



Digital Marketing Communications and Consumer Patronage of Fashion Products in Nigeria

Peter Esuh^a, Uduakobong Imeh^b, Maureen Ebele Ogbobeta^{c*}

^{abc}Department of Advertising and Marketing Communications, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

*ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6917-6251>

*Corresponding email: maureenebeleogbobeta@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined the influence of digital marketing communications on the patronage of fashion products by Nigerians. The study hinged on the Uses and Gratifications, and Consumer Behaviour theories. The survey research technique was used and the questionnaire was the instrument for data gathering. The target population comprised of Nigerians residing in Eket local government area, Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted, with a sample size of 398 computed using the Taro Yamane formula from an estimated accessible population of 83,384 internet-active adult residents. A structured questionnaire was administered across the eleven wards of Eket LGA, yielding 384 valid responses after exclusions, representing a response rate of 96.5%. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and Weighted Mean Scores, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the study's hypothesis. Findings revealed that residents (56%) see advertisements for fashion products on the digital platforms they access on a daily basis; residents (46%) mostly come across digital marketing contents about fashion products on social media. Digital marketing communications had a significant influence on the patronage of fashion products (53%). Study revealed (46%) that the most effective digital marketing communications channel for promoting fashion products is social media. Factors that had a greater influence on the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in driving patronage of fashion products were discounts, free delivery and other special offers. The study concludes that digital marketing communications, particularly through social media, play a substantial role in shaping fashion consumption patterns of Nigerian residents in Eket, and recommends that fashion vendors sustain consistent digital engagement, prioritise social media investment, and incorporate price-based incentives into their promotional strategies.

Keywords: digital marketing communications, consumer patronage, fashion products

Introduction

The Nigerian fashion industry has grown over the years and is now an important part of the country's economy. It spans clothing, accessories, cosmetics, and skincare, and has become a substantial contributor to national output valued at over \$10 billion and accounting for approximately 0.47% of Nigeria's GDP (Adedapo and Adedeji, 2021), against a global fashion industry contribution of roughly \$3,000 billion, or 2% of world GDP (Adeola, Moradeyo, Muogboh and Adisa, 2021). Events such as Lagos Fashion Week, Uyo Fashion Week, TOZALI African Fashion and Cultural Week, and African Bridal Fashion Week have extended this visibility, drawing investment and generating employment across design, styling, modelling, and fashion journalism. What these figures and events do not clarify, however, is how this growth is distributed geographically, whether the digital-marketing-driven gains observed at high-profile, urban-centred fashion events and platforms extend meaningfully to smaller commercial towns where much of Nigeria's everyday fashion retail actually occurs. This is the coherence gap the



present study seeks to close: connecting the industry's documented economic significance to the specific, under-examined question of how digital marketing communication functions for fashion vendors outside Nigeria's major commercial and cultural hubs.

Abdulraheem, Imouokhome and Abdulsalam (2025) demonstrate that fashion businesses increasingly use Instagram, WhatsApp, and blogs to showcase products and sustain two-way engagement with customers, but their study does not examine whether this engagement translates into measurable patronage outcomes, nor does it account for platform-specific effectiveness across differing consumer segments. Okafor, Ihechu and Osuagwu (2025) provide more direct evidence that social media advertising enhances the perception and patronage of locally made fashion products, but their sample was restricted to tertiary students, a demographic that is comparatively young, digitally literate, and urban, and whose consumption patterns may not generalise to the broader adult consumer base that sustains fashion retail in smaller commercial towns. Taken together, these studies establish that digital marketing communication is relevant to Nigerian fashion consumption, but they leave unresolved how this relationship holds outside student populations and outside Nigeria's dominant fashion cities, a gap in both demographic and geographic scope that this study is positioned to address.

Eket, a growing commercial town in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, offers a relevant setting for this inquiry precisely because it falls outside the urban-centric and student-centric focus of existing literature. Fashion vendors in Eket have visibly adopted Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook as promotional tools, mirroring the platform choices documented in larger cities, yet no known study has examined whether these tools produce comparable patronage outcomes within this specific commercial and consumer context. Investigating Eket therefore extends the geographic and demographic scope of existing Nigerian digital marketing literature rather than merely replicating it in a new location. Given this, the study examines the relationship between digital marketing communications and the patronage of fashion products by Nigerians residents in Eket Local Government Area.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing use of social media, mobile advertising and e-commerce to promote fashion products in Eket, it remains unclear whether digital marketing communications translate into sustained consumer patronage. Although Ewah et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between social media marketing and MSME performance in Akwa Ibom State, their study did not specifically examine fashion patronage. Similarly, Okafor et al. (2025) found that social media advertising enhanced the perception and patronage of made-in-Nigeria fashion products, but focused on tertiary students in Abia State. Conversely, Aroyehun and Aliede (2023) found that exposure to foreign advertising content could shift consumer preference away from Nigerian-made products. These findings suggest that digital marketing outcomes may vary by product category, audience and advertising content. However, evidence remains limited on the relationship between digital marketing communications and fashion product patronage among the wider consumer population in Eket. This gap leaves local fashion businesses with insufficient context-specific evidence to guide their digital marketing investments. The study therefore examines the relationship between digital marketing communications and consumer patronage of fashion products in Eket Local Government Area.



Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. assess the extent of exposure to digital marketing communications of fashion products by Nigerian residents in Eket;
2. identify the digital marketing communications channels through which residents are most exposed to fashion products;
3. determine the influence of digital marketing communications on the patronage of fashion products by residents;
4. identify the most effective digital marketing communications channels for promoting fashion products to residents; and
5. examine the factors that influence the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in driving the patronage of fashion products by residents.

Research Hypothesis

H₁ - There is a significant relationship between exposure to digital marketing communications and the patronage of fashion products.

Conceptual Review

Digital Marketing Communications

Digital marketing is a form of marketing that emerged in the 1990s and since then, many communication scholars have tried to come up with different definitions of the concept. Davenport, Guha, Grewal and Bressgott (2020) note that companies began using digital marketing dominantly in 2014 and since then it has become one of the major forms of marketing in every part of the world. Islam (2021) observes that more recently, digital platforms have been integrated into marketing plans and everyday life as people are increasingly using digital platforms for shopping instead of visiting physical shops. Rao and Ratnamadhuri (2018) define DMC primarily in channel terms, describing it as the use of platforms such as social media, search engines, email, websites, and mobile applications to create, deliver, and manage promotional messages. Abdulquadria and Dixon-Ogbechi (2022), by contrast, define DMC in outcome terms, emphasising the efficient use of technology to produce engaging advertisements capable of capturing attention and driving conversion.

The two definitions are not competing so much as complementary: Rao and Ratnamadhuri specify where DMC happens, while Abdulquadria and Dixon-Ogbechi specify what it is meant to achieve. Neither definition alone is sufficient for the purposes of this study, a channel-only definition risks treating DMC as merely technical infrastructure, while an outcome-only definition risks obscuring the specific platforms and message formats through which that outcome is pursued. For this study, therefore, digital marketing communications is defined as the strategic use of internet-based channels, including social media, search engines, email, websites, and mobile applications to create and deliver promotional content designed to capture consumer attention and influence purchase behaviour. This working definition combines the channel specificity of Rao and Ratnamadhuri (2018) with the outcome orientation of Abdulquadria and Dixon-Ogbechi (2022), and it is this composite understanding that guides the analysis of digital marketing communications and fashion patronage in later sections of this study.

Digital Marketing communications Channels

Digital Marketing Communication Channels are online platforms, tools and methods used by digital marketers to market and advertise their products, brands and services to potential clients



and customers. According to Frank and Idenedo (2023, p. 52), “to develop a deeper understanding of digital marketing, scholars have classified it into several channels and forms.” Parmar (2019) identifies the core digital communication components as search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), content marketing, influencer marketing, content automation, campaign marketing, e-commerce marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, display advertising, e-books, and other digital media. These components collectively represent the tools and pathways through which messages are strategically crafted, transmitted, and received in the digital environment to influence consumer perception and behaviour.

While this literature identifies numerous digital marketing communication channels, including social media marketing, email marketing, affiliate marketing, and website marketing, this study restricts its empirical focus to social media marketing, given that it is the channel most visibly and consistently used by fashion vendors in Eket, as established in the introduction. Email marketing, affiliate marketing, and website marketing are reviewed below solely to situate social media marketing within the broader conceptual landscape of digital marketing communication channels; they are not independently investigated or measured in this study. This distinction is necessary because much of the existing literature treats these channels as interchangeable components of a single DMC construct, when in practice they differ considerably in cost, accessibility, and relevance to small-scale, informally structured fashion retail of the kind that characterizes Eket's market.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing in simple terms simply means using social media advertising platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, X app formerly known as Twitter, etc, to market products and services to potential clients who are known as social media users. This aligns with the formal academic conceptualization by Li et al. (2021), who define social media marketing as “the use of social media platforms, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization’s stakeholders”. Baker (2024), states that “social media marketing is the process of creating content for social media platforms to promote your products and/or services, build community with your target audience, and drive traffic to your business” Social media has witnessed incredible growth since its inception”. Chen and Qasim, (2021) note that there has been tremendous growth in the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook over the past decade. The Nigerian Communications Commission (2023) reports that Nigeria currently has over 140 million active internet users, with social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp being the most popular (NCC, 2023). This vast user base presents businesses with an unprecedented opportunity to engage with existing and potential customers at a lower cost compared to traditional marketing channels (Oladipo and Okonji, 2021).

