



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING REVOLUTION IN PAKISTAN: A STUDY OF ITS ADOPTION AND IMPACT ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

E-marketing has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their customers, offering a dynamic approach to exploring, creating, and delivering value electronically. Its influence has been particularly profound in Pakistan, where the widespread adoption of the internet has sparked a paradigm shift in the marketing landscape. This paper delves into the motivations behind Pakistani businesses adopting e-marketing strategies. Through a survey of 250 business owners randomly selected from twin cities, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, the study utilizes descriptive statistics to analyze the current state of e-marketing and its potential in the country. The research reveals a commendable level of online marketing proficiency among Pakistani businesses. They are effectively wielding e-marketing tools to attract qualified leads and navigate the increasingly competitive environment. It also sheds light on the critical role of policymaking in fostering further growth and unlocking the full potential of e-marketing in Pakistan. By actively integrating e-marketing tools and techniques across various sectors, Pakistan can take a significant stride towards its vision of becoming a truly digital nation.

Keywords: E-marketing, Business adoption, Digital marketing, Digital transformation, Marketing strategies, Competitive environment.

Introduction

E-marketing has become a force to be reckoned with in the global economy, acting as a major driver of economic growth, development, and job creation (Tembo, 2019). The revolution in information technology and communications fundamentally changed how business is done. Witnessing a power shift from organizations to consumers (Onete et al., 2017), the internet emerged as a formidable weapon in the modern business arsenal. Companies are pouring resources into expanding their networks and online presence. With Asia boasting over 2.2 billion internet users in June 2019, countries in the region are actively leveraging e-commerce and e-marketing opportunities. This shift is evident in the near-universal migration of organizations from traditional methods to the online environment. Leveraging cybernetic networks, countless businesses have moved their marketing and operational activities online (Lin, 2016).

Pakistan, too, has embraced the global technological wave. The government's ambitious "Digital Pakistan" initiative aims to integrate advancements across all socio-economic sectors. However, the journey towards realizing this digital dream is at its nascent stage. Current efforts fall short of the benchmark in various aspects of e-governance, including web initiatives, online services, infrastructure,



and citizen preparedness. As Shabbir et al. (2020) suggest, it may take some time before e-marketing reaches its full potential in Pakistan.

Despite this gap, the country has made noticeable strides. Government-backed online facilities started in 1996, and by the early 2000s, the internet user base surged to 60,000. Additionally, in 1996, intercity fibre optic networks began connecting various regions, laying the groundwork for further infrastructural expansion. Pakistan's e-marketing journey may have just begun, but the seeds of potential are undeniably planted. With continued investment in infrastructure, digital literacy, and strategic policy making, the country can leverage the power of online platforms to empower businesses, boost economic growth, and ultimately pave the way for a truly digital future.

For Pakistan, the gateway to the digital world opened wide in early 2000s, with its first connection to the International Submarine Fiber Optic Network. Joining the Global Information Superhighway through the submarine cable in 2000s marked a turning point for Pakistan. This internet revolution, once nascent, has now fully engulfed Pakistan, propelling it to one of the top position in global internet user rankings. The ripple effects of this digital wave have been particularly pronounced among Small and Medium Enterprises with international aspirations. As internet culture seamlessly integrates into daily life, from large corporations and universities to bustling news media, online presence has become the norm. Pakistan's digital journey is a testament to the transformative power of the internet. From connecting SMEs to global markets to empowering women and bridging the digital divide, the journey holds immense promise for the future. As the country continues to ride the digital wave, one thing is certain: Pakistan is surfing towards a vibrant and connected tomorrow. While Pakistan has embraced the digital wave, e-marketing still holds untapped potential for its businesses. Understanding the core principles of e-marketing can empower potential leaders to revitalize their ventures, but it's crucial to consider both the implications and challenges (Alharthey, 2023; Naz et al., 2023).

