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Digital Touchpoints and their Influence on Customer Preference for the B2B Mark

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Abstract
Many B2B companies have invested in transformation technology, enhancing their digital marketing strategies. This study investigates digital marketing website touchpoints and explores their influence on customer preference in online transactions. The investigation proceeded with convenience sampling, and 311 electronic manufacturers participated in this online survey. Six variables were tested and analyzed using SPSS regression analysis. Three significant variables are visual appearance, ease of use, and order fulfillment. This study contributes to both theoretical and practical implications of digital marketing practice by B2Bs, especially decisions on the features to be implemented on their current website to enhance their marketing practices further.

Keywords: B2B, customer preference, website features, visual appearance

1.0 Introduction
Digital marketing has been known to have a voluminous impact on businesses. In the Business-to-Business (B2B) context, digital touchpoints refer to the various online interactions and channels through which companies connect with their customers, partners, and stakeholders. These touchpoints are critical in building relationships, providing information, and facilitating transactions. Various B2B digital touchpoints include websites, email, social media, content marketing, online advertising, and e-commerce platforms. Many B2B companies have invested in enhancing their digital marketing strategies, such as online presence, content marketing, CRM software, and chatbots. Today, more companies are utilizing digital marketing to reach their target markets, which aligns with consumers' increasing usage of digital media (Smith, 2011).

With more competition in the market, customers have many choices in choosing what they intend; technological developments have evolved over the past decade, including in the aspects of marketing where user requirements have been transformed (Łukowski, 2017). Besides transforming how industry players conduct their businesses, it has also changed the pattern of customers' decision-making processes (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). When individuals and marketers communicate through digital platforms, they

encourage easily shared information and the spreading of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Levy & Gvili, 2015). The recipients judge e-WOM messages based on social capital, richness of information, and interactivity. An information-enriched tool enhances the credibility of the channel (Levy & Gvili, 2015).

In contrast with traditional marketing, marketers can control the audience, timing, and frequency of exposure of the advertising as well as initiate communication. Nevertheless, the audience will have a limited range of responses and opportunities to respond (Perry & Cherkas, 2014). Electronic B2B provides a platform for a business to interact with another company electronically, primarily via the web. It helps to increase productivity, reduce potential staff overhead, and clear the audit trail. Digital or electronic channels allow retailers to be more efficient and increase their reachability to appropriate customers at lower costs (Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfält, 2017). They reiterate that digital channels will enable faster service, better tailored, and more beneficial offers, which results in better and well-informed decision-making (Grewal et al., 2017).

Despite the well-known advantage digital marketing offers businesses, B2B faces challenges in utilizing their digital touchpoints. Existing research implies that these firms need to access the benefits of digital marketing enjoyed by B2Cs or larger firms, which is potentially concerning, given that SMEs are significant economic contributors (European Commission, 2019). Even less is known about how B2B SMEs practice digital marketing, with just a few studies considering these firms' social media use (Setkute, J. & Dibb, S.(2022)). The adoption of social media remains limited among the B2B (Juntunen et al., 2020; Leek et al., 2019). There needs to be more understanding of the take-up of digital marketing practices among companies, primarily in the B2B context. The B2B industry utilizes the offline platform more in operations and customer transactions. The company's nature (Quinton et al., 2018), such as size, volume, and product nature, is distinct from consumer-to-consumer or business-to-consumer markets. Even some well-established B2B organizations need more digital marketing practices in their business operations. The adoption of these practices needs to be improved in the SME industry (Sekute and Dibb, 2022). Hence, this research investigates another perspective of digital marketing among B2B businesses: customers' preferences in dealing with these B2B regarding website attributes. This research investigates one of the digital touchpoints: the extent of website utilization among the B2B for consumer transactions. Websites are platforms where much information can be shared, and advertisement and transaction elements can be embedded.

