

## **The Influence of Social Media Platforms on E-Commerce Promotion in Cross River State: The Calabar Experience, 1999-2023**

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*Abstract— This study investigates the influence of social media on e-commerce in Calabar, analyzing how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter (now X) have revolutionized company practices and customer interaction in the digital economy. As internet and mobile technology proliferate in Calabar, Cross River State, social media has emerged as an essential instrument for entrepreneurs, small and medium companies (SMEs), and large corporations to promote products, expand their reach, and streamline transactions. The research examines the degree to which social media impacts consumer behaviour, brand visibility, and business expansion in the local setting. It evaluates the techniques utilized by enterprises to capitalize on these platforms and the obstacles they encounter, including trust, digital literacy, and logistical concerns. The study employs an interdisciplinary methodology that includes surveys, interviews, and online content analysis to furnish empirical data regarding user interaction, engagement levels, and conversion rates associated with social media marketing. Research indicates that social media has markedly improved the visibility and operational efficacy of numerous e-commerce enterprises in Calabar; however, obstacles persist in infrastructure and trust development.*

**Keywords:** Social Media; Calabar; E-commerce; Facebook; Instagram.

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## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has revolutionized company interactions with customers, product marketing, and transaction facilitation. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (previously Twitter), and WhatsApp have transformed from simple communication tools into essential elements of global trade (Chaffey, 2022). These platforms function as economical marketing channels, customer support centres, and marketplaces, facilitating connections between buyers and sellers. E-commerce, denoting the transaction of products and services over digital platforms, has shown remarkable expansion globally, especially in the 21st century. The incorporation of social media into e-commerce in Nigeria has profoundly transformed consumer behaviour, corporate strategy, and market dynamics. Calabar has experienced swift urbanization and technical progress in the last twenty years. This expansion has propelled the utilization of digital channels for commercial endeavours.

Social media has become a principal catalyst for e-commerce in the city, equipping firms with resources to access broader audiences and interact with customers in novel ways. Businesses, from tiny vendors to huge corporations, now employ platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to display their products, engage with customers, and facilitate transactions (Ekong, 2008).

This period, spanning 1999–2023, has seen notable developments in Calabar's digital economy. The proliferation of affordable smartphones and increasing access to the internet have created a conducive environment for e-commerce to thrive (Poushter et al., 2019). Social media has not only enhanced marketing efforts but has also enabled businesses to collect customer feedback, analyze market trends, and build brand loyalty. Furthermore, social media influencers and digital content creators have played significant roles in promoting products and services, thereby boosting sales and cultivating consumer confidence. Notwithstanding these gains, difficulties, including insufficient infrastructure, cybersecurity issues, and weak regulatory frameworks, endure. Nevertheless, the significance of social media in facilitating e-commerce in Calabar is a vital subject of investigation, considering its ramifications for economic advancement, youth employment, and entrepreneurial innovation within the city. This study examines the dynamics of social media's impact on e-commerce growth in Calabar during the last twenty years.

## ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media platforms have become essential to contemporary communication, networking, and information distribution, influencing personal, societal, and global connections. These platforms are virtual environments where users engage, disseminate material, and partake in diverse forms of online interaction. Since their emergence in

the early 2000s, social media platforms have transformed into potent instruments impacting sectors including marketing, education, politics, and entertainment. They furnish users with instruments to generate, disseminate, and engage with material, enabling instantaneous communication and promoting worldwide connectivity. A key element of social media platforms is their varied purposes and functionalities. Platforms like Facebook, established in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, originally aimed at connecting individuals but have subsequently broadened to encompass business marketing, e-commerce, and community development (Blessing, 2020).

Likewise, Instagram, launched in 2010, focuses on photo and video sharing and has incorporated tools like Stories and Reels to foster user engagement artistically. Founded in 2006, Twitter is distinguished for its microblogging format, where conciseness intersects with immediacy, rendering it an essential instrument for news distribution and public dialogue. These platforms serve particular niches while concurrently enhancing their features to maintain relevance and competitiveness, expanding their features to remain relevant and competitive.

