

# **EMPOWERING INDUSTRIAL OPERATORS IN THE MIDDLE EAST THROUGH TARGETED DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES**

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## **Abstract**

To reach logical conclusion on how digital marketing can be integrated as part of the operational strategy that improves the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market, this study used systematic review as one of the methodologies for qualitative critical content analysis. As the world becomes increasingly digital, findings of the study revealed that digital marketing tends to become quite essential for improving the effective market performance of most contemporary businesses. Usage of digital marketing enables businesses reach multitudes of consumers using cheap products and easy approaches that reach consumers in any location. This lowers the overall cost of marketing and promotion to spur the business' overall cost competitiveness. Yet as the business' cost competitiveness improves, significant reduction of marketing costs also lowers the general operational costs. This enlarges the business' operational profits to contribute to the increment of the returns on shareholders' value. To achieve such positive outcomes, findings suggest strategic digital marketing would require the utilization of five steps encompassing identification of target audience, competitor landscape analysis, determining digital marketing channels, creating and optimizing digital marketing strategy, creating content and unique value proposition plan and creating and optimizing digital marketing strategy. In the context of such findings, the study concludes with the suggestion of the digital marketing framework that can be integrated as part of the operational strategy that improves the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Traditional Marketing, Strategic Digital Marketing Process, Impact of Digital Marketing on a Firm's Market Performance, and Limitations of Digital Marketing on a Firm's Performance

## **INTRODUCTION**

Even if the use of digital marketing is yet to diffuse across the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market, empirical evidence has so far confirmed digital marketing to improve a firm's effective market performance (Dwivedi et al., 2019). Digital marketing is the strategic process of using a combination of different online technologies and electronic devices to reach different segments of the consumers with different promotional messages (Gustavsen, 2023). It is not only the process requiring the selective use of digital

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technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, social media and search engine optimisation (SEO), but also a strategic process that requires the application of a combination of online tactics to ensure that the promotional messages capture customer attention to influence the attraction and retention of the desired multitudes of customers (Erhan et al., 2024).

Using its Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) tool, digital marketing improves a firm's market dominance by rendering it easy for customers to search, enquire and buy the firm's products. Digital marketing improves a firm's market outreach. Through usage of more attractive content creations and demonstration videos that become viral, digital marketing enables the business reach different wider segments of the global market with their marketing and promotional messages (Behera et al., 2020). Compared with the often more costly traditional TV, radio and newspaper advertisements; digital marketing often lowers the overall marketing costs. This reduces the overall operational costs to improve not only a firm's cost competitiveness, but also the enlargement of the operating profit margin.

Unfortunately even if that is the case, the question as to how digital marketing can be used to bolster the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market is a challenge that most of the executives are still grappling with (Mouraille, 2023). The operators in the industrial automation and equipment market refer to the multitudes of businesses that are involved in the research, innovation and development and selling of heavy industrial automation and equipment like flow meters, process analyzers, pressure transmitters and programmable controllers (Next Move Strategy Consultant, 2024).

Besides meteorological and hydrological monitoring systems and signals, the other industrial equipment that the operators in the industrial automation and equipment market deal in encompasses industrial automation, measurement and information technologies. Though internally, these industrial operators use digital technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning and robotics to improve their operational efficiency, usage of digital marketing technologies is still a challenge (Mordor Intelligence, 2024). Most of the executives have not yet conceptualised how digital marketing can be utilised to bring the products into the digital market (Novatiq, 2024). Developing content and videos that illustrate how certain industrial automation and equipment technologies work, cause some executives to fear that the business can end up spilling the secrets of their products to the competitors. Installation of some heavy industrial automation and equipment technologies like in the oil and gas sector or energy exploration and development require the utilisation of more complex processes and training for the client to understand how such processes work. Hence by developing and using such videos to promote and market the business, some of the executives in the industrial automation and equipment market believe that the business would be offering free services that should have only been exclusively offered to clients that have spent millions (Novatiq, 2024).

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Yet as such business philosophy affects the effective use of digital marketing by most of the operators in the industrial automation and equipment market, the business world is increasingly becoming digital and virtual. This implies to survive and thrive, digitalisation is the way forward for the operators in the industrial and equipment market to not only lower operational costs, but also to reach different segments of consumers. Irrespective of the time and location of customers, digital marketing enables a firm reach wider market segments in the most cost effective and efficient way as possible (Novak & Aditham, 2023).

