

Digital Marketing in Emerging Economies: A Comparative Study of Consumer Engagement Strategies in Nigeria and South Africa

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Abstract

This article used a comparative systematic review to examine the key consumer engagement (CE) strategies within the distinct DM landscapes of Nigeria and South Africa (SA). It also investigated the cultural, economic, and technological influences affecting the strategies in both countries. The study involved systematic research of Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, other internet-based data and publications, and secondary data from grey literature. Boolean string search protocols were used to address the research questions raised in the study. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure rigour and comprehensiveness and to reduce publication bias. Data from twenty-five (25) primary studies (13 for Nigeria and 12 for South Africa) indicated that social media is a primary engagement tool; mobile and email marketing are also used, although not as prominent as social media. Similarities and differences in both country's engagement strategies were examined.

Additionally, the study identifies the cultural differences, economic gap, and technological divide in both countries as major factors that influence engagement. The findings provide valuable implications for marketers that aim to optimise their strategies in emerging markets. These highlight the need to implement culturally adaptive strategies, leverage mobile penetration opportunities, consider economic sensitivities, bridge the digital divide, foster technological acceptance, and adopt ethical and sustainable marketing practices.

Keywords: digital marketing, consumer engagement, emerging economies, Nigeria, South Africa

1. Introduction

In emerging economies, businesses are leveraging contemporary marketing tools, known as digital marketing (DM) technologies, to seize unique business opportunities and gain competitive advantage. Most importantly, DM technologies have driven meaningful interactions between brands and their target audience (consumers). There is a shift from transactional to relationship marketing as consumers expect brands to connect with them rather than merely sell them products (Rosenbaum et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2019).

A distinct interest in relationship marketing is the CE concept, which has gained significant attention in the last decade from various researchers and practitioners. The number of publications in this area has an annual growth rate of 36%, indicating the escalating academic interest (data obtained from the Web of Science database as of June 6, 2021) (Pereira et al., 2024). Such research scope includes effectual conceptualisation (Gavilanes et al., 2018), validity and measurement (Dessart et al., 2016), background evaluation (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2019), and the causal relationship mechanisms (Hamzah et al., 2021), among others. To a considerable extent, the findings of the studies simultaneously suggest that DM technologies positively impact CE. However, there are discrepancies in the findings, with varying privacy concerns (Quach et al., 2022) and platform differences in each study (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020).

The underlying assumption between DM and CE is that "DM provides opportunities for businesses to engage with consumers in more interactive, personalised and measurable ways compared to traditional marketing" (Ozuem & Willis, 2022). It presumes that businesses that harness channels like social media, email, and mobile marketing can establish stronger relationships with consumers through various strategies, such as targeted content (Kumar & Mittal, 2020). However, the strategies' effectiveness relies on how well businesses identify and incorporate cultural (Mattison Thompson & Brouthers, 2021), economic (Liu, 2024), and technological factors (Hussain et al., 2023) that impact consumer behaviour and preferences in individual markets.

In developed nations, DM has become increasingly advanced; a comparative analysis by Matosas-López (2021) confirmed that Americans and Europeans are employing multi-channel strategies while using real-time customer data to deliver hyper-personalised experiences (Bala & Verma, 2018). On the other hand, businesses in highly developed nations like the U.S., Britain, and Japan use innovative DM technologies more effectively (Dubovyk et al., 2022).

In emerging economies, DM has experienced rapid growth, driven by the proliferation of internet penetration and mobile phone usage (Tamirat & Zewdie, 2023). As of 2019, a survey by Pew Research Centre discovered that a median of 83% of individuals in nine surveyed emerging economies reported having a mobile phone, with high ownership rates in nations like SA and Tunisia seeing ownership rates of 94% and 90% respectively (Silver, 2019). As a result, DM is simplifying how businesses in emerging economies reach a wider audience at a lower cost (Madan, 2021).

Local businesses across Africa use digital platforms for e-commerce to overcome geographical barriers and expand their reach beyond their immediate geographic location (Clement et al., 2021). A study surveyed multiple African countries and found that the dominant social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter (now X), and WhatsApp, are dominant (Attah & Sule, 2022). The study failed to detail the specific countries but concluded that social media platforms allow businesses to create engaging campaigns with minimal costs (Attah & Sule, 2022; Adeola et al., 2022). Moreover, social media is becoming more popular among African youths, who use the platforms for productive and counterproductive purposes (Camara et al., 2023).

DM technologies conceptualisation and adoption positively impact CE strategies in Nigeria. Studies revealed that Nigerian businesses prioritise social media and influencer marketing to connect with their audience, especially younger and tech-savvy consumers (Fakeye & Ayoola, 2022).

Like Nigeria, SA's DM landscape has witnessed rapid evolution as enterprises adopt a range of digital tools/technologies to engage consumers. Studies revealed that South African businesses are increasingly integrating SEO (Nyagadza, 2022), content marketing (Swart et al., 2021), and social media marketing (Urban & Maphathe, 2021) to reach target audiences. Studies further highlighted that the growth of e-commerce platforms in the country allows businesses to engage with consumers throughout their purchasing journey (Urban & Maphathe, 2021).

Existing studies have established CE as a vastly context-specific construct (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Behnam et al., 2021); subsequently, it has been examined in various organisational and cultural contexts. However, it has not been explored adequately in the context of emerging economies (Hollebeek et al., 2022; Kutaula et al., 2024). Emerging economies are national economies in the early stages of economic development and are expected to grow rapidly (Scott, 2024). The dearth of research on DM in these regions is often due to limited resources, infrastructural issues, and focus on traditional marketing methods (Deku et al., 2024). In addition, the dynamic and diverse nature of consumer behaviour in emerging economies makes the comparative analysis of CE strategies complicated and less frequently explored (Nwabekee et al., 2024; Castaño & Flores, 2018).

Most CE studies originate from developed economies and large organisational contexts (Lim et al., 2022); therefore, emerging economies provide valuable extensions to CE research. Moreover, by studying emerging economies, this research can offer insights into how a context alters CE theories and frameworks, an agenda outlined for future research (Hollebeek et al., 2016).

In light of this, this study attempts to compare and analyse the CE strategies used in DM in Nigeria and SA, identifying key factors that impact their effectiveness and providing recommendations for optimising strategies. This will address the gap and highlight these regions' lack of comparative research. The study addresses two research questions: firstly, what key CE strategies are used in DM in Nigeria and South Africa? Secondly, how do cultural, economic, and technological factors impact the effectiveness of these strategies in each country?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, it provides a succinct overview of the emerging field of DM and CE, as well as influencing factors, and highlights critical studies and leading strategies. Next, it provides a theoretical framework based on marketing theories, cultural and economic models, and technological frameworks. This is followed by a methodology that details the data retrieval and collection procedure. Next is the detailed presentation of findings and analysis; subsequently, the article discusses the practical implications of the research. Lastly, the study concludes by discussing possible future research opportunities and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Engagement Strategies

Consumer engagement (CE) and its conceptualisation have gained significant attention since 2010 (Lim & Rasul,

2022). The most recognised definitions of CE were developed by authors such as van Doorn et al. (2010), Vivek et al. (2012), and Brodie et al. (2013). van Doorn et al. (2010) conceptualised CE as a behavioural construct, describing it as actions consumers take towards a brand or business, driven by motivational factors and transcends mere purchasing. Contrariwise, Brodie et al. (2013) perceived CE as a psychological condition that arises from consumers' interactive, co-creative experiences with a focal entity (such as a brand) within specific service relationships.

2.1.1 Social Media as a Primary Engagement Tool

Several scholars highlighted social media as a dominant platform for CE in emerging economies (De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Yeboah et al., 2023). This is evident in studies by Kapoor et al. (2017) and Bryla et al. (2022), which implied that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow brands to develop interactive relationships with customers by promoting engagement through user-generated content, market-generated content (such as emojis, second-person pronouns) and personalised marketing (Yang et al., 2022). Similarly, studies by Giertz et al. (2022) highlighted social media as a crucial channel for customer engagement, explicitly underlining Facebook Live and Instagram Live as key platforms for real-time interaction that encourage community-driven engagement. This is supported by Galib et al. (2023) discourse regarding the role of user-generated content generated in building trust and loyalty. Content marketing, influencer marketing, social media advertising (paid ads), and SEO are key strategies in social media marketing.

