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Towards an understanding of digital marketing adoption among the retail sector: An analysis of small independent apparel retailers

Vers une compréhension de l'adoption du marketing digital dans le secteur du commerce de détail : Une analyse des petits détaillants de vêtements

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Abstract

Digital technology provides new communication and distribution channels for consumers and suppliers in the retailing environment. Digital marketing enables retailers to attract, inform and communicate with their customers through its various tools. However, in Cameroon, the adoption of digital marketing in the retail sector is slow. In light of this, the present study aimed to analyse the various factors influencing implementing digital marketing strategies among small independent retailers when developing effective communication strategies. A sample of 538 small independent apparel retailers participated in the study, responding to a self-administered questionnaire. The findings obtained through descriptive analysis and logistic regression analysis led to the completion of the study's objectives. As a result, it is possible to note that digital marketing is increasingly used by small apparel retailers in their communication with both customers and partners (suppliers). Social media is the most used tool in view of their wider audience. Moreover, the main reasons for the adoption of digital marketing are related to his profitability, to a better relationship with the consumers and the audience coverage. Furthermore, the main factors behind this adoption are facilitating conditions, customer pressure, employee skills, and competitive pressure.
Keywords : digital marketing adoption, small apparel retailers, digital marketing strategies, facilitating conditions, customer pressure.

Résumé

La technologie digitale offre de nouveaux canaux de communication et de distribution aux consommateurs et aux fournisseurs dans l'environnement de la vente au détail. Le marketing digital permet aux détaillants d'attirer, d'informer et de communiquer avec leurs clients grâce à ses différents outils. Cependant, au Cameroun, l'adoption du marketing digital dans le secteur de la vente au détail est lente. C'est pourquoi la présente étude vise à analyser les différents facteurs qui influencent la mise en œuvre des stratégies de marketing digital chez les petits détaillants indépendants lors de l'élaboration de leurs stratégies de communication. Un échantillon de 538 petits détaillants indépendants de vêtements a participé à l'étude, en répondant à un questionnaire auto-administré. Les résultats obtenus grâce à l'analyse descriptive et à l'analyse de régression logistique ont permis d'atteindre les objectifs de l'étude. En conséquence, il est possible de noter que le marketing digital est de plus en plus utilisé par les petits détaillants de vêtements dans leur communication avec les clients et les partenaires (fournisseurs). Les médias sociaux sont l'outil le plus utilisé en raison de leur audience plus large. En outre, les principales raisons de l'adoption du marketing digital sont liées à sa rentabilité, à une meilleure relation avec les consommateurs et à la couverture de l'audience. En outre, les principaux facteurs à l'origine de cette adoption sont les conditions facilitatrices, la pression des clients, les compétences des employés et la pression concurrentielle.
Mots clés : adoption du marketing digital, petits détaillants de vêtements, stratégies de marketing digital, secteur du commerce de détail, conditions facilitatrices, pression des clients.

Introduction

The traditional retail environment has changed over the years, and this has been accelerated in the past decade or so as online shopping channels have been added to the traditional brick-and-mortar shopping channels (Slawsky, 2018, p. 2). This enhancement results from developing the Internet and digital technologies (Bressolles, 2020). In addition to this development, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in substantial social and economic crises which impacted negatively many businesses due to the suppression of economic activities, the reduction of customer mobility, the rise in online training, and lower spending on products such as apparel (Deloitte, 2021). The clothing industry, one of the significant classes of retail products worldwide (Gerefi & Frederick, 2010), has been severely affected by digital technology, requiring retailers to change how they do business (Euromonitor, 2021). According to Poloian (2013:74) and Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2012:71), none of the other facets of retail development has changed as rapidly or presented as many new opportunities and formats to the consumer as online selling, and this is due to technology. Technology allows retailers to distribute goods through their marketing channels at a much quicker pace, and more efficiently than ever before (Poloian, 2013:73).

Thus, the FitForCommerce Annual Report (2017) underlined the pressure for retailers to focus on digital channels and deliver a complete and unified shopping experience that connects and mixes in-store and digital experiences. This pressure is especially accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many businesses to explore online channels for selling to customers. Indeed, retailers need to be aware of the mechanisms and intricacies of digital marketing – as digital marketing is central to online business (Winarsih et *al*., 2020). Moreover, Poloian (2013:73) indicated that the acceptance and implementation of change in the e-environment is needed if organisations plan to grow while engaging their customers.

Even though the online retail industry is growing at an increasing pace, some scholars pointed out a high rate of adoption of digital marketing among large retailers compared to small retailers (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Ballweg et *al*., 2018; Eggers et *al*., 2017). These authors highlighted that those small retailers had yet to be seriously inclined towards new technologies. Many reasons explain this fact: small retailers may not consider the use of digital media as an effective marketing communications channel to promote products and services, the lack necessary confidence and skills to engage with their online prospects, or may not have the time and resources to use digital media (Brouthers et *al*., 2015). Similarly, the European Commission (2021) claimed that small firms are not benefiting from the digital

transition in the European market and lag behind more prominent firms. This finding is based on the fact that large businesses are more likely to have the required resources and knowledge to adopt new digital channels and tools.

