



## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)-DRIVEN MARKETING: A CATALYTIC AGENT FOR BUSINESSES GROWTHS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*In this age of global networking, the Internet has come to play a crucial role in all aspects of lives, businesses and society as a whole. Presently in the world, the Internet has become an indispensable tool for driving various businesses and services in fields of human endeavours. It is a versatile tool that has helped users' of diverse endeavours in accomplishing various businesses' tasks seamlessly and speedily with the aids of few clicks of buttons made possible ICT aided infrastructure. The role of information and communication (ICT) in modern marketing is crucial, because of its various essential applications in driving businesses' growths. The paper is therefore concerned with the impact of ICT potentials for the promotion of goods and services in the Nigerian economy. An ICT-driven marketing entails the application of interactive and virtual tools for promoting and sales of a nation's businesses' goods and services. The fact is that, the advent and application of the Internet has contributed immensely in reshaping the global economies through marketing changes which are cost-effective, flexible and speedy with unparalleled global reach. ICT-driven marketing has the potentials to creating incredible gains for nations and Nigeria in particular and not without its challenges.*

**Keywords:** ICT-Driven, Marketing, Catalytic agent, and Businesses growths

### Introduction

It can no longer be denied that the concept of marketing- a platform for customers' awareness of the exchange of goods and services, has passed through drastic changes, and has become more impactful in this era of online businesses made possible with the evolution of the Internet. The Internet as a global network of linked computers,

the infrastructure of network of computers, servers and communication links that connect and aids the flow of vast quantity of information on the Internet, invariably influencing and advancing marketing strategies globally.

Over the years, the power of the Internet has generated possibilities for our generation and made business owners and marketers to make products and services easily and timely accessible

to consumers. With the Internet, new platforms had been developed and still being developed for the growth of businesses and benefits of their customers. The birth of the Internet has brought with it life transforming changes in human endeavors, as a result of the advances in the sciences and information and communication technologies (ICTs). The role and positive contributions of ICTs has influenced all facets of human endeavours including marketing, tourism, hospitality, security, medicine and health care, manufacturing, etc. ICT has of recent, provided the human race with a vast array of modern communication capabilities, that enables people to communicate globally in real-time, by aiding instant messaging, video-conferencing, varied social platforms for consistent contacts and communication by users of the Internet.

In the opinion of Singh (2020), ICT in marketing, provides companies with easy access to enormous global information resources and facilities, valuable competitive knowledge and consumer information that simplifies the decision process. Some of the ICT powered marketing channels include; websites, social media marketing, search engine marketing, content marketing, affiliate marketing, electronic mail marketing, and Short Message Service (SMS), all powered with the Internet. Okpara (2002) explained marketing research as the planned collection, analysis and reporting of data for possible application to a specific marketing situation. And so, marketing depends very much on ICT in making business decisions.

ICT provides support to business clients by creating a network of agents that can cover the target territory and develop sales. ICT empowers investments in marketing activities required to create customers' brand recognition and managing the exclusive representation of the customers' products geographical area, promoting

sales through ICT's network (Singh, 2020). The existence of ICT as powered by the Internet, has evolved a "global village" which has motivated peoples to communicate with friends and strangers across the globe. And has reshaped the structure and re-invented different sectors of the nation's economy such as; marketing, travels and tours, Medicare, Education, Military and Security, Policing, etc. The arrival of the Internet with the World Wide Web (www) has helped to globalize the rules of marketing and its practitioners. The fact is that marketing is one of the numerous fields that have been greatly revolutionized by ICTs. Information and communication technology (ICT) as an Internet technology, has evolved to play a key role in all components that make up marketing and has promoted the relevance of communication in the interface between business, customers and society.