2.0 Literature Review

Due to external changes in competition and shifting customer expectations, there was growing pressure for firms to adopt digital marketing practices (Setkute, J. & Dibb, S.(2022)). Analyzing a visitor's behavior and customer's purchasing habits on a website using specific engagement metrics data provides critical insights into the performance of product pages and the optimization and improvement of the effectiveness of the e-commerce solution (Ehikioya, SA, Zeng, J., 2022). Ellonen et al. (2015) analyze consumer behavioral patterns on a magazine website using a unique dataset of real-life clickstream data from 295 website visitors. They found interesting behavioral patterns that 86% of all sessions only visit the blogs hosted by the magazine (Ehikioya, SA, Zeng, J., 2022). A study has proven that customers prefer to do online purchasing based on the availability of sufficient information about the product on the website. Website content with adequate knowledge is essential in determining the customer's preference. Hence, marketers must constantly provide good website content according to customer expectations (Mathan Kumar & Velmurugan, 2019). The elements of a good website are content, interactivity, attractive design and appearance, and ease of use, which help increase the effectiveness of a marketing strategy (Drezgić et al., 2009). Web content is essential to ensure a business is more successful through its website simply because customers can navigate and search for information more easily. Thus, creating excellent and compelling web content for customers is the key to a successful business (Yang & Yang, 2015). Interactivity is a computer-based interaction system that acts as a communication medium between the sender and receiver. Good interactivity on the website should include the elements of responsiveness, communication linkage, the immediacy of feedback, source diversity, equality of participation, and the ability to terminate (Aziz et al., 2011). Good interaction capability on the website will help capture the customer's preference (Cvitanović, 2018). In the B2B context, it could also be argued that the nature and size of the buyer could influence their purchasing channels.

Larger and more internet-savvy organizations may adopt online purchases for business transactions, whereas smaller startups may prefer to purchase via conventional channels (i.e., offline channels). Nevertheless, it can't be denied that many past types of research have shown that the customer support element on the website should contain details of the customer services representative, product description, and customer decision tools. These details enable a company to become a customer's choice besides increasing customer satisfaction (Zgódka, 2011). The element of ease of use is essential for gaining customers' preference. Customers prefer to choose user-friendly websites when they navigate and search for product information, especially for first-time users (Dabrowski et al., 2014). Another study also found that easy navigation and searching for information on the website are essential aspects of e-commerce website design. The quality of web design with attractive visual appearance and good news has a significant relationship with customer preference and satisfaction (Ganguly et al., 2010). Mansori, Liat & Shan (2012) discovered that website appearance positively influences customer choice and satisfaction. Good features of order fulfillment on the website are one factor in retaining customers with repeated purchasing. Transparency of inventory information is one element that a customer expects when visiting the website. Besides that, the excellent aspect of order fulfillment on the website is that it allows customers to keep track of the status and location of their purchased items. These elements will help retain current customers and attract new ones to buy products (Xue et al., 2000). Another study found that goods of digital order fulfillment, product selection and assortment, product availability, and product conditions positively influence customer behavior (Nguyen et al., 2018). The following research framework is developed based on the discussions above to investigate the elements significant in predicting business customers' preferences to buy via a website, and relevant hypotheses are formulated.
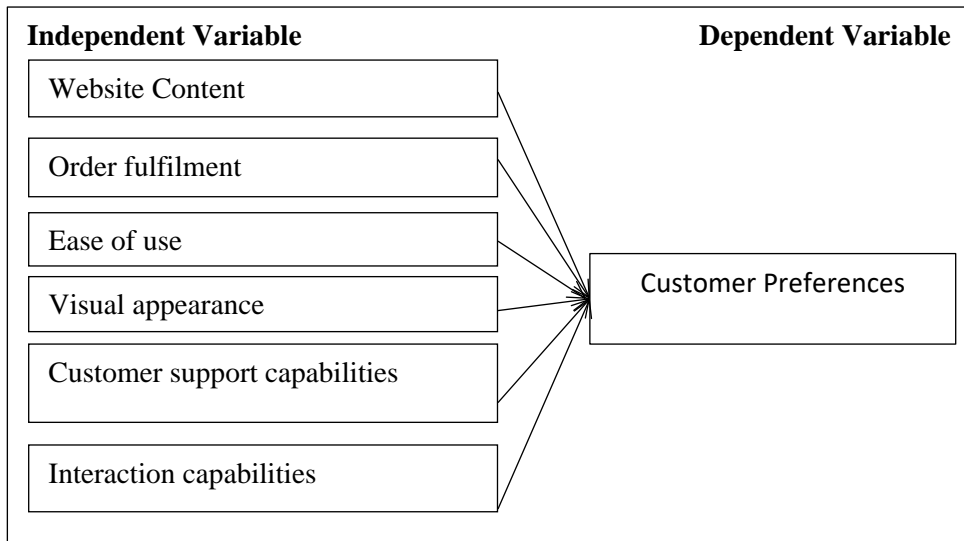
H1 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website content and customer preference.
H2 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website interaction capabilities and customer preferences.
H3 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website customer support capabilities and customer preferences.
H4 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website ease of use and customer preference.
H5 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website visual appearance and customer preference.
H6 There is a significant relationship between a B2B company's website order fulfillment and customer preference.

