



# Digital marketing and customer satisfaction in the Garment industry during Post COVID 19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

Consumer purchasing in Zimbabwe has always been dominated by Bricks and Mortar shops with few online stores. When COVID 19 set in the paths of consumers in March 2020 with restrictions on movement but with needs and wants to be met, many firms were forced to re think their marketing strategies which saw a rise in digital marketing in Zimbabwe. Consumers are always seen as savvy animals with ever changing needs and wants, all to be met by the firms through the supply of goods and services. The rise in consumer needs, competition and declining income levels during and after COVID 19 made firms to blend their marketing strategies and encompass the recent digital marketing strategies. This was the optional marketing strategy firms were left to embrace as Zimbabwe has a 90% mobile phone ownership per household (Maphosa, 2021). The study was informed by Theory of planned behaviour. The target population for the study was low to medium income segment of the market mainly comprising of university students. Convenience sampling technique was used and the interviewer used respondents that were easy to reach and the planned number of interviews was 25, however 18 interviews were conducted, data saturation (Kumar, 2011) was reached and no further data was gathered. The study results showed differed perceptions from consumers based on their technological knowledge towards ICT but mainly many consumers showed willingness to embrace digital purchasing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century although many challenges included fear of cyber crimes, poor network, cost of data, age of the consumer and social networks influence. The results from the study will help many organisations in drafting their digital marketing strategies using consumer based perceptions.

**Key Words:** Digital purchasing, Consumer perceptions, Theory of Planned Behavior, Digital Marketing, Digital marketing tools.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing has taken many businesses by storm in the global world (Chamboko, Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). Panda and Mishra (2021) describes digital marketing as the new saviour of modern marketing by creating a long overdue paradigm shift from the traditional conventional marketing. However, it should also be noted that Digital marketing came to close the gap traditional marketing tools failed to sustain as consumer tastes and preferences tool turmoil. When the lockdown hit many nations, the whole parts of the world shifted to digital platforms but the major drawback was the need to support these platforms with technical assistance, infrastructure support and skill building (International Trade Centre 2020). The presetting technological changes are threatening the use of traditional marketing tools (Day, 2011) give rise to the use of digital platforms, closing the information gap needed by consumers (Orlandi, 2016). Firms that radically embrace digital marketing strategies are at an advantage of tapping the new customers that were never tapped by traditional marketing tools (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). However, marketers need transition to ensure effective utilisation of the ever changing technology (Gregory et al., 2019) and this leaves the customers also in the verge of confusion if digital marketing tools become complex to access and execute and achieve gainful purchasing. Many researches have been done to explore the link that exists between digital marketing and firm performance in differing environmental conditions (Zhou et al, 2019), but no digital marketing tool has been found to be more acceptable and effective than the other (Kaleka & Morgan, 2019). To date few researches have been conducted to discover the perceptions consumers have towards digital marketing strategies that are targeting their pockets on a minute base. Research have

been done on the beneficial transitions that firms gain when they transitionally shift from traditional marketing practices to digital marketing practices (Zhou et al., 2019), but one has been left wondering whether the transition done by firms as they embrace technology in marketing does not leave other customers in the old company databases, all in the venture of tapping untapped markets that might not be sustainable in the long run. A research on digital marketing capabilities in Zimbabwe on firm performance has been conducted, and results are now known by firms (Chinakidzwa, More, Phiri, Maxwell 2020). However, the satisfaction of consumers on these digital platforms can never be measured using firm performance alone which made the research more relevant as sales volumes may be deceiving for long term sustainability use of digital marketing strategies in Zimbabwe, basing on the premise that digital marketing is still lagging behind in developing countries (Makacha and Njovo, 2022) with 60% of firms of e-commerce firms now accepting mobile money, credit cards and e-banking, while 40% still insist on cash on delivery with most of these firms found in developing countries (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020).

**2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To establish the digital marketing strategies which consumers are exposed too in the garment industry?
- To identify consumer benefits of digital marketing in the garment industry.
- To determine the challenges faced by consumers when digitally purchasing garment products.

**3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the digital marketing strategies being used by companies in the garment industry?
- How are consumers benefiting from interacting with companies through digital marketing tools?
- What are the challenges faced by consumers when they purchase garment products online?