A very important gain from the advent of the Internet as regards marketing operations such as; promotion and provision of goods and services to the reach of customers, is that it has created a turning point, that is; a holistic shift from the old order to a new business model, which acts as the catalyst for the electronic conceptualization of marketing globally. This evolutionary trend has become inevitable as ICT-driven marketing has created a dynamic business environment where a customer-oriented, bottom-up, and reciprocal process has over thrown the old market-oriented, top-down, and unilateral process. Marketing, in the opinion of Busch & Huston (1985), is the systematic and objective search for and analysis of information relevant for the identification and solution of marketing problems. Achumba (2003), views marketing research as the systematic and objective gathering, recording and analysis of all marketing facts on marketing realities about problems that concern the transfer and sale of goods and services from the producers

to the consumers in any nation. It provides marketing managers with the capacity for decision marketing

Some ICT tools for marketing include; the Internet, intranet, websites, blogs, emails, social media platforms, radio, television, computer-aided mobile devices, and other communication technology devices, (Singh, 2020). And that the social web has created new and personalized needs for customers, evolving platforms for marketers, customers, and innovators in building business relationships. The emergence of new electronic business models are getting popular with the aid of ICT. Without any doubt, ICT is a valuable and universal marketing tool for successful business organizations. ICT has shown its vivacity as a marketing tool and as such, no business organization can be successful in modern times without the application of it.

### **What is ICT?**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is defined as the technology for telecommunications, audiovisual processing, and network-based control and monitoring functions (Singh, 2020). The author sees ICT as crucial to most businesses and applied in organizations for expanding their capabilities. ICT includes both the internet-enabled as well as the mobile-powered technologies that help business organizations in identifying the opportunities and the implementation of marketing communications through multiple media. Again, ICT helps in markets expansions, diversity of revenue streams, provision of 24/7 service convenience, value addition, customer satisfaction, improved sales performances, credibility, and growth opportunities.

In the Nigeria business sphere, the application of ICT in driving marketing is valued to be creating greater business opportunities for business organizations to serve their customers better. The

introduction of the Internet and its infrastructure in the country's business environment, has ensured that the customers of goods and services, now has the freedom for shopping from their homes, notwithstanding their distances from their businesses with the aid of ICT tools like the; Internet, intranet, businesses websites, blogs, emails, other social media platforms, radio, television, computer-aided mobile devices, and other communication technology devices. Adeleke (2000) opinionated that the world economic activities are presently enabled by tele-computing which poses enormous challenges to marketing in an economy such as ours in Nigeria without much of it. The evolution of ICT has greatly changed the face and practices of marketing worldwide. Turban (1996) viewed information technology as a subsystem of an information system. Hartzeli (2006) defined information technology as the use of information system in the process of gathering, recording, storing, processing and dissemination of information, combining the technology of the Computer with that of communication. Ukwuegbe (2004) explained information technology as the use of information systems and communication apparatus in processing and disseminating data and information.

The concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) incorporates technologies used for creating, storing, exchanging, and applying information in its forms like; business data, voice conversations, still and motion pictures, multimedia presentations, and others. ICT is the technology that is believed to be driving the present age of information revolution. Again, ICT can be related to computing technology; as it is the application of computers and telecommunication equipment for the purpose of storing, retrieving, transmitting, and manipulating of data and dissemination of /information. Hence, ICT as a field of specialization is associated with

the operations of numerous industries, such as; electronics functionalities, the internet operations, e-commerce and marketing operations, computer hardware and software, semiconductors, computer services, and many others.

### **Conceptualization of ICT-Driven Marketing**

ICT-aided marketing is a type of marketing that uses the Internet to driving and delivering promotional marketing messages from industries and services providers worldwide through the Internet tools like organizational websites, emails, Face book, YouTube, Instagram, X handles, blog sites, and other social media platforms/accounts. This processes aid web banners and mobile advertising in ICT-Driven marketing. ICT-Driven marketing often involves a publisher, who integrates advertisement into its online content and an advertiser who provides the advertisement for display on the publishers' contents.

