

# **Digital Marketing and Internationalization of Small and Medium-sized Agricultural Exporters**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined digital marketing and internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. The purpose of this paper was to explore the effects of social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. We adopted cross-sectional survey research design. Using a structured questionnaire survey, we obtained primary data from 348 respondents. Using regression analysis and descriptive statistics, the data obtained were analyzed and interpreted. We found that digital marketing could significantly improve the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. We also found that social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing had significant positive effects on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. Based on the findings, the study suggested that digital marketing (social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing) can provide a unique and cost-effective outlet for intending agricultural SMEs to seek out partners, and build robust networks that extend their ability to get their products to foreign markets effectively.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Mobile Marketing, Internationalization, Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Search Engine Marketing

**JEL Classifications:** M31, M3, M0

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## **1. Introduction**

The internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is regarded as a key step towards the growth and expansion of their commercial operations (Boso et al., 2019). With the fast-pace of globalization and economic integrations of markets, business organizations, including SMEs are exploring new ways to expand their operations to new foreign markets. This push toward internationalization is often driven by intense and unfavourable competition in the home market, the desire to exploit foreign-market potential, business growth objectives, trade liberalization policies, among others (Kunday & Şengüler, 2015; Alon et al., 2018; Kraus et al., 2017). Whatever the motivations may be, existing studies have shown that business organizations, including SMEs are realizing their internationalization ambitions by harnessing digital marketing technologies (Khemkhaeng et al., 2021; Pergelova et al., 2019; Jin & Hurd, 2018; Vadana et al., 2021). Digital marketing is the conception, design, execution and coordination of marketing activities and campaigns of business firms through internet-enabled platforms and other digital media (Papadopoulos et al., 2020). It encompasses a wide array of innovative tools, however, social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing were the digital marketing tools considered for this study, being that they are some of the most popularly applied tools in Nigeria. Through these digital marketing technologies, Nigerian businesses in several sectors, particularly banking, tourism and entertainment are expanding their operations to target potential customers in African countries and other parts of the world (citation needed).

However, Nigerian SMEs in the agricultural sector are yet to fully harness the potential of digital marketing technologies for commercial purposes due to several impediments. Agricultural SMEs are small and medium-sized enterprises that are involved in the production, processing and distribution of agro-based commodities for domestic and/or international use. According to Eze et al. (2020), the slow pace of digital marketing adoption by Nigerian agricultural SMEs is caused by digital illiteracy, unfamiliarity with digital systems, lack of internet connectivity and lack of access to modern information and communications technologies. Gbadegeshin et al. (2019) observed that the key forces impeding the use of digital marketing tools by agricultural SMEs in Nigeria include distrust in new technology, privacy concerns, cyber-insecurity and poor internet connectivity. As a consequence, most of these enterprises operate using traditional marketing media like face-to-face marketing, indirect marketing through intermediaries and direct selling at marketplaces. Their inability to harness digital technologies for marketing purposes, including internationalization has shrunk their market bases and prevented agricultural SMEs from sourcing for new market potential in foreign markets. In addition, unfavourable export-related policies, lack of foreign market networks, language barriers and cultural disparities have also impeded Nigerian agricultural exporters to do business in foreign countries, especially in non-English-speaking countries (Mendy et al., 2021; Adebayo et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, Gbadegeshin et al. (2019) suggested the need for Nigerian SMEs to resort to digital marketing tools as a way of gaining efficient access to foreign markets.

However, there appears to be insufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate how digital marketing could affect the internationalization initiatives of Nigerian agricultural exporters. A preliminary scoping review of existing relevant scholarly studies revealed that although much research exists on digital marketing and internationalization of business enterprises around the world, the subject has been shortchanged and acutely under-researched by Nigerian scholars, especially with respect to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. The majority of Nigerian studies on digital marketing and SMEs were limited to determining the influence of digital marketing on the performance of SMEs before, and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aladejebi, 2020; Njoku et al., 2021; Oyeniyi & Ayanleke, 2021; Obeki & Mayor, 2022). This entails that there is therefore a monumental dearth in empirical studies specifically centered on determining the influence of digital marketing on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. As such, it is unclear the degree to which digital marketing influences the internationalization process of agricultural SMEs and precisely how these SMEs apply digital marketing tools (such as social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing) to enter foreign markets. This has negative implications for the Nigerian economy because if agricultural exporters in the country are unwilling or unable to leverage digital marketing technologies to expand their operations into foreign markets, Nigeria's foreign earnings from international marketing activities will be adversely impacted, thereby undermining its economic growth. Against this backdrop, we designed and carried out this study to specifically determine the impact of digital marketing technologies (such as social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing) on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in the technology acceptance model (TAM) and network theory of internationalization because both theories explain how digital technologies could accelerate the formation of foreign networks and access into foreign markets. TAM espouses the notion that suggests that the adoption of digital marketing technologies by agricultural SMEs for internationalization depends on their attitudes, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the technologies. Similarly, the network theory emphasizes the value of a robust web of partnerships to the internationalization ambitions of agricultural SMEs.

