



Utilization of Social Media Platforms by Entrepreneurs in their Entrepreneurial Activities in Delta State

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to assess the extent of utilization of social media platforms by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities in Delta State. Five research questions guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Population consisted of 200 entrepreneurs randomly selected in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State. A 12 item questionnaire structured on a 5-point rating scale and validated by experts was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' views. The study revealed that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in creating new product image and awareness, marketing new business ideas, stimulating sales of new business products and building long term relationships with their customers at a very low extent. It was further revealed that the entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in promoting new business products at a low extent. The study concluded that the utilization of relevant social media platforms will give entrepreneurs strategic edge in their entrepreneurial activities because they will be in a better position to explore and meet the needs of their technologically savvy customers. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government economic and communication agencies should provide favorable e-business policies with adequate ICT infrastructural facilities that will enable entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in their businesses.

Keywords: Utilization, social media, social media platforms, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial activities

INTRODUCTION

The term utilization entails effective usage of assets, inputs and raw resources to achieve desirable outcomes. Conceptually, Van Tassel and Dehaan (2013) posited that utilization is synonymously referred to as application and use. According to Blattberg, Kim and Neslin (2008), utilization is the indirect use of information in order to produce meaningful results. Correspondingly, Okolocha and Nwadiani (2015) defined utilization as the art of putting things or resources that are tangible or intangible into proper use.

Therefore, utilization is defined as the process of putting facts, objects and ideas into specific practice. In the context of this study, utilization refers to the extent to which modern technologies such as social media platforms are used by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities.

Social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 which facilitates the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The user-generated content of social media platforms empower users of technologies to read, write and contribute to the content delivery of information. User generated content is a core component of the so-called second generation web or Web 2.0 which includes online blogs, contributions to wikis, comments in forums, pictures and status updates on social networking sites (Grannell, 2009). Correspondingly, Gordon (2010) defined social media as an online platform which enables customers to create and share content, communicate with one another and build relationships with other customers.

According to Wankel (2011), immediacy, ubiquity and availability are the three things that make social media platforms a powerful force in modern entrepreneurial pursue. Wankel further maintained that immediacy is the instant sharing of information, while ubiquity means that hundreds of millions of people use social media platforms and availability means that anyone with internet connection can access it. Social media platforms consists of technological tools that streamline market research activities for the creation and development of customer-business relationships through quality marketing, advertising and coordination of customer's support with less overhead costs. Harris and Ray (2009) categorized social media platforms into 15 types covering social networking (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Orkut, etc.), publishing (e.g. Wikipedia and SlideShare), photo, audio and video sharing (e.g. Flickr, YouTube and Vimeo), microblogging (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr, Plurk, etc.), live casting, virtual worlds (such as Second Life), gaming, productivity applications (such as BitTorrent or Google Docs), aggregators (e.g. Digg, Reddit, Yelp, etc.), RSS, search, mobile and interpersonal.

Presently, social media platforms enforce entrepreneurial activities because they open up new business ventures and discover new markets through unrestricted flow of untapped business ideas and information. Mark Zukerberg, co-founder of Facebook supports this by observing that businesses need to understand the usage of internet and social media technologies to remain relevant (Maymann, 2008). The utilization of social media can strategically help businesses to increase their customer and market base in order to attain business growth (Fruhling & Digman, 2000). The relationships formed via social media can boost sales and generate opportunities for new products and services (Porter, 2011).

The basic activity of entrepreneurship is recognizing and exploiting an opportunity (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurial activity involves an enterprising human action in pursuit of the generation of value, through the creation or expansion of economic activity by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets (Ahmad & Hoffman, 2007). In essence, entrepreneurial activities anchor on the creation of novel business ventures and development of innovative wealth outlets with the motive of building new corporate entities. From the foregoing, a cursory outlook at entrepreneurial activities include but not limited to the creation of new product image and awareness, marketing of new business ideas, promotion of new business products and stimulating sales of new business products as well as building long term customer relationships. In developing entrepreneurial activities, social media platforms open up a whole new world of possibilities for entrepreneurs to bring in un-conceived products and services to the marketplace.

Entrepreneurs refer to individuals who develop and commercialize novel ideas geared towards meeting untapped and recognized marketplace needs. An entrepreneur can be defined as a person who sees an opportunity in the market, gathers resources, establishes and grows a business towards the satisfaction of the needs of the market (Nieman & Pretorius, 2004). Entrepreneurs may be properly applied to individuals who incubate ideas, start enterprises based on those ideas, and provide added values to society based on their independent initiative (Holt, 2005).

Social media platforms enable entrepreneurs to create collaborations with their fellow business innovators and expand their network of connection with new and old business clients. On the other hand, consumers can use social media platforms to share their opinions and experiences on business transactions by

entering simple text or uploading content in other formats, such as documents, photos, videos or audio files (Lai & Turban, 2008). Hence, Spear (2007) opined that social media platforms enable sharing, promoting and discussion about products and services on social channels to a wide community in real time. It is against this backdrop, this study sought to assess the extent of utilization of social media platforms by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities in Delta state.