Based on country-specific research, Fakeye and Ayoola (2022) and Urban and Maphathe (2021) discovered that social media marketing is the most prominent in Nigeria and SA compared to DM and engagement tools. Despite the shared preference for social media in these regions, the studies fail to critically analyse how engagement varies across social media platforms and how cultural factors such as language diversity in Nigeria and SA might influence engagement efforts across a multilingual populace (Adams, 2024; Adeola et al., 2022; Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023).

2.1.2 Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is another prevalent strategy discovered to be an instrumental driver of consumer engagement, especially in regions where mobile penetration transcends internet connectivity (Tong et al., 2020). Maduku et al. (2016) discussed how mobile-first strategies reform customer interactions in emerging economies like SA. However, several of these studies fail to examine the impact of economic instability and evolving regulatory environments on the consistency of mobile-based engagement (Kumar & Mittal, 2020). Hence, a critical gap exists in the study, as little attention is paid to how mobile marketing strategies adapt to dynamic conditions.

Some studies argue that mobile advertising, SMS campaigns, and mobile apps have enabled direct engagement between marketers and customers in remote regions, thereby overcoming infrastructural barriers (Truong, 2023; Tong et al., 2020). The widespread usage of mobile phones among Nigerian younger demographics has driven marketers to invest heavily in mobile-centred campaigns (Bakare et al., 2017). On the other hand, mobile-centred strategies are more successful in urban regions of SA but less effective in rural areas (Maduku et al., 2016). Nevertheless, these studies often dismiss the challenges of inconsistent internet connectivity and high data costs, which significantly hinder customer engagement (Gillwald, 2017). SMS marketing, app-based marketing, mobile advertising, location-based marketing, and mobile SEO are key strategies in mobile marketing.

2.1.3 Email Marketing

Email marketing is less prominent than social media and mobile marketing, yet Sempelidou et al. (2024) regard it as an effective tool for personalised customer engagement. However, in some emerging regions like Nigeria and SA, the effectiveness of email marketing in engaging a wider customer base is questionable as email usage is skewed towards more formal business-to-consumer (B2C) and professional sectors (Inuwa & Igbadumhe, 2023; Kallier, 2017). While studies indicated that email marketing helps businesses uphold sustained engagement, they failed to highlight crucial issues such as email receptiveness and deliverability and how customers have low trust in online communications, particularly pertinent in fraud-prone regions like Nigeria. Furthermore, findings by Kallier (2017) outline the relative effectiveness of email marketing in SA's formal sector but ignore the limited reach of such a strategy in the country's informal economy. Personalisation, segmentation, automated campaigns, and A/B testing are key strategies in email marketing.

2.2 Overview of Digital Marketing in Emerging Economies

Digital marketing (DM) has gained popularity, especially in developed countries. It is often coined with terms such as 'online marketing', 'web marketing', and 'internet marketing'. According to Desai and Vidyapeeth (2019), it encompasses marketing products or services through digital tools and technologies, primarily on the

Internet, but also includes mobile phones, display advertising, and other digital platforms (Zahay, 2021). With the proliferation of DM tools driven by dynamic communication technologies (Graesch et al., 2021), different scholars have attempted to classify these tools in different ways. Although not an exhaustive or mutually exclusive list, the identified DM channels are classified as social media marketing, email marketing, SEO, search engine marketing (SEM), web analytics, affiliate marketing, mobile marketing, online advertising, pay-per-click (PPC), and influencer marketing (Madan, 2021; Dash & Sharma, 2019).

Various authors argue that DM provides opportunities for rapid market entry and competitive advantage for businesses that operate in regions with underdeveloped traditional infrastructure (Watson IV et al., 2018; Bala & Verma, 2018). However, the adoption and practice of DM in emerging economies are noted to be slow and limited in scope (Abreu & Antonio, 2017) compared to developed economies (Vieria et al., 2019; Graesch et al., 2021). Moreover, research on DM in emerging economies remains limited and scattered across various industries and contexts despite its potential (Ajiboye et al., 2019; Lim & Rasul, 2022).

Studies highlighted the increasing role of social media, e-commerce, and mobile marketing in reshaping consumer-brand relationships in emerging and developing markets (Safia et al., 2019; Alavi, 2016). These platforms bypass infrastructural constraints and allow businesses to connect with the rapidly increasing online populace. However, the sophistication level of DM strategies differs depending on socio-economic, cultural, technological, and regulatory factors (Shanko & Zewdie, 2023). For example, findings indicate that South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate distinct market dynamics (Mahmoud et al., 2017; Vimalkumar et al., 2021; Hawaldar et al., 2022) compared to Latin American markets due to varying levels of mobile phone adoption, internet penetration, and digital literacy (Moctezuma & Rajagopal, 2016). Hawaldar et al. (2022) examined how India's mobile marketing harnesses the nation's massive smartphone adoption to influence purchasing decisions. Similarly, Moctezuma and Rajagopal (2016) explored social media effectiveness in Latin American markets, which are experiencing a decline in traditional media consumption. Nevertheless, both studies primarily focused on larger economies like India and Brazil, often overlooking less-developed or smaller countries with less robust digital infrastructure.

A critical review of the literature reveals that most extant studies presume a uniform trajectory of the growth of DM across emerging markets (Tamirat & Zewdie, 2023). Yet, this disregards substantial discrepancies in culture, digital literacy, technological access, and regulatory environment. For instance, some scholarly studies examined cultural influence on CE in digital spaces (Messner, 2022; Gupta et al., 2018); however, there is a lack of detailed analysis comparing diverse cultural settings within emerging economies (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). This gap highlights the need for comprehensive and comparative research that examines the intersection of culture and DM effectiveness.

Another area that needs further exploration is how economic development influences DM outcomes. Existing research suggests that economic factors such as disposable income and access to financial infrastructure significantly impact the adoption of DM strategies in emerging economies (Deku et al., 2024). However, these reviews often consider economic growth as a homogenous factor across regions (Shanko & Zewdie, 2023), neglecting how certain economic factors, like informal economies in some emerging regions, could influence digital consumer behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2024).

While extant literature recognises the prospects of DM to facilitate market access, only a few studies critically assess its sustainability in regions with fragile technological infrastructure (Adeola et al., 2022; Lambrechts & Sinha, 2019; Gillwald, 2017). One of the studies argues that unreliable internet access and high costs of data in some African regions limit the spread of DM (Gillwald, 2017), thereby questioning the long-term sustainability of such strategies in regions that are less connected.

According to Chakraborty and Jain (2022), emerging economies's DM practices encounter significant opportunities and challenges. Among the challenges, the effectiveness of DM activeness is influenced by factors such as slow internet connectivity (Adeola et al., 2022). Moreover, individuals in emerging economies demonstrate lesser DM awareness (Lambrechts & Sinha, 2019). Instead, advertising firms and brands prefer traditional media like television, radio, billboards, and newspapers to create brand awareness for consumers (Bosah, 2022). Despite the challenges, DM is gaining popularity in emerging economies. SA, for instance, has a 35% growth rate thanks to 94% ownership rates of mobile phones (Silver, 2019). Khanna et al. (2015) also noted that the expansion of liberal trade policies and the growth of affluent customers in emerging economies further draw digital marketers to these markets.

2.3 Digital Marketing and Consumer Engagement

According to Steinhoff et al. (2019) and Thaicon et al. (2020), the widespread adoption of new technologies and

the growing popularity of DM platforms have played a crucial role in the development and transformation of relationship marketing. From one perspective, the use of smart devices and the availability of high-speed internet have made it easier for customers to access information about brands instantly (Papakonstantinidis, 2017). From another perspective, the simplicity of setting up and utilising social media platforms has enabled consumers to freely and openly express their opinions about brands, whether through likes, comments, or shares (Swani & Labrecque, 2020; Buzeta et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). These highlighted the need to explore innovative methods to interact with consumers, with CE set to play a pivotal role in the digital landscape.

