

Implementation of E-marketing in the Restaurant Sector in Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City, Butwal, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) in semi-urban regions such as Butwal are navigating both opportunities and challenges in the adoption of e-marketing strategies as digital technology reshapes Nepal's business landscape. This study examines the primary factors influencing the utilization of digital marketing tools by these companies, focusing on organizational capability, technological readiness, and external market conditions. The research employs the Technology Organization Environment (TOE) framework and analyzes data from 384 Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Butwal, pinpointing advantageous market conditions and the perceived benefits of e-marketing as the principal factors influencing digital adoption. On the other hand, things like trialability, compatibility with existing systems, and customer pressure are of lesser significance. The results unequivocally illustrate a correlation among improved customer engagement, brand visibility, overall marketing performance, and the effective utilization of e-marketing. Despite these advantages, several SMRs continue to face challenges such as insufficient internal expertise, a deficiency in strategic planning, and a fragile digital infrastructure. This study underscores the necessity for targeted training, enhanced infrastructure, and policies tailored to the needs of businesses functioning outside major urban areas, offering valuable insights for policymakers, advocacy organizations, and local entrepreneurs. The study highlights the importance of aligning digital tools with local business realities to promote sustainable growth in Nepal's evolving hospitality sector.

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2021, approximately 74% of Nepal's population had gained access to the internet, marking a significant transformation in the country's communication landscape (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology [MoCIT], 2021). This expansion was largely fueled by the increasing penetration of smartphones and the provision of affordable data packages by domestic telecom operators. Despite this encouraging progress, disparities remain in the pace of digital adoption across industries and geographical regions, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural and semi-urban areas facing particular challenges.

Within this broader context, the restaurant and hospitality industry in Butwal – a growing commercial hub in Lumbini Province – has yet to fully embrace digital solutions. Research shows that only around 20% of small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) in Butwal actively utilize e-marketing strategies, a figure considerably lower than the national average of SMEs, especially those operating in metropolitan centers such as Kathmandu (Khanal & Parajuli, 2020). This underutilization highlights persistent difficulties in integrating online platforms into everyday business functions such as sales, customer engagement, and promotional activities.

The barriers are multifaceted. According to Pasa et al. (2024) many restaurant proprietors in Butwal have limited digital literacy, resulting in lower levels of competence and confidence when employing tools like social media campaigns, online advertising, or digital ordering systems. These difficulties are compounded by infrastructural constraints, including unreliable internet connectivity and insufficient investment in digital infrastructure in peri-urban zones (Kunwar, 2021). Moreover, most available e-marketing models are designed with metropolitan consumers in mind and often fail to reflect the unique consumption habits and cultural preferences of population of Butwal, reducing their practical relevance (Sharma, 2024).

At the same time, digital marketing presents vast opportunities for the hospitality sector of Butwal. The adoption of digital platforms can enable restaurants to expand their reach beyond walk-in customers, establish strong and differentiated brand identities, and utilize customer feedback to improve service delivery (Bhandari, 2025). Additionally, digital tools

allow for real-time interaction with customers, which not only fosters trust and long-term relationships but also strengthens customer retention.

Although Nepal's digital economy continues to expand, the literature shows a lack of focused studies on the specific enablers and barriers to e-marketing adoption in semi-urban contexts like Butwal. Most published research remains centered on national-level trends or insights from the Kathmandu Valley (Irwin & Ibrahim, 2020). This gap underlines the urgency of conducting in-depth, localized investigations to guide tailored policy interventions and targeted capacity-building initiatives that can support the sustainable adoption of digital practices in semi-urban areas. The main objective of this study is to analyze the primary drivers influencing the adoption and utilization of e-marketing by small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) in Butwal.

