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usbet.fspuperak@gmail.com

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THE CHALLENGES WITH DIGITAL MARKETING IN THE PRACTICE OF ESTATE AGENTS

Wahsuffi Sajuri¹ , Hairul Nizam Mansor^{1*}

¹Department of Built Environment Studies and Technology, College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610, Seri Iskandar, Perak Malaysia

wahsuffisajuri@gmail.com , *hairu038@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The estate agent is well-known profession when it comes to selling and buying property because the services provided by the estate agency are trusted. Moreover, digital marketing increases the usage of estate agents' services because it is more convenient and can save more time and money. However, when the relationship between estate agents and digital marketing is synthesized, the challenges between them continue to increase. The objectives of this study are to identify the challenges faced by digital marketing in the practice of estate agents and to determine the rank of the most critical challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents. To achieve these objectives, data were collected through questionnaire while the respondents were gathered using simple random sampling method in which the researcher distributed the questionnaire randomly to the estate agents in Malaysia. The data collection employed quantitative survey method, and the analysis utilized descriptive frequency analysis and mean score analysis. The results of the research shows that the challenges have been gathered through literature reviews and the challenges have been ranked. Thus, the highest rank for the most critical challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents is high competition, followed by lack of technological knowledge. Moreover, the third highest ranking is expensive technology, which receives negative feedback, privacy, and security, while the lowest ranking is annoying. Overall, this study has come out of the challenges of digital marketing in the practice of estate agents and emphasizes the need for future research.

Keywords: Estate Agent, Digital Marketing, Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing refers to any action taken by a corporation to attract an audience to its services or goods through high-quality content (Forsey, 2022). Presently, one of the most crucial elements of any business is marketing, which helps guarantee that the services or goods offered will appeal to customers and fulfil their needs. According to (Anderson, 2021) a real estate agent is a licenced expert who facilitates real estate transactions by connecting buyers and sellers and advocating for them during negotiations. Real estate agents mediate negotiations between buyers and sellers. Some purchasers do not know the purchasing property. Thus, using estate agents' services helps purchasers make good decisions when they want to purchase a property. It can be seen that there is a relationship between marketing and estate agents because estate agents have products and services that they need to convey to purchasers, which refer to a house buyer or house tenant. There are two techniques in real estate marketing: traditional and modern marketing. Since technology has been introduced and applied around the world, traditional techniques have been less used compared to modern techniques. Maina (2017) considered the possibility that real estate agents switch from conventional offline marketing techniques to digital platforms. However, according to Maina (2017), the effective use of digital marketing requires broad support, and real estate companies can set up a department to kickstart adoption in a way that promotes return on investment.

The phrase 'digital marketing' refers to the practice of reaching consumers and selling goods and services through digital channels. Digital marketing gained popularity in the 1990s with the emergence of the internet and claims (Barone,2022). According to a report from the Statista Research Department in 2022, as of the third quarter of 2020, Malaysians spent an average of 9.17 hours per day online. In contrast, they averaged 3.01 hours daily on social media. The use of modern digital marketing for estate agents cannot be separated because estate agents need online digital marketing to market and advertise their property listings. According to (Bond, 2020) customers are increasingly turning to the Internet as their first stop when looking to purchase goods or services, and 51% of buyers find their homes there. To put this into perspective, only 28% of those who purchased a home did so through an estate agent, and 7% did so after seeing a yard sign. Based on the Malaysia Annual Property Market Report trend, the volume of transactions for property in H1 2021 is 139,759 units worth RM62.01 billion. The number of Malaysians buying a house increased drastically from H1 2020, from -27.9% to 21.0% by HI 2021. Dilek (2014) stated that experienced agents make more accurate decisions in their economic lives. This is also experienced in Malaysia, where the use of estate agents' services continues to increase due to the knowledge, professionalism, and trust carried by the estate agents to assist people in purchasing their homes, especially for first-home buyers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section interprets the challenges of digital marketing in the practice of estate agents, and includes a review of each challenge.

Digital Marketing

Because most people use technology nowadays, digital marketing is one of the most essential issues in this digital era. Digital marketing involves the use of electronic media by marketers to promote products or services in the market with the primary goal of attracting customers and allowing them to interact with the brand via digital media (Yasmin et al., 2015). Digital marketing is also known as online marketing because it is done through websites, online advertisements, opt-in emails, interactive kiosks, interactive television, or mobiles (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). Yasmin et al. (2015) defined digital marketing as having seven components: online advertising, e-mail marketing, social media marketing, text messaging, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization, and pay-per-click. Social media marketing is an important digital marketing method (Chaffey 2011). In everyday life, active marketing tools serve as venues for communication, promotion, brand awareness, customer connection, and feedback mechanisms (Mkwizu 2019). Website marketing, social media marketing, smartphone marketing, etc.