However, achievement of such outcomes in the industrial automation and equipment market is not only affected by the executives' lack of belief, but also by lack of use of a more effective digital marketing strategy. In most of the cases, some of the operators do not have a clearly defined digital marketing strategy since digital marketing like use of e-mail marketing tends to be randomly used as part of the conventional one-on-one marketing(European Financial Review, 2023).

Such approach affects the utilisation of the more appropriate digital marketing strategy that aids the increment of customer awareness about the product, leads' generation, conclusion of deals and sales as well as the continuous generation of new leads to bolster a firm's overall business continuity and sustainability. For some of the operators in the industrial automation and equipment market that use digital marketing, the challenge has often been that some of such businesses have been overwhelmed by enquiries to the extent that they cannot handle and convert all enquiries into sales (Imagine, 2021). This is because some of the operators do not have adequate capacity as others believe that investing enormously in the physical and digital structures that bolster effective use of digital marketing may not pay off.

As reflected in the research aim, objectives and questions outlined below, it is a nexus of such dynamics and complexities of digital marketing that motivates this study to evaluate a digital marketing framework that the operators in the industrial automation and equipment market can adopt to improve their overall effective market performance. With such challenges not being different from the limitations that most of the operators in the industrial automation and equipment often experience, it is that context that this study seeks to use the methodology described below to discern the improvement initiatives that must be adopted.

**METHODOLOGY**

To reach logical conclusion on how digital marketing can be integrated as part of the operational strategy that improves the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market, the study used systematic review as one of the methodologies for qualitative critical content analysis. Systematic review connotes the strategic process of gathering, analysing and interpreting the collected secondary data to respond to the issues outlined in the research questions for the study (Coates, 2021). It is the logical process that focuses on evaluating the insights from the existing studies with the motive of discerning the solutions that must be extracted to respond to the identified organisational problems. Systematic review is often

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used in situations where a lot of studies have been conducted on a particular programme or subject. Given the avalanche of the conducted studies, it is the fundamental argument in systematic review that instead of conducting new primary studies, the existing studies can be evaluated to discern whether through social construction and reconstruction of the prevailing insights, they can offer solutions to the identified problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Considering the avalanche of studies conducted on digital marketing and its impacts on a business' performance, it is such thinking that influenced the use of systematic review in this study. Through the evaluation of the existing digital marketing studies, it was construed that a digital marketing framework could be extracted and integrated as part of the operational strategy that improves the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market. To accomplish that, the process of systematic review was structured according to four main steps encompassing creating the systematic review questions, literature search, literature extraction and data analysis (Berman, 2017).

In the first instance, the systematic review questions were formulated to improve the accuracy of the research process to evaluate and extract studies that offered answers to the critical questions examining the notion of digital marketing vis-à-vis traditional marketing, strategic digital marketing process and impacts of digital marketing on a firm's market performance. After the clarification of the systematic review question, the process of literature search commenced. But the process of literature search which is the process of evaluating and exploring the studies that offer answers to the research questions was guided by the use of key words encompassing "Digital Marketing", "Traditional Marketing", "Strategic Digital Marketing Process", "Impact of Digital Marketing on a Firm's Market Performance", and "Limitations of Digital Marketing on a Firm's Performance".

While using such key words, the actual process of literature search was accomplished using search engines like Google and Web of Science. For a study to be included, it had to not only reflect answers to the research questions, but it also had to be published in English in the period between 2015 and 2024. The study also had to reflected full texts. Articles that only had abstracts were excluded from the study even if the abstract was relevant. To ascertain compliance with such conditions, the process of literature search and extraction entailed reading the title, abstract and the entire text of the article to ensure that it offered the required accurate insights that answer the research questions.

Articles that did not offer more accurate insights were excluded from the study. After extracting 23 articles offering more relevant insights, the process of data analysis commenced. Data analysis was accomplished using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of which in the first instance, each article was read again and again to improve familiarisation and discerning of the relevance of the article to the research questions. Thereafter, key themes, subthemes and their accompanying narratives were one after another extracted to offer insights on digital

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marketing vis-à-vis traditional marketing, strategic digital marketing process and impact of digital marketing on a firm's market performance. In that context, the details of the findings are as reflected below.