Cameroon's retail sector represents 48.7% of the tertiary sector and comprises formal and informal sectors. Retailing in Cameroon is based on various types of retailers: hypermarkets, supermarkets, discounters, convenience stores, mixed retailers, health and beauty retailers, clothing and footwear retailers, furniture and furnishing stores, DIY and hardware stores, durable goods retailers, leisure and personal goods retailers (Euromonitor International, 2021). However, GSMA Report (2021) noted that retail is predominantly traditional and informal. Based on the above repartition, the focus of this study will be on these small businesses and more specifically on the apparel industry. A small independent retailer is categorized through the following characteristics: size (small businesses can range from 1 to 9 employees) and independence: refers to a privately owned business with a limited number of outlets, as opposed to a chain store.

Despite the fact that brick-and-mortar retailers have taken a pre-emptive approach by adding e-stores (websites or social media Pages) to their selling strategy, Cameroon is lagging in terms of digital marketing adoption development compared to other first-world countries. Indeed, when it comes to using the Internet for business transactions, only 6.7% of enterprises take advantage of this opportunity, compared with 50.0% of large enterprises (NIS, 2018). Based on the above figures, digital marketing use in the retail sector in Cameroon is steadily on the rise; however, small retailers adoption rate is low compared to large ones.

As far as could be established, no studies on the adoption of digital marketing by apparel retailers have been carried out in Cameroon, and no framework for this has been developed. Furthermore, no research has been conducted in Cameroon on the views of small apparel retailers on the use of digital marketing tools in their marketing communication strategy. Digital marketing is a potential source of competitive advantage for small businesses (Foltean, 2019; Morzhyna et *al*., 2019), but digital marketing is weakly adopted by the latter in Cameroon. Thus, the main research question is: what are the various factors influencing digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers?

The focus of this study is to analyse the various factors influencing digital marketing strategies implementation among small independent retailers when developing an effective communication strategy. In order to attain the focus of the study, the following secondary objectives have been formulated: Determine the extent of digital marketing adoption by small

independent apparel retailers; Identify the most used tools and techniques of digital marketing by small independent apparel retailers; Identify the main reasons for the adoption of digital marketing by small independent apparel retailers; Establish the critical success factors towards implementing digital marketing by small independent apparel retailers;

The epistemological frame of reference on which our research is based is positivist since the aim is to discover the underlying structure of reality to identify the factors that explain the adoption of digital marketing. Our reasoning is deductive, and the research strategy is quantitative. This contribution is structured as follows: the literature review (1), the overall approach to the research (2), the results of the research (3), and finally, the conclusion.

1. Literature review and research hypotheses

1.1. Literature review

The literature review will present the definition and tools of digital marketing and the theoretical foundations of the research.

1.1.1 Digital marketing: a growing phenomenon

Digital marketing is a phenomenon that has emerged with the widespread use of the Internet (Abi & Arief, 2017), the increase of social media applications, and the rapid development of technology. There are various definitions of digital marketing, and so far, a consensus on the elements of this term has yet to be found (Abi & Arief, 2017). A literature review points out two different viewpoints on what digital marketing is.

Based on the first viewpoint, digital marketing is similar to internet marketing or e-marketing. For Avery et *al*. (2011), digital marketing is a set of techniques developed on the Internet to persuade users to buy a product or service. Afifah et *al*. (2018) consider digital marketing as using the Internet to deliver promotional marketing messages to consumers. Thus, Desai (2019) defined digital marketing as all activities which use the Internet or electronic devices. Forghani et *al*. (2021) define digital marketing as a modern marketing activity that uses different web-based media such as emails, websites, blogs, or social networking. Also, according to Bressolles (2020, P.9), "digital marketing or e-marketing can be defined as the process of planning and implementing the development, pricing, communication, distribution of an idea, product or service to create trade, carried out in whole or in part using digital technologies in line with individual and organisational objectives."

The second viewpoint includes authors who have integrated the use of both offline and online tools into their definitions of digital marketing. For example, Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick

(2012) described digital marketing as applying the Internet and related digital technologies in conjunction with traditional communication to achieve marketing objectives. For Girchenko et *al*. (2016), digital marketing is the complex approach to the market promotion of goods and services and the whole company as a brand, which uses many digital channels or integrates traditional channels in the virtual marketing space. This point of view is shared by Yasmin et *al*. (2015), who state that digital marketing refers to utilising electronic media to promote products and services in the market to attract customers and allow them to interact with the brand through digital media. They extend the definition of digital marketing beyond Internet marketing, including media that do not require the Internet (SMS and MMS).

In this study, digital marketing is considered a form of direct marketing that connects the buyers with the sellers through various online and offline technologies to achieve marketing objectives and deliver value to the customers.

With the advancement of technology, traditional marketing methods have been enhanced and, in some cases, replaced gradually by digital marketing methods. Deployment of these strategies leads companies to have capabilities and advantages that can be used to improve. These tools are email marketing, mobile marketing, social media marketing, Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), viral marketing, affiliate marketing, content marketing, display/online advertising, and websites.

1.1.2 Theoretical foundations of the research

Several theoretical perspectives exist in the literature that has been used and modified to understand the adoption of digital marketing by organisations, such as the Technology-Organisation-Environment Framework (TOE), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI).

