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SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF URBAN MALE CONSUMERS IN THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

The cosmetic industry has historically targeted female consumers, yet in the last decade, urban male participation in grooming and personal care has grown significantly. Despite this trend, marketing strategies in Kenya remain largely female-oriented, creating a gap in addressing male consumer needs. This study examined the effect of search engine optimization (SEO) on the buying behaviour of urban male consumers in the cosmetic industry in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study adopted a quantitative approach and causal research design. A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items was administered to a sample of 139 male consumers, selected through simple random sampling from a target population of 214. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple linear regression, with diagnostic tests confirming model validity. The findings established that search engine optimization had a positive and significant effect on consumer behaviour. The study also found that SEO improved brand visibility and trust, translating into higher purchase intent. It recommends that cosmetic brands invest in credible influencer partnerships, create personalized and interactive social media campaigns, and strengthen content strategies to build long-term trust. Policy makers and industry stakeholders should also promote gender-inclusive marketing approaches to maximize market potential.

Key words: Digital Marketing Strategies, Search Engine Optimization, Buying Behaviour

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Introduction

Digital Marketing Strategies (DMS) have become a powerful trend in contemporary marketing, as it transforms the way companies can reach their audiences via internet-based technologies (Cachero-Martinez et al., 2024). For urban male consumers, especially in the Cosmetic industry, behavioral tendencies are influenced by logic-driven decision-making, time efficiency, brand loyalty, and a utilitarian focus on product features and certifications (Neuendorf, 2018). The Kenyan Cosmetic industry is experiencing notable growth, yet a critical issue persists: the systemic exclusion of male consumers from targeted marketing efforts and brand engagement strategies. While global trends show an expanding interest in male grooming—with the global male grooming market valued at USD 55.22 billion in 2020 and projected to reach USD 78.6 billion by 2027 (Allied Market Research, 2021)—Kenya's beauty industry remains disproportionately focused on female consumers. A 2023 report by Euromonitor showed that only 12% of beauty product marketing in Kenya is directed at men, indicating a significant strategic gap. This figure is starkly low when compared to rising male grooming participation, signaling a considerable gap between consumer interest and industry responsiveness.

Despite a growing urban middle class, rising disposable incomes, and increased exposure to global grooming trends, urban male consumers in Kenya remain sidelined. Nairobi, the country's commercial and cultural capital, houses a significant population of tech-savvy men aged 18–35 who regularly engage with digital platforms. Cultural perceptions continue to present barriers. Research by Izugbara and Egesa (2020) highlights that personal care is often socially coded as feminine, making many Kenyan men reluctant to be associated with grooming products. Consequently, men are less likely to engage in overt product trials or seek grooming advice, further limiting their inclusion in marketing campaigns. Alenezi (2024) emphasizes that without inclusive representation, beauty brands risk stagnating their market potential and alienating a valuable consumer segment. The lack of empirical studies focusing on how digital marketing influences male consumer behaviour in Kenya presents a significant knowledge and practice gap. Therefore, this study sought to fill a critical gap.

Literature Review.

Search Engine Optimization and Consumer Behavior.

Recent studies on the relationship between Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and consumption behaviour have provided valuable empirical data that helps to understand how digital marketing strategies influence consumer actions. Torieh and ELGendy (2021) studied the Effect of Search Engine Optimization on industrial performance in Egypt. A descriptive research design was utilized. The target sample consisted of consumers segmented by age, gender, and educational level, with 158 participants selected. Data collection was conducted electronically through emails and social media platforms. Beyond utilizing descriptive statistical measures like frequency, mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation, the research incorporated confirmatory factor analysis

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alongside multiple regression techniques to rigorously evaluate the validity of the proposed hypotheses. The first hypothesis tested the effect of search engine optimization (SEO) on consumer response based on gender and revealed a significant result. The males responded more positively to SEO than females. The second hypothesis explored the impact of SEO on consumer response according to age and showed no significant differences between age groups. The third hypothesis assessed SEO's influence on consumer response based on educational level and found a significant difference. The findings thus indicated a significant difference in consumer response to search engine optimization based on gender and education level, while no significant difference was observed based on age. While the study offered useful insights, it was not conducted in the Kenyan context. Moreover, the study focused more digital market strategies effectiveness based on age, gender and education level and not on urban male consumption behaviour..

Additionally, Velayudham and Rose (2019) investigated how Search Engine Marketing influences customer purchasing behaviour. Their study involved the distribution of 180 questionnaires to both professionals and students, yielding 116 completed responses for analysis. In order to systematically analyze the objectives that relate to the completion of brand recognition based on the order of search results, correlation of the search capabilities of the respondents to their purchase decisions, as well as the identification of consumer preferred products for purchase through the internet, send tool which included chi-square test, correlation analysis and percentage analysis was used.

