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Exploring the Relationship among Digital Marketing, Market Orientation, and SME Sustainability: A Systematic Review

Article History:

Name of Author:

Pooja Saharan¹, Uma Sankar Mishra²

Affiliation:

¹Research scholar, Dept. of Management, Central University of Rajasthan, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India, PIN- 305817

²Professor, Dept. of Management, Central University of Rajasthan, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India, PIN- 305817

Corresponding Author:

Uma Sankar Mishra

Email: usmishra@curaj.ac.in

How to cite this article: Mishra S U, *et al.* Exploring the Relationship among Digital Marketing, Market Orientation, and SME Sustainability: A Systematic Review. *J Int Commer Law Technol.* 2025;6(1):872–887

Received: 30-09-2025

Revised: 11-10-2025

Accepted: 28-10-2025

Published: 13-11-2025

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Abstract: This research paper aims to study the impact of digital marketing and market orientation, both individually and in combination, on the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Considering the important role of SMEs in the economy, innovation, and employment globally and understanding the significant challenges they face in an environment with limited resources under digital disruption, this study aims to provide deep insights into how these management tools lay at foundation for better long-term survival and competitiveness of business. In order to maintain scientific rigor, a thorough literature search using the PRISMA approach was used. We conducted a systematic search as part of the review process in key academic databases such as ScienceDirect, Web of Science and Scopus to identify peer-reviewed journal papers published between 2016 to 2024. A total of 52 relevant studies were selected, following strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Analysis of the review revealed significant recent and persistent literature gaps and patterns in topics, conceptual links, and methodological approaches. It is evident from the findings that digital marketing could be implemented within each of these areas of market-oriented small firms' activity and that it may allow firms to become scalable, meaning capable of reaching out to many customers at once with a high level of personalization in their experience, and achieve long-term sustainability by remaining competitive in the market for a longer period.

Keywords: Business Sustainability, Digital Marketing, Market Orientation, SMEs.

INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Businesses (SMEs) are essential to innovation, job creation, and economic growth in several industries. However, these businesses frequently face sustainability challenges, including fluctuating markets, limited resources, and shifting customer needs. In an increasingly digitalized business world, SMEs must employ innovative strategies to enhance their competitiveness and long-term survival. Adopting digital marketing has become a game-changing instrument that helps SMEs reach new markets, enhance customer interaction, and improve operations. In the current digital world,

SMEs are becoming increasingly aware of how important digital marketing is to their success (Knežević & Has, 2024). SMEs are utilizing digital marketing techniques to connect with their target audience, encourage engagement, and achieve long-term growth as a result of consumers spending more time online and traditional marketing channels being less successful (Tochukwu Ignatius Ijomah et al., 2024a). In the modern business environment, digital marketing has become essential for SMEs looking to compete. Since the majority of consumers research products and services online, SMEs need to be well-represented online to attract and engage with their target market. However, because of things like

market competition, resource constraints, and changing consumer tastes, their long-term sustainability is still a major concern. SMEs must use strategic techniques that improve their competitiveness and adaptability to overcome these obstacles. One of the main factors contributing to corporate success is market orientation, which emphasizes customer focus, competitive awareness, and interfunctional coordination. Still, how well SMEs use digital marketing in their strategy framework will increasingly determine how effective it is at ensuring business survival. The adoption of digital marketing helps SMEs improve customer relations, increase market responsiveness, and accelerate business operations. Despite its potential, digital marketing adoption is still varying among SMEs, frequently because of obstacles like financial limitations, a lack of digital literacy, and opposition to change. For SMEs to adopt sustainable business practices, it is essential to comprehend how market orientation and digital marketing adoption interplay. Applying digital marketing entails a variety of tactics for the business's goal of reaching customers through digital marketing channels (Emini & Merovci, 2021). In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, small businesses are turning to advanced technologies to enhance efficiency, foster innovation, and strengthen customer relationships. Small businesses today face the challenge of striking a balance between achieving profitability, practising environmental responsibility, upholding social accountability, and ensuring sustainable growth over the long term. In detail, our analysis is guided by two research questions:

RQ1. How does market orientation influence business sustainability in SMEs?

RQ2. Does digital marketing adoption enhance the causal nexus between market orientation and business sustainability in SMEs?

Our systematic review adheres to PRISMA principles and only includes articles that specifically address our scope to address these research objectives. Using an inductive thematic coding technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we examine 52 articles to find themes and map the research environment on digital marketing, market orientation, and business sustainability in SMEs. In the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this research attempts to do a comprehensive evaluation of the body of existing literature on digital marketing, market orientation, and business sustainability. To inform future academic research and real-world applications, the study aims to critically evaluate the current literature, identify key theoretical and empirical findings, and discover gaps.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Influencing business sustainability through digital marketing: In the 1990s, the idea of digital marketing was first proposed, and it developed in parallel with the Internet. As firms started using

