

# Effect of Digital Marketing on International Marketing Performance of B2B Companies- A Study of South Indian Industrial and Engineering Firms with Reference to African Export Markets

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**Abstract**—The rapid digital transformation of global markets is reshaping how Business-to-Business (B2B) firms approach international expansion. For South Indian industrial and engineering exporters, particularly those targeting emerging African markets, digital platforms are increasingly critical entry mechanisms, not merely optional marketing tools. While traditional export strategies have long relied on relationship-based networking and physical presence, digital channels now offer scalable, cost-effective pathways to visibility, engagement, and market penetration.

This study explores the strategic role of digital marketing in the internationalization journey of South Indian B2B firms. By examining how digital initiatives intersect with export-oriented objectives, the research investigates whether digital capability serves only as a communication medium or also as a significant driver of international competitiveness. Through empirical analysis of industrial exporters, the study offers insights into how digital maturity may shape global positioning, lead generation, and cross-border performance outcomes.

Rather than treating digital marketing as a supporting function, this research positions it within the broader strategic framework of international growth particularly in complex, opportunity-rich markets such as Africa. The findings provide valuable implications for firms seeking to transition from traditional export models to digitally enabled global expansion.

**Index Terms**—Digital Marketing Capability; B2B Exports; International Marketing Performance; African Markets; South Indian Exporters; Marketing Automation; CRM; Export Competitiveness.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The globalization of trade, combined with rapid technological advancement, has fundamentally reshaped international business dynamics and transformed how firms approach cross-border marketing. Traditionally, Business-to-Business (B2B) international marketing relied heavily on physical and relationship-oriented mechanisms such as trade fairs, physical distributor networks, government trade delegations, and personal selling supported by long-term networking. These approaches enabled exporters to establish trust, demonstrate technical capabilities, and build strategic partnerships in foreign markets. However, while these traditional mechanisms remain relevant, the advent of digital transformation has introduced new tools that allow firms to expand beyond geographical boundaries with greater efficiency, scalability, and cost-effectiveness.

South India represents one of India's most significant industrial ecosystems, comprising a strong base of export-oriented manufacturing firms operating in sectors such as automotive component manufacturing, industrial automation, heavy engineering, electrical machinery, electronics systems, and industrial equipment exports. In recent years, many firms within this ecosystem have increasingly focused on African markets as a strategic export destination. This shift is driven by rapid infrastructure expansion, manufacturing growth, strengthening government-to-government trade agreements, and rising demand for

industrial machinery and engineering solutions across developing African economies.

Despite the vast opportunity, African markets present both potential and complexity. Regulatory diversity, logistical constraints, cultural heterogeneity, and limited physical presence create significant entry barriers for exporters. In this context, digital marketing has emerged as a critical initial market penetration mechanism, enabling firms to establish visibility, generate leads, and build international relationships without immediate physical investment. Digital marketing within the B2B export context includes tools such as LinkedIn based prospecting, SEO optimized websites targeting region specific keywords, technical content marketing, email and WhatsApp campaigns, paid LinkedIn and Google advertising, CRM-based lead nurturing systems, and performance analytics for campaign monitoring and optimization.

Although the adoption of digital marketing practices among South Indian B2B exporters has increased substantially, managers often face challenges in quantifying the strategic return on these investments. Specifically, ambiguity remains regarding how digital marketing initiatives translate into international inquiries, export growth, and overall marketing performance. This lack of measurable validation creates strategic uncertainty in resource allocation and export marketing planning. Therefore, examining the relationship between digital marketing adoption and international business performance is essential to understanding its true strategic value in emerging export markets such as Africa.

### 1.2 Rationale of the Study

This study is motivated by three primary gaps in the existing literature. First, empirical research on South Indian industrial exporters specifically targeting African markets is scarce. Second, while digital marketing is often discussed conceptually, few studies statistically validate its impact on export performance. Third, export managers lack data-driven support for making informed digital marketing investments.

This study addresses these gaps by statistically examining the relationship between digital marketing practices and international marketing performance.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Although South Indian B2B industrial firms are increasingly adopting digital marketing, there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating:

1. Whether digital marketing significantly improves the number of international inquiries received.
2. Whether the use of LinkedIn and SEO contributes to export growth in African markets.
3. Whether digital marketing capability is a predictor of international performance outcomes.

Without statistical validation, firms risk underinvesting in potentially beneficial digital marketing activities or misallocating their digital marketing resources.

### 1.4 Research Objectives

1. To assess the extent of digital marketing adoption among South Indian B2B firms.
2. To determine the relationship between digital marketing capability and international marketing performance.