**4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Table 4.1 Digital marketing defined**

Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen (2009)	‘form of communication and interaction between organizations and their customers through digital channels’
Margilof (2014)	‘is a way to tell a digital story to the consumer’
Chaffey (2015)	‘is the use of information and communication technologies to support marketing activities in order to better meet consumer needs’
(Abudullah et al, 2019).	‘the use of digital channels, devices, and platforms (whether online or offline) to create and promote a marketing message’
Sokolova and Titova (2019)	‘the formalization of <i>digital marketing content</i> and a <i>digital interaction channel</i> . It is their combination that generates specific <i>digital marketing tools</i> , sites or environments that allow to realize a marketing impact on target audiences’ Examples of digital marketing tools: Social media (SMM) and blogs; E-mail; Search engine optimization (SEO); Content creation; Landing page; Virtual Reality (VR); Augmented Reality (AR); Press releases in online media; Co-creation.
Panda and Mishra (2021)	‘Digital marketing is the process of advertising of products or services of companies using digital technologies available on internet including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium like google and facebook ads etc’
Rajagopal(2022)	‘Digital marketing is the term where business organization can promote and sell their products and give services to the customers with the use of technologies’

Source: Researcher

**4.2 Digital Marketing Strategies**

According to Nhau (November,16, 2022) news it is estimated that half of Zimbabwean population is poverty stricken to access the internet as lamented by JenfanMuswere the Cabinet Minister for ICT that the current internet penetration in Zimbabwe stands at 60%. PTRAZ second quarter report for the year ending December 2022 noted with concern that 50% of Zimbabwe population remains unconnected to the internet due to lack of financial resources, expensive data charges, technological advanced gadgets and this has widened the digital gap between individual.

A critical analyses from different authors Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen (2009); Margilof (2014); (Abudullah et al , 2019); Sokolova and Titova (2019), following are the digital marketing tools: Search marketing, online advertising, affiliate marketing, use of websites, Press release in online media, Co-creation, Landing page, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), social media, blogs and E-mail. Some of the platforms can be accessed online while others can be accessed while the customer is offline. According to Panda and Mishra (2021) digital marketing strategies are rooted on the choice of channels firms use to reach customers that are always connected on the internet. This assertion is supported by various authors that the method of digital marketing used by a firm depends on the firms’ objectives, reach of the digital tool, effectiveness of the digital tool, size of the organisation, segment of the target market among other reasons Jarvinen et al., 2012), Taiminen&Karjaluo (2013). Many firms that use digital marketing strategies assume to have achieved their digital marketing objectives.

The main digital marketing tools are better summarised by Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020) noting a clear distinction that some tools are online tools while others are offline digital tools.

**Table 4.2 Digital Marketing tools**

<b>Basic tools of digital marketing</b>	
<i>Website</i>	<p>Online Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> corporate web site;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> online store;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> online platform aggregating services or products;</li> </ul>
<i>Email marketing</i>	Based on email technology. An extremely effective means of reaching the target audience, even a specific user. Helps to establish personal communication with real and potential users.
<i>Social media</i> (Facebook, Twitter; LinkedIn; Instagram and others)	The main goal of marketing in social networks (optimization for social networks) is to build the so-called communication funnel to help find and attract users by directing people (users) from social media communities to company websites, blogs or e-shops. Social networks create the opportunity to advertise businesses and also to offer customer assistance. This, in turn, would lead to a significant increase in consumer satisfaction and create preconditions for building loyalty.
<i>Blogs</i>	An electronic platform that provides a field for discussing various issues and finding relevant information.
<i>SEO</i>	Website optimization process, using various techniques and tools, to make it easier for these sites to be discovered and ranked higher in search engines.
<i>Big Data Marketing</i>	Provides tools for collecting, processing, analyzing and interpreting data sets for various marketing purposes - segmentation, planning, feedback, user habits and forecasting.

<i>Internet advertising</i>	Various paid forms of controlled impact made through the Internet to offer products or services in the interest of a specific, explicit source. The various formats of Internet advertising are: banners; VIP links; Rich media; streaming advertising; pop-ups; online games, contests, polls; online seminars; intermediate pages; landing pages; floating ads; wallpaper ads; trick banner; RSS, site sponsorship; paid search; promotional articles; Google AdWords paid ad slots; batch ads and more.
<i>Visual marketing (You Tube)</i>	Includes activities that marketed products/ services through visual communication tools.
<i>Mobile Marketing</i>	Mobile application services providing various aspects of the daily life of the users - from meeting the daily needs to entertaining and useful activities. It is possible to create virtualization by scanning visual images and adding information to them, in order to offer detailed information to users in an interactive way, relying solely on their permission.
<i>Wearables</i>	A technique for using wearables such as watches; glasses, directly related to mobile devices and the Internet. In this way a direct connection with the users is achieved, their behaviour and habits as consumers are studied, with the aim of achieving precise segmentation and targeting subsequently.

