

## UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS BY SMALL SCALE BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS FOR SUCCESSFUL ONLINE MARKETING IN ABIA STATE: IMPLICATION TO BUSINESS EDUCATION

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### Abstract

*This study determined the utilization of social media platforms by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 462 respondents (305 male and 157) female drawn from a population of 4,620 registered small scale entrepreneurs in Abia State. The instrument for data collection was a 52-item researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Social Media Platforms Utilization for Successful Online Marketing Questionnaire (SMPUSONQ)". The instrument was validated by three experts two from Business Education in the Department of Educational Management and one from Measurement and Evaluation in Department of Science Education, all in the College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Pearson product moment correlation to test the stability of the instrument which yielded coefficient of 0.81. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings showed among others that small scale business entrepreneurs moderately utilize Facebook and Whatsapp platforms for successful online marketing. It also showed that small scale business entrepreneurs. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that small scale business entrepreneurs should develop keen interest in utilizing Facebook and Whatsapp, social media platforms to enable them carryout their businesses online and as well develop their business outfits to compete with their counterparts globally.*

**Keyword:** Small scale Business, utilization, social media platforms entrepreneurs, successful online marketing

### Introduction

A growing economy tends to provide and create opportunities for the small firms. Small firms not only provide outlet for enterprising and independent minded people, but they are also the efficient form of business organization in industry where the option size of the production unit or sales outlet is small. Small scale businesses or enterprises (SSEs) now attract the attention of governments all over the world. Different criteria are used in defining the SSEs. Based on this, the meaning of small

scale business cannot be said to be adequate in a single definition. The various definitions of SSEs are based on the background, orientation and environment of the scholar. Small sale business according to Isike and Emoga (2010) is that business which is independently owned and managed by private individual to meet up their desired income and their employment needs. Sarokin (2019) viewed small scale business as one marked by a limited number of employee and a limited flow of finances and materials. Charles (2019) opined that small scale business entrepreneurs are people who owned a business that's considered small in terms of its work force, sales volume or organizational structure.

Entrepreneurs are individuals who conceive the idea for a business venture, gather the necessary human, material, financial and physical resources to start the operations of the venture and grow it to the point where more people are added to the organization and they usually bear the most personal, environmental and financial risk in beginning the venture. An entrepreneur is a change agent, an innovator who is also a risk taker, who is able to exploit business opportunities in his/her environment, and utilize resources effectively to develop new technologies, produce new products and services to maximize his/her profit and by so doing contributes significantly to the betterment of the society (Ekoh-Nweke, 2017).

Utilization is the transformation of a set of input into goods and services to achieve stated objectives. It involves the use of information resources to promote production output. It is the action of using something that is making practical use of it. Utilization simply refers to the process of using something effectively. In business, utilization may also mean the percentage of available time that a machine, device, or employee is actively working. Uzoma (2017) stated that utilization has to do with the extent to which facilities are provided, they are either used effectively or ineffectively or else they may remain unused. However, in the context of this study, the researcher view utilization as the rate or how often social media platforms or networking sites are put into use or services by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online businesses and marketing.

A platform or social platform is a web-based technology that enables the development, development and management of social media solutions and services. It provides the ability to create social websites and services with complete social media network functionality. A social platform exhibits a social media network's technological and user-specific characteristics. Technologically, a social platform provides markup language for creating native applications, an application programming interface (API) for third-party application integration and a backend admin console for managing the entire user base and preferences. From a user's perspectives, a social platform enables communities, sharing of content, adding friends, setting privacy controls and other native social media network features. According to Bicen and Cavus (2011), the rightful and timely utilization of social media platforms in marketing in every business settings yield greater output of the business. However, popular social media platforms include; Facebook, WhatsApp, Google Plus, Twitter, Blogs, and Instagram and many more.

