

Impact of Digitalisation on Consumer Awareness of a SME Mobile Enterprise

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Abstract

Digitalisation is crucial for success in today's business world, providing a competitive edge and keeping companies on par with competitors. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka have been slow to adopt digitalisation. This study focuses on the impact of digitalisation on customer awareness in SME enterprises and identifies key areas for improvement. The study examined the impact of interactive marketing, personalisation, and comment reviews on customer awareness. A survey was conducted with 100 employees of A & G Enterprises, a SME in the mobile phone business. The findings indicate that interactive marketing and comment reviews have a greater influence on customer awareness compared to personalisation. Based on the research findings, recommendations are provided on how to improve customer awareness through digitalisation. These recommendations include incorporating 24/7 chatbots for inquiries, offering targeted recommendations, implementing a comment section, and including a star rating system on their websites.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Consumer Awareness, Small and Medium Enterprises

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The mobile phone industry is witnessing a rapid growth globally, with 6.6 billion user's worldwide, accounting for 83.32% of the global population (Statista, 2022). In Sri Lanka, there are 32.29 million mobile connections, growing by 1 million from the previous year (Kemp, 2021). Samsung leads the Sri Lankan market with a 43.35% share, followed by Huawei and Apple (StatCounter Global Stats, 2022). Digital transformation is vital for companies to stay competitive (Kraus et al., 2021). SMEs should prioritise digitalisation and e-commerce to

increase customer awareness, boost sales, gain market share, and tap into new segments (Kergroach, 2020; Montenegro, 2021; Yacob et al., 2021). It is recommended to emphasise digitalisation in interactive marketing, personalisation, and customer reviews (Dilham et al., 2018).

1.2 Company Background

The study focuses on A & G Enterprises, a small-scale partnership established in 2011 in the mobile industry. It employs six workers and two area managers. A & G Enterprises serves as the exclusive distributor for Zigo, Akai, Etel, Joyroom, Bird, and IPro brands in the Kalutara and Colombo districts. Their product portfolio

includes feature phones, tablets, touch phones, headphones, speakers, and other mobile accessories. Their current interests are digitising operations despite ongoing challenges (Lakshman, W. K., Personal Communication, July 16, 2022).

1.3 Problem Statement

The economic downturn in Sri Lanka has hampered sales and profits. USD scarcity and fuel concerns have prompted customers to shift to online platforms, negatively impacting A & G Enterprises' sales (as shown in Figure 1), resulting in revenue that falls short of expectations (Lakshman, W. K., Personal Communication, July 16, 2022). Currently, A & G Enterprises seeks to understand how digitalisation can enhance customer awareness and increase customer retention/loyalty (Subhashini, M. H., Personal Communication, July 16, 2022).

The declining sales of A & G Enterprises can be addressed by digitalisation as indicated in studies conducted by Dwivedi et al. (2021), Hien and Nhu (2022), and Lähteenmäki, et al. (2022), which indicate that digitalisation enhances customer awareness and helps boost sales.

Various global studies have explored the impact of digitalisation on customer behaviour (Dimova, 2021; Hofmann, 2021). However, there is limited research conducted on its impact specifically on SME mobile enterprises, especially in Sri Lanka. Thus, conducting a contemporary study is crucial to gain insights

into how digitalisation can help improve customer awareness in the SME mobile industry in Sri Lanka.

