Marketing on Google and its Impact on Internet Users in Kinshasa

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Abstract : This article examines the impact of marketing on Google among internet users in Kinshasa. In a context where internet access is steadily increasing and search engines are becoming essential tools for information, Google plays a central role in consumers' decision-making processes. Digital marketing—through paid advertising and organic search engine optimization (SEO)—deeply influences online behavior. In Kinshasa, a city facing various socio-economic challenges, these strategies enable local businesses to increase their visibility, facilitate access to products and services, and shape consumer perceptions. The study highlights the effects of these marketing actions on users' choices, their perception of brands, and their loyalty. The findings reveal a strong influence of targeted marketing, particularly on purchasing habits, the way information is consumed, and digital engagement.

Moreover, studies have shown that African internet users rapidly adopt digital tools when they perceive direct benefits, especially in terms of time-saving and access to information (Aker & Mbiti, 2010). Google marketing benefits from this trend to reach an increasingly connected audience. In addition, trust in search results plays a crucial role in the perception of online brands (Pan et al., 2007). In Kinshasa, where companies often seek to overcome a lack of traditional visibility, ranking on Google is a strategic alternative. Finally, consumer engagement on digital platforms can be strengthened through targeted and contextualized communication, confirming the importance of localized digital marketing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Keywords : Google Marketing, Digital Impact, Internet User Behavior.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Marketing on Google

Marketing on Google refers to the set of techniques used by businesses and organizations to improve their visibility, attract prospects, and convert users through Google's various services, primarily its search engine. It relie mainly on two complementary strategic levers : organic search (SEO) and paid advertising (SEA).

➢ *Organic Search (SEO)*

SEO encompasses practices aimed at optimizing a website so that it appears among the top "organic" results on Google. This includes content optimization, relevant keyword selection, proper use of HTML tags, page loading speed, mobile-friendliness, and many other factors influenced by Google's algorithm (Ledford, 2015).

According to Fishkin & Høgenhaven (2013), SEO is a long-term strategy, particularly useful for strengthening online authority and building a sustainable presence. In an environment like Kinshasa, where advertising resources may be limited, SEO offers an economical and effective alternative for small businesses seeking to stand out locally.

➢ *Paid Advertising (SEA)*

SEA involves paying to appear in Google's sponsored search results, typically displayed at the top or bottom of the results page. These ads are highly targeted, based on keywords, geographic location, user interests, and online behavior. This system operates on a bidding model, where companies set a budget to obtain favorable ad placement (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). SEA offers direct and immediate control over visibility, making it particularly useful for Congolese businesses aiming for rapid growth. However, this approach can become costly in the long term, especially if not supported by a complementary SEO strategy.

➢ *Behavioral Analysis and Influence on the Purchase Journey*

Google marketing also relies on analytical tools such as Google Analytics, which make it possible to observe user behavior, assess the effectiveness of campaigns, and adjust strategies accordingly (Clifton, 2012). The personalization of

ads and behavioral targeting enhance the relevance of advertising messages, especially in rapidly changing urban contexts like Kinshasa, where digital tools are reshaping consumption practices.

Moreover, a website's position in search results directly influences how credible it is perceived. According to Pan et al. (2007), internet users place more trust in the top results displayed on Google, which reinforces the strategic importance of ranking for brands and businesses.

B. Digital Impact

The rise of digital technology has profoundly transformed lifestyles, consumption patterns, and communication dynamics around the world. In Africa particularly in fast-growing cities like Kinshasa this transformation is amplified by the expansion of mobile telephony, increased internet access, and the emergence of social networks.

➢ Growing Connectivity

Over the past decade, internet penetration has increased dramatically in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), largely thanks to the widespread adoption of smartphones and the gradual reduction in access costs. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2022), the number of active internet users in the DRC has doubled in five years. In Kinshasa, this development has encouraged the rapid adoption of digital services, including search engines like Google, which have become everyday tools for accessing information, making purchases, or supporting decision-making.

➢ More Informed and Demanding Consumers

With the internet, consumers now have instant access to information : price comparisons, customer reviews, tutorials, business locations, and more. This shift is transforming the business-client relationship by making consumers more autonomous in their decision-making. As Kotler et al. (2017) highlight, digital tools foster consumer-centered marketing, where the customer becomes an active participant in their own buying experience.

➢ Digital Technology as a Lever for Economic Inclusion

Digital tools also offer opportunities for economic inclusion for populations previously marginalized by traditional channels. In Kinshasa, many small businesses today use digital platforms (Google Business Profile, Facebook, WhatsApp Business) to promote their products and interact with customers. These tools help lower the barriers to entering the formal market, particularly for young people and women entrepreneurs.

➢ New Challenges: Digital Divide and Skills Gap

However, this digital transition also raises challenges. The digital divide persists, especially between urban and rural areas, and according to levels of education and income. The uptake of digital tools remains unequal and requires efforts in terms of training, infrastructure, and awareness. According to Aker & Blumenstock (2015), the benefits of digital technology in Africa are fully realized only when the environment promotes access, skills development, and effective use of technology.

C. Internet User Behavior in the Digital Age

The evolution of digital technologies has radically transformed user behavior, especially in how people search for, consume, and share information. In a context like Kinshasa, this transformation is even more pronounced as internet access becomes increasingly available via mobile phones, particularly among young adults.