The TAM was developed by Davis (1989) to predict users' adoption of new technology and has since received immense attention in the academic literature. The TAM, which is characterised as parsimonious, has been found to consistently predict a substantial proportion of the variance in technology usage (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), and "it provides the broadest range of contexts in which generalizability has been examined" (Venkatesh et *al.*, 2007, p268). The TAM proposes that an individual's perceptions of a technology's ease of use and usefulness determine intentions to adopt the technology and actual adoption behaviour (Davis, 1989). A principle underlying the TAM is that the easier a technology is to use, the more beneficial it is to the user (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Although TAM was initially developed

to study technology adoption at an individual level, the application of TAM at an organisational level is not uncommon. Several studies have applied and extended TAM in various contexts to understand digital marketing adoption behaviour in organisations (Siamagka et *al*., 2015; Abbas & Mehmood, 2021).

The TOE is an organisation's conceptual framework, designed by Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990) and emerged from psychology. The technological dimension covers but is not limited to the internal and external expertise that play significant roles in the organisation. This also extends to tools as well as procedures. The organisational dimension looks at the structures, resources, business size, and degree of monopolisation. Finally, the environmental dimensions focus on competitors, customers, macroeconomic perspective, and regulatory background (Patil et *al*., 2022; Abbasi et *al*., 2022; Eze et *al*., 2020, 2021). The TOE framework has been widely explored from different perspectives on digital marketing adoption in organisations (Jokonya & Mugisha, 2020; Effendi et *al*., 2020; Eze et *al*., 2020; Eze et *al*., 2021).

The diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI), formulated by Rogers (1995), is a process-based theory that seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology are adopted in an organisation. DOI argues that adopting innovation is influenced by characteristics such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability, operating at both the individual and the organisational level. DOI is believed to "lack conceptual and operational definitions of adoptions, and not to distinguish between acquisition and authorisation of an innovation at an organisational level" (Maduku, 2015, p. 89). It has been contended that DOI should be blended with other theories to provide a more holistic adoption model (Dlodlo & Dhurup, 2013; Shaltoni, 2017). Thus, almost all the studies conducted in the field of digital marketing adoption by organisations combined DOI with other theories and models such as TOE, TAM and SOR (Patil et *al*., 2022; Alrousan et *al*., 2020; Shaltoni, 2017; Dlodlo & Dhurup, 2013).

Various studies have integrated theories to provide a more substantial theoretical base for understanding digital marketing adoption in organisations, notably SMEs. These studies have been used to develop research hypotheses.

1.2. Research hypotheses

1.2.1. Perceived benefits

Perceived benefits are term used to express the benefits that small independent apparel retailers may obtain when adopting digital marketing tools, strategies or practices (Chau et *al*.,

2021). The adoption of digital marketing tools can provide a wide range of benefits to small independent apparel retailers, such as improved information gathering and feedback, reduced costs, building trust, facilitated awareness same as information and creation of the brand image, improved interactivity, promoted internal and external relationships and increased productivity, improved communication processes and better outcome measurement, enhance targeting and measurement, reached customers more efficiently, improved customer satisfaction, enhance the promotion of products and services and increased competitiveness (Desai, 2019; Carpio et *al*., 2020; Erlangga et *al*., 2021; Forghani et *al.*, 2021). Several studies have found that perceived benefits have a significant positive influence on digital marketing adoption in SMEs and MSMEs such as small independent apparel retailers. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived benefits and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.2. Perceived complexity

The perceived complexity of digital marketing refers to the degree of perceived difficulty in using digital marketing tools (Alrousan et *al.*, 2020). Perceived complexity has been found to be an essential factor affecting digital marketing adoption in SMEs and MSMEs (Dlodlo and Dhurup, 2013; Siamagka et *al.*, 2015; Alrousan et *al*., 2020; Effendi et *al.*, 2020; Emini & Merovci, 2021). Thus, small independent apparel retailers who perceive digital marketing tools as complex and require excessive efforts to achieve specific tasks will be less likely to adopt such technologies (Alrousan et *al*., 2020). The above discussion leads to the following proposed hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between perceived complexity and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.3. Perceived cost

Perceived cost refers to the costs involved in adopting digital marketing tools. The relevant criteria include how much less expensive technology is and how much easier and faster it can be applied (Teixeira et *al*., 2018). Perceived cost is another critical element frequently considered while implementing new technology (Patil et *al*., 2022). Many SMEs experience significant financial constraints which create cautiousness about their investment in adopting specific technology; the costs of technology adoption are perceived to be too high, with no immediate benefit (Maduku, 2015). In several studies, perceived cost is directly associated

with digital marketing adoption by SMEs and MSMEs (Maduku et *al.*, 2016; Eze et *al.*, 2021; Patil et *al.*, 2022). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a significant negative relationship between perceived cost and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.4. Organisational readiness

Organisational readiness refers to their willingness to adopt new technology (Jokonya & Mugisha, 2020). It requires available resources (technological, financial and human) to adopt digital marketing (Texeira et *al.*, 2018; Jokonya & Mugisha, 2020). In addition, an organisation must have adequate funds and suitable facilities to adopt specific technologies (Fahriawan, 2020). A higher level of organisational readiness and resources predicts successful technology adoption in SMEs (Fahriawan, 2020). Numerous studies have confirmed that organisational readiness and resources available have a significant influence on digital marketing adoption in SMEs and MSMEs (Eze et *al.*, 2021; Abbasi et *al.*, 2022). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between organisational readiness and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.5. Organisational innovativeness