Existing studies indicated that CE in the digital environment positively influences brand-and-consumer-related outcomes, including brand evaluations, trust, loyalty, purchase intentions, and satisfaction (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2023; Nyadzayo et al., 2020). DM is a widely used and effective tool for promoting customer-brand relationships. Social media platforms, in particular, have become a primary channel for brands to engage with their audiences (Liadeli et al., 2023; De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Qin, 2020). However, it has also added dynamism and complexity to CE by facilitating direct consumer-brand interactions and interactions between consumers themselves (Prentice et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2018). Thus, social media marketing is one strategy that has transformed consumers into active participants (Hussain et al., 2022; Hollebeek et al., 2014) and co-creators of brand narratives (Bosisio, 2024; de Vries & Carlson, 2014).

2.4 Cultural, Economic, and Technological Factors

The impact of cultural, economic and technological discrepancies across regions also creates various levels of engagement, which few studies have addressed. For example, a study suggests that national and cultural norms like cultural and intra-national cultural divergence, such as cultural restrictiveness and openness, influence how customers connect to digital content (Jamalova, 2024). Additional studies discovered that cultural norms impact attitudes such as sharing, content clicking, and e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) (Thompson & Brouthers, 2021). However, a significant gap exists in understanding how such cultural forces distinctively influence other digital engagement forms, such as social media interactions and online advertising. Furthermore, the pivotal role of subcultures within a country remains underexamined (Pratesi et al., 2021), indicating the necessity for more granular research that considers intra-national cultural diversity.

Economic factors, especially income levels and purchasing power, are often cited as major determinants of engagement strategies (Yeboah et al., 2023). These determine the affordability of digital devices and internet access. Yeboah et al. (2023) highlighted the economic divide as a factor that impacts digital customer behaviour, with the wealthier segment having more access to digital platforms. This is driven by their higher disposable income, which allows them to afford advanced digital services (Tsetsi & Rains, 2017). However, this economic disparity challenges marketing practitioners who aim to engage a wider audience (Xiao et al., 2024). Additionally, economic instability in emerging economies can result in unstable customer confidence, thereby influencing engagement levels (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Potwora et al., 2023). Nevertheless, there are limited studies on the specific impact of macroeconomic trends and economic policies on engagement strategies (Cioppi et al., 2023).

Studies affirm that adopting DM tools heavily depends on the technological environment (Diaz et al., 2021). Thanks to the rise of mobile technologies, emerging economies are witnessing transformative technological infrastructure (Tamirat & Zewdie, 2023). A systematic review by Loo et al. (2024) underscores that TOE (technological, organisational, and environmental) factors significantly impact the adoption of DM platforms, specifically e-commerce, in emerging markets. However, the rapid technological evolution often outperforms the ability of companies and customers to adapt, resulting in a digital divide (Pascucci et al., 2023). Hence, there is a need for further studies on how businesses can leverage emerging technologies to enhance customer engagement in these regions.

Despite these insights, detailed research on the intersection of cultural, economic, and technological factors is lacking. Most studies focus on the factors separately, misusing the opportunity to understand the combined effects. Additionally, the majority of the literature tends to employ a descriptive rather than an analytical approach, which provides limited insights into the scalability across different segments within emerging economies.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Presence Theory

Social presence theory examines how digital interfaces influence the 'sense of being with another' in human-computer interactions (Chang & Hsu, 2016). The theory assumes that higher levels of social presence

result in more meaningful and engaging interactions (Song & Hollenbeck, 2018). Thus, in DM, a brand's ability to simulate high social presence through interactive and responsive content might increase customer trust and connection. Yeboah et al. (2023) applied the theory to predict online CE in emerging economies; their findings revealed that online communication, interactivity, and privacy significantly influenced consumer engagement. The study further highlighted the role of technology and social gratification as moderators and mediators, respectively, indicating that these factors enhance DM effectiveness.

Furthermore, Hollebeek et al. (2021) developed a framework to examine customer digital cocreated value (CDCV) through the social presence theory. The study emphasised the role of perceived platform intimacy and immediacy in enhancing CDCV, primarily through -human-to-human and human-to-machine interactions. Osei-Frimpong and McLean's (2018) research underscored the importance of social presence in online interactions to enhance consumer-brand engagement. It further indicated that higher social presence increases participation and interaction in social media environments (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). The social presence theory serves as a foundation for understanding digital customer engagement by bridging the gap of how socio-cultural elements modify the impact of social presence on customer engagement.

3.2 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Cultural dimensions, especially those developed by Hofstede (2011), highlighted the role of understanding local values and norms in shaping customer behaviour. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory can provide a solid framework for analysing how cultural factors affect digital consumer behaviour. The theory outlines six dimensions which vary significantly between Nigeria and SA.

Studies by Waqas et al. (2022) implied that community-driven content encourages customer engagement in collectivist cultures, while personalised communication fosters engagement in individualistic societies. However, most studies excessively depend on conventional cultural dimensions, which oversimplify the dynamic changes driven by urbanisation and global media exposure. Furthermore, studies indicate the increasing influence of hybrid culture in emerging economies, where local norms coexist with global digital trends (Jamalova, 2024; Islam et al., 2020; Arya, 2024). For example, Arya (2024) emphasised that social media engagement often combines contemporary individualism with conventional collectivist values. However, studies rarely examine the fluidity of cultural shifts, which limits the conception of how changing cultural influences could alter customer engagement over time. Moreover, existing studies lack comparative research that addresses how cultural dimensions directly affect customer engagement strategies across emerging countries.

3.3 Digital-divide Concept

Digital divide is the gap between individuals, societies, or countries with access to modern technologies and those lacking it (Ghobadi & Ghobadi, 2015). Using the concept as a theoretical framework can explore how economic disparities impact digital access and usage in emerging economies. Firstly, economic disparities denote that not all customers in emerging economies have equal access to digital tools/technologies such as the internet and smartphones (Correa et al., 2021). Thus, digital divide can investigate how limited access driven by economic constraints can influence the effectiveness of DM strategies. Specifically, if a small population segment can engage with digital platforms, this limits the reach of customer engagement strategies.

Secondly, the affordability of digital tools is a critical economic factor in emerging economies (Correa et al., 2021); hence, digital divide can examine how income levels impact customers' ability to engage with digital content. Thirdly, economic factors play a role in the geographical distribution of digital resources (Gilbert & Masucci, 2019). Thus, the digital divide concept can explore the differences in engagement between rural and urban consumers due to poorer digital infrastructure in rural areas in emerging economies.

3.4 Technological Acceptance Model (TAM)

The model postulates that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are key determinants of technology adoption and usage (Nistor, 2019). Thus, it examines how technological factors shape digital consumer engagement. DM platforms' ease of use and functionality are critical to their success in emerging economies like Nigeria and SA, where technological infrastructure is still developing.

Recent studies have extended TAM to include additional variables like perceived enjoyment, social influence, and trust, which play a pivotal role in the digital era (Al-Qaysi et al., 2020; Al-Adwan et al., 2023). For example, a study by Kumar et al. (2023) emphasised the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between TAM and customer engagement. They further highlighted that a significant correlation exists between perceived usefulness and rational and emotional engagement, mediated by customer satisfaction (Kumar et al., 2023). These findings indicate that enhancing the perceived usefulness of digital platforms can result in greater

customer satisfaction and, subsequently, higher engagement.

Furthermore, a review revealed that TAM has been widely employed in various marketing contexts to elucidate customer behaviour regarding new technologies (Musa et al., 2024). The study suggests that understanding customers' perceived usefulness and ease of use can aid marketers in designing effective strategies that maximise technological adoption and usage rates. The review further identifies emerging marketing research trends (e.g., online marketing, mobile technology) that influence customer engagement strategies.

4. Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) method was employed for this study. Various comparative studies have employed the SLR to compare existing literature between two or more terms (Etim & Daramola, 2020; Shahid & Qureshi, 2022). Studies highlighted that the approach has gained significant popularity in the fields of business, marketing, and management research due to the growing complexity of data collection in the rapidly changing environment (Sauer & Seuring, 2023; Bilro et al., 2023). It follows a rigorous and predefined approach that entails thorough search strategies, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, and comprehensive documentation (Snyder, 2019). This transparent process reduces bias and enhances the reproducibility of findings, unlike a semi-systematic review that is more prone to bias (Guillaume, 2019).