While digital marketing has gained notable momentum among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nepal, a careful review of existing literature reveals that its practical adoption remains underexplored, especially within the restaurant sector in Butwal. For example, Kumar and Shah (2022) conducted a broad study on digital marketing practices among Nepalese SMEs, offering useful insights at the national level. However, their findings provide limited industry-specific detail, particularly for the food service and hospitality domain in emerging cities such as Butwal. Likewise, Gautam and Singh (2024) assessed the extent of digital tools being utilized by local firms. Yet their analysis was largely data-driven and fell short of evaluating how these tools perform in everyday operations or how effectively they align with the unique challenges of local businesses.

Both studies overlooked the interplay of socio-economic and cultural conditions of Butwal that shape customer behavior and influence how restaurants respond to marketing opportunities. This omission highlights a broader issue: SMEs in this region are not fully adopting or refining their e-marketing strategies due to gaps in knowledge related to consumer trust in online platforms, patterns of purchasing, and levels of digital literacy.

This research intends to bridge these shortcomings through two targeted approaches. First, it proposes to design and recommend e-marketing strategies that are both cost-effective and culturally adaptable, ensuring that they resonate with the operational realities of restaurants in Butwal. Second, it undertakes an in-depth exploration of local consumer patterns to support the development of marketing practices that are not only effective but also sustainable in the long term.

By directly connecting strategic marketing theories to the lived experiences and expectations of restaurant owners and their patrons in Butwal, this study adds value beyond

existing literature. It provides nuanced insights into Nepal's ongoing digital transition within the SME sector, offering a context-specific perspective that strengthens both academic understanding and practical implementation.

E-marketing adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has become a central topic in global research, with scholars relying on established theoretical models to interpret how and why organizations engage with digital transformation. Theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), and especially the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework have been instrumental in providing structured perspectives on the drivers and barriers of adoption. Among these, the TOE framework developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) has become particularly relevant, as it simultaneously addresses technological readiness, organizational capability, and environmental pressure – three dimensions that strongly influence adoption decisions. This study, therefore, draws on the TOE framework as its guiding theoretical perspective.

Empirical evidence from developed markets illustrates the value of theoretical lenses such as TAM and IDT. Brodie, Winklhofer, Coviello, and Johnston (2007), for example, demonstrated how digital technologies fundamentally reshape marketing rules and consumer engagement. Nguyen et al. (2015a) found that firms with sufficient technological capacity performed better in marketing, reinforcing the technological readiness component of TOE. Similarly, Davis et al. (1989) and Ifinedo (2011) argued that ease of use and perceived usefulness determine whether individuals adopt technology, reflecting TAM's explanatory power in digitally mature contexts. However, while TAM and IDT are more suited to individual-level adoption, TOE is especially effective for organizational-level analysis (Ramdhani et al., 2013), making it a more appropriate foundation for this study.

The situation in developing economies highlights the importance of TOE even more clearly. Research by Awa et al. (2017) and AlSharji et al. (2018) showed that adoption is not constrained by awareness but by structural factors such as cost, infrastructure, and organizational readiness. Similarly, SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa cited uncertainty, lack of skills, and inadequate incentives as obstacles. In South Asia, traditional business practices and limited innovation cultures further complicate the adoption of new technologies (Alatawi et al., 2013; Khan & Nawaz, 2019). These findings underscore that the environmental and organizational dimensions of TOE are critical to understanding adoption in resource-constrained contexts.

In Nepal, recent scholarship also validates the relevance of the TOE framework. Adhikari and Sharma (2024) found that online advertisements significantly boosted customer acquisition in restaurant sector of Butwal, aligning with the technological dimension of TOE. At the same time, Gurung and Pradhan (2022) identified low digital literacy among restaurant employees as a challenge, demonstrating the importance of organizational readiness. Bhattarai et al. (2023) highlighted that integrating digital payments not only improved customer satisfaction but also strengthened loyalty, confirming that technological capabilities directly shape marketing outcomes. Meanwhile, Thapa and Basnet (2024) showed how consistent engagement on social media enhanced restaurant reputation and consumer trust, reflecting the influence of environmental conditions on digital strategies.