### **2.1 Technology acceptance model (TAM)**

The technology acceptance model, propounded by Davis (1985) has been chosen to anchor this study, because it explains how new technology, such as digital marketing is accepted and adopted by individuals and organizations like small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. The theory was developed on the basis of the theory of reasoned action propounded by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), which laid the basic foundation for TAM. The basic premise of TAM is that "users' motivation to accept and adopt new technologies is shaped and influenced by three core variables, namely: users' attitude towards the technology, the technology's perceived usefulness and its perceived ease of use"

(Davis 1985). This entails that before people adopt a new technology, they must first possess a positive attitude towards innovation generally, and the new technology specifically. And this attitude is shaped by their perception of the perceived usefulness and ease of use of the intended technology. In the context of this study, the relevance of TAM is embedded in its basic assumption which implies that acceptability of digital marketing technologies by small and medium-sized agricultural exporters depends on their attitude towards new technology as a whole. And their attitude towards new technology in turn depends on their perception of the extent of usefulness provided by the technology and the ease of effort required to utilize the technology for internationalization purposes. By this, the theory implies that for agricultural SMEs to adopt and use digital technologies for internationalization, they must first of all possess a positive attitude towards digital change and transformation. Also, it could be deduced from the theory that not only is attitude central to digital technology adoption; the technology itself has to be perceived as potentially useful and easy to operate and apply by agricultural SMEs.

## **2.2 Network theory of internationalization**

The network theory of internationalization was developed by Johanson and Mattsson (1988) to explain the indispensability of network formation and relationship building with partners to the internationalization agenda of firms. It was developed to contribute to the internationalization agenda of business firms by demonstrating the value of seeking and developing a network of foreign partners as a recipe for actualizing internationalization. The basic premise of the network theory is that “the internationalization process of a firm is anchored in its ability to create, sustain and nurture productive relationships with affiliates and partners operating in the intended country-market to be entered” (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988). In this study, the relevance of the network theory is embedded in its basic assumption which suggests that the success of the internationalization agenda of any organization (in this case, agricultural SMEs) depends on the value of formal and informal networks that they are able to create and maintain in foreign countries. This entails that for agricultural exporters to be able to effectively expand their operations to foreign countries, they must consciously build, nurture and maintain an extensive and robust network of potential partners in the intended country market. This network facilitates their internationalization agenda by providing preliminary but vital market access information, such as the political/legal, economic, sociocultural, technological and procedural dynamics of the market. The network can also expedite SMEs’ ability to satisfy basic procedural requirements to obtain authorization to enter foreign markets with their operations. This is why the network theory suggests that successful internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural SMEs is contingent on their ability to network with useful partners in intended foreign-markets. Also, a key usefulness of digital marketing is that it creates the platform for agricultural SMEs to gain access to foreign markets, build and sustain social connections with potential partners through the internet and other digital systems.

### **2.3 Digital marketing**

The concept of digital marketing encompasses all marketing activities initiated, executed and implemented using internet-based tools and other information, communication technologies that enable companies to target customers directly without geographical limitations (Atshaya & Rungta, 2016). It is the adoption and utilization of the internet and accessory digital systems to facilitate the execution of the marketing activities of business firms, including market research, product development, promotion, customer relationship management, and a host of others. According to Kim et al. (2019), digital marketing has not necessarily come to replace traditional face-to-face marketing; but it has been developed to work in concert with conventional marketing tools to amplify the effectiveness of companies' marketing campaigns and operations. According to Christina et al. (2019), digital marketing is marketing that integrates internet-based and offline digital technologies into a system that enables businesses to promote their brands, interact with customers and achieve marketing objectives effectively, efficiently and expeditiously. This implies that digital marketing has two basic partitions. On the one hand, it uses internet-based tools like social media, websites, search engines, electronic mail and virtual reality. And on the other hand, digital marketing encompasses offline digital tools like television, radio, cameras, digital file formats (like MP3, MP4, PDFs, JPEG), audio files, electronic books, among others. With a combination of both online and offline technologies, digital marketing expands the ability of businesses like agricultural SMEs to get their products promoted and sold to customers in several different countries without significant geographic barriers. This is why digital marketing technologies like social media, electronic mail and others are increasingly becoming popular among businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises around the world.

### **2.4 Internationalization of firms**

Internationalization is the incremental process whereby a domestic firm searches for foreign markets and expands its commercial operations to serve customers in the chosen foreign market (Tiwari et al., 2016). It is the step-by-step process whereby local business organizations become more actively engaged and entrenched in marketing activities and operations across their national borders. Cahen et al. (2016) observed that internationalization is a strategic international business strategy that enables local businesses to transition from domestic market players to global market players by being economically and commercially involved across countries. Its benefits to the marketing and overall performance of business organizations cannot be overemphasized, because internationalization is regarded as a long-term business strategy that ultimately results in higher returns on investment (Boso et al., 2019). It enables domestic firms to expand their customer bases to include foreign markets, while enabling them to gain foreign-market experience and building foreign-market networks for deeper business ties in foreign countries. As the market bases of firms expand as a consequence of internationalization, the quantity of customer patronage, sales volume and revenue obtainable grows exponentially (Diojoto & Marambe, 2015). This is why several Nigerian businesses, across sectors, are desirous of internationalizing their operations into foreign markets to exploit available market