**FINDINGS**

In line with the critical systematic review questions, the overall findings from the systematic review are presented and discussed according to three subsections encompassing:

- The Notion of Digital Marketing vis-à-vis Traditional Marketing
- Strategic Digital Marketing Process
- Impacts of Digital Marketing on a Firm's Market Performance Details of these themes are evaluated as follows.

**Digital Marketing vis-à-vis Traditional Marketing**

Digital marketing enables a firm craft and reach different segments of the market with different promotional messages. As compared to the traditional TV, radio, magazine advertisements and the use of leaflets, digital marketing tends to be less costly. Even if digital marketing differs from the traditional TV, radio and magazine marketing, digital marketing is also now being fused with TV and radio marketing which are also increasingly becoming digital (Jung & Shegai, 2023). The operators of the traditional marketing mechanisms are increasingly becoming tactical by adopting the digital approach of streaming their programmes live to the population. When such approach is fused and integrated with the modern digital media technologies, it influences the overall effectiveness of digital marketing. It enables digital marketing to respond to different consumers' needs and to influence the reaching of the wider segments of the market.

Digital marketing is a tech-savvy tactical process that requires thinking and rethinking to ensure that the customers are delighted with different promotional messages to motivate them to try the product by placing orders (Gustavsen, 2023). It is a difficult process that seeks to ensure that the promotional messages are differentiated from the pool of different online information, garbage and information. It is not a simple marketing exercise since it requires marketers to use tactical approach to ensure that of all the voluminous and various interesting information and content, the customers are attracted by a particular promotional message.

Due to increasing competition, digital marketing has evolved to encompass different forms of online marketing that encompass affiliate, content, e-mail, mobile, analytical, Pay-per-Click (PPC), Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and social media marketing (Gustavsen, 2023). Affiliate marketing requires the usage of influential industry experts or social media influencers to create impressive content, blogs, posts or videos that market and promote the product. It is commonly used on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook (metaverse), Instagram, YouTube and other online platforms. Content marketing uses blogs, posts, articles, podcasts and videos to tell impressive narratives of using a particular product, service or organisation with the motive of building customer trust and confidence so as to lure them into signing or trying the product being promoted (Grewal et al., 2020).

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Content marketing may not seem like a promotion so as to avoid discouraging the consumers that often tend to avoid online adverts. It may appear as if one is just a consumer who is impressed with the product and therefore excited to share his or her story with the rest of the world. However, if digital marketing is not taking the form of content marketing, it may use e-mail marketing (Goyal et al., 2021). E-mail marketing is the strategic process of using personalized messages to get the targeted members of the public to try the use of a particular product or service. It uses a blind approach in which bulks of e-mails are generated and sent out to multitudes of recipients that may or may not take interest in the consumption of a particular product or service.

For e-mail marketing to generate the desired leads that can be closed as deals, it must create a sense of urgency, be personalized and offer options for recipients to highlight their preferences (Rosario & Cruz, 2019). As this tends to open the doors for conversation with the client, marketing analytics deals with the gathering, analysis and interpretation of relevant customer information with the motive of discerning how certain promotional messages must be structured and put across to attract the attention of the designated market segment. In that process, marketing analytics also tend to be integrated with mobile marketing that uses a variety of mobile devices like smartphones, laptop computers, e-mails and car electronic devices to reach different consumers with different promotional messages (Montgomery et al., 2012).

Pay-per-Click is used for generating quick sales by putting a product as cheap and a promotion that can be easily obtained or purchased by just clicking and paying using a particular online button or knob. Pay-per-Click differs from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) that aims to render the advertised product or service easily discoverable during customer search. This enables the firm's products or services to take the prominence over the products or the services of its rivals (Diez-Martin et al., 2020). Just like mobile marketing, social media marketing uses a combination of different social media platforms like twitter(X), Facebook(meta-verse), Instagram, TikTok, We-Chat and other websites and online platforms to create and reach different consumers with various types of interesting content, videos, posts and blogs. Even if digital marketing constitutes of all these different components, for it to influence the attainment of the desired outcomes, it often requires the utilisation of certain strategic digital marketing process (Ungerma & Dedkova, 2019).