**Table 4.3 Offline tools for advertising**

Offline tools Television Radio Digital billboards; SMS and MMS.
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Source: Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020)

From the digital marketing strategies, Social media marketing has always remained the prominent media (Rajagopal, 2022).

**4.2.1 Theory of planned behaviour**

Consumer purchases using online or offline digital marketing platforms are better explained using the Ajzen (2011) model which holds that individuals or consumers develop positive or negative attitude towards buying products with purchases rooted on one’s beliefs. (Ajzen, 2011). **Attitude, subjective norm and perceived behaviour control (PBC)** are the three constructs that influence behavioural intent (BI). Behavioural intent predicts actual behaviour, as BI shows the level of effort a person exerts into performing behaviour. It should be noted that if the intention gets stronger to perform the then in return the individual performs the behaviour. [Petra, Sanne, Melanie and Wiese, 2018]. Attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control which in turn lead to consumer purchase using digital platforms or traditional platforms are the three attributes that make up the theory.

**4.2.3 Benefits of digital marketing for the consumer**

The benefits of digital marketing can be viewed from the company’s perspective as well as from the consumer perspective. The managing director for Google Marketing Solutions of Google Asia Pacific lamented that the internet has remained the only fuel to sustainable business growth today and the era to come (Panda and Mishra, 2021). Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020) many firms have embraced digital marketing as a booster of the traditional marketing tools, all meant to satisfy the need for information by consumers. Baltes (2015) asserts that a comprehensive digital marketing campaign should embrace content marketing which encompasses identifying, analysing and satisfying consumer obligations through personalisation of messages, creating content that addresses individuals’ emotions, (Charfey et al (2009) ). Digital marketing strategies are a measure of the firm’s ability to achieve its digital marketing objectives(Kee&Yazdanifard, 2015) as they trigger customer engagement and trigger purchase behaviour (Hollebeek&Macky, 2019). According to Ajzen (2011) say intention is assumed to be first to occur before any purchase of a good or service is made after considerations of various factors such as behaviour and its subjective norms related to perceived behavioural control. Ajzen (2006) spells out that intentions are motivational factors that either lead or inhibit purchase decisions.

These intentions can be triggered by behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs which act as benefits to consumers if subjection to these beliefs is achieved.

There are many benefits that consumers can get from digital marketing Rakuten Marketing (2017) connects them to more platforms and can compare prices and discounts, Chozzle (2017) leads to consumer exposure to numerous products. Needs are quickly responded too, save time to physically travel and compare prices, more convenient as purchasing is done from home or office comfort, can get individualised products based on specifications, can air out service excellence or failure instantly, ensure fair treatment to every customer regardless of variations in orders or payment methods, Provides customers with unlimited communication time Tsvetanova (2005a), Tsvetanova (2005b), Krasnov et al (2018), Veleva (2019, Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020), more relevant and timely adverts, Consumers can access free services OECD (2019).According to Panda and Mishra (2021) the main objective of digital marketing is to convert online web visitors into substantive customers, which helps in building customer database and brand recognition in turn meeting consumer needs and wants at ease.The growth in internet connectivity has created a global market place for consumers Dhanya, Amirtha and Nithya (2022) that will take time for marketing practioners to embrace fully for consumer benefit because of its complexity.

**4.2.4 Challenges faced by consumers when digitally purchasing goods and services.**

The adoption of digital marketing comes with a number of challenges and these can be examined from two perspectives: consumer and company perspective. The challenges experienced by consumers include fraud and misleading adverts are a great concern (OECD (2019), customers are exposed to drip pricing (OECD, 2018), Easy to miss beneficial adverts by customers due to online clutter (OECD, 2016), exposure to fake consumer testimonials, ratings and product quality and commercial propaganda (Leiser, 2016).The major challenge clouding consumers is the confusion to embrace online media for sustainable purchases as they only visit with the main aim to create social lives than beneficial business transactions (Dhanya, Amirtha and Nithya, 2022). All these challenges make it difficult for consumers to adopt different digital platforms in the purchase of products from the clothing.