Another significant aspect of social media is its role in fostering community engagement and interaction. Platforms like Reddit and Discord allow users to create and join communities centred around shared interests, while LinkedIn provides a professional networking space for career development and industry-related interactions. These platforms enable individuals and organizations to collaborate across borders, creating opportunities for innovation, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. The economic implications of social media platforms cannot be underestimated. Companies leverage these platforms for targeted advertising, utilizing algorithms to tailor content to users' preferences. Social media advertising revenue has grown exponentially, with platforms like Facebook and YouTube generating billions of dollars annually through advertising placements and sponsored content. Influencer marketing has become a key strategy for brands, leveraging the rich credibility of online influencers to promote their products and services (Charles, 2008). This has democratized brand promotion, allowing small businesses to compete alongside large corporations in reaching diverse audiences. While social media platforms offer numerous benefits, they also raise critical concerns. Privacy issues, misinformation, and cyberbullying are persistent challenges (Zuboff, 2019). Platforms often collect vast amounts of user data, sparking debates about data security and the ethical use of information.

Efforts to mitigate these challenges include stricter regulations, improved content moderation policies, and public awareness campaigns. The influence of social media on culture and society is profound. Platforms shape popular culture by promoting trends, memes, and viral content that transcend geographic boundaries. They also serve as outlets for self-expression, where users craft digital identities and connect with like-minded individuals. However, the curated nature of social media content can lead to

unrealistic standards, particularly in areas like beauty, success, and lifestyle, which may affect users' mental health. Studies have linked excessive social media use to anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem, highlighting the need for balanced consumption (Twenge, 2020). Social media's global reach and adaptability ensure its continued evolution and influence. Emerging platforms like TikTok have disrupted the market with short-form, algorithm-driven video content, appealing particularly to younger audiences.

As technology advances, future platforms are expected to integrate augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) to create more immersive and personalized experiences (Kaplan & Michael, 2010). These innovations will likely redefine user interactions and expand the possibilities for communication and engagement. Social media platforms are dynamic entities that have reshaped communication, commerce, and culture. While they offer unparalleled opportunities for connection and innovation, they also demand responsible use and governance to address associated challenges. Their evolution will continue to influence the digital landscape, making them indispensable to contemporary life.

## **EVOLUTION OF E-COMMERCE IN CALABAR**

The evolution of e-commerce in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, reflects the global shift toward digital trade while also showcasing unique local adaptations. Calabar's journey into the e-commerce space is relatively recent, fueled by increasing internet penetration, growing technology literacy, and the demand for convenience in trade. Although the adoption of e-commerce in Calabar initially lagged behind major Nigerian cities such as Lagos and Abuja, it has gained significant momentum in the past decade, driven by a combination of private and public sector initiatives. The foundational phase of e-commerce in Calabar began in early 2010 with the proliferation of mobile phones and internet access. As telecommunication companies expanded their coverage to include Calabar and its environs, more residents gained access to affordable data services, creating a fertile ground for digital trade.

Local businesses, which traditionally relied on physical shops and markets such as the Watt Market, began exploring online platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to reach a broader audience. This period marked the informal beginning of e-commerce, where small-scale entrepreneurs and artisans used social media to connect with customers and advertise their products (Bail, 2022). A significant turning point came with the entry of national e-commerce giants such as Jumia and Konga into Calabar's market. These platforms introduced residents to structured online shopping, complete with payment gateways and delivery services. While their initial reach was limited due to infrastructural challenges such as poor road networks and unreliable postal services, they spurred local entrepreneurs to develop localized e-commerce solutions tailored to

the peculiarities of Calabar. For example, local delivery startups emerged to bridge the gap between online orders and physical delivery, often employing motorcycles to navigate the city's terrain effectively.

Further growth was fueled by government and private sector interventions aimed at promoting digital literacy and entrepreneurship. Initiatives like the Federal Government ICT Hub, a state-of-art facility commissioned by the Vice President Kashim Shettima, located within the newly refurbished State Library Complex which serves as a hub for digital innovation, business development, and skill acquisition for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), provided young entrepreneurs in Calabar with the skills and resources needed to leverage digital platforms for business. Similarly, the establishment of hubs like LiftHub creates a support system for tech-driven businesses, encouraging the development of e-commerce platforms tailored to local needs. These efforts have played a crucial role in fostering a culture of innovation and digital adoption in Calabar. Another factor contributing to the evolution of e-commerce in Calabar is the increasing trust in online transactions. Initially, many residents were sceptical of digital payments due to concerns about fraud and cybercrime (Bail, 2022).