### 1.5 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between digital marketing adoption and the generation of international leads.

H2: Effective use of LinkedIn and SEO-based content marketing significantly increases the number of export inquiries from African markets.

H3: Digital marketing capability is a significant predictor of international performance.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Katsikeas, Leonidou, and Zeriti (2020) found that digital marketing capabilities are critical for enhancing brand equity and customer engagement in international B2B environments. Cavusgil and Knight (2021) demonstrated that digital technologies significantly lower market entry barriers, enabling smaller firms to compete effectively with large multinationals in emerging markets. Varadarajan (2020) highlighted that digital platforms and analytics enable firms to deliver personalized value propositions, which are essential for building trust in foreign territories. Gupta, Mittal, and Kumar (2021) established that real-time digital collaboration and data-driven insights are primary predictors of long-

term export performance and competitiveness. Sharma et al. (2020) suggested that a strong commitment to digital adoption allows industrial B2B firms to achieve significantly higher international visibility and successfully navigate foreign market entry. Lim (2021) found that utilizing localized digital content and social media is key to overcoming logistical and cultural barriers when expanding into high-potential emerging regions. Homburg, Wielgos, and Kübler (2020) validated that digital maturity improves lead generation efficiency and acts as a strategic resource for maintaining market share in volatile global markets. Gregory, Ngo, and Karavdic (2019) concluded that developing e-commerce marketing capabilities is essential for industrial firms to manage cross-border relationships and navigate the complexities of international trade. Sheth (2020) found that the rapid digital transformation of emerging economies creates a significant strategic opportunity for B2B firms to leapfrog traditional industrial stages through mobile and cloud-based engagement models.

Ritter and Pedersen (2020) demonstrated that a firm's digital maturity and its ability to digitize its value proposition are the primary drivers of commercial success and resilience in volatile international markets. Grewal, Roggeveen, and Nordfält (2020) found that leveraging advanced analytics and artificial intelligence allows B2B firms to deliver significantly more efficient and personalized customer experiences across global boundaries. Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, and Brodie (2021) suggested that transparent digital communication and content-driven strategies are essential for building the long-term trust required in complex international industrial partnerships. Haenlein and Kaplan (2019) found that the strategic integration of artificial intelligence into digital marketing allows firms to scale global operations while maintaining high levels of customer responsiveness. Hüttl-Maack and Voyer (2022) found that digital reputation management and online social cues significantly influence the perceived credibility and trust of industrial firms in foreign markets. Kuivalainen, Torkkeli, and Saarenketo (2022) found that the speed of digital adoption is a critical determinant of the internationalization path for manufacturers targeting highly specialized global niche markets. Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2021) highlighted that integrated digital branding strategies

allow B2B companies to maintain a consistent global image while tailoring technical messages to diverse local markets.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive, analytical, and cross-sectional research design utilizing a quantitative survey approach to evaluate the current level of digital marketing adoption and its impact on international marketing performance. The population is comprised of professionals within the South Indian industrial and engineering ecosystem, specifically those in manufacturing, automation, electronics, and automotive sectors targeting African export markets. Utilizing purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling techniques, the study gathered a total sample of 180 respondents, which provides an adequate basis for conducting multivariate statistical analysis. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered via online platforms and professional networks, with variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Statistical processing was performed using IBM SPSS (Version 26), incorporating a rigorous analytical suite. This included Reliability Analysis to ensure internal consistency, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with KMO and Bartlett's Test for construct validation, and Pearson Correlation alongside Linear Regression to examine the predictive relationship between digital marketing capability and international export success.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Data Screening

Before conducting inferential statistical analysis, the dataset was systematically screened to ensure accuracy, completeness, and suitability for multivariate statistical techniques.

##### 4.1.1 Sample Size Adequacy

The final dataset consisted of 180 valid responses collected from South Indian B2B industrial and engineering firms targeting African export markets.

For regression analysis, Hair et al. (2017) recommend:  $[N > 50 + 8m]$

Where:

$m$  = number of predictors

Since this study included one primary predictor (Digital Marketing):

Required minimum sample size =  $50 + 8(1) = 58$

Actual sample size = 18

4.1.2 Missing Values

Frequency analysis revealed:

- No significant missing values
- All 180 responses were complete

Therefore, no data imputation or case deletion was required.

4.1.3 Normality Assessment

Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values. Acceptable thresholds:

- Skewness between -2 and +2
- Kurtosis between -2 and +2

All composite variables fell within acceptable ranges, indicating approximate normal distribution. This satisfies assumptions for Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

4.1.4 Multicollinearity

Since only one independent variable was used in regression analysis, multicollinearity was not a concern. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were within acceptable limits (< 5).