**Strategic Digital Marketing Process**

Strategic digital marketing often requires the utilisation of five steps encompassing identification of target audience and building personas, competitor landscape analysis, determining the digital marketing channels, creating and optimizing the digital marketing strategy, creating content and unique value proposition plan and creating and optimizing the digital marketing strategy (MejíaTrejo, 2018). Identification of target audience and building personas require the evaluation of the existing demographics to discern the kinds of people who are usually the consumers of the products/services being offered. This must be accompanied by the analysis of their purchase habits as well as preferences reflecting what they like and dislike.

Through such analysis, it is important to also assess the key channels that the largest segments of the consumers usually use to accomplish different activities. The analysis must also evaluate the critical customer touch-points that the firm must respond to, in order to trigger purchase decisions (Gustavsen, 2023). Completion of the evaluation of what the customers desire or do not desire must be accompanied with the evaluation of the competitor landscape to assess the digital marketing channels that the rivals are using as well as the products and the kinds of customers that they are serving. Such an approach will enable the business to assess how its digital marketing strategy must be crafted to distinguish its digital marketing approach from those of the competitors. With such insights, the business can be able to assess a mix of the digital marketing channels like mobile, digital TV and radio channels, social media platforms like twitter(X), Facebook(meta verse), Instagram, usage of artificial intelligence and machine learning and other digital platforms that can be used to reach different customer segments(Alalwan, 2018). Using marketing analytics, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) must be set to enable the assessment of the performance of each of the digital marketing platforms.

The KPIs can assess the number of potential customers attracted to watch the advertisement videos, the number of the potential customers that visit the store or the business website to search for the product/service and the percentage of customer traffic from each digital channel that turn up to purchase the product/service (Behera et al., 2019). Such analysis enables the marketing executives to assess how each digital marketing channel is performing so as to discern the digital marketing channel to concentrate on and those to ignore. With the mix of digital marketing channels selected, the next step involves the creation of the contents and the value proposition plan that reflect the unique values that the product offers (Osmundson, 2023). Content creation must be directed towards pointing the difference in the product/service features and attributes that will entice the consumers to opt to purchase the product being advertised (Chen & Lin, 2019).

Creating and optimizing the digital marketing strategy deal with the actual implementation of the digital marketing strategy by assessing and improving the frequency of the online and digital promotional activities. It also deals with the evaluation and assessing the performance of each digital marketing channel as well as the identification of new digital marketing channels that must be integrated as part of the digital marketing mix. As the business uses such approach, its positive results are often easily reflected in the improved market performance of the business (Hemsley, 2018).

### **Digital Marketing and a Firm's Market Performance**

As the world becomes increasingly digital, digital marketing tends to become quite essential for improving the effective market performance of most of the contemporary businesses (Hossain et al., 2019). Usage of digital marketing enables the business reach multitudes of consumers using very cheap and easy approaches that reach consumers in any location. This lowers the overall cost of marketing and promotion to spur the business' overall cost competitiveness. Yet as the business' cost competitiveness improves, the significant reduction of the

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marketing costs also lowers the general operational costs. This enlarges the business' operational profits to contribute to the increment of returns on shareholders' value (Johnson et al., 2019).

Digital marketing improves the market presence of the business in all segments. Through artificial intelligence, machine learning and robotics, digital marketing enables the steaming of several videos and contents about the business' products/services. This improves client awareness in relation to the product that the business is selling to spur increased sales, revenue and profitability (Kapoor et al., 2016).

Digital marketing also improves the understanding of customer preferences and purchase behaviours and patterns. Through its marketing analytics, digital marketing enables the gathering and analysis of critical data about customer preferences. This improves the ability of the business to accurately modify its product features and attributes in the way that effectively respond to the needs and demands of its customers. Unfortunately even if that is the case, Osmundson (2023) argues that digital marketing may never aid the achievement of the desired outcomes unless accompanied with the use of the appropriate tactics and digital marketing strategy.

As digital marketing strategy may focus on long-term oriented goals, channels and audience, the digital marketing tactics that aid the achievement of long-term goals often focus on achieving short-term goals. Besides focusing on the achievement of short-term measurable goals and objectives, digital marketing tactics are also often campaign and action oriented.

If the appropriate digital marketing strategies and tactics are used, Novak and Aditham (2023) reveal that the positive impact of digital marketing may be reflected in significant reduction of marketing cost, improved brand awareness, strong customer engagement and improved returns on investment. But even to achieve such positive outcomes, Novak and Aditham (2023) argue that some of the best practices that influence the effectiveness of digital marketing encompass setting clear goals, defining the target audience, allocation of an adequate budget for digital marketing, use of the appropriate digital marketing channels and frequent measurement of results.

