

The Influence of Online Marketing Strategy on the Sales Performance of a Traditional Fresh-Grocery SME in Malaysia

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Abstract

Online marketing strategies had become a crucial determinant of sales performance across various industries, particularly for traditional fresh grocery businesses that faced increasing pressure to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital consumer behaviour. The use of online marketing was seen as a communication tool to attract more new customers through social media and influencer marketing. Furthermore, it also served as a channel for selling products online via e-commerce platforms. Although these strategies were widely applied, there was a lack of academic research examining their effectiveness among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This conceptual paper provided a comprehensive discussion of previous studies related to sales performance improvement, focusing on online marketing strategies within SMEs. The study also identified research areas that had been underexplored and offered recommendations for future qualitative and quantitative research directions. Based on the findings discussed, this study aimed to strengthen SMEs' understanding of more effective approaches to improving sales performance through online marketing strategies.

Keywords: Online Marketing Tools, Sales Performance, SME, Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, E-commerce Marketing.

Introduction

Sales performance had long been recognized as a crucial indicator of business health and sustainability, particularly for traditional enterprises operating in Pasar Tani (farmers' markets). These businesses had relied heavily on physical sales and local customers, which made them highly vulnerable to disruptions such as reduced foot traffic and shifting consumer behavior (Asmat, 2020). A decline in sales performance had weakened financial stability, constrained operational capacity, and limited innovation and market competitiveness (Benjamin, 2022). For such enterprises, improving sales performance required strategic adaptation to the changing digital environment.

Online marketing strategies had emerged as vital tools for enhancing business performance in the digital era (Chaffey, 2019). Social media platforms, in particular, had enabled businesses

to communicate directly with customers, foster engagement, and strengthen brand loyalty through interactive and personalized content (Ali et al., 2017). At the same time, influencer marketing had become an effective promotional strategy that leveraged trusted online personalities to enhance product visibility and credibility, especially among younger consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Furthermore, e-commerce marketing had provided traditional businesses with new selling channels, allowing them to expand beyond local markets, streamline transactions, and sustain operations even during physical market disruptions (Kenneth, 2022).

Despite the growing evidence on digital marketing adoption, research focusing on integrated online marketing approaches combining social media, influencer marketing, and e-commerce among traditional SMEs in Malaysia's fresh-grocery sector had remained limited. Existing studies had primarily concentrated on urban or service-based SMEs, leaving a gap in understanding how traditional market businesses could utilize digital platforms to recover from sales decline. Therefore, this paper reviews social media and influencer marketing strategies for customer engagement and promotion, as well as the effectiveness of e-commerce marketing in improving sales performance.

Literature Review

Online Marketing

Online marketing also called digital or internet marketing, used internet-based tools and technologies to promote products, services, or brands to targeted consumers (Ashrani, 2023; Chaffey, 2019). It offered SMEs cost-effective access to global markets through channels such as content marketing, social media, influencer marketing, affiliate programs, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and email campaigns. These methods enabled precise audience targeting, real-time interaction, and measurable results, helping businesses build customer relationships, brand loyalty, and sales. Compared to traditional marketing, which relied on offline media like TV or print and was costlier and harder to measure, online marketing provided two-way communication, rapid campaign adjustments, and detailed analytics, making it more adaptable in the digital economy. However, it faced challenges such as technology dependence, privacy and security risks, global competition, and lack of personal interaction (Ashrani, 2023).

Social Media Marketing

Social media, originally defined as Web 2.0, based platforms that enabled users to create and share content (Kaplan, 2010; Vinerean, 2013), has been examined across many fields, including sociology, business, politics, economics, ICT, psychology, education, and marketing for its role in shaping identity, communication, and consumer behaviour. From building communities and influencing culture (Jonathan, 2015) to supporting brand management (Paul, 2013) and political engagement (Robert, 2012), social media became a powerful communication and marketing tool. For small businesses, social media marketing, especially strong customer relationships, communication, and content sharing was found to enhance sales performance (Atirah, 2020), with customer engagement driven by satisfaction, positive emotions, and trust (Santini, 2020). Among platforms, TikTok stood out for its rapid growth since 2018 and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it became a global hub for entertainment, commerce, and information sharing (Moch, 2023). While offering high engagement and cost-effective content creation (Yudhistira, 2022), TikTok also posed risks

