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Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship Development of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Enugu State, Nigeria

¹ Okonkwo Chukwudi Joseph, ² Nwokolo Adaeze Nneka Patricia, ³ Itodo Emeka Paul

¹ Department of Entrepreneurship Studies, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria

² Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Enugu Zonal Station, Nigeria

³ Department of Co-operative Economics and Management, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Corresponding Author: **Okonkwo Chukwudi Joseph**

Abstract

The study centred on digital marketing and entrepreneurship development of SMEs in Enugu State, Nigeria. It also ascertained the influence of social media marketing on SMEs business growth rate and determined email marketing on SMEs business growth rate in Enugu State. Descriptive survey research design was adopted with 303 SMEs sampled through a multistage sampling method. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, thoroughly validated and its reliability (0.83) confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha statistical tool. Data were analyzed descriptively in mean and standard deviation based on a 5-point Likert scale through SPSS (23). The formulated hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of linear

regression analysis to determine their significance. The findings revealed that social media marketing [$r^2 = 0.500$, $f = 0.206$, $p < 0.05$] and email marketing [$r^2 = 0.601$, $f = 0.732$, $p < 0.05$] had significant positive influence on SMEs business growth rate in Enugu State. SMEs are encouraged to design structured social media strategies to increase visibility and market presence. This can be achieved through continuous digital marketing training and active customer engagement online. SMEs should adopt personalized email campaigns to foster customer loyalty and drive sales. This can be accomplished by implementing CRM tools and automated email communication management systems effectively.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Business Growth Rate, Customer Engagement, Technology Adoption

Introduction

The rapid expansion of internet connectivity has driven smartphone development and advanced digital tools, reshaping global communication. As business environments become more dynamic, the internet serves as a key platform for promoting products and services, with digital technologies central to business operations and competition across markets (Ziółkowska, 2021) ^[60]. Dumitriu *et al.* (2019) ^[16] highlighted the growing relevance of digital marketing in corporate communication. Digital marketing integrates technology into marketing practices, enabling businesses to promote goods, services, and ideas through digital channels such as the internet, mobile devices, and online media (Pradhan *et al.*, 2018) ^[47]. Digital tools improve performance, stimulate entrepreneurship (Wilson & Makau, 2018) ^[58], and support innovation and sustainable growth. On the consumer side, digital adoption shapes purchasing behaviors (Voramontri *et al.*, 2019) ^[57], prompting firms to adopt customer-centric strategies (Nagy *et al.*, 2018) ^[37].

Marketing campaigns leverage digital platforms to share information, attract customers, and strengthen relationships. Products and services are promoted via online channels that shape purchasing decisions. Social media, affiliate networks, search engines, mobile apps, and email campaigns enhance visibility and loyalty (Saura *et al.*, 2021) ^[49]. Digital transformation drives efficiency but may cause challenges such as misinformation and social tensions (Mujahid & Mubarik, 2021) ^[34]. For SMEs, digital marketing enables competitiveness, market intelligence, cost reduction, and brand development (Wilson & Makau, 2018) ^[58].

Digital marketing has become a transformative force in entrepreneurship. Increased internet access, smartphone use, and changing consumer behavior make digital tools vital for growth (Okoroafor *et al.*, 2023) ^[43]. In Nigeria, the digital economy

grows through supportive government policies and private investment in broadband and technology hubs (Eze & Chinedu, 2022) ^[20]. SMEs, forming the backbone of the economy, use digital tools to enhance efficiency and reduce costs, though limited understanding exists on how specific tools such as social media and email marketing influence entrepreneurship.

Social media has emerged as a powerful entrepreneurial tool, enhancing visibility and customer relationships. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn allow direct engagement, build trust, and foster loyalty. Studies in Nigeria reveal that SMEs applying strategic social media use achieve broader reach, stronger brand recognition, and higher retention (Ogomegbunam & Odita, 2022; Akpojiyovwi & Adigizey, 2023) ^[39, 4]. These platforms promote innovation and resilience during disruptions such as COVID-19 (Ihemebiri *et al.*, 2023) ^[26].

Email marketing remains efficient for personalized communication. Entrepreneurs employ targeted campaigns to improve retention and profitability (Onwuka & Ijeoma, 2022) ^[45]. Email marketing provides customer insights, enabling personalized engagement and long-term loyalty. Globally, it yields high returns on investment for SMEs (Abubakar *et al.*, 2023) ^[1], and in Nigeria, it enhances customer retention and growth.