SLR provides a robust overview of current literature, answers research problems/questions, and highlights literature/research gaps to suggest pathways for future research (Sauer & Seuring, 2023). Due to the dynamic nature of the research topic, various literature, as well as academic and non-academic sources, have been used. Apart from significant older sources, the latest literature is examined to provide a level of recency while considering reliability principles to identify gaps in the existing studies.

4.1 Research Questions

This study's SLR employed a qualitative method for secondary data collection and documentation to address these research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What key CE strategies are used in DM in Nigeria and South Africa?

RQ2: How do cultural, economic, and technological factors impact the effectiveness of these strategies in each country?

4.2 Study Design

The SLR design was designed to examine and compare the CE strategies of Nigeria and SA based on evidence obtained from extant literature. To ensure a comprehensive review, the literature search followed five stages, presented in Table 1, with each stage further explained in subsequent sections.

Table 1. The systematic review procedure (Khan et al., 2003)

S/N	Procedure
1	Formulation of research questions to guide the review process
2	Identify relevant studies alongside the inclusion and exclusion criteria
3	Quality appraisal of selected studies
4	Summarising the evidence (findings and analysis)
5	Interpretation of results

4.3 Formulation of Research Questions to Guide Review Process

It is crucial to ensure that clear, precise, and well-structured questions are developed in the initial stage of the search to guide the study's direction and focus (Guillaume, 2019). As Sauer and Seuring (2023) noted, research questions should include intervention, participants, or outcome elements. Alternatively, Pollock and Berge (2018) suggest using the PICO framework (population, intervention, comparator, outcome) and registering the protocol with PROSPERO for preliminary review (Kolaski et al., 2023).

Bilro et al. (2023) described SLR as a 'review of existing literature that employs a transparent and reproducible methodology in searching, evaluating its quality, and synthesising the findings, with a high degree of objectivity'.

Therefore, the search procedures were designed to include explicit criteria for including and/or excluding studies from review. Although the emphasis was on bibliographic databases, grey literature was also included to ensure comprehensiveness and prevent publication bias (Snyder, 2019). In August and September 2024, searches were

conducted on databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Scopus due to their global recognition as leading indexes of research publications.

4.3.1 Literature Search Queries

The literature search queries incorporated typical syntax elements such as keywords or 'search strings', along with parentheses and Boolean operators like "AND", "OR", and "NOT" (Bramer et al., 2018). These keyword-based search strings were designed to identify documents related to emerging economies, Nigeria and SA:

- a. "Digital Marketing" OR "Online Marketing" OR "Internet Marketing" AND "Emerging Economies" OR "Emerging Countries" OR "Emerging Nations" OR "Africa" AND "Consumer Engagement" OR "Customer Engagement" AND "Nigeria" AND "Cultural Factors" OR "Economic Factors" OR "Technological Factors".

Applying the search string for Nigeria generated 2610 documents from Google Scholar, 59 from ResearchGate, and 523 from Scopus.

- b. "Digital Marketing" OR "Online Marketing" OR "Internet Marketing" AND "Emerging Economies" OR "Emerging Countries" OR "Emerging Nations" OR "Africa" AND "Consumer Engagement" OR "Customer Engagement" AND "South Africa" AND "Cultural Factors" OR "Economic Factors" OR "Technological Factors".

For South Africa, the search string generated 2450 documents from Google Scholar, 47 from ResearchGate, and 452 from Scopus (Table 2). ResearchGate was included to access relevant articles made openly available by their authors, whereas Google Scholar and Scopus were chosen for their international recognition as standard research publication indexes.

Table 2. Search strings and results

S/N	Search String	Google Scholar	ResearchGate	Scopus
Nigeria				
1	"Digital Marketing" OR "Online Marketing" OR "Internet Marketing" AND "Emerging Economies" OR "Emerging Countries" OR "Emerging Nations" OR "Africa" AND "Consumer Engagement" OR "Customer Engagement" AND "Nigeria" AND "Cultural Factors" OR "Economic Factors" OR "Technological Factors".	2610	59	523
South Africa				
2	"Digital Marketing" OR "Online Marketing" OR "Internet Marketing" AND "Emerging Economies" OR "Emerging Countries" OR "Emerging Nations" OR "Africa" AND "Consumer Engagement" OR "Customer Engagement" AND "South Africa" AND "Cultural Factors" OR "Economic Factors" OR "Technological Factors".	2450	47	452

4.3.2 Sources of Data

Contemporary research is characterised by its interdisciplinary, collaborative, and global nature. Prominent institutions now require top-tier data to make well-informed decisions. Hence, researchers must glean information from rich and high standardised data sources, such as:

- a. **Google Scholar:** Launched in November 2004, Google Scholar is a freely accessible web search engine that indexes metadata or full text of scholarly literature across various disciplines and publishing formats. Users can search for articles, books, dissertations/theses, conference papers and perspectives from various academic publishers, online repositories, universities, professional societies and other website sources. Google Scholar uses the Boolean operator AND by default in its searches and aims to rank documents in a way that mirrors researchers' evaluation, taking into consideration factors such as each document's full text, the authors, its publication source, and its frequency and recency of its citations.
- b. **ResearchGate:** ResearchGate is a European professional social networking platform launched in 2008. It is designed for researchers and scientists to collaborate, connect, and share their research with a community of more than 25 million users worldwide. ResearchGate is a useful source of data due to its vast collection of research papers, articles, and publications from various scientific disciplines, which promotes the spread and discovery of innovative research.

- c. **Scopus:** Scopus was introduced by Elsevier in 2004 as a curated abstract and citation database. It covers approximately 36,377 titles, out of which 22,794 are active titles and 13,583 inactive titles. Approximately 94% (34,346) of these are peer-reviewed literature, which includes scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings. In addition, Scopus indexes content from more than 39,100 serial titles, 120,000 conferences, and 206,000 books from over 5,000 global publishers. The platform offers APIs that enable institutions to generate custom reports and deep dive into data. The main sources are journals, book series, and trade journals, evaluated using quality assurance metrics like CiteScore, h-index, SNIP (Source Normalised Impact per Paper), and SJR (SCImago Journal Rank).

4.4 Identify Relevant Studies Alongside the Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The criteria used to select the articles were as follows:

- Articles published in English for Nigeria and SA, with a cut-off year of 2014, aside from older essential sources.
- Keywords like ‘digital marketing’, ‘emerging economies’, and ‘consumer engagement’ or appropriate synonyms were used in the title or abstract to refine the selection criteria.
- Considered sources included peer-reviewed articles, master’s and doctoral theses, conference proceedings, statistical data, and reports from international organisations.
- The research included articles from both quantitative surveys and qualitative secondary data.
- Final selection of studies had to provide answers to at least one of the two research questions developed.

Based on the search protocol, the criteria identified resulted in 14 articles for Nigeria and 12 for SA (Table 3). The research protocol outlines the constructs and parameters for data collection.

Table 3. Systematic literature review of studies

S/N	Authors (Nigeria)	Authors (South Africa)
1	(Adeola et al., 2022)	(Swart et al., 2021)
2	(Fakeye & Ayoola, 2022)	(Nyagadza, 2022)
3	(Adams, 2024)	(Urban & Maphathe, 2021)
4	(Bakare et al., 2017)	(Maduku et al., 2016)
5	(Inuwa & Igbadumhe, 2023)	(Kallier, 2017)
6	(Abraham, 2021)	(Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023)
7	(Ilodigwe, 2024)	(de la Roche et al., 2022)
8	(Egieya et al., 2024)	(Adeola et al., 2022)
9	(Godwin, 2019)	(Nadkar, 2023)
10	(Graham-Douglas, 2016)	(Payne, 2024)
11	(Etuk et al., 2024)	(Chittiah, 2018)
12	(Otopah et al., 2024)	(Cowling, 2024a) (Statista)
13	(Arobo, 2022)	
14	(Sasu, 2024a) (Statista)	

4.5 Quality Appraisal of Selected Studies

The quality appraisal process involved using a checklist to screen the articles for eligibility. This comprised assessing the study design, sample size, and relevance to the research topic, alongside excluding only tangentially related articles.