However, the proliferation of secure payment systems such as Paystack and Flutterwave, alongside public awareness campaigns on cybersecurity, has gradually built consumer confidence. Today, many Calabar residents routinely use mobile banking apps and digital wallets to complete online transactions, reducing dependence on cash and enhancing the e-commerce system. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the growth of e-commerce in Calabar, as lockdowns and social distancing measures forced many businesses to shift online (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Restaurants, grocery stores, and fashion retailers quickly adapted by creating websites and partnering with delivery services. This period witnessed a significant increase in online consumer behaviour, with residents increasingly relying on e-commerce platforms for essential goods and services.

Additionally, remote working trends further entrenched the role of digital platforms in everyday life, as individuals sought convenience and safety in online interactions. The evolution of e-commerce in Calabar is a testament to the city's adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit. From its humble beginnings with social media sales to a more structured system supported by national and local platforms, Calabar's e-commerce journey mirrors broader global trends while reflecting unique local dynamics. Continued investments in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and entrepreneurial training will further solidify Calabar's position as a thriving hub for e-commerce in southern Nigeria.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND E-COMMERCE IN CALABAR METROPOLIS**

The relationship between social media and e-commerce has grown increasingly intertwined, redefining how businesses engage with consumers and conduct transactions. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, serve as virtual marketplaces where businesses and customers interact seamlessly. This integration has led to the emergence of social commerce, which combines the networking capabilities of social media with the transactional functions of e-commerce. The result is an innovative model that promotes brand awareness, drives sales, and enhances customer engagement. One of the most significant contributions of social media to e-commerce is its unparalleled ability to foster brand visibility. Social media platforms host millions of users daily, providing businesses with vast audiences to showcase their products and services. By using targeted advertising algorithms, businesses can tailor their marketing campaigns to specific demographics, ensuring that their products reach the right audience. This ability to reach consumers based on their preferences and online behaviours is a hallmark of social media marketing and has been instrumental in the rapid growth of e-commerce. In Nigeria, for example, the increasing penetration of platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp has allowed small-scale entrepreneurs to gain visibility and compete with larger firms. Social media also plays a pivotal role in creating interactive and engaging customer experiences (Obi, 2021).

Unlike traditional advertising media, platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow for two-way communication between businesses and their customers. This interaction helps build trust and loyalty, essential components for sustaining e-commerce growth. Consumers are not only able to leave reviews but also engage directly with brands through comments, likes, and direct messages. Such engagement fosters a sense of community and provides valuable feedback for businesses to refine their offerings. Local entrepreneurs in Nigeria often rely on these interactions to establish trust with their customers, as many buyers are wary of fraudulent practices in online transactions. The power of social media influencers further strengthens their relationship with e-commerce. Influencers, who command large followings on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, often partner with businesses to promote products to their audience. These collaborations are highly effective because they leverage the trust that influencers have built with their followers.

In turn, followers are more likely to purchase recommended products. This trend is especially pronounced in Nigeria, where influencers like Tacha and Sabinus have transformed the advertising landscape, driving significant traffic to e-commerce websites and social media storefronts. Moreover, social media platforms have integrated e-commerce functionalities directly into their interfaces, enabling seamless shopping experiences. Features like "Shop Now" buttons, in-app payment options, and personalized product recommendations have simplified the purchasing process.

Platforms such as Facebook Marketplace and Instagram Shops allow users to browse, compare, and purchase items without leaving the app.

These integrations enhance convenience, which is a critical driver of online shopping behaviour. Nigerian businesses have embraced these tools, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift to digital commerce as physical stores faced restrictions. Social media has become an indispensable tool for e-commerce, bridging the gap between businesses and consumers. Its ability to enhance brand visibility, foster customer engagement, and simplify transactions underscores its transformative impact on the global marketplace (Okonkwo, 2022). In Nigeria, where digital commerce is rapidly growing, social media offers unique opportunities for businesses to thrive. However, addressing trust and regulatory challenges is essential to unlock its full potential.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR E-COMMERCE PROMOTION**

Social media has transformed the e-commerce landscape by offering platforms to engage with customers, promote products, and drive sales. Key social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, TikTok, and LinkedIn serve as integral components of modern e-commerce promotion. These platforms provide businesses with the opportunity to reach global audiences, build brand awareness, and cultivate customer loyalty (Okonkwo, 2018).