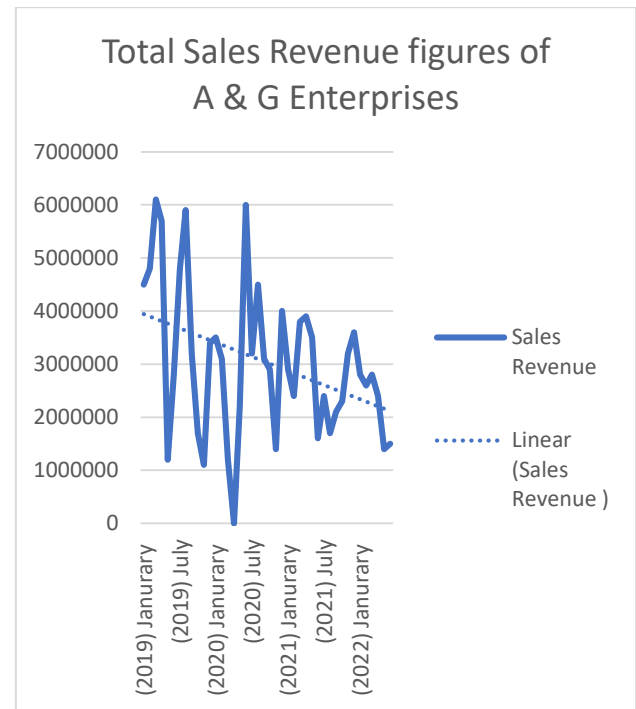


Figure 1. Total Monthly Sales Volume (A & G Enterprises, 2022)

1.4 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to identify the impact of digitalisation on customer awareness of customers of A & G Enterprises.

1.5 Scope

A & G Enterprises' target consumer base is estimated to be around 700,000 (Kasun, G. B., Personal Communication, July 16, 2022). This study will survey 100 customers of A & G enterprises in the Kalutara and Colombo district.

2. Research Methodology

This study used a mono method quantitative research approach.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is given in Figure 2.

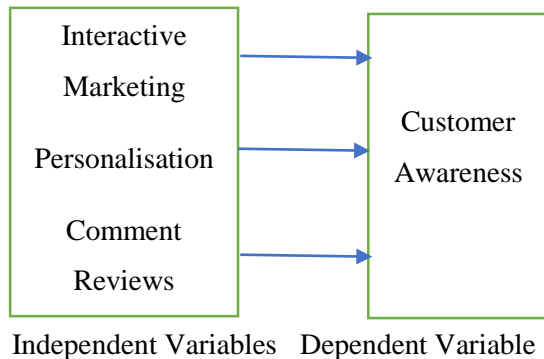


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

2.2 Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated in this study are given below.

H1: There is a relationship between interactive marketing and customer awareness.

H2: There is a relationship between personalisation and customer awareness.

H3: There is a relationship between comment reviews and customer awareness.

2.3 Operationalisation Table

The operationalisation Table is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalisation Table

Variable	Measure
Interactive Marketing	Customer Engagement
	Interactivity
	Experience
Personalisation	Customisation
	Targeting
	Categorisation
Comment Reviews	Reduce uncertainty
	Customer impression
Customer Awareness	Customer Knowledge
	Brand recognition

The entire questionnaire used the 5-point Likert scale.

2.4 Population and Sampling

Considering the fact that A & G Enterprise's target market exceeds 100,000 individuals, the researcher selected 100 clients as a representative sample due to cost and time limitations. The convenience sampling technique was used.

2.5 Data Collection

A pilot study involving ten participants was conducted. The questionnaire was approved based on the positive feedback.

The research used Google Forms to collect the data. The invitations were distributed via email and WhatsApp.

2.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha, correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1 Response Rate

A total of 96 responses were received from 100 distributed questionnaires to A & G Enterprise customers.

3.2 Demographic Data

The demographic data of the respondents are given below.

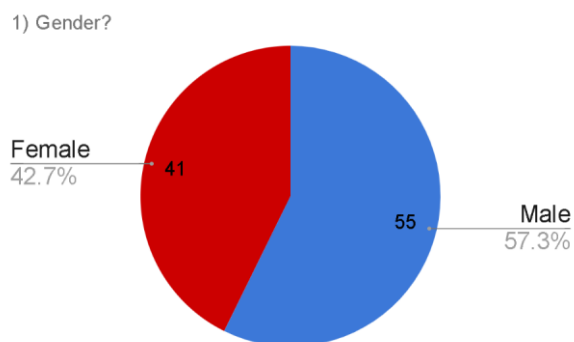


Figure 3. Respondents' Gender

It is evident from Figure 3, that 57.3% of the 96 participating customers were male, while 42.7% were female.