According to Chaffey (2024), social media presents lots of opportunities to reach, interact with, convert, and engage users and savvy marketers use social media across their marketing funnel, to influence journeys from product discovery, through to first purchases, loyalty, and advocacy. Ebrahim (2020) adds that for organisations to believe to survive in the online marketplace, such organisations must consider social media as a very important tool of digital marketing. According to Hafez (2021), on the other hand, social media marketing enhances communication between an organisation and its clients, while also helping in increasing brand awareness.



Email Marketing

One of the most effective digital marketing methods is Email marketing. According to Samantaray and Pradhan (2020, p. 5221), Email marketing is defined "as the promotion of a product by sending emails and newsletters." Neil Patel, a digital marketing guru states that "Email marketing is a digital marketing strategy that involves sending promotional messages or content to subscribers via email. This allows marketers to nurture relationships, generate leads, and drive sales." Patel (2024) believes that email marketing is one of the most effective channels of digital marketing. According to the scholar, email is one of the oldest forms of digital communication, and email marketing has become one of the most effective digital marketing strategies. He explains further that email marketing sits at the top of the list of digital marketing channels. Its key advantages include low cost, audience segmentation, and the personalisation of brand-customer communication, though Sabbagh (2021) notes that poorly targeted or excessive messaging can render it ineffective or spam-like.

Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is a performance-based model in which businesses compensate third-party promoters, or affiliates, for driving traffic or sales through custom referral links (Narayan & Singh, 2022; Asehinde, 2023). It typically involves four parties, the merchant, the affiliate, the network connecting them, and the consumer. It is particularly attractive to businesses with limited advertising budgets, since affiliates are paid only on performance rather than upfront cost (Asehinde, 2023).

Website Marketing

Website marketing involves the strategic promotion of a brand's website to drive traffic, capture consumer attention, and generate leads that may convert into sales (Santo, 2022). Supported by search engine optimisation, websites allow businesses to publish updates, respond to customer feedback, and build an accessible digital presence beyond social platforms (Ahmed & Mobydeen, 2022). Effective website marketing typically requires clearly defined marketing goals and identification of a target audience's demographic and behavioural characteristics. Of the four channels reviewed, social media marketing is the most consistent with the operational realities of fashion retailing in Eket, where vendors typically lack the technical infrastructure or budget for dedicated websites, affiliate networks, or structured email lists, but can access Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook at comparatively low cost using only a smartphone. Email, affiliate, and website marketing are therefore retained in this review for conceptual completeness but fall outside the scope of the present investigation, which concentrates specifically on social media marketing as practised by fashion vendors and experienced by consumers in Eket.

Consumer Patronage

Consumer patronage is distinct from consumer behaviour, purchase intention, repeat purchase and customer loyalty. Consumer behaviour covers the broader processes through which consumers search for, evaluate, purchase and use products (Chinedu, 2022), while patronage focuses on actual buying behaviour. Purchase intention reflects a willingness to buy but does not guarantee an actual purchase. Similarly, repeat purchase may result from convenience, habit or limited alternatives rather than genuine brand preference. Dick and Basu (1994) explain that customer loyalty combines repeat patronage with a favourable attitude towards a brand. Thus, patronage concerns observable purchasing behaviour, whereas loyalty also requires attitudinal



commitment. Scherleitner (2024) likewise highlights the need to distinguish patronage from related constructs to avoid conceptual confusion.

In this study, consumer patronage is defined as the consistent and repeated purchase of fashion products over time, rather than stated purchase intention or attitudinal loyalty. Almotairi (2020) associates patronage with regular purchases from a company, while Chinedu (2022) identifies product quality, affordability, availability, income, lifestyle and cultural background as factors that influence consumer buying behaviour. Anucha (2022) further highlights consumer choice in relation to competing products and the role of satisfaction in sustaining patronage. Accordingly, this study operationalises consumer patronage as the actual and repeated purchase of fashion products by consumers in Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

Empirical Review

Consumer Buying Behaviour in the Digital Age

Understanding consumer behaviour in the digital age as business owners, companies and organisations is very important to the growth of a business. With the significant technological innovation hitting the world today, there has been changes in the way people use the media. Media users are now exposed to a variety of information, ideas, brands, goods and services. What this implies is that they can easily make informed decisions on which brand to patronise of the exposure to certain brands. Statista (2024) states that in Nigeria alone, there were 64 million people who have access to mobile Internet in 2023 alone. In 2022, the same statistics said that there were 84 million people who had access to the Internet; this is expected to reach 117 million people who use the Internet come 2027.

