

From Clay to Clicks: Selling Nigerian Ceramics in the Digital Age By

Charlotte Tam-George PhD

Lecturer, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ceramics Unit
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
charlottetamgeorge28@gmail.com 08033095728

Abstract

Ceramics has always been a beautiful part of Nigerian culture, from traditional pottery to modern clay art. Today, many ceramic artists face challenges in finding buyers who can help grow their craft into a full-blown business. This paper reveals that the use of technology and other tools can help ceramic artists in Nigeria reach more people and succeed in the modern market. With the rise of the internet and smartphones, artists no longer need to rely solely on local shops or exhibitions to sell their work. Using social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, artists can share photos and videos of their ceramics, tell their stories, and connect with buyers across Nigeria and around the world. However, simple tools such as online payment apps, delivery services, and e-commerce websites can also help artists run a ceramic business from their comfort. With this system, artists can learn how to take good photos of their work, create online profiles, and build strong brands. This paper therefore encourages young and existing ceramic artists to combine their traditional pottery skills with new digital ideas. By doing so, they may expand their skills and business structure, creating multiple channels to earn more, preserve the nation's art culture more adequately, and help grow Nigeria's economy.

Keywords: Art, Ceramics, Culture, Digital Tools, Entrepreneurship, Media, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigerian ceramics have been an integral part of the country's cultural heritage for centuries, showcasing the intelligence, skill, and creativity of its people despite the lack of modern technological advancements (Ogunbiyi & Adeyemi, 2020). The art of pottery in Nigeria offers insight

into the culture of our ancestors, serving practical, magical, social, commemorative, and religious purposes that are still preserved in archives today (National Museum). In West Africa, pottery was not merely a utilitarian craft but a vital aspect of the continent's cultural identity (Falola, 2018). The evolution of Nigerian ceramics is deeply rooted in its history, with various regions developing unique styles and techniques. The northern part of the country, with its conducive climate for grazing, facilitated the rearing of herds, which in turn influenced the development of pottery in the region (Esezobor & Olorunniwo, 2019).

The Igbo, Ibibio, and Kalabari people in Eastern Nigeria have used pots as musical instruments, underscoring the significance of ceramics in traditional Nigerian life (British Museum). Despite this rich history, modern Nigerian ceramics face numerous challenges, including limited market access, a lack of modern technology, and competition from imported ceramics. However, opportunities for growth and development exist, particularly with the advent of digital marketing and e-commerce. The National Conference of African Industrial Designers has highlighted the need for better opportunities for Nigerian ceramics in local and international markets (Ogunbiyi & Adeyemi, 2019).

Digital marketing has revolutionized the way businesses operate and reach their target audience. For Nigerian ceramics, having an online presence can be a game-changer, enabling artists and businesses to showcase their products, connect with customers, and build a community of enthusiasts (Breunig, 2016). In addition, Nigerian ceramics can overcome some of the challenges they face by leveraging these benefits and capitalizing on new opportunities.

Digital Marketing Strategies for Nigerian Ceramics

Digital marketing for Nigerian ceramics involves leveraging online platforms to promote and sell ceramic products. Digital marketing strategies in Nigeria, as opined by Ogundiran (2018) and Tylecote (2015), include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Optimize your website to rank higher in search engine results, increasing visibility and driving organic

traffic. This strategy will help your products gain greater visibility, likes, shares, and comments.

2. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising: Use platforms like Google AdWords to create targeted ads, and pay only for clicks.

3. Social Media Marketing (SMM): This includes leveraging platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to showcase products and build brand awareness. This will help to expand your product's visibility and branding.

4. Email Marketing (EM): This involves building an email list and sending targeted campaigns to subscribers, promoting products and offers.

5. Influencer Market (IM): This involves partnering with influencers in the ceramics or art niches to promote products to their followers.

6. Targeted Advertising: Focus on specific demographics, locations, or behaviors to reach potential customers interested in your ceramic products. This method will help ensure that every market effort applied is seen by the right people at the right time, thus increasing the likelihood of engagement.

7. Word-of-Mouth Advertising: Encouraging satisfied customers to share their products experiences with others. Personal recommendations are powerful ways of promoting your ceramic business and building trust with existing and potential customers.

8. Content Marketing: This involves creating engaging content, such as tutorials, customer testimonials, or behind-the-scenes stories, to help attract and retain a clearly defined business audience.