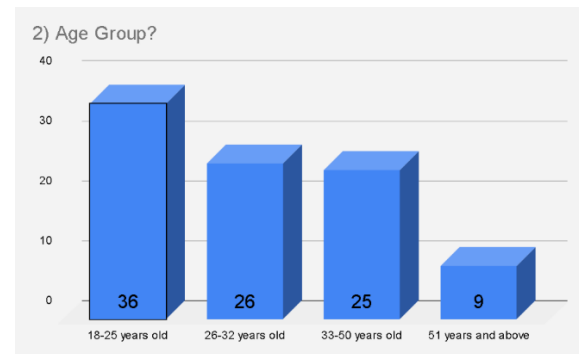


Figure 4. Respondents' Age

The majority of A & G Enterprises' customers, as shown in Figure 4, fall within the 18 to 25-year-old age group.

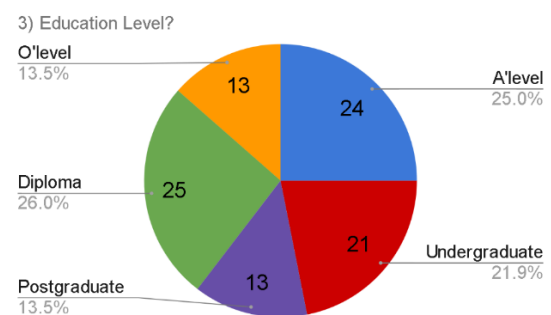


Figure 5. Respondents' Education Level

The Figure 5 shows a significant proportion of A & G Enterprises' customers have a sound education, indicating their intellectual capacity to adapt to digitalisation.

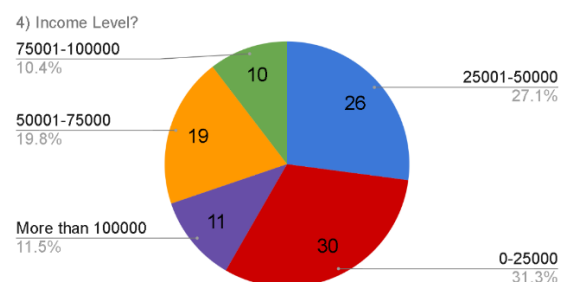


Figure 6. Respondents' Income level

Figure 6 indicates that a majority of respondents fall within the income bracket of 0-

25000 rupees. This finding provides guidance for A & G Enterprises in prioritising their product catalogue during their digitalisation journey. Based on these results, it is advisable for them to focus on establishing an online customer base for their lower-priced products before targeting their higher-end products.

3.3 Data Reliability

The data reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha test.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Interactive Marketing	0.712
Personalisation	0.759
Comment Reviews	0.702
Customer Awareness	0.716

The reliability analysis, presented in Table 2, indicates that all the variables are reliable, since the Cronbach alpha values are higher than 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.4 Correlation Analysis

The Correlation analysis results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Interactive Marketing	0.508	0.000
Personalisation	0.406	0.000
Comment Reviews	0.569	0.000

Note: The dependent variable is customer awareness.

Table 3 shows a moderate positive correlation between interactive marketing and customer awareness, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.508 and a significance of 0.000. Similarly, personalisation and customer awareness exhibit a moderately favourable relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.406 and a significance of 0.000. Additionally, comment reviews and customer awareness have a moderate association, with a correlation coefficient of 0.569 and a significance of 0.000.

Overall, the correlation analysis demonstrates positive relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, supporting the research hypotheses.

3.5 Hypothesis Validation

H1: There is a relationship between interactive marketing and customer awareness

H1 is accepted

This study's findings support previous research by Halvadia and Menon (2021), and Sharma et al. (2022). According to Giombi et al. (2022), despite its lower click-through rates, interactive marketing leaves a lasting impression. However, Bóveda-Lambie and Hair (2012) discovered no evidence of stronger self-brand connections through social media engagement. Furthermore, Ismagilova et al. (2020), cautioned against excessive inquiries due to slower response times and high costs.