Statement of the Problem

Social media has become an integral component of how modern businesses are created. The public acceptance and utilization of social media platforms suggests that modern day entrepreneur needs to utilize them for their numerous entrepreneurial activities. The problem of this study is that little is known about the extent at which entrepreneurs in Delta state utilize social media platforms in their entrepreneurial activities. This knowledge is necessary in facilitating entrepreneurial growth and success in the state, hence this study.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to determine the extent of utilization of social media platforms by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities in Delta State. Specifically, the study determined the extent at which:

1. Social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in creating new product image and awareness in Delta State.
2. Social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in marketing new business ideas in Delta State in Delta State.
3. Social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in promoting new business products in Delta State.
4. Social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in stimulating sales of new business products in Delta State.
5. Social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in building long term customer relationships in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in creating new product image and awareness in Delta State?
2. To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in marketing new business ideas in Delta State?
3. To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in promoting new business products in Delta State?
4. To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in stimulating sales of new business products in Delta State?
5. To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in building long term customer relationships in Delta State?

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of 200 entrepreneurs randomly selected in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Utilization of Social Media Platforms for Entrepreneurial Activities Questionnaire (USMPECQ)". The questionnaire had a five point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE). It contained five clusters each with 12 items according to the research questions. Content and face validity of the instrument was determined by two experts in Business Education and one expert in Computer Science Department all in College of Education, Agbor. A pilot test was conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument by administering it to 20 entrepreneurs in Edo State which were not part of the population and the data collected were analyzed with Cronbach Alpha. Reliability

coefficients of 0.74, 0.76, 0.71, 0.78, and 0.76 were obtained for the five sections of the instrument. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' views. Decisions on the research questions were based on the grand mean in relations to the real limits of numbers. Therefore, items with mean ratings of 0.50 - 1.49 are utilized at very low extent, those with 1.50 - 2.49 are utilized at low extent, items with mean ratings of 2.50 - 3.49 are utilized at a moderate extent, those with 3.50 - 4.49 are utilized at a high extent and those with 4.50 – 5.00 are utilized at a very high extent.

RESULTS

Research question 1

To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in creating new product image and awareness in Delta State?

Table 1: Respondents mean ratings on the extent social media are utilized in creating new product image and awareness (N = 200)

S/N	Social media platforms	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Social networking sites	2.82	0.59	ME
2	Publishing sites	1.05	0.58	VLE
3	Photo sharing	1.12	0.60	VLE
4	Audio sharing	1.11	0.61	VLE
5	Video sharing	1.21	0.58	VLE
6	Microblogging	2.98	0.63	M.E
7	Live casting	1.22	0.64	VLE
8	Virtual worlds	1.09	0.61	VLE
9	Gaming	1.03	0.62	VLE
10	Productivity applications	1.37	0.60	VLE
11	Aggregators	1.04	0.60	VLE
12	RSS live feeds	1.10	0.59	VLE
Grand Mean		1.43		VLE

Data in table 1 show that only two item with mean ratings of 2.82 and 2.98 are utilized at a moderate extent. The remaining 10 platforms have mean ratings ranging from 1.03 to 1.37. This means that the entrepreneurs in Delta State utilize them at very low extent. Finally, the grand mean of 1.43 shows that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in creating new product image and awareness at a very low extent in Delta State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

Research question 2

To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in marketing new business ideas in Delta State?

Table 2: Respondents mean ratings on the extent social media are utilized in marketing new business ideas (N = 200)

S/N	Social media platforms	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Social networking	3.42	0.60	M.E
2	Publishing	1.11	0.58	VLE
3	Photo sharing	1.09	0.59	VLE
4	Audio sharing	1.10	0.57	VLE
5	Video sharing	1.15	0.56	VLE
6	Microblogging	3.27	0.60	M.E
7	Live casting	1.12	0.56	VLE
8	Virtual worlds	1.07	0.57	VLE
9	Gaming	1.09	0.58	VLE
10	Productivity applications	1.04	0.55	VLE
11	Aggregators	1.02	0.59	VLE
12	RSS live feeds	1.01	0.59	VLE
Grand Mean		1.46		VLE

Data in table 2 show that only two item with mean ratings of 3.27 and 3.42 are utilized at a moderate extent. The remaining 10 platforms have mean ratings ranging from 1.01 to 1.15. This means that the entrepreneurs in Delta State utilize them at a very low extent. Finally, the grand mean of 1.46 shows that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in marketing new business ideas at a very low extent in Delta State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

Research question 3

To what extent are social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in promoting new business products in Delta State?