When combined, social media and email marketing create synergies that enhance entrepreneurial success. Social media drives visibility, SEO improves reach, and email builds loyalty, while e-commerce platforms support online sales (Okoroafor *et al.*, 2023) ^[43]. Integrated strategies strengthen competitiveness and sustainability among Nigerian SMEs (Ugochukwu & Onyema, 2024) ^[56].

Evidence links digital marketing literacy with enterprise performance. Obiekwe and Uba (2022) ^[38] found that e-advertising, email marketing, and digital payments improve SME financial performance. Ojobo *et al.* (2023) ^[40] observed that digital literacy enhances transaction volume and reduces costs. Okojie *et al.* (2023) ^[42] highlighted social media's role in driving sales and market expansion, while Anyionu *et al.* (2022) ^[10] found that Instagram and YouTube marketing fostered youth self-employment in Enugu.

Despite such evidence, most studies examine these tools separately. Many firms remain confined to small markets, face tough competition, and rely on traditional marketing approaches that are costly and less effective, hindering innovation and scalability. This study bridges that gap by assessing how integrated digital marketing, specifically social media and email marketing, affects entrepreneurship development in Enugu State. The findings will inform policymakers, development agencies, and training institutions working to strengthen entrepreneurial capacity and digital competitiveness.

Research Questions

1. What is the influence of social media marketing on SMEs business growth rate?
2. What is the influence of email marketing on SMEs business growth rate?

Hypotheses

1. Social media marketing has no significant influence on SMEs business growth rate;
2. Email marketing has no significant influence on SMEs business growth rate;

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing marks a major turning point in how businesses attract, engage, and maintain customer relationships. According to Dwivedi *et al.* (2021) ^[17], it involves the purposeful use of digital platforms such as websites, search engines, social networks, mobile apps, email campaigns, online advertising, and artificial intelligence-powered systems to achieve promotional and relational goals. The expansion of the digital economy enables organizations to transcend geography and time, reaching global markets efficiently with tailored experiences. Unlike traditional marketing's one-way communication, digital marketing promotes interactive, multidirectional exchanges where consumers influence brand narratives, provide immediate feedback, and engage in real-time dialogue. Advanced analytics deliver measurable results, allowing firms to refine strategies instantly and optimize returns. A key component is digital marketing communication, emphasizing interactive, customer-centered exchanges. Shankar and Malhotra (2022) ^[50] note it enables two-way conversations through paid and organic search, display advertising, mobile engagement, video, and social networking. Pascucci *et al.* (2023) ^[46] highlight that AI, data analytics, and automation personalize and enhance brand loyalty and competitiveness for SMEs.

Entrepreneurship Development

Entrepreneurship is the ability to recognize or create opportunities and act upon them to turn innovative ideas, products, or services into practice (Costin *et al.*, 2021) ^[13]. It is driven by profit and improving goods and services. The term entrepreneur derives from the French *entreprendre*, meaning "to undertake." An entrepreneur accepts business risks, organizes resources, and manages operations (Shi *et al.*, 2020) ^[51]. They identify opportunities, transform them into workable ideas, and add value through effort, skill, and time, generating returns while bearing risks. Entrepreneurs drive societal progress by challenging the status quo (Jiatong *et al.*, 2021) ^[28]. Altahat and Alsafadi (2021) ^[5] outline three key elements: innovation, venturing, and strategic renewal. It fuels job creation, raises living standards, and supports economic growth (Dhar, 2020) ^[15]. Entrepreneurship development nurtures individuals, institutions, and environments for business creation through education, institutions, and coordination (Carayannis *et al.*, 2022) ^[11].

Social Media Marketing

Social media has evolved into a dynamic digital ecosystem integrating people, information, and business functions through seamless knowledge exchange (Eze *et al.*, 2021) ^[21]. Beyond communication, it enables real-time interaction between producers and consumers, fostering innovation and business growth (Musa, 2021) ^[36]. For SMEs, social media redefines engagement with society and markets, making it central to operations. A major contribution lies in brand visibility, as platforms serve as cost-effective marketing channels for advertising, stakeholder connection, and relationship building. In the fashion industry, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube enhance brand awareness (Hsiao *et al.*, 2020) ^[24], while Yee *et al.* (2022) ^[59] found social media

strengthens brand loyalty through satisfaction, value consciousness, and relationships. Beyond marketing, it expands markets, improves competitiveness, facilitates remote work, knowledge sharing, and innovation (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021) [48]. Social media marketing involves using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to promote brands, engage audiences, and drive traffic (Ancillai *et al.*, 2019) [8].

