

Interactive Communication and Marketing Performance of Micro and Small Enterprises within Nyanza Region, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

To address the ever-changing needs of the clients, MSEs have to potentiate their one-to-one interaction with their customers as a cornerstone for their marketing performance. This is because interactive marketing courtesy of interactive communication makes a real effort to reach customers and understand their needs and preferences leading to high levels of marketing performance. However, the use of collaborative technologies for interactive communication amongst MSEs in Kenya remains a challenge. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to establish the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of micro and small enterprises within Nyanza region, Kenya. Theory of relational market behaviour and a cross-sectional survey research design was adopted with a target population of 3,211 registered MSE owners in the Nyanza out of which sample size of 356 was selected using Yamane's (1967) formula. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics using SPSS version 25.0. From findings interactive communication explained 30.7 percent variation on marketing performance. A coefficient of .319 indicated that a unit change in interactive communication leads to .319 units of positive change in marketing performance. In conclusion interactive communication significantly predicts marketing performance at $t = 12.510, p < 0.05$ thus the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is need for MSEs to strengthen their interactive communication platforms for consumers to voice their requirements, perspectives, or opinions and support information exchange. They should also develop methods for collecting input from customers. The report also suggests that when dealing with consumers, MSEs should use positive language, be concise and clear, and personalize their interactions. Thus, it mandates the MSEs to scan the marketing environment for opportunities and align their capabilities of interactive marketing communications with the changes in the customer preferences for maximal output. The finding of this study can help major stakeholders in the MSE sector to strengthen interactive marketing communications for marketing performance.

Key words: Interactive Communications, Marketing Performance, MSEs, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

It is crucial for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) to use marketing strategies that are up to date and responsive to the constantly changing needs of their customers because a business' success or failure depends on how well its marketing initiatives reflect the needs of its customers and the advantages that they stand to gain from using their products or services (Brenes, Mena & Molina, 2007). Therefore, to address the ever-changing needs of the clients MSEs have to potentiate their one-to-one interaction with their customers as a cornerstone for their marketing performance. This is because interactive marketing courtesy of interactive communication makes a genuine attempt to connect with customers and comprehend their wants and preferences, resulting in excellent marketing performance (Shivani, 2022). However, MSEs suffer from poor integration or use of interactive marketing communication tools (Tsikirayi, Muchenje, & Katsidzira, 2013). In this regard, MSEs frequently rely on the adoption of traditional marketing methods to smaller businesses, which affects their marketing performance. It therefore implies that MSEs should not embrace market communications strategies for short-term tasks but to support any defined strategic marketing objectives, or to build distinctive and sustainable competitive positions in their markets.

To take advantage of market possibilities and/or address environmental threats that are disclosed by interactive marketing communication, specific strategic measures are implemented based on the strengths and limitations of the business. A two-way method of marketing and advertising known as interactive marketing communication enables customers to interact with businesses directly. (Abin & Sujianto, 2022). In contrast to

conventional types of marketing, interactive marketing communication incorporates marketing initiatives based on customer behavior. This discussion often takes place on social media, email, surveys, and other digital marketing platforms. Interactive marketing communication, a development of direct marketing, is a media technology that permits two-way contact between a customer and a seller. The majority of interactive marketing communication approaches contain a response mechanism that enables customers to react to communications directly and maybe make purchases (Mulhern, 2010).

Therefore, the interactive content should be ingrained with value addition for attraction of customers and catalyzing more user engagement to engender maximal market performance. This is underpinned by the fact that the use of interactive marketing communications increased customer acquisition rate over time leading to marketing performance (Majid, 2020). Stone and Woodcock (2014) noted that interactive communication strategies have affected marketing performance through their role on the different areas of the marketing mix as branding, personal selling, product, advertising and promotion. However, the use collaborative technology for interactive communication amongst MSEs in Kenya remains a challenge. Wanjala, (2016) adds that performance of MSEs that use Information Communication Technology (ICT) is still unconvincing; the production levels anticipated from such MSEs' ICT investments are not correlated with improved products and services, a larger market, or lower costs. In addition, the MSEs in the region continue to have performance issues, with a failure rate of 65%, despite the trainings provided and the marketing plans in place (Menya, 2020). Therefore, for MSEs to increase their positive relationships with their customers locally and internationally, they need to understand the role of interactive communication in re-shaping marketing performance. However limited research has been conducted in the sphere of marketing communication and marketing performance in MSEs.