Access to technological devices have changed the way consumers interact with businesses and how they make decisions on which products and services to patronise. Consumers now have access to ready and immediate information about a company and the goods and services they offer. Before consumers make purchasing decisions, with the help of their digital devices, they go online, research and get public reviews on a product before they make an actual purchase. Consumers now sit in the comfort of their homes and shop online. These products are searched for online, prices are negotiated and the products get delivered to the consumer's doorstep. Online platforms and e-commerce apps are on the rise because consumers are now opting for online shopping. Recommendations from friends, social media ads and influencer marketing have also shaped the consumer patronising behaviour and decisions. Consumers don't necessarily need to put faith in a product's advertisement, they now rely on authentic reviews and recommendations from people who have used the products.

In today's digital age, consumers now have control of their buying activities. This as a result of the connection the Internet has created between businesses and consumers. Consumers have access to a company's website, business pages and profiles on social media platforms. They follow these pages, watching out for new products, changes in prices and leave feedback whether negative or positive in their comments section. Consumers now engage with business online which helps in building good relationships and fostering brand trust and loyalty. Consumers do not just wake up to buy from online vendors, immediately they discover a product that interests them online, whether through influencers on social media, social media ads, or search engines. They do research, compare prices and quality of the goods and services. They equally read reviews and get opinions from other consumers to make more informed decisions.



Digital Marketing Communications and Patronage of Fashion Products

Not all scholars agree on a positive relationship between these two variables, Ugwuanyi et al. (2026), studying consumer brand engagement within the Nigerian fashion industry itself, found that while engagement positively influenced brand expected value and purchase intention overall, engagement unexpectedly exerted a negative influence on brand attitude, a finding the scholars attribute to the possibility that excessive or highly frequent brand interaction in digitally saturated environments may generate persuasion awareness or engagement fatigue among consumers, rather than the straightforward goodwill typically assumed. Their study further found that age significantly moderates how brand attitude translates into purchase intention, meaning the strength and even direction of digital engagement's effects vary across consumer segments within the same Nigerian fashion market.

This finding is particularly relevant to the present study for two reasons. First, it is drawn from the same national and industry context this study investigates, directly answering the concern that earlier comparative evidence may not transfer reliably to Nigerian conditions. Second, it demonstrates that even within Nigeria's fashion industry, digital marketing communication does not act as a uniformly positive force, certain mechanisms assumed to drive patronage, such as frequent engagement, can instead produce fatigue or scepticism among some consumer segments. This complicates the more straightforwardly positive findings of Islam (2021), Fadzilah et al. (2024), Mahdhani (2022), and Ewanlen and Uchenna (2023), and reinforces the need for context-specific investigation, since a relationship confirmed in one Nigerian setting (Port Harcourt, or fashion consumers nationally) cannot be assumed to hold, in strength or direction, in a distinct commercial environment like Eket.

These studies do not present a uniform picture even within Nigeria. Several trace a plausible chain from awareness (Islam, 2021), to improved targeting capability (Fadzilah et al., 2024; Mahdhani, 2022), to confirmed patronage in one Nigerian market (Ewanlen & Uchenna, 2023), while Ugwuanyi et al. (2026) demonstrate, using Nigerian fashion consumer data, that specific mechanisms within digital marketing communication can produce unexpected or even counterproductive effects depending on consumer segment. The evidence is therefore suggestive rather than conclusive when generalised to a setting like Eket: it establishes that a positive relationship between social media marketing and fashion-related consumer outcomes is plausible and has been observed in comparable Nigerian markets, but it also confirms that this relationship is neither automatic nor uniform even within the country. No single study reviewed here traces the full path from social media exposure to realised fashion patronage within a small Nigerian commercial town, nor accounts for which specific mechanisms are likely to hold or fail there, precisely the gap the present study is designed to close.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theoretical perspectives: Uses and Gratifications Theory and Consumer Behaviour Theory. The Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974), the theory views audiences as active media users who select media and content to satisfy psychological and social needs. It underpins Objectives One and Two by explaining residents' exposure to digital marketing communications and their preferred channels for fashion products. It suggests that consumers selectively engage with platforms based on needs such as keeping up with fashion trends, self-expression and social interaction. The Consumer Behaviour Theory assumes that consumers make purchasing decisions based on perceived