Email Marketing

Email marketing, according to Halinen (2000) in Obiekwe and Uba (2022) [38], is the act of sending a group of people a commercial message via email. It is one of the best methods for business marketing, used to inform customers about a business and its goods and services, thereby increasing brand awareness, loyalty, and trust. The commitment trust theory views trust and confidence as essential for building strong client relationships, promoting repeat business and customer retention. Businesses use email messages to enhance client relationships, foster confidence, and build enduring loyalty through newsletters (Obiekwe & Uba, 2022) [38]. Elrod and Fortenberry (2020) [18] define email marketing as using electronic mail to target specific groups, presenting and promoting products and services to inform, remind, and encourage purchases.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Although Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are key drivers of economic growth, their definitions vary globally, depending on employee numbers, turnover, and asset value (Gbadeyan & Boachie–Mensah, 2016) [22]. The Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry defines small firms as employing 10–49 people with ₦5–₦49 million turnover, while medium enterprises employ 50–199 workers with ₦50–₦499 million turnover (SMEDAN, 2017) [52]. SMEs are vital to development, job creation, and innovation (Redjeki & Affandi, 2021) [48]. Many leverage digital technologies, especially social media, to advertise, enhance visibility, and sustain engagement (Isiaka *et al.*, 2022) [27]. Nigerian SMEs must pursue diversification, innovation, and adaptability for competitiveness (Locket, 2018) [30].

Business Growth Rate

Business growth rate refers to the speed at which a firm expands within a given timeframe, assessed through changes in revenue, profit, employment, assets, or market share. Expressed as percentage shifts, it reflects how effectively a company deploys resources, pursues strategy, and positions itself in the market (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2021) [14]. Ibidunni *et al.* (2021) [25] note that entrepreneurs' ability to recognize opportunities, innovate, and manage risks determines whether expansion is sustained or stagnates. Growth drivers arise from internal and external factors. Internally, innovation, financing, and technology adoption are critical. Olubiyi (2023) [44] found Nigerian SMEs with strong digital capabilities performed better post-pandemic. Predictable credit and regulatory systems encourage growth (Storey & Greene, 2019) [53]. In Nigeria, SMEs with proactive strategies and institutional support sustain positive trajectories, driving employment and income (Coad *et al.*, 2022) [12].

Theoretical Framework

The study anchored on the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), introduced by Everett M. Rogers in 1962 in *Diffusion of Innovations*. The theory explains how new ideas, technologies, or products spread within a community or social system over time. Diffusion occurs through communication channels influencing adoption at different speeds. Rogers classified adopters into five categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, forming the diffusion curve, and identified five factors influencing adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. The theory has wide scholarly support. Moore and Benbasat (1991) [32] linked usefulness and ease of use to adoption. Tornatzky and Klein (1982) [55] showed innovation attributes affect organizational adoption, while Greenhalgh *et al.* (2004) [23] applied IDT in healthcare. Many studies still use IDT to explain adoption variations. However, critics argue diffusion is not always smooth, noting cultural, structural, and institutional barriers. Others say it overlooks inequality and assumes inevitable diffusion. Despite this, IDT remains vital in explaining digital adoption. For this study, it clarifies how digital marketing spreads in Enugu State. Innovators and early adopters embrace social media, SEO, and e-commerce, while laggards resist due to illiteracy or infrastructure limits. IDT explains varying adoption rates and highlights awareness, training, and institutional support in entrepreneurship development.

Empirical Review

Amoah and Jibril (2021) [7] assessed social media use as a promotional tool for SME development in Ghana using 800 questionnaires and online surveys. Nonprobability sampling yielded 648 responses. PLS-SEM analysis revealed that social media advertising significantly affects firms' financial performance, business motivation, customer attraction, and market share increase.

Lawal and Adejuwon (2022) [29] examined social media marketing's effect on SMEs' brand loyalty in Southwest Nigeria. A descriptive design and sample of 489 SMEs were analyzed using SPSS 24 and SmartPLS 3.3.3. Results showed social interaction significantly affects brand loyalty ($\beta=0.342$, $t=2.916$), with PLS-SEM predictive results (Adj $R^2=0.693$, $p=0.000$).

Muideen *et al.* (2022) [33] investigated social media's impact on SMEs' financial performance in Nigeria using ANOVA and Chi-square analyses on 566 RIAS 2019 responses. Grounded in social network theory, results showed social media significantly enhances SME growth through customer engagement, retention, and advertising, improving financial performance relationships in Nigeria.

Adesunkanmi *et al.* (2022) [2] assessed electronic marketing's effect on customer retention in Southwestern Nigeria's food and beverage firms using cross-sectional descriptive surveys from six companies. Multiple regression results showed e-marketing significantly influences customer retention, with email, internet, mobile, and intranet marketing having significant effects, excluding extranet marketing.