1.1 Objective

The specific objective of the study was to establish the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of micro and small enterprises within Nyanza region, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In accordance with the research's aims, the study was premised on the theory of relational market behavior. The major goal of ongoing communication with consumers is to establish a friendly rapport that fosters client confidence. A component of SET called relational market behavior shows how effective customer connections may be built from the standpoint of retaining customers (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001). Building ties with customers is a business strategy whose origins date back to the early industrial era (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

The authors assert that manufacturers and customers interacted directly while artisans concentrated on creating things that were uniquely their own. Strong relationships were formed between the producers and the customers as a result of this. Nevertheless, the advent of intermediaries during the mass production era in the 1930s made it harder for producers and consumers to communicate directly, which resulted in the development of transaction-oriented marketing. Producers used to manage marketing, but intermediaries took over now that they were more interested in making money than in building relationships with the clients they served (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Yet as customers became more conscious of the products they wanted and the amount of satisfaction the products might provide, the relationship marketing approach quickly developed and evolved by the 1980s.

This theory thus offers an explanation for how effective business to customer relationships may be formed through appropriate interactions to guarantee customer retention and new client acquisition. The theory gave this study the rationale it needed to interview the owners or operators of MSEs in order to analyze the nature of the connection between the service they offer and their interactions with consumers. With respect to readiness to participate in interactive marketing and the degree of reciprocal dependency and cooperation, the researcher was able to measure perceptions of the exchange interaction connection using the responses that were received.

2.2 Empirical Review

Samson et al. (2014) looked at the “effect of online digital communication on consumer purchasing decision” to assess how well it works as a marketing medium for the passenger vehicle segment of the automotive industry. By using stratified random selection to choose 100 respondents from a sample group of different demographic backgrounds. The findings showed that, despite the fact that most people utilize and trust online digital communication sources, the best methods for luring potential buyers to the showroom were television advertising and

word of mouth. This suggests that while being a potent instrument for informing clients, online digital communication is still not the most popular and impactful media.

By examining the communication process and the communication mix that cellular service providers use to communicate with their consumers, Poovalingam et al. (2007) researched the “effect of communication on customer relationship marketing among cellular service providers”. According to the survey, the majority of mobile phone users were happy with their service provider's communication efforts and that relationship marketing was effectively promoted by the service providers' communication tools. Nabi et al., (2017) looked at the “role and effects of business communication on employee productivity and work satisfaction in a case study on Karmasangsthan Bank Limited in Bangladesh”. A questionnaire was used to guide the study in the form of a descriptive survey. Using several expository statistical analysis techniques, the data were examined. The findings clearly imply that efficient business communication has a clear and undeniable impact on employees' general performance and happiness.

In a quantitative case study on the Shoe Stop Oy Company in Pietarsaari, Finland, conducted by Bista, (2018) the author looked at how effectively visual merchandising may be used to communicate with customers in the physical retail sector. Significant evidence was discovered to support this claim. The study found that both shop owners and patrons understood the importance of visual merchandising tools distinguished between effective and ineffective stimuli. The business employed a lot of visual merchandising components to communicate with its audience, and curiously, these messages were well received. Thus, it came to the conclusion that more efficient and effective use of these technologies may provide solutions to most, if not all, of the issues now encountered by retailers.