potential. In the context of this study, the dimensions of internationalization chosen include direct exportation, indirect exportation and foreign market presence. Direct exportation is the process whereby agricultural SMEs get involved in the exportation of their products to be marketed in foreign country-markets without the support of intermediaries or middlemen (Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2017). The exportation exercise is basically organized, executed and managed independently by agricultural SMEs in the foreign-country market. On the other hand, indirect exportation occurs when agricultural SMEs rely on the networks, channels and logistical resources of foreign-market agents or intermediaries to export their products to foreign country-markets (Obeki & Mayor, 2022). With respect to foreign-market presence, agricultural SMEs establish physical presence or outlets in foreign country-markets through which they carry out marketing of their products in the selected country-market (Vadana et al., 2021). In the agricultural sector of Nigeria, the main business category that has successfully internationalized their operations abroad are large-scale agro-businesses, while small and medium-sized enterprises are encumbered by challenges that impede their ability to enter foreign markets (Opeyemi, 2022).

## ***2.5 Digital marketing and internationalization of SMEs***

This unit reviews extant literature on the parameters of digital marketing selected for this study – social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing. It also tries to explain the possible roles of each of the digital marketing parameters in promoting the internationalization agendas of agricultural SMEs.

### ***2.5.1 Social media marketing and internationalization of SMEs***

Social media marketing is an innovative approach to marketing that utilizes social media platforms, virtual communities and social media tools to target customers, deliver products and services and interact more closely with customers to ensure their needs are met at the profitability of business firms (Etim et al., 2021). In the context of this study, social media marketing comprises the following parameters: social media networks, social media communities, and social media relationships. According to Arabah and Aboagye (2018), social media networks are online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, among others that enable agricultural SMEs to connect with customers, partners and others to communicate, and build business relations. Social media communities are groups of people (including agricultural SMEs) who come together in social media spaces to share common interests, values and objectives, such as improving the marketing of agricultural products. Ibrahim et al. (2021) view social media relationships as social connections created and promoted by agricultural SMEs with customers and other important stakeholders via social media to promote the marketing of their products. For SMEs seeking internationalization opportunities, social media can be a useful avenue for interacting with the outside world to understand their unique cultures, traditions and laws, as well as forging and sustaining relationships with foreign partners who will be central to their internationalization agenda. This entails that social media provides a framework for potential SMEs to acquire the information, and partner networks necessary

for internationalization to be successful. As such, it could be implied that social media marketing has the potential to enhance the internationalization of SMEs to foreign countries. This viewpoint is corroborated by the study of Gbadegeshin et al. (2019), which revealed that social media platforms significantly facilitated the internationalization process of Nigerian SMEs. It is also backed by the study of Arabah and Aboagye (2018), which revealed that social media marketing had a significant positive influence on the internationalization of textile exporters in Ghana. Therefore, we tested the following hypothesis to verify the authenticity of this premise in the context of our study:

*H1: Social media marketing has a significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.*

### **2.5.2 Email marketing and internationalization of SMEs**

Email marketing is the utilization of electronic mailing services to promote a company's offerings to customers with the intention of building long-lasting relations with customers capable of enhancing its marketing performance in the long run (Etim et al., 2021). In the context of this study, email marketing, as a digital marketing practice, comprises: email prospecting, email relationship building and email-based advertisement. According to Makalani and Gichinga (2020), email prospecting entails agricultural SMEs using electronic mail to search for and target potential customers and partners in an effort to accelerate their marketing efforts. Arabah and Aboagye (2018) view email relationship building as the intentional process whereby agricultural SMEs utilize electronic mail services to establish, build, nurture and maintain useful relations with customers and business partners. Email-based advertisement entails agricultural SMEs using electronic mailing services to advertise their products to customers for the purpose of attracting patronage and other business opportunities (Ibrahim et al., 2021). The importance of email marketing to the internationalization agenda of SMEs cannot be disregarded in any manner or circumstance, because electronic mail is the primary means of communication between foreign and domestic firms. Particularly at the partner-prospecting stage, where both parties are not so familiar with each other, it is through electronic mail that agricultural exporters seek out fresh relations in foreign markets (Kumar et al., 2021; Nuseir & Aljumah, 2020). In fact, agricultural exporting companies intending to internationalize either harness personal relationships, purchase a mailing list or search for partners via search engines to contact them for business purposes. Even when the relationship has been built, sustaining it over the long term requires regular emailing of information and important files between the partners. Similarly, for an agricultural exporting company that seeks to sell its products to customers in foreign countries, email marketing can provide the platform for it to design and disseminate advertising campaigns to potential customers who are likely to purchase from the firm (Arabah & Aboagye, 2018). The implication of this is that email marketing enables SMEs to forge relationships with foreign partners, promote and sell their products to foreign customers, which enhances their internationalization agenda. This viewpoint is supported by the study of Makalani and Gichinga (2020), which revealed that email marketing had significant positive influence on the internationalization of SMEs in the Kenyan agricultural sector. The viewpoint is also reinforced by

the study of Ibrahim et al. (2021), which revealed that email marketing had a significant positive impact on the internationalization of manufacturers in Pakistan. Therefore, we tested the following hypothesis to verify the authenticity of this premise in the context of our study:

*H2: Email marketing has a significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.*

### **2.5.3 Search engine marketing and internationalization of SMEs**

Search engine marketing (SEM) is the process whereby agricultural exporting companies utilize search engines like Google, to locate customers, and partners in order to promote their offerings and enhance sales, customer patronage and market share (Poturak et al., 2022). In the context of this study, search engine marketing comprises the following parameters: search engine profile, search engine advertisement, search engine optimization. According to Makalani and Gichinga (2020), search engine profile is a virtual account created by agricultural SMEs on search engines like Google to increase their visibility and findability by potential customers and other stakeholders. Search engine advertisement entails agricultural SMEs using search engines to advertise their products to customers for the purpose of attracting patronage and other business opportunities (Ibrahim et al., 2021). In the view of Arabah and Aboagye (2018), search engine optimization is a search engine marketing strategy in which agricultural SMEs generate increased traffic for their offerings by orienting their websites and content to rank higher on search engine results pages. Potential agricultural companies planning to internationalize can use search engines to learn more about the business environment of foreign country-markets in terms of its political, economic, sociocultural, technological, legal and ecological dynamics and how these factors will potentially impact their operations. With this market intelligence, the agricultural company can assess the potential opportunities and threats inherent in the intended country-markets on the basis of which a decision can be made on the most favourable country-market to enter (Brouthers et al., 2016). Also Hervé et al. (2020) argued that search engines can also help agricultural SMEs intending to internationalize to locate and access the contact information of potential foreign partners, who may be useful to their internationalization agenda. For instance, an SME in the agricultural sector could simply look up the contact information of agricultural companies in Asia, Europe or Africa using search engines like Google and receives a ton of information on potential partners. As such, with search engine, access to potential partners is improved substantially. Similarly, through search engine-based advertising campaigns, SMEs can target potential customers in foreign countries to purchase their products and services; and hence enable them gradually internationalize to the intended country-market (Arabah & Aboagye, 2018). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that search engine marketing is useful to the internationalization of SMEs to foreign markets. This viewpoint is supported by the study of Makalani and Gichinga (2020), which revealed that search engine marketing had a significant positive influence on the internationalization of SMEs in the Kenyan agricultural sector. It is also reinforced by the study of Khemkhaeng et al. (2021), which revealed that search engine marketing had a significant positive relationship with the



internationalization of rice marketing companies in Thailand. Therefore, we tested the following hypothesis to verify the authenticity of this premise in the context of our study:

*H3: Search engine marketing has a significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.*

#### **2.5.4 Mobile marketing and internationalization of SMEs**

Mobile marketing is the adoption and use of smartphones and other mobile devices to carry out the marketing activities and processes of business organizations with the aid of the internet and multimedia tools (Maduku et al., 2016). For this study, mobile marketing practices comprise app-based marketing, mobile advertisement, location-based marketing. According to Ibrahim et al. (2021), app-based marketing is the development and utilization of customized application software programmes for computers and mobile devices to accelerate the marketing operations of agricultural SMEs. Mobile advertisement is the process whereby agricultural SMEs use mobile devices like smartphones to target and advertise their campaigns to customers in order to attract patronage and other business opportunities (Makalani & Gichinga, 2020). Also, Arabah and Aboagye (2018) maintain that location-based marketing is the process whereby agricultural SMEs use technology to identify customers' locations and target their marketing campaigns to selected customer segments on the basis of their locations. The advances in mobile communications technologies have enabled mobile devices to be used not just for informal personal communications between and among people; but also importantly, for business interactions and transactions (Haslinda et al., 2016). Today, a small and medium-scale firm can promote their products and services to billions of potential consumers around the world from a remote town connected to the internet on their mobile devices. This is one of the remarkable transformations that has spawned the popularity and adoption of mobile marketing by business organizations around the globe. For SMEs intending to internationalize to foreign markets, the hurdles and difficulties can be greatly diminished just by leveraging the connectivity of their smartphones (Hervé et al., 2020). Mobile marketing platforms like electronic mail, social media and search engines can all be accessible to such firms via smartphone devices. As such, the firms can use these tools to locate potential customers and partners over the internet as well as building useful relationships with them for the long term. Electronic mailing services on smartphones can be used to communicate with new and existing partners and customers to promote market offerings and explore foreign-market opportunities that can enhance internationalization. In doing so, mobile marketing can serve to promote the internationalization agenda of business firms, including SMEs. The foregoing viewpoint is backed by the study of Arabah and Aboagye (2018), which revealed that mobile marketing had a significant positive influence on the internationalization of textile exporters in Ghana. The viewpoint is also backed by the study of Khemkhaeng et al. (2021), which revealed that mobile marketing had a significant positive relationship with the internationalization of rice marketing companies in Thailand. Therefore, we tested the following hypothesis to verify the authenticity of this premise in the context of our study:

*H4: Mobile marketing has a significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.*