Estate Agent

In the Malaysian real estate industry, there are three types of estate agents based on their educational backgrounds and qualifications. These are the registered estate agent, probationary estate agent, and real estate negotiator. Therefore, the complete definitions are as follows:

- Registered Estate Agent

According to BOVEAP, 2022 registered Estate Agents are only those who are registered with the Board and can act as estate agents. They assist clients in buying, selling, and leasing properties to maximize returns.

- Probationary Estate Agent

This means a person who is employed or engaged by an estate agent to assist the estate agent in the practice of the estate agency, who has been registered under this Act as a Probationary Estate Agent under S22E of the Act, and whose name has been included in the Register of Probationers. Real Estate Negotiators (RENS) and probationers are both considered negotiators, and they must always work under the direct guidance and supervision of a real estate agent (MEAS, 2020).

- Real Estate Negotiator

This means that a person is hired or contracted by an estate agency firm to work as a salesperson on their behalf. Real Estate Negotiators (RENs) and Probationers are both considered to be Negotiators, and they must always work under the direct guidance and supervision of a real estate agent (MEAS, 2020).

Challenges with Digital Marketing in the Practice of Estate Agents

Expensive technology

In the modern era, everyone needs at least one smartphone to connect. Additionally, people can purchase anything from their smartphones. This is noticeable: people need to allocate their money to buy digital essentials such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops. Thus, estate agents need digital gadgets to market their listings online, and they need smartphones that can connect to the Internet to publish their listings successfully. In addition, the cost of the Internet is costly for some people. The high cost of this technology can be challenging for some people. According to Mumbua and Kalei (2020), the use of digital marketing by Kenyan SMEs is moderate at around 30%, and they face challenges such as a lack of funds to set up websites, a lack of technical know-how to manage these strategies, and a lack of knowledge on digital content development. While enhanced marketing operations may assist them in overcoming these problems, these activities are costly and require specialized skills that SMEs lack. According to Jaas (2022), setting up websites requires substantial expenditure because website construction and design demand specialized and highly efficient people. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for marketing and technological research to produce engaging sites capable of enhancing clients and attracting their attention, which can provide additional value to an organization's strong brand. Based on the two researchers above, starting marketing in this digital era requires the cost to constantly market due to the needs of gadgets and the internet. It is quite difficult for some people, especially small or startup companies, to constantly market their listings if they have limited budgets.

Lack of technology knowledge

Marketing a product or service through a digital marketing platform requires knowledge to perform better and provide high returns. If estate agents lack knowledge of modern technology, how will they survive in the industry, knowing that there are many competitors in this digital world? According to (Danzen, 2022) small business owners may be unable to implement digital marketing strategies because of their lack of knowledge. When a company does not have strategies to market its products or services properly, it will prevent the company from achieving the set target. According to (Harjai, 2019) A lack of awareness of digital marketing is another significant

obstacle to the growth of the digital market. Although youth in India are very adaptable to technology, a large portion of the population is still wary of electronic devices. Not all people are familiar with electronic gadgets and digital marketing, especially in the old-age group. Therefore, knowledge of technology should be implemented from a young age and in all age groups due to changes in the era.

High competition

Being an estate agent is very competitive because of the large number of agents in Malaysia. According to BOVEAP, updated in 2021, the number of (E) license holders was 2151 while (PEA) license holders were 1901, including (REN) license holders. According to The Malaysian Institute of Estate Agents (MIEA), 2020, there are 25,000 agents and negotiators. Both local and international expansion have brought about intense competition in the online market space. To differentiate themselves from competitors, they must capture the attention of target customers. The ability of different target purchasers to organize and optimize messages and websites is critical for success. They must compete with thousands of websites, content, videos, advertisements, and so on, from other estate agents' digital marketers. According to the Indeed Editorial Team, a high level of business competition in 2021 may be a sign of a healthy, profitable marketplace, and it frequently improves the overall quality of available products and services by encouraging organizations to improve their operations, meet customers' needs, and develop client relationships. It is good to have high competition in business because it can compete and optimize the outcome; however, in the real estate industry, estate agents need to compete with unregistered estate agents or brokers. This can be observed when some unethical firms hire unregistered estate agents to work under them. In addition, they do not have a real estate background and have no knowledge of this industry. Unregistered estate agents can create trust issues with registered estate agents when purchasing a property.