online platforms, especially with the emergence of the World Wide Web, the phrase itself began to acquire use in the mid-1990s. (Deku et al., 2024a) Search engines, email, and social media marketing are examples of modern marketing tools known as digital marketing technologies that small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in emerging markets can anticipate using to grab special business opportunities and gain a competitive edge. One of the significant turning points in the business world that has raised standards and importance across a range of industries is digitalization. Digital marketing refers to marketing efforts that involve promoting goods and services via digital channels. The use of digital technologies by businesses to engage and keep customers, market goods and services, and boost sales is referred to as digital marketing (Emini & Merovci, 2021). Digital marketing is the process of managing customer connections and public engagement via the use of diverse digital platforms. Its evolution over the past three decades has been remarkable, enabling firms to use digital media to draw in, hold on to, and grow their client base. This strengthens their brand's stance relative to competitors. (Lima et al., 2024) Adopting digital marketing is critical to any business's survival in this cutthroat market. Most of the literature on digital marketing concentrates on large firms and organizations; thus, small businesses are not well-informed about digital marketing despite the well-established advantages of digital promotions (Ritz et al., 2019). Small and medium-sized businesses can use a variety of digital marketing strategies to compete with huge multinational corporations. Digital marketing in competitive markets refers to the efficient use of digitized information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, to accomplish marketing objectives. It entails establishing and serving as a communication channel between SMEs and their established clientele via the internet and other multimedia platforms. Reduced expenses, improved client access, and increased business efficiency are the primary advantages of digital marketing in emerging markets. As a result, firms that employ innovative methods to do business via the Internet and information and communication technology (ICT) have greater success than SMEs that do not employ digital marketing (Deku et al., 2024; Herhausen et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; F. Wang, 2020). Therefore, businesses that use new techniques to do business through information and communication technology (ICT) and the Internet are more successful than SMEs that fail to use digital marketing. Expanding market reach beyond regional boundaries is one of the main ways that digital marketing affects the sustainability of businesses. Unlike traditional marketing methods, digital platforms enable companies to communicate with both target audiences across the globe and also

attract new buyers and maintain existing clientele at a lower cost. In addition, digital marketing allows for flexibility and adaptability, thus helping firms respond easily to consumers changing demands and market trends as well as competitive challenges. On the plus side, digital marketing is not without its challenges, especially in a developing nation like India where SMEs often lack experience and resources or are simply too entrenched to change. But in an increasingly digitalized business world, firms that successfully incorporate digital marketing into their strategic operations acquire a competitive edge and guarantee sustainable growth.

Role of market orientation in achieving business sustainability: According to (Martín-Consuegra & Esteban, 2007), Market orientation means putting the marketing concept into practice. To compete with each other in the global marketplace, businesses must have a market-oriented strategy. (Narver et al., 1990) mentioned that Market Orientation is the organizational culture that every person in the organization adapts to know the customers' needs and competitors' strengths and weaknesses, disseminating information among the concerned people in the organization, which helps the organization to set superior values for their customers. The idea of Market Orientation makes it easier for a business to forecast, respond to, and take advantage of changes in its surroundings, which produces better results. To compete with each other in the global marketplace, businesses must have a market-oriented strategy. Adopting effective market-oriented strategies can result in enhanced effectiveness, such as service quality, which is increasingly important for service businesses to meet customer needs and improve organisational performance (Ramayah et al., 2011). A strong customer orientation enables businesses to anticipate and respond to evolving consumer preferences, ensuring the continuous delivery of relevant products and services. By consistently meeting customer needs, businesses build brand loyalty and long-term relationships, which are essential for sustained growth. Similarly, competitor orientation allows firms to stay aware of industry shifts, identify opportunities, and develop strategies that enhance their market positioning. Businesses that actively monitor their competitive landscape can make informed decisions, reduce risks and increase their chances of survival in dynamic markets. Moreover, interfunctional coordination ensures that all departments within an organisation work collaboratively towards common goals. By aligning marketing, operations, finance, and customer service efforts, businesses can optimise resource utilisation, improve efficiency, and enhance overall performance. The degree to which a business adopts a market orientation significantly influences the success of its

marketing performance (Dahmiri et al., 2024). This integrated approach fosters resilience and adaptability, key attributes for achieving long-term sustainability. In the context of SMEs, market orientation is particularly valuable as it helps overcome resource limitations by focusing on strategic decision-making and customer-driven innovation.

The role of digital marketing adoption in linking market orientation and business sustainability:

Business sustainability involves a holistic strategy that incorporates economic, social, and environmental factors into daily operations. It demands forward-thinking strategies and the implementation of sustainable business models, ensuring that firms maintain financial stability while having a positive impact on society and the environment. Sustainability requires businesses to make decisions that consider long-term impacts, ensuring that resources are available for future generations. Businesses that prioritize sustainability focus on responsible practices, optimizing resources, and fostering innovation to fulfil present needs without compromising future generations' needs (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Market orientation is crucial for firms looking to achieve business sustainability in today's extremely competitive and digitalized business environment. Firms are better equipped to adjust to market changes and ensure long-term success when they prioritise their customers' needs, monitor their competitors, and efficiently manage internal operations. However, the effectiveness of market orientation in driving sustainability is increasingly dependent on digital marketing adoption, which serves as a crucial link between understanding market dynamics and implementing actionable strategies. Digital marketing adoption enables businesses, particularly SMEs, to translate market-oriented insights into effective engagement strategies. Through tools such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and data analytics, businesses can enhance customer interactions, improve brand positioning, and gain real-time insights into consumer behavior (Tochukwu Ignatius Ijomah et al., 2024a). These digital tools allow firms to respond quickly to shifting customer preferences and competitive pressures, reinforcing the adaptability that market-oriented businesses require for sustainability. Moreover, digital marketing provides cost-effective avenues for reaching broader audiences, overcoming geographical barriers, and improving customer retention. This is particularly beneficial for SMEs with limited resources, as they can leverage digital platforms to maximize visibility and optimize marketing expenditures.