➢ Information Search and Decision-Making

Internet users rely on Google as the first step in their decision-making journey whether to gather information, compare products, locate services, or read reviews. According to Pan et al. (2007), users tend to trust the results that appear at the top of the search page, giving search engine optimization (SEO) and targeted advertising (SEA) a central role in marketing strategies. In Kinshasa, this trend is reflected in a growing reliance on search engines to find goods and services, whether local (neighborhood shops, transport services, restaurants) or international (e-commerce, digital services).

➢ Mobile Usage and Instant Gratification

The majority of internet connections in Kinshasa occur via smartphones, encouraging a mobile-first and instant-access approach. Users expect quick responses, simple interfaces, and smooth user experiences. This trend compels businesses to adapt their content and optimize their websites for mobile devices—also a key ranking factor on Google.

➢ Social Influence and Sharing

Today's internet users are no longer passive recipients of information—they are active participants, content creators, and peer influencers. Through online reviews, comments, and shares on social media, they contribute to shaping brand reputation.
In an environment like Kinshasa, where trust in formal institutions may be limited, social recommendations carry significant weight. Users often rely on the opinions of others to validate their choices, reinforcing the need for a credible and engaging online presence.

➢ Engagement and Loyalty

User engagement now goes beyond simple clicks—it includes interaction with content, participation in discussions, and even co-creation of brand identity. The most successful brands are those that build ongoing relationships with their customers through relevant content, email marketing, or personalized offers, often supported by user data analysis. In Kinshasa, this digital relationship is often maintained through WhatsApp Business, local Facebook pages, or well-managed Google Business profiles, highlighting the importance of digital marketing tailored to local realities.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on a quantitative approach and aims to collect the opinions of various internet users residing in Kinshasa. It relies on the collection of primary data to assess

their appreciation of real-time advertising dissemination via Google, particularly during their online browsing.

The uses and gratifications theory serves as the main theoretical framework. It helps to understand the behaviors adopted by internet users in response to digital advertisements, based on their personal needs (information, entertainment, perceived usefulness, etc.).

III. RESULTS

The analysis of data from the questionnaire administered to internet users in Kinshasa revealed three main thematic areas:

➢ *Frequency of Exposure to Digital Advertising*

The majority of respondents (nearly 78%) report being regularly exposed to advertisements while using Google, whether through sponsored results, banners, or video ads on YouTube. This exposure is now perceived as an unavoidable part of daily browsing.

Advertisers fully capitalize on this reality by widely broadcasting their advertising content across Google platforms. By relying on the high level of connectivity and web traffic among Kinshasa internet users, they seek to effectively position their brands in real time, taking advantage of every moment of browsing to influence consumption decisions.

➢ *Reaction to Online Advertising*

About 62% of participants report ignoring or quickly skipping ads encountered while browsing on Google, while a minority of 21% say they click on ads when they are deemed useful, relevant, or directly related to their needs. The relevance of the message therefore plays a central role in internet users' reactions. The more targeted, clear, and contextually appropriate the advertisement, the more interest it generates. However, another significant factor influences this behavior: mobile data consumption. Some respondents indicate avoiding websites that display too many ads because these tend to quickly drain their internet data plans. This observation highlights the importance of adapting advertising formats to the local economic context, where connection costs remain a major concern.

➢ *Influence on Purchasing Behavior*

Nearly 38% of the surveyed internet users acknowledge having made a purchase or conducted more in-depth research after being exposed to an advertisement on Google. This behavior is particularly observed among young adults, who view online advertising as a quick recommendation or a convenient opportunity to discover new products.

Even though many Congolese internet users do not purchase directly online, ads broadcast via Google play an inspirational and discovery role. They allow consumers to identify products, brands, or services, which they then seek out in physical stores or local markets. Thus, digital advertising acts as a trigger in the purchasing journey, even when the process ends offline.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study clearly show that digital advertising via Google holds a significant place in the daily lives of internet users in Kinshasa, both in terms of exposure frequency and behavioral impact.

First, the high frequency of exposure reveals a strong penetration of digital tools in the browsing habits of Kinshasa residents. This confirms advertisers' strategies, which leverage the regularity of internet connection to maximize their real-time visibility. This phenomenon illustrates the evolving media landscape in Kinshasa, where audiences are increasingly connected, mobile, and exposed to targeted content.

Second, the contrasting reactions to advertising highlight the complexity of the relationship between the internet user and the advertiser. Although the majority of users ignore ads, a notable segment responds positively, especially when the message is perceived as relevant or personalized. However, local constraints such as mobile data consumption negatively influence ad reception, forcing brands to consider lighter formats adapted to the local economic realities.

Finally, the impact on purchasing behavior, although partly indirect, is significant. Ads on Google do not always lead to immediate online purchases but play an informative and prescriptive role. They guide choices, spark interest, and direct consumers toward purchases in physical stores, thus confirming Google's role as a key player in the hybrid shopping journey (digital → physical).

In line with the uses and gratifications theory, internet users do not passively endure advertising messages: they filter, evaluate, and consume them according to their own interests. The effectiveness of advertising therefore lies in its ability to meet a perceived need at a specific moment in the user journey.

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