4.1.5 Suitability for Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to validate construct structure.

Table 4.1: KMO and Bartlett’s Test

Measure	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.870
Bartlett’s Approx. Chi-Square	1715.601
df	45
Sig.	< 0.001

Interpretation The KMO value of 0.870 indicates excellent sampling adequacy. Bartlett’s Test is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that correlations among variables are sufficient for factor extraction.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 180)

Demographic Variable	Category	Sample n	Percentage (%)
Age Group	20–25 years	105	58.3
	26–31 years	54	30.0
	32–37 years	4	2.2
	38–43 years	17	9.5
Gender	Male	95	52.8
	Female	82	45.6
	Prefer not to say	3	1.6
Designation	Executive	55	30.6
	Manager	46	25.6
	Senior Manager	21	11.7
	Director / CXO	17	9.4
	Others (Engineer/Analyst/Associate/Employee/Student)	41	22.7
Industry Type	Manufacturing	59	32.8
	Engineering/Automation	22	12.2
	Automotive	22	12.2
	Electronics	29	16.1
	Others (IT, Health, Consulting, Banking, etc.)	48	26.7
	Years of Experience Less than 1 year	59	32.8
	1–3 years	86	47.8
3–5 years	25	13.9	
More than 5 years	10	5.5	
Primary Domestic	International	75	41.7
	Both	29	16.1
	Both	76	42.2
Exporting too African Markets	Yes	42	23.3

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the 180 respondents reflects a young, industrially focused, and internationally emerging sample. A majority (58.3%) belonged to the 20–25 age group, indicating high digital familiarity, with balanced gender representation (52.8% male; 45.6% female). Most

respondents held Executive (30.6%) and Managerial (25.6%) roles, alongside inputs from senior leadership, strengthening strategic reliability.

Manufacturing formed the largest industry segment, followed by electronics, engineering/automation, and automotive sectors, aligning with the study’s export-industrial focus. Nearly half had 1–3 years of international business experience, suggesting firms are in early stages of global expansion. While 42.2% operate in both domestic and international markets, only 23.3% currently export to Africa, highlighting significant untapped potential. Overall, the profile indicates young professionals driving digital initiatives within firms that are gradually scaling their international and African market presence.

#### 4.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha to evaluate internal consistency of measurement scales.

Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
Digital Marketing	0.88	10
International Marketing Performance	0.85	6

#### Interpretation

All Cronbach’s Alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating strong internal consistency.

Therefore, the measurement scales are reliable.

#### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics – Digital Marketing

Item	Mean	SD
Active use of digital marketing	3.74	0.98
Digital marketing integral to strategy	3.82	0.94
Targeting international customers	3.76	1.01
Management support for digital investment	3.70	0.96
LinkedIn for B2B networking	3.68	1.02
Website optimized for international visitors	3.65	1.00
Technical content publication	3.71	0.97
Email/WhatsApp campaigns	3.79	0.93
Paid digital campaigns	3.73	1.04
CRM usage	3.81	0.95