benefits and satisfaction, which may encourage repeat purchases. It guides Objectives Three, Four and Five by explaining the relationship between digital marketing communications and actual patronage, the factors influencing repeated purchases, and the conditions affecting the effectiveness of digital marketing. Factors such as trust, product presentation, affordability and prior experience may shape consumers' purchasing decisions. Together, the theories explain consumers' selection of digital content and whether exposure translates into actual and sustained patronage of fashion products.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to examine the relationship between digital marketing communications and consumer patronage of fashion products in Eket Local Government Area (LGA), Akwa Ibom State. The target population was estimated at 305,164 residents, based on the National Population Commission's (NPC, 2025) projection. The accessible population comprised adults aged 18 years and above who had regular access to internet-enabled devices. Applying the adult population estimate of 54% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023) and the national broadband penetration rate of 50.58% (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2025) produced an estimated accessible population of 83,384. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 398 was determined. Questionnaires were administered across Eket's 11 wards, yielding 384 valid responses after 14 were excluded for incompleteness or damage, representing a 96.5% usable response rate. A multistage sampling procedure involved clustering by ward, proportionate allocation, systematic selection and purposive screening. Eligible respondents were adults who had regular internet access, purchased at least one fashion product in the preceding 12 months, and encountered fashion-related promotional content on social media during the same period.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and two other lecturers in Public Relations and Marketing Communications at the University of Uyo, and pilot-tested among 30 respondents in Onna LGA. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability with SPSS version 25. The main data were analysed using SPSS: frequencies and percentages addressed Objectives One and Two, while weighted mean scores addressed Objectives Three, Four and Five, with 2.50 as the decision benchmark. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between digital marketing communications and consumer patronage at the 0.05 significance level.

Data Presentation

The findings of this study are presented in tabular form and analysed in terms of frequencies and percentages.

Table 1. *Extent residents are exposed to digital marketing communications of fashion products platforms they access*

Options	Frequency	Percentage%
Daily	214	56
Weekly	40	10
Occasionally	70	18
Rarely	60	16

Note: $n=384$

Data on table 1 above indicates that a majority of respondents (56%) are exposed to digital marketing communications of fashion products daily, with a further 10% exposed weekly, meaning 66% encounter such content at least once a week. This indicates that most residents in

Eket experience frequent, near-routine exposure to fashion-related digital marketing, rather than occasional or rare contact.

Table 2. Responses on where respondents mostly come across digital marketing content about fashion products

Options	Frequency	Percentage%
Social Media	175	46
E-commerce websites	80	21
Influencers promotions and endorsements	50	13
Email marketing	43	11
SMS and phone calls	36	9

Note: $n=384$

Table 2 points that 175 (46%) respondents said they mostly came across digital marketing content about fashion products on Social Media. This confirms social media as the dominant channel through which Eket residents encounter digital marketing content on fashion products.

Table 3. Perceived influence of digital marketing communications on respondents' patronage of fashion products

Options	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	WMS	Decision
Increase my awareness of fashion products which makes me purchase them	152	181	38	13	384	3.23	Accept
Increase my trust in specific brands of fashion products and encourages me to patronize	608	543	76	13	1240	3.28	Accept
It makes fashion products more accessible which leads to patronage	175	159	32	18	384	3.28	Accept
It has no influence on my patronage.	700	477	64	18	1259	3.28	Accept
	194	150	35	5	384	3.39	Accept
	776	450	70	5	1301	3.39	Accept
	32	15	187	150	384	1.84	Reject
	128	45	374	150	697	1.84	Reject

Note: $n=384$

Findings presented in Table 3 indicate that respondents largely agree that digital marketing communications shape their patronage of fashion products, with weighted mean scores of 3.23, 3.28, and 3.39 recorded for awareness, brand trust, and accessibility respectively, all well above the 2.50 criterion. The last item, which claimed digital marketing has "no influence" on patronage, was rejected with a low mean score of 1.84.

Table 4. Most effective digital marketing communication channels for promoting fashion products to Eket residents

Options	Frequency	Percentage%
Fashion products displayed on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, X, and including Youtube	164	43
Ads displayed on search engine pages like e-commerce websites	42	11
Promotions by celebrities or social media personalities for a fashion brand	91	24
Personalised emails with fashion products promotions	47	12
Fashion products and ads displayed in a mobile app	40	10

Note: $n=384$

Table 4 identified social media platforms as the most effective channel for promoting fashion products, with 43% of respondents rating it highest, followed by celebrity/influencer promotions (24%) and personalised emails (12%). Search engine ads (11%) and mobile app placements (10%) were rated least effective, suggesting Eket residents respond more strongly to social and personality-driven promotion than to more passive or automated digital formats.