such as cyberbullying, privacy concerns, and misinformation. Its algorithm, short-form videos, and interactive features (Githaiga, 2024) enabled brands to deliver targeted, visually appealing, and user-generated content that built trust and encouraged participation, particularly among younger users. Successful marketing tactics included official brand channels, collaborations with influencers and creator communities, strategic hashtag campaigns (e.g., #eyeslipsface), and the use of TikTok's business advertising tools. In this study, TikTok marketing provided an effective strategy to increase visibility, strengthen customer relationships, and improve sales.

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing emerged over the past decade as a leading modern marketing strategy, using the credibility, reach, and trust of social media personalities to shape consumer purchasing decisions (Rathod, 2022; Brown, 2008; Leung, 2022). Influencers built strong audience connections through authentic, high-quality content such as reviews, tutorials, and personal recommendations, making this approach a powerful form of digital word-of-mouth. Key characteristics included popularity and influence across niches like fashion, food, technology, and finance, active engagement with followers, creative content production, authenticity, collaboration with brands, and measurable outcomes such as engagement rates, brand awareness, and sales (Kresnawidiansyah, 2023; Mahardhani, 2023; Suherlan, 2023). Rathod (2022) identified several influencer types: traditional celebrities ("Sharers"), emerging digital creators ("Discoverers"), social-network "Networkers," topic-based experts ("Opinion Leaders"), and everyday users who influenced peers through word-of-mouth. Despite their differences, all shared the ability to impact purchasing decisions through trust, relationships, or expertise.

Research showed that influencer marketing increased brand awareness, strengthened brand image, improved word-of-mouth communication, and boosted sales, particularly benefiting SMEs as a cost-effective alternative to traditional advertising (Agustian, 2023; Mandiri, 2022). However, its effectiveness depended on the right match between influencer and target audience and on maintaining authentic content. Overly commercial posts, sponsorship disclosures, or content inconsistent with an influencer's persona could weaken engagement or trust (De Veirman, 2017; Djafarova, 2019; Hughes et al., 2019; Kay et al., 2020; Boerman et al., 2017). Some studies even found that product price and quality influenced purchasing decisions more strongly than influencer endorsements (Tjandrawibawa, 2020). Agung (2021) concluded that influencer marketing temporarily raised brand awareness but should be complemented with other marketing strategies for sustained sales growth.

E-commerce Marketing

The evolution and importance of e-commerce as a sales channel began with Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) in the 1970s and early platforms such as the Boston Computer Exchange in 1982 (Laudon, 2022). E-commerce then expanded rapidly in the 1990s with the commercialization of the internet, the first secure online transaction by Net Market, and the emergence of Amazon and eBay (Laudon, 2022). From the 2000s onwards, platforms such as PayPal, Shopify, Alibaba, Lazada, Shopee, and TikTok Shop continued to drive growth, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when e-commerce became an essential channel for shopping and income generation (Madhumitha, 2021). After the pandemic, online shopping habits persisted, supported by 24/7 accessibility, mobile integration, live commerce, and fast

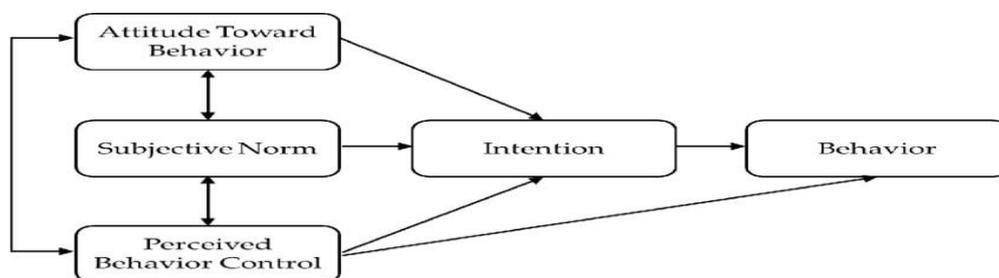
logistics (Darlene Gabrielle.S, 2025). Studies showed that adopting e-commerce and digital payment systems improved sales performance and customer confidence, as demonstrated in Indonesia and found to be similarly relevant to Malaysia (Yudhistira, 2023; Sulistyaningsih, 2021). Platforms such as Shopee and Lazada, as well as super apps like Grab and Gojek, provided secure payment systems, logistics, and a wide range of integrated services (Chen, 2025; Prananda, 2020). However, experts advised that super apps should have avoided adding too many features that could have disrupted the user experience (Hasselwander, 2025).