Although significant research has examined the influence of market orientation on business performance, there remains a scarcity of studies investigating its impact on business sustainability, particularly within the SME sector. Moreover, while digital marketing adoption is widely acknowledged as a key driver of SME competitiveness, limited research explores its mediating role in the relationship between market orientation and business sustainability. Much of the existing literature treats digital marketing as an independent strategy rather than integrating it within a market-

oriented framework. This paper attempts to close these gaps by conceptualizing digital marketing adoption as a crucial link between market orientation and business sustainability in SMEs, offering insightful information for researchers, policymakers, and business professionals. Previous studies have also mostly focused on large enterprises, leaving a gap in understanding how SMEs, often constrained by limited resources and digital adoption challenges, can effectively utilize digital marketing for long-term survival and growth.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study draws upon three foundational theories as its theoretical underpinning: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). These theories have been extensively adopted in prior literature as the theoretical basis for understanding digital marketing adoption and market orientation, particularly in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Their relevance lies in their capacity to explain individual and organizational behavior regarding the acceptance and use of technology, as well as strategic orientation towards market needs.

3.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): An efficient theoretical framework for comprehending how digital marketing is applied in SMEs and how it supports business sustainability is offered by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). It was initially created by (Davis et al., 1989) and is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) theoretical framework (Sheppard Jon Hartwick Paul R Warshaw et al., n.d.). The TAM is one of the most widely used models for examining the adoption and use of new technologies. Digital marketing and TAM are closely related since both seek to understand how people use technology and how perceptions influence behaviour. TAM is a useful tool for assessing how well users embrace digital marketing platforms, technology, and strategies. It focuses on how people's thought processes influence their behaviour when utilizing technology. In digital marketing, positive impressions are produced by meaningful and user-friendly experiences that boost the likelihood that users will connect with the platform or marketing content. Deeper insights into how people use and adopt digital tools and platforms can be gained by integrating TAM into an organization's digital marketing strategy. Digital marketers may promote technology adoption and customer happiness while improving marketing success by providing SMEs with improved strategies that focus on customer perceptions through the TAM principles.

3.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): (Ajzen, n.d.) created the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in 1985 as a basic psychological framework for assessing and comprehending human behavior. By adding the idea of "perceived behavioral control" a person's belief about their ability to perform a behavior it expands on the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which was first put forth by Martin Fishbein and Ajzen. By doing so, a person's actual behavior can be more predictably predicted (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969). TPB assumes that certain motivational and cognitive aspects impact an individual's behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2020). This study links market orientation to business sustainability by utilizing TPB to explain how SMEs' attitudes, perceived pressures, and confidence in implementing digital marketing influence its adoption. Understanding these behavioral variables can assist policymakers and business leaders build targeted initiatives that boost digital marketing adoption, thereby promoting the long-term resilience and sustainability of SMEs in an increasingly digital economy.