**Facebook:** Facebook continues to be an important platform for e-commerce promotion globally and within Nigeria, driven by its expansive reach of over 2.8 billion monthly active users. The platform integrates diverse tools, such as Facebook Shops, Marketplace, and targeted advertising, enabling businesses to present products effectively and facilitate transactions seamlessly. These features, coupled with Facebook Ads Manager's advanced segmentation capabilities, empower businesses to target audiences based on parameters like geography, interests, and demographics, ensuring a high degree of precision and relevance in their promotional strategies. In Nigeria, where e-commerce faces infrastructure challenges like delivery and a lack of ground personnel, Facebook has become an invaluable tool for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Entrepreneurs use it to promote cultural and artisanal products to niche markets, taking advantage of the platform's accessibility and cost-effective promotional tools. The ability to reach specific local communities while simultaneously accessing global markets underscores its utility in a country with a rapidly growing digital economy. Studies from Calabar, such as Asuquo's work on social media and small business growth, highlight Facebook's transformative impact on local enterprises. Asuquo emphasized that businesses leveraging Facebook experience increased customer

engagement, particularly in urban areas like Calabar, where mobile internet penetration is high. Similarly, Ekong explores how the platform enhances visibility for artisans and cultural businesses, providing them with a competitive edge in niche markets. These findings align with global trends, suggesting that Facebook's e-commerce functionalities are not just tools for transactions but mechanisms for socio-economic inclusion (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). By bridging digital divides and empowering local businesses, Facebook continues to influence the e-commerce landscape in significant ways.

**Instagram:** Over the years, Instagram has emerged as a powerful platform for brands, leveraging its visual-centric design to craft compelling narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. The platform's emphasis on high-quality imagery and dynamic video content, including reels, provides brands with creative tools to showcase their products in visually appealing formats. This aligns with the increasing consumer preference for visually stimulating content, which fosters greater engagement and emotional connection with brands. The platform's integrated shopping features significantly enhance its utility for businesses.

Tools such as product tagging in posts and Stories streamline the consumer journey by linking directly to product pages. This facilitates immediate action from consumers, bridging the gap between discovery and purchase, thus contributing to higher conversion rates. Such seamless functionality is particularly advantageous for small and medium-sized enterprises, which can now reach global audiences without the need for extensive e-commerce infrastructures. One notable strength of Instagram is its robust influencer marketing system. By partnering with influencers who have established credibility and trust among their followers, brands can tap into existing networks of loyal consumers. Studies indicate that younger demographics, especially Generation Z and Millennials, are more inclined to trust peer-like recommendations over traditional advertising (Umeh, 2020).

This is evident in the Nigerian fashion industry, where designers and entrepreneurs utilize Instagram to market Ankara styles and accessories. Through visually engaging campaigns, these creators not only showcase their cultural heritage but also appeal to global audiences, effectively using the platform to penetrate international markets. Instagram's visual storytelling capabilities, coupled with its shopping features and influencer system, make it an indispensable tool for modern branding. Nigerian designers exemplify its potential by blending cultural artistry with digital innovation, creating narratives that transcend geographical boundaries. However, leveraging Instagram effectively requires a nuanced understanding of its algorithms and audience engagement strategies.



**Twitter:** Twitter, as a microblogging platform, has evolved into a vital tool for businesses seeking real-time engagement with their audiences. The immediacy of Twitter enables businesses to partake in instant conversations, respond to customer queries, and conduct promotional activities, such as flash sales. These features underscore the platform's suitability for dynamic customer interaction and brand visibility. Twitter's ability to facilitate conversations through trending hashtags is one of its many noteworthy benefits. During campaigns or events, hashtags serve as connectors that let companies interact with larger audiences. In addition to increasing awareness, this tool helps brands create a sense of community.