Theory Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action, is central to this study for understanding consumer behaviour in online marketing, particularly in addressing SME's declining sales. TPB emphasizes how attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape intentions and behaviours, making it a relevant framework for analysing digital marketing strategies. TPB explained how consumer attitudes toward social media content, influencer credibility, and e-commerce convenience influence engagement and purchase decisions; how social norms such as peer influence, reviews, and endorsements drive acceptance; and how perceived ease of actions, like seamless transactions or simple calls-to-action, affect actual behaviour. Through TikTok marketing, influencer collaborations, and GrabMart e-commerce, this study leverages TPB components to build stronger engagement with existing customers, attract new markets, and ultimately improve sales performance.

Table 1

The Theory Planned Behavior



(Source: Fishbein, 1975)

AIDA

The AIDA model Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, introduced by St. Elmo Lewis in 1898, provides a structured framework for understanding the consumer decision-making process and has long influenced advertising and marketing strategies. By dividing the customer journey into four stages, it helped marketers design campaigns that first capture attention, then build interest, create desire through emotional appeal, and finally prompt action with clear calls to purchase or engage. Over time, the model evolved to adapt to digital marketing, with variations like AISAS reflecting the rise of search engines and social media. Despite these adaptations, AIDA remains a fundamental tool for analysing consumer behaviour and guiding marketing strategies.



Figure 1: The AIDA Model Pyramid (Source: Lewis, 1898)

Sales Performance

Sales performance measures how effectively a business or individual achieves sales goals by generating revenue, meeting targets, retaining customers, and maintaining profitability. It is commonly evaluated through metrics such as revenue generation, quota attainment, conversion rates, customer acquisition and retention, and profit margin per sale. Scholars highlight that sales performance is shaped by multiple perspectives: organizational theory (appropriate control systems and structures), cognitive psychology (motivation, goal perception, stress response), and economics (incentives and monetary rewards). Four main components define sales performance: sales results, behaviours, effectiveness, and efficiency. Factors influencing sales performance include individual skills and knowledge, motivation and incentives, customer relationships, market conditions, and managerial support. Research shows that self-efficacy, effort, and positive salesperson behaviour drive customer trust and repurchase intentions (Prathamesh, 2021), while strong communication and customer relationships are critical for SMEs (Atirah, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework illustrated the causal relationship between online marketing strategies and sales performance. Three key constructs were identified at the input stage: social media marketing (TikTok), influencer marketing, and e-commerce marketing (GrabMart). These strategies were designed to enhance customer engagement, expand market reach, and facilitate online purchasing. In the process stage, TikTok and influencer marketing acted as interactive communication channels that increased brand visibility and consumer trust, while GrabMart functioned as an alternative sales channel that improved product accessibility and convenience for customers. Guided by the AIDA model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the framework explained how increased awareness, interest, and customer intention generated through digital marketing activities led to improved sales performance. The outcome demonstrated that the adoption of these integrated digital marketing strategies strengthened customer engagement, enhanced promotional effectiveness, and contributed to the recovery of the company's overall sales performance.