Social media came into existence in the 1990s. Boyd et al in Ekeledo (2021) documented that the first recognizable social network site called “Six degrees” was launched in 1997 on sixdegrees.com. It allowed users to create profiles, list and surf friends' lists. While six degrees attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and in the year 2000, the service came to an end. In 2002, social media received a great boost with the launch of Friendster. Within a year of its launch, Friendster recorded more than three million registered users and a ton of investment interests. In 2003, My Space, LinkedIn, Last FM, Tribe net, Hi5 among others sprang up. In 2004, popular names like Facebook, Harvard Dogster and Mixi evolved. From 2005 till date a lot more of social media sites were launched for examples; Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Google Plus, and Blogs. However, the study will focus on the following; facebook and whatsapp applications of social media platform that can aid small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing. According to Greenstein and Howard in Ekeledo (2021), facebook was launched in February 2004 and has an estimate of 800 million users. It is ranked as the most used social networking service. Through facebook, businesses can create a page which allows their followers or customers to like and drop comments about their product. This will also allow their friends to see their activities thereby putting brands in front of an audience you may not have access to. According to Locke et al in Ekeledo (2021), facebook is a popular social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send message and keep in touch with friends. The site which is available in 37 different languages includes public features such as; Market place which allow members to post, read and respond to classified ads groups which allow members to have common interest to find each other and interact, events which allow members to publicize an event, invite guest and track who plans to attend, pages which allow members to create and promote a public page built around a specific topic and present technology which allow members to see which contacts are online and chat.

Whatsapp Messenger was founded by Jan Koum and Brian Acton who was the former employees at yahoo Inc in 2009. It was initially created for android mobile devices and soon came to windows, symbian, ios, blackberry OS. WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform instant messaging client for smart phones, PCs and tablets. The app relies on the internet to send images, texts, documents, audio and video messages to other users that have the app installed on their device. Launched in January 2010, WhatsApp Inc. was acquired by facebook on February 19, 2014 for about \$ 19.3 billion. Today, more than 1 billion people use the service to communicate with their friends, loved ones and even customers. This further helped to increase its popularity (Cole, 2011). According to Parry and Olsen (2014), whatsapp is a proprietary cross- platform instant messaging client for smart phones that operated under a subscription business model. It uses the internet to send messages, images, videos, user location and audio media messages to others.

The American Marketing Association (2013), definition says that marketing is “exchanging offerings that have value for customers, client, partners, and society at

large”. From the definition, we know that customers and clients are not the only concern for marketers, but also the society as a whole. Marketing is the business function that identifies customers' needs and wants, determines which target markets the organization can serve best, and designs appropriate products services, and programme to serve these markets. It is important in creating human ideas and activities aimed at identifying, anticipating and satisfying human needs and want through exchanging as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In Nigeria both women and men play very significant roles in socio-economic activities at the family and community levels through subsistence of lives of inhabitants. The fact remains that the contribution of both gender in food security, agriculture and business is the untapped green oil of Nigeria. The issue of gender differences as it relates to productivity and subsistence has been of special interest from the beginning to policy makers in developing countries like Nigeria (Mabundza *et al*, 2014; Kabeer, 2016). Male and female entrepreneurs are those that are into one entrepreneurial activities or the other and they are used as an intervening variables in this study because they make use of social media. According to Olatokun and Bankole (2011), male and female entrepreneurs in Nigeria use social media platforms as a marketing tool for creativity, open communication and sharing of knowledge with their customers and as such there is no significant difference in their opinions. Gender relations are essential part which must be taken into account in every comprehensive socio-economic analysis as it is a factor in all social and economic relations.

Small scale industries orientation is part and parcel of Nigeria. Evidence abound in our respective communities of what successes our great grandparents made of their respective trading concerns such as yam barns, iron smelting, farming, cottage industries and the likes. Economic history is well stocked with enough insights into the humble beginnings of present day enterprises. Evidence abound that almost all of the multinational giant corporations were cottage enterprises growing as their industry grew, and through own sheer ability either reproduce existing products more cheaply or improve their ability; even at the international level, in the early stages of her industrialization. One of the significant problems facing the small scale businesses is lack of marketing abilities (both traditional and online) and necessary skills to deploy modern technologies to reach out to its wide range of customers. Besides, the complexity of the modern market conditions and poor locations of their sale outlets further restrict their ability to analyze and cope with the changing trends in the marketplace. Some small scale firms do not even have the financial muscle to compete with their counterparts talk more of making use of social media platforms in carrying out their business activities online. Hence, these study to determine the influence of utilization of social media platforms by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State, Nigeria.