Table 5. Responses on if respondents made a purchase after seeing a fashion product being promoted via any digital marketing channel

Options	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes, respondents made a purchase after seeing a fashion product being promoted via any digital marketing channel	220	57
No, respondents didn't make a purchase after seeing a fashion product being promoted via any digital marketing channel	164	43

Note: $n=384$

Table 5 showed that the number of respondents who made a purchase after seeing a fashion product being promoted via any digital marketing channel 220 (57%) respondents followed by 164 (43%) respondents who didn't make any purchase.

Table 6. Factors respondents think has a greater impact on the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in driving patronage of fashion products

Options	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	WMS	Decision
Engaging and visually appealing image, text and video advertisements	133	190	46	15	384	3.15	Accept
Discounts, free delivery and other special offers	532	570	92	15	1209		
Positive online reviews and testimonials	157	181	34	12	384	3.35	Accept
	628	543	68	12	1251		
Active and strong online presence	162	154	52	16	384	3.20	Accept
	648	462	104	16	1230		
Influencer and celebrity endorsement and promotion of the products	145	160	59	20	384	3.12	Accept
	580	480	118	20	1198		
	136	175	55	18	384	3.12	Accept
	544	525	110	18	1197		

Note: $n=384$

The results in Table 6 present discounts and special offers recorded the highest influence (3.35), followed by online reviews (3.20) and visual content (3.15), while influencer endorsement and online presence ranked lowest (3.12 each). This suggests price-based incentives matter more to Eket consumers than aesthetics or influencer appeal.

Test of Hypothesis

H0 - There is no significant relationship between increased exposure to digital marketing communications and the patronage of fashion products by Eket residents.

H1 - There is a significant relationship between increased exposure to digital marketing and the patronage of fashion products by Eket residents

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was adopted to test the hypothesis stated above. The method was adopted because it is appropriate for determining the degree and direction of association between two coded variables. The variables were measured based on the responses obtained from the questionnaire and analysed tables.

The data on Table 1, showing how often respondents see advertisements for fashion products on the digital platforms they access, represents exposure to digital marketing communications and was labelled as variable X. The data on Table 5, showing whether respondents had made a purchase after seeing a fashion product being promoted via any digital marketing channel, represents patronage of fashion products and was labelled as variable Y.

Exposure to digital marketing communications (X) was coded from the frequency with which respondents saw advertisements for fashion products on the digital platforms they accessed. Daily was coded 4, Weekly 3, Occasionally 2 and Rarely 1. Mean patronage (Y) was obtained by calculating the average patronage response for respondents within each exposure category. The resulting mean patronage values were 1.5 for respondents exposed to fashion advertisements daily, 1.7 for those exposed weekly, 1.2 for those exposed occasionally, and 1.0 for those rarely exposed. These grouped mean patronage values were subsequently used as the Y values in the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The study used 384 valid respondents for the analysis.

Table 7. *Correlation between Exposure to Digital Marketing Communications and Patronage of Fashion Products among Residents*

f (Frequency)	X (Exposure)	Y (Mean Patronage)	fx	fy	fx ²	fy ²	fXY
214	4	1.5	856	321	3,424	481.5	1,284
40	3	1.7	120	68	360	115.6	204
70	2	1.2	140	84	280	100.8	168
60	1	1.0	60	60	60	60	60
384	Total		ΣX = 1,176	ΣY = 533	ΣX ² = 4,124	ΣY ² = 757.9	ΣXY = 1,716

Table 7 presents the correlation between exposure to digital marketing communications and patronage of fashion products among Eket residents. The result produced a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.861$, indicating a strong positive relationship between exposure to digital marketing communications and patronage of fashion products. The positive direction of the coefficient indicates that greater exposure to digital marketing communications is associated with higher patronage of fashion products among the respondents. For each grouped observation, XY represents the product of the corresponding X and Y values, X² represents the squared X value, and Y² represents the squared Y value. The corrected total for ΣX² is 4,124, obtained from 3,424 + 360 + 280 + 60 = 4,124.