After the process, the articles that were essential to the study are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Extracted articles on Nigeria

S/N	Authors (Nigeria)	Research Design Employed	RQ1	RQ2
1	(Abraham, 2021)	Qualitative	Yes	No
2	(Adams, 2024)	Qualitative	Yes	Yes
3	(Adeola et al., 2022)	Qualitative	Yes	Yes
4	(Arobo, 2022)	Qualitative	Yes	Yes
5	(Bakare et al., 2017)	Quantitative	Yes	Yes
6	(Egieya et al., 2024)	Quantitative	Yes	No
7	(Etuk et al., 2024)	Quantitative	Yes	No
8	(Godwin, 2019)	Quantitative	Yes	No
9	(Graham-Douglas, 2016)	Qualitative	Yes	No
10	(Ilodigwe, 2024)	Quantitative	Yes	No
11	(Inuwa & Igbadumhe, 2023)	Quantitative	Yes	Yes
12	(Otopah et al., 2024)	Quantitative	Yes	No
13	(Sasu, 2024a) (Statista)	Quantitative/Qualitative	Yes	No

Table 5. Extracted articles on South Africa

S/N	Authors (South Africa)	Research Design Employed	RQ1	RQ2
1	(Swart et al., 2021)	Qualitative	Yes	No
2	(Nyagadza, 2022)	Qualitative	Yes	No
3	(Urban & Maphathe, 2021)	Quantitative	Yes	Yes
4	(Maduku et al., 2016)	Quantitative	Yes	Yes
5	(Kallier, 2017)	Quantitative	Yes	No
6	(Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023)	Quantitative	Yes	Yes
7	(de la Roche et al., 2022)	Qualitative	Yes	No
8	(Adeola et al., 2022)	Qualitative	Yes	Yes
9	(Nadkar, 2023)	Qualitative	Yes	No
10	(Payne, 2024)	Quantitative	Yes	No
11	(Chittiah, 2018)	Qualitative	Yes	No
12	(Cowling, 2024a) (Statista)	Quantitative/Qualitative	Yes	No

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Summarising the Evidence (Findings and Analysis)

5.1.1 RQ 1: What Key Consumer Engagement Strategies Are Used in Digital Marketing in Nigeria and South Africa?

5.1.2 Nigeria's Digital Marketing Landscape

Abraham (2021) highlighted that Nigeria's DM landscape has significantly evolved over the past decade. Arobo (2022) opined that the transformation is primarily driven by the growing penetration of internet-enabled devices and the growth of social media platforms. Adeola et al. (2022) highlighted that brands integrate social media, email, and mobile marketing with SEM, SEO, influencer and content marketing in Nigeria. The channels provide various avenues for businesses to connect with their target audience while driving growth.

Bakare et al. (2017) identified the rise of internet and mobile phone penetration as a major factor that contributes to Nigeria's DM growth. According to Statista report, Nigeria has over 122.5 million active internet users, with mobile devices being the primary medium for internet access (accounting for 84% of internet traffic) (Sasu, 2024b). Similarly, Statista report indicated that with an internet penetration rate of 55.4%, more Nigerians are gaining access to the internet (Sasu, 2024b). Thus, businesses are rapidly harnessing digital platforms in brand promotion and to engage with customers (Egieya et al., 2024; Graham-Douglas, 2016). Etuk et al. (2024) notably identified social media platforms as powerful tools leveraged to reach a vast audience. Statista report indicated that WhatsApp is the leading social media platform, followed by Facebook and Instagram (Sasu, 2024a) (see Figure 1). An article by Nnaemeka (2023) mentioned that businesses also employ mobile apps, email marketing, and online advertising to reach various audience segments. Specifically, Egieya et al. (2024) noted that these platforms provide direct interaction and engagement through personalisation and direct communication with recipients.

Another study by Bakare et al. (2017) discovered that demographics is a critical factor that contributes to Nigeria's DM growth. Nigeria's youthful populace, with a median age of about 18 years, is highly active on

social media, which makes it a major channel for reaching younger customers. Moreover, Ilodigwe (2024) highlighted influencer marketing as the most widely used social media strategy, as it allows the audience to interact or engage with brands online when they see their favourite people promoting the brand.

Despite the growth of DM in Nigeria, Inuwa and Igbadumhe (2023) highlighted poor infrastructure, high data costs, and low levels of trust due to fraud and quality as barriers. Poor infrastructure, in particular, limits the adoption of advanced and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and big data in DM (Etuk et al., 2024). Nevertheless, a report by the International Trade Administration (2024) emphasised new strategies and commitment to fostering a robust digital economy through infrastructure development, strategic policies, and extensive training programmes. This resulted in a 71% digital readiness ranking (Okamgba, 2024), which positions the country for sustained innovation and growth.

5.1.3 South Africa's Digital Marketing Landscape

South Africa (SA) is a leader in Africa's digital economy; findings by Payne (2024) indicated that the country's DM landscape is more mature due to higher internet penetration and more advanced digital infrastructure. Urban and Maphathe (2021) observed that SA's advanced digital infrastructure is driven by a vibrant startup ecosystem and significant usage of digital services and e-commerce. Additionally, SA has a higher digital development index score (83.6) compared to Nigeria (46.9) (International Telecommunication Union, 2024), which demonstrates a more developed technological infrastructure and environment.

According to Statista report, SA has approximately 41.2 million active internet users. The primary medium for internet access is mobile phones, accounting for 98.7% of internet traffic (Cowling, 2024a; Cowling, 2024b). Statista report further indicated that SA has the highest internet penetration rate in Africa, at 73% (Galal, 2024), which suggests that a large majority of South Africans have access to and use the internet. Nadkar (2023) highlighted that SA's advanced digital landscape allows businesses to reach a wider audience and engage with potential customers online. While social media marketing is prominent, other DM channels employed in the country include SEO (Nygadza, 2022) and content marketing (Swart et al., 2021). Studies further highlighted the growth of e-commerce platforms in the country, which allows businesses to engage with consumers throughout their purchasing journey (Urban & Maphathe, 2021).

Ntobaki and Buthelezi (2023) discovered that the need for genuineness, trust and value heavily influences SA's CE strategies. Thus, Adeola et al. (2022) reiterated that businesses are rapidly harnessing advanced tools like data analytics to obtain strategic insights and personalise their marketing efforts. For example, businesses employ predictive analytics to forecast potential consumer behaviours and adjust their strategies accordingly (Adeola et al., 2022). On the other hand, personalisation emerged as a major differentiator, which allows businesses to design highly personalised messages and campaigns that align with distinct customer preferences/behaviours (de la Roche et al., 2022).

Social media marketing is the most widely used channel in SA, and approximately 68% of enterprises used social media for marketing purposes in 2022 (Cowling, 2023). Additionally, research by Chittiah (2018) showed that South Africans spend significant time on social media, making the platform a key engagement channel. Statista report indicated that WhatsApp is the leading social media platform, followed by Facebook and TikTok (Cowling, 2024a) (see Figure 2). These platforms are popular for their wide reach and engagement capabilities (Urban & Maphathe, 2021).

On the other hand, de la Roche et al. (2022) observed that email marketing is a staple for several South African businesses due to its direct approach and high ROI. Customers engage with this channel primarily through newsletters and promotional offers. However, Kallier (2017) argued that spam filters, deliverability issues, and limited engagement are some limitations of email marketing. These factors reduce the visibility and effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, Maduku et al. (2016) observed that the high usage of mobile devices in SA allows businesses to develop mobile-friendly content, platforms, and marketing campaigns for their target audiences. Thus, consumers engage with mobile marketing through SMS campaigns, mobile apps, and mobile-optimised sites (Payne, 2024). However, Maduku et al. (2016) highlighted ad fatigue and short attention spans as limitations of mobile marketing.