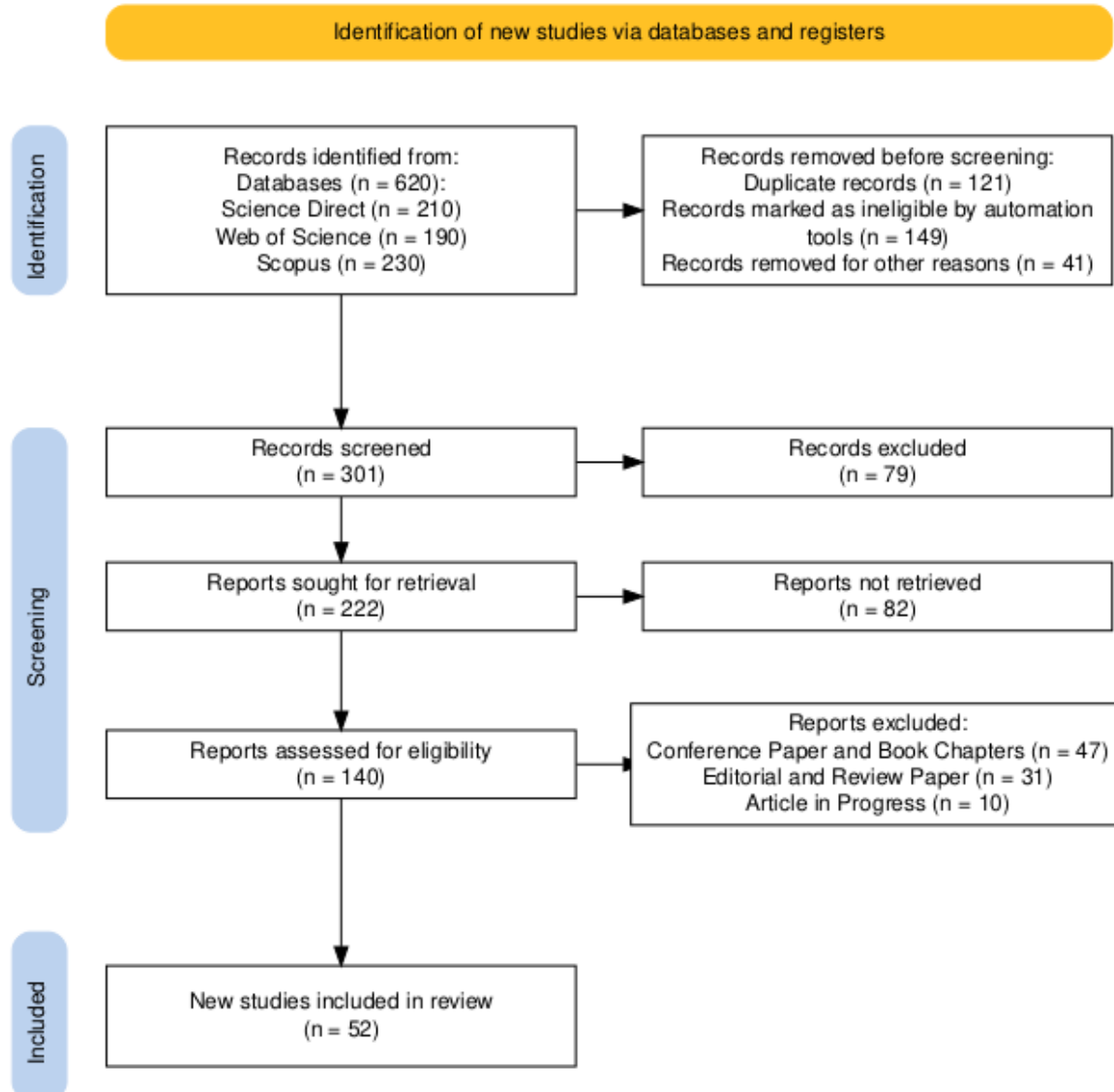
3.3 Resource-Based View (RBV): The Resource-Based View (RBV) describes how businesses use their distinct resources and competencies to gain a competitive edge. A strategic management concept that emphasizes an organization's assets and competencies as the primary sources of competitive advantage, the resource-based view (sometimes called the resource-advantage theory) was initially presented by Barney (2001). In the extremely competitive business world of today, entrepreneurs need to comprehend how firms can gain and maintain a competitive edge. RBV has since succeeded with a perspective that places more emphasis on dynamic capabilities (DC), which highlights how an organization may adapt its processes to effectively use resources in a changing business environment. The DC approach holds that innovative resource combinations based on dynamic capabilities, rather than just resources, provide a competitive advantage (Ates et al., 2013; Joensuu-Salo, 2021). Two well-known frameworks- the resource-based view (RBV) and market orientation- have formed to explain how businesses attain better results. The limited financial, human, and technological resources of SMEs are a major obstacle. But according to RBV, businesses may maximize their market orientation efforts by utilizing digital marketing as a scalable and affordable resource. Digital marketing allows SMEs to reach broader markets with lower costs, making it an invaluable resource for achieving sustainability despite resource limitations.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this review aims to systematically examine how digital marketing and market orientation, conceptualized through these behavioral models, contribute to the long-term sustainability of

SMEs. Prior research suggests that the adoption of digital tools and market-responsive strategies enhances SMEs' adaptability, competitiveness, and overall business resilience (Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015). Thus, this theoretical foundation supports the central aim of this paper.

Initially, articles were retrieved from multiple scholarly databases to conduct this systematic review. Specific inclusion criteria, selecting only peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2024 and written in English,

Figure 1. Methodological procedure



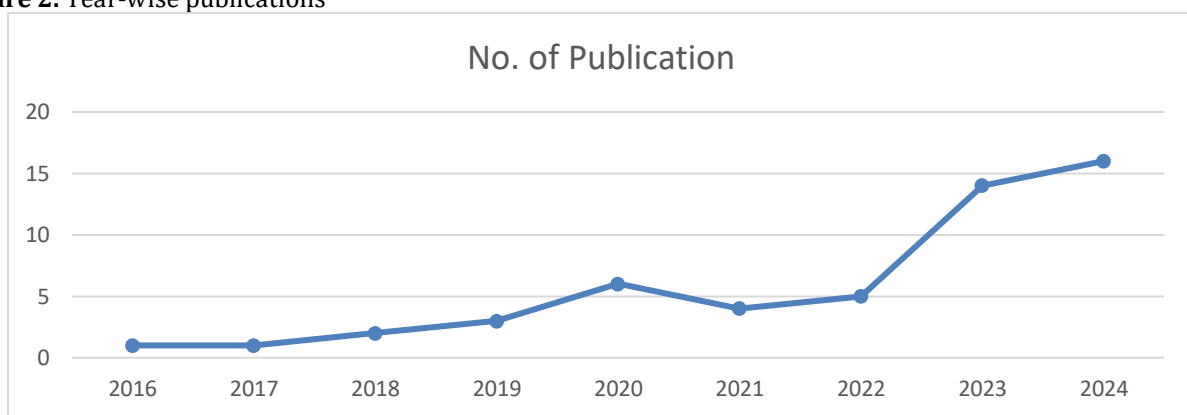
were applied. Following the initial search, a screening process based on the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles was performed. Studies that did not align with the scope of our review were excluded. Only those articles that were relevant to our research theme and objectives were included in the final analysis. To further refine the selection process and ensure methodological rigor, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines were applied, which helped us systematically identify, screen, and include studies transparently and replicably (Figure 1). A comprehensive search was conducted using three major databases, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus, focused on the keywords "Digital Marketing," "Market Orientation," "Business Sustainability," and "SMEs." A total of 620 records were initially identified: 210 from ScienceDirect, 190 from Web of Science, and 230 from Scopus. Before screening, 121 duplicate records were removed, 149 records marked as ineligible by automation tools and 41 records removed for other reasons, resulting in 301 records available for screening. Following a detailed title and abstract screening process, 79 records were excluded for not meeting the relevance criteria. Of the 222 reports sought for retrieval, 82 were not retrieved due to access limitations or missing data. Subsequently, 140 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, an additional 88 articles were excluded, 47 conference papers and book chapters, 31 editorial and review papers, and 10 articles still in progress. Ultimately, 52 studies were included in the final synthesis,

providing a robust foundation for analyzing how digital marketing adoption, market orientation, and business sustainability interact within the context of SMEs.