## **2.6 Review of empirical studies and research model**

A study by Gbadegeshin et al. (2019) centered on determining the “influence of ICT tools like websites and social media platforms on the internationalization of SMEs in Nigeria”. The study obtained primary data from 265 managers and staff of SMEs in Nigeria through a structured questionnaire survey. From the analysis of data collected using descriptive and regression statistics, the findings revealed that the internationalization process of Nigerian SMEs is significantly facilitated by ICT tools including social media platforms and websites. However, the limitation of this study is that it was centered on Nigerian SMEs generally, with no specific emphasis on small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. Arabah and Aboagye (2018) conducted a study to explore the extent to which digital marketing strategies, namely: social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, and mobile marketing have influenced the internationalization of textile exporters in Ghana. The study collected primary data from 281 textile exporters in Takoradi and Kumasi using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the hypotheses were statistically tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings of the study then revealed that social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, and mobile marketing had significant positive influences on the internationalization of textile exporters in Ghana. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to Ghanaian textile exporters, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria.

Makalani and Gichinga’s (2020) study centered on “determining the influences of social media marketing, mobile marketing, search engine marketing, affiliate marketing and email marketing on the internationalization of SMEs in the Kenyan agricultural sector”. Through a combination of physical and online questionnaire survey, the study obtained primary data from 226 operators of agricultural SMEs in Uasin Gishu and Kakamega Counties in Kenya. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while regression analysis was done for hypotheses testing. Consequently, it was revealed that social media marketing, mobile marketing, search engine marketing, affiliate marketing and email marketing had significant positive influences on the internationalization of SMEs in the Kenyan agricultural sector. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to Kenyan agricultural SMEs, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. Ibrahim et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore the “impacts of email marketing, mobile marketing, search engine marketing and social media marketing on the internationalization of indigenous manufacturers in Pakistan”. To collect the data used in the study, the study administered a semi-structured questionnaire to 281 managers, owners and personnel of selected local manufacturing companies in Lahore, Pakistan. The data were subsequently descriptively analyzed and interpreted while multiple linear regression was applied for hypotheses testing. The findings thereof revealed that email marketing, mobile marketing, search engine marketing and social media marketing had a significant positive impact on the internationalization of

indigenous manufacturers in Pakistan. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to indigenous manufacturing companies in Pakistan, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Khemkhaeng et al. (2021) carried out a study to “ascertain the relationship between digital marketing technologies (search engine marketing, websites, social media, and mobile marketing) and internationalization of rice marketing companies in Thailand”. The study used a structured questionnaire survey to obtain primary data from 186 managers and personnel of rice marketing companies in Bangkok. The data obtained were analyzed statistically using descriptive statistics, while Pearson’s product moment correlation was used for hypotheses testing. Consequently, the findings of the study revealed that digital marketing technologies (search engine marketing, websites, social media, and mobile marketing) had significant positive relationships with the internationalization of rice marketing companies in Thailand. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to rice marketing companies in Thailand, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. Another study by Lee et al. (2019) addressed “how digitalization moderated the relationship between international business competencies and internationalization speed”. The study adopted a systematic literature review methodology to source for published literature articles for review. Consequently, the study found that digitalization has the capacity to substantially facilitate the ability of SMEs to enter international markets at a fast pace. However, the study is limited in its nature of being a literature review which could not empirically demonstrate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in developing climes like Nigeria.

Also, Pergelova et al. (2019) carried out a study to “establish the impact of digital technologies like front-end digital infrastructures, information management systems and internet (frequency of use) on the internationalization of SMEs in Bulgaria”. The study obtained primary data from 300 entrepreneurs in Bulgaria using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while hypotheses testing was done using logistic regression analysis. The findings of the study thereby revealed that digital technologies like front-end digital infrastructures, information management systems and internet (frequency of use) had significant positive impacts on the internationalization of SMEs in Bulgaria. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to women-led SMEs in Bulgaria, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. In addition, a study by Jin and Hurd (2018) explored the “the degree to which digital platforms had facilitated the internationalization of New Zealand SMEs into the Chinese market”. To that end, the study obtained primary data from four SMEs from New Zealand doing business in China through key informant interviews. The data were analyzed and interpreted using qualitative thematic analytical strategy. The findings revealed that digital marketing platforms had a significant positive impact on the internationalization of New Zealand SMEs into the Chinese market, especially in easing entry barriers, enabling access to potential networks and mitigating

resource constraints. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to SMEs in New Zealand, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria.

Another study by Hervé et al. (2020) examined the positions of existing researchers on the roles of digital technologies in facilitating the internationalization of SMEs to foreign markets. The study adopted an in-depth content analysis of 5 relevant recent scientific research papers from online research resources. From the viewpoint of the scholarly works reviewed, the study revealed that digital technologies play critically supporting roles in the internationalization of SMEs to foreign markets. However, the study is limited in its nature of being a literature review which could not empirically demonstrate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in developing climes like Nigeria. Also, Vadana et al. (2021) carried out a study to “determine how digitalization of value-chain activities facilitated the internationalization of born-digital companies in Finland”. The study used a semi-structured key informant interview method to obtain primary data from 6 top managers and personnel of 3 born-digital companies in Finland. Supporting secondary data were also obtained from the companies’ website. Upon analysis of the data using descriptive and thematic analytical methods, the findings revealed that digitalization of value-chain activities significantly facilitated the internationalization of born-digital companies in Finland. However, the limitation of this study is that it was constrained to born-digital companies in Finland, with no reference to small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria.