Requires a lot of hard work

According to Gupta (n.d.), digital marketing appears appealing, but success requires a significant amount of time and effort. This is noticeable as they need to create an appealing advertisement for estate agents to achieve their target sales. Examples include creating valuable content, designing an appealing website, engaging with leads on various social media and websites, and managing digital advertising platforms to maintain a competitive edge. Outdated content should be updated or removed as soon as possible. As a result, to rank high on search engines, businesses must now write about topics rather than just keywords. All these operations require sufficient manpower and focus to work efficiently. This can be related to the marketing of estate agents in advertising and marketing their listings because they need to inspect the property and its surroundings before publishing it to the digital platform. They need to ensure that their listing is not misleading to purchasers because it is prohibited in MEAS, 2020.

Negative feedback

Digital marketing is a free and accessible environment in which advertisements receive unexpected exposure. Estate agents can find negative feedback or criticism on social media and review websites. Negative word of mouth spreads faster than positive in an online environment. Negative remarks can affect an estate agent's reputation. Furthermore, the inability to reply efficiently may hurt the reputation of estate agents. Furthermore, estate agents must be firm so that competitors do not exploit the marketing plan or criticize themselves. According to Jaas (2022), when someone begins to give negative feedback on the smallest mistake, the number of consumers who are far more dissatisfied may increase. Furthermore, it may result in negative evaluations, which can dramatically destabilize various digital marketing efforts and procedures. Estate agents should know that working in the modern era must deal with negative comments and must always take all negative comments to improve marketing strategies.

Privacy and Security

Some customers are concerned about confidentiality and privacy while considering online buying, particularly because the electronic exchange procedure involves the availability of specific customer data such as name, gender, country, payment method, etc.. Consequently, special software, such as cookies, must be used to protect the confidentiality and privacy of electronic business transactions. According to Gupta (n.d.), the possibility of cyberattack is the most significant obstacle in Internet-based digital marketing. DDoS attacks, phishing attacks, data breaches, identity theft, malware, and other types of attacks are some examples. Such attacks have an impact on a company's infrastructure system as well as client confidence. To protect personal and confidential information, it is necessary to use additional software such as firewalls, virtual private networks (VPNs), and HTTPS encryption. Living in the digital era must be extra cautious when it comes to data inserted on websites and social media platforms. This is because some digital platforms sell their clients' information to other parties who are prohibited from doing so. For example, an estate agent firm obtains people's data as phone numbers from irresponsible parties to cold-call people to find a home buyer.

Distrust of electronic payment methods

Despite the rapid growth of online transactions, many homebuyers still distrust electronic payment methods and are unsure whether the property exists and whether the services provided by the estate agents are legitimate. On the other hand, the prevalence of online danger has caused customers to have skeptical attitudes toward online purchasing (Uslu, 2014). Since online credit card payments are among the most popular in digital marketing, there is a trend toward using software to safeguard electronic payment methods and build client trust. Fraud, theft, forgery, and deception are among the most serious types of crimes in this area. The solution to these crimes is to use software that ensures information security (Jaas, 2022). Many consumers

hesitate to use digital payment. Some people are concerned about using this technology because they do not trust the Internet and perceive security risks. Many people are put off the idea that someone else has access to their bank accounts. People who have trust issues with online transactions still exist because some irresponsible people are scammers who scam people for their goods. Therefore, when people want to purchase a house and transfer money online, they are unsure about doing so. Thus, they ask multiple questions to estate agents before transferring money. In addition, they do not trust the estate agents even though they are registered under the board and have a license. This is because of the prevalence of fraudulent activities.

Lack of face-to-face interaction

Another issue in online marketing that has been addressed in the literature is the lack of personal interaction. Because Internet transactions do not embody personal interaction, some homebuyers prefer to inspect the house by themselves. Rather, they would interact with estate agents face-to-face and have physical tours. According to (Kaur & Gurveen Sandhu, n.d.) to be more specific "for the types of products that rely heavily on building a personal relationship between buyers and sellers such as the selling of life insurance, transaction of property and the type of products that requires a physical examination, Internet marketing may be less appropriate." Based on the experience of working at an estate agent firm, most home purchasers prefer face-to-face interactions when purchasing a house because they want the best for their living, and they want to see every detail about the property. During the pandemic Covid-19, people were required to remain at home. Therefore, they cannot inspect the properties that they want to buy. Therefore, the alternative was the estate agent video called the prospective buyer to show the house. Only a few bought houses after the virtual viewing. Purchasing a property requires more face-to-face interaction to satisfy prospective purchasers and to avoid misunderstanding between both parties.