Deploying e-marketing can reshape the nature of a Pakistani business, offering a fresh approach to the traditional marketing landscape. Though research in this field has gained momentum over the past decade, it's still a relatively nascent area in the country. However, the interactive nature of e-marketing is undeniable. It provides instant access to product information for consumers, eliminating the limitations of traditional communication methods. The internet's arrival in Pakistan has opened up new possibilities and challenges for marketing professionals, creating a fresh communication channel across industries. (Choudhury et al., 2021) aptly observes that due to the internet's widespread popularity and dependence, e-marketing can be the most potent tool for managing marketing operations and promoting Pakistani products. While it may take time for e-marketing to reach its full potential, a growing number of companies across diverse industries are increasingly shifting online, generating a significant portion of their revenue through digital channels.

This trend underscores the growing importance of e-marketing in Pakistan's evolving business landscape. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities, businesses can unlock the power of this transformative tool, paving the way for a future of growth and success in the digital age. E-marketing has rewritten the rules of the game, dictating the fate of many businesses worldwide. In Pakistan, however, this powerful tool faces roadblocks that hinder its full potential. One major obstacle lies in the lack of robust technical infrastructure, including secure systems, reliable connections, standardized protocols, and effective communication channels.



These limitations call for a clear and practical roadmap for e-marketing in Pakistan. A well-defined set of guidelines, encompassing both technical and strategic aspects, can pave the way for efficient and effective implementation. Such a framework would not only address security concerns but also provide businesses with a blueprint for harnessing the full potential of online marketing strategies. With a stronger digital infrastructure and a structured approach, e-marketing can unlock boundless opportunities for Pakistani businesses. It can bridge the gap between products and consumers, streamline marketing operations, and expand market reach like never before. By addressing the existing challenges and fostering a supportive environment, Pakistan can transform e-marketing from a promising concept to a transformative force, empowering businesses and driving the country's digital future.

Literature Review

This research draws upon a diverse range of sources, spanning academic journals, books, and even websites, to explore the fascinating world of e-marketing. In today's business landscape, this innovative approach has established itself as a powerful tool, propelling modern companies forward (FazliWadood, 2022). Its potential lies in its ability to unlock new opportunities, streamline processes, and ultimately, drive success. One of the most attractive advantages of e-marketing is its cost-effectiveness. Compared to traditional methods, online strategies can significantly reduce marketing expenses. Companies that strategically leverage the internet can witness skyrocketing market share (Arora & Predmore, 2013).

While some discussions within the e-marketing literature anticipate widespread disintermediation, where electronic markets bypass traditional intermediaries like brokers, the picture is more nuanced. As Strauss and Frost (2014) defined e-marketing as it involves leveraging digital applications "to upgrade, implement, and distribute the prices of products and services" for both business development and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, many researchers argued that the web market can effectively fulfil the core objectives of retailers offering the right product at the right time, place, and price by minimizing geographical and temporal barriers, streamlining middleman functions, and even reducing the need for physical stores.

In essence, e-marketing empowers consumers to be time-and-space-conscious decision-makers, facilitating their journey towards connecting with virtual networks and online platforms for seamless product purchases. Frost and Strauss (2016) aptly stated that e-marketing is about rethinking and applying modern business practices to market goods, services, information, and even ideas through the internet and other electronic channels. This perspective, echoed by my researchers (Asghar & Manzoor, 2022; Asghar et al., 2015; Asif, 2022; Dominici, 2009; Shahid et al., 2022), underscores the diverse applications and transformative potential of this dynamic field. By harnessing the power of e-marketing, businesses can not only thrive in today's competitive landscape but also pave the way for a future of streamlined operations, customer-centric strategies, and boundless opportunities.

E-marketing, a term as dynamic as the digital landscape itself, takes on different hues depending on the author's perspective, background, and approach. Kaur et al. (2015) view it as the skilful application of digital technologies to achieve marketing objectives through online product and service exchange. This focus on measurable effectiveness through high response rates highlights e-marketing's power as a targeted and adaptable tool. Sam and Chatwin (2013) emphasize e-marketing's ability to dismantle communication barriers, bringing customers and employees closer despite geographical



constraints. Himel (2022) echoes this sentiment, defining e-marketing as the modern engagement with products, services, and information through digital channels.