From the scholarly positions of the afore-reviewed existing researchers, it has been observed that most researchers share the notion that the internationalization process of business organizations, including SMEs could be enhanced and facilitated by digital marketing technologies. Consequently, based on the positions of extant researchers, this study assumed that in the Nigerian context, it is plausible for digital marketing technologies to support the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters. Guided by the studies of Arabah and Aboagye (2018); Makalani and Gichinga (2020); and Ibrahim et al. (2021), the independent variable (digital marketing) was decomposed into the following parameters: social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing. Similarly, the dependent variable (internationalization) was also decomposed into the following parameters: direct exportation, indirect exportation, and Foreign market presence (Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2017). The conceptual model presented in FIG. 1 portrays the hypothesized relationship between digital marketing and internationalization in the context of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.

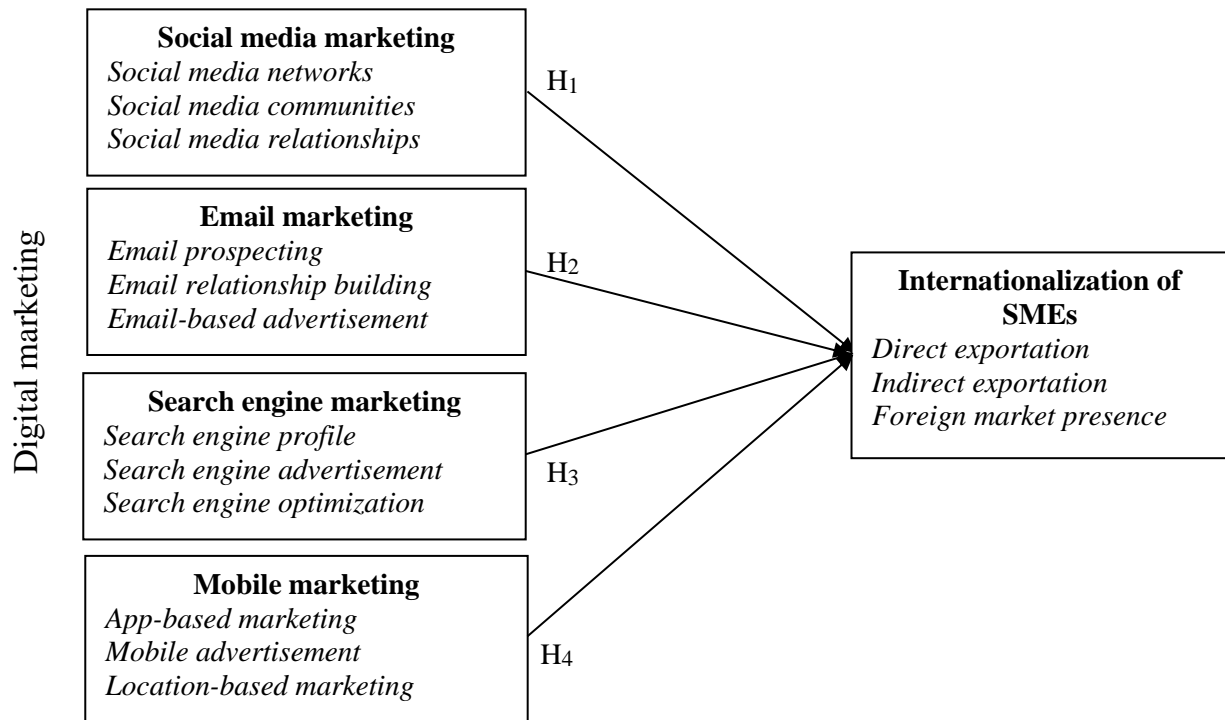


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

Source: Proxies of independent variables adapted from Arabah and Aboagye (2018); Makalani and Gichinga (2020); and Ibrahim *et al.* (2021). Proxies of dependent variable adapted from Dominguez and Mayrhofer (2017)

### 3. Methodology

This study is a quantitative study which adopted a deductive research approach, where we tested hypotheses to arrive at findings. The study used the cross-sectional survey research design to obtain primary data from respondents on a one-time basis. The data were obtained from a sample of 348 owners and managers of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Lagos, Nigeria. To select the respondents into the sampling frame, the study applied convenience and snow-ball sampling techniques. Convenience sampling enabled the study to locate and include respondents who were easily accessible and available to participate in the survey, while snow-ball sampling enabled us to use informed recommendations from few agricultural SMEs to locate other exporters in their business network. Both sampling techniques enabled us to include respondents who accurately represented the characteristics of the population in the questionnaire survey. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire (see Appendix I) with measures adapted from existing relevant studies. It adopted a 5-point Likert scale to measure the opinions of respondents. The measures of social media marketing (social media networks, social media communities, and social media relationships), email marketing (email prospecting, email relationship building and email-based advertisement), search engine marketing (search engine profile, search engine advertisement, search engine optimization), and mobile marketing (app-based marketing, mobile advertisement, location-based marketing) were adapted from Arabah and Aboagye (2018); Makalani and Gichinga (2020); Ibrahim *et al.* (2021). While, the measures of internationalization of SMEs (direct exportation, indirect exportation and