3.0 Methodology

This descriptive research examines the relationship between digital marketing elements as the independent variables. The study setting used in this study is non-contrived, and the analysis unit is organized. Questionnaires were used for data collection using convenience sampling from samples manufacturers of electrical and electronic products. The population is 1,500 active electrical and electronic manufacturers in West Malaysia, as referred to by the Matrade website and Ong, Teh, & Lee (2019). This sector was chosen because electrical and electronics is one of the largest sectors in the country. The sample was 306 out of 1,500 population-based on Raosoft Software. The measurements of the IV and DV are adopted from past studies, and all were reported as reliable and valid. The questionnaires have two parts. The first part consists of questions for demographic data, which uses the ordinal and nominal scales. The second part consists of questions about this study's IV and DV. A scale of 1-5 was adopted to minimize the bias in the answers provided. This part also discusses the primary measurement scales and goes on to classify and describe the scaling technique.

Table 1. Measurement

Variables	Source
Content	Janita & Miranda, (2013)
Interaction capability	Nilsson & Wall, (2017)
Order fulfilment	Zhang et al., (2011)
Customer support capability	Negash, Ryan, & Igbaria, (2003)
Ease of use	Gefen (2003)
Visual appearance	Liu et al., (2013)
Customer preference	Jalil & Rahman, (2014)

4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 2. Respondent demographics

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	143	46
	Female	168	54
Age	20-30 years	91	29.3
	31-40 years	122	39.2
	41-50 years	79	25.4
	51-60 years	19	6.1
	Above 60 years	0	0.0
Education	SPM	7	2.3
	STPM/Certificate	16	5.1

	Diploma	77	24.8
	Degree	196	63
	Master	14	4.5
	PhD	1	0.3
Position	Non-executive	2	0.6
	Junior executive	95	30.5
	Senior executive	98	31.5
	Asst manager	49	15.8
	Manager	58	18.6
	Others	9	2.9
Working experience	Less than a year	4	1.3
	1-2 years	17	5.5
	3-4 years	58	18.6
	6-8 year	27	8.7
	8-10 years	60	19.3
	Above 10 years	145	46.6

In this study, the researchers focused on getting respondents from the purchaser, buyer, or decision-maker in the purchasing department. Of a total of 311 respondents, 143 are male, which makes up 46% of total respondents, and 168 are female, with a total percentage of 54%. Most respondents are from 31 to 40 years old, with a rate of 39.2%, followed by the respondents' age group between 20-30 years old, with 29.3%. A portion of 25.5 respondents aged between 41-50 and respondents aged between 51-60 years old represented 6.1%. The data shows that most of the decision-makers in the purchasing department were dominated by purchasers aged 31 to 40 years old. Most of the respondents were degree holders (63%). About 24.8% of the respondents are diploma holders, followed by 5.1% STPM/Certificate holders, 4.5% are master's degree holders, 2.3% SPM holders, and 0.3% are PhD holders. Most of the respondents have working experience of more than ten years. There 1.3% of the respondents who are new in the working environment have less than one year of working experience. The data shows that most respondents are experienced and can make the right decisions based on their working experiences.

Table 3. Reliability analysis

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Content	9	0.880
Interaction capability	4	0.812
Order fulfillment	3	0.859
Customer support capability	6	0.787
Ease of use	4	0.877
Visual appearance	3	0.894
Customer preference	3	0.810

In Table 3 above, the Cronbach Alpha value for all variables ranges from 0.70 to 0.89. This indicates that all variables are reliable and acceptable since it shows the importance of Cronbach's Alpha between $\alpha=0.7$ to $\alpha=0.9$, which means a solid internal consistency with a coefficient value nearly 1.0 and is, therefore, fit to proceed with further analysis.