Frost and Strauss (2016) see it as a potent force, elevating traditional marketing tasks and reshaping strategies through enhanced customer value and increased profitability. Imran et al. (2022) highlight the relationship-building aspect, describing e-marketing as leveraging communication networks and internet environments to connect with potential customers. Frost and Strauss (2016) expand the scope, suggesting that e-marketing goes beyond the marketing department, requiring collaboration across various business functions.

Faulds et al. (2018) point out the mutual benefit: informed customers, empowered by readily available online information, make better buying decisions, while organizations streamline processes and save time. Shabbir et al. (2020) underscores the undeniable trend – the future of marketing hinges on web-based platforms and internet technologies. Therefore, researchers face a crucial task: understanding how e-marketing's influence plays out in the market, particularly its impact on positioning and marketing competencies. This knowledge can pave the way for businesses to confidently invest in e-marketing, unlocking its true potential for growth and success in the digital age.

Research Objectives

The digital revolution has swept across the globe, transforming countless industries, and e-marketing has emerged as a powerful tool reshaping the business landscape. In Pakistan, a nation embracing technological advancements, understanding the current state of e-marketing and its perceived effectiveness among business owners becomes crucial. This research aims to delve into this dynamic realm with the following objectives:

1. **Mapping the Terrain:** Uncover the range of technological advancements that have infiltrated marketing practices in Pakistan. This involves identifying the specific tools, platforms, and trends shaping the digital marketing landscape.
2. **Decoding E-Marketing:** Delve into the rationale behind developing and implementing e-marketing strategies in Pakistan. This exploration will assess the potential benefits, opportunities, and challenges associated with embracing online marketing initiatives. Additionally, it will identify the most effective marketing tools and techniques that resonate with Pakistani audiences within this context.
3. **Technology in Action:** Analyze the multifaceted role of technology within promotional activities and assess the overall significance of e-marketing for businesses in Pakistan. This objective will examine how businesses leverage technology to create impactful campaigns, engage with customers, and achieve their marketing goals.
4. **Charting the Course:** Formulate practical and actionable implications for implementing effective e-marketing strategies and techniques. This concluding stage will provide valuable insights and recommendations for businesses to successfully navigate the digital marketing landscape in Pakistan, maximizing their reach, engagement, and ultimately, their success.

By investigating these objectives, this research aims to shed light on the current state of e-marketing in Pakistan, offering valuable insights to both academics and practitioners. It holds the potential to not only illuminate the challenges and opportunities but also to pave the way for a future where Pakistani businesses harness the power of e-marketing to thrive in the ever-evolving digital age.



Research Methodology

This study embarked on a two-pronged approach, drawing its insights from both primary and secondary methods. For primary data, structured questionnaires guided personal interviews with owners of business organizations within twin cities, the bustling cities of Pakistan. In specific instances, Likert's five-point scales helped gauge the respondents' opinions with greater nuance. Simultaneously, the research sought to enrich the existing knowledge base in e-marketing. This involved a systematic review of relevant articles and past publications in the field, sourced from international marketing journals, e-marketing books, and informative websites. By carefully combing through this wealth of knowledge, the paper aimed to paint a comprehensive picture of the current e-marketing landscape in twin cities of Pakistan.

Data Collection, Analysis and Results

This study's main goal was to comprehend the attitudes of business owners regarding e-marketing. A systematic, closed-ended questionnaire was created especially for them in order to explore their viewpoints. This tool examined their opinions on a variety of e-marketing topics that were common in their companies. Using the accuracy of descriptive statistics, the pages that follow go out to analyse their perspectives on these important matters.

Table 1

Familiarity with the use of Internet, N=250.