**4.3 Research Methodology**

Data was gathered using a qualitative research methodology; the main research tool used was the interviews so as to get detailed insights on consumer views about digital marketing (Zimund et al, 2013). Guiding list of interviews was constructed and data was gathered using physical administration of interviews and online platforms as COVID 19 is still evident in Zimbabwe. The target population for the study were university students who comprise low to medium income segments of the market. Convenience sampling was done and the interviewer used respondents that were easy to reach and the planned number of interviews was 25 and after conducting 18 interviews, data saturation (Kumar, 2011) was reached and no further data was gathered. To avoid mixing ideas, coding of interviews versus responses was made;the letter M denoted interview and the letter C denoted customer number. These letters were also inputted to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

The responses from the interview were analysed and the findings were presented using thematic analysis. This is a qualitative data presentation technique where themes are derived from the responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) asserts that thematic analysis is a qualitative data presentation approach whereby data is analysed and scrutinized to identify recurring themes on the data set. This is a flexible presentation and interpretation approach hence its applicability to the current study.

**4.4 Discussion of findings**

The first question related to the products consumers usually buy online, frequency of purchase and digital platforms usually used.

**Table 4.4 Consumer online purchases**

<b>Customer (C)</b>	<b>Garment occasion</b>	<b>Frequency of purchase</b>	<b>Digital platforms usually used</b>
1	Formal	Once in two months	Websites, social media platforms like facebook
2	Casual wear	Monthly	Company website Email Mobile marketing
3	Casual wear	monthly	website
4	Formal	Once in a while	Social media platforms

5	Casual wear	Anytime	Websites, social media platforms like facebook, whatsapp
6	Casual wear, formal	Once in three months	Social media platforms, websites
7	Casual wear, formal and sports wear	Anytime, as long as funds permit	Websites , social media platforms

From the above responses from the first question it can be noted that most of the customers used social media platforms in interacting with the companies where they buy garment products from. The mostly used social media platform is Facebook and WhatsApp. On WhatsApp the customers indicated the emergence of new players in the clothing sector known as ‘runners’ promoted the use of WhatsApp platforms for digital marketing activities. The so-called ‘runners’ would invite actual as well as potential customers to join their WhatsApp groups where they will be advertising their products. The WhatsApp platform became very popular for marketing activities due to the fact that almost everyone is in WhatsApp hence making it to reach more companies and then transact. Customers are able to like Facebook pages for different companies, view he products offered and then carryout their transactions.

The other digital platform highly indicated by the customers was the company websites. Most companies were forced to create fully interactive websites which supports the entire buying process (Chaffey et al, 2009). This means that customers would easily interact with the different companies on these websites. Some customers also indicated that they use mobile marketing as well as aids to interact with their suppliers of clothing items. These platforms are very convenient for the customers.

It was also noted that customers had different shopping occasions or times. Some indicated shopping for clothing on month ends, some once every three months and others once in a while. The customers also indicated that they shop for different products from the different companies. Some would buy formal or casual wear using the digital platforms.

**4.4.1 Benefits of digital marketing to the consumer**

Most of the customers indicated that digital marketing had many benefits to them as far as the buying of clothing is concerned. The responses from the customers did not vary much and the major themes derived from the responses are:

**Customer 1**

*‘The use of digital platforms for business made it possible for us to buy garments from different companies from different countries. This is because on the digital platforms like facebook, websites as well as whatsapp we can view and zoom the different products on offer enabling us to compare prices as well as products quality.’*

From the above theme it can be noted that customers are benefiting from the use of digital platforms in the garment sector. The benefits indicated by the customers are supported by (Chaffey et al, 2009; Chozzle, 2017;Mishra, 2021). The others asserts that the use of digital marketing strategies eliminate geographic boundaries hence exposing customers to different suppliers of products.

**Customer 2**

*‘Digital marketing enabled us to carryout transaction at the comfort of our homes. This was very crucial especially during the lockdowns and Covid restrictions. Some companies had delivery options were the products will be delivered directly to our doorsteps. Transacting using digital platforms enables us to search for and buy products anytime and from anywhere. This was very convenient for us as customers.’*

From the above theme it can be noted that convenience and comfort is one of the major benefit of digital marketing. This concurs with Veleva and Tsvetanova (2020) who asserts that sophisticated customers want to transact at the comfort of their homes.

