

DOES AWARENESS ENHANCE THE ADOPTION OF DIGITAL MARKETING AMONG SMALL ENTERPRISES IN SAUDI ARABIA?

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at identifying how awareness enhances the adoption and impact of digital marketing on the profitability of small businesses in Saudi Arabia. This study employs a descriptive approach by surveying 50 individual small business owners in Jeddah. The study employed a questionnaire to collect data on demographics, awareness level, impact on profitability, and obstacles to using digital marketing. The analysis of the survey data suggests that small businesses are aware of the basic concept of digital marketing and its connection to social media platforms. Further, the analysis reveals that digital marketing has a positive impact on the profitability of small businesses and that social media platforms are the most widely used for digital marketing among small business owners. Digital marketing engages younger age groups the most. Although digital marketing is easy to learn, most businesses use a specialised agency to run their campaigns. Overall, the study offers valuable insights into utilising digital marketing tools to promote small businesses in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The level of awareness, engagement of young entrepreneurs, implications for business promotions, and the appointment of specialists in digital marketing in cases of lack of familiarity with digital marketing for small businesses highlight the importance of social media platforms and search engine optimization tools for small businesses.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Awareness, Profitability, Obstacles, Small Businesses, Saudi Arabia.

JEL Classification: D21, D83, M13, M31

INTRODUCTION

The world witnessed unprecedented development at the beginning of the current century, particularly in the realm of the information revolution, which significantly expanded the flow of information through the internet (Purba et al., 2021; 38. Su, Zhang & Wu, 2023). The emergence of various search platforms and social networking platforms, whose user base is increasing day by day, casts a shadow over many aspects of technology, creating significant benefits for both parties (Malesev & Cherry, 2021; Abbasi, Qamar & Iqbal, 2022). Traditional marketing dominated the era that followed the invention of radio and television until the emergence of social media platforms, search engines, and the web, which significantly contributed to the development of e-marketing techniques and tools. The considerable influence of digital marketing has led to its increased utilization and adoption by numerous entities as an alternative to traditional marketing, distinguished by rapid accessibility, reduced prices, and the elimination of geographical barriers (Affandi, Sarwani & Sari 2024; Kumar, 2025).

Digital marketing is a contemporary and novel paradigm within the marketing domain, sometimes characterized by ambiguity in the literature due to the misconception that marketing is limited to online activities (Biemans & Malshe, 2024; Gensler & Rangaswamy,

2025). Consequently, certain data must be highlighted prior to articulating a specific definition of digital marketing. Digital marketing operations and functions are executed through various digital technologies, including extranets, intranets, mobile devices, and all telecommunications methods (Csordás et al., 2022; Enshassi, Alkilani & Tayeh, 2025). This phrase refers to the utilization of computers and information and communication technologies for marketing goods and services, defined as the application of technology to efficiently link sellers and customers (Basimakopoulou, Theologou & Tzavaras, 2022). Digital marketing utilizes various technologies, including Electronic Data Interchange, Electronic Funds Transfer, and email. It is also characterized as a commercial transaction predicated on the digital exchange between parties rather than direct physical interaction. The process of purchasing and vending services and goods using the internet, extranet, and intranet networks (Masrianto et al., 2022).

The internet has grown over the past decades, and marketing and commercial techniques have progressed accordingly, occurring in many stages. Web 1.0: from 1991 to 1999, it was referred to as the traditional network, a system focused solely on information dissemination to users, who acted merely as recipients without the capacity to post content. Web 2.0: From 2000 to 2009, it was referred to as a social or participatory network, distinguished by the exchange of information and content. At this juncture, the user has assumed the role of an actor and can engage with and generate content. Therefore, the inception of digital marketing through the internet has emerged. Web 3.0: Since 2010, it has evolved into a semantic network designed to organize the vast array of available information based on the context and individual requirements of each user, including their preferences and geographical location, thereby integrating Geographic Information. With the emergence of information and digital transformation, it is imperative to understand small businesses' aspirations for adopting digital technologies (Tiago, & Veríssimo, 2014).