To give a preliminary overview of the literature, this section provides a thorough analysis of 52 chosen publications, classifying them according to several criteria.

Journal sources and the year of publication: The yearly distribution of research papers reviewed in the study from 2016 to 2024 is depicted in the year-wise publication chart. The number of publications on digital marketing, market orientation, and business sustainability increased gradually between 2019 and 2020, from three to six, as illustrated in Figure 2, suggesting a growing interest in the area. It reveals a gradual but steady increase in the number of publications from 2016 to 2019, followed by a notable rise in 2020 with six publications. Following a minor slowdown in 2021, there was a dramatic uptick beginning in 2022, reaching a significant peak of 14 and 16 publications, respectively, in 2023 and 2024. This trend reflects the growing academic interest and expanding research focus on the integration of digital marketing and market orientation in enhancing the sustainability of SMEs, especially in the most recent years. The sharp increase post-2022 may indicate heightened relevance due to digital transformation trends and evolving market dynamics impacting small and medium enterprises.

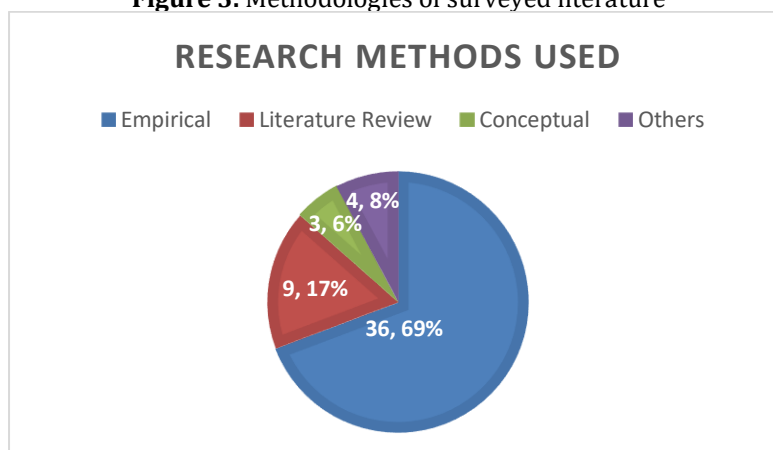
Figure 2. Year-wise publications



Source: Author's own work

Methods used: The pie chart titled “Research Methods Used” presents the methodological distribution of the papers reviewed in the study. Out of the total papers analyzed, a significant majority 36 papers (69%) employed empirical research methods, reflecting a strong inclination toward data-driven, real-world investigations in this domain. Literature reviews accounted for 9 papers (17%), highlighting efforts to synthesize existing knowledge. Conceptual studies made up 3 papers (6%), indicating relatively fewer theoretical contributions without empirical testing. Lastly, 4 papers (8%) were categorized under 'Others,' suggesting the use of alternative or mixed research approaches. This distribution underscores the predominance of empirical research in exploring the dynamic relationship between digital marketing, market orientation, and SME sustainability, while also acknowledging the presence of diverse methodological perspectives in the field.

Figure 3. Methodologies of surveyed literature



Source: Author's Own Work

Thematic analysis of literature on market orientation, digital marketing, and SME sustainability: This section offers synthesize and interpretation of the findings from the 52 studies reviewed in this paper, a thematic analysis was conducted. This approach made it possible to find important focal areas and recurrent themes in the literature. Based on their primary research focus, the examined studies were methodically divided into four main themes: The relationship between digital marketing and market orientation, market orientation and SME performance, business sustainability in the digital age, and digital marketing adoption in SMEs. These themes reflect the dominant areas of inquiry in recent scholarly work and provide a structured lens through which the interplay between digital marketing, market orientation, and SME sustainability can be examined. Table 1 presents a summary of the selected studies, organized according to these thematic categories.

Market orientation and SME Performance: Emerging-market businesses and the need to build dynamic capacities to achieve SMEs' internationalization have been the subject of recent studies (Fernandes et al., 2020; Kolbe et al., 2022). Market orientation helps SMEs improve their competitiveness and adjust to market dynamics by concentrating on customer needs, competitor actions, and internal coordination. Customer orientation involves understanding and meeting customer needs, which is crucial for SMEs to maintain competitiveness. It allows firms to create superior customer value, leading to improved business performance (O'Dwyer & Gilmore, 2019; Y. J. Wang et al., 2017). SMEs with strong customer orientation can better anticipate market changes and respond effectively, enhancing their ability to compete in dynamic environments (Montiel-Campos, 2018). Competitor orientation requires SMEs to monitor and respond to competitors' strategies. This focus helps SMEs to position themselves strategically in the market, offering competitive pricing and innovative products. Research shows that organizational performance and competitor orientation are strongly correlated, indicating that SMEs can improve their market positioning and sustainability by concentrating on their competitors (Gaur et al., 2011; O'Dwyer & Gilmore, 2019). Interfunctional coordination within SMEs, facilitating the sharing of market intelligence across departments, leads to more cohesive and strategic decision-making, while interfunctional coordination is essential, excessive coordination can sometimes reduce the positive effects of market orientation by increasing costs and complexity, particularly in smaller firms (Y. J. Wang et al., 2017). Market orientation fosters a thorough awareness of consumer needs, competition strategies, and internal coordination, all of which have a substantial impact on SMEs' competitiveness. In rapidly changing business environments, SMEs that effectively implement market orientation can achieve superior performance and sustainability.

