

PERCEPTIONS OF BUSINESS EDUCATORS ON DIGITAL MARKETING SKILLS REQUIRED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the perceptions of Business Educators on digital marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment in universities in South-South, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The population of this study consisted of 85 Business Educators (57 males and 28 females) in eight public universities in South-South, Nigeria. The entire population was studied without sample as size was not too large. A structured questionnaire titled "Digital Marketing Skill Assessment Questionnaire" adapted for data collection and were analysed descriptively, using mean to answer the research questions, standard deviation to determine the homogeneity and closeness of the responses and t-test to test the null hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance. The Instrument consists of 14 structured questions arranged in two clusters. All the clusters were based on four-point scale of Highly Required, Required, Moderately Required, and Not Required. The instrument was validated by three experts with the reliability coefficients of 0.82 and 0.84 respectively. Data collected relating to the research questions were analysed using Cronbach Alpha to determine its reliability. Findings of the study revealed that the respondents perceived that affiliate marketing skills and social media marketing skills as required in Business Education in South-South, Nigeria for self-employment of the graduates. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that unless these graduates are adequately equipped with these skills, they

will hardly be successful in entrepreneurial endeavour in this digital era. It was recommended that stakeholders should design learning activities that allows students to use internet and social media platforms while in school and that Business Education graduates should embark on further digital marketing skill training programmes to acquire affiliate marketing skills.

KEYWORDS: Business educators, Business Education, Digital marketing skills, social media marketing skills, Affiliate marketing skills, Self-employment.

INTRODUCTION

Business educators are facilitators through which the students acquire the right skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies to excel in the technology driven world. Morrison (2017) defined business educator as an academic professional dedicated to the art and science of teaching and mentoring in the area of business. Also, Akpomi and Ikpesu (2021) viewed business educators as tertiary education professionals who serve as major implementers of educational reforms while contributing immensely to developing a skilled workforce for private and public sectors. According to Emeasoba and Nwatalari (2021), Business Education at university level has to do with mainly the development of suitable and important saleable skills and knowledge that would enable an individual to function effectively in the world of work. Business educators in universities, therefore, are trained professionals who are expected to be innovative and skilled in accounting, entrepreneurship, office technology and management, marketing and cooperative studies. Universities, globally, are accepted as the citadel of knowledge, education and human resource development (Ekpo & Aiyedun, 2020). Business educators are male and female professionals who are qualified instructors specifically trained to deliver business-related courses, possessing comprehensive expertise across all business subjects.

Business Education at tertiary level is offered in both federal and state universities and consist of both male and female business educators. Gender as a moderating variable in this study, could influence the perceptions of business educators as they are made up of males and females. Gender is a sociological concept that is used to define social distinctions between men and women and from which these differences can be deduced (Amidu, 2022). Business educators in the context of this study are males and females who are professionally qualified and are employed to teach Business Education and its related subjects in universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Business Education is a vocational education programme of instruction which provides students with information, skills, techniques and competencies required for managing personal business or serving in public and private establishments. Ordu and Abdulkarim (2020) noted that recipients of Business Education programme have every opportunity to acquire skills relating to the various areas of business such as, accounting, office technology and management, marketing/distribution trade, entrepreneurship, and management if guided appropriately. According to National University Commission (NUC, 2023), the philosophy of Business Education programme is to provide individuals with relevant knowledge, skills and competence to be self-reliant and economically self-sufficient for gainful employment, meaningful living and to contribute to the development of the society. The programme is designed in consonance with the needs of the business community to ensure that education and

training offered are consistent with the competencies for the current and emerging job requirements and opportunities. In the same vein, Emeasoba and Mmuo (2018) noted that Business Education is a tripartite programme of instruction that equips the recipient or the learner with skills, competencies knowledge, attitudes and values to be business teachers of business subjects, an office worker or an entrepreneur. Furthermore, Aina (2018) noted that products of Business Education programme are expected to adequately acquire numerous business-related skills to help them in creating and managing their own businesses as source of employment and become self-reliant. Business Education is a vocational education programme that aims at grooming students with information and competence to fill the very growing vacuum created by unemployment through self-employment.