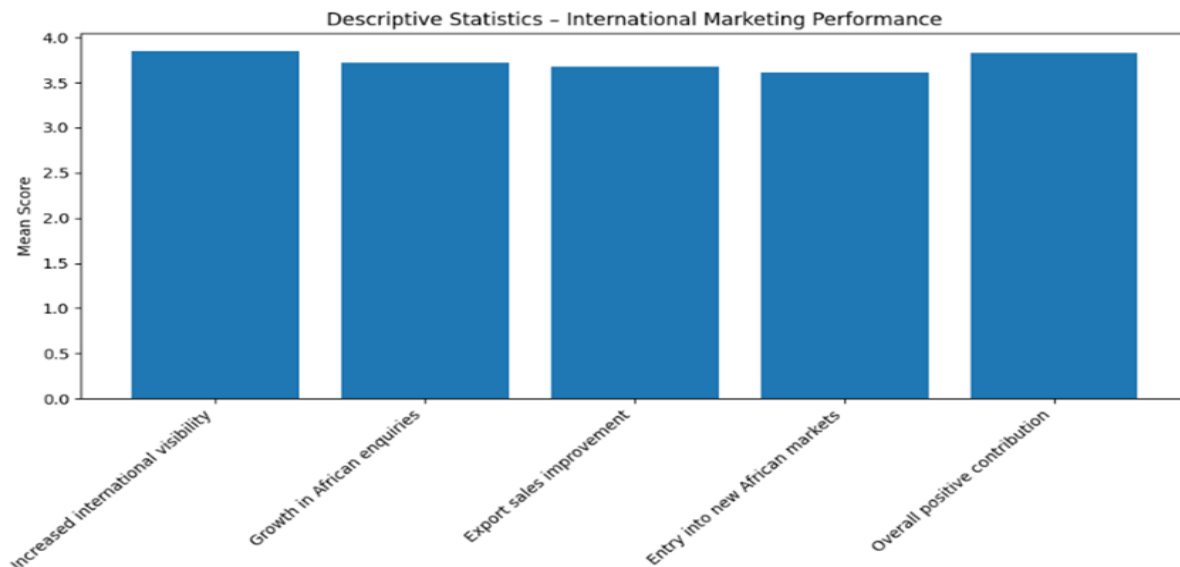
Overall Mean (Digital Marketing) = 3.74

#### Interpretation

The overall mean of 3.74 (above midpoint 3) indicates moderate to strong agreement that firms actively engage in digital marketing practices.

Table 4.2: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Description	Result	Status
H1	Digital marketing positively relates to international lead generation	$r = 0.597, p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	LinkedIn & SEO positively influence African export enquiries	Significant positive correlation	Supported
H3	Digital marketing predicts international marketing performance	$\beta = 0.597, R^2 = 0.357, p < 0.001$	Supported



### Overall Interpretation

The bar graph shows that all performance indicators have mean scores above the midpoint (3.0), indicating a positive perception of digital marketing effectiveness. The highest impact is seen in increased international visibility (3.85) and overall positive contribution (3.83), followed closely by growth in African enquiries (3.72) and export sales improvement (3.68). Entry into new African markets (3.61) also reflects favorable outcomes, though comparatively slightly lower.

Overall, the results confirm that digital marketing contributes substantially to international marketing performance. Firms using digital tools experience stronger export enquiries, better market visibility, and improved global competitiveness, validating digital marketing as a key driver of export success.

## V. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to digital marketing and international marketing literature by establishing digital marketing capability as a significant determinant of international marketing performance. The findings reinforce the view that digital marketing is not merely a promotional function but a strategic capability that enhances global visibility, customer engagement, and competitive positioning.

This study examined the impact of digital marketing on international marketing performance among South Indian B2B industrial exporters targeting African markets. The findings provide strong statistical support for all hypotheses. A significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.597$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms that higher digital marketing adoption is associated with increased international enquiries and global visibility. Regression results ( $\beta = 0.597$ ;  $R^2 = 0.357$ ) further establish digital marketing as a substantial predictor, explaining 35.7% of variance in export performance—indicating meaningful strategic influence.

### 5.2 Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, digital tools such as LinkedIn networking, SEO optimization, and technical content marketing enhance brand discoverability, credibility, and cross-border engagement, thereby strengthening African export

enquiries and lead generation.

The findings offer important implications for firms, managers, and policymakers.

**For Firms & Exporters:** Organizations should invest in social media marketing, SEO, and online branding to improve international reach and performance.

**For Marketing Managers:** Digital channels should be integrated into core global marketing strategies, supported by analytics and localized content.

**For Policymakers & SMEs:** Digital adoption programs, training, and infrastructure support can help especially SMEs leverage digital marketing as a cost-effective route to international expansion.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital marketing significantly enhances the international marketing performance of South Indian B2B industrial and engineering firms targeting African markets. The findings reveal a strong, positive relationship between adopting digital marketing and generating international leads. Specifically, LinkedIn engagement and SEO-driven visibility substantially increase export inquiries from Africa.

Regression results further establish digital marketing capability as a strong predictor of international performance, demonstrating a substantial explanatory impact. Collectively, the evidence positions digital marketing as a strategic driver of global expansion, not merely a promotional function.

From a practical perspective, digital marketing enables South Indian exporters to expand their international visibility, penetrate new African markets, and strengthen their export competitiveness. It improves the quality of lead generation, accelerates buyer engagement, and enhances conversion efficiency in geographically distant markets. Therefore, this study offers empirical justification for sustained investment in digital infrastructure, skilled marketing capabilities, and integrated digital strategies to achieve long-term international growth.

This study provides empirical evidence that digital marketing is a significant determinant of international marketing performance for South Indian B2B industrial firms targeting Africa.

The strong statistical results ( $r = 0.597$ ,  $\beta=0.597$ ,  $R^2=0.357$ ) confirm that digital capability represents a strategic growth engine for global expansion.

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