Foreign market presence) were adapted from Dominguez and Mayrhofer (2017). Prior to field administration, the research questionnaire was content-validated, while its reliability status was verified using the Cronbach's alpha reliability method, which revealed that all questionnaire measures generated alpha coefficients not less than 0.7 (see Table 1). Subsequently, the data obtained from respondents were analyzed and interpreted descriptively while hypotheses testing was done using multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients of questionnaire

Research variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Social media marketing	3	.781
Email marketing	3	.829
Search engine marketing	3	.758
Mobile marketing	3	.808
Internationalization	3	.763
	<b>15</b>	

Table source: Computation by authors on SPSS 2023

#### 4. Analysis and discussion of findings

Table 2. Results of descriptive analysis of research variables

	Items	n	Mean	SD
	<b>Social media marketing</b>			
1	Social media networks	348	4.972	1.811
2	Social media communities	348	3.862	1.602
3	Social media relationships	348	4.612	1.787
	<b>Email marketing</b>			
4	Email prospecting	348	3.811	1.901
5	Email relationship building	348	3.672	1.509
6	Email-based advertisement	348	4.652	1.777
	<b>Search engine marketing</b>			
7	Search engine profile	348	4.981	1.698
8	Search engine advertisement	348	3.723	1.999
9	Search engine optimization	348	3.998	1.576
	<b>Mobile marketing</b>			
10	App-based marketing	348	4.122	1.981
11	Mobile advertisement	348	4.091	1.745
12	Location-based marketing	348	4.003	1.602
	<b>Internationalization</b>			
13	Direct exportation	348	3.611	1.651
14	Indirect exportation	348	4.221	1.761
15	Foreign market presence	348	3.981	1.662

Table source: Computation by authors on SPSS 2023

Table 2 displays the results of the descriptive analysis of social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, mobile marketing and internationalization. It shows that the proxies of social media marketing generated mean responses ranging from agree to strongly agree. Mean values were 4.972, 3.862 and 4.612 respectively for social media networks, social media communities and social media relationships. The table also displays that the proxies of email marketing generated mean responses ranging from agree to strongly agree. Mean values were 3.811, 3.672 and 4.652 respectively for email prospecting, email relationship building and email-based advertisement. Also, the proxies of search engine marketing generated mean responses ranging from agree to strongly agree. Mean values were 4.981, 3.723 and 3.998 respectively for search engine profile, search engine advertisement and search engine optimization. Similarly, the table shows that the proxies for mobile marketing generated mean responses showing respondents mostly agreed to the statements. Mean values were 4.122, 4.091 and 4.003 respectively for app-based marketing, mobile advertisement and location-based marketing. Finally, the table shows that the proxies of internationalization generated mean responses showing respondents mostly agreed to the statements. Mean values were 3.611, 4.221 and 3.981 respectively for direct exportation, indirect exportation and foreign market presence.

### ***Hypotheses testing***

For the purpose of testing, only the test hypotheses (null hypotheses) were stated in this section

- i.  $H_0$ : Social media marketing has no significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.
- ii.  $H_0$ : Email marketing has no significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.
- iii.  $H_0$ : Search engine marketing has no significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.
- iv.  $H_0$ : Mobile marketing has no significant effect on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters.

Test statistic: Multiple regression

Decision rule: Reject null hypotheses if p-value is less than 0.05. Accept the null hypotheses if p-value is greater than 0.05

Table 3. Model summary of the effect of digital marketing on internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.618 <sup>a</sup>	.382	.375	.67471

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, mobile marketing

Table source: Computation by authors on SPSS 2023

Table 4. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the effect of digital marketing on internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	96.718	4	24.179	53.115	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	156.143	343	.455		
	Total	252.861	347			

a. Dependent Variable: Internationalization

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, mobile marketing

Table source: Computation by authors on SPSS 2023

Table 5. Coefficientsa of the effect of digital marketing on internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.484	.263		1.841		
Social media marketing	.516	.063	.400	8.248	.765	1.307
Email marketing	.731	.078	.520	9.362	.583	1.715
Search engine marketing	.163	.061	.351	2.681	.571	1.751
Mobile marketing	.157	.052	.194	3.003	.433	2.310

a. Dependent Variable: Internationalization

Table source: Computation by authors on SPSS 2023

The results on Tables 3, 4 and 4 demonstrate the effects of digital marketing on internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.618$ ) in Table 3 reveals that the relationship between digital marketing and internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria is 61.8 percent. This indicates a very high degree of relationship between the variables in the context of this study. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.382$ ) indicates that digital marketing accounts for up to 38.2 percent in the variation of the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. This implies that if other factors remain unchanged, digital marketing will affect the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria by up to 38.2 percent. Given that  $F = 53.115$  and  $p = 0.000$  as shown in Table 4, it indicates that the effect of digital marketing on the international of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria is statistically significant.