The research established that whether a certain brand appears above or below a competitor did affect consumer decisions to purchase. However, there is a positive relationship between internet searcher skills and purchase favorable behaviour. The findings also revealed that people tended to use search engines for detailed information but were less likely to make actual purchases of certain products, particularly electronic goods. The study was, however, not based on beauty care products. Moreover, the study focused on the whole population and not urban male consumers.

In their study, Ndung'u and Mutinda (2022) sought to determine the impact of SEM on the top one hundred medium firms in Kenya. The population was marketing managers of these medium size enterprises within Nairobi City County-Kenya based on a survey conducted by KPMG in collaboration with the nation media group year 2020 (Ndung'u & Mutinda, 2022). The respondents were selected by adopting the technique of stratified random sampling with reference to the company type. The data was collected through administering questionnaires which took a structured form. Reliability was used since content validity offers the ability to determine the extent to which particular set of a number of items represents the purpose of the instrument in question. In evaluating the reliability of the instruments used in the study Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Qualitative data obtained was analyzed using the content analysis method. The obtained quantitative information was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, mean, and standard deviation. The inferential analysis was carried out by the use of correlation and regression analysis to determine the level of

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relationship between the variables. The research proved that search engine marketing had a significant impact on the performance of the 100 leading medium-sized enterprises in Kenya (Ndungu & Mutinda, 2022). However, the research was conducted in another company and was not related to beauty cosmetics, as well as to the male population of the city. The research study used quantitative methods, which can limit the richness of the results.

Research Methodology.

The study adopted a quantitative approach and causal research design. A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items was administered to a sample of 139 male consumers, selected through simple random sampling from a target population of 214. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple linear regression, with diagnostic tests confirming model validity.

In order to allow the researcher to collect data in their institutions, the researcher acquired a research permit from NACOSTI. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22) was applied to the data. Analysis of data was performed on both descriptive basis (means and standard deviations) and inferential basis (regression and correlation analysis), and findings were presented in tables, figures and pie charts.

Results and discussion of findings

Descriptive Statistics for Search Engine Optimization

The objective of this was to determine the effect of search engine optimization (SEO) on the buying behaviour of urban male consumers in the cosmetic industry in Nairobi County, Kenya. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Search Engine Optimization

	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
I am more likely to consider a cosmetic brand if it appears at the top of search results.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	57.85%	42.15%	4.42	.496
I trust cosmetic brands that are easy to find through search engines.	0.00%	1.65%	2.48%	38.02%	57.85%	4.52	.634
Seeing a brand frequently in search results makes me more confident in trying it.	2.48%	0.00%	15.70%	26.45%	55.37%	4.32	.915
I often read customer reviews from search results before buying a product.	1.65%	13.22%	11.57%	32.23%	41.32%	3.98	1.103

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Statement						Mean	SD
Search ads (like Google ads) have influenced my choice of a grooming or cosmetic product.	4.96%	4.96%	17.36%	28.93%	43.80%	4.02	1.125
I discover new grooming or skincare products through online searches.	1.65%	0.83%	13.22%	38.02%	46.28%	4.26	.844
Search engine visibility affects how I perceive a brand's credibility.	0.00%	0.00%	16.53%	19.83%	63.64%	4.47	.765
Well-ranked search results make me more likely to explore a brand's website.	0.00%	8.26%	8.26%	31.40%	52.07%	4.27	.931
I have bought grooming products after finding useful search results or tutorials.	4.96%	2.48%	4.13%	33.06%	55.37%	4.31	1.025

Source: Researcher (2025)

As shown in table 1 above, the first statement assessed whether urban male consumers are more inclined to consider a cosmetic brand that appears at the top of search results. The data revealed high level of agreement, with 57.85% agreeing and 42.15% strongly agreeing, resulting in a high mean of 4.42 (SD = 0.496). This strong consensus affirms the influence of search rankings on consumer attention and brand consideration. It suggests that SEO is not just a visibility tool but a credibility signal for male consumers, particularly in a market where grooming products are often associated with quality and identity.

When asked whether they trust brands that are easy to find through search engines, a striking 57.85% strongly agreed and 38.02% agreed (mean = 4.52, SD = 0.634), the highest in this category. This indicates that ease of online discovery directly contributes to consumer confidence. For urban male shoppers—who may seek efficiency in decision-making—accessibility is equated with brand legitimacy. These results underscore the necessity for cosmetic brands targeting men to invest in SEO as a trust-building mechanism.

Respondents also affirmed that frequent brand appearances in search results boost their confidence in trying new products, with 55.37% strongly agreeing and 26.45% agreeing (mean = 4.32, SD = 0.915). Although 15.70% were neutral and 2.48% strongly disagreed, the data suggested that regular exposure positively reinforces brand familiarity and perceived reliability. This supports the psychological principle of the mere-exposure effect—frequent visibility breeds acceptance, a critical insight for marketers.