Besides that, other social media challenges often arise from the difficulty of using a customer-centric approach since the consumer needs and demands are constantly changing and evolving. This is further exacerbated by the challenge of more innovation to create and post videos and content that can generate the desired attention and sales (Plume, 2016). This is because all the marketers in the digital space are also striving to be as innovative as possible. This implies that any content or video placed online may shadow or get shadowed by more impressive promotional videos or content. In addition to the regulations governing the sharing of data and contents, there is also a challenge of using the appropriate marketing mix to ensure the presence of the business across all digital marketing channels (Xu et al., 2017).

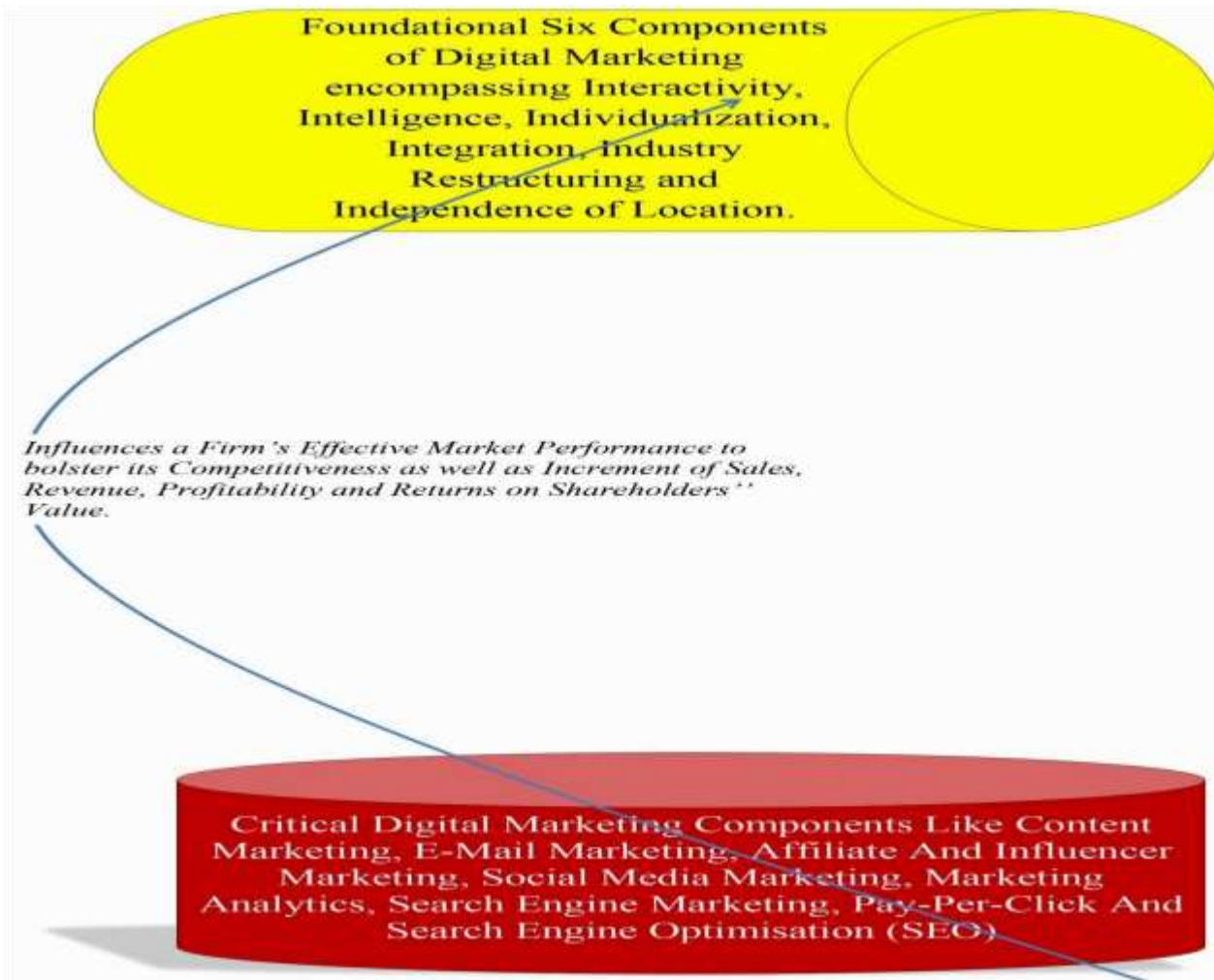
**MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As the world becomes digital with the support of the internet and other digital media like smartphones, smart TVs and tablets, McDonald and Wilson's (2016) "Theory on Internet Marketing" argues that the concept of online