Taken together, the literature suggests that e-marketing success cannot be explained solely by access to technology. Instead, it depends on the balance of technological infrastructure, organizational capacity, and external pressures – the very dimensions articulated in the TOE framework. While developed nations benefit from robust ecosystems, SMEs in Nepal must address complex barriers rooted in social, economic, and institutional realities. By grounding this research in TOE, the study situates its analysis within a theoretically rigorous framework and addresses a critical gap in understanding how e-marketing adoption unfolds in Nepal's restaurant industry, with a particular focus on Butwal.

HYPOTHESIS

Technological Context (H1)

- H1: Technological factors have a major impact on how small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) accept and use e-marketing.
- **H1a:** The perceived relative advantage of e-marketing tools positively influences their acceptance and implementation.
- **H1b:** The compatibility of e-marketing platforms with existing business processes positively influences their adoption among SMEs.
- **H1c:** The perceived ease of use of e-marketing technologies positively affects their adoption among SMEs.
- **H1d:** The trialability of e-marketing tools contributes positively to their adoption among SMRs.

- **H1e:** The observability of benefits resulting from e-marketing practices positively affects their acceptance and usage.

Organizational Context (H2)

H2: Organizational characteristics significantly influence the acceptance and implementation of e-marketing strategies in SMRs of Nepal.

- **H2a:** Getting help from top management makes it more likely that e-marketing will be used.
- **H2b:** Organizational readiness, reflected through digital infrastructure and strategic alignment, significantly enhances the implementation of e-marketing in Nepalese SMRs.
- **H2c:** Prior experience with ICT systems within the firm enhances the likelihood of adopting e-marketing tools.
- **H2d:** A digitally supportive organizational culture positively influences e-marketing acceptance.
- **H2e:** The kind of product the business sells affects how ready the organization is to use e-marketing.
- **H2f:** The bigger the company, the better it can use e-marketing strategies.

Environmental Context (H3)

- **H3:** Environmental factors have a big impact on how SMRs accept and use e-marketing.
H3a: The type of business a company is in affects how likely it is to use e-marketing.
- **H3b:** Help from government agencies and IT vendors makes it easier to use e-marketing.
- **H3c:** The pressure of competition in the market makes businesses more likely to use e-marketing strategies.
- **H3d:** The acceptance of e-marketing technologies is greatly affected by what customers want and expect.
- **H3e:** The market scope (local, regional, or global) of a business positively influences the correlation between environmental readiness and e-marketing adoption.

E-Marketing Acceptance and Performance Outcome (H4)

H4: The endorsement and execution of e-marketing strategies substantially enhance the marketing efficacy of SMRs.

DATA AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City, a semi-urban commercial hub of Nepal where the restaurant sector is rapidly expanding and gradually integrating digital practices. Butwal was purposefully selected because it represents a transitional business environment—while internet access and digital activity are growing, the adoption of advanced technologies among small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) remains uneven. This setting provides a relevant backdrop for exploring the determinants of e-marketing adoption.

Both primary and secondary data sources were employed. Primary data were collected through structured, self-administered questionnaires directed at owners and managers of SMRs. Secondary data were drawn from published reports, scholarly literature, and local records that provided contextual insights into the digital transformation of Nepal's hospitality sector.

The research followed a quantitative and descriptive design, allowing the study to systematically document current trends and statistically assess the relationships between variables. The Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework served as the guiding theoretical perspective, supplemented by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI) to shape the construction of variables and the design of research instruments.

The population for this study consisted of 525 active SMRs in Butwal. From this population, a sample of 384 restaurants was selected, which was deemed statistically sufficient to represent the larger group. To ensure inclusivity, the sampling strategy followed a proportional stratified random approach, with stratification based on the size and geographical distribution of restaurants. This method ensured that diverse types of businesses were appropriately represented.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into sections on respondent demographics, business characteristics, motivations for adopting e-marketing tools, and perceived outcomes such as increased visibility, sales growth, and customer engagement. Items were constructed using insights from TOE, TAM, and DOI frameworks. Prior to full-scale deployment, the instrument underwent a pilot test with 30 restaurant managers, which led to refinements in wording and structure to improve clarity.