Additionally, studies by Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007), and Shankar et al. (2010) revealed that millennials swiftly embrace interactive marketing that suit their social lifestyle but resent corporate intrusion in their personal online space and are concerned about data protection.

H2: There is a relationship between personalisation and customer awareness

H2 is accepted

The study shows a positive association between personalisation and customer awareness. This finding is supported by Dong et al. (2019), Segijn and Ooijen (2020), Shanahan et al. (2019), and Siddiqui and Warraich (2021). However, Ramnarayan (2011) found privacy concerns and only a partial correlation. Fridh and Dahl (2019) highlighted the importance of timely and authentic personalisation for effective customer awareness.

Conversely, Kharouf et al. (2018), and Mahajan (2015) highlighted the positive impact of

personalisation on brand experience and value co-creation. Tyrväinen et al. (2020), confirmed the relationship with customer experience and loyalty. Jackson (2007) suggests integrating personalisation into a broader strategy for business success.

H3: There is a relationship between comment reviews and customer awareness

H3 is accepted

This study confirms a positive relationship between comment reviews and customer awareness. This is consistent with previous studies such as Battha and Zina (2022), Chakraborty and Bhat (2017), and Changchit et al. (2020). Moreover, Saavedra et al. (2015) revealed that positive reviews impact lesser-known brands, while negative comments have a greater impact on well-established brands.

3.5 Multiple Linear Regression

The multiple linear regression results are given in Table 4. The regression model has an R-squared value of 0.398, indicating that 39.8% of the variability in customer awareness can be explained by the independent variables of interactive marketing, personalisation, and comment reviews.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Variable	Unstand. B	Sig. 5%
Interactive Marketing	0.301	0.004
Personalisation	0.074	0.429
Comment Reviews	0.401	0.000

The regression analysis revealed that the most significant variables that impact customer awareness are comment reviews (significance of 0.000) and interactive marketing (significance of 0.004).

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of interactive marketing and comment reviews in increasing customer awareness, suggesting that personalisation may have a lesser impact.

3.6 Descriptive Analysis

The degree of importance of the variables are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Degree of Importance

Variable	Mean
Interactive marketing	4.8
Personalisation	4.9
Comment Reviews	4.8
Customer Awareness	4.9

Note: 1 – Low Importance, 5 – High Importance

Based on the descriptive statistics analysis, interactive marketing was perceived positively by potential customers, with a mean score of

4.8. The responses indicate a preference for humorous interactions and marketing. These findings align with previous research by Groening et al. (2020), Jenneboer et al. (2022), and Yun and Park (2022) supporting the positive perception of interactive marketing.

Regarding personalisation, participants showed a positive perception, with a mean score of 4.9. The findings revealed a willingness to allow websites to store cache/cookies for an improved shopping experience. These findings align with studies by Scientific American (2022) and Strycharz et al. (2021), emphasising the benefits of using cookies for personalised and seamless experiences.

Comment reviews were also positively perceived, with a mean score of 4.8. The findings indicate that customers are influenced by online recommendations from friends and family. This finding is consistent with research by Dellarocas et al. (2014), Kaushal (2022), Venkatesakumar et al. (2020), and Wang and Wang (2020) emphasising the significance of word-of-mouth recommendations.

Regarding customer awareness, potential customers demonstrated a positive perception, with a mean score of 4.9. The findings indicate that customers were already aware of A&G Enterprises' trademarks and logo. This finding aligns with previous research by Najat (2017), and Noorlitaria et al. (2020), emphasising the importance of brand recognition and differentiation in influencing purchasing decisions.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has revealed that interactive marketing, personalisation and comment reviews have a positive impact on customer awareness in a digital online shopping platform. The study also revealed that interactive marketing and comment reviews have a greater impact than personalisation.

Based on the research findings, it is clear that A & G Enterprises' customers show a strong preference for digitalised operations and online purchasing. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are given for A & G Enterprises to consider in their digitalisation efforts.