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selling has evolved from the notion of internet marketing to the concept of digital marketing. As contrasted to online selling which is just synonymous with ecommerce, digital marketing is more comprehensive, since it integrates critical digital marketing components like content marketing, e-mail marketing, affiliate and influencer marketing, social media marketing, search engine marketing, pay-per-click and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). However, to achieve the desired marketing outcomes and business goals, McDonald and Wilson (2016) highlight that the digital marketing model is often built on the foundational components that constitute of six components encompassing Interactivity, Intelligence, Individualization, Integration, Industry Restructuring and Independence of Location. The interactivity component of digital marketing requires the promotional and marketing messages being put across different online platforms to instigate interest and conversation about the product. It must instigate the potential consumers to inquire about the product being advertised.

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**Figure 1: Conceptual/Theoretical Framework as Based on McDonald and Wilson's (2016) "Theory on Internet Marketing"**

This creates the beginning of the conversation that can enable sales personnel to further market the product to the customers and close the deals. Though this contributes to sales increment, McDonald and Wilson (2016) note that the intelligence component of digital marketing emphasises that digital marketing platforms are not only used for promoting and selling products to the market, but also for gathering new insights. Digital marketing must also be used for gathering new insights that influence the business' future product development decisions as well as the marketing decisions on the best digital marketing channels to use. Individualization does not only mean the use

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of e-mail marketing in the one-on-one marketing initiative, but also the process of creating and using promotional messages that speak directly to each of the potential customers.

Promotional messages must be developed to appear as if the product is speaking directly to each of the multitudes of customers spread across the world. It is through such approach that the promotional messages instigate interest and purchase decision. In that process, McDonald and Wilson (2016) state that the integration component of digital marketing must emphasise the use of omni-channel marketing approach that not only uses all channels, but also the quests of ensuring that delightful customer experience is created and delivered across all digital and non-digital platforms like physical stores, websites and apps. Industry restructuring of digital marketing requires digital marketing to introduce new operational ways of creating and delivering values to customers in the way that disrupts the existing industry practice. It must invoke higher level of creativity and innovativeness that enable the business to take the lead of disrupting the existing approach to doing business.

In terms of independence of location, McDonald and Wilson (2016) posit that digital marketing technologies must improve the capabilities of the sales personnel to reach and engage with customers from all corners of the globe. Such thinking seems to echo the reasoning in Behera et al.,'s (2020) Theory on "Personalized Digital Marketing Recommender Engine". Behera theory states that the effectiveness of the digital marketing model is measured by the extent to which it aids the seamless integration of online and offline selling that blend with cross-selling, upselling, best-in-class selling, needs-satisfaction-selling and consultative-selling. However, even if this study agrees with the thinking in McDonald and Wilson's (2016) "Theory on Internet Marketing" as the conceptual/theoretical framework of the study, it will still be subjected to evaluation against the outcomes of literature review and primary research in order to discern how such a conceptual framework can be modified to respond to the present digital marketing challenges.

**CONCLUSION**

This study is of significant importance because it will lead to the development of the digital marketing framework for improving the effective market performance of the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market. Such a framework will offer new insights on how to effectively use digital marketing strategy and technologies to achieve superior market performance. In such analysis, the study will also be important for examining the overall effectiveness of the digital marketing approaches and technologies being used by the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market. Such analysis will be essential for discerning whether the processes being used are also effective for enabling the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment achieve the desired outcomes. It is through such analysis that this study will also become even more important for assessing the limitations undermining the effective utilisation of digital marketing strategies as part of the operational and competition enhancing strategies by the operators in the Middle East industrial automation and equipment market. After understanding all such perspectives, the study will extract

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and recommend the remedial digital marketing framework that can be adopted for improving the effective market performance of the operators in the industrial automation and equipment market. As such a framework becomes widely adopted, it will not only improve the market performance of the operators in the Middle East Industrial automation and equipment market, but also the enrichment of the existing theories and literature on digital marketing and digital business management.

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