This study will examine the effects of digital marketing on small firms in Jeddah, focusing on the tools and techniques used and their impact on profitability. This study evaluates four dimensions of digital marketing, starting with awareness (AW), which leads to better adoption of digital marketing (DMA) tools. Further, it assessed how the key digital marketing platforms can help small business owners enhance the profitability (PI) of their ventures. Finally, it evaluates the implications of age (AGE) and obstacles (OBS) in the adoption of digital marketing among small businesses. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in several important ways. First, it offers empirical data from an area where academic research on SME digitalization is still developing, thereby enhancing geographic diversity within digital marketing studies. Second, the study uses a comprehensive analytical framework that looks at four areas: awareness, profitability, age, and obstacles. This provides a comprehensive picture of how small firms in Jeddah use digital marketing. Third, the results have real-world effects on policymakers, digital marketing firms, and small business owners by showing how demographic characteristics affect adoption, how digital practices can be profitable, and what hurdles entrepreneurs experience in their environments. These contributions collectively underscore the increasing necessity for specialized digitalization strategies within the Saudi Arabian SME ecosystem.

Literature review and research hypotheses

Digital marketing has become an important part of how businesses operate today because information and communication technologies are changing rapidly. A lot of research has shown that digital platforms like social media, websites, search engines, and online analytics have changed the way businesses engage with customers, build their brands, and compete in markets that are becoming increasingly digital. These tools can help small firms get more exposure, be more flexible, and reach more people at a lower cost (Alford & Page,

2015; Malesev & Cherry, 2021). Digital technologies let businesses get information out to more people faster, attract more customers, and target their advertising better. This makes them especially useful for businesses that don't have much money or people. Several studies examined the factors influencing the adoption of digital marketing by small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). Researchers have consistently found that factors such as perceived utility, ease of use, competitive pressure, and managerial backing affect adoption (Chatterjee & Kumar Kar, 2020; Abbasi, Qamar & Iqbal, 2022). Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) regularly use digital marketing to stay competitive, but research shows they don't always manage it effectively. (Ritz, Wolf & McQuitty, 2019) point out that many small business owners try to do things themselves, even when they don't know how, which might lead to results that aren't always the best (Lilienfeld et al., 1994).

(Alford & Page, 2015) evaluated the integration of technology in marketing among small enterprises through a qualitative study of 24 owner-operated small businesses. They discovered significant enthusiasm for technological adoption in marketing and a distinct recognition of its potential, especially for enhancing market orientation and facilitating more agile marketing, in accordance with the principles of effectual reasoning. Analysed the impact of e-marketing on achieving bank customer satisfaction in Jordan. The study analysed the influence of e-marketing on customer satisfaction and found that e-marketing via e-services has a significant impact on customer satisfaction at Jordan Commercial Bank (Faruk, Rahman & Hasan, 2021). Examined social media marketing and its impact on strengthening customer relationships in IT organisations and found a statistically significant correlation between social media marketing and customer relationship management. Hussein (2020) assessed the extent to which the components and foundations of e-marketing influence service quality and found a linear relationship between the components of the marketing mix and its pillars and service quality, as indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient (Hassan, Ali & Rahman, 2023).

(Chatterjee & Kumar Kar, 2020) identified the factors that would help Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in India adopt Social Media Marketing (SMM) mechanisms to improve their business impact, using a survey of 310 firms. The results highlighted that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and compatibility have a positive impact on the adoption of SMM by SMEs. (Ritz, Wolf & McQuitty, 2019) examined the participation of small businesses in digital marketing, integrating the do-it-yourself (DIY) behaviour model and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explore the motivations and expected outcomes of such participation. The findings support the idea that the technological benefits may not be the only motivators for small business owners/managers who undertake digital marketing, but find that the DIY behaviour model motivates them to perform tasks that require specialised knowledge themselves. (Kahveci, 2025) aimed to identify the characteristics that influence the adoption of social media marketing by SMEs, with a focus on the competitive industry as a moderating factor. The findings indicated that perceived relative benefit, perceived cost, top management support, felt competitive pressure, and perceived vendor pressure significantly influence the adoption of social media marketing. Moreover, the competitive sector mitigates the influence of competitive and customer pressures on the adoption of social media marketing. (Hidayat, Alifah & Lutfia, 2025) examined the adoption of digital marketing among Indonesian SMEs. The findings underscore the need for government-supported digital literacy programs and industry partnerships to enhance SMEs' digital marketing capabilities. The study demonstrates how marketing innovation can enhance a firm's resilience in a digital economy, contributing to the ongoing debate on digital transformation (Alalwan et al., 2017).