Integration of Digital Marketing and Market Orientation: Market orientation focuses on understanding and responding to the customer needs, which remains crucial in the digital age, where digital marketing focuses on the ability to gather, disseminate, and act on marketing information through digital tools, making firms more responsive and customer-centric (Cheng et al., 2023; Kohli, 2017; Quinton et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2023). Integrating digital marketing with market orientation leads to improved marketing performance, customer satisfaction, and profitability, especially in firms with strong digital and entrepreneurial orientations (Abbu & Gopalakrishna, 2021; Goldman et al., 2021; Munir et al., 2025; Paşcalău et al., 2024; Sultoni et al., 2022; F. Wang, 2020). Research highlights how digital tools, combined with a strong market orientation, can improve the innovation capabilities of a firm, better firm performance, and enables firms to better understand and serve customers.

Digital marketing Adoption in SMEs: For small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) looking to increase their growth and profitability, digital marketing has emerged as a crucial tactic. SMEs have particular difficulties in the digital age, such scarce resources and intense competition from larger firms (Deku et al., 2024b). However, digital marketing offers a suite of tools and strategies that can help SMEs overcome these challenges and achieve sustainable growth (Dumitriu et al., 2019). By leveraging social media platforms, SMEs can engage directly with customers, fostering a sense of community and loyalty, which is crucial for long-term growth (Chatterjee et al., 2021a). Also, content marketing and personalized email campaigns are effective in attracting and retaining customers by providing valuable and relevant information tailored to their needs (Tochukwu Ignatius Ijomah et al., 2024b). By doing so, digital marketing offers cost-effective solutions for SMEs, allowing them to compete with larger enterprises without the need for substantial financial investment. By utilizing data-driven analytics, SMEs can optimize their marketing strategies in real-time, ensuring maximum return on investment (ROI) and improving overall profitability (Purba et al., 2021; Salhab, 2024). By improving market presence, promoting customer engagement, and offering cost-effective marketing solutions, digital marketing is essential to the growth and profitability of SMEs. Targeted digital marketing campaigns assist SMEs in turning prospective clients into actual customers, which boosts sales and profitability.

Business Sustainability in the Digital Age: Since digital transformation entails integrating digital technology into every aspect of a business, it is a crucial process for SMEs since it profoundly alters how companies function and provide value to their clients. Maintaining competitiveness in a quickly changing digital landscape, promoting

innovation, and improving operational efficiency all depend on this shift. Through individualized marketing and immediate customer service, SMEs can improve client experiences through digital transformation, potentially increasing customer happiness and loyalty(Sharabati et al., 2024a; Wu et al., 2024). By automating processes and utilizing data-driven decision-making, SMEs can enhance their productivity and reduce operational costs, which are crucial for economic sustainability(Alojail & Khan, 2023; Kim & Ha, 2023). Digital tools can also help SMEs monitor and improve their environmental performance, which is increasingly linked to economic outcomes (Eisner et al., 2022). Digital transformation is driven by the need to integrate sustainability into business models, which includes achieving economic, social, and environmental goals. This integration helps SMEs to align their operations with broader sustainability objectives (Broccardo et al., 2023) Balancing the trade-offs between environmental, economic, and social sustainability during digital transformation requires a strategic approach that integrates digital technologies with sustainable practices. SMEs should focus on optimizing resource use, engaging employees, and aligning business strategies with sustainability goals.

The following table presents the thematic categorization of the reviewed literature:

Table 1. Thematic categorization

Authors & Years	Findings	Themes
(Sagala & Őri, 2024)	The success of SMEs' digital transformation depends on their investment in education and ongoing learning	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Bruce et al., 2023)	Adoption of digital marketing helps SMEs become more competitive and adjust to shifting business circumstances	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Kolbe et al., 2022)	Innovation capability and reactive market orientation drive export performance, while proactive market orientation has an indirect effect	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Joensuu-Salo, 2021)	Digital orientation and market orientation significantly enhance marketing capability in SMEs, Smaller firms struggle with resources, impacting their marketing capability	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Amin et al., 2022)	Digital marketing significantly enhances sales performance, market orientation positively affects product innovation and product excellence	Integration of Digital Marketing and Market Orientation
(Purba et al., 2021)	Digital marketing significantly affects business sustainability and financial performance	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Broccardo et al., 2023)	Digital technologies enable entrepreneurs to explore and implement new business models for better performance	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Astuty et al., 2024)	Micro-businesses must adopt digital technology to achieve sustainable practices and meet development goals	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Alojail & Khan, 2023)	highlights how crucial it is to incorporate sustainability principles into the process of digital transformation to improve organizations' long-term sustainability results	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Kurniasari et al., 2023)	Financial accessibility positively influences digital adoption among traditional market SMEs	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Chatterjee et al., 2021a)	Social Media Marketing tools significantly enhance sustainable growth in SMEs within emerging economies like India	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Saura et al., 2020)	Effective management of user behaviour data enhances business strategies and supports data collection and analysis	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Rokkan, 2023)	The market orientation performance relationship remains robust despite extensive research efforts to identify moderators	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Tarazona-Montoya et al., 2024)	Effectively utilising various digital platforms and marketing strategies to enhance client interaction and engagement, which is crucial for achieving strategic results	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Lekmat et al., 2018)	Market orientation directly and indirectly impacts firm performance through marketing capabilities	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Deb et al., 2024)	Digital marketing can significantly enhance sustainable performance in handicraft family businesses	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs

(Danh & Long., 2024)	Digital Transformation directly enhances Firm Performance and mediates the effects of Market Orientation and Corporate Social Responsibility	Integration of Digital Marketing and Market Orientation
(D'souza et al., 2022)	The association between business performance and competitor orientation is mediated by innovation	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Wu et al., 2024)	Identifies the critical elements that affect the adoption of digital marketing tactics, including managerial skills, inventiveness, and proactivity	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Gaur et al., 2018)	Discovered a favorable correlation between manufacturing performance in Indian SMEs, inter-functional cooperation, and customer focus.	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Kaushik & Dangwal, 2023)	Entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation as critical resources influencing SMEs' performance	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Tochukwu Ignatius Ijomah et al., 2024a)	Innovative digital marketing strategies help SMEs increase brand awareness, generate leads, and improve marketing ROI	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Kim & Ha, 2023)	Findings suggest that applying digital transformation enhances innovation performance, positively impacting sustainable growth positively	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Y. J. Wang et al., 2017)	SMEs should focus on rebuilding their market-oriented culture based on customer and competitor orientation protocols	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Singh & Selvasundaram, 2024)	Digital marketing significantly promotes sustainable development by fostering sustainable consumption behaviours and influencing consumer attitudes	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Zahara et al., 2023)	To effectively reach clients and establish relationships in real time, SMEs must concentrate on enhancing their digital marketing tactics.	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Ali et al., 2020)	Market Orientation also positively influences performance by enabling firms to meet customer needs better	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Türkeş, 2024)	It is suggested that SMEs must integrate digital marketing techniques in order to enhance their operational effectiveness and adjust to shifting market conditions.	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Emini & Merovci, 2021)	SMEs can enhance their marketing effectiveness through digital tools, which facilitate two-way communication and improve customer relationships	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Trueba-Castañeda et al., 2024)	Investing in digitalisation leads to improved efficiency, cost savings, and enhanced product quality	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Ritz et al., 2019)	The do-it-yourself behaviour model applies to small business owners who require specialised knowledge for digital marketing	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Knežević & Has, 2024)	The subject of digitalization in small and medium-sized businesses is becoming increasingly prominent in the academic community	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Gomez-Trujillo & Gonzalez-Perez, 2022)	Businesses must enhance digital capabilities to balance economic, environmental, and social impacts	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Sharma & Sharma, 2023)	Digital marketing adoption among small businesses is significantly influenced by relative advantage and organisational readiness	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(S. Wang & Esperança, 2023)	The study reveals that digital resources and firm competitiveness positively influence environment, social, governance (ESG) performance through market performance as a mediator	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Al-Hakimi et al., 2023)	SMEs practising marketing ethics can fully leverage competitor orientation to enhance performance, especially at low levels of competitive intensity	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(O'Dwyer & Gilmore, 2019)	Market orientation in SMEs is influenced by marketplace knowledge and industry relationships. SMEs should monitor	Market Orientation and SME Performance

	competitors to enhance performance and identify opportunities	
(Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020)	Effective digital strategies create customer awareness and positive brand associations	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Chawla et al., 2023)	Numerous variables, including business innovation and process improvement, business sustainability, internal digital aspirations, and unexpected external circumstances, encourage and influence organizations to pursue digital transformation.	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Mudanganyi et al., 2020)	Brand orientation significantly influences an SME's brand distinctiveness, suggesting a competitive advantage for SMEs that focus on branding	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Zamri et al., 2024)	Digital marketing practices can lead to improved business performance, indicating the critical importance of these practices in organisational success	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Savastano et al., 2022)	The study discovered that the maturity of digital business models positively impacts long-term, sustainable business success. It also showed how important it is for businesses to deliberately adapt and change to continue performing well in a setting that is changing quickly.	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Gündüzyeli, 2024)	The study reveals that AI enhances sustainability in digital marketing through personalised experiences and optimised strategies, AI integration improves environmental, economic, and social sustainability outcomes	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Pradhan, 2020)	Digital marketing tools by SMEs lead to significant changes in average turnover and expenses, indicating a direct impact on business performance after digital transformation efforts are implemented	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Ahmad & Pandey, 2024)	The study reveals that SMEs in India predominantly own websites but utilise digital marketing tools minimally	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Jadhav et al., 2023)	Digital marketing on SMEs', with larger firms experiencing a "relatively large impact" compared to medium-sized firms	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Sucipto, 2024)	Findings shows that digital marketing and brand image positively impact business sustainability, while green business has a negative effect	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Plekhanov et al., 2023)	The paper highlights the strategic challenges posed by digital transformation, including power dynamics and the need for agile organizational structures to adapt to technological changes	Business Sustainability in the Digital Age
(Sharabati et al., 2024a)	Effective customer engagement through digital channels leads to improved financial outcomes and market presence for SMEs'	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Yoo et al., 2019)	Digital marketing significantly enhances SMEs' financial outcomes and market presence, improving customer satisfaction	Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs
(Fernandes et al., 2020)	The findings suggest that fostering a culture oriented towards internationalisation is crucial for SME success	Market Orientation and SME Performance
(Affendy A H & Asmat-Nizam, 2016)	Market orientation has a beneficial impact on business performance, and when customer happiness is given priority, higher market orientation results in better Business performance.	Market Orientation and SME Performance