Businesses can successfully place themselves into pertinent discourses by utilizing popular subjects throughout Nigeria's cultural or technical events. In Nigeria, Twitter has emerged as a strategic asset, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the technology and service sectors. These sectors, dominated by urban, tech-savvy customers, benefit from Twitter's wide reach and real-time nature. For instance, tech startups in Calabar, like Denis Web Design and other metropolitan areas, use Twitter to market their services, engage in industry discussions, and solicit feedback from their target audience. This trend aligns with the growing digitalization of the Nigerian economy, where social media platforms increasingly serve as critical channels for commerce and networking.

The real-time aspect of Twitter is particularly useful for managing customer relationships. By promptly addressing complaints or inquiries, businesses can demonstrate reliability and customer-centric values. In Calabar, SMEs leveraging Twitter to handle customer inquiries not only enhance their service delivery but also build trust, thereby cultivating loyalty within their customer base (Umeh, 2020). Twitter's utility as a real-time engagement tool offers immense benefits for Nigerian businesses, particularly in urban centres like Calabar. By embracing its features, such as hashtags and real-time responsiveness, SMEs can enhance their visibility and customer relations.

**TikTok:** This has emerged as a transformative force in e-commerce, blending entertainment and marketing to redefine consumer engagement. Its short-form video format encourages creativity and fosters an environment where businesses can present products innovatively. Tutorials, product demonstrations, and user-generated reviews dominate the platform, creating a unique form of advertising that feels more organic than traditional promotional techniques. This format aligns with the preferences of individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, as well as millennial audiences, who value authenticity and relatability in brand interactions. The platform's ability to convert viewers into customers is further enhanced by integrated features such as in-app shopping and hashtag challenges. These tools enable businesses to seamlessly

bridge the gap between entertainment and commerce. Hashtag challenges, for instance, foster participation and virality, enabling brands to amplify their reach exponentially. In the Nigerian context, where mobile internet penetration is on the rise, TikTok provides a crucial avenue for businesses to tap into the expanding e-commerce market. Nigeria's e-commerce sector has experienced exponential growth, driven by an increasing number of digital-savvy youth (Oladipo, 2019).

TikTok's profound resonance with this demographic renders it an indispensable platform for businesses seeking to establish a robust online retail presence, thereby capitalizing on the app's vast and engaged user base. Calabar, in particular, demonstrates this trend, with its vibrant urban population actively engaging in digital marketplaces. Research on youth consumer behaviour in Calabar indicates a strong preference for visually engaging and interactive content, underscoring TikTok's relevance. TikTok's fusion of entertainment and commerce offers unparalleled opportunities for businesses to engage younger consumers, particularly in urban centres like Calabar. By leveraging its innovative features and understanding the cultural dynamics of the Nigerian market, TikTok can serve as a potent tool for driving e-commerce growth in the region.

### **CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN PROMOTING E-COMMERCE IN CALABAR**

Social media has revolutionized e-commerce by providing businesses with direct access to a wide audience. However, its use is not without challenges. This research explores three major challenges: algorithm dependency, cybersecurity risks, and customer trust issues, which significantly impact e-commerce performance. The reliance on social media algorithms is a significant challenge for businesses engaging in e-commerce in Calabar. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok serve as essential tools for local businesses to reach customers, but their algorithms often limit organic visibility, creating barriers for sustained engagement. Social media algorithms determine the content that users see based on factors such as engagement, relevance, and user preferences. These algorithms frequently evolve, requiring businesses to continually adapt their strategies. For instance, a shift in platform preference from static images to short-form videos, such as Instagram Reels or TikTok content, forces businesses in Calabar to invest in creating engaging videos to remain relevant. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate Calabar's economy, this constant need for adjustment poses financial and operational challenges (Ibekwe, 2021).

Furthermore, organic reach on social media has been steadily declining. The research observes that organic reach for business accounts on Facebook is only 5.2% of their total followers. This limitation significantly affects businesses in Calabar, where many rely on Facebook as their primary marketing platform. Without paid advertisements, their

content often fails to reach a wide audience. However, with limited marketing budgets, especially for small businesses, the additional cost of boosting posts or running paid campaigns can strain resources. This dependency on algorithms also creates inequities among businesses in Calabar. Larger enterprises with more resources can afford consistent paid promotions, gaining visibility over smaller competitors. For instance, a well-funded retail outlet in Calabar might dominate the local market by leveraging frequent paid ads, leaving smaller retailers struggling to compete for attention. Algorithm dependency remains a critical issue for social media e-commerce in Calabar. While platforms provide opportunities to reach a global audience, the need for consistent adaptation, financial investment, and strategic planning presents significant challenges, particularly for small businesses. Policymakers and local business associations should consider providing training and funding opportunities to help businesses overcome these barriers.

