



Digital Marketing Impact on Sales Performance for International Cuisine Restaurants in Malaysia

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Abstract. In recent decades, the restaurant industry in Malaysia has increasingly adopted digital marketing to boost sales revenue. The primary goal of this study is to examine the effect of digital marketing tools on the sales performance of international cuisine restaurants in Malaysia. This study aims to help digital marketers understand the importance of these tools and their impact on sales performance after adoption. The targeted respondents were Japanese, Korean, and Thai cuisine restaurants operating in Malaysia that had implemented digital marketing strategies in their business operations. A total of 235 sets of questionnaires were used for data analysis. SmartPLS 4 was employed to conduct the main data analysis. The results revealed that social media marketing (SMM), search engine marketing (SEM), and mobile marketing (MM) have a significant positive impact on sales performance (SP). However, email marketing (EM) was found to have a significant negative influence on SP, while online advertising did not demonstrate a significant positive impact on sales performance. This study seeks to assist marketers in identifying the most effective digital marketing tools for enhancing sales performance in international cuisine restaurants.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Sales Performance, International Restaurant, PLS-SEM, Malaysia.

1 Introduction

Digital technology refers to electronic systems used to create, store, and process paperless versions of information, enabling users to access it from any location and at any time [1]. Marketing encompasses the strategic activities undertaken by businesses or individuals to enhance visibility and achieve various objectives by promoting themselves, their products, or services [1]. Combining these concepts, digital marketing involves the promotion of commercial or personal objectives using electronic technology over the Internet [1]. The development trajectory of digital marketing in Malaysia is currently in progress. The number of enterprises that have embraced digital technology in Malaysia remains relatively low, with only 62% of enterprises having internet connectivity [2]. Compared to the global average, Malaysia lags in digital adoption. However, the country is widely regarded as having significant potential for digital marketing [3]. According to DataReportal [4], 78% of Malaysia's 32.25 million total internet users are active users.

Upon closer examination of the Malaysian restaurant industry, it emerges as a key sector contributing significantly to the country's economic development [5]. Othman, Zahari, and Radzi [6] observed that Malaysia's restaurant sector has evolved over the past decade to include various culinary categories, such as fine dining, fast food, casual dining, themed, and ethnic restaurants. Thanks to its multiculturalism and diverse culinary traditions, Malaysia is widely recognized as a culinary paradise for both local and international tourists [7]. A survey conducted by The Star Malaysia revealed that 64% of Malaysians dine out daily [8]. The survey also indicated that the trend of dining out is growing, especially in the realm of international food. Popular choices among Malaysians include restaurants serving Japanese, Korean, and Thai cuisines. Early 2024 data showed that Japanese food ranked among the top three favorite cuisines for Malaysians [9]. Additionally, Wan and Yazdanifard [10] highlighted the growing popularity of Korean cuisine in Malaysia, largely driven by the widespread influence of K-pop. Thai cuisine, too, has remained a perennial favorite, particularly among residents of the northern region [11]. For restaurant businesses to stand out from their competitors, they must adopt unique strategies that allow customers to recognize their distinctiveness. Therefore, incorporating digital marketing programs into their corporate operations is essential.

The average daily internet usage among Malaysians amounts to 8.5 hours. Malaysians are extensively engaged in digital activities for various purposes. For example, 63% of Malaysians use the internet for mobile texting, 70% for video streaming, 55% for mobile gaming, 47% for mobile banking, and 53% for mobile map services [12]. Studies conducted elsewhere have shown a shift in customer preferences from traditional media to digital marketing, particularly in the banking and services sector. However, few studies on digital marketing have been conducted in Malaysia. Parveen et al. [13] conducted a study focusing on measuring social media usage and organizational performance among Malaysian social media managers. The lack of validated research assessing the impact of digital marketing on sales performance hinders marketers from verifying or quantifying the benefits that digital marketing technologies can offer to businesses.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background - Marketing Mix Theory