Language and culture barriers

Language and culture are two significant barriers to interactions among homebuyers. In Malaysia, there are multiple races and languages, such as Chinese-speaking Mandarin and Cantonese, while Indians speak Tamil. Some of them could not speak Bahasa or English. Thus, they must interact with people who speak the same language. In addition, different cultures have different beliefs about purchasing a house. According to Mei-Hui et al. (2019), the Chinese community, Malaysia's second-largest ethnic group, may still have similar beliefs while purchasing a property because their culture has been influenced by the locals. As a result, sophisticated software that will make a qualitative shift in the translation of texts into languages understood by customers while considering cultural barriers, customs, traditions, and values is required to avoid creating barriers to the use of various commercial sites (Jaas, 2022). When living in a multicultural country, people must understand and be

considerate of each other to promote a unity attitude and behavior. In addition, in Chinese Culture they have Feng Shui follows before purchasing a property.

Annoying

A customer visiting any website is typically inundated with content, advertisements, blogs, webinars, etc.. Some digital technologies, such as video commercials, pop-up ads, and retargeting ads, are particularly unpleasant. They follow the audience on every website and social media platform they visit. Receiving random promotional emails daily is another issue that arises after the website collects customer information and interests (Gupta, n.d.). Advertising listings on websites or social media include ads, videos, and other media. To continue working, estate agents must view videos or wait for advertisements to end. It takes a long time. Furthermore, to disable these types of distractions, they must purchase a premium plan, which is costly.

METHODOLOGY

A literature review was conducted to gather the secondary data for this study. For this study, a quantitative method was applied using questionnaire instruments to collect data. The questionnaire has two sections: Section A is for demographic factors and Section B is for the challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents. A questionnaire survey was used to collect data from respondents. A total of 206 responses were collected. After calculating approximately 25,000 estate agents in Malaysia, this still met the minimum sample requirement of 100 samples specified by Solvin's formula. Data were analyzed using descriptive frequency analysis and mean score analysis. For Section A, frequency analysis is used, and for Section B, mean score analysis is used. On top of that, this study has potential limitations. Estate agents time are limited due to the responsibilities bear by them to assist and give good services to the property buyers. Thus, the responses might not truly legit due to their hectic schedules. In addition, not all estate agents understand the questions due to the different respondents' background of studies which may lead to not getting the right answer that researchers expected. Lastly, the sources of data were limited and difficult to obtain due to the private and confidential terms of the journals.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The frequency analysis in Table 1 shows the demographic information of the study participants. For age, the majority of respondents had an age range between 31 and 41 years (39.3%). This is followed by those aged 20–30 years (33.0%), 41–50 years (20.4%), and 51 years (7.3%). The respondents came from various states, mostly

from Selangor (18%), followed by Kedah (11.2%), and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur (10.7%). The least number of respondents was from Sabah, with only 0.5%. Next, the majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree or Professional Qualifications (69.4%), followed by a master's degree or a postgraduate certificate or diploma (PGDip) (22.3%), and pre-university/matriculation/foundation/A-level (8.3%). The majority of the respondents (140 individuals) had less than five to ten years of experience. This was followed by 58 respondents who had 11 and 20 years of experience, and eight individuals who had more than 21 years of experience. Finally, the respondents' types of registration were examined. The greatest number of respondents (99 respondents) had a registration to practise as real estate negotiators, followed by those who had a licence to practise as registered estate agents (62), and those who had a licence to practice as probationary estate agents (45).

Table 1: Demographic Factor

	Item	F	%
Age	20 - 30 years old	68	33.0
	31 - 40 years old	81	39.3
	41 - 50 years old	42	20.4
	51 years old and above	15	7.3
	Total	206	100.0
State	Johor	10	4.9
	Sabah	1	5.0
	Selangor	37	18.0
	Terengganu	11	5.3
	Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	22	10.7
	Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan	2	1.0
	Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya	7	3.4
	Kedah	23	11.2
	Kelantan	14	6.8
	Malacca	8	3.9
	Negeri Sembilan	18	8.7
	Pahang	19	9.2
	Penang	13	6.3
	Perak	15	7.3
	Perlis	6	2.9
	Total	206	100.0
Education Level	Pre-University/Matriculation/ Foundation/A-Level	17	18.3
	Bachelor's Degrees/ Professional Qualifications	143	69.4
	Masters/ Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) or Diploma (PGDip)	46	22.3
	Total	206	100.0
Year of Experience	Less than 5 years	70	34.0
	6 – 10 years	70	34.0