Self-employment can be considered as the residual category of gainful employment not remunerated by a wage or salary. According to Hurst (2022), self-employment is the promotions of free enterprise and self-sufficiency by creating and spreading wealth to the grass root level as a contribution to economic growth, employment generation and social process. It is an economic activity whereby individuals own and manage their business as gainful employment. Self-employment refers to the state of working for oneself rather than an employer. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), reported that the unemployment rate in Nigeria increased significantly in the 3rd quarter 2023 at 5.0% showing increase of 0.8% from the 2nd quarter of the year. NBS also reported that about 87.3% of workers were self-employed in 3rd quarter 2023. This is why increasing level of unemployment has become a growing problem in different part of the country requiring that more people acquire skills to become self-employed.

Self-employment is an important potential source of new jobs and a way of employing the entrepreneurial ability of the population in Nigeria where large and increasing unemployment has become a major economic problem (Umoru, 2020). Self-employment is currently on the increase globally, and its pursuit will invariably lead to poverty reduction and reduced joblessness among university graduates. The decision to become self-employed hinges on a wide array of factors which include graduate unemployment, inability to get a well-paid job, job satisfaction, personality traits, and independence among others. Self-employment can take many forms, from freelancing and entrepreneurship to the creation of small businesses. Success in self-employment especially operating a private enterprise requires possession of different skills set and such as marketing skills.

Business Education graduates need basic skills that are necessary for starting, keeping and running a business and one of the basic skills in the programme is marketing skills. Marketing skills enable individuals to identify needs, create a product that satisfies the need, place a proper value on the product, win customers' interest through the use of the

right media and ensure that the product is effectively distributed. Abdulkarim (2019) noted that skills for marketing products acquired through Business Education are meant to enable students to identify market needs, persuade and win clients, build marketing relationships and sustain such relationships for entrepreneurial success. Angelo *et al* (2019) explained that marketing skills that ensure employability include effective communication, personal selling, interpersonal skills, creativity and innovation skills, IT and presentation skills, work planning and prioritization, sales knowledge and management skills, planning, organization and time management, creative thinking, precision and attention to details, content creation across channels, as well as the ability to manage multiple marketing tasks.

The ever-changing and complex need for digitalization requires Business Education graduates to develop adequate digital skills to succeed in self-employment. Due to globalization, digital skills are currently considered requisites for a successful entrepreneurial journey in the world. UNESCO (2018) defined digital skills as a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication, applications and networks to access and manage information. Digital skills involve the ability to find, organize, understand, evaluate, create and share information using digital devices or technologies such as smartphones and computers as well as relevant applications and software. Cornell University in Burton (2016) also defined digital skills as the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share and create content using information technologies and the internet. Chaouchi and Bourgeau (2020) noted that some digital skills are required to use the internet with technology to fulfil specific tasks while others are required to design, create and maintain tools and solutions for different industries. UNESCO (2018) also noted that digital skills enable people to create and share digital content, communicate and collaborate, and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfilment in life, learning, work and social activities at large. Other workplace digital skills include e-commerce, network and information security, digital Business analysis, data analysis, data entry, original content creation, programming and coding, artificial intelligence, and digital marketing. Digital skills are necessary to effectively and efficiently participate and benefit in digital marketing

Digital marketing is the use of digital technology to build and maintain customer relationships by creating integrated targeted and measurable communication to facilitate the exchange of ideas, goods and services that satisfy the customer. The American Marketing Association Dictionary (2019) stated that digital marketing has to do with planning and initiating marketing campaigns using digital platforms such as the Internet, email, search engines, social media and other tools. Angelo *et al.* (2019) explained that the digital transformation of marketing has posed a systematic phase change in marketing and communication practice, developing a parallel and fragmented world focused on digital media.

Digital marketing does not occur in isolation but is most effective when it is integrated with other communication channels such as phone, and direct mail, among others. Barone (2020) viewed digital marketing as the use of the internet, mobile devices, search engines and other channels to reach customers. Gustavsen (2022) reported that digital marketing encompasses a wide variety of marketing tactics and technologies used to reach customers online. Digital marketing enables and improves the communication of product value using digital technology and aids the execution and implementation of marketing strategies and tactics. In regards to these, Dawada (2019) outlined the reasons digital marketing is important in today's business to include: higher conversation rates, increase of trust in the brand, creation of longer growth options for any business, cost-effective marketing, targeting and getting connected to mobile customers. Mckinley's Marketing partner (2019) reported that the relevance of digital marketing to firms made its skills to be sought among personnel requirements for future marketing endeavours. To achieve success in digital marketing, an individual needs it is necessary to possess certain digital marketing skills.