E-commerce businesses operating on social media in Calabar are increasingly vulnerable to cybersecurity risks, reflecting a global trend of rising cybercrime. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are popular in Calabar, particularly among small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) leveraging these tools to reach customers. However, the convenience of social media as a marketplace is accompanied by significant cybersecurity challenges, including data breaches, hacking, and phishing attacks. Cybercriminals frequently target social media accounts to steal sensitive customer data or impersonate businesses to defraud customers. For instance, attackers may create fake profiles resembling legitimate businesses to solicit payments from unsuspecting customers. These risks are compounded by the limited cybersecurity awareness among many business owners in Calabar, who may lack the technical knowledge to detect and prevent cyber threats. According to a report by Cybersecurity Ventures, global cybercrime costs are projected to reach \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025, with social media platforms becoming a growing area of concern (Akanbi, 2020). In a digitally evolving city like Calabar, this poses a significant threat to the trust and growth of e-commerce businesses.

For small businesses in Calabar, the financial and reputational impact of cyberattacks can be devastating. A single data breach or fraudulent transaction can lead to severe financial losses, a damaged reputation, and a loss of customer trust. Customers who fall victim to scams may avoid patronizing the affected business, further compounding the economic impact. Unfortunately, many businesses in Calabar operate without robust security systems, making them easy targets for cybercriminals. While social media provides a valuable platform for e-commerce in Calabar, the associated cybersecurity risks cannot be ignored.

Building customer trust remains a critical challenge for e-commerce businesses in Calabar, as the proliferation of fake accounts, scams, and counterfeit products on social

media platforms has led to heightened scepticism among consumers. Social media has become a popular avenue for businesses in Calabar to market and sell products due to its wide reach and cost-effectiveness. However, concerns over fraud, poor-quality products, and lack of authenticity undermine consumer confidence, posing significant barriers to growth in the local e-commerce space. A notable issue is the rise of fraudulent vendors using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to exploit unsuspecting buyers (Nkanga, 2021). These fake accounts often advertise high-demand items at unusually low prices, only to deliver substandard goods or disappear after payment. This has created a culture of distrust, where many potential customers are hesitant to engage in online transactions without verifiable assurances of credibility. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported that social media scams accounted for over \$1.2 billion in losses globally in 2022, a trend mirrored in Calabar's growing digital economy. For new and emerging businesses in Calabar, the challenge is compounded by their lack of established brand presence and minimal customer reviews. Unlike larger companies with well-known reputations, these businesses must work harder to prove their authenticity.

Consumers often prefer to purchase from familiar or heavily endorsed vendors, leaving newer players struggling to gain a foothold in the market. Offering quality assurance measures, such as clear return policies and money-back guarantees, is another effective way to alleviate consumer fears. Collaborations with trusted local influencers can also boost credibility, as their endorsements often carry significant weight within the community. While customer trust issues pose a significant challenge to e-commerce businesses in Calabar, implementing transparency, encouraging customer reviews, and fostering engagement can help mitigate these concerns, ultimately driving growth in the local digital economy.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**

This presents significant prospects for business expansion, facilitating platforms for improved brand visibility, consumer interaction, and data-informed decision-making. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok offer accurate demographic targeting, allowing businesses to engage with prospective clients across various regions based on age, location, interests, and purchase behaviour. A tiny fashion enterprise in Calabar can leverage these platforms to promote its items to consumers in Lagos, Accra, Nairobi, or even New York. Utilizing technologies such as sponsored advertisements and boosted posts, these enterprises can access remote markets with less expenditure relative to conventional advertising methods. A local enterprise specializing in traditional Nigerian garments might disseminate captivating material, such as movies highlighting its designs, utilizing the viral potential of social media to garner attention and cultivate a devoted customer base outside the local market. The shareability of

social media material is a crucial factor in market penetration. When customers interact with a post through liking, commenting, or sharing, the Businesses benefit from organic reach as the information is disseminated to a broader network of prospective purchasers. This enables firms in Calabar to expand their audience significantly without incurring extra expenses.