Lumumba and Aila (2022) [31] explored e-marketing’s relationship with brand loyalty in Kisumu supermarkets. Correlational design with 193 respondents analyzed email, social media, and SMS alert marketing. Regression results showed all significantly affected brand loyalty (p=0.000), explaining 25.3% variation (R²=0.253), while 74.7% depended on other external factors.

Agbor *et al.* (2023) [3] studied social media’s link to entrepreneurship development in Benue State using data from 300 entrepreneurs across Zones A–C. Logistic regression and principal component analysis showed a significant correlation between social media usage and higher entrepreneurship development probability, identifying key factors influencing digital entrepreneurial engagement.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design was adopted with 303 SMEs sampled through a multistage sampling method. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, thoroughly validated by experts. The instrument’s reliability was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha, a statistical tool commonly employed to evaluate the internal consistency of survey items. The computation followed the standard Cronbach’s Alpha After the analysis, a reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. This value indicated a high level of internal consistency, suggesting that the questionnaire items measured their intended constructs effectively and consistently. Therefore, the research instrument was considered reliable and suitable for achieving the objectives of the study. Data were analyzed descriptively in mean and standard deviation based on a 5-point Likert scale through SPSS (23). The formulated hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of linear regression analysis to determine their significance.

Analysis and Results

Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate

A total of 303 copies of questionnaire were distributed, constituting 100% of the sample size. Out of these, 294 copies were returned, representing a response rate of 97%, while 9 copies, representing 3% were not returned.

Table 1: Influence of social media marketing on SMEs business growth rate

Item	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Using social media has increased my business visibility and strengthened my brand awareness	3.554	1.3633
2	My campaigns on platforms like Facebook and Instagram have helped me attract new customers and expand my market reach	3.524	1.4702
3	Engaging with customers through social media has built loyalty and improved my relationships with them	3.582	1.2686
4	Being active on social media has given me a competitive edge over similar businesses	3.384	1.2953
5	Consistent social media marketing has accelerated my growth and boosted my sales revenue	3.418	1.2524
Aggregate		3.492	1.3230

SPSS, 2023.

Table 2: Influence of email marketing on SMEs business growth rate

Item	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Personalized email campaigns have helped me retain more customers	3.142	1.2682
2	Regular email communication has boosted customer loyalty and repeat purchases in my business	3.333	1.2048
3	Email marketing has given me a cost-effective way to reach and engage customers	3.415	1.2412
4	My email campaigns have contributed to steady revenue and overall business stability	3.753	1.2189
5	Using email effectively has improved my chances of long-term survival in the market	3.701	1.1824
Aggregate		3.469	1.2232

SPSS, 2023.

Table 1 shows the respondents’ response on the influence of email marketing on SMEs business growth rate, indicating that they agreed on all the items 1-5. This is based on the aggregate mean score 3.492, which is above the minimum acceptance mean of 3.0.

The respondents’ opinion on the influence of email marketing on SMEs business growth rate in table 2 illustrates that they were in agreement on all the items, 6-10. This is based on the aggregate mean score 3.469, which is above the minimum acceptance mean of 3.0.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: Social media marketing has no significant influence on SMEs business growth rate

Table 3a: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.502 ^a	.500	.500	.98362	1.966

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Social media marketing
- b. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate

Table 3b: ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	.096	1	.096	.206	.000 ^b
	Residual	259.727	293	.463		
	Total	259.822	294			

- a. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Social media marketing

Table 3c: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	3.715	.160		23.226	.000
	Social media marketing	1.312	.041	.502	.050	.960

- a. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate
- R = 0.502
- R² = 0.500
- F = 0.206
- T = 0.050
- DW = 1.966

The model explained a significant portion of the variance in “social media marketing and SMEs business growth rate” ($R^2 = 0.500$, $F = 0.206$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the model explained 50% of the variance. The results showed that “social media marketing” predicted “SMEs business growth rate” ($\beta = 1.312$, $n = 563$, $t = 0.050$, $p < 0.05$). A 1966 Durbin-Watson statistic not exceeding 2 indicates no autocorrelation. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that social media marketing has significant influence on SMEs business growth rate in Enugu State.