$$\text{PPMCC: } r = \frac{N \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[N \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2] [N \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Where:

r = correlation coefficient

N = number of respondents

X = coded values of exposure to digital marketing

Y = coded values of patronage of fashion products

Substituting into the Pearson formula:

$$r = \frac{[384(1716) - (1176)(533)]}{\sqrt{[384(4124) - (1176)^2] [384(757.9) - (533)^2]}}$$

$$r = \frac{32,136}{37,327,86}$$
$$r = 0.861$$

To determine significance of the correlation coefficient was assessed using the t-transformation

$$t = \frac{r\sqrt{N-2}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}}$$
$$= \frac{0.861 \times \sqrt{384-2}}{\sqrt{1-(0.861)^2}}$$
$$= \frac{0.861 \times 19.545}{\sqrt{0.2587}}$$
$$= 33.09$$

Degrees of freedom (df) = $N - 2 = 384 - 2 = 382$

Two-tailed p-value = <0.0001

The significance test produced a t-value of 33.09 with 382 degrees of freedom and a two-tailed p-value of less than 0.0001. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between exposure to digital marketing communications and patronage of fashion products among Eket residents.

Decision rule

Reject H_0 if $p < 0.05$. Fail to reject H_0 if $p \geq 0.05$.

Decision: Since p is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the data presented, the following are the findings of the study: Residents (214, 56%) see advertisements for fashion products on the digital platforms they access on a daily basis against 70 respondents who see advertisements for fashion products on the digital platforms they access occasionally. This shows that most respondents are exposed to the digital marketing communications of fashion products to a large extent. This finding agrees with that of Bassey and Ufot (2023) who found that the majority of respondents had exposure to digital marketing campaigns especially on social media. From this study, it was observed that residents who were also part of the respondents have access to smartphones and the internet. As a result, they are exposed to digital marketing campaigns of fashion businesses in the form of social media marketing, search engine optimisation and marketing, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing where product ads pop up as certain mobile apps are launched.

The findings also reveal that residents (175, 46%) mostly come across digital marketing contents about fashion products on social media which means that fashion brands mostly used social media to advertise and promote their products with some variance of e-commerce websites, influencers promotion, email marketing, SMS and phone calls. This is in line with Chen and Qasim, (2021) confirmation that there has been a remarkable growth in the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook in recent times. According to Chaffey (2024),



social media provides lots of opportunities for organisations to reach, interact with, convert, and engage users. Ebrahim (2020) also confirms that organisations must consider social media as a very important tool of digital marketing if they want to survive in the online marketplace.

To also support these assertions, Hafez (2021) opines that social media marketing promotes communication between organisations and their customers, which also helps in increasing brand awareness. Social media has the quality of providing a platform where customers can give their honest feedback through direct messages, comments and posts. Tied to the gratifications theory, the findings suggest Eket residents are not simply encountering fashion content passively, but are gravitating toward the platform that most efficiently bundles multiple gratifications into a single browsing experience, consistent with the theory's core claim that media selection is motivated and purposive rather than incidental. Findings from table 3 reinforces that digital marketing communications influenced patronage mainly by improving product accessibility (WMS = 3.39), building brand trust (3.28), and raising awareness (3.23), with respondents firmly rejecting the claim that it had no influence (WMS = 1.84), a pattern consistent with the strong positive correlation ($r = 0.861$) established in the hypothesis test.

Findings from the study also indicate that digital marketing communications had a significant influence on the patronage of fashion products (205, 53%) by increasing their awareness of fashion products which makes them purchase, making fashion products more accessible which leads to patronage, increasing trust in specific brands of fashion products and encouraging the respondents to patronise them. These findings are in accordance with the study Islam (2021) conducted on the impact of digital marketing on patronage of fashion products. In his study, Islam (2021) confirms that when consumers engage with a fashion company's Facebook page, they are positively influenced which makes them become aware of the brand and their organisational activities which in turn persuades the consumer's purchase intentions to change. In this current era, businesses including fashion brands are increasingly digital marketing platforms to advertise their businesses and to reach more customers which can influence their patronage intentions.