Digital Marketing Agencies in Nigeria

These are agencies that offer digital marketing strategies, social media marketing, pay-per-click (PPC), branding, email marketing, and web design. They have experience, offer a variety of digital services, and have a local presence. According to Adeyemi and Olowu (2023), these agencies include, but are not limited to, the following;

1. Digital Elixir: This is a digital marketing agency in Abuja, Nigeria, that offers services such as Google AdWords, Facebook/Instagram Ads, and LinkedIn Ads.

2. Ziza Digital: This is a Lagos-based agency providing high-impact digital marketing solutions, recommended for companies seeking to hire a digital marketing agency.

3. E29 Marketing: This refers to a full-service marketing agency specializing in brand strategy, digital marketing, and influencer campaigns.

4. CEPED ICT Centre: This is a global web design and digital marketing agency with diverse offices in Ibadan, Lagos, Abuja, Ekiti, and Benin. They provide information, technology, and digital services and have been industry pioneers since 2016.

5 Marketing Trybe: This is a multi-service digital marketing agency based in Benin City, with an office in Lekki, Lagos. They provide such services as social media marketing, PPC, branding, digital strategy, email marketing, and mobile & app marketing.

Digital Marketing Platforms

Digital marketing platforms can play a significant role in promoting and selling Nigerian ceramics both within and abroad. Some of these key platforms and their roles, as disclosed by Ogundiran (2019) and Willett (2017), are:

1. **E-commerce Platforms:** These platforms provide convenient ways for ceramic artists and business people to sell their products online. Some of these platforms include-
 - Shopify: This is a popular e-commerce platform that allows ceramic artists and business owners to create online stores to showcase and sell their products.
 - WooCommerce: This WordPress plugin enables ceramic artists and businesses to sell their products online
 - BigCommerce: This is a comprehensive e-commerce platform that provides tools for ceramic artists and businesses to manage their online stores.

2. **Media Platforms:** These platforms offer essential and powerful ways for ceramic artists and business owners to showcase their products online, engage with customers, and build brand awareness and loyalty. These platforms include-
 - Instagram: This refers to a visual platform ideal for showcasing ceramic products, sharing behind-the-scenes content, and engaging with customers.
 - Facebook: This is a platform that allows ceramic artists and business people to create online pages, share updates of their business, and engage with customers.
 - Pinterest: This refers to a platform that enables ceramic artists and business owners to showcase their products online and reach a wider audience.
 - WhatsApp: This is a social media platform that enables ceramic artists and business people to showcase their products online to people who have their contact information, with adequate descriptions of the products.

3. **Online Marketplaces:** These platforms provide avenues for ceramic artists and business owners to sell their products to a global audience. Some of these include-
 - Etsy: This is a marketplace that helps in selling handmade and unique ceramic products to a global audience
 - eBay: This is a platform that allows the auctioning off of ceramic products to customers worldwide.
 - Afrobuzzle: This refers to an online platform that helps in showcasing African ceramics and connecting with potential buyers.

4. **Online Communities and Forums:** These include-
 - Ceramic Voice: Used in sharing news, technical information, and issues concerning Nigerian ceramics development.
 - Reddit: Helps in engaging with ceramic enthusiasts and potential customers on subreddits like r/ceramics.
 - Discord: This allows ceramic communities to connect with other artists, businesses, and enthusiasts.

5. **Digital Marketing Forums:** These include-
 - Google Ads: These platforms target specific audiences and help in increasing the online visibility of ceramic products.
 - Facebook Ads: These ads help in reaching potential customers and driving traffic to the website.
 - Influencer Marketing: Partnering with influencers or art niches to promote products online.

Digital Marketing Processes

By leveraging digital marketing strategies, Nigerian ceramics can enhance visibility, drive sales, and build brand awareness in global markets. To develop a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for Nigerian ceramics, the following factors must be considered (Akinbogun, 2015; Oluwasemire, 2017);

1. **Conduct Market Research:** The first step in conducting market research is to understand the target audience, their preferences, and behaviours. This will help in the production of customers' specified products, leading to customer satisfaction, repeat patronage, and increased market share and returns.
2. **Develop a Website:** Create a website that is capable of showcasing ceramic products, with e-commerce functionality.
3. **Choose Digital Platforms:** Select platforms that give wider access to the target customers, audience, or market, and expected marketing goals.
4. **Create Engaging Content:** Develop content that can showcase products, tell the stories behind the ceramics, and engage the audience beyond their expectations.
5. **Monitor and Evaluate:** Finally, track the performance of digital marketing campaigns, making adjustments as needed.