According to Chaffey (2007), ICT-Driven marketing can be defined as; the application of digital technologies through online channels such as; the Web, email, mobile and wireless devices, digital televisions, smart databases that aid online marketing activities with the aim of achieving profitable acquisitions and the retention of customers, through the improvement of customers' knowledge to delivering of integrated targeted communications and online services that meet individual needs. In the words of Coviello et al. (2005), the adoption of electronic/ICT-Driven marketing in an organization is equivalent to its orientation towards information technology. As a higher orientation of ICTs initiates the efficient application of ICT-Driven marketing in an organization and nation respectively.

Chineo (2022) is of the opinion that the electronic payments marketing process in Nigeria has significant impact on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) performances. Ighomereho &

Iriobe (2019) posited that, electronic marketing is a marketing philosophy that has transformed the practice of marketing from the traditional means to the current online platforms. According to them it has changed the way and manner firms relate with their customers.

### **ICT-Driven Marketing approaches**

ICT-Driven marketing which can equally be called online, electronic or Internet marketing entails sundry approaches and techniques, which are enumerated below.

- i. Website-powered marketing;** this is a very popular approach of ICT-Driven marketing. This approach applies the virtual space to upload marketing messages and virtuals on websites to attracting Internet users. Its main aim is to increase sales and to build brand awareness. The Website-powered marketing involves the displaying of promotional messages placed on third-party websites, search engines, and directories available via Internet access. Unlike the use of the print, radio and television media for marketing advertisements, the website-powered marketing does not enforce on the customer the need to pay attention to promotional messages, but rather comes by way of persuasion and attraction of the viewers to act decisively. The approach leaves the buyers/customers the choice to click or not to click a visited site. Website-powered marketing makes use of pop-ups, floating adverts, banner adverts, and interstitial banners.
- ii. Email marketing;** is the application of emails as medium for sending promotional messages to Internet users. It is the most effective approach to ICT-Driven marketing. Among its gains are the high responses rates of customers and its low

costs to customers during marketing. The gains have suddenly turned email marketing into an invaluable marketing tool. But its basic problem is that the online customers can easily ignore or forget the received messages as advertisements and may decide to send them to the spam folder.

**iii. Associate marketing;** this is an ICT-Driven/web-based marketing approach that employs automated systems or specialized software that creates rewards platform for a visited customer or sales via network links. Very often, these rewards may be in monetary form, extended Internet time, or other incentives that can keep the subscriber or customer bound to an organization. This is a key aspect of ICT-Driven marketing approaches where two or more websites owners can link for the purpose of promoting their products or services with the intention of expanding their financial base and gains.

**iv. Search engines marketing;** the adoption of search engines in ICT-Driven marketing are indispensable approaches for the seamless operations of businesses organizations. These aids the speedy trafficking of information into websites that are Internet connected. They are a cluster of strategies and techniques applied for increasing the number of visitors to be linked to such websites.

**v. Social media marketing;** this is used to describe the process of boosting websites' traffics or brands' awareness with the aid of social media network sites. Majority of social media marketing activities are for creating exclusive contents that attract awareness and encourage visitors and customers to share such contents with friends and contacts on social networking sites.

### **Gains of ICT-Driven Marketing**

A very high percentage (82.2%) of the number of the responses from the interviewees from the interviews carried out, acclaimed the gains of ICT-Driven marketing as a catalyst for business growths in modern Nigeria. The implementation of privatization of the telecommunication sector together with the banking sector's consolidation far back in 2000, in conjunction with the implementation of the nation's cashless policy in 2013, brought about the drive for the adoption of electronic commerce and by extension, the development of electronic or ICT-Driven marketing in the nation, as reported by the Central Bank of Nigeria in its 2014 report. In the same vein, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) in its 2015 report equally showed that Internet users grew to about 30 million users in Nigeria.