H02: Email marketing has no significant influence on SMEs business growth rate

Table 4.28a: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.637 ^a	.601	.601	1.37330	1.866

a. Predictors: (Constant), Email marketing

b. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate

Table 4.28b: ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	.821	1	.821	.732	.000 ^b
	Residual	629.605	293	1.122		
	Total	630.426	294			

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate

b. Predictors: (Constant), Email marketing

Table 4.28c: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.664	.162		22.569	.000
	Email marketing	1.007	.042	.871	.174	.862

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs business growth rate

$R = 0.637$

$R^2 = 0.601$

$F = 0.732$

$T = 0.172$

$DW = 1.866$

The model explained a significant portion of the variation in "email marketing and SMEs business growth rate" ($R^2 = 0.601$, $F = 0.732$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the model accounted for 60.1% of the variance. The results showed that “email marketing” predicted “SMEs business growth rate”, $\beta = 1.007$, $n = 563$, $t = 0.172$, $p < 0.05$. A Durbin Watson 1866 statistic not exceeding 2 indicates no autocorrelation. The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that email marketing has significant influence on SMEs business growth rate.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that social media marketing significantly influenced SMEs’ business growth rate in Enugu State [$r^2 = 0.500$, $f = 0.206$, $p < 0.05$]. This demonstrates that consistent and purposeful engagement on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn improves brand recognition, customer interaction, and revenue generation. Businesses maintaining active social media presence attract and retain more customers. These platforms are inexpensive, easy to use, and effective communication tools enabling entrepreneurs to expand markets and

strengthen loyalty. Visible, interactive enterprises generate more inquiries, broader product awareness, and increased repeat patronage, driving steady growth. This outcome aligns with previous studies. Amoah and Jibril (2021) [7] found social media significantly impacted firm motivation, client acquisition, and performance in Ghanaian SMEs. Tawa *et al.* (2023) [54] reported improved sales among firms in North-East Nigeria, while Ambrose and Kinyua (2021) [6] observed enhanced customer relationships and market access for Nairobi SMEs. Lawal and Adejuwon (2022) [29] revealed social media interactions strongly predicted brand loyalty, and Muraina and Ammar (2025) [35] confirmed positive effects on brand awareness and engagement. Theoretically, the findings align with Rogers’ Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), which explains that innovations spread when benefits are visible and adaptable. SMEs in Enugu adopted social media marketing due to its clear advantages, operational fit, and peers’ success. The impact is further linked to smartphone growth, improved internet access, and digital consumer behavior. From a policy standpoint, entrepreneurship initiatives should include digital marketing literacy and social media analytics training to help SMEs design targeted campaigns, enhance engagement, and improve competitiveness in Enugu’s digital economy.

The study also revealed that email marketing has a statistically significant influence on the business growth rate of SMEs in Enugu State [$r^2 = 0.601$, $f = 0.732$, $p < 0.05$]. This indicates that structured, consistent, and data-driven email campaigns lead to higher customer retention, repeat purchases, and profitability. Email marketing remains one of the most cost-effective and reliable communication methods, helping entrepreneurs maintain contact, strengthen trust, and build lasting relationships. The use of marketing automation and data analytics enhances effectiveness by personalizing messages and tailoring communication to customer preferences and behaviors. Empirical evidence supports these findings. Etim *et al.* (2021) [19] found that email marketing, social media, and online advertising improved SME performance in Nigeria. Saleh (2020) reported profitability gains among Malaysian SMEs, while Anucha (2019) [9] confirmed that targeted email communication increased customer retention in Nigeria’s hospitality sector. Okeke *et al.* (2023) [41] observed that personalized, regular email engagement boosted loyalty and repeat patronage, and Onwuka and Ijeoma (2022) [45] concluded that integrating email with social media enhanced brand loyalty across small businesses. Consistent with the Commitment-Trust Theory, SMEs in Enugu recognize email marketing as a relational strategy that builds durable customer connections. Personalized emails, loyalty incentives, and consistent communication foster confidence and belonging, encouraging customer loyalty. This research extends evidence to developing contexts, showing structured email communication drives SME growth in Nigeria. Policy efforts should prioritize digital CRM and marketing automation training to help entrepreneurs craft customized communication strategies, strengthen customer experiences, and enhance competitiveness in Nigeria’s digital economy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that adopting digital marketing practices, specifically social media marketing and email marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing the growth and

sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Enugu State. These digital tools improve visibility, customer interaction, and profitability. Promoting digital literacy, encouraging government support, and fostering innovation-focused marketing initiatives will help SMEs remain resilient, adaptive, and competitive in Nigeria's rapidly evolving, technology-driven entrepreneurial environment. SMEs are encouraged to design structured social media strategies to increase visibility and market presence. This can be achieved through continuous digital marketing training and active customer engagement online. SMEs should adopt personalized email campaigns to foster customer loyalty and drive sales. This can be accomplished by implementing CRM tools and automated email communication management systems effectively.

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