The marketing mix theory, introduced by Borden [14], originally consists of four elements: product, price, promotion and place. This theory has become a fundamental component of marketing theory and practice, widely adopted by both managers and academics [15]. However, in this study, the focus is on the promotion aspect, which encompasses advertising and promotional activities. Promotion refers to marketing strategies and tactics used to encourage customers to make a purchase or engage with a brand. [16]. The element of interaction, particularly in building purchase relationships and trust with customers through digital tools, is crucial in today's landscape [17]. Research conducted by Han et al. [18] and Li et al. [19] suggests that effective promotional strategies can strengthen the relationship between restaurants and their patrons, ultimately leading to improved sales performance. Five common digital marketing tools identified by Peter and Dalla Vecchia [72] are used as exogenous constructs in this study.

2.2 Sales Performance

The concept of business growth can be understood as the process of enhancing a business's sales performance (SP) [20]. According to Djakasaputra et al. [21], SP can be improved by adopting digital marketing tools that enable businesses to reach both current and potential customers more effectively. Bala and Verma [22] as well as Behera et al. [23], demonstrated in their studies that the adoption of digital marketing can help businesses reach new customers, provide personalized communication, and increase brand awareness, ultimately leading to higher sales. This approach allows business owners to act as digital marketers, measuring sales performances using the feedback and insights generated from digital marketing activities. In short, digital marketing enables businesses to identify solutions and strategies to enhance sales performance.

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) refers to a group of internet-based tools or applications that operate on web technology and foundational ideologies [24]. According to Marketing Signal Lab [25], Malaysia ranks among the top five countries globally in terms of social media penetration. Malaysians spend an average of approximately 3 hours per day on social media, while total daily internet usage via devices averages 8 hours [25]. Facebook, with 16.8 million users, is the most active social media platform in Malaysia, followed by YouTube with 16.6 million users [4]. A study by Bortolato [26] found that when social media marketing is adopted as part of an organization's marketing strategy, it can significantly improve sales performance. Similarly, research by Tajvidi and Karami [27] shows that social media marketing has a positive effect on customers, leading to increase sales performances. Therefore, marketers should prioritize SMM, as it has become essential for Malaysian consumers. Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing and sales performance.

2.4 Email Marketing

Prasant [1] defined email marketing (EM) as a digital tool that enables marketers to send emails to promote and engage with customers. EM helps foster relationships with potential customers and retain existing ones by keeping them continually informed and updated about the latest and ongoing developments, thereby encouraging customer loyalty [1]. More than half of the global population uses email, and marketers have seized this opportunity to promote their products through email campaigns [29]. Sending well-crafted emails can strengthen the relationship between customers and organization, leading to increase customer loyalty and repeat business opportunities [29]. However, Mitreva et al. [28] found that EM has had a negative impact in recent years. A study by Chaparro-Peláez et al. [41] suggests that email over-saturation may be a contributing factor to this trend. Over-saturation occurs when recipients are overwhelmed by an excessive number of emails from a particular sender or on a specific subject [2]. This can lead to negative outcomes, such as decreased engagement, higher unsubscribe rates, and ultimately a decline in sales performance. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between email marketing and sales performance.

2.5 Online Advertising

Online advertising (OA) refers to the process of promoting products or services through technological communication [31]. Marzan and Gonzales [32] explained that the primary goal of OA is to deliver marketing messages via the Internet and the World Wide Web to attract customers, encouraging them to engage with the advertisement by clicking on it. Ideally, this click-through can lead to an increase in sales performance. OA is often measured by the click rate, which reflects the attractiveness of the advertisement [26]. This allows marketers to assess whether their advertisements are drawing customer attention and to make adjustments as necessary. Terrance et al. [30] demonstrated that online advertising can lead to increase sales of products and services. Similarly, a study by Bayer et al. [33], showed that OA positively impacts both online and offline sales. In summary, engaging in online advertising can stimulate viewers' interest and prompt them to click on ads for more information, which can directly boost sales performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between online advertising and sales performance.