(Malesev & Cherry, 2021) interviewed residential construction SMEs to address crucial questions about their attitudes toward digital marketing. SMEs recognize the value of digital marketing strategies, but deficiencies in external environment analysis and a lack of

investment and training to plan, monitor, and maintain effective and up-to-date marketing mixes, strategies, and objectives hinder uptake and effective use. (Su, Zhang & Wu, 2023) examined the utilisation of public platforms for digital marketing to gain a competitive edge among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and offered pragmatic guidance on agile implementation for SMEs, highlighting the integration of pertinent technologies derived from existing technological capabilities to expedite the exploration of business opportunities relative to competitors. (Sharabati et al., 2024) assessed the influence of digital marketing tactics on the performance of SMEs, encompassing online advertising, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and consumer engagement via digital channels. The findings indicated that digital marketing is crucial to SME effectiveness, serving as a catalyst for digital transformation that drives enhanced economic outcomes and expanded market presence (Gupta & Kohli, 2020).

Demographic factors, particularly age, have been demonstrated to affect the adoption of digital marketing. Many studies show that younger entrepreneurs are more comfortable utilising digital technologies and have better digital literacy than senior business owners (Rahayu & Day, 2015). Older business owners often view digital platforms as difficult to use or time-consuming, and they rely on more traditional marketing approaches (Kumar & Ayedee, 2021). Even while training and capacity-building programs can help reduce these discrepancies (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015), age remains a major factor in how SMEs use digital technology. Moreover, the literature cites various challenges that hinder the adoption of digital marketing among small enterprises, such as lack of digital skills, insufficient funds, not knowing all the possible benefits, not knowing whether the investment will pay off, and concerns about cybersecurity (Apulu & Latham, 2011). The literature indicates that small businesses face significant challenges in acquiring and retaining customers. However, reaching the lead customer through digital marketing is faster than traditional marketing. Therefore, this study aims to answer pertinent research questions: how familiar small business owners are with the concept of digital marketing, which digital marketing tools they use, the impact of digital marketing on the profitability of small businesses, the implications of age in adopting digital marketing, and the obstacles that prevent small business owners from using digital marketing (Figure 1).

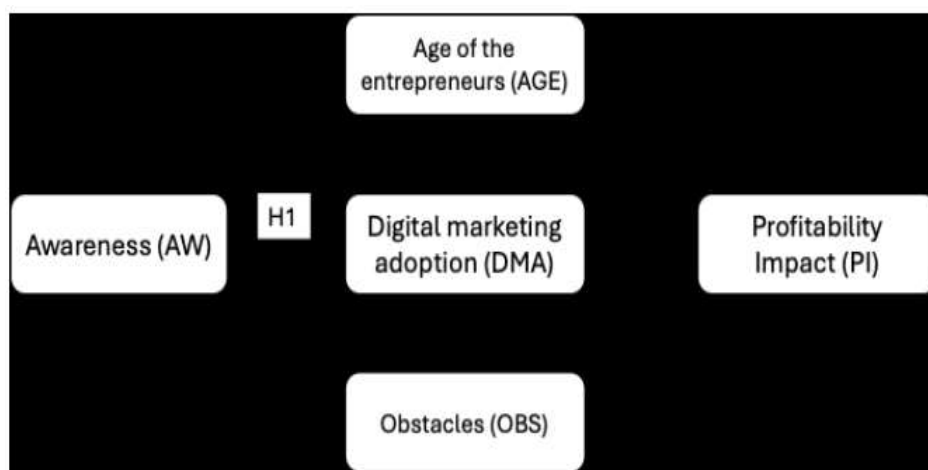


FIGURE 1

CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Source: Prepared by the authors