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Unfamiliar with internet	4	1.6	1.6
Somewhat familiar	84	33.6	35.2
Familiar	109	43.6	78.8
Well familiar	53	21.2	100
Total	250		100

The internet has evolved into the vital core of contemporary living, permeating every aspect of day-to-day existence. Its impact on business, especially in the field of marketing, is profound and goes well beyond personal relationships. It has opened up completely new avenues for communication, encouraging lively discussions on forums, social networks, and instant messaging. Aware of these revolutionary potential, Pakistani entrepreneurs are using the internet more and more to promote their businesses and broaden their customer base. Effectively traversing this digital terrain, however, calls for the right knowledge and abilities.

The table 1 shows the results of a survey of 250 people about their familiarity with the use of the internet. 1.6% of the respondents said they were unfamiliar with the internet, 33.6% said they were somewhat familiar, 43.6% said they were familiar, and 21.2% said they were well familiar. The table also shows the percentage of respondents who fall into each category, as well as the cumulative percentage. For example, 35.2% of respondents said they were either somewhat familiar or unfamiliar with the internet.



Table 2

Use of online information for Business, N=250

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	164	65.6	65.6
No	86	34.4	100
Total	250		100

Table 2 shows the results of a survey conducted on 250 participants regarding their use of online information for business purposes. It analyzes the frequency and percentage of respondents who answered "Yes" or "No" to the question. The majority of respondents 65.6% use online information for business purposes. A significant minority of 34.4% do not use online information for business. The table provides a clear overview of the data without going into further details about the type of online information used, the frequency of use, or the specific reasons for not using online information available for customers.

Table 3

Trust on online available information, N=250

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	158	63.2	63.2
No	92	36.8	100
Total	250		100

In a survey of 250 individuals, the pulse of trust towards online information was gauged. A resounding 63.2%, translating to 158 respondents, expressed confidence in the information readily available on the internet. This leaves 36.8%, or 92 individuals, harbouring scepticism and opting for a "No" when asked about their trust in online information. Overall, the survey paints a picture of a digital landscape where online information finds favour with the majority, yet a sizeable chunk remains wary of its reliability. Perhaps those who trust online information readily see it as a treasure trove of knowledge, readily accessible and constantly updated. They might rely on it for research, news, or even personal decisions, viewing it as a valuable tool in navigating the modern world. For them, the internet's vastness holds answers and insights, readily available at their fingertips.

Table 4

Response against the importance of digital marketing, N=250

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly disagree	31	12.4	12.4
Disagree	34	13.6	26
Neutral	25	10	36
Agree	74	29.6	65.6
Strongly Agree	86	34.4	100
Total	250		100



Table 4 paints a fascinating picture of public opinion regarding the importance of digital marketing. It reveals a spectrum of perspectives, highlighting both ardent support and hesitant scepticism. A resounding 34.4%, the largest group, wholeheartedly agree with the significance of digital marketing. These 86 individuals likely view it as an essential tool for reaching customers, building brand awareness, and driving sales in today's digital age. They might be early adopters who embrace technology and its transformative potential. Close behind, another 29.6%, 74 respondents express agreement with the importance of digital marketing.

These individuals might not be as fervent as the "Strongly Agree" group, but they still recognize its value and acknowledge its growing influence in the modern marketing landscape. A combined 13.6%, 34 people and 12.4%, 31 people disagree or strongly disagree with the importance of digital marketing. These 65 individuals represent a significant portion of the population who harbour doubts about its effectiveness or relevance. Concerns about cost, competition, or even the impersonal nature of digital interactions might fuel their scepticism. A further 10%, 25 people remain neutral on the issue. This group might be unsure about the impact of digital marketing or may require further evidence to be convinced. They could also represent individuals who operate in industries less reliant on digital strategies.

Overall, Table 4 suggests a positive, albeit not unanimous, sentiment towards digital marketing. While a sizeable minority remains unconvinced, the majority acknowledges its significance in the modern marketing landscape. This trend likely reflects the increasing prevalence of digital technology and its growing influence on consumer behaviour. However, the presence of dissent underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of digital marketing's effectiveness. Different industries, target audiences, and marketing goals might necessitate diverse approaches, with digital strategies playing a more or less prominent role depending on the context.