2.6 Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing (SEM) allows customers to access information about products and services, as well as the brands and companies that match their search criteria [34]. When users enter keywords into a search engine, it generates a list of websites and paid search listings relevant to those keywords [34]. Paid search listings, which are part of SEM, appear in search engines to gather information before making a purchase [4]. A study by Terrance et al. [30] indicates that SEM helps improve the quality of sales and services. Therefore, marketers should consider adopting SEM to attract more potential customers, given that a significant portion of Malaysians use search engines to obtain information before completing transactions. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between search engine marketing and sales performance.

2.7 Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing (MM) is a revisionary tool that allows companies to connect with their customers via mobile devices at the right moment through direct messaging [35]. According to Jebarajakirthy et al. [36], a key objective of MM is to increase brand awareness through interaction between customers and brands. In 2016, Malaysia had a total population of 31 million, while the mobile penetration rate was 144.8%, equating to approximately 44 million mobile devices [37]. This suggests that individuals may own more than one device capable of accessing the internet. Additionally, by 2019,

mobile data subscriptions had reached 42.93 million, accounting for 139% of Malaysia’s total population [4]. This trend is expected to continue, partly due to the Malaysian government’s focus on the digital economy [38]. A study by Ravindran et al. [39] found that mobile marketing significantly improves sales performance for micro to medium-sized enterprises. Furthermore, Iftikhar and Khan [40] reported that consumers have embraced mobile marketing as a viable marketing tool, resulting in positive impacts on sales performance. Therefore, businesses are encouraged to adopt MM, as the number of mobile users is expected to rise annually. Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between mobile marketing and sales performance.

2.8 Proposed Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework that was proposed following the hypothesis development.

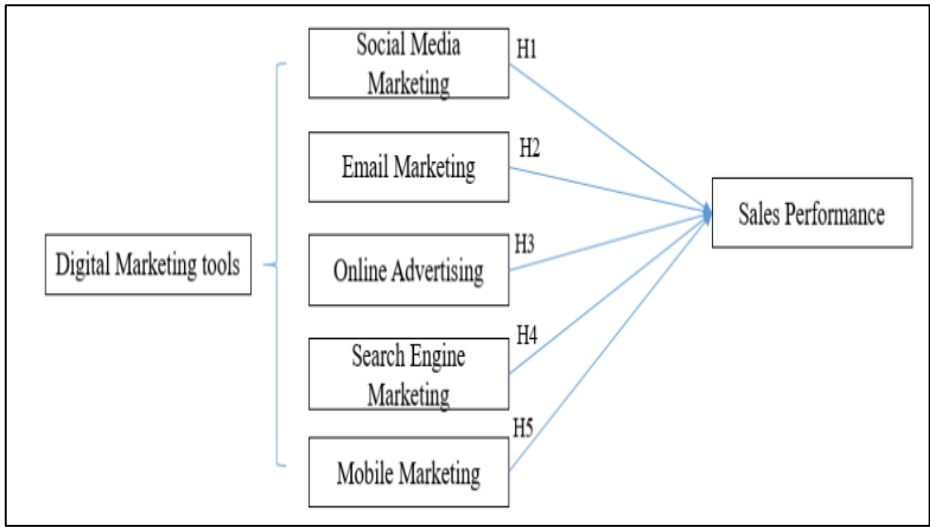


Fig. 1. Proposed Research Framework

3 Research Methodology

The target population for this study comprises Japanese, Korean, and Thai cuisine restaurants operating in Malaysia. Researchers constructed a sampling frame using a list of restaurants from the Smartsrapers 2023 database [43][44][45]. A judgmental sampling technique was employed to ensure that the respondents met specific criteria for survey eligibility. Specifically, respondents must incorporate digital marketing tools

into their business operations, and only restaurant employees with managerial authority or restaurant owners were permitted to complete the questionnaire. This approach ensures that participants align closely with the study's objectives.