Organisational innovativeness is related to the ability of a company to be open to new ideas and use new solutions for enhanced its projects (Texeira et *al.*, 2018). Organisational innovativeness considers the diversity of information and users' acceptance of information to determine the ability of the organisation to implement new technologies (Eze et *al.*, 2020, 2021). Thus, innovative organisations are more likely to adopt digital technologies because they tend to be early adopters (Shaltoni, 2017). Given that the adoption of digital marketing is mainly based on the adoption of digital tools whose development is supported by technological innovation, organisational innovativeness can significantly affect digital marketing adoption by SMEs and MSMEs. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between organisational innovativeness and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.6. Employees skills

Employee skills refer to the presence of a specialised human resource to handle the intricacies of the technology-related adoption process (Abbassi et *al.*, 2022). This further ties in with organisational readiness in terms of the availability of human resources. Abbassi et *al.* (2022)

argue that employees' learning skills and competency enhance and aid the technology adoption process in any firm. Thus, employee skills are a significant factor influencing digital marketing adoption among SMEs and MSMEs (Dlodlo and Dhurup, 2013; Effendi et *al.*, 2020; Abbassi et *al.*, 2022). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between employees' skills and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

1.2.7. Competitive pressure

Competitive pressure is the degree of pressure the organisation feels from competitors within the industry to adopt digital marketing (Shaltoni, 2017; Eze et *al*., 2020; Patil et *al*., 2022). Small businesses must constantly keep up with technological advances in a competitive environment to maintain their competitive advantage. Thus, Eze et *al*. (2020) noted that small businesses must consider the environment in which they operate to know the role innovation plays. So, the enterprise's positive behavioural intention toward innovation may result from competitive pressure (Maduku et *al*., 2016). Therefore, competitive pressure is a significant factor influencing small businesses' adoption of digital marketing. The above discussion leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between competitive pressure and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

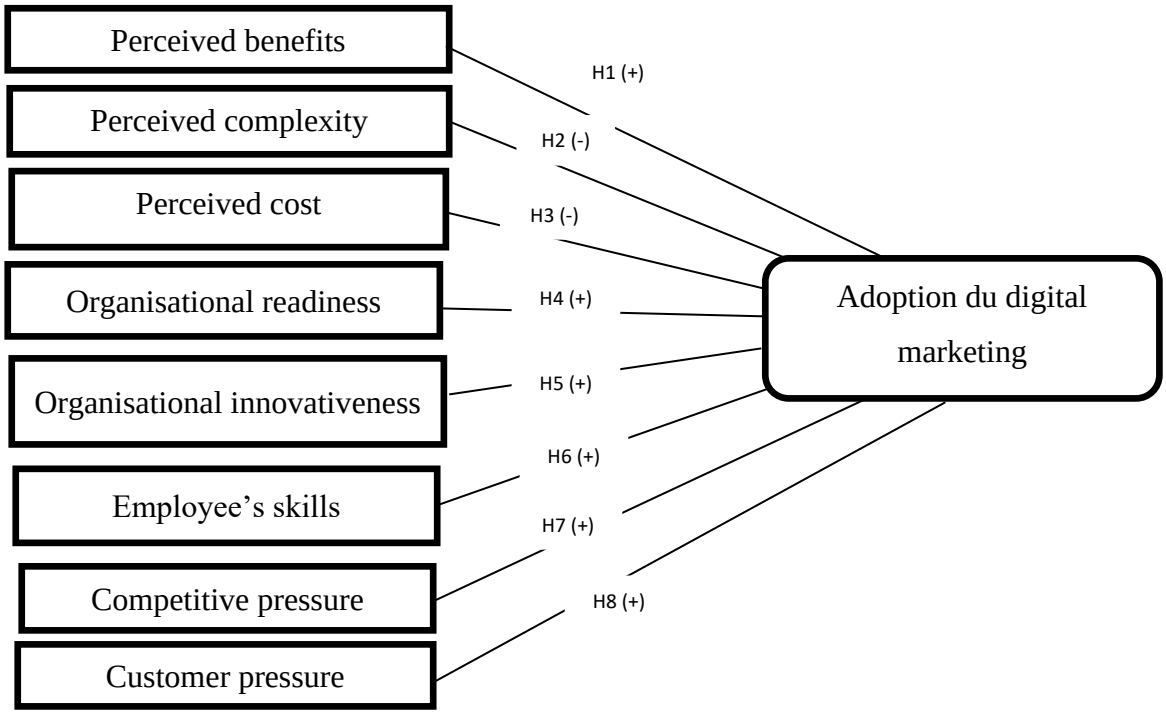
1.2.8. Customer pressure

Customer pressure relates to the degree of pressure felt by the organisation due to customers' expectations or requests regarding the use of digital marketing tools (Texeira et *al.*, 2018). It has been proved that using electronic services to satisfy customers' needs and interact with them efficiently is the primary motivator for innovation adoption (Qashou & Saleh, 2018). As a result, organisations implement technologies because they believe it responds to consumer expectations (Maduku et *al*., 2016). Therefore, perceived customer pressure has been found to be a critical factor in the adoption of digital marketing by small businesses. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: There is a significant positive relationship between customer pressure and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

The following figure resume the research model:

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the research



Source : Author

2. Research methodology

The empirical study is based on quantitative research, which refers to a research method that uses a larger and more representative sample by addressing the research objectives through an experiential assessment that involves numerical measurements and analysis (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:112; Wiid & Digging, 2015:95). Quantitative research tends to be more structured, making it easier to measure and analyse the responses.