5.1.4 Comparison of Channels

Social media marketing

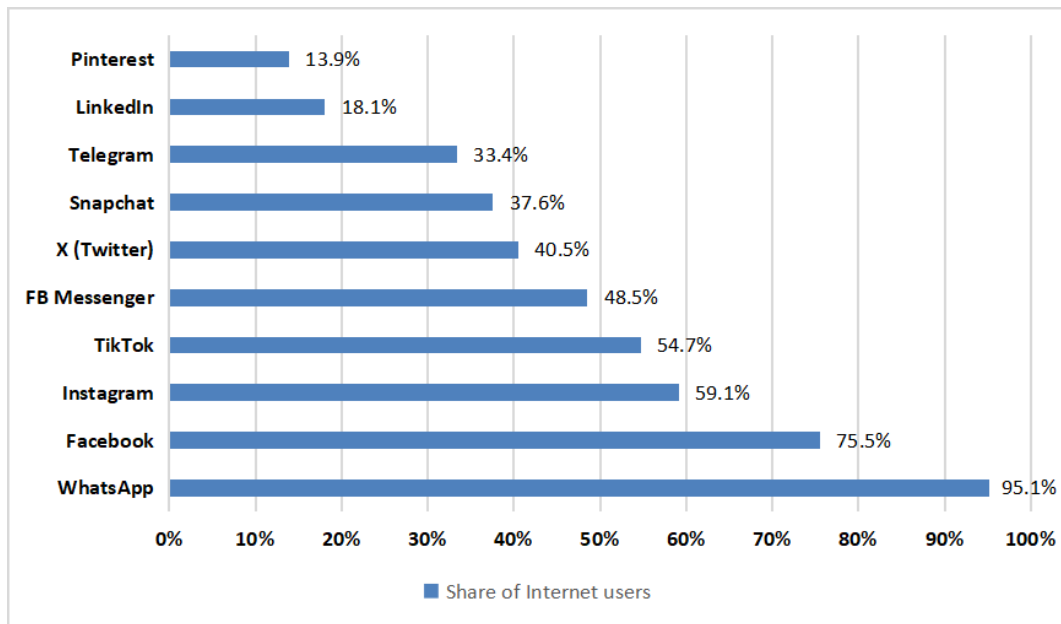


Figure 1. Most used social media platforms in Nigeria as of 2023

Source: Developed by Author from Sasu, 2024a.

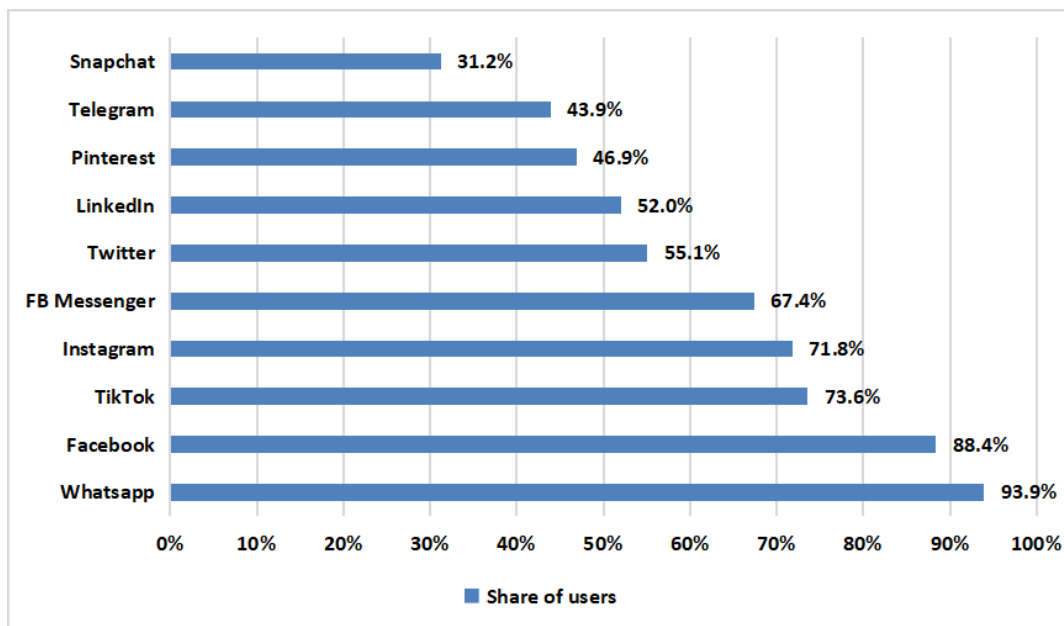


Figure 2, Most used social media platforms in South Africa as of 2023

Source: Developed by Author from Cowling, 2024a.

Table 6. Comparison of social media marketing

	Nigeria	South Africa
Similarities		
High penetration of social platforms and engagement	WhatsApp and Facebook are the leading engagement platforms in both countries	
Influencer marketing	Both countries leverage influencer marketing, especially on Instagram and TikTok, to drive campaigns and increase engagement	
Community engagement	Businesses in both markets employ social media to promote a sense of community	
Differences		
Platform preferences	WhatsApp is for both personal and business communication	WhatsApp is for personal communication, while LinkedIn sees higher usage for professional networking and marketing
Content style	Entertaining, vibrant and culturally rich content that aligns with local traditions/trends	Politically diverse content to reflect its multicultural society
Reach	Challenges of reaching rural regions due to infrastructural limitations	Higher percentage of urbanisation

Source: Developed by Author.

Email marketing

Table 7. Comparison of email marketing

	Nigeria	South Africa
Similarities		
Personalisation and targeted campaigns	Both countries prioritise personalised email marketing to engage with the target audience (through newsletters, promotional offers, follow-ups)	
Automation	Both employ email automation tools to streamline campaigns	
Integration with other platforms	Businesses in both markets integrate email marketing with social media to create omnichannel experiences	
Differences		
Adoption rates	Lower open rates for email due to limited internet access	Higher adoption due to better internet infrastructure and more developed formal sector
Spam and trust issues	Customers are wary due to history of phishing scams, affecting trust in unsolicited emails	More receptive customers to well-executed campaigns

Source: Developed by Author.

Mobile marketing

Table 8. Comparison of mobile marketing

	Nigeria	South Africa
Similarities		
High mobile penetration	Both countries have high mobile phone penetration, which makes mobile marketing effective	
SMS marketing	SMS marketing is employed to reach consumers, especially for confirmations, reminders, or promotions	
Mobile commerce growth	Growing smart phone usage and mobile payment systems drive mobile commerce growth	
Differences		
Mobile data accessibility	Expensive and less reliable, especially outside urban areas	More affordable and reliable, which allows for more effective mobile marketing campaigns
Technological sophistication	Relies more heavily on SMS and USSD codes	Advanced mobile marketing technologies such as geotargeting and personalised push notifications
Mobile payment integration	More focused on integration of mobile payment due to the popularity of services like Opay and Paga	More focused on promotions tied to retail loyalty programmes

Source: Developed by Author.

5.1.5 RQ2: How Do Cultural, Economic, and Technological Factors Impact the Effectiveness of These Strategies in Each Country?

Nigeria

Culturally, Hofstede's analysis (see Figure 3) indicated that Nigeria is a collectivist society in which community, family, and social approval are paramount values (Hofstede, 2011).

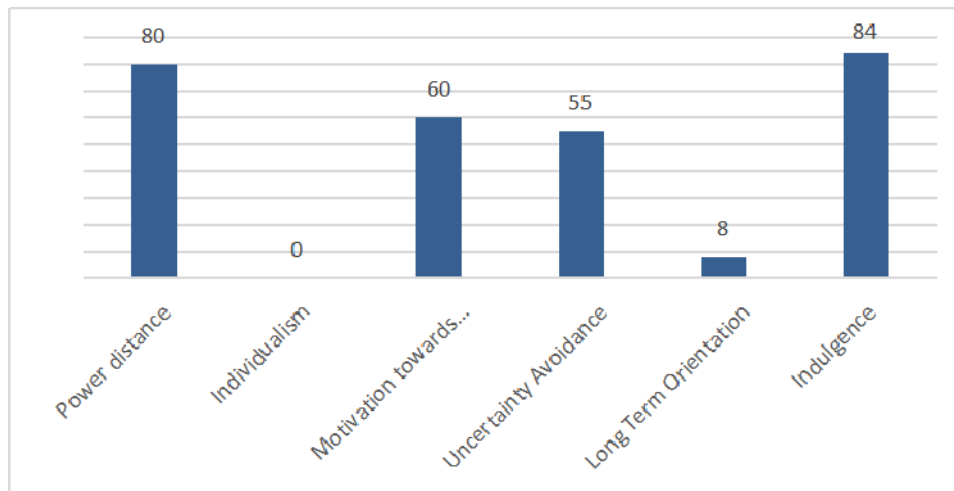


Figure 3. Hofstede cultural dimensions analysis for Nigeria

Source: Developed by Author from Hofstede Insights, 2024.