The current research utilized a quantitative survey through a self-administered questionnaire. Items for each variable were adapted for this study, with the exception of general questions variable. Social media marketing (SMM) was measured using four items from Dodokh and Al-Maaitah [46]. Four items from Iftikhar and Khan [40] were used to measure email marketing (EM). Four items were adapted from Njuguna [31] to assess online advertising (OA), while three items from Khraim [47] measured search engine marketing (SEM). For mobile marketing (MM), five items were taken from El-Gohary [48]. Additionally, five items were used to measure sales performance (SP) from Jalang'o [49]. General questions were included in the questionnaire as part of the marker variable technique to test for common method bias (CMB) in this study, with seven items adopted from Miller and Simmering [62] used for this purpose.

Sample size statistical justification was obtained using G*Power software, which is widely used and accepted in social science research to calculate the minimum sample size through power analysis [50][51]. A minimum sample size of 138 is required based on medium effect size, with $\alpha = 0.05$, a power of 95%, and 5 predictors. The theoretical justification for the sample size generally suggests that at least 200 responses are sufficient for structural equation modelling data analysis [52][53]. Therefore, a minimum of 200 questionnaires will be collected for this research.

Before the actual data collection, pre-tests were conducted to assess the validity of the questionnaire. Expert judgment was first used to measure the content validity of the questionnaire. Three academics with expertise in marketing from Malaysian private universities evaluated the items within the constructs used in this research. Feedback from the experts was utilized to enhance the validity of the questionnaire. A pilot study was then conducted with 32 respondents, as suggested by Perneger et al. [54], to assess the face validity of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback received, minor modifications were made to some items before the actual data collection [55]. Following good research practices, the 32 respondents from the pilot study were excluded from the main data collection. Out of 1,500 questionnaires distributed, only 235 were collected. After checking and cleaning the data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, all collected data were deemed suitable for subsequent analysis.

4 Data Analysis

This study employed Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis with the SmartPLS 4 software. The two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing [56] was applied. The initial step involved evaluating the measurement model, while the final step focused on assessing the structural model to analyze the formulated hypotheses in the study [57]. Before conducting the analysis, common method bias (CMB) was addressed using the marker variable technique. To avoid CMB, the relationship between the constructs must not exhibit a change of R^2 (the difference between R^2 without marker variable and R^2 with marker variable) that exceeds

10% [63]. It is found that there are no significant R^2 changes with the addition of marker variable (R^2 without marker variable = 0.129, R^2 with marker variable = 0.132, Δ 2.33%). Hence, it can be concluded that CMB is not a major issue in this study.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The general profile of the respondents includes 103 (43.8%) operating Japanese restaurants, 69 respondents (29.5%) operating Thai restaurants, and 63 respondents (26.8%) operating Korean restaurants. Most of the restaurants had been in operation for 1-2 years, with 74 respondents (31.5%), while the least represented category was those operating for less than 1 year, with 50 restaurants (21.3%). In terms of the usage of digital marketing tools per week, the majority used them 3 to 4 times (96 respondents, 40.9%), while the least frequent usage was 7 times or more (24 respondents, 10.2%). The largest reported annual income before and after the adoption of digital marketing falls within the range of RM 1 million to RM 2 million (34.5%) and RM 2 million to RM 3 million (33.2%), with 81 and 78 respondents, respectively.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

The model, constructed using reflectively measured variables, was subjected to a thorough evaluation of its internal consistency reliability, convergent and discriminant validity. The reliability and convergent validity of the model were closely examined based on its loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR).

Table 1. Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
SMM	SMM3	0.953	0.857	0.751
	SMM4	0.771		
EM	EM1	0.708	0.878	0.604
	EM2	0.815		
	EM3	0.866		
	EM4	0.811		
OA	OA1	0.787	0.898	0.692
	OA2	0.873		
	OA3	0.796		
	OA4	0.867		
SEM	SEM1	0.788	0.837	0.632
	SEM2	0.806		
	SEM3	0.790		
MM	MM1	0.767	0.893	0.627
	MM2	0.752		
	MM3	0.755		
	MM4	0.864		
	MM5	0.815		

SP	SP1	0.817	0.811	0.643
	SP2	0.746		
	SP3	0.785		
	SP4	0.851		
	SP5	0.805		

Note: SMM-Social media marketing, EM-Email marketing, OA-Online advertising, SEM-Search engine marketing, MM-Mobile marketing, SP-Sales performance. SMM1 and SMM2 were deleted due to low loadings.