Findings indicate that the factors that had a greater influence on the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in driving patronage of fashion products were discounts, free delivery and other special offers (120, 31%). This means that fashion brands and marketers of fashion products should make sure to put these factors into consideration while advertising their products on digital platforms. Ridge (2023) opines that business organisations should recognise what can drag a marketing campaign into ineffectiveness because it is very important to the success of a brand that is involved in digital marketing especially fashion brands. The Theory of Consumer Behaviour provides the best framework for interpreting these findings. The theory posits that consumers are rational decision-makers who seek to maximise satisfaction and value from their choices. Supporting this, Memon, Kazi, Zubedi, and Ansari (2019) confirm that external stimuli such as advertising content and promotional offers play a vital role in shaping consumer actions. Therefore, this theory helps explain why residents respond more positively to incentives like discounts and free delivery, as these align with their rational drive for value and satisfaction. Data in table 6 further reveals that discounts and special offers (WMS = 3.35) had the greatest impact on the effectiveness of digital marketing communications, followed by positive online reviews (3.20) and visually appealing content (3.15), while active online presence and influencer endorsement ranked lowest (3.12 each), though all factors were accepted. This suggests that price-



based incentives and social proof carry more weight with Eket residents than aesthetic appeal or celebrity influence, consistent with the Consumer Behaviour Theory's emphasis on rational, value-driven decision-making.

These findings should also be read against the specific infrastructural and economic conditions shaping digital access in Eket and Nigeria more broadly. As of late 2025, Nigeria's national internet penetration stood at approximately 50%, with broadband penetration still short of the government's 70% target (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2025), meaning the 56% daily exposure rate reported in this study's Table 1 sits close to, and arguably exceeds, national digital access norms, a notable finding for a semi-urban LGA rather than a major commercial city. At the same time, Eket's socioeconomic profile, characterised by variable disposable income and comparatively limited e-commerce logistics infrastructure relative to cities like Lagos or Port Harcourt helps explain why price-sensitive incentives (discounts, free delivery) outperformed purely persuasive content in this study's Table 6 findings. These contextual factors position Eket's findings as broadly consistent with national digital marketing trends, while also reflecting locally specific economic constraints that shape how digital exposure translates into actual patronage.

The hypothesis testing results provide strong empirical support for the relationship this study set out to examine. The Pearson correlation analysis produced $r = 0.861$, $t(382) = 33.09$, $p < 0.0001$, indicating not merely a statistically significant relationship, but a strong positive one between exposure to digital marketing communications and patronage of fashion products among Eket residents. Statistical significance here confirms that the relationship observed is highly unlikely to be due to chance; practical significance goes further, asking how much this relationship actually matters in real terms. With $r = 0.861$, the coefficient of determination (r^2) is approximately 0.741, meaning that roughly 74% of the variation in patronage across exposure groups is associated with differences in exposure frequency. This is a substantively large effect, not merely a statistically detectable one. Thus, this distinction matters because with a sample as large as 384, even trivially small relationships can register as statistically significant; here, the size of the effect itself, not just its significance, supports the conclusion that exposure meaningfully tracks with patronage.

Conclusion

In light of the findings, a significant proportion of respondents were exposed to digital marketing of fashion products, mainly through social media. This frequent, socially-driven exposure supports the Uses and Gratifications Theory, as residents' preference for social media over more passive channels suggests deliberate, need-driven media use rather than incidental exposure. The results also show that digital marketing communications significantly influenced patronage, primarily by building awareness that shaped purchasing decisions, a relationship confirmed by a strong positive correlation. Social media emerged as the most effective channel, while discounts, free delivery, and other special offers were the strongest factors driving effectiveness, ahead of visual appeal or influencer endorsement. This supports the Consumer Behaviour Theory: respondents acted as rational, value-seeking consumers, responding more to tangible incentives than persuasive appeal alone. Ultimately, this study establishes that increased exposure to digital marketing communications significantly influences the patronage of fashion products.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this work, the following recommendations have been made;



1. Fashion brands should prioritise digital marketing communications to reach consumers since there is a high exposure to digital marketing among respondents.
2. Given that social media accounted for the highest share of both exposure (46%) and effectiveness (43%), fashion brands should channel the bulk of their marketing budget and creative effort into social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, rather than distributing resources evenly across email, search engines, or mobile apps.
3. Fashion brands should focus on developing awareness-driven digital marketing strategies of their products as this was a key influence of patronage among respondents.
4. Fashion brands should allocate resources to social media marketing since it is the most effective in promoting fashion products. To achieve this, Fashion brands should create a digital marketing team whose primary function should be to plan and execute digital marketing campaigns.
5. Fashion brands should incorporate incentives like discounts, free delivery, and special offers into their digital marketing campaigns since these factors significantly influenced patronage of fashion products among respondents.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used an AI-based large language model developed by Google to help refine the writing, structural flow, and formatting of this paper. Specifically, the AI assisted in improving clarity, organizing the academic sections, polishing the descriptions of methods, and ensuring the references follow APA 7th edition formatting guidelines. Following the use of this tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited the content as needed. All original concepts, research questions and data remain entirely owned by the authors. The authors assume full responsibility and accountability for the final content, integrity, and accuracy of this published article.