Adams (2024) noted that Nigeria's collectivistic culture drives customers to favour brands that prioritise group-oriented messaging and promote a sense of belonging. For instance, customers tend to engage with online campaigns that harness social proof through influencers and community-driven initiatives. Furthermore, Adeola et al. (2022) observed that Nigerians are swayed by traditional/religious beliefs, which businesses take into account when tailoring their messaging. Thus, Bakare et al. (2017) concluded that strategies may fail to connect emotionally if they disregard cultural differences, thereby limiting engagement.

Economically, Etuk et al. (2024) noted that Nigeria's economic gap highlights various challenges. Urban regions, especially Lagos, boast a budding middle class with high digital literacy and purchasing power. However, a significant segment still undergoes economic adversity (Etim & Daramola, 2020). This impacts access to technology and the internet, thereby limiting DM efforts' reach. Etim and Daramola (2020) maintained that the informal economy plays a crucial role in shaping marketing efforts, as micro-entrepreneurs and small business owners drive much of Nigeria's economic activity. However, the country's economic stability, driven by inflation and fluctuating buying power, compels customers to prioritise essential products, thereby making value-driven engagement strategies more effective for sustained long-term relations (Etuk et al., 2024).

Technologically, the mobile internet penetration rate remains a key enabler of DM and engagement in Nigeria. Abraham (2021) pointed to the country's high mobile phone usage, which has enabled businesses to engage customers through social media, SMS, and mobile apps. Yet, Ilodigwe (2024) discovered a major drawback in internet infrastructure, with unreliable connectivity and low broadband penetration obstructing the effectiveness of digital campaigns, especially those dependent on data-heavy content. Furthermore, Graham-Douglas (2016) highlighted the increasing influence of fintech, especially in facilitating e-commerce and digital transactions. According to Graham-Douglas (2016), mobile payment solutions have enhanced customer trust in online platforms, thereby facilitating the conversion of engagement into sales. However, Arobo (2022) identified digital literacy gap as a factor that affects how customers interact with digital content.

South Africa

Culturally, Hofstede's analysis indicated that SA is also a collectivistic society (see Figure 4) but with a higher individualism score than Nigeria.

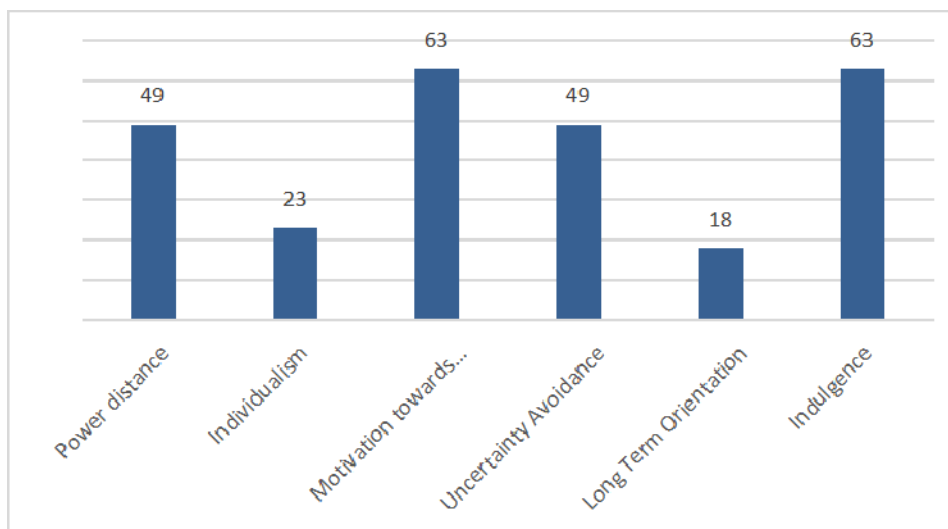


Figure 4. Hofstede cultural dimensions analysis for South Africa

Source: Developed by Author from Hofstede Insights, 2024.

This implies that while South Africans prioritise community, family, and social approval, they also somewhat value personal autonomy, independence, and self-expression (Hofstede, 2011). Thus, community-driven campaigns and personalised marketing tend to resonate with them (Maduku et al., 2016). Additionally, SA's multi-ethnic population, comprising Xhosa, Zulu, and Afrikaans communities, emphasise diversity and varying customer behaviours/preferences (Adeola et al., 2022). Therefore, Ntobaki and Buthelezi (2023) highlighted that culturally misaligned messaging can result in disengagement or backlash.

Economically, World Bank data indicated that SA is an upper-middle-income country compared to Nigeria, a lower-middle-income nation (Metreau et al., 2024). Consequently, SA has a higher GDP per capita, a more formalised economy, and higher purchasing power compared to Nigeria (Etim & Daramola, 2020). Etim and Daramola (2020) implied that SA's economic structure allowed for an advanced technological infrastructure and sophisticated digital engagement strategies that prioritise personalised and data-driven campaigns. In addition, both rural and urban regions have access to the internet, thereby broadening the reach of DM efforts (Urban & Maphathe, 2021).

Technologically, SA's high digital development index score (83.6) (International Telecommunication Union, 2024) demonstrates a more developed technological infrastructure and environment. Thus, Adeola et al. (2022) identified digital infrastructure and mobile penetration as key drivers of engagement. He further observed that SA's high mobile device usage positions social media and mobile marketing as integral to digital engagement strategies. Additionally, Payne (2024) emphasised that developments in AI and ML provide opportunities for businesses to analyse customer behaviour, optimise ad targeting, and improve service through chatbots, which Nigeria lacks (Abraham, 2021). However, such costly technologies create challenges for small businesses striving to compete with bigger businesses that can afford innovation (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023). As a result, Urban and Maphathe (2021) highlighted technological divide as a significant drawback that risks exacerbating inequality between large and small enterprises in SA.

5.2 Interpretation of Results

Based on the systematic literature review, it was discovered that several authors have examined the DM landscape in emerging economies. However, there has been no effort to conceptually compare and contrast the CE strategies between two or more markets. Such a comparative study is essential for creating a comprehensive framework to improve African technological infrastructure and the DM landscape. The findings from the investigation are related to the research questions and theoretical framework.

5.2.1 Key Consumer Engagement Strategies

The study revealed that social media was consistently identified as a key CE channel, with authors like Abraham (2021) and Ntobaki and Buthelezi (2023) highlighting its role in developing a dynamic interaction between businesses and customers. Giertz et al. (2022) highlighted Facebook Live and Instagram Live as crucial platforms for real-time interaction that encourage community-driven engagement. However, the effectiveness of

social media marketing is not uniform in emerging economies like Nigeria and SA. While Statista report indicated that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most used platforms for engagement in both countries, cultural, economic, and technological settings present significant challenges.

Aside from social media marketing, the study further revealed that email and mobile marketing are used in engagement but not as paramount as social media. This is supported by studies that highlighted social media as a dominant platform for CE in emerging economies (De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Yeboah et al., 2023).

The findings above align with the social presence theory, as both countries employ digital platforms to enhance perceived immediacy and closeness in communication (Chang & Hsu, 2016; Song & Hollenbeck, 2018; Yeboah et al., 2023). However, Nigeria's heavier dependence on DM platforms despite unreliable connectivity and lower broadband penetration implies that social presence is often less effective compared to SA. This corresponds with the observation that DM in emerging economies is slow and limited in scope (Abreu & Antonio, 2017) compared to developed economies (Vieria et al., 2019; Graesch et al., 2021). On the other hand, SA's scenario aligns with Osei-Frimpong and McLean's (2018) research, which indicated that higher social presence results in an increased sense of participation and interaction in social media environments (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). In the case of Nigeria, there is a lower social presence, which ultimately leads to a lesser sense of participation and interaction.