Finally, the study focuses on the following research hypotheses:

H1: *Awareness of digital marketing varies among small businesses*

H2: *The use of digital marketing leads to an increase in the profitability of small businesses*

H3: *Younger age groups are most responsive to digital marketing*

H4: *Obstacles to digital marketing adoption exist among small businesses*

Data and analysis

Data collection

The descriptive approach has been employed, which is considered one of the most important research methods and is deemed the most suitable for examining the impact of digital marketing on small businesses. The definition of a small enterprise varies from one country to another, depending on the nature of the economic system, and may be based on the number of employees or the size of the capital used. In this study, small businesses are defined as those with a limited number of employees that do not require large amounts of capital to operate. Their ownership is typically limited to the entrepreneur or another partner, and they usually operate within a limited geographical area. A questionnaire survey was administered to 50 small-business entrepreneurs in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, using convenience sampling. Digital marketing tools considered in this study include websites, search engines such as Google, email addresses, social media platforms, mobile devices, and blogs. Four dimensions of digital marketing use among small businesses have been evaluated in this exploratory study: awareness of digital marketing, the impact of digital marketing on profitability, the relationship between age and digital marketing adoption, and the obstacles to adopting digital marketing.

Survey instrument

A detailed survey instrument was developed comprising 4 dimensions and 28 questions using a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neutral=3, disagree, and strongly disagree=1). The first set of 10 questions covered the responses of small businesses on the awareness of digital marketing tools, followed by 8 questions on the impact of digital marketing on the profitability of small businesses, 5 questions related to the age groups most responsive to digital marketing, and 5 questions related to obstacles that prevent small entrepreneurs from using digital marketing. Table 1 provides the definitions of the constructs used in the study and the reliability details of the survey instrument. To ensure the integrity of the wording of the phrases used, the clarity of the questions, and the comprehensiveness and ease of understanding, the survey instrument was reviewed by experts for their feedback. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha and the coefficient of honesty were examined to assess the reliability of the survey instrument. The concept of stability refers to the degree to which a scale provides consistent results across diverse and independent conditions for multiple questions. Questionnaire honesty means ensuring that it measures what it was designed to measure. Therefore, the stability coefficient Alpha, also known as Cronbach's Alpha, is used to determine the credibility and degree of dependence on the scales used in the study, as well as the strength of internal consistency between the survey questions (Liew & Idris, 2017; Segal & Coolidge, 2018; Govindasamy et al., 2025). As for the honesty coefficient, it is equal to the square root of the stability coefficient and indicates that the scale measures what it was intended to measure (Lilienfel, 1993; Sarah et al., 2019).

Table 1						
DEFINITION OF CONSTRUCTS AND RELIABILITY OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT						
Constructs	Survey Questions	Conceptual definition	Key operational indicators	Number of Questions	Cronbach's alpha	Coefficient of honesty

Awareness (AW)	How familiar are small business owners with the concept of digital marketing?	Knowledge and familiarity with digital marketing concepts, tools, and channels.	Awareness of social media use; staying updated; familiarity with DM concept; use of digital tools; knowledge of website, search engine and content marketing	10	0.899	0.948
Profitability Impact (PI)	What is the impact of digital marketing on the profitability of small businesses?	Perceived effect of digital marketing on reach, speed, ROI, and profits.	“Reach potential customers quickly”; “faster than traditional”; “direct impact on profitability”; “high ROI”; negative-reverse items for robustness.	8	0.604	0.777
Age (AGE)	The youngest age groups most responsive to digital marketing	Entrepreneur age group; theorized to shape adoption and benefits realization.	Five grouped items capturing perceived responsiveness by age bands towards digital marketing adoption	5	0.483	0.695
Obstacles (OBS)	What are the obstacles that prevent small entrepreneurs from using digital marketing?	Perceived barriers in adopting/using digital marketing (skills, cost, complexity).	Cooperation with other parties; ease/difficulty to learn; presence of obstacles; cost burden.	5	0.449	0.670
Digital Marketing Adoption (DMA)	All statements	Actual use of digital platforms/tools for marketing (e.g., social media, websites, SEO, content).	Items reflecting adoption of digital marketing in business, e.g., social platforms, website, search engines, content—treated as behaviour/implementation.	28	0.869	0.932