Furthermore, the collinearity statistics presented in Table 5 indicate that the variables were devoid of multicollinearity because the tolerance values generated exceeded 0.1 and the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) generated were not greater than 5. This entails that the multicollinearity condition of regression analysis has been met under this circumstance (Ringle et al., 2015). Also, from the standardized coefficients column in Table 5, it has been revealed that with a beta coefficient of 0.520 or 52.0 percent, email marketing had the highest contribution to the regression model. The



second-highest contributor to the model is social media marketing, with a beta coefficient of 0.400 or 40.0 percent. Whereas, the least contributing variable to the model is mobile marketing, with a beta coefficient of 0.194 or 19.4 percent. In addition, Table 5 also shows that the p-values of all the variables tested were less than the error margin of 0.05 with positive t-test values [(social media marketing: p-value = 0.000, t = 8.248); (email marketing: p-value = 0.000, t = 9.362); (search engine marketing: p-value = 0.008, t = 2.681); and (mobile marketing: p-value = 0.003, t = 3.003)]. This implies that social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing have significant positive effects on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. On the basis of this finding, null hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4 were rejected.

## 5. Conclusion, and practical implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the causality between digital marketing and the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. It aimed to determine how these SMEs could leverage and apply digital marketing tools such as social media, search engine, email and mobile marketing to actualize their internationalization agenda to foreign markets. To that end, the targeted a sample of 348 owners and managers of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Lagos, Nigeria to obtain data for the study through a questionnaire survey. With the aid of descriptive and inferential statistics, our findings revealed that digital marketing could significantly improve the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. It specifically revealed that social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing had significant positive effects on the internationalization of small and medium-sized agricultural exporters in Nigeria. On this basis, we have recommended some practical measures that could be adopted by agricultural SMEs to achieve their internationalization ambition.

Firstly, we believe that social media is essential to the internationalization ambitions of SMEs, as such they should utilize social media networks, and online communities to search for potential foreign partners, promote their offerings to them and build relationships that would enable them expand to foreign markets. Secondly, electronic mail should be effectively utilized by agricultural SMEs to prospect for foreign partners and build mutually-beneficial relationships that will enhance their ability to expand into foreign markets. Thirdly, agricultural SMEs seeking internationalization opportunities should utilize search engines to search for potential foreign partners, and promote their offerings to customers in intended foreign countries in order to gradually enter those markets. Finally, mobile marketing solutions such as location targeting, mobile application software and mobile advertising should be exploited by agricultural SMEs to enable them network and promote their offerings to foreign partners. Overall, digital marketing can provide a unique and cost-effective platform or outlet for intending SMEs to seek out partners, and build robust networks that extend their ability to get their goods and services to foreign markets effectively.

### 5.1 Research limitations and future studies

This study was limited to SMEs in the Nigerian agricultural sector. It was constrained to digital marketing technologies including social media marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing and mobile marketing. Therefore, we suggest that future researchers should expand the scope of their studies to include large enterprises and SMEs outside of the agricultural sectors to determine whether or not digital marketing could play significant roles in their internationalization ambitions. Also, there is need for more studies on digital marketing using more variables other than social media, email, search engine and mobile marketing in order to generate a wide variety of digital marketing options that firms can apply to realize their internationalization agenda

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**APPENDIX I**  
**RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

**SECTION A**  
**RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Please kindly select the option that best describes your demography from the options provided

1. Age: (a) 18-25 years ( ) (b) 26-35 years ( ) (c) 36-45 years ( )  
(d) 46 years or above ( )
2. Gender: (a) Male ( ) (b) Female ( )
3. Marital status: (a) Single ( ) (b) Married ( ) (c) Divorced ( )
4. Employment status: (a) Business owner ( ) (b) Business manager ( ) (c) Both ( )

**SECTION B**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS**

Please kindly select the option that best describes your response to the statements. Note that:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

U = Undecided

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

SN	RESEARCH VARIABLES	SA	A	U	D	SD
	<b>SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING</b>					
1	I use social media networks to interact with partners in foreign markets					
2	I regularly interact with other members on foreign trade-based communities on social media					
3	My firm uses social media to build useful relationships with foreign market partners					
	<b>EMAIL MARKETING</b>					
4	The firm uses electronic mail to search for potential customers and partners in foreign markets					
5	We use electronic mail services to build business relationships with foreign market partners					
6	Our products are advertised to foreign-market customers via electronic mail on a regular basis					
	<b>SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING</b>					
7	The firm has an active business profile on Google to promote the brand					
8	We run specialized advertisements on Google to attract foreign-market customers to products					
9	We work with digital marketers to increase traffic by improving content ranking in search engine results					

	<b>MOBILE MARKETING</b>					
10	We use mobile application software services to connect with foreign-market customers					
11	The firm advertises its products via mobile devices like smartphones					
12	We use location services to target advertising campaigns at customers in specific country markets for improved results					
	<b>INTERNATIONALIZATION</b>					
13	Digital marketing enables us to export directly to intended country markets					
14	We export through partners to foreign markets using networks developed via digital marketing technologies					
15	Through digital marketing, the firm reinforces the presence of its brand in foreign markets					