5.2.2 Cultural, Economic, and Technological Influences

Cultural

While reports indicated that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most used platforms for engagement in both countries, cultural factors present a significant challenge. This aligns with findings that national and cultural norms like cultural and intra-national cultural divergence, such as cultural restrictiveness and openness, influence how customers connect to digital content (Jamalova, 2024). Hofstede's (2011) theory applies to this aspect, especially in the concept of collectivism in Nigeria and SA, where community-driven content aligns more. However, SA values individualism to an extent, which implies that South Africans prioritise community-driven campaigns and personalised marketing efforts. This further aligns with studies by Waqas et al. (2022), which implied that community-driven content encourages customer engagement in collectivist cultures while personalised communication fosters engagement in individualistic societies.

Economic

Findings revealed that as a lower-middle-income nation country, a significant portion of the Nigerian populace still undergoes economic adversity. This affects the accessibility and affordability of internet and technology-based services that drive engagement. However, it was observed that the informal sector drives much of Nigeria's economic activity, although its economic instability led to the adoption of value-driven engagement strategies. This is supported by studies that discovered that economic instability in emerging economies can result in unstable customer confidence, thereby influencing engagement levels (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Potwora et al., 2023).

On the other hand, SA is an upper-middle-income country with a higher GDP per capita and a more formalised economy. This implies that businesses can invest in advanced digital technologies while customers can afford internet services that drive engagement. This aligns with findings by Yeboah et al. (2023), which highlighted the economic divide as a factor that impacts digital customer behaviour, with the wealthier segment having more access to digital platforms due to their higher disposable income, which allows them to afford advanced digital services (Tsetsi & Rains, 2017).

The above findings also resonate with the digital divide concept, which describes the gap between individuals, societies, or countries with access to modern technologies and those who lack it (Ghobadi & Ghobadi, 2015). The digital-divide is stark between both countries. With better internet access, SA's higher urbanised populace allows for more diverse and technologically advanced engagement strategies. Contrariwise, Nigeria's significant rural population is constrained by a divide, which limits engagement strategies. This aligns with the description that not all customers in emerging economies have equal access to digital tools/technologies such as the internet and smartphones (Correa et al., 2021). It further resonates with the assertion that the affordability of digital tools is a critical economic factor in emerging economies (Correa et al., 2021).

Technological

It was observed that mobile internet penetration rate remains a key enabler of DM and engagement in Nigeria and SA. Both countries' high mobile phone usage has enabled businesses to engage customers through social media, SMS, and mobile apps. However, Nigeria's significant drawbacks lie in unreliable connectivity and low

broadband penetration, which hinder the effectiveness of digital campaigns. On the other hand, SA has adopted advanced technologies like AI and ML, although such costly technologies create challenges for small businesses; hence, it highlights technological divide as a significant drawback that risks exacerbating inequality between large and small enterprises in SA.

The above findings align with TAM. On one hand, SA's technological acceptance is higher, driven by higher digital literacy, advanced infrastructure and a high digital development index score. These factors make the adoption of advanced engagement strategies like AI, ML, and even augmented reality (AR) more feasible. On the other hand, Nigeria's internet penetration is still growing; thus, it experiences more resistance due to low digital literacy. However, while there are plans to advance Nigeria's digital economy, corruption, high data costs, and low trust in digital activities remain key challenges (Gillwald, 2017).

6. Recommendations/Implications for Marketing Practice

The findings in this study provide several implications for marketers in Nigeria and SA, especially regarding CE strategies shaped by cultural, economic, and technological influences.

1) Culturally adaptive strategies

Marketers in both countries should focus on culturally adaptable engagement strategies. Hofstede's analysis indicates that Nigeria has higher collectivism and is more inclined to use community-based strategies (Hofstede, 2011). Hence, cultural differences require marketing strategies that can be localised and receptive to socio-cultural settings to drive engagement (Arya, 2024). Brands targeting Nigerians should prioritise communal narratives while utilising social proof through influencer marketing. Conversely, South Africans are collectivistic but with a hint of individualism. Thus, they could benefit from personalised marketing targeting individual preferences.

2) Mobile penetration opportunities

While both countries demonstrate high mobile penetration, marketing practitioners should be aware of various technological adoption rates and user attitudes in each nation. Findings revealed that mobile devices are Nigeria's primary medium for internet access. Thus, this necessitates mobile-first strategies. Marketers should invest more in mobile-based strategies, such as mobile apps and mobile-optimised websites and integrate advanced technologies. Some affordable tools are Chatfuel (AI-powered chatbots) and Google Cloud vision (image recognition for e-commerce). On the other hand, SA has a more advanced digital infrastructure; however, marketers can diversify their engagement strategies by integrating metaverse experiences for more dynamic and engaging content.

3) Economic sensitivities

The economic gap between both countries significantly affects the purchasing power of customers and receptiveness to marketing information. Nigerian customers are cost-conscious due to the economically-strained nature of their environment. As a result, they tend to engage more with content that highlights affordability and discounts (Etim et al., 2024). Therefore, marketers should take advantage of promotional strategies like giveaways, flash sales, and freemium models to encourage and enhance engagement. South Africans have comparatively higher purchasing power due to the country's higher GDP per capita. Thus, they may respond better to value-added and aspirational content that highlights social status and quality (Nadkar, 2023).

4) Digital divide and technological acceptance

It was observed that there is a significance difference in technological forces like digital infrastructure and literacy between urban and rural regions in both nations, with a more noticeable digital divide in Nigeria. Marketers must consider the TAM when developing engagement strategies because perceived ease of use and usefulness play a pivotal role in consumer interaction with digital platforms. Nigerian marketers must align their strategies with less tech-savvy consumers by providing digital training programmes to bridge the gap. Additionally, the lack of trust in online marketing can be resolved by implementing stringent data privacy (NDPR compliance), transparency practices, and permission-based marketing (opt-in options), as well as using secure payment gateways (SSL encryption) (Bakare & Tolulope, 2021; Madugu et al., 2021). SA has a higher digital literacy; thus, marketers should deploy more cutting-edge digital experiences like metaverse to enhance engagement.

5) Ethical and sustainable marketing

Globally, there is an increasing consumer awareness of ethical and sustainable marketing practices (Ilodigwe, 2024). Thus, this presents opportunities for Nigerian and South African businesses to adapt their engagement

strategies with socially responsible initiatives. Brands should prioritise incorporating ESG (environmental, social, governance) interests into their marketing content to align with the increasing number of ethically conscious customers (Ferrell, 2021). Nigerian brands should engage in practices that address the country's socio-economic challenges, whereas South African brands should capitalise on the trend and showcase their sustainability efforts.

7. Conclusions

This paper provides a comparative study of the CE strategies in Nigeria and SA. Findings indicate distinct similarities and differences in both countries' social media, email, and mobile marketing. Furthermore, globally, the perception is that the adoption and practice of DM in emerging economies is slow and limited in scope compared to developed economies. This perception holds when marketers fail to consider cultural, economic, and technological factors that affect the effectiveness of DM strategies. Therefore, the growth of the DM landscape may be impeded unless adequate strategies are in place. These include implementing culturally adaptive strategies, leveraging mobile penetration opportunities, considering economic sensitivities, bridging digital divide and fostering technological acceptance, and adopting ethical and sustainable marketing practices.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The use of a systematic literature review as the sole methodology allowed for a detailed synthesis of existing studies. However, it inherently limited the study by focusing on secondary data instead of primary evidence. This implies that any current literature gap, such as under-studied areas or limited research, may have affected the analysis scope. In addition, the time-sensitive nature of the reviewed studies is another limitation. Due to rapid changes in the DM environment and consumer behaviour, studies may not fully encapsulate the current trends in Nigeria and SA. This is pertinent to emerging economies where economic shifts and technological advancements can result in rapid changes in CE practices.

Future research should consider addressing the limitations by integrating primary data collection methods like interviews, surveys or focus groups with Nigerian and South African customers and marketers. This can offer more up-to-date and context-specific insights into consumers' perceptions of DM strategies in these economies.

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The author declares that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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