Source: Prepared by the authors

Data analysis

The survey data have been analyzed using SPSS software. Simple statistical tests have been applied to analyse the data, such as Cronbach's Alpha for checking the reliability and degree of consistency in the study variables and descriptive statistics for understanding the responses of the small business owners on all 28 statements related to awareness of digital marketing, the impact of digital marketing on profitability, age and digital marketing, and obstacles in the adoption of digital marketing. The arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and relative importance are used in analyzing and describing the survey responses, revealing the extent of differences in opinions regarding the study variables. Awareness (AW) of digital marketing among small business entrepreneurs has been analysed to understand the level of knowledge and familiarity with digital marketing concepts, tools, and channels. It is assumed that awareness would lead to greater adoption of digital marketing (DMA), thereby impacting

profitability (PI) for small businesses. Finally, the implications of age (AGE) in the adoption of digital marketing and the associated obstacles (OBS) have been analysed through a survey of small entrepreneurs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile analysis of the respondents

The results showed that the largest percentage, by gender, favoured males, with 34 samples and a percentage of 68%, followed by females, with 16 samples and a percentage of 32% (Table 2). In terms of age, most of the small business owners belonged to the younger age group of 18 to 29 years, i.e. 38 per cent, followed by 30 to 39 years (28%), 40 to 49 years (26%), and more than 50 years (8%). The results showed that the largest percentage, according to educational level, was bachelor's, representing 52 per cent, followed by diploma (20%), secondary (14%), master's (5%), and doctoral (2%).

Profiles	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	34	68
Female	16	32
Age (Years)		
18 to 29	19	38
30 to 39	14	28
40 to 49	13	26
>50	4	8
Education level		
Diploma	10	20
Secondary	7	14
Bachelor	26	52
Masters	5	5
PhD	2	2

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

Awareness of digital marketing among small businesses

Recent research indicates that a small firm's understanding of digital marketing is vital to its competitiveness and growth in the digital economy. Research shows that most small business owners are familiar with social media and websites, but not search engine optimisation, online analytics, or targeted advertising. The benefits of digital marketing are becoming increasingly recognised, but low digital literacy, time constraints, and perceived complexity hinder its widespread adoption (Dlodlo, 2010; Alford & Page, 2015). Without strategic integration or performance measurement, many small enterprises utilise digital media superficially. Small firms must address this awareness gap by focusing on targeted training, peer learning, and institutional assistance to utilise digital marketing for sustainable growth and competitiveness (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sharabati et al., 2024).

The responses of respondents regarding their familiarity with the concept of digital marketing among small business owners reveal interesting insights from the mean values for 10 statements (Table 3). The response to using social media platforms in digital marketing ranked first in terms of arithmetic mean ($\mu=4.04$, $\sigma=0.92$), indicating that most small businesses reported awareness. The respondents have also indicated agreement on various digital marketing awareness statements, such as updating the knowledge on digital marketing ($\mu=3.88$, $\sigma=0.90$), familiarity with the concept of digital marketing in general ($\mu=3.72$, $\sigma=0.95$), use of digital tools that help with digital marketing ($\mu=3.54$, $\sigma=1.03$), use of the

website in digital marketing ($\mu=3.52$, $\sigma=1.13$), use of search engines in digital marketing ($\mu=3.46$, $\sigma=1.03$), use of digital content marketing ($\mu=3.40$, $\sigma=1.14$), and knowledge of the most important digital marketing tools ($\mu=3.38$, $\sigma=0.95$). However, the respondents reported lower awareness of blogging in digital marketing ($\mu=3.02$, $\sigma=1.10$) and of specialists in digital marketing ($\mu=2.80$, $\sigma=1.23$). Thus, the research hypothesis H1, assuming that awareness of digital marketing varies among small businesses, is accepted.