Data indicates that companies utilizing social media advertising had a 33% rise in foreign sales over two years, highlighting its effectiveness in facilitating global market growth (Kumar et al., 2022). The capacity of social media to expand worldwide reach and enable market penetration has rendered it essential for corporate success in Calabar (Nkanga, 2021). By effectively utilizing these platforms, local entrepreneurs and SMEs may compete globally, transforming their enterprises into internationally renowned brands with minimal capital expenditure. Social media has become a potent instrument for enterprises in Calabar to augment client engagement and cultivate loyalty. Interactive elements like live chats, comment sections, and stories enable firms in Calabar to address client issues swiftly, deliver tailored service, and get significant insights into consumer preferences. Numerous local enterprises, including restaurants and retail establishments, use Facebook to engage with consumers, respond to inquiries, and advertise new items or services. This immediate interaction not only elevates client happiness but also improves the brand's image as approachable and customer-focused.

One notable example is the use of Twitter for customer service. Several businesses in Calabar, including telecommunication service providers and e-commerce platforms, address customer complaints and queries on Twitter within hours. This swift response to issues significantly improves brand perception and builds trust. Research from Sprout Social underscores this trend, revealing that 64% of consumers prefer brands that engage actively with their audience on social media. Moreover, engaging content such as polls, contests, and user-generated posts has proven to be an effective strategy for creating a sense of community around brands in Calabar.

For example, local fashion brands and event organizers often run social media contests where customers can showcase their style or share experiences, generating excitement and fostering a deeper connection to the brand. These interactions encourage customer retention and build loyalty by making customers feel valued and involved. Furthermore, satisfied customers in Calabar often transform into advocates who promote brands through word-of-mouth and social shares. The ripple effect of positive feedback and testimonials on social media can attract new customers and strengthen the brand's reputation. Businesses that actively engage their customers online create a network of loyal patrons who help sustain growth in a competitive market. Social media has revolutionised customer engagement in Calabar, enabling businesses to foster stronger relationships with their customers.

By embracing real-time communication and interactive content, businesses can enhance loyalty, create a sense of community, and leverage satisfied customers as advocates for their brands. Evidently, data-driven marketing has emerged as a game-changer for businesses in Calabar, Cross River State, leveraging social media platforms to enhance performance and drive growth. Social media platforms such as Facebook Insights, Instagram Analytics, and Google Ads provide local businesses with valuable metrics, including reach, engagement, and conversion rates. These platforms empower businesses in Calabar to refine their marketing strategies based on real-time consumer behaviour and preferences.

The significance of these analytics tools lies in their ability to provide insights into customer demographics and behaviour. For example, a skincare brand in Calabar can use Facebook Insights to identify the age group or gender most engaged with its content (Ekanem, 2020). With this information, the business can create targeted campaigns that focus on its most active audience, such as running special promotions for young adults or tailoring product launches to meet specific consumer needs. Moreover, social media analytics enable businesses in Calabar to identify trends and adjust their product offerings to match local demand. can build personalized experiences for their customers, enhance engagement, and ultimately improve their bottom line.

## CONCLUSION

Social media platforms significantly enhance e-commerce in Calabar, demonstrating a transformational effect on the city's commercial environment. Social media platforms have transformed business-customer engagement, providing economical and extensive tools for brand visibility, customer involvement, and sales expansion. The swift embrace of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp has enabled enterprises, irrespective of scale, to display their products, engage wider audiences, and cultivate robust online communities. Notwithstanding these achievements, difficulties such as digital illiteracy, erratic internet connectivity, and rivalry within the digital realm endure. Addressing these challenges necessitates cooperative endeavours among enterprises, governmental bodies, and digital marketing specialists to deliver training, enhance infrastructure, and promote innovation in marketing techniques. To maintain success, organizations must consistently adapt to changing trends, invest in focused campaigns, and prioritize consumer connection (Kietzmann et al., 2011). By efficiently leveraging social media, Calabar's e-commerce sector can sustain its growth, empower local entrepreneurs, and foster economic development in the city.

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