Jerman and Završnik (2014) study on the “efficacy of marketing communications in the Slovenian market” discovered a significant link between the creation of a marketing communication plan and improved marketing communications inside the company. The study used a questionnaire that was addressed to the corporate marketing directors of 850 Slovenian businesses so as to explicitly examine the effect of marketing communications strategy on marketing communications effectiveness. A stratified sample of Slovenian enterprises was also employed in the study. Nimusima et al. (2022) studied the “effect of interactive marketing practices on market performance of soft drink enterprises in Kigali City.” The research found a favorable and strong correlation between interactive marketing techniques and market success. Customer satisfaction is improved via interactive marketing among Jaffna Peninsula mobile communication service providers (Sir, 2012). As measured by customer loyalty and happiness, Bader et al. (2022) discovered how e-marketing impacts marketing success in Jordan. According to the findings, e-marketing significantly improved both consumer loyalty and satisfaction. Relatedly, according to Lafley and Martin (2014), adopting a marketing communications strategy that is not only ignorant of the true market's purchasing patterns but also unaware of the dynamics of the competition is associated with failure to meet market sales and profitability objectives.

Samson, et al. (2014) examined the influence of online communication on customer purchasing decisions. The two studies were mostly limited to online interactions, with the first research using a customer's purchasing decision as a dependent variable. In view of the above therefore, most studies on interactive communication suggested its effectiveness especially in online marketing, they mainly focused on telecommunication sector like Automobile industry, cellular service providers and visual merchandising. There was therefore need to empirically investigate other sectors too since such results could not be generalized given the structure and organization of businesses within other sectors. By examining the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of MSEs in the Nyanza area of Kenya, this study sought to bridge this gap. Furthermore, the bulk of communication studies had been carried out in industrialized nations like Slovenia, Bangladesh, and Finland, with the majority being case studies within certain businesses.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed positivist research methodology since it gave the researcher the chance to formulate hypotheses based on the specified objective and statistically evaluate it in order to draw findings that could be compared to theories already in existence. The researcher used a cross-sectional survey research methodology. Cooper, et al, (2006) posits that a cross sectional survey design gives the researcher the chance to get information from many organizations at a certain period. In addition, it gives the researcher the chance to collect quantitative or qualitative data from the intended audience. A questionnaire was used to gather primary data. The target population was 3,211 registered MSE owners in the Nyanza area by Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI). Yamanes (1967) formula was to determine the sample size of 356.



$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n= preferred sample size

N= Population

e = margin of error at 5% (standard value of 0.05) for 95% confidence level.

The sample size will be determined as follows given the population of 3,211.

$$n = \frac{3,211}{1+3,211(0.05^2)} = 355.69 \approx 356$$

Following the collection of the data, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze it. The hypotheses were assessed using simple regression analysis at the .05 significant level.

The general regression model expressed will be as follows:

$$MP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IC_n + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots 3.1$$

Where: MP = Marketing performance

β_0 = is the intercept

IC_n =Interactive Communication

ϵ = error term

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Descriptive analysis

The statements on interactive communication and marketing performance were presented on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = Very low extent, 2 =low extent, 3 = moderate extent, 4 = great extent, and 5 being of extremely high extent. The responses were presented in terms of means and standard deviations.

4.1.1 Interactive communication of Micro and Small Enterprises

The responses on items of interactive communication were displayed on Table 1 in terms of means and standard deviations.

Table 1

Interactive communication of Micro and Small Enterprises

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Timely information offered to customers	356	3.22	.063	1.194
Regularly share accurate information	356	2.90	.077	1.454
Customers involved in product service delivery	356	2.58	.072	1.353
Interactive meeting held regularly	356	2.23	.070	1.325
Customers show awareness of our brands	356	2.93	.079	1.490
Aggregate mean		2.77	.072	1.363

The highest mean score of 3.22 and Se of .063 in Table 1 demonstrate how highly respondents regarded providing consumers with timely information. Sharing of accurate information, involvement in service delivery, regular holding of interactive meetings and customer show of awareness to brands had a mean of 2.90, 2.58, 2.23 and 2.93 respectively. This indicates that the respondents had just a minimal amount of interactive communication with their clients. Interactive communication had an overall mean score of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 1.36.