Table 3: Respondents mean ratings on the extent social media are utilized in promoting new business products (N = 200)

S/N	Social media platforms	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Social networking	3.46	0.61	M.E
2	Publishing	1.01	0.59	VLE
3	Photo sharing	1.09	0.60	VLE
4	Audio sharing	1.11	0.58	VLE
5	Video sharing	1.19	0.59	VLE
6	Microblogging	3.37	0.63	M.E
7	Live casting	1.16	0.60	VLE
8	Virtual worlds	1.08	0.61	VLE
9	Gaming	1.11	0.62	VLE
10	Productivity applications	1.19	0.60	VLE
11	Aggregators	1.22	0.59	VLE
12	RSS live feeds	1.18	0.61	VLE
Grand Mean		1.51		LE

Data in table 3 show that only two item with mean ratings of 3.37 and 3.46 are utilized at a moderate extent. The remaining 10 platforms have mean ratings ranging from 1.01 to 1.22. This means that the

entrepreneurs in Delta State utilize them at a very low extent. Finally, the grand mean of 1.51 shows that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in promoting new business products at a low extent in Delta State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions

Research question 4

To what extent are social media platforms are utilized by entrepreneurs in stimulating sales of new business products in Delta State?

Table 4: Respondents mean ratings on the extent social media are utilized in stimulating sales of new business products (N = 200)

S/N	Social media platforms	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Social networking	3.24	0.65	M.E
2	Publishing	0.71	0.66	VLE
3	Photo sharing	0.62	0.64	VLE
4	Audio sharing	0.89	0.60	VLE
5	Video sharing	1.04	0.61	VLE
6	Microblogging	2.99	0.63	M.E
7	Live casting	0.66	0.64	VLE
8	Virtual worlds	0.69	0.61	VLE
9	Gaming	0.91	0.62	VLE
10	Productivity applications	0.79	0.66	VLE
11	Aggregators	0.96	0.61	VLE
12	RSS live feeds	0.63	0.67	VLE
Grand Mean		1.18		VLE

Data in table 4 show that only two item with mean ratings of 2.99 and 3.24 are utilized at a moderate extent. The remaining 10 platforms have mean ratings ranging from 0.62 to 1.04. This means that the entrepreneurs in Delta State utilize them at a very low extent. Finally, the grand mean of 1.18 shows that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in stimulating sales of new business products at a very low extent in Delta State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

Research question 5

To what extent are social media platforms utilized by entrepreneurs in building long term customer relationships in Delta State?

Table 5: Respondents mean ratings on the extent social media are utilized in building long term customer relationships (N = 200)

S/N	Social media platforms	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Social networking	2.72	0.62	M.E
2	Publishing	0.68	0.59	VLE
3	Photo sharing	0.76	0.62	VLE
4	Audio sharing	0.88	0.60	VLE
5	Video sharing	0.66	0.61	VLE
6	Microblogging	2.57	0.63	M.E
7	Live casting	0.55	0.59	VLE
8	Virtual worlds	0.71	0.61	VLE
9	Gaming	0.79	0.62	VLE
10	Productivity applications	0.55	0.62	VLE
11	Aggregators	0.62	0.62	VLE
12	RSS live feeds	0.69	0.64	VLE
Grand Mean		1.02		VLE

Data in table 5 show that only two item with mean ratings of 2.57 and 2.72 are utilized at a moderate extent. The remaining 10 platforms have mean ratings ranging from 0.55 to 0.88. This means that the entrepreneurs in Delta State utilize them at a very low extent. Finally, the grand mean of 1.02 shows that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in building long term relationships at a very low extent in Delta State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in creating new product image and awareness, marketing new business ideas, stimulating sales of new business products and building long term relationships with their customers at a very low extent in Delta State. However, they utilize social media platforms in promoting new business products at a low extent. These findings are in agreement with the report of Jagongo and Kinyua (2013) that most entrepreneurs do not optimally utilize social media platforms because they have not fully understood the potentials for their businesses. The low extent of utilization social media platforms by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities was also reported by Ukpere, Slabbert and Ukpere (2014) who stated that Nigerian entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms only in corporate and social world but not as a tool for entrepreneurship because of issues of trust and confidentiality.

However, this study also discovered that social networking and microblogging were utilized at a moderate extent by entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities in Delta State. This discovery is in agreement with Green (2011) who reported that most business entrepreneurs have embraced Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter because it helps them in building their brand and product awareness. It also agrees with Jagongo and Kinyua (2013) who maintained that only few social media platforms were highly utilized due to limitations emanating from technical capabilities and infrastructure. In same light, Ajayi (2015) asserted that agro-entrepreneurs in Nigeria relatively utilize social networking tools such as Facebook for customer relationship management.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the utilization of social media platform are vital for modern entrepreneurs who crave to be major players in today's competitive and technologically advanced business environment. The utilization of relevant social media platforms will give entrepreneurs strategic edge in their entrepreneurial activities because they will be in a better position to explore and meet the needs of their technologically savvy customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it was recommended that

1. Entrepreneurs should endeavor to acquire competencies that would empower them utilize social media platforms in order to adequately meet the demands of today's technologically based business environment.
2. Internet service providers should offer steady internet services at subsidized rates in order to enable entrepreneurs effectively utilize social media platforms to meet the needs of their numerous online customers.
3. Government economic and communication agencies should promote entrepreneurial activities by providing favorable e-business policies with adequate ICT infrastructural facilities that will enable entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in their businesses.

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