The target population is the entire group of individuals with the desired characteristics relevant to the current study. For the purpose of this study, the target population is described as all Cameroonian small independent apparel retailers who owned or managed an apparel store.

The sampling frame for this study, depending on the target population, was selected based on the inclusion criteria of the study, namely, they must be Cameroonian males and females who: is the owner or manager of an apparel store; are older than 21 years; can read, write and speak French or English; have the time and are willing to participate.

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability sampling method, implementing the technique of judgement, was used. Judgement sampling is a technique where the sample is chosen based on the researcher's judgement about some relevant characteristics of the sample members

(Babin & Zikmund, 2016, p. 349). The inclusion criteria and characteristics of the sample members based on the researcher's judgment were discussed in the above paragraph about the sample frame. This sampling method was appropriate for the study as this method of sampling is cost-effective; the population is readily available for the researcher to collect data from, it is easy to measure, and the data collection can be done in a short period.

A self-administered questionnaire was used as the research instrument in the study. The self-administered questionnaire was developed after completing literature review. The structured questions in the self-administered questionnaire were based on the study's objectives.

For the purpose of this study, a sample size of 383, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, was deemed appropriate for a population of 150 000 (Raosoft, 2004). However, a larger sample size was considered because factor analysis would be used to analyse the data. After the data-cleaning process, the sample size for the quantitative section consisted of 538 respondents who lives in Yaounde and Douala.

The information collected in this quantitative analysis through the self-administered questionnaire was analysed on the statistical program SPSS version 26. Before the analysis process started, the data was cleaned, edited and validated, to ensure that no errors occurred during the analysis process. The necessary ethical strategies that are relevant to a quantitative research study were applied throughout the duration of this study. The strategies included the respect of persons, beneficence and justice, as well as reliability and validity.

3. Research findings

3.1. Business profile

The business profile resumes the characteristics of the company to which each respondent belongs. This profile was constructed using location, time of operation, employee number, and annual turnover. These questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire (questions 13 to 17) just before the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample included 39.6% (n = 213) businesses located in the centre region and 60.4% (n = 325) located in the littoral region, specifically at Douala, which is the economic capital where most commercial activities are concentrated with the largest markets in the central Africa sub-region.

In terms of business operation, the majority of the sample (50.7%, n=273) have been operating for more than 5 years, followed by companies which have been created between 3 and 4 years ago (39.6%, n=213). The most recent companies were created 2 years ago (7.8%, n=42) and less than one year (1.9%, n=10).

The majority of the sample (51.9%, n=276) employed 6 persons. 36.6% (n=197) of the sample has 7 to 10 full employees, and 12.1% (65) has more than 10 employees. These characteristics permit us to deduce that the apparel retailers of this sample respect the inclusion criteria related to the number of employees. They are comprised within the category of small and medium companies.

Finally, the companies of the study mainly produce an annual turnover between 1 million and 5 million CFA.

3.2. Extent of digital marketing adoption among small independent apparel retailers

The first question of the self-administered questionnaire was to know the extent of digital marketing adoption within small independent apparel retailers. In total, 538 respondents filled the questionnaire correctly, and among these respondents, 376 answered 'yes' and 162 answered 'No'. It is clear from these responses that more than half of the respondents (69.9%) have already adopted digital marketing for their marketing activities. This indicates that most respondents were aware of digital marketing and used digital tools for their business.

3.3. Description of the most used digital tools

The respondents were required to indicate on a scale of 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to a very large extent) the extent to which they were already using the following platforms/channels: website accessible on a mobile device, Facebook Marketplace, Instagram, Instagram Direct messaging, WhatsApp Business, direct emails and SMS to promote their business. The Table below presents the ranking of the various platforms/channels related to their extent of use.

Table 1: Ranking of the platforms/channels based on the extent of use

	Mean	**SD**	**Rank**
Our business uses a website (accessible on a mobile device) that displays our products/services and supports online transactions.	3.28	1.018	6
Our business uses Facebook Marketplace to promote our products and communicate with customers.	4.00	0.665	1
Our business uses Instagram to promote our products and communicate with customers.	3.86	0.748	3
Our business uses Instagram Direct messaging to sell our products/services	3.53	1.058	5
Our business uses WhatsApp Business to sell our products/services (our customers can use their mobile device to send a direct message to the business on WhatsApp to enquire, place orders, and determine shipping and payment options)	3.99	0.820	2
Our business uses direct emails	2.10	1.062	7
Our business uses SMS	3.61	0.792	4

Source: Results from question 6

As depicted in table 1, Facebook Marketplace is the most used tool by small independent apparel retailers to promote their products and services. This fact is due to the higher penetration of this network towards the Cameroonian population. This social media is the most used and is a significant tool to engage with potential customers. The second most important tool is WhatsApp Business. WhatsApp appears as an essential tool because apparel retailers create WhatsApp groups to display the products to customers. Moreover, they used their status to highlight new products, communicate on promotions and transmit various information related to the products and services to all their contacts.