**Customer 3**

*‘Covid pandemic forced companies to sell their products on digital platforms and also us customers to search for products on the online platforms. This created intense competition for the companies hence as customers we benefit from lower prices as well as improved variety of products’*

The adoption of digital platforms created a wide market for companies .this means that they can reach customers from anywhere. On the other hand it also created a wide pool of suppliers for the customers to choose from. This means that it intensifies competition for the companies and consumers benefits from this. This is supported by Panda and Mishra (2021).

#### **4.4.2 Challenges faced by consumers when digitally purchasing goods and services.**

The challenges faced by consumers when digitally purchasing clothes did not vary much from one consumer to the other and following were noted challenges:

##### **Customer 1**

*‘The covid pandemic has brought many challenges, lockdowns and restricted movements resulted in reduced disposable income for us as consumers. This has a negative impact on our adoption of the new approach to buying that is, online buying. This is because of high data costs, hence we are not able to properly zoom and view the clothes images posted by companies due to fear of data being depleted. By the end of the day we are not ready to buy clothes online because we are not full satisfied by the images that we see on the digital platforms.’*

From the above theme it can be noted that the Covid pandemic disrupted the general way of life hence also impacting on the adoption of digital technologies. This concurs with POTRAZ second quarter report of December 2022 which asserts that 50% of Zimbabwe population remains unconnected to internet due to lack of financial resources. Covid worsened the situation because some companies were forced to lay off workers during the lockdown periods.

##### **Customer 2**

*‘The major problem that we face when buying garmentss online is that what you see is not what you receive. When an advert for a dress on the mannequin is displayed, as a customer you are attracted to it but by the time you receive the dress, it will not fit on you as you saw it on the mannequin.’*

This was the major challenge cited by the respondents though there are more benefits that they had indicated. Most of the customers were disappointed by the products that they received after buying online. The clothes will be below their expectations.

##### **Customer 3**

*‘We are not much comfortable in transacting online due to fear of issues of security, being scammed and identity theft on the internet. There are many unscrupulous players who are there to still from us and we find it difficult to see if we are dealing with genuine companies on the online platforms.’*

There are a lot of customerswho have been scammed on the online platforms and these ones will spread the negative word of mouth hence discouraging others. Customers are afraid to do business online since they are not sure if they are interacting with a genuine company.

##### **Customer 4**

*‘The online business is a new phenomenon that has been heightened by the Covid -19 pandemic and we were not yet used to this new approach of buying products. The major challenge now is that we do not know exactly what to do on the online platform, for example after login on the company’s website, how to view the products, choose the type of clothes that I want and then make payment’.*

From the above response it is clear that most customers do not know what to do on the online platforms. They are bombarded with a lot of information and they end up getting lost on the virtual space. This becomes a challenge faced by customers with regard to buying clothes online.

#### **4.5 Recommendations**

From the above discussions, a number of recommendations can be made to the garment sector in order for the companies to fully benefit from the use of digital platforms in interacting with customers. The recommendations include:

Consumer education is critical in order to overcome the challenges experienced by the consumers in regard to the use of digital marketing platforms in the purchase of clothing. Most of the consumers indicated that they do not know what to do on the online platforms, hence companies need to advertise their products informing the customers on how to get the products. This concurs

with Farber (2019) asserting that digital platforms have become the new channels for conducting businesses hence both customers and companies are to adopt them.

In order to overcome the challenge of customers not knowing what to do on the digital platforms, companies must design websites that are easy to navigate .this will make it easy for customers to move from one point to the other. Companies must also provide a variety of payment options on the website so that it's easy for customers to move from one point to the next.

It is also recommended that the images displayed on the digital platforms must show the exact products being offered by the company in question. This is because some customers indicated that what they received was sometimes different from what they would have ordered.

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

Conclusively it can be noted that digital platforms made it possible for companies to be in constant touch with their customers regardless of Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns and movement restrictions. This made the customers to be able to get the products that they needed, clothing, in this case because it is one of the basics that had to be taken care of even under the pandemic. From the study it is clear that there are many benefits being enjoyed by customers through the use of these digital platforms. However, consumers indicated a number of challenges that affected the adoption and use of the different digital platforms, however there are recommended strategies to overcome the challenges.

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