Table 5

Response for the use of Digital Marketing, N=250

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
Blogs & Websites	51	20.4
Social Media Marketing	145	58
Electronic mail	25	10
Content Marketing	59	23.6
Sponsored Links	86	34.4

Table 5 indicates the different digital marketing channels respondents prefer to use, revealing some interesting preferences among the 250 individuals surveyed. With 145 respondents which are 58%, social media reigns supreme as the most popular digital marketing channel. This highlights the immense power of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to reach and engage target audiences. Following closely behind, 86 respondents which are 34.4% utilize sponsored links, indicating the effectiveness of paid advertising platforms like Google Ads and Facebook Ads in driving targeted traffic and generating leads. 59 respondents which are 23.6% embrace content marketing strategies like blog posts, infographics, and videos to attract and nurture leads.



This suggests a focus on providing valuable information and building trust with audiences. While not as dominant as social media, 51 respondents which are 20.4% still find blogs and websites valuable channels for digital marketing. This might reflect their effectiveness for organic search optimization and reaching specialized audiences. Electronic mail: With only 25 respondents which are 10% opting for email marketing, it appears to be a less preferred channel in this group. This could be due to concerns about spam filters, competition in inboxes, or the need for effective email marketing strategies.

Table 6

Preferred Choice of Respondent to choose E-marketing, N=250

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative Percentage
Wide Reach	21	8.4	8.4
Fast reach	124	49.6	58
Cost effective	25	10	68
Easy access to information	41	16.4	84.4
Easily accessible to use	39	15.6	100
Total	250		100

Table 6 delves into the minds of 250 individuals, revealing their preferred reasons for choosing email marketing as a communication tool. It paints a clear picture of what aspects of email marketing resonate most strongly with users. A resounding 49.6% which are 124 respondents prioritize fast reach. This group values email's ability to instantly deliver messages to a large audience, making it ideal for time-sensitive campaigns or urgent updates. They likely appreciate the immediacy and impact email offers compared to slower channels like traditional mail or even some forms of social media. While speed is king for some, 10% depicts 25 respondents highlight the cost-effectiveness of email marketing. They see it as a budget-friendly way to reach their target audience without breaking the bank. This group might be particularly drawn to email's scalability and its ability to deliver high returns on investment compared to other marketing channels.

For 16.4% which are 41 respondents, easy access to information is the winning feature. They appreciate email's ability to house detailed information, reports, or instructions in a structured and readily accessible format. This group might value the permanence and searchability of email compared to fleeting social media posts or transient conversations. Rounding out the top choices, 15.6% which are 39 respondents prioritize ease of use. They find email's interface intuitive and user-friendly, making it a hassle-free way to communicate and share information. This group might value simplicity and efficiency, appreciating the minimal learning curve associated with email compared to more complex marketing tools.

While not the top choices, wide reach which are 8.4% and easy accessibility 8.4% still hold some appeal for a portion of the respondents. These individuals likely see these aspects as complementary benefits to email are other strengths, contributing to its overall effectiveness as a communication tool. Table 6 reveals that email marketing's appeal lies in its potent combination of speed, affordability, information accessibility, and user-friendliness. While individual priorities vary, these core strengths



collectively make email a compelling choice for reaching target audiences and achieving communication goals.

Table 7

Respondents' opinion towards Limitations of E-Marketing, N=250.