On the role of search engines in influencing buying decisions through customer reviews, responses were more varied. While 41.32% strongly agreed and 32.23% agreed, a notable 13.22% disagreed and 11.57% remained neutral (mean = 3.98, SD = 1.103). This variation implies that while online reviews matter to many male consumers, others may either rely on different cues (e.g., influencer

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content, peer recommendations) or view online reviews with skepticism. For brands, this signals an opportunity to integrate authentic review strategies—like user-generated content and verified feedback—into their digital presence.

The influence of paid search advertisements (e.g., Google Ads) on purchase behaviour also showed strong support. A combined 72.73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such ads had impacted on their grooming product choices (mean = 4.02, SD = 1.125). However, the presence of 9.92% disagreement or uncertainty reveals that fatigue or distrust in paid content may still exist among some consumers. Brands should therefore balance paid campaigns with organic visibility to maintain authenticity and credibility in their outreach.

On whether consumers discover new grooming products through search, 46.28% strongly agreed and 38.02% agreed, while 13.22% were undecided (mean = 4.26, SD = 0.844). This confirms that SEO is not only a tool for reinforcing known brands but also a channel for discovery. For emerging cosmetic brands targeting urban males, this insight is especially valuable—smart keyword targeting and educational content can serve as cost-effective ways to capture interest from curious, experience-driven consumers.

The idea that search visibility enhances brand credibility also received strong affirmation. A majority (63.64%) strongly agreed, while 19.83% agreed (mean = 4.47, SD = 0.765). The absence of disagreement signals that search engine presence is a non-negotiable credibility marker for many men in the grooming space. For cosmetic brands, this reinforces the importance of maintaining high-quality, optimized web content that signals authority, professionalism, and trustworthiness to this target audience.

A similarly strong pattern emerged regarding the influence of well-ranked search results in prompting further exploration. With 52.07% strongly agreeing and 31.40% agreeing (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.931), the data show that strong SEO encourages deeper engagement with the brand—whether through browsing websites, following social pages, or reading product details. However, 8.26% who disagreed or remained neutral suggest that strong search visibility alone may not always compel action; landing page quality and overall user experience must also be optimized.

Finally, consumers were asked whether they had made purchases after finding useful search results or tutorials. Here, 55.37% strongly agreed and 33.06% agreed (mean = 4.31, SD = 1.025), indicating that SEO not only drives awareness but also conversions. Nonetheless, 4.96% strongly disagreed and 2.48% disagreed—this minority may reflect consumers who are less influenced by digital content or who prioritize in-person experiences. These insights highlight the importance of complementing SEO efforts with engaging tutorials, testimonials, and visual content to capture the attention of more hesitant buyers.

The data thus clearly established that SEO has a powerful and multidimensional influence on urban male cosmetic consumers in Nairobi. From trust and discovery to confidence and purchase intent, SEO serves as a crucial enabler of digital engagement and brand choice. These findings align with previous studies. Velayudham and Rose (2019) emphasized the role of top search

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positioning in shaping customer behaviour—paralleling the current finding that visibility at the top of search results boosts brand preference. Torieh and ELGendy (2021) found that male consumers respond more positively to SEO efforts than females, which supports this study's consumer profile. Similarly, Ndung'u and Mutinda (2022) confirmed that SEO drives improved performance among Kenyan firms, underscoring the commercial value of optimized search strategies.

However, while the benefits of SEO are evident, the study also uncovers areas of inconsistency, particularly with regard to search-generated traffic and the perceived influence of reviews. This suggests that SEO must be approached holistically, combining technical visibility with high-quality content, user trust signals, and seamless web experiences. For cosmetic brands seeking to win over the urban male segment, SEO is not just a tool for digital placement—it is a strategic asset in building lasting brand relationships.

Correlation Analysis
Pearson correlation coefficient was applied in this work, and it is suitable to work with interval data and evaluates linear relationships to establish the correlation between SEO and the buying behaviour of urban male consumers in the cosmetic industry in Nairobi County, Kenya. The results are presentable in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficients

		Organizational Performance
Strategic Resource Allocation	Pearson correlation	0.529**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01
	N	121

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: Survey Data (2025)

Based on the results, SEO and the buying behaviour of urban male consumers in the cosmetic industry in Nairobi County, Kenya were highly, positively correlated as indicated by (r = 0.529, p<0.05). The findings support Ndung'u and Mutinda (2022), who reported that search visibility enhances customer acquisition and purchase intent in Kenya's SME sector.