Statements	Mean	Deviation Standard	Ranking	Degree
Use social media platforms in digital marketing	4.04	0.92	1	Agree
I try to keep abreast of everything new about digital marketing	3.88	0.90	2	Agree
I have a familiarity with the concept of digital marketing in general	3.72	0.95	3	Agree
Use digital tools that help with digital marketing	3.54	1.03	4	Agree
Use the website in digital marketing	3.52	1.13	5	Agree
Use search engines in digital marketing	3.46	1.03	6	Agree
Use digital content marketing	3.40	1.14	7	Agree
I have knowledge of the most important digital marketing tools	3.38	0.95	8	Agree
Use blogging in digital marketing	3.02	1.10	9	Neutral
Specialist in digital marketing	2.80	1.23	10	Neutral
Overall	3.48	0.76		Agree

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

Impact of digital marketing on the profitability

Recent academic research has investigated the relationship between digital marketing and the success of small businesses. Social media marketing, SEO, and online advertising can increase a company's earnings by reaching, engaging, and retaining more customers, according to many studies. Digital solutions enable small firms to target specific client groups at lower costs, thereby increasing sales and marketing effectiveness (Ainin et al., 2015; Chatterjee & Kumar Kar, 2020). SMEs utilising digital marketing tactics have improved ROI and brand visibility, which boosts profit growth (Ratul, 2022; Jones, Borgman & Ulusoy, 2015). Through customer relationship management and data-driven decision-making, (Kraus et al., 2019) asserts that digital marketing enhances both short-term profits and long-term competitiveness. The amount of money a business makes depends on how effectively the owner utilizes technology, marketing, and resources (Alford & Page, 2015). The financial benefits of digital marketing may not be fully realised without strategic planning and analytics, as poorly executed campaigns can increase operational expenses without generating commensurate returns (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The literature generally agrees that small enterprises can be more lucrative and long-lasting if they employ digital marketing effectively, utilising the correct digital skills and a plan that aligns with their goals.

Table 4 provides the responses of small business owners on the impact of digital marketing on their profitability. It is evident from the analysis that digital marketing helps in

reaching potential customers quickly, ranking first in terms of arithmetic mean (4.20) and standard deviation (0.78), which indicates that most of the study sample strongly agrees with this statement. Digital marketing is faster than traditional marketing in reaching potential customers, as reported by the respondents ($\mu = 4.20$, $\sigma = 0.83$). Additionally, digital marketing has a direct impact on business profitability ($\mu = 4.16$, $\sigma = 0.77$). Further, it is reported that earnings size varied after using digital marketing ($\mu = 3.80$, $\sigma = 0.86$), and that digital marketing leads to a high return on investment ($\mu = 3.78$, $\sigma = 0.79$). To verify the impact of digital marketing on profitability, it has further been probed with statements such as "The return on investment on digital marketing is low" ($\mu = 2.50$, $\sigma = 0.95$), "There was no effect of digital marketing on profits" ($\mu = 3.78$, $\sigma = 0.79$), and "Profits fell after using digital marketing" ($\mu = 2.20$, $\sigma = 0.86$). Therefore, research hypothesis H2, which posits that the use of digital marketing increases the profitability of small businesses, is accepted.