The purpose of the study was to determine the level of utilization of social media platforms by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State. Specifically, the study determined the level of;

1. utilization of Facebook platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing;
2. utilization of WhatsApp platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing;

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the level of utilization of Facebook platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State?
2. What is the level of utilization of WhatsApp platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance:

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs in the level of utilization of Facebook platform for successful online marketing.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs in the level of utilization of WhatsApp platform for successful online marketing.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. A descriptive surveys research is one which involves the collection of detailed description of public opinion in existing phenomena with the intent to justify current conditions and practices to make better plans for improving phenomena (Nworgu, 2015). Descriptive survey research design was suitable for this study because it used questionnaire to elicit the opinions of respondents on the utilization of social media platforms by small-scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State. The study was conducted in Abia State. The choice of Abia State for the study was informed by the fact that the area is entrepreneurial compliance compared to other states in the South-East to enable the researcher determined the utilization of social media platforms by small-scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State. The population of the study was 4,620 (male and female) registered small scale businesses in 2019 in Abia State that has social media platform (Abia State Trade & investment, 2019). The sample for this study comprised 462 (305 male and 157 female) respondents. Multi stage sampling technique was used for the study.

The instrument for data collection was structured and self-developed questionnaire titled; “Social Media Platforms Utilization for Successful Online Marketing Questionnaire (SMPUSONQ)”. The instrument was developed by the

researcher through extensive review of literature based on the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into two Sections A and B. Section A contained an item on the gender of the respondent while Section B focused on the specific objectives of the study in five clusters of B1 to B6 with 8, 10, 6, 9, 9, and 10 items respectively. The questionnaire items were structured on a five-point rating scale. The response categories were: Very Highly Utilized (VHU), Highly Utilized (U), Moderately Utilized (MU), Rarely Utilized, and Not Utilized (NU). The instrument was validated by three experts. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used and a reliability co-efficient value of 0.81 was obtained.

The researcher administered the instrument on the subjects in their business offices with the help of three properly briefed research assistants for easy coverage. To ensure that all the 462 copies of the questionnaire were returned, on the spot collection was used except where respondents re-scheduled later date/time for collection. In the end, 452 copies of the questionnaires were duly completed and returned representing 97.6% return rate with only 9 copies lost which gave 2.4 % attrition rate. The data generated from the study were analyzed using the mean to answer the research questions while the t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Decision on the research questions was based on the cluster mean scores in relation to the real limit of numbers as presented as follows: Very Highly Utilized (VHU) = 4.50 – 5.00, Highly Utilized (U) = 3.50 – 4.49, Moderately Utilized (MU) = 2.50 – 3.49, Rarely Utilized 1.50 - 2.49, and Not Utilized (NU) = 1.00 – 1.49. The hypothesis of no significant difference was not rejected where the P-value is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 otherwise was rejected.

## **Results**

**Research Questions One:** What is the level of utilization of Facebook platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State?

**Table 1:** Mean ratings of small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Facebook platform for successful online marketing

S/N	Item statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Using Facebook for your business	2.70	0.68	Moderately utilized
2.	Advertising your business through Facebook	2.64	0.50	Moderately utilized
3.	Marketing your products and services through Facebook	2.81	0.80	Moderately utilized
4.	Active group in your niche or industry for your business	2.69	0.90	Moderately utilized
5.	Member of a legit group of Facebook marketer utilization	2.64	0.91	Moderately utilized
6.	Always making changes regarding your business update on Facebook platform	2.77	0.78	Moderately utilized
7.	Introducing your new brand of product in news room blog in Facebook	2.57	0.71	Moderately utilized
8.	using Facebook page for your businesses	2.61	0.80	Moderately utilized
	<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>Moderately utilized</b>

Data in Table 1 still shows that the mean values of all the items are between 2.57 and 2.81 indicating that they are moderately utilized mean responses. The cluster mean of 2.68 which also falls within the moderately utilized mean responses shows that respondents moderately utilize Facebook platform for successful online marketing.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Facebook platform for successful online marketing

**Table 2:** t-Test analysis of mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Facebook Platform for Successful online Marketing

Status	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	df	t-cal	P-value	Remark
<b>Male</b>	305	12.29	2.10				
				451	-2.74	.088	NS
<b>Female</b>	148	11.22	2.16				

Data in Table 2 reveals that the P-value of 0.088 is greater than 0.05 alpha value. This means that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Facebook platform for successful online marketing. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

**Research Question Two:** What is the level of utilization of WhatsApp platform by small scale business entrepreneurs for successful online marketing in Abia State?