The private and public sectors investments in Internet infrastructure in the country has led to improvement in the connectivity and speed of Internet usage in Nigeria, and has brought about increase in the broadband penetration of about 41.6% as at January 2022 (Sasu, 2024). According to the report, Nigeria ranks fifth in the sub-Saharan Africa, and has the largest youth population in the world. Though the nation has an Internet penetration rate of about 55% as at today, the number of Internet users is estimated to be about 123 million which is about 61.5% of the population with the majority of users accessing the Internet with the aid of mobile devices which shows the absence of adequate ICT infrastructure for the full usage of Internet in the country (Sasu, 2024).

ICT-Driven marketing also referred to as electronic marketing, is aimed at providing business organizations with tangible gains or benefits. Some of which are;

1. **Creating empowerment.** It has enabling effects on business organizations, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) business outfits as the Internet is able to provide extensive market reach and operational efficiency for them. The Internet has created exceptional opportunities for the empowerment of the workforce in all categories of businesses engaged in national and international business operations. ICT-Driven marketing has provided a level playing ground for both small and large business organizations to generate empowerment.
2. **Geographical and time barriers.** A key gain of ICT-Driven marketing is that it has drastically reduce the distance factor in the marketing of goods and services globally. And this has helped to lower the costs of goods and services, as sundry options are provided for the customers that are Internet-enabled. With it, customers can get information on products and services of business outfits, and enable customers to purchase products round the clock as organizations and business outfits offer their products and services on 24-hours basis.
3. **It provides a global target reach.** ICT-Driven marketing is targeted at reaching customers more efficiently, as the digital marketing devices are designed to target specific sets of customers in relationship to products and services. Unlike the traditional media marketing approach that focus on all without targeted customers, ICT-Driven marketing is designed to attract targeted customers who are in search of specific brands, services and products required. It allows businesses to discover new markets and aid them to compete globally.
4. **It provides efficient results and affordable costs.** ICT-Driven marketing devices deliver better results and revenues for business organizations than the old fashioned devices. A well designed ICT-Driven marketing offers cost savings in the areas of transactional costs, customers' services, digital media channels, prints and distribution. The reason is because the old fashioned marketing media like newspapers, social magazines, televisions and radios are becoming outdated in the present marketing approach, and being over shadowed by modern digital devices.
5. **It provides prompt results and appropriate feedbacks.** ICT-Driven marketing is designed to deliver prompt results, as it operates mostly with real-time marketing devices that create more benefits for business outfits. ICT-Driven marketing is branded with real-time interactions for business connectivity required for expansion and prompt services. Whenever a targeted customer visits an organization's website, there is the likelihood of increased sales or exposure of the products and services. It allows organizations to obtain the detailed responses of customers to advertisements.
6. **It is cost effective.** ICT-Driven marketing is much more cost effective than the traditional methods of marketing. It does not require large quantities of investment like the old marketing methods. The ICT-Driven marketing networks are cheaper with websites traffics sometimes efficient.
7. **It enables personalization.** ICT-Driven marketing enables business organizations to obtain and save information about their customers and identify them individually. When customers' databases are linked to the websites of organizations, they get welcome messages from the firms to which they are connected. The more they visit such websites to purchase goods and services, the

more the firms can refine their profiles to serve them effectively.

### Challenges of ICT-Driven Marketing

A percentage of about 17.8%, of the responses of the persons interviewed did not agree that ICT-Driven marketing is a positive tool in growing businesses in Nigeria, as a result of some perceived factors. They believe that inadequate Internet infrastructure, high cost of Internet connectivity, unpredictable power supply, insufficient ICT specialists, absence of security, among others; are still basic challenges that needed to be addressed by those concerned, for the nation to achieve and sustain the gains of ICT-Driven marketing. In the opinion of Faloye (2014), notwithstanding Nigeria's recent adoption and growth in digital economy, the country's electronic (ICT-Driven) marketing is still at its infancy stage compared to some other developing countries in Africa. World Bank (2022), reported that while countries like South Africa, Ghana and Kenya have 74.7%, 69.8% and 40.8% of their populations with access to the Internet, Nigeria only attained 29.23% of her population in the same year. Agwu & Murray (2017) are of the opinion that, despite the relevance and benefits of ICT in modern development and its importance in (ICT-Driven) electronic marketing, Nigeria is still faced with some challenges. Some of the challenges militating against the large scale application of ICT-Driven marketing in Nigeria are;