The third tool category is Instagram, which appears as a significant social network tool due to its higher use by the population, as highlighted in the digital report (2023). Thereafter, apparel retailers used SMS, Instagram direct messaging and a website accessible on a mobile device. Lastly, direct email is the less used tool because this tool is considered as a formal tool that reduces the proximity with the consumer. Indeed, we are in the B2C relationship.

The digital tools most used are those to facilitate the proximity with the consumers and the potential customers. The next section describes the main reasons why apparel retailers adopt digital marketing.

3.4. Main reasons explaining the adoption of digital marketing

The respondents were required to indicate why they adopted digital marketing in their marketing strategy by selecting all the possible reasons from a pre-determined list. The respondents could also select an "other" option and then specify the reason for the "other" option if the option was not included in the list. These reasons rank based on their importance are presented in the Table below.

Table 2: Reasons explaining the adoption of digital marketing

Items	Mean	SD	Rank
To create awareness about the company's products	4.30	0.459	4
To increase sales and generate more profits	4.54	0.499	1
To do business anywhere and at any time	4.30	0.566	5
To increase customer base	4.43	0.552	2
To improve customer service and satisfaction	4.25	0.590	6
To reduce communication cost	4.17	0.883	7
To facilitate communication with customers	4.41	0.492	3

Source: Results from question 7

According to Table 2, digital marketing is adopted by small apparel retailers because it helps increase sales and generate more profits. Thus, the main reason explaining the adoption of digital marketing is related to its profitability for the business. Apparel retailers are more

engaged in adopting digital marketing due to the profits they can make through this new form of consumer interaction. Thereafter, the other reasons are related to the relationship with the consumer because digital marketing helps increase customer base and facilitates communication with the customers. The last category of reasons is related to the benefit based on the audience coverage because digital marketing creates awareness about the company products and doing business anywhere and at any time, improving customer service and satisfaction and reducing communication costs.

The main reasons explaining the adoption of digital marketing are related to his profitability, to a better relationship with the consumers and the audience coverage.

3.5. Hypothesis testing

3.5.1. Factor analysis

Common factor analyses using the principal axis factoring method and reliability analyses were conducted on the data. Principal axis factoring with Varimax rotation was utilised. Factors were subsequently extracted using a combination of methods, including the Kaiser criterion or latent root criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than-one), scree-plot test and the percentage of variance criterion. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were utilised to determine the factorability of the data. We also consider the Kaiser criterion or latent root criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than-one).

Factor analysis was calculated for each factor, and the significant items per factor were identified to help label each factor. In conjunction with considering the sample size, the general rule of thumb was applied in identifying significant factor loadings, with only items with a factor loading of $\geq .5$ considered in the analyses (Field, 2005; Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Concerning the reliability analyses, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each sub-scale.

The following table resume all the factor analysis conducted on the main variables of this study.

Table 3: Resume of factor analysis

Variables	KMO	Bartlett's Sphericity test	Sig.	Eigenvalue	% variance	Cronbach Alpha
Perceived benefits	0.881	3178.813	0.000			
Facilitating conditions				4.957	45.066	0.905
Increase customer loyalty				2.134	19.395	0.740
Perceived complexity	0.901	1845.879	0.000	4.051	67.509	0.870
Perceived cost	0.719	51.740	0.000	2.222	74.063	0.651
Organizational readiness	0.678	297.287	0.000	1.814	60.482	0.644
Organizational innovativeness	0.826	1219.940	0.000	3.001	75.019	0.842
Employee skills	0.888	1517.813	0.000	3.554	71.090	0.864
Competitive pressure	0.721	542.676	0.000	2.302	57.562	0.635
Customer pressure	0.746	633.683	0.000	2.030	67.670	0.756

Source: our results

- **Factor analysis of the variable "Perceived benefits"**

Perceived benefits were measured with 11 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.881) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (55) =3178.813, p < .000, indicated sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. Moreover, the factor analysis results show two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 64.461% of the total variance.

According to Table 3, the variable perceived benefits is related to two factors. The first factorial axis is correlated with eight items. These items highlight the various facilitating conditions related to the use of digital marketing, hence the name "**facilitating conditions**".

The second factor is correlated with three items with appreciable loading focusing on the advantages related to customer loyalty thus the label "**increase customer loyalty".**

- **Factor analysis of the variable "Perceived complexity"**

Perceived complexity was measured with 6 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.901) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (15) = 1845.879, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the six items of perceived complexity has brought out one factor.

As illustrated by Table 3, perceived complexity explains 67.509% of the total variance. The label "perceived complexity" can thus be assigned to this factor.

- **Factor analysis of the variable "perceived cost"**

Perceived cost was measured with 3 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.719) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (3) = 51.740, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the items of perceived cost has brought out one factor which explains 74.063% of the total variance.

Considering the factor loadings and the combination of the item content for the various items, this factor can thus be labelled "**perceived cost".**

- **Factor analysis of the variable "organisational readiness"**

Organisational readiness was measured with 3 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.678) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (3) = 297.287, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the items of perceived readiness has brought out one factor which explains 60.482% of the total variance.