	11 – 20 years	58	28.2
	More than 21 years	8	3.9
	Total	206	100.0
Type of Registration	Registered Estate Agent	62	30.1
	Probationary Estate Agent	45	21.8
	Real Estate Negotiator	99	48.1
	Total	206	100.0

(Source: Researcher, 2023)

In Part B, the challenges of digital marketing in the practice of estate agents were analyzed using a Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). In addition, the researcher identified 10 factors: expensive technology, lack of technology knowledge, high competition, requiring a lot of work, negative feedback, privacy and security, distrust of electronic payment methods, lack of face-to-face interaction, language and cultural barriers, and annoying. The mean and ranking results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking for Challenges with Digital Marketing In the Practice of Estate Agents.

Challenges	Mean	Rank
High competition	4.26	1
Lack of technology knowledge	4.24	2
Expensive technology	4.21	3
Negative feedback	4.21	3
Privacy and security	4.21	3
Distrust of electronic payment method	4.17	6
Requires a lot of hard work	4.10	7
Lack of face-to-face interaction	3.94	8
Language and culture barriers	3.80	9
Annoying	3.59	10

(Source: Researcher, 2023)

According to the results, high competition was ranked first among the other challenges, which is in line with the findings and discussion in Chapter 4. The most critical challenge with digital marketing in estate agents' practice is high competition. This is because of the existence of brokers challenging the practice of real estate agents; not only that, but the number of agents also kept increasing year by year. The second most critical is a lack of technology knowledge because some agents are still not familiar with technology, and they prefer a more traditional way of marketing using banners, flyers, templates, etc. Followed by the third most critical challenge is expensive technology, in which some of the online platforms need to pay for premium

features, negative reactions from the audience may impact the performance of the agents due to the hatred thrown at the agents and privacy and security due to unsafe personal data sharing. The fourth challenge is the distrust of electronic payments because many people are put off by the idea that someone else has access to their bank account. The fifth and sixth challenges require a lot of hard work because advertising online needs to consider many aspects to make it safe and not misleading, and lack face-to-face interaction because some buyers prefer online viewing due to the existence of Covid-19 respectively. The least critical challenges are language and culture barriers, because some buyers want the same races to assist them in purchasing a house to make the interactions easier, followed by annoying.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research aims to determine the challenges faced by digital marketing in the practice of estate agents and identify the most critical challenges. This research consists of five chapters: background of the study, literature review, research methodology, analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The researcher completed all the chapters and successfully achieved both research objectives. The first objective has been achieved through literature reviews such as journals, articles, books, etc.; the first objective is to determine the challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents, and the second objective was achieved through a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Software and the Mean Score Analysis method to identify the most critical challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents. Lastly, the most critical challenges with digital marketing in the practice of estate agents are the high competition among the estate agents themselves and the existence of brokers in Malaysia. By completing this research, the researcher addresses these challenges and finds ways to overcome them. Therefore, the research endeavors have been effectively accomplished, achieving triumphant success in its pursuit. Based on the data and information gathered, the researcher recommends future researchers to conduct the similar research in different contexts of challenges due to the changes of technology that might affect the performance of estate agents in the future. Other than that, future researcher should focus more on specific place such as Seri Kembangan to make the researcher easy to find respondents. Next, the researcher should gather a greater number of respondents and complete it with longer period to make the research significant. Following that, the future researcher imposes a qualitative method in this research. This holds great significance for future researchers as they endeavour to address fresh challenges that can be applied to a different case study. Afterwards, the researchers recommend that estate agents should know the challenges in digital marketing in the practice of estate agents that will help them to overcome the challenges and indirectly can increase their performance and can get high return.

Besides that, estate agents should willingly participate in the research to make the researchers' data significant and more reliable.

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Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

Prof. Madya Dr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim
Rektor
Universiti Teknologi MARA
Cawangan Perak



Tuan,

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Perkara di atas adalah dirujuk.

2. Adalah dimaklumkan bahawa pihak kami ingin memohon kelulusan tuan untuk mengimbas (*digitize*) dan memuat naik semua jenis penerbitan di bawah UiTM Cawangan Perak melalui Repositori Institusi UiTM, PTAR.

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Kelulusan daripada pihak tuan dalam perkara ini amat dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

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Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

SITI BASRIYAH SHAIK BAHARUDIN
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27.1.2023

PROF. MADYA DR. NUR HISHAM IBRAHIM
REKTOR
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA
CAWANGAN PERAK
KAMPUS SERI ISKANDAR