Regression Analysis
In this study, multiple linear regression was employed to evaluate the influence of search engine optimization on urban male consumer buying behaviour in Nairobi's Cosmetic industry.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.839[a]	.704	.694	2.64649

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a. Predictors: (Constant), Search engine optimization

Source: Researcher (2025)

The model summary in Table 3 shows that the regression model explains a substantial portion of the variance in urban male consumer buying behaviour. The R value of 0.839 indicates a strong positive correlation between SEO and consumer behaviour. The R Square value of 0.704 suggests that approximately 70.4% of the variability in male consumer buying behaviour can be explained by the search engine optimization. The Adjusted R Square of 0.694, which accounts for the number of predictors, reinforces the robustness and generalizability of the model across similar populations.

Table 4: Analysis of variance

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1930.704	4	482.676	68.915	.000[b]
	Residual	812.453	116	7.004		
	Total	2743.157	120			

a. Dependent Variable: Male consumer buying behaviour
b. Predictors: (Constant), Search engine optimization

Source: Researcher (2025)

The ANOVA results in Table 4 confirm the overall significance of the regression model. The F-statistic of 68.915 and p-value of .000 ($p < 0.05$) indicate that the model is statistically significant. This means that, collectively, the four digital marketing strategies significantly explain variations in urban male consumer buying behaviour. The model is thus appropriate for hypothesis testing and further interpretation.

Table 5: Coefficients Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.648	5.069		2.101	.038
	Search Engine Optimization	.277	.114	.215	2.437	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Urban Male consumer buying behaviour

Source: Survey data (2025)

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Each predictor shows a positive and statistically significant relationship with urban male consumer buying behaviour at the 0.05 level. The p-values (all ≤ .001) confirm that the impact of these digital marketing strategies is not due to random chance. This model indicates that, holding all other variables constant, a one-unit increase in search engine optimization is associated with a 0.277 unit increase in urban male consumer buying behaviour.

Hypothesis Testing

This section interprets the regression coefficients and evaluates the statistical significance of the independent variable - search engine optimization.

H_01: Search engine optimization has no statistically significant effect on urban male consumer buying behaviour.

The regression results indicate an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.277 for search engine optimization, with a t-value of 2.437 and a p-value of .001. The positive coefficient suggests that improvements in search engine optimization—such as enhancing brand visibility, improving search rankings, and using paid search ads—are associated with increased buying behaviour among urban male consumers. The low p-value ($P<0.05$) indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, and thus the null hypothesis (H_01) is rejected. These results align with empirical evidence from Ndung'u and Mutinda (2022), who reported that search visibility and ranking significantly influence purchase decisions and brand trust in Kenya's SME sector. Similarly, Velayudham and Rose (2019) emphasized that higher search engine rankings boost consumer credibility perceptions and drive conversions. Although these studies focus on broader contexts, the current findings affirm that search engine marketing is an essential tool in influencing male buying patterns within the Cosmetic sector in Nairobi. Firms that invest in SEO are likely to experience gains in brand recognition, trust, and consumer action among male audiences.

Discussion

The Pearson correlation analysis indicated a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between SEO practices and consumer buying behaviour (r = 0.440, p < 0.01). This suggests that better implementation of SEO strategies is associated with improved engagement levels and higher purchasing activity among male consumers in the cosmetic sector.

Further analysis using regression techniques confirmed this relationship. SEO was found to significantly predict buying behaviour, with an unstandardized coefficient (B) = 0.277, standardized beta (β) = 0.215, t = 2.437, and a p-value of .001. These results indicate that for every unit an increase in SEO effectiveness, there is a corresponding 0.277 unit increase in consumer buying behaviour, when all other variables are held constant. This confirms SEO's strategic value as a visibility and credibility tool, particularly in influencing the grooming and skincare choices of the modern urban male consumer.

Conclusion

The study concludes that digital marketing approaches are vital in shaping the behaviour, preferences, and loyalty of urban male consumers in a more competitive market. These strategies can result in increased conversion rates, brand attachment, and long-term engagement when applied carefully and in accordance with the individual preferences and values of male consumers. The study therefore recommends that organizations ought to embrace systematic and analytics-based Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Other than just enhancing the rankings of the websites, companies must make their websites mobile-friendly, content-rich, and always up to date. The keywords to be used in the SEO activities must be related to the male grooming interests and should be able to generate visibility and qualified traffic. Also, the SEO and content marketing and social media will be integrated to assist consumers through the product discovery to conversion. It is also recommended that SEO needs to be institutionalized by companies in the form of formal policies that set clear benchmarks (e.g., organic traffic growth, bounce rate, average session duration), dedicated budgets to paid and organic

search efforts, and internal roles and responsibilities in the implementation of SEO. Such policies must also have continuous training programs to upgrade marketing teams to make them sustainable and consistent over time and across departments.

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