Interactive Marketing

To thrive in the digital era, businesses must prioritise online communication and enhance customer experience (Maroengsit et al., 2019; Suwono & Sihombing, 2016). Utilising chatbots can boost customer loyalty by offering an additional communication channel and proactive responses to inquiries and concerns (Brandtzaeg & Følstad, 2017).

A significant majority of respondents (88.6%) prefer having a 24/7 chatbot feature for addressing product inquiries, highlighting their preference for immediate answers. Moreover, customers express interest in interacting with a digital agent to gather product information. Thus, incorporating an AI-powered chatbot on the A & G Enterprises website can enhance the customer experience and reduce the workload

of customer service representatives (Ameen et al., 2021). By utilising natural language processing (NLP) technology, the chatbot system can provide real-time assistance without human intervention, improving efficiency (Adamopoulou & Moussiades, 2020). This leads to positive customer experiences, increased sales, and reduced response time and support costs (Jenneboer et al., 2022; McLean & Wilson, 2016). Implementing a chatbot should be considered by A & G Enterprises to enhance customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Implement a Wishlist feature on the website with an automated notification system for discounts. Online wish lists have gained popularity among consumers and offer retailers various benefits, including measuring product popularity, predicting sales, optimising product assortments, and enabling personalised advertising (McMullen, 2019; Miller et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2016). Wish lists can influence consumer choices and increase sales by providing touchpoints for retailers to engage with consumers (Bradford & Sherry, 2013).

The majority of the respondents (86.5%) showed interest in having a Wishlist feature on the website that automatically notifies them of discounts related to their Wishlist items through social media or email. By integrating the Wishlist with an automated notification system, customers can receive mobile alerts about discounts for their desired items. This feature

enhances the overall shopping experience, increasing customer satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat purchases. It also contributes to a sense of psychological ownership and perceived value for consumers (Groening et al., 2020; Peck & Shu, 2018; Petit et al., 2019). Thus, incorporating this feature into the A & G Enterprises website can be a strategic move to boost sales and improve customer awareness.

Personalisation

Personalised recommendation agents play a crucial role in increasing customer satisfaction and gaining a competitive edge for organisations (Lye et al., 2020; Shen, 2014).

According to the findings of this study, 87.5% of respondents prefer websites that offer recommended searches and receive personalised emails with relevant product suggestions and special deals based on their viewed products. To leverage this preference, A & G Enterprises can utilise machine learning algorithms to personalise recommendations according to customer shopping history and preferences. They can also send tailored promotional emails with relevant discounts (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Zhou & Han, 2019). By implementing these strategies, A & G Enterprises can enhance customer convenience, improve the online shopping experience, and drive sales (Lambillotte et al., 2022). Personalised recommendations based on customer behavior have been proven to

enhance the customer experience, increase satisfaction, and boost sales (Basu, 2021; Hoyer et al., 2020).

Comment Reviews

Customers are increasingly relying on social media and virtual communities to understand brands, with online reviews significantly influencing purchasing decisions (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2017; Fagerstrøm et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2013). The importance of credibility has led to increased information-seeking and sharing behaviour among customers (Changchit et al., 2020).

A substantial number (90.6%) of respondents prefer reading product reviews before making online purchases. To enhance customer trust and product promotion, A & G Enterprises can encourage customers to leave reviews and feedback on their website, social media pages, and third-party review platforms (Dellarocas et al., 2014; Nasr et al., 2014). Leveraging popular social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter can facilitate effective marketing campaigns, generate buzz, and encourage customers to share reviews (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010).

The importance of leveraging social media is further supported with 74.5% of respondents stating they are likely to purchase a product if recommended by friends and family on social media. Additionally, this study highlights that 89.6% of respondents desire an online store with a star rating system for products. Implementing a star rating system alongside the

review system, A & G Enterprises can empower customers to make informed choices and foster trust in both the products and the organisation (Kostyk et al., 2017; Venkatesakumar et al., 2020).

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