Digital marketing skills equip a marketer with the right strategy and tactics on how best to communicate the value of a product to the customer, how to meet their dynamic and emerging needs and how to build a reliable and sustainable relationship and loyalty. The United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UN-CSTD, 2018), defined digital marketing skills as a part of the intermediate digital skills required for the performance of work-related tasks. Mckinley Marketing Partner (2019) noted that skills relating to digital marketing most substantially demanded by firms are digital content creation, digital analysis, search engine optimization, cloud computing, emails and social media skills. Digital Marketing Institute (2022) also reported that digital marketing skills that provide students with the opportunity to be instantly employed after graduation include social media marketing skills, search engine skills, digital analytic skills, content marketing, email marketing, skills, mobile marketing skills, strategic planning skills, social selling skills, pay-per-click marketing skills and video creations skills. This study covers two skills; social media marketing skills and affiliate marketing skills as very important digital marketing skills for success in self-employment.

Social media marketing creates a digital linkage and communication with customers. Social media is a channel of providing information to customers, connecting with stakeholders, and ultimately generating sales by effectively utilizing the advantages offered by the Internet (Maria, Borges & Jose, 2014). According to Constantinides (2014), social media marketing is a form of digital marketing that involves creating and sharing content on different social media channels to achieve branding and marketing goals. Social media platforms are more than just avenues for companies to broadcast information about themselves. Social media marketing activities like posting text,

images, videos and other audience-engaging content on different social media platforms can be used to achieve these goals. Social media marketing skills can help Business Education graduate to build an online presence through content creation, blog, podcast, influencer marketing, affiliate marketing and engage with potential customers on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, among others, which can lead to more brand awareness and sales.

Affiliate marketing is a form of digital marketing where businesses partner with content creators to earn a commission on sales generated by customers who visit the company's website through the affiliate's unique referral link. Haydn (2017) noted that affiliate marketing is a kind of online marketing, whereby a company (an advertiser or merchant) makes an agreement with another firm (a publisher or affiliate) to feature a link for its website on affiliated sites. Affiliate marketing is an agreement achieved between a merchant and content providers for promoting the merchant's products/services at their websites. Based on the agreement, the content provider is paid when visitors from their website perform a specific action. Bede and Anuradha (2015) noted that affiliate marketing is a performance-based channel meaning that the publisher is paid a reward in a form of commission only for a realized sale or any other desired action. Affiliate marketing promotes self-employment by allowing individuals to earn commission-based income through promoting other companies' products or services across digital platforms. It requires minimal startup costs while offering flexibility in work hours, location independence, and the potential for multiple passive income streams through various promotional channels like blogs, social media, and email marketing.

The success of Business Education programmes in preparing students for self-employment significantly depends on the quality and expertise of Business Educators, particularly their understanding and teaching of essential digital marketing skills. This is highly necessary due to the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria. This study determined necessary digital marketing skills perceived by Business Educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria for their students' entrepreneurial success and self-employment. This is very important in enveloping effective educational strategies that prepare students for successful self-employment in the digital age.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rate of unemployment among Business Education graduates continues to increase despite the fact that it is a vocational programme that should empower the graduates with essential business skills to help them thrive independently. The rapid growth of the digital economy, accelerated by increasing internet usage has impacted every facet of business, from product, distribution and consumption to transactional processes and operational management. Regrettably, Business Educators seems to have neglected to

adequately emphasize digital marketing in their teaching approaches. Business Educators appear to focus on theoretical instruction without sufficient practical applications which raises concerns about students' inability to acquire the necessary digital marketing skills to succeed independently as self-employed in the 21st-century business world. Many graduates of the programme are still roaming the streets years after graduation looking for white collar jobs instead of establishing and successfully operating entrepreneurial businesses. This ugly situation could be as a result of their lecturers not knowing the essential digital marketing skills they require to succeed in entrepreneurship businesses. Therefore, this research provides empirical data on digital marketing skills mostly required by Business Education graduates for success in self-employment to enable both the curriculum designers and implementers take remedial actions for the benefits of the students and society.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The main purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of business educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria on digital marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment. Specifically, study sought to determine the:

1. Social media marketing skills perceived by business educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria as required by Business Education graduates for self-Employment.
2. Affiliate marketing skills perceived by business educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria as required by Business Education graduates for self-Employment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following Research Questions guided the study:

1. In the perception of business educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria, what are the social media marketing skills required in Business Education graduates for self-employment?
2. In the perception of business educators in universities in South-South, Nigeria, what are the affiliate marketing skills required in Business Education graduates for self-employment?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.5 level of significance:

H0₁: there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female Business Educators on the social media marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment.