Relevance of Digital Marketing to the Nigerian Ceramic Industry

Using digital marketing to sell ceramic products has several benefits, some of which are stated by Adeyemi and Olowu (2023), and explained below:

1. **Increased visibility:** Digital marketing helps to showcase products to a larger audience, thus increasing the level of visibility and, in addition, drives sales.

2. **Cost-Effective:** Digital marketing can help in reducing the cost of promotion and distribution of products, compared to traditional marketing approaches.
3. **Targeted Marketing:** This form of marketing uses digital platforms to target specific demographics, interests, objectives, and behaviours.
4. **Measurable Results:** Digital marketing helps in tracking the performance of digital marketing campaigns, thus making data-driven decisions.
5. **Global Reach:** Selling Nigerian ceramics online increases global reach and attention. It helps promote Nigerian ceramics worldwide, thereby creating additional avenues for potential sales.
6. **Fintech Integration:** Nigerian financial technology (Fintech) companies such as Paystack and Flutterwave have revolutionized the mode of financial transaction in business. Financial institutions, including deposit money banks, are now making digital transactions more accessible. Thus, integrating these Fintech solutions can help ceramic artists and businesses streamline their online sales and payment systems.
7. **Comfort in transactions:** One key indicator of customer satisfaction is convenience and comfort. Customers and buyers always desire convenience when engaging in business transactions. Online businesses provide buyers with adequate convenience and comfort, since they can search websites to evaluate products and place orders when they find an appealing one, all from their comfort zones. No buyer would want to endure the stress of moving around the city searching for a product that could be found online. If so, the best option is to order online.
8. **New markets:** Digital platforms can enable innovation and creativity in the ceramic industry. They create convenient channels for different stakeholders to conduct business.
9. **Innovation:** Digital platforms can create avenues for innovation and creativity in the ceramics industry.
10. **Blend of tradition and modernity:** By combining traditional techniques and materials, Nigerian ceramic artists can stand out amid the global trend in modern ceramics.

11. Quality and Craftsmanship: Focusing on high-quality products and exceptional craftsmanship is essential for building a strong and credible identity and reputation.

Challenges of Marketing Nigerian Ceramics in the Digital Age

By understanding the challenges of marketing Nigerian ceramics in the digital age, researchers, practitioners, and industries can develop effective strategies to support the growth and development of ceramic industries. In addition, some of the major challenges, as highlighted by Shaw (2018) and Tylecote (2018), are:

1. Limited Access to Technology: Most ceramic artists and business owners in Nigeria may face challenges accessing digital technologies, including computers, smartphones, and internet connectivity.
2. Digital illiteracy: Most ceramic artists and business owners may require professional training and support to effectively utilize digital platforms and apply digital tools.
3. Competition: The digital market is highly competitive, and as a result, ceramic artists and business owners may struggle to stand out and differentiate themselves.
4. Logistical challenges: One of the major challenges is shipping and distributing fragile ceramic products that require careful packaging and handling.
5. Effective Marketing: Effectively marketing ceramic products online requires deep, professional knowledge of digital marketing strategies and approaches.
6. Online Payment Fraud: Ensuring a secure payment system and processes that help identify fraudulent payments is a major challenge. In addition to this, enabling a system capable of protecting customers' data from fraud is crucial for successful online sales.
7. Sincere business: In most cases, people pay for products that are never delivered to them, or they receive products but do not make the payments. As such, ensuring that a sincere online business for ceramics in Nigeria is very challenging.
8. What I ordered and what I received: Most people complain that what they receive in real life is different from what they order online. As a result, people are often afraid to buy products online

because they fear receiving a lower-quality product than what was shown during the online promotion. In support of this, online product buyers believe products look better online than in reality. As a result, they fear purchasing goods online; this situation affects digital marketing for ceramic artists, the industry, and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

This study on Nigerian ceramics in the digital age highlights the role of digital platforms in transforming the ceramics industry in Nigeria. Nigerian ceramic artists and businesses can increase their online presence, reach a global audience, and drive sales by leveraging e-commerce, social media, and online marketplaces. The study underscores the benefits of addressing the industry's challenges, including limited access to technology, inadequate digital literacy, logistical issues, and poor policies. However, Nigerian ceramic artists and businesses can unlock the full potential of digital platforms by providing training and support and developing effective strategies to overcome these challenges.