- **Organisational innovativeness**

Organisational innovativeness was measured with 4 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.826) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (6) = 1219.940, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the items of organisational innovativeness has highlighted one factor which explains 75.019% of the total variance.

- **Factor analysis of "Employee skills"**

Employee skills were measured with 5 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.888) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (10) = 1517.813, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis.

- **Factor analysis of "Competitive pressure"**

Competitive pressure was measured with 4 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.721) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (6) = 542.676, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and

common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the items of competitive pressure has highlighted one factor which explains 57.562% of the total variance.

- **Customer pressure**

Customer pressure was measured with 4 items. All these items were used for the factor analysis. The results from the factor analysis provided a KMO measure (.746) and Bartlett's test of sphericity x2 (6) = 633.683, p < .000, indicating sufficient inter-correlation and common variance within the data to conduct a factor analysis. The factor analysis of the items of customer pressure has brought out one factor which explains 67.670% of the total variance. After the factor analysis, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for each factor (sub-scales) were calculated. All the scales were found to have good internal consistency and reliability (0.905 to 0.635), with all the Cronbach's alpha coefficients > 0.6. (Field, 2005; Hair et al., 2010). Thus, all the factors can be used for the hypothesis test.

3.5.2. Results of the binomial logistic regression

A binomial logistic regression has been conducted to identify the various factors influencing the adoption of digital marketing by small apparel retailers due to the nature of the variables.

The study of the overall significance of the model obtained following binomial logistic regression analysis is given by the overall measure of association, the chi-square (25.988, Sig: 0.000), which is significant. Thus, this model fits for the analysis. This result is confirmed by the coefficient of determination presented in Table 4 below and the classification table that shows 89.4% of the small apparel retailers were correctly classified according to the adoption of digital marketing.

Table 4: Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	23.564	.513	.688

Source: binomial logistic regression results

As depicted in Table 14, the Cox and Snell coefficient of determination for the overall model gives a value of 0.513. This value allows us to conclude that the model chosen is of good quality. This conclusion is reinforced by the value of Nagelkerke's coefficient of determination R of 0.688. The model thus obtained explains 68.8% of the variance of the

digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers. In other words, the various factors identified explain 68.8% of small apparel retailers' chances of adopting digital marketing.

Once the strength of the association of the model has been verified, we move on to the next stage, which is the analysis of the significance of the predictors and the interpretation of the odds ratios, which is resumed in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Breakdown of the Binomial Logistic Regression

Factors	B	E.S.	Wald	ddl	Sign.	Exp (B)
Facilitating conditions	4.890	1.989	6.124	1	0.008	132.953
Increase customer loyalty	2.033	1.612	5.20	1	0.010	7.636
Perceived complexity	- 0.129	0.068	4.350	1	0.043	1.137
Perceived cost	-0.696	0.232	2.013	1	0.003	2.005
Organisational readiness	1.632	1.032	3.333	1	0.001	5.114
Organisational innovativeness	1.249	0.357	6.249	1	0.000	3.486
Employee's skills	3.635	1.411	6.636	1	0.010	37.901
Competitive pressure	2.739	1.130	6.968	1	0.006	15.471
Customer pressure	3.762	1.437	6.852	1	0.009	43.034

Source: binomial logistic regression results

3.5.3. Discussion of the findings

Facilitating conditions appears as one of the significant predictors of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=4.890, p=0.008<0.05), which highlights the fact that the awareness of various benefits related to the use of digital marketing contributes to the continued use of digital marketing methods and techniques by small apparel retailers. This factor is, therefore, essential, and this finding is consistent with the research conducted by Alrousan et *al*. (2020), who stated that digital marketing allows small businesses to use digital channels for marketing purposes and enables marketers to improve their performance. Facilitating conditions helps small businesses to meet their long-run obligations and objectives, as noted by Eze et *al*. (2021).

The second factor, "increase customer loyalty", is another benefit the factor analysis highlights. The result of the binomial logistic regression analysis indicated that this factor appears as a predominant predictor of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=2.033, p=0.010<0.05). This finding is consistent with the study of Rizvanovic, Zutshi, Grilo and Nadehi (2023), who noticed that digital format, availability of various content and interactivity facilitate a fluid and personalised customer communication and relationship. Similarly, Tiago & Vérissimo (2014) stated that digital marketing has many benefits, such as

the potential for increasing customer relationships. Considering the above discussion, the first hypothesis is validated.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived benefits and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

The third factor, "perceived complexity," is one of the factors highlighted by the factor analysis. The result of the binomial logistic regression analysis indicated that this factor is shown as a predictor of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers. However, the result indicated a significant but negative influence of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=-0.129, p=0.043<0.05). This result aligns with the finding of Shaltoni (2017), who asserted that complex technologies would create more significant uncertainty concerning their implementation among small businesses. From the above development on perceived complexity, the second hypothesis was confirmed, which leads to the following conclusion:

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between perceived complexity and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

Perceived cost refers to the costs involved in adopting digital marketing tools. The binomial logistic regression analysis conducted while testing the hypothesis shows a significant influence of perceived cost on digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers. However, this influence is negative (B=-0.696, p=0.005<0.05). This finding is aligned with Awa et *al.* (2015), who indicated that the cost of procuring information technology that is perceived to be high by small independent apparel retailers will slow down technology adoption. Based on the above development on perceived cost, the thirth hypothesis was confirmed, which leads to the following conclusion:

H3: There is a significant negative relationship between perceived cost and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

The next factor is "organisation readiness". This factor was used for the binomial logistic regression, highlighting a significant influence of organisational readiness on digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=1.632, p=0.001<0.05). This result aligns with the study of Su et *al*. (2023), who stated that organisational readiness drives small businesses to try digital marketing approaches. From the above development on organisation readiness, it appears that it is a predictor of digital marketing adoption, hence the validation of the fourth hypothesis:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between organisational readiness and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

"Organisational innovativeness" has a significant influence on digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=1.249, p=0.000<0.05). This result is consistent with the finding of Shaltoni (2017), who stated that innovative organisations are more likely to adopt digital technologies because they tend to be early adopters. Furthermore, Eze et *al*. (2020) noted that organisational innovativeness is essential for achieving competitive advantage, particularly in emerging markets. Consequently, the fifth hypothesis was confirmed:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between organisational innovativeness and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

Digital skills (also known as digital competencies) has become of increasing concern to researchers and professionals, due to the growing use of digital technologies in the daily life of organizations (Mabrouki et *al*., 2024). The results indicated that employee skills are one of the most critical predictors of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B= 3.635, p=0.010<0.05). This result aligns with the finding of Abbassi et *al*. (2022), who argued that employees' learning skills and competency enhance and aid the technology adoption by small apparel retailers. Thus, employee skills are a significant factor influencing digital marketing adoption among small apparel retailers, hence the validation of the sixth hypothesis labelled:

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between employees' skills and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

Competitive pressure has a positive and significant influence on digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=2.739, p=0.006<0.05). This result clearly indicated that competitive pressure is one of the most significant predictors of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers. This result is consistent with the study of Jokonya & Mugisha (2020), who found that competitive pressure influences the retail SME's adoption of new technology in order to enhance the organisation's competitive position. Shaltoni (2017) mentioned that organisations need to keep up with technological advances to avoid losing their competitive advantage. Based on the above development on competitive pressure, the seventh hypothesis is confirmed:

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between competitive pressure and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

Customer pressure appears as a significant predictor of digital marketing adoption by small apparel retailers (B=3.762, p=0.009<0.05). This result is consistent with the study of Qashou

& Saleh (2018), who proved that using electronic services to satisfy customers' needs and interact with them efficiently is the primary motivator for innovation adoption. Align in the same vein, Zhu et *al*. (2021) noted that customer demands represent a significant source of pressure on an organisation. Therefore, the eighth hypothesis is validated:

H8: There is a significant positive relationship between customer pressure and digital marketing adoption by small independent apparel retailers in Cameroon.

The conceptual model is finally the research model through the validation of all the hypothesis. Thus, this part of the study is satisfying because of attaining all the research objectives.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to analyse the various factors influencing digital marketing strategies implementation among small independent retailers when developing an effective communication strategy. A quantitative analysis of 538 small apparel retailers through a questionnaire revealed the fundamental aspects underlying the adoption of digital marketing in their communication strategy. As a result, it is possible to note that digital marketing is increasingly used by small apparel retailers in their communication with both customers and partners (suppliers). Social media is the most used tool in view of their wider audience. There are several reasons for this adoption of digital marketing which are related to his profitability, to a better relationship with the consumers and the audience coverage. Furthermore, the main factors behind this adoption are facilitating conditions, customer pressure, employee skills, and competitive pressure.

These results lead to the following scientific implications:

- This research contributes to the extent of literature on digital marketing's impact on the retail environment. The study increases the understanding of adopting digital marketing from small businesses from a macro approach based on reasons explaining the adoption and success factors. Technology adoption behaviour has already been explored for the variability of different firms regarding solution models and decision logic. However, we focused on the main points of a global adoption approach by small businesses. We found that small apparel retailers with generally limited resources and knowledge tend to quickly identify the most crucial technologies based on owners'/managers' and employees' skills that respond mostly to market pressure, competitor actions, and capture opportunities.

- The study also found that many reasons explain digital marketing adoption. This supports the idea that digital marketing technology adoption by small apparel retailer is prioritised based on their objectives.
- A successful campaign based on digital tools and methods should consider technological, environmental and organisational factors. Thus, it is recommended to objectively evaluate the company's capabilities to identify how to consider its resources when implementing digital marketing. Small apparel retailers should, therefore, adopt a strategy based on their capabilities.

The limitations associated with this research study are related to the employment of a non-probability judgement sampling method, which can be considered a limitation, as the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population. Therefore, it would be advisable for future researchers to select a more representative sample. Furthermore, the sample may be representative in terms of the demographics of the population of small apparel retailers; the majority of the respondents emanated from Yaoundé and Douala areas and may not be representative of the broader Cameroonian apparel retailers.

Based on the findings and the conclusions discussed above, there are a few suggestions for future research. These are as follows:

- Future research can identify the impact of each predictor of digital marketing adoption on the performance growth of small apparel retailers.
- Another research could focus on analysing the realm of digital marketing research from a more micro-perspective to identify the appropriate digital marketing strategies that small apparel retailers can use according to the various stages of their development.

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