Statements	Mean	Deviation Standard	Rankings	Degree
Digital marketing helps to quickly reach the potential customer	4.20	0.78	1	Strongly agree
Digital marketing is faster than traditional marketing in reaching the potential customer	4.20	0.83	2	Strongly agree
There was a direct impact of digital marketing on increasing the profitability of the project	4.16	0.77	3	Strongly agree
The size of earnings varied after using digital marketing	3.80	0.86	4	Agree
The return on investment on digital marketing is high	3.78	0.79	5	Agree
The return on investment on digital marketing is low	2.50	0.95	6	Disagree
There was no effect of digital marketing on profits	2.46	0.95	7	Disagree
Profits fell after using digital marketing	2.20	0.86	8	Disagree
Overall	3.41	0.44		Agree

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

Age and digital marketing adoption

Age is a well-known demographic factor affecting small business digital marketing. Numerous studies show that younger entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt and master digital marketing technology (Payares, 2023; Alford & Page, 2015). Digital literacy, technological acceptance, and risk assessment are the main causes of this generational divide (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010). Elderly entrepreneurs often lack digital knowledge, are reluctant to adopt new technology, and rely on traditional marketing methods (Kumar & Ayedee, 2021). However, evidence suggests that training, education, and external aid may overcome age-related barriers to adoption (Nguyen, Newby & Macaulay, 2015). Older business owners who receive specialized digital skills training adopt at rates comparable to younger leaders (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Thus, while age remains a major determinant in digital marketing adoption, programs that help small enterprises develop their abilities and adapt to the digital world might mitigate its consequences. It is evident from the analysis that the youngest age groups, specifically those aged 15 - 20 years ($\mu=3.40$, $\sigma=1.07$), 20 -25 years ($\mu=4.14$, $\sigma=0.81$), and 26-30 years ($\mu=3.78$, $\sigma=0.82$), are most responsive to digital marketing

adoption (Table 5). The mean value declines with increasing age for digital marketing adoption, specifically among respondents aged 31 - 36 years ($\mu=3.30$, $\sigma=0.81$) and 37 years & above ($\mu=2.78$, $\sigma=1.02$). Thus, the research hypothesis H2, assuming that younger age groups are most responsive to digital marketing, is accepted.

Age	Mean	Deviation Standard	Rankings	Degree
The age group of 15 years - 20 years is more engaged with digital marketing	3.40	1.07	3	Agree
The age group of 21 years - 25 years is more engaged with digital marketing	4.14	0.81	1	Agree
The age group of 26 years - 30 years is more engaged with digital marketing	3.78	0.82	2	Agree
The age group of 31 years - 36 years is more engaged with digital marketing	3.30	0.81	4	Neutral
The older age group of 37 more engaged with digital marketing	2.78	1.02	5	Neutral
Overall	3.48	0.52		Agree

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

Obstacles to digital marketing adoption

Despite the success of digital marketing, small businesses struggle to adopt and apply digital technologies. A major difficulty is that owners and staff lack the necessary computer and internet skills, making it challenging to create and manage effective online marketing plans. According to studies, many small business owners view digital marketing solutions as complex and time-consuming, which makes them hesitant to engage (Durkin, McGowan & McKeown, 2013). Small businesses often lack the cash to engage qualified workers or invest in innovative marketing tools (Kumar, Choi & Greene, 2016). A lack of information about potential benefits and uncertainty about ROI can reduce digital platform use (Rahayu & Day, 2015). In developing nations, limited internet connectivity and inadequate technical support hinder digital adoption (Apulu & Latham, 2011). Organisational hurdles, including change aversion and a lack of digital initiatives, impede success (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Data privacy, cybersecurity, and confidence in online transactions are additional deterrents to online commerce. The report emphasises that while digital marketing offers numerous benefits, small businesses must overcome these complex challenges through training, government support, and ecosystem development to fully capitalise on them. Table 6 provides obstacles to digital marketing adoption among small businesses. The analysis indicates that small businesses often cooperate with other parties to engage in digital marketing ($\mu = 3.70$, $\sigma = 0.89$). The respondents also agreed that digital marketing is easy to learn ($\mu = 3.44$, $\sigma = 0.93$). However, the respondents seem to be neutral on the use of digital marketing being difficult and difficult to learn ($\mu = 2.78$, $\sigma = 0.89$), there being obstacles that prevent them from using digital marketing ($\mu = 2.66$, $\sigma = 0.94$), and digital marketing requiring paying huge sums ($\mu = 2.62$, $\sigma = 0.95$). Thus, the research hypothesis H4, which assumes that obstacles to digital marketing adoption exist among small businesses, is not accepted.