This implies that interactive communication has been moderately embraced by the Micro and Small Enterprises in Nyanza Region. The findings corroborate with Nabi et al. (2017) in their study on the “role and impact of business communication on employee performances and job satisfactions” which found a significant relationship between communication and performance. This is also echoed by Bista (2018) in his case study on shoe stop of company in pietarsaari, Finland. Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) concur that there is a synergic relationship between communication approach and efficient organizational performance. Lafley and Martin (2014) note that; adopting inappropriate marketing communications strategies is associated with failure to meet market sales and profitability objectives. Jerman and Završnik (2014) later contend to this fact when he found in his study a strong correlation

between communication and performance. Therefore, MSEs in Nyanza region Kenya should strongly embrace interactive communication for maximal outcome in terms of maximal performance. This is because of the low extent of their use of interactive communication. This calls for strengthening their interactive communication platforms and support information exchange with their clients for effective engagement of customers.

4.1.2 Marketing Performance of Micro and Small Enterprises

Marketing performance was evaluated using seven items as presented in Table 2 displays the findings.

Table 2

Marketing performance of Micro and Small Enterprises

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Customers have positive attitude for us	356	3.82	.052	.982
Feedback handled and delivered efficiently	356	3.76	.053	1.007
We realize increased sales and customer visits	356	3.55	.051	.963
We meet customer demands and expectations	356	3.87	.048	.885
Customers uniquely identify our products	356	3.45	.056	1.045
Customers proud to be associated with us	356	4.11	.039	.736
Customers value our products and services	356	4.25	.043	.809
Aggregate mean		3.83	0.048	0.918

According to Table 2, the majority of MSEs believed that their consumers appreciated and expressed pleasure with their goods and services, as shown by the highest mean score of 4.25. Also, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.11 (Sd = 0.736), the customers' pride in their business was also valued as the finest deed performed. This suggests that the respondents valued their customers' sense of pride in their relationship with them. However, meeting of customers' demands and expectation, positive attitude, handling of feedback, increased sales and unique product identification registered the lowest mean scores of 3.87, 3.82, 3.76, 3.55 and 3.45 respectively. Therefore, the firms' level of marketing performance was rated moderately. The overall mean score for marketing performance was 3.83, with a 0.918 standard deviation.

The overall mean score for marketing performance was 3.83, with a 0.918 standard deviation. As a result, the majority of fairly engaged in a significant way on actions that improve marketing success. This is in line with Lafley and Martin (2014) who linked adoption of a marketing communications strategy that is unaware of both the dynamics of the competitive market as well as genuine market purchasing behaviors with failure to meet market sales and profitability objectives. Thus, it mandates the MSEs to scan the marketing environment for opportunities and align their capabilities of interactive marketing communications with the changes in the customer preferences for maximal output. This is explained by the fact that, courtesy of the theory of relational marketing behavior, interactive marketing communication should provide the clients with unique experience that makes communication more interactive thus encouraging potential customers to make a purchase which in turn leads to improved marketing performance. Interactive communication creates valuable experience to consumers as an added value to engender heightened purchases translating to an increase in market share and sales volume as aspects of marketing performance.

4.2 Inferential Analysis

Regression analysis was used to investigate the influence of interactive communication on the marketing performance of Micro and Small Enterprises in order to test the following hypothesis:

H₀₂: Interactive communication has no significant influence on the marketing performance of micro and small enterprises within Nyanza region.

Test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.554 ^a	.307	.305	.51433	1.700

a. predictors: (constant), interactive communication

b. dependent variable: marketing performance

The marketing performance of MSEs was found to vary by 30.7%, according to the coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.307 as explained by interactive communication, 69.3% of the variance in marketing performance is explained by other factors that weren't accounted for in the empirical model of the study. The strength of the relationship between interactive communication and marketing performance among MSEs in the Kenyan Nyanza area was also analyzed and presented in table 4.