All indicator loadings in Table 1 surpassed the suggested threshold of 0.708 as proposed by Hair et al. [58]. This denotes the measure of effective item contribution and hence, all the items are retained. All six constructs meet the threshold values for CR and AVE, with all CRs greater than 0.7 [59] and all AVEs exceeding 0.5 following the process of item deletion [57]. At this stage, it can be confidently stated that all constructs meet the reliability and convergent validity criteria in this study.

Next, the discriminant validity of this model was assessed using the HTMT technique developed by Henseler et al. [60]. As shown in Table 2, all values met the stringent HTMT_{.85} criterion recommended by Kline [61]. This indicates that discriminant validity has been determined for this model.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity using HTMT Criterion

Construct	Email Marketing	Mobile Marketing	Online Advertising	Sales Performance	Search Engine Marketing	Social Media Marketing
EM						
MM	0.115					
OA	0.112	0.064				
SP	0.232	0.198	0.101			
SEM	0.241	0.235	0.184	0.340		
SMM	0.106	0.157	0.144	0.192	0.210	

Note: EM-Email marketing, MM-Mobile marketing, OA-Online advertising, SP-Sales performance, SEM-Search engine marketing, SMM-Social media marketing.

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

Upon evaluating the measurement model, the researcher proceeded with hypothesis testing to determine the statistical significance of the relationships. Lateral collinearity issues were assessed first, as it is important to address multicollinearity between constructs before performing further analysis. Table 3 shows the variance inflation factor (VIF) for the five exogenous constructs, while Table 4 provides a concise overview of the results concerning the examination of the direct relationships among the constructs in the study.

Table 3. Lateral Collinearity Assessment

Construct	Sales Performance (VIF)
Social Media Marketing	1.048
Email Marketing	1.041
Online Advertising	1.035
Search Engine Marketing	1.103
Mobile Marketing	1.052

Collinearity is assessed by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) value. According to Hair et al. [64], the threshold for concern is a VIF value of 5. Based on Table 3, the inner VIF values for all constructs range from 1.035 to 1.103, all of which are below the threshold of 5. Therefore, multicollinearity is not a concern in this study.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis and Relationship	Standard beta	t-value	R ²	Decision
H1: Social Media Marketing → Sales Performance	0.117	1.968*	0.129	Supported
H2: Email Marketing → Sales Performance	-0.155	3.187**		Supported
H3: Online Advertising → Sales Performance	0.032	0.541		Not Supported
H4: Search Engine Marketing → Sales Performance	0.198	2.822**		Supported
H5: Mobile Marketing → Sales Performance	0.120	2.243*		Supported

Note * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Based on the path coefficient shown in Table 4, four (4) out of five (5) direct relationships have $t\text{-value} \geq 1.645$, based on one-tailed test. In other words, all the four is significant at 0.05 level of significance in this study. Social media marketing ($\beta = 0.117$, $p < 0.05$), search engine marketing ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$) and mobile marketing ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < 0.05$) are positively related to sales performance while email marketing ($\beta = -0.155$, $p < 0.01$) is negatively related to sales performance. Together, they can explain 12.9% of the variance in sales performance. R^2 value of 0.129 is in between 0.02 (weak) and 0.13 (moderate) that was suggested by Cohen [65]. Considering R^2 is very close to 0.13, it is safe to say the model in this study is nearly moderate. Finally, there is no significant relationship between online advertising and sales performance in the study.