**Table 3:** Mean ratings of small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
9	Utilization of WhatsApp account for your business	2.55	0.81	Moderately utilized
10.	Advertising your business through WhatsApp	2.72	0.78	Moderately utilized
11.	Using WhatsApp to market products	2.74	0.81	Moderately utilized
12.	Introducing your businesses using WhatsApp text and graphic representation platform	2.89	1.02	Moderately utilized
13.	Inserting pictures and symbols of your business on WhatsApp	2.69	0.93	Moderately utilized
14.	Involving your business into many WhatsApp group	2.83	0.81	Moderately utilized
15.	Regular updating of your business arrangement in WhatsApp	2.77	0.78	Moderately utilized
16.	Spread text and graphics representing your products on WhatsApp	2.62	0.81	Moderately utilized
17.	Changing text alignment in WhatsApp messaging regarding your business	2.73	0.87	Moderately utilized
18	Utilization of marketing strategy for your business using WhatsApp	2.65	0.77	Moderately utilized
	<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>0.84</b>	

Data in table 3 showed that the mean responses values of all the items ranged from 2.55-2.89 indicating moderately utilized mean responses. The cluster mean of 2.72 which also falls within the moderately utilized mean responses indicated that respondents moderately utilized Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing.



**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing

**Table 4:** t-test analysis of mean ratings of Male and Female small scale Business Entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing

Status	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	df	t-cal	P-value	Remark
Male	305	14.72	1.89	451	-2.09	.088	NS
Female	148	13.86	1.64				

Data in Table 4 reveal that the P-value of 0.088 is greater than 0.05 alpha value. This means that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study were discussed in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses as follows:

Findings of the study reviewed in relation to research question one that small scale business entrepreneurs moderately utilize Facebook platform for successful online marketing showed no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female respondents on their level of utilization of Facebook platform for successful online marketing. These findings agree with Lockey and Laura in Ekeledo (2021) which emphasized that Facebook is a popular social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send message and keep in touch with friends. Dominic (2014) noted that reasons for advertising business products using Facebook include low cost and access to millions of targeted audience who could turn to potential customers creating business page is very easy. Amit (2014) concluded that Facebook is used for business enterprises as it could provide customers' support very easily and respond quickly to queries and resolve problem faster.

The result in Table 4.3 in relation to research question two showed that small scale business entrepreneurs moderately utilized Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing. The result went further in Table 4.4 to reveal that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on the utilization of Whatsapp platform for successful online marketing. The result specifically showed that respondents agreed that small scale business entrepreneurs moderately use Whatsapp platform among others for advertising and marketing their products. They also agreed that the platform is used

by small scale business entrepreneurs for introducing businesses and updating of business arrangements. The results were aligned with Cole (2011) who remarked that more than one billion people use the services of Whatsapp to communicate with their friends and customers. Supporting this, Kashmira (2015) maintained that business entrepreneurs use whatsapp because of its speed, opening ratio, frequency of use and quality of communication. Business -Owners could easily use the platform to interact with the customers on updates on their products by giving them vital information and answering their questions. In agreement, to Sulleyman (2018) explained that whatsapp officially launched a new platform called Whataspp Business. It is completely separate to the standard version of whatsapp, but it work in much the same manner only its purpose is connecting businesses and customers, rather than friends and family.

### **Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century business and marketing strategies has gone beyond the traditional approach of business awareness, creating such social media platforms become an important aspect of business marketing and branding. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that small scale business entrepreneurs moderately utilize Facebook and Whatsapp in carrying out their business activities especially in online marketing. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female small scale business entrepreneurs on their level of utilization of Facebook and Whatsapp platforms for successful online marketing.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Small scale business entrepreneurs should develop keen interest in utilizing facebook and whatsapp platforms to enable them create business awareness and compete with their business counterparts globally.
2. Telecommunication industries should reduce their network tariff to enable the small scale business owners to operate their businesses online without any hitch.
3. Government and its Agencies should encourage the small scale business owners by giving them financial support in terms of loan and as well provide an enabling environment for their businesses to thrive.

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