Table 4*Analysis of Variance*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41.401	1	41.401	156.508	.000 ^b
	Residual	93.645	354	.265		
	Total	135.056	355			

a. Dependent Variable: Marketing Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Interactive Communication

From the results in Table 4, a value of $F(1,354) = 156.505$, $p < 0.05$ was obtained. This implies that interactive communication could statistically significantly predict marketing performance among MSEs in Nyanza region, Kenya. Thus the rejection of the null hypothesis, the independent variable's contribution to the dependent variable was shown in the regression coefficients Table 5.

Table 5*Regression Coefficient*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.842	.084		33.997	.000
	Interactive Communication	.319	.026	.554	12.510	.000

Dependent Variable: Marketing Performance

From the data in Table 5, the study established regression equation was $Y = 2.842 + .319X_1$. Therefore, marketing performance among MSEs = $2.842 + .319$ Interactive Communication. If interactive communication were held constant at zero, MSEs' marketing performance would be 2.842. Moreover, one unit increase of interactive communication results in a 0.319 rise in marketing performance. Thus, interactive communication is statistically significant at $\beta = 0.319$; $t = 12.510$; and $p = 0.000$. Interactive communication hence has a favorable impact on MSEs' marketing performance at a 95% level of confidence. The study's findings in this instance indicate a connection between MSEs' marketing performance in Nyanza Region, Kenya and interactive communication. The findings are corroborated by Bader, et al (2022), Nimusima, et al., (2022) Samson, et al., (2014) who found a positive and significant relationship between interactive marketing communication and marketing performance.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**5.1 Conclusion**

The results of the study showed that interactive communication predicts MSE marketing performance in the Nyanza area of Kenya. The study came to the conclusion that MSEs in the Nyanza area of Kenya perform better in

their marketing when they engage in interactive communication. Hence, regular and engaged customer communication is likely to lead to enhanced marketing performance. It is also evidenced by study findings that interactive communication is overly in dispensable in capitalizing on marketing performance. Therefore, a policy framework is unquestionably essential to support interactive communication in this context as a strategic recipe that embeds the characteristics of marketing communication among MSEs. Interactive communication helps the MSEs in increasing their sales and customer visits courtesy of meeting and exceeding customer demands and expectations. It has been argued that interactive communication has a substantial impact on marketing performance based on the study's findings. Due to this, it is still essential for MSEs to assess and improve the ways in which they use interactive marketing communication, since doing so will improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts.

5.2 Recommendations

The research advises MSEs to strengthen their interactive communication platforms and support information exchange with their clients. A platform for consumers to voice their requirements, perspectives, or opinions concerning MSEs' activities and performances should be provided by MSEs, who should also develop methods for collecting input from customers. The report also suggests that when dealing with consumers, MSEs should use positive language, be concise and clear, and personalize their interactions. The MSEs should strengthen their interactive communication by enhancing their digital marketing capabilities (DMCs) for high marketing performance by remaining competitive.

5.3 Future Research Directions and Limitations

The study is constrained by the problem of generalizability. Due to the unique characteristics of each sector, it may not be possible to generalize the study's findings to all sectors. Therefore, it is advised that future research be done in other areas and that a more thorough comparison study between sectors be done. The study focused only on MSE owners thus if the study was conducted on the corporate organizations including the marketing department, there may be variations in the strength and direction of the association between the studied variables. Future studies should thus examine the marketing division of the public sector or conduct a study like to this across diverse businesses to better understand the connection between interactive communication and marketing performance. The scope of the study was restricted to marketing performance and interactive communication. Additional study might improve the literature by taking into account moderator like years of experience on in the relationship between interactive communication and marketing performance.

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