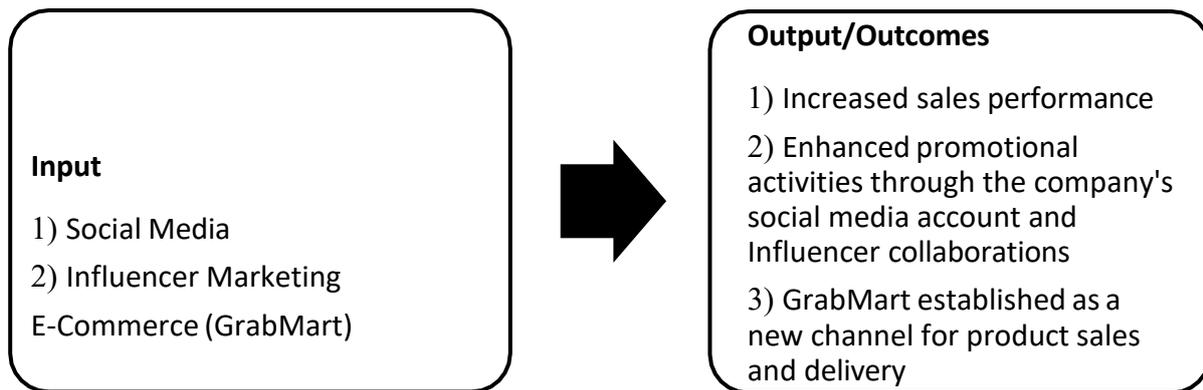


Figure 2: Input-Process-Output/Outcomes Conceptual Framework of Online Marketing Strategies Influencing Company's Sale Performance

(Source: Rajaletchumi 2023; Menevse 2025; Carol 2020; Olufisayo 2023; Zamani 2024; Hückstädt 2024; Hsiao-Yun Lu 2018; Heikki 2017; A'ang 2014; Daniel, 2005)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to review previous research on the impact of online marketing strategies on the sales performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Social media had been widely recognized as both a promotional tool and a communication channel that enabled businesses to reach a broader audience. This strategy focused on creating and sharing content to achieve goals such as enhancing brand visibility, engaging with consumers, generating potential leads, and increasing website traffic or sales. It also allowed businesses to interact directly with their audiences, gather feedback, and build customer loyalty through consistent and personalized engagement. Previous studies indicated that social media marketing was essential for modern businesses, as it provided a cost-effective means of connecting with a large audience. It also helped businesses strengthen brand awareness, promote products, and engage with customers while offering real-time feedback that allowed companies to adjust their strategies and remain competitive in the digital landscape. In addition, the use of influencer marketing had grown significantly, as influential individuals on social media platforms exerted strong effects on consumer behaviour. Their wide reach and popularity helped raise brand awareness and attract new customers. Research found that the effectiveness of influencer marketing depended on several factors, including the alignment between the influencer and their audience, the level of trust in the influencer, and the quality of content delivery. Furthermore, e-commerce emerged as an important sales channel, enabling transactions to take place without the physical presence of buyers and sellers. This approach allowed SMEs to reach a wider customer base without being constrained by distance or weather conditions. However, the effectiveness of these strategies in the context of SMEs operating within traditional farmers' markets had not been thoroughly explored in existing literature.

Conclusion and Future Studies

In the digital era, online marketing had become an essential component of business operations, functioning both as a communication channel and a platform for product sales. This conceptual paper reviewed existing literature to examine the influence of online marketing on the sales performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the

fresh vegetable sector operating in Malaysia's *Pasar Tani* (farmers' markets). The review revealed that although the topic of online marketing had been widely discussed, its application among traditional fresh-grocery SMEs in Malaysia particularly in the areas of social media, influencer marketing, and e-commerce remained limited and required further exploration. The findings also indicated that while these strategies offered numerous benefits, more in-depth research was necessary to ensure that insights remained current and aligned with ongoing technological advancements. Future research should place greater emphasis on qualitative approaches, such as conducting interviews with business owners and employees to gain deeper insights based on their real-world experiences. Such interactions would help researchers better understand the challenges faced by traditional enterprises and identify effective strategies to address them. These interviews should ideally be conducted over multiple stages to capture the evolving realities and outcomes of the strategies implemented. Additionally, quantitative research was seen as crucial for monitoring metrics such as sales performance, social media engagement, and e-commerce sales outcomes. The use of numerical data would enable researchers to evaluate, refine, and enhance marketing strategies more effectively. These measurable indicators not only demonstrated the success of specific marketing initiatives but also provided practical guidance for continuous improvement. In conclusion, this study aimed to integrate both qualitative and quantitative perspectives to assist SMEs in applying online marketing strategies more effectively. The recommendations presented were expected to help other small and medium enterprises deepen their understanding of digital marketing practices, ultimately supporting sustainable growth and strengthening competitiveness in the evolving digital marketplace.

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