5 Discussion

Social media marketing (SMM) is identified as one of the crucial factors influencing sales performance (SP) among international cuisine restaurants in Malaysia. The relationship between SMM and SP shows a significant positive result. This finding is consistent with Bortolato [26], which demonstrated that SMM helps organizations build

direct relationships with customers, market products, improve sales, and create brand loyalty.

There is no doubt that email marketing (EM) is a common digital marketing tool in the service industry [66], including the food and beverage sector. It is a convenient digital tool for restaurants, as consumers may be willing to provide their email addresses for various purposes. For instance, restaurants might have loyalty programs that require customers to register by filling out personal details such as their name, contact number, and email address. However, this study indicate EM has a significant negative relationship with sales performance (SP). As noted by Abu Seman and Segar [67], this may be due to issues such as over-saturation, irrelevant content, and cybersecurity concerns, which contributed to the negative outcome. Therefore, care should be taken when sending promotional materials using this tool, as mismanagement could adversely impact sales performance [68].

Attracting both potential and existing customers to a restaurant's website is crucial for providing detailed information about the restaurant's profile, menu offerings, promotions, and more. This is where the effectiveness of search engine marketing (SEM) becomes essential. Without a strong SEM strategy, restaurants risk falling behind in search engine rankings, potentially missing out on valuable traffic, customer engagement, and ultimately, sales. A previous study by Terrance et al. [30] indicated that SEM tends to affect the quantity of sales in products and services. This finding aligns well with the outcome of this study.

The next finding reveals that mobile marketing (MM) and sales performance (SP) has a significant positive relationship between them. According to El-Ebiary et al. [69], MM has been shown to enhance business outcomes, including brand building, sales growth, and advertising effectiveness within the restaurant industry. Consequently, it is valuable to explore MM as a digital marketing tool to boost sales performance in international cuisine restaurants in Malaysia.

An important research contribution from this study arises from H3, which indicates that online advertising (OA) does not positively influence the sales performance (SP) of international cuisine restaurants in Malaysia. This lack of impact may stem from the limited attention span of individuals. With the vast amount of information accessible via personal devices, consumers often overlook online advertisements [70]. Additionally, the polished and well-designed nature of these advertisements might lead to skepticism regarding their credibility, causing consumers to question the authenticity of the advertised content [71].

6 Recommendations and Conclusion

Four out of five digital marketing tools in this study provides valuable insights and recommendations, highlighting key areas for improvement, especially from the restaurant's perspective. For example, social media marketing can utilize targeted advertisements that allow restaurants to reach specific demographics and geographic locations, optimizing marketing efforts for maximum impact. Promotions and special offers exclusive to social media followers can drive immediate traffic and boost sales. Research

can be conducted regarding search engine marketing to identify the most relevant and frequently used keywords related to the restaurant's cuisine, location, and offerings. This will enable restaurants to craft targeted ads that appear in search results when users are actively seeking dining options. Restaurants should also consider developing a user-friendly mobile app for their mobile marketing. A well-designed app can offer features such as easy online ordering, loyalty programs, and a reservation system, fostering customer loyalty and increasing the frequency of visits. Lastly, evaluating email campaign performance is critical for refining strategies and improving results in restaurant email marketing. Statistical measures such as click-through rates provide valuable information about the content that effectively connects with customers. By analyzing these metrics, restaurants can adapt their email marketing strategies to better cater to client demands and preferences.

7 Limitations and Future Studies

There is a need to expand international cuisine restaurants types and include local cuisine restaurants in future studies. This measure will reveal a more comprehensive tendencies in the Malaysian restaurant industry. Furthermore, the emphasis solely on the international cuisine restaurant does not consider the insights that can be obtained from the local cuisine restaurants, which are equally important in the analysis. Data analysis used is mainly based on hypothesis testing, which is, nevertheless, helpful but does not give a comprehensive picture of the data. To obtain a more powerful and detailed analysis, it is suggested to use effect size measurements, predictive relevance, and PLSpredict analysis. By doing so, this approach will add value to the analysis since it will not only give the degree by which relationships are statistically significant, but also the utility and prediction precision in a real-life scenario.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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