Statements	Mean	Deviation Standard	Ranking	Degree
I cooperate with other parties to do digital marketing for my project	3.7	0.89	1	Agree
Using digital marketing is easy and easy to learn	3.44	0.93	2	Agree
The use of digital marketing is difficult and difficult to learn	2.78	0.89	3	Neutral
There are obstacles that prevent me from using digital marketing	2.66	0.94	4	Neutral
Digital marketing needs to pay huge sums	2.62	0.95	5	Neutral
Overall	3.04	0.51		Agree

Source: Primary survey conducted by the author

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this research is to determine the extent to which digital marketing is related to small businesses in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This study evaluated four dimensions of digital marketing, including the level of awareness of digital marketing, the impact of digital marketing on profitability, the age of entrepreneurs and their adoption of digital marketing, and the obstacles to adopting digital marketing. To conduct this study, a descriptive methodology was utilised, and 50 small company owners in Jeddah were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. Based on the analysis of survey data, it appears that small businesses are familiar with the fundamental concepts of digital marketing and its connection to social media platforms. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that digital marketing has a positive impact on increasing the profitability of small businesses and that social media platforms are the most widely used platforms for digital marketing among small business owners. The analysis also shows that younger age groups are the most engaged with digital marketing. Although digital marketing is easy to master, most firms outsource the management of their digital marketing initiatives to a specialised agency.

This study contributes theoretically and practically in a number of ways. In general, the study provides insightful information on the utilisation of digital marketing technologies to promote products and services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The significance of social media platforms and search engine optimisation tools for small businesses is highlighted by the level of awareness, the engagement of young entrepreneurs, the implications for business promotion, and the appointment of digital marketing specialists when small businesses lack familiarity with the field. Through simple data analysis, this study provides several key implications for small businesses, digital media marketing agencies, and regulatory bodies to work together to create vibrant digital marketing opportunities. Firstly, the study attempted to conceptualise a model of how awareness leads to the adoption of digital marketing, thereby increasing profitability among small businesses. Further, how the age of entrepreneurs can be an enabler and what obstacles may affect the adoption of digital marketing tools. This study provides insight into the level of awareness of digital marketing among small businesses and generates an appetite among them to utilise digital marketing tools in their communication

and information systems. The study develops a comprehensive analytical framework for integrating four areas, i.e. awareness, profitability, age, and obstacles. Secondly, this study provides evidence on the use of digital marketing to enhance consumer outreach and profitability among small businesses and identifies the potential target group for effectively promoting the digital marketing campaign. Finally, the results provide a comprehensive picture of how small firms in Jeddah use digital marketing and the real-world effects on policymakers, digital marketing firms, and small business owners by showing how demographic characteristics affect adoption, how digital practices can be profitable, and the hurdles entrepreneurs face in their environments.

Although this study is unique and based on primary insights from small businesses, it has several limitations. Firstly, this study is based on a small sample of 50 small business owners, which limits the capability of generalization of the results. The study is also limited to small businesses based in Jeddah city, which may not represent businesses in other regions of Saudi Arabia. Secondly, the study's results are based on entrepreneurs' perceptions of 28 parameters on a 5-point Likert scale; therefore, the qualitative impact of digital marketing cannot be ascertained. Thirdly, the study includes only four dimensions, i.e. awareness, profitability, age and obstacles, while other relevant factors such as industry type, digital readiness, competition, etc, have not been included in the analysis. Finally, the study is based on simple statistical analysis, and future studies may expand the sample size, add additional parameters, and use sophisticated analytical techniques with coverage of multiple locations and countries. Since this study utilised basic descriptive statistics, future research may employ inferential statistics, structural equation modelling (SEM), regression analysis, or machine learning to uncover more robust causal relationships among awareness, adoption, profitability, obstacles, and demographic variables.

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