H0₂ there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the affiliate marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is deemed suitable in line with Siedlecki (2020) which explained that descriptive survey enables a researcher to observe and describe individuals, events, or conditions in their natural state. As the study sought to determine the perceptions of business educators on digital marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment, the design is therefore adequate for the study. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Population of this study consisted of 85 Business Educators (57 males and 28 females) in eight public universities in South-south, Nigeria. There was no sample because the population was manageable, hence census sampling was adopted. The instrument for data collection was a 14-item structured questionnaire titled "Digital Marketing Skills Assessment Questionnaire (DMSAQ)". The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A sought for background information of the respondents and Section B contained 14 items organized into two clusters of 7 items each covering the research questions. The instruments were structured on a four-point Likert rating scale of: Highly Required (HR)=4, Required (R) =3, Moderately Required (MR) =2 and Not Required (NR) =1. The instrument was validated by three experts two in Business Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all in College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. The reliability of the instruments was established by administering the questionnaire to 20 business educators in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State which is outside the South-South zone and not part of the study but with similar characteristics to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test method and their responses were analysed using Cronbach Alpha. A reliability coefficient level of 0.82 and 0.84 respectively and it was deemed adequate for the study. The instruments for the study were administered to the respondents and were collected back after five days by the researchers, with the help of three research assistants whom they gave instructions regarding what to do. Out of 85 copies administered, 80 copies (which represents 94 percent) were properly filled and used for data analysis. Data collected from the respondents were analysed using Mean to answer the research questions and standard

deviation to determine the homogeneity of the respondents while t-test statistic was used to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean value of 2.50 or above in a given item was regarded as required while any item with a mean below 2.50 was regarded as Not Required. The null hypothesis was accepted when the t-calculated value is less than the t-table value at 0.05 level of significance but rejected when the t-calculated value is equal to or greater than the t-table value at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS Question 1: what are the social media marketing skills required in Business Education graduates for self-employment?

Table 1: Respondents' mean rating on social media marketing skills required by Business Education graduate for self-employment.

S/N	Social media marketing skills	Male X	(N57) SD	Decision	Female X	(N28) SD	Decision
1.	Ability to obtain relevant feedback from customers	3.44	0.54	Required	3.46	0.51	Required
2.	Ability to run paid social media advertising campaigns	3.46	0.54	Required	3.34	0.54	Required
3.	Ability to manage and grow social media communities	3.44	0.50	Required	3.54	0.56	Highly Required
4.	Ability to create engaging social media content across platforms	3.50	0.54	Highly Required	3.51	0.56	Highly Required

5.	Ability to use instant messaging to respond promptly	3.50	0.54	Highly Required	3.54	0.56	Highly Required
6.	Ability to use social networking site to connect with potential customers	3.52	0.52	Highly Required	3.35	0.48	Required
Cluster Mean		3.46		Required	3.42		Required

In Table 1, the mean scores of the items range from 3.26 to 3.54. Also, the cluster mean of the item range from 3.42 to 3.46. The standard deviation did not vary much as the scores range from 0.48 to 0.57. The standard deviation scores for both male and female respondents for all the seven items are within the same range showing that the respondents are homogenous in their mean ratings. This suggest that, the items were perceived by Business Educators as social media marketing skills required in Business Education for self-employment

Null Hypotheses 1: there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female Business Educators on the social media marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment.

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis of significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female Respondents on social media marketing skills required by Business Education graduate for self-employment.

Gender	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Male	57	3.46	0.54	83	0.33	1.98	NS
Female	28	3.42	0.53				

N= Number of respondents, X = Mean, SD = Standard deviation, DF = Degree of freedom, NS = Not Significant

Table 2, shows that the calculated-t value of 0.33 is less than the t-critical value of 1.98 at 83 degrees of freedom. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on social media marketing skills required by

business educations graduates for self-employment, therefore the null hypothesis of no significance difference was not rejected.