The study demonstrates that Nigerian ceramics have a bright future, with opportunities for growth, innovation, and global recognition. In addition, by embracing digital technologies and platforms, Nigerian ceramic artists and businesses can showcase their creativity, skill, and craftsmanship to a global audience and support the industry's development.

The study revealed that continued research into the impact of digital platforms on the Nigerian ceramics industry can provide valuable insights and inform effective strategies for growth and development. In addition, training and capacity-building programs can help Nigerian ceramic artists and businesses develop the skills and knowledge needed to use digital platforms effectively. Finally, by working together, Nigerian ceramic artists, business owners, and industry stakeholders can unlock the full potential of digital platforms to drive innovation, growth, and global recognition for the industry.

References

- Adebayo, A. A. (2017). *Nigerian ceramics: A cultural perspective*. University of Ilorin Press.

- Adeyemi, A. A., & Olowu, R. A. (2023). An investigation of the properties of Nigerian kaolin clay for ceramics production. *Journal of Marketing Science and Engineering*, 9(3), 1-8.
- Akinbogun, T. L. (2015). *Nigerian ceramics: A study of traditional pottery*. University of Lagos Press.
- Breunig, P. (2016). Nok: African Sculpture in Archaeological context. *Journal of African Archaeology*, 12(2), 109-127.
- Ekwueme, E. E., & Okoro, E. C. (2020). Investigation of the properties of Nigerian ceramic materials for industrial applications. *Journal of Materials Science and Engineering*, 10(1), 1-10.
- Esezobor, D. E., & Olorunniwo, O.E. (2019). Development of ceramic membranes from Nigerian clays for water treatment. *Journal of Ceramic Research*, 11(1), 1-10
- Fagg, B. (1977). *Nok Terracottas*. Nigeria: Ethnographica Ltd.
- Falola, T. (2018). *Nigerian art and culture: A historical perspective*. University of Ibadan Press.
- National Museum of Nigeria, Abuja: *Nok culture collection*.
www.nationalmuseumofnigeria.org
- Nwankwo, C. C., (2018). Development of ceramic membranes from Nigerian clays for water treatment (Master's thesis). University of Nigeria.
- Nwankwo, C. C., & Okafor, C. C. (2019). Utilization of Nigerian ceramic materials for sustainable development. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sustainable Development*, 1-5.
- Obiora, S. C. (2020). Characterization of Nigerian feldspar for ceramics production (Ph.D, Dissertation). University of Port Harcourt.
- Obiora, S. C., & Okeke, C. E. (2020). Ceramic technology and innovation in Nigeria. *Proceedings of the Nigerian Ceramics Conference*, 1-10
- Ogunbiyi, A.O. & Adeyemi, A. A. (2019). Utilization of Nigerian ceramic materials for sustainable development. *Proceedings of the Nigerian Materials Congress*, 1-5.
- Ogunbiyi, A. O., & Adeyemi, A. A. (2020). Ceramic technology and Innovation in Nigeria. *Proceedings of the Nigerian Ceramics Conference*, 1-10.
- Oluwasemire, K. O. (2017). Ceramic education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects (Master's thesis). University of Ibadan.
- Ogundiran, A. O. (2018). *Ceramic technology and innovation in Nigeria*. Ibadan University Press.

- Ogundiran, A. O. (2019). Ceramic art in Nigeria: A study of traditional and contemporary practices. University of Lagos Press.
- Okpiafon, E. U. (2019). Ceramic art in Nigeria: A study of traditional pottery. University of Calabar Press.
- Shaw, W. (2018). *Marketing in perspectives*. New York. Sage.
- The British Museum: *Nok Terracotta Sculptures*. www.britishmuseum.org
- Tylecote, T.J. (2018). Digital Marketing Strategies and Success in business. *Journal of Marketing Strategies*, 9(2), 69–81.
- Willett, G. (2017). Online business people: The best ways out. New York *Journal of Marketing Science*, 2(1), 58–65.