Opinion	Frequency									
	Customer Hesitation		Deceptive Behaviour		Data Exposure		Increased Risk		Disruptive Interactions	
	Response	%	Response	%	Response	%	Response	%	Response	%
Strongly Disagree	34	13.6	21	8.4	23	9.2	43	17.2	31	12.4
Disagree	38	15.2	51	20.4	42	16.8	22	8.8	19	7.6
Neutral	52	20.8	47	18.8	57	22.8	48	19.2	47	18.8
Agree	57	22.8	62	24.8	52	20.8	61	24.4	64	25.6
Strongly Agree	69	27.6	69	27.6	76	30.4	76	30.4	89	35.6
Total	250	100	250	100	250	100	250	100	250	100

A survey of 250 people explored their opinions on the limitations of e-marketing. The table above summarizes their responses. Among the five limitations listed, Customer Hesitation and Deceptive Behaviour emerged. A significant portion of respondents expressed concerns about various limitations of e-marketing. No single limitation received strong disagreement from a majority. This suggests that most respondents acknowledge at least some drawbacks associated with e-marketing. The survey findings suggest that consumers are concerned about the limitations of e-marketing, particularly those related to privacy and trust. Businesses that engage in e-marketing should be aware of these concerns and take steps to address them.

Key Findings of the Study

The study found that business owners surveyed had a high level of internet literacy. This implies a solid basis for the uptake of e-marketing. Despite widespread internet usage, e-marketing websites are nevertheless remarkably underutilised. This suggests possible obstacles or a lack of knowledge on the efficacy of websites. A considerable proportion of participants conveyed doubts regarding the impact of internet advertising on consumer buying choices. This emphasises how important it is for e-marketing techniques to foster transparency and trust. It's interesting to note that, despite consumers' apparent reluctance to believe information they find online, company owners all agree on the significance of e-marketing. This suggests a perceptual gap that has to be filled. It was discovered that website users place a high priority on using their online platforms to enlighten prospective clients about goods and services. This demonstrates the importance of specialised websites for focused outreach.

Social media has become the undisputed best option for e-marketing tools support the findings of Evans et al. (2021) and Dwivedi et al. (2015). Even among those who are familiar with the internet, its appeal is probably due to its accessibility and broad reach. Limiting Factors: The study also raised important questions regarding the restrictions associated with e-marketing. Major obstacles to its expansion in Pakistan were found to include unwilling customers, security concerns, privacy breaches, and interruptions.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into Pakistan's e-marketing usage and growth trends. E-marketing has the potential to greatly influence consumer behaviour and corporate marketplaces by improving organisational marketing methods. Seen as a novel strategy, its implementation in the contemporary company environment has practically become essential for prospering in the contemporary marketplace. Nevertheless, the analysis reveals an unexpected fact: a lot of big enterprises in Pakistan still don't have websites and haven't used e-marketing strategies. Pakistan is still in the early phases of its journey towards mainstream e-marketing adoption, despite a growing awareness of its potential. In spite of this, worries about e-marketing are also growing. Gaining a competitive edge in this globalization-period era requires embracing rapidly evolving technology and optimising e-marketing frameworks.

Based on our analysis of the evaluated previous published literature and research data. Although internet usage is widespread, people's understanding of online marketing is frequently lacking, which makes it difficult for businesses to succeed. Ensuring the successful deployment of e-marketing requires necessary professionals to receive appropriate training and technological know-how. It is vital to address the dearth of websites among different companies. To close this gap, it is imperative to simplify e-marketing methods, provide high-speed internet accessibility, and provide user-friendly, time-saving infrastructure. It's important to combat the belief that online information is not very reliable. To earn the trust of customers, all parties involved businesses in particular must place a high priority on consistency, veracity, and prompt updates in their online content. In order to protect the privacy and information security of both customers and merchants, the government should enact robust cyber laws and legal frameworks in recognition of the significance of e-commerce.

Although social media is undoubtedly the most popular e-marketing tool, making use of all the resources at your disposal is essential to taking advantage of all the chances and improving the efficacy of e-marketing. Something has to be done about the general discontent with the constraints of e-marketing. Government agencies and industry associations need to work together to spread the word about the benefits of e-marketing and put workable plans in place to deal with its current disadvantages. This can entail starting extensive programmes for marketing research and offering pertinent logistical assistance.

Through proactive implementation of these suggestions, Pakistan may foster a flourishing e-marketing environment, enabling enterprises to scale to new heights in the international marketplace.

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