**1. Insufficient Internet Infrastructures.** The basic platform for ICT-Driven marketing is the one powered by the ideal Internet infrastructures. But these are at the lowest level especially in the rural areas of the nation. Presently, the level of Internet accessibility in Nigeria is still very negligible. The rural areas with its high percentage of businesses potentials lack

access to the Internet services and so cannot effectively engage in ICT-Driven marketing.

- 2. Unpredictable Power Supply.** The issue of unstable power supply in Nigeria has been a thing of concern to Nigerians and the business environment. It has become an albatross to the nation's drive to meaningful digital development. Because, electricity power is essential in powering Internet services and the accompanying devices, its limited availability now posed a serious setback for ICT-Driven marketing in the Nigerian business environment.
- 3. Cost of Internet Connectivity.** The availability of computers, smart devices which are import dependent coupled with fast internet connectivity are prerequisites for achieving resourceful ICT-Driven marketing, but these are costly to acquire by small and medium business organizations in Nigeria as they require huge scarce foreign exchange which are the preserve of multi-nationals. Equally, the high cost of Internet connectivity required for ICT-Driven marketing is also a basic issue for concern due to its high acquisition and maintenance costs for majority of the local business bodies.
- 4. Non-availability of adequate number of ICT technical Staff.** The number of ICT technical staff and specialists in the nation is relatively low, as they are mainly expatriates hired from foreign countries and paid in hard currencies, especially in dollars which are scarce to procure because of the devalued state of the naira/national currency. The nation is in dire need of sufficient ICT technical staff and adequate computer literacy to achieve a seamless ICT-driven marketing. When these are sufficiently made available, it will lead to the rapid growth of the nation's ICT-Driven marketing.

5. **Online insecurity.** The lack of adequate security for online transactions for businesses and customers alike possesses a great discouragement to ICT-Driven marketing. ICT-Driven marketing is supposed to be well secured with the latest technology for its operations against access to fraudsters.
6. **It involves much Competition.** The proliferation of online adverts faced by ICT-Driven marketing has created much competition among marketing organizations. ICT-Driven marketers presently struggle to undo each other in their bids to reach their targeted customers for marketing and advertising advantages. The severe competition result in the deployment of scarce resources in terms of finance, time and materials to out-do each other.
7. **It is still not a popular choice for countries with poor internet connectivity.** Buyers or customers of business organizations in countries with poor internet connectivity or infrastructures like Nigeria or the ones with none at all, cannot operate ICT-Driven marketing, as they possess strong doubts in the security of online/electronic transactions, and so would stick with the old method of marketing.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The advent of the Internet has positively influenced all sectors of human activities with the inclusion of marketing as a catalyst for the global spread of businesses. The impact of the Internet vis-à-vis ICT-Driven marketing has brought with it a revolutionized modern marketing approach. The dawn of modern marketing is now ICT-Driven with its gains and challenges. For a better understanding of the power of ICT-Driven marketing, a holistic view of its gains and challenges were x-rayed so as to assist business owners and marketers to be

abreast of present modern global marketing channels and requirements.

As ICTs continue to evolve, new devices to aid ICT-Driven marketing will emerge as well to define how business organizations' products and services will be marketed and delivered to prospective customers in the coming years.

### **Suggestions**

It is suggested that ICT facilities or tools should be made affordable to drive this new and resourceful marketing technology. The relevant authorities in the country must ensure the provision of cheap and secured Internet space for the ingenious operation of ICT-Driven marketing in modern Nigeria.

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