To establish validity and reliability, expert consultation was sought during the design phase, and internal consistency was statistically assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The results yielded values above 0.70, confirming that the scales used were sufficiently reliable.

The research adhered to ethical guidelines. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality of data was maintained, and the information was used exclusively for academic purposes.

Data collection was carried out through face-to-face distribution of questionnaires, supplemented by follow-up visits to ensure adequate response rates. Respondents completed the questionnaires independently, reducing interviewer bias.

For data analysis, the study used SPSS Version 30. Descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and frequencies were employed to summarize trends, while inferential statistical techniques – including regression analysis, chi-square tests, and independent sample t-tests—were applied to test hypotheses and examine associations among variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Background Characteristics of Sampled SMRs (N = 384)

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	361	94
	Female	23	6
Age	Below 30	146	38
	30–49	169	44
	50 and above	69	18
Qualification	Less than High School	15	4
	High School	123	32
	Diploma	65	17
	Bachelor	157	41
	Postgraduate	23	6
Years of Experience	1–3 years	88	23
	4–6 years	92	24
	7–10 years	100	26
	Over 10 years	104	27
Nature of Work	Restaurant Owner	138	36
	Marketing Manager	84	22
	General Manager	134	35
	E-marketing Staff	23	6

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Restaurant Age	Less than 1 year	42	11
	1–3 years	58	15
	3–6 years	119	31
	6–10 years	69	18
	Over 10 years	100	26
Number of Employees	1–4	0	0
	5–9	192	50
	10–19	115	30
	20 or more	77	20
Marketing Budget (% of total)	<10%	61	16
	10–20%	96	25
	21–30%	77	20
	31–40%	92	24
	Over 40%	58	15

Most respondents were male (94%), with a majority aged below 49. Educationally, 41% held a bachelor's degree, and nearly one-third had completed high school. Around 53% had more than seven years of experience, and restaurant ownership or general management roles were most common. Most restaurants had operated for at least three years, employed between five and nineteen staff, and allocated 10–30% of their total budget to marketing, suggesting a meaningful focus on digital promotion.

Table 2

Adoption of E-marketing Tools by SMRs

E-marketing Tool	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neutral (%)
E-mail	55	37	8
Mobile Marketing	68	24	8
Website	70	18	12
Social Media	98	1	1
Intranet	36	34	30
Extranet	45	30	25
Global Search Engines	30	48	22
Local Electronic Guides	78	12	10

Social media dominates e-marketing practice (98%), followed by websites (70%) and local electronic directories (78%). Intranets, extranets, and global search engines are either underutilized or perceived as less relevant, indicating that user-friendly, consumer-facing tools are preferred in Butwal's restaurant sector.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Variables within the Conceptual Framework

Variable	Items	Mean	SD
Technological factors	5	3.76	0.42
Relative Advantage (RA)	5	3.75	0.58
Compatibility (COM)	3	3.88	0.53
Ease of Use (EOU)	3	3.83	0.57
Trialability (TR)	4	3.30	0.58
Observability (OBS)	3	3.80	0.57
Organizational factors	6	3.66	0.50
Top Management Support (TMS)	4	3.78	0.63
Organizational Readiness (OR)	4	3.64	0.61
ICT Experience (ITE)	3	3.72	0.67
Organizational Culture (OC)	4	3.60	0.63
Product Type (PT)	3	3.84	0.71
Firm Size (FS)	3	3.28	0.69
Environmental factors	5	3.45	0.49
Industry Support (IS)	3	3.51	0.66
Gov. & Vendor Support (GVS)	4	2.95	0.82
Competitive Pressure (COP)	3	3.50	0.64
Customer Pressure (CUP)	4	3.69	0.62
Market Scope (MS)	3	3.61	0.70
E-marketing adoption	8	3.80	0.43
Marketing performance	10	3.79	0.52

High mean scores for relative advantage, compatibility, and ease of use suggest these technological factors strongly influence adoption. Organizational support and leadership also score relatively high, while government/vendor support lags behind. Marketing performance and e-marketing adoption achieved nearly identical positive scores.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Before conducting regression, the assumptions of **linearity, normality, constant variance, and multicollinearity** were tested. Normality was confirmed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($p > .05$). Multicollinearity was checked via Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values below 3, indicating no severe multicollinearity. Scatterplots confirmed homoscedasticity. No major violations were identified. The model was significant, $F(16, 367) = 24.1$, $p < .001$, confirming that the predictors collectively explain variation in adoption.