Table 4. Multiple regression

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate
1	0.445(a)	0.198	0.182	1.29662

Table 4 above shows R^2 =19.8%; taken as a set, the predictors of website contents, ease of use, order fulfillment, customer support capabilities, visual appearance, and interaction capability account for 19.8% of the variance in customer preference on the website.

The overall model regression model is significant, $P<0.001$, $R^2=0.198$. This predicts that all the independent variables are substantial with customer preference for the website.

Table 5. ANOVA

Model	Sum of squares	f	Mean square	F	Significance
(1)Regression	126.422	6	21.070	12.533	0.000 (b)
Residual	511.095	304	1.681		
Total	637.518	310			

Table 6. Multiple regression

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Std error			
(1)Constant	2.499	1.137		2.197	0.029

Interaction capability	-0.026	0.042	-0.040	-0.608	0.544
Order fulfillment	0.115	0.052	0.123	2.187	0.029
Customer support capabilities	0.052	0.035	0.087	1.473	0.142
Ease of use	0.148	0.040	0.205	3.724	0.000
Visual appearance	0.256	0.066	0.229	3.872	0.000
Website contents	0.027	0.025	0.068	1.077	0.282

The researchers tested each independent variable at a confidence level of 0.05 (Table 6). Interactional capability (p=0.544), customer support capability (p=0.142), and website contents (p=0.282) are higher than alpha 0.05, meaning these three variables are not significant in unique variance to customer preference on the website. Meanwhile, order fulfillment (p=0.025), ease of use (p<0.001), and visual appearance (p<0.001) show significant unique variance in the customer's preference for the website. The result shows that three out of six hypotheses developed were substantial, namely visual appearance (H5), ease of use (H4), and order fulfillment (H6). Content (H1), interaction capabilities (H2), and customer support capabilities (H3) were insignificant in unique variance to customer preference. The factor with the most significant impact on customer preference is visual appearance (β = 0.229, p<0.001), the second most influencing factor of customer preference is the ease of use (β = 0.205, p<0.001), and the third most influencing determinant factor of customer preference is order fulfillment (β = 0.123, p = 0.025).

Visual appearance (H5) is the most significant variable regarding customers' website browsing preferences. Visual appearance is the first thing that attracts users to surf one website further. It is the first impression users will experience on each website, including website design and layout (Affandy, Hussain, & Nadzir, 2018). Another study on consumer adoption of online purchases supports this statement. The study shows that the website appearance is the first impression on consumers to adopt the online purchase (Reghuthaman & Gupta, 2018). The following variable is the ease of use (H4), wherein a study by Reguthaman and Gupta (2018) also supports the importance of applying ease of use in creating a website. Ease of use helps users to scroll the website flawlessly. The study by Nilsson & Wall (2017) also found a positive relationship between ease of use and customer satisfaction where their online clothing retailing customers appreciate the website's ease of use and the fuss-free search for information. The third most significant variable is order fulfillment (H6). In previous studies, results from the research done by Chincholkar & Sonwaney (2017) show that security provided by the website, website uploading and processing time, and product or services offered are the most critical factors that create a positive experience during online shopping.

5.0 Conclusion

More organizations, including B2B companies, have invested in enhancing their marketing activities via digital marketing. This modern platform will enable them to reach out to their potential customers more effectively and cheaply. It is also a platform that B2B companies can use to promote new products faster than traditional sales tactics, which require more time and workforce (Miraz et al., 2020). Six factors were tested, and the findings concluded that three were significant: visual appearance, ease of use, and order fulfillment. The results align with the studies by Nilsson & Wall (2017) and Chincholkar & Sonwaney (2017). The study was conducted on a B2B manufacturing company and examined its potential customers' preference for website use. Based on the findings, it is evident that the websites are preferred if the elements of visual appearance, ease of use, and order fulfillment are developed on the website. This finding contributes to the understanding of and practice of digital marketing in which B2B companies could decide on the features to be implemented on their current website to enhance their marketing practices further. These are also the website features that future customers prefer the most for digital marketing practices. The customers found other elements as insignificant determinants of their preference for using a B2B website, such as content, interaction capabilities, and customer support. These are the functionalities that can be implemented at a later stage for digital marketing practices. Future research could examine other types of digital touchpoints, such as websites, email, social media, content marketing, online advertising, and e-commerce platforms, to see the extent of its utilization. A comparison of utilization between industries would be beneficial in providing insights, and best practices could be highlighted.

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