that adolescents are more likely to engage in digital marketing (Choudhury & Dey, 2014). Perhaps there are indications that the youth are more likely to utilize the Internet for shopping purposes (Chris-Nnamchi et al., 2021). For example, undergraduates in tertiary institutions usually conduct transactions online because they are more connected to internet devices which fuels digital marketing behavior. Numerous studies have assessed e-commerce behavior among Nigerians amidst the growing trend of internet access (Abdulrahman & Muhammad, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Nwosu, 2017; Ojiaku et al., 2021; Oresanya & Oresanya,

2016; Salaudeen & Omotosho, 2020). However, little is known about civil servants' response to digital marketing in the era of online shopping. Civil servants are primarily adults that devote much time to official duties. Thus, they are likely to patronize digital marketing. However, it is assumed that safety concerns remain dominant in utilizing e-commerce.

Hypothesis: *Digital distrust predicts attitudes toward digital marketing among civil servants in Ebonyi State, Nigeria*

Methods

Participants

This research aims to determine the role of digital distrust on attitudes toward digital marketing. The quantitative research method is used to investigate the relationships between the variables. Data was collected using a self-report measure. The analysis is based on 228 respondents from different ministries, departments, and agencies in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The population comprised male and female workers between the ages of 30-60 years employed in different MDAs in the state. The rationale for choosing this population is based on the notion that they are the most distanced from IoTs ~~users~~ and are most likely to eschew digital marketing.

Measures

Attitude towards digital marketing was measured using a developed 10-item scale instrument designed to measure consumers' attitudes towards digital marketing in four dimensions: convenience, time-saving, website design, and security. The Likert-type scale is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from (1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree). The score on the scale ranged between 10 and 50, with a higher score indicating a positive attitude. The scale's reliability was ascertained after a pilot study, and a Cronbach alpha $r=.091$ coefficient was recorded.

Digital distrust was measured using an instrument to measure individuals' perceptions of the internet marketplace and the associated risks. The instrument consists of 10 items on a 5-point Linkert type. The instrument contains questions like "Shopping online is very reliable" and "People can lose their money through digital marketing ." A higher score indicates distrust in using the internet platform for shopping. Cronbach's alpha of .82 was recorded for the instrument following a pilot study in this study.

Procedure

With the aid of research assistants, students from three different tertiary institutions were recruited for the study. The participants were mainly pooled from the student's lodges and classrooms. A total of 256 students were approached and asked to participate in a survey to understand their attitudes toward digital marketing. In all, 248 students out of the 256 approached agreed to participate in the study. Hence, the questionnaires were administered to them. In particular, only

two hundred and twenty-eight (228) copies of the questionnaires given to the respondents were adequately completed and retrieved immediately and were used for the study.

Result

A cross-sectional research design was adopted in the present study. A simple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that digital distrust positively predicts attitudes toward digital marketing among undergraduates. The investigation revealed that digital distrust statistically significantly predicted the respondent's attitudes towards digital marketing $F(1,226), 36.57, P<.000$. More so, digital distrust contributed 32.1% of the variance in the undergraduate's attitudes towards digital marketing.

Table 1: shows the simple regression result for digital distrust and attitude toward digital marketing.

	B	SEB	β	t	Sig
Constant	1.82	.033		56.76	.000
Digital distrust	.81	.047	.79	16.81	.000
R^2	.321				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SEB = Standardized error of the Coefficient; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination. * $P<.000$.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the role of digital distrust on attitudes toward digital marketing among undergraduates. Two hundred and twenty-eight respondents were recruited, and a simple regression model was employed to analyze the data. Results of the study suggest that digital distrust is a significant psychological antecedent of attitude towards digital marketing, which is a new aspect of online behavioral studies. Explanation of this correlation describes the critical contribution of the present study since the growing complication of human interactions with cyberspace triggers a sufficient amount of distrust. Accordingly, people shop online, pay bills and store their personal information online. However, concerns about fraudulent transactions, the safety of data, and the accuracy of online information are always on the mind of users. Thus, people are trapped in a framework that promotes digital distrust. Thus, the current finding broadens the previous knowledge that distrust harms attitudes toward e-commerce (Kim, 2012; Zimaitis et al., 2020). The recent study presupposes that consumers who distrust the digital ecosystem are more likely to adopt digital marketing negatively. In contrast, those who trust the IT framework have a favorable attitude toward e-commerce. The finding is significant in the growing trend of e-marketing in Nigeria. It expands our understanding of the probable explanation of the variation in consumers' adaptation to digital marketing.

The implication of the study

The findings have some practical contributions. First, the study results revealed digital distrust as a correlate of attitudes toward digital marketing among undergraduates. Thus, understanding the role of IT distrust in consumers' attitudes toward online purchasing helps firms evaluate and redesign strategies relating to inclusivity in the digital marketing context. Although, this study was not without limitations. First, the participants were undergraduates enrolled in an institution of higher learning in one state, thereby do not represent a broader population of online shoppers. Thus, a larger sample size will be needed in further research. Second, the study could not establish a cause-effect relationship due to the cross-sectional design. Future research should adopt an experimental approach to identify the cause-effect mechanisms.

Conclusion

The study examined digital distrust as a factor that could determine consumers' attitudes toward digital marketing in a sample of undergraduates. The result indicated a positive relationship between digital distrust and online purchasing attitudes. Therefore, it was concluded that digital distrust positively predicts attitudes toward digital marketing. Thus, the study recommends that the governments create a legislative framework with functional building blocks that will secure consumers' information and introduce a digital platform that can be trusted. In so doing, they will create a digitally trusted marketplace that allows consumers to shop freely in the digital marketing era.

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