Table 4

Standardized Regression Coefficients for Predictors of E-marketing Adoption

Predictor	β	t	p
Relative Advantage	0.31	4.35	0.000
Ease of Use	0.27	2.35	0.000
Top Management Support	0.21	2.10	0.000
Market Scope	0.29	4.39	0.000
Customer Pressure	-0.19	-2.48	0.000
Competitive Pressure	-0.17	-2.12	0.000
Compatibility	-0.08	-0.91	0.388
Trialability	-0.05	-0.40	0.333
Observability	0.07	0.88	0.157
Other factors (NS)	0.05	1.22	0.225

Relative advantage, ease of use, managerial support, and market scope significantly improve adoption, while competitive and customer pressures negatively influence it.

DISCUSSION

The findings align with Maduku et al. (2016), showing that relative advantage strongly predicts e-marketing adoption. Other technological constructs – trialability, compatibility, and observability – did not exert significant influence, consistent with Rahayu and Day (2015), Brown et al. (2003), and Low et al. (2011). Among organizational factors, none – such as readiness, ICT experience, or firm size – had a significant role, supporting results from Wang et al. (2010), El-Gohary (2010), and Ramdani et al. (2013).

From the environmental context, market scope emerged as the only significant predictor, aligning with Ramdani et al. (2013) and Zhu et al. (2003), whereas factors like government/

vendor support, competition, and customer pressure showed limited impact (Das & Das, 2012; El-Gohary, 2010).

Finally, the study confirmed that e-marketing adoption has a positive impact on marketing performance, in line with Brodie et al. (2007) and El-Gohary (2010), demonstrating that businesses using digital strategies achieve stronger marketing outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights that small and medium-sized restaurants (SMRs) in Butwal are still in the early stages of e-marketing adoption, with digital tools yet to be systematically incorporated into their day-to-day operations. One noticeable gap is the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, as the findings indicate that managerial roles are predominantly occupied by men.

Among the factors influencing adoption, relative advantage, customer demand, and market scope emerged as the most significant. This demonstrates that restaurant managers are inclined to embrace digital marketing when its benefits are tangible, when rising consumer expectations must be met, and when opportunities to expand market presence are visible. While these drivers support the gradual uptake of digital practices, challenges persist. Limited financial capacity, inadequate technological infrastructure, and the absence of strategic direction continue to restrict the full integration of e-marketing within this sector.

The evidence suggests that to enhance adoption and ensure long-term gains, SMRs in Butwal require structured capacity-building initiatives. Programs aimed at strengthening digital literacy, managerial capabilities, and the effective use of available technologies would help restaurant managers and staff maximize the benefits of e-marketing. Furthermore, the development of well-defined e-marketing strategies aligned with overall business objectives is essential for sustaining competitiveness in a rapidly changing consumer environment.

Beyond individual businesses, external support systems hold critical importance. Policymakers, government agencies, and digital service providers must design policies and offer financial and technical assistance that specifically target the realities of SMRs. Collaborative partnerships between public institutions and local businesses can accelerate digital transformation by creating a stronger technological foundation, improving online visibility, and fostering innovation.

In conclusion, the findings underscore that e-marketing in Butwal's restaurant sector is not merely a matter of adopting tools but of embedding them into broader business practices.

By aligning organizational strategies with digital innovation and leveraging external support, SMRs can strengthen their resilience, expand their market presence, and actively contribute to Nepal's broader digital transition.

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