Question 2: what are the affiliate marketing skills required in Business Education graduates for self-employment?

Table 3: Respondents' mean rating on affiliate marketing skills required by Business Education graduate for self-employment.

S/N	Affiliate Marketing skills	Male (N57)			Female (N28)		
		X	SD	Decision	X	SD	Decision
8.	Ability to create persuasive product reviews and recommendations	3.50	0.50	Highly Required	3.46	0.51	Required
9.	Ability to understand affiliate marketing terms, conditions, and commission structures.	3.50	0.54	Highly Required	3.29	0.62	Required
10.	Ability to integrate affiliate links effectively into content	3.52	0.51	Highly Required	3.31	0.53	Required
11.	Ability to build and maintain relationships with affiliate program managers	3.52	0.58	Highly Required	3.29	0.56	Required
12.	Ability to optimization conversion and customer journey	3.46	0.54	Required	3.11	0.47	Required

13.	Ability to identify and evaluate profitable affiliate programs	3.52	0.51	Highly Required	3.29	0.62	Required
14.	Ability to use affiliate marketing platforms and tools effectively	3.28	0.49	Required	3.23	0.43	Required
Cluster Mean		3.47		Required	3.28		Required

In Table 3, the mean scores of the items range from 3.11 to 3.52. Also, the cluster mean of the item range from 3.28 to 3.47. The standard deviation did not vary much as the scores range from 0.43 to 0.62. The standard deviation scores for both male and female respondents for all the seven items are within the same range showing that the respondents are homogenous in their mean ratings. This suggest that, the items were perceived by Business Educators as affiliate marketing skills required in Business Education for self-employment

Hypothesis 2: there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female Business Educators on the Affiliate Marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for Self-Employment.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female Respondents on Affiliate marketing skills required by Business Education graduate for self-employment.

Gender	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Male	57	3.47	0.52	83	1.57	1.98	NS
Female	28	3.28	0.53				

N = Number of respondents, X = Mean, SD = Standard deviation, DF = Degree of freedom, NS = Not Significant

Table 4, shows that the calculated-t value of 1.57 is less than the t-critical value of 1.98 at 83 degrees of freedom. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on affiliate marketing skills required by business educations graduates for self-employment, therefore the null hypothesis of no significance difference was not rejected.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that the respondents perceived that social media marketing skills are required by Business Education graduates for self-employment. This means that social media marketing skills will help Business Education graduates to be proficient in the use of information and communication technology to connect their customers effectively and market their products online with ease. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of males and female's respondents on social media marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment. These findings are supported by the findings of Burton (2016) who reported that graduates are lacking digital marketing skills for modern workplace. This finding is also supported by the finding of Constantinides, E. (2014) that emphasizes the need to expose business students to courses in social media marketing skills. Findings indicated that social media marketing skills are essential skills required by anyone respective of gender to facilitate marketing in the 21st century digital era.

The findings from research question two indicated that the respondents perceived that affiliate marketing skills are required by Business Education graduates for self-employment. This means that affiliate marketing skills will help Business Education graduates to use affiliate marketing platforms and tools effectively to identify and evaluate profitable affiliate programs while managing multiple affiliate partnerships simultaneously. These findings agreed with the findings of Haydn (2017) that affiliate marketing create an online platform where business and graduate can meet for a commission. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of males and females' respondents on affiliate marketing skills required by Business Education graduates for self-employment. The findings shows that affiliate marketing skill is required of Business Education graduates for self-employment as if is an important skill in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, that Business Educators perceived social media marketing skills and affiliates marketing skills as required by Business Education graduates for self-employment, the study concluded that unless these graduates are adequately equipped with these skills, they will hardly be successful in entrepreneurial endeavour in this digital era.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Business educator with social media marketing skills should design learning activities that allows students to use internet and social media platforms in creating digital content for promoting products or service online while in school.
2. Business educator should be re-trained to enable them up-date their digital skill competencies for proper teaching of affiliates marketing skills.
3. Business Education graduates should also embark on further digital marketing skill training programmes to acquire marketing skills. This will enhance their self-employability potentials.
4. Educational administrators should plan and provide appropriate digital marketing resources, tools, and infrastructure needed for effective teaching. This includes digital labs, software, and online platforms essential for practical digital marketing training.

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