OUTCOME AND DISCUSSION

RQ1. How does market orientation influence business sustainability in SMEs?

Market orientation has consistently been recognized in the literature as a critical driver of long-term

business viability in SMEs. Market orientation directly enhances business sustainability by enabling SMEs to identify and meet customer demands, adapt to market changes, and deliver superior value, which supports ongoing business viability (Appiah-Nimo & Chovancová, 2020; Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2024;

Sulaiman, 2025; Yadegaridehkordi et al., 2023). Market orientation boosts SME competitiveness, which is a key driver of business sustainability. While it may not always directly lead to sustainability, it strengthens competitiveness, which in turn supports long-term business success (Prasada et al., 2021). Business sustainability also mediates the relationship between market orientation and corporate reputation, suggesting that market-oriented SMEs are more likely to build strong reputations through sustainable practices (Hanaysha & Al-Shaikh, 2024; Prasada et al., 2021). Market orientation, especially when combined with innovation and digital marketing, further enhances sustainable performance and adaptability in dynamic markets (Lima et al., 2024; Munawar et al., 2024; Sulaiman, 2025). Moreover, scholars have highlighted that market orientation fosters innovation and learning orientation, which are essential for sustainability. SMEs with strong market orientation tend to be more innovative, open to feedback, and responsive to customer needs, all of which support sustained performance and resilience in dynamic environments. Market orientation is a vital strategy for SMEs aiming for business sustainability. By prioritizing customer needs, fostering innovation, and leveraging internal resources, market-oriented SMEs achieve better performance, greater competitiveness, and stronger reputations, all of which contribute to their long-term sustainability.

RQ2. Does digital marketing adoption enhance the causal nexus between market orientation and business sustainability in SMEs?

Recent studies indicate that digital marketing adoption significantly strengthens the relationship between market orientation and business sustainability in SMEs. Its adoption leads to improved economic results, market presence, and customer experiences by enabling better engagement and understanding of customer preferences (Sharabati et al., 2024b). Market orientation, when combined with digital marketing or e-commerce adoption, significantly boosts business performance and sustainability outcomes (Octavia et al., 2020; S. Wang & Esperança, 2023). Also, Studies show that integrating market orientation and digital strategies leads to better customer acquisition, satisfaction, and retention, which are key drivers of sustainability (Al-Slehat, 2023; Wakjira, 2023). E-commerce and digital marketing adoption mediate and enhance market orientation's effect on financial and sustainability performance (Gao et al., 2023; Octavia et al., 2020). Actual use of digital marketing tools is linked to measurable improvements in sustainability and business performance, especially in developing and emerging markets (Bruce et al., 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2021b; Deku et al., 2024b; Dumitriu et al., 2019; Tochukwu Ignatius Ijomah et al., 2024b). Research increasingly shows that digital marketing adoption strengthens the positive relationship between market orientation and business

sustainability in SMEs. Digital tools and strategies not only enhance market presence and customer engagement but also support sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness. Furthermore, digital marketing adoption allows SMEs to scale their market-oriented strategies without significant capital investment. Literature shows that digital marketing reduces barriers to market entry, enhances brand visibility, and supports data-driven decision-making. These digital capabilities help SMEs become more customer-centric and innovative when integrated with a strong market orientation. Based on the comprehensive literature review, it can be concluded that digital marketing adoption significantly strengthens the causal relationship between market orientation and business sustainability in SMEs, serving as a strategic enabler that translates market-oriented practices into sustainable business outcomes

CONCLUSION

This systematic review explored the interplay between digital marketing, market orientation, and SMEs' sustainability, revealing important patterns and gaps in the existing literature. The increasing number of publications from 2016 to 2024, particularly the sharp rise after 2022, reflects the growing academic and practical interest in how SMEs can leverage digital tools and market-driven strategies to ensure long-term survival and growth. Findings suggest that market orientation enables SMEs to remain adaptive, customer-focused, and competitive, while digital marketing adoption enhances outreach, operational efficiency, and customer engagement. Together, these approaches contribute not only to economic performance but also to environmental sustainability by reducing resource consumption through digital processes and social sustainability by fostering inclusivity, transparency, and community engagement. However, despite their growing adoption, the integrated role of digital marketing and market orientation in achieving broader sustainability goals remains underexplored, especially in diverse regional and sectoral contexts. In conclusion, digital transformation and market orientation form a strategic foundation for SMEs seeking to achieve sustainable development. Future research should focus on developing integrative frameworks and conducting comparative studies to better understand how these factors jointly impact the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability in small and medium-sized enterprises.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was not funded by any grant

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