

E-Marketing Skills Required by Start-up Operators for Effective Management of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises

Virginia N. Egbu, (M.Ed)

Department of Business Education
Ebonyi State University Abakaliki
Ebonyi State

Nonye Azih, (Prof)

Department of Business Education
Ebonyi State University
Ebonyi State

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ABSTRACT: *The study ascertained the “E-Marketing Skills Required by Start-up Operators for Effective Management of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises” in Ebonyi State. One research question guided the study with one null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance. A sample of 261 was selected from the population of 745 Start-up operators of small and medium scale enterprises using Yaro Yamane formula. Data was collected using 15 items structured questionnaire of four points scale. The instrument was validated by three experts from Ebonyi State University. The reliability index of the instrument was 0.80. Data collected from the research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation while t-test statistics tested the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from this study revealed that e-marketing skills are highly required by start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State and that gender influenced the views of the respondents. Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that e-marketing skills are highly required for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage over other fierce rivalries in the market space. It is therefore recommended among others that training of SMEs managers on e-marketing skills for adequate utilization of the skills in business management be treated as critical strategy to close the gap between traditional marketing and digital marketing system.*

KEYWORDS: start-up operators, SME, skills, e-marketing, effective management

INTRODUCTION

The success of any human activity is majorly dependent on the application of the relevant abilities required in the accomplishment of the activity. These abilities are the skills necessary to achieve a task according to already set standard. Uchendu (2015) defined skills as abilities to carry out a task with already determined outcome within a specific time frame, energy, or both. Skills are dynamic especially, as it is witnessed today with the emergency of digital

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technology. The emergency of digital technology has revolutionized processes and procedures in business enterprises development. Digital technology such as e-marketing skills are responsible for the revolution taking place in management of businesses which include small and medium scale enterprises. Digital skills are referred to as the capabilities that are used in operating emerging technologies of information and communication technology. E-marketing is a modern concept that is replacing the traditional marketing using electronic method. Gilmore (2017) defined e-marketing as a process of using internet, other technological devices together with other marketing mix to carry out the traditional marketing activities online; to reach, communicate and deliver product or service to customers. In the like manner, Azubuike (2017) described electronic marketing as a computerized marketing process involving planning and executing the conception, distribution, promotion and pricing of products and services using internet and the World Wide Web environment to enable the exchange and satisfy customers' demand. In other words e-marketing is the combination of traditional and electronic marketing process. With electronic marketing skills start-up operators have opportunities to widen business transactions via internet facilities.

According to Mbaskool (2021), e-marketing skills include abilities to market products or services using internet to reach the target audience on electronic devices, social media etc. Digital technology has changed the customers marketing orientation that customers now search for products and services on the web or internet. It then becomes critical that start-up operators acquire e-marking skills to bring their products and services to the internet space. Start-up operators are the owner/managers of SMEs that are started out of curiosity, ingenuity, innovativeness and creativity of an individual or a team with the intention to grow the business to a big company. Riani (2021) described start-up enterprises as innovative, scalable, shakers and movers of the society. E-marketing skills are the abilities that enable business operators to buy, sell, transfer, serve, or exchange their products, services, or information via computer network and internet facilities. E-marketing skills are full of marketing strategies that start-up operators develop to achieve and sustain competitive advantage over fierce competitors. Caffey, (2017) argued that online activities that businesses engage in the course of their businesses such as search engine optimization, and social media programmes are all e-marketing.

Digital technology improves traditional marketing practice by introducing electronic application for timely exploring, creating and delivering value to target customers. Teo and Pain (2015) added that the shift of marketing to internet and World Wide Web attracts new business, retains current customers and develop brand identity for business enterprises. E-marketing is one of the fastest growing global marketing systems that SMEs adopt for rapid development of business. The flexibility of e-marketing points out that with the skills start-up operators can compete favourably with bigger firms in the same industry. It is for this fact that SMEs both in advanced and developing countries are immensely contributing in economic development of the nations. Literature have revealed that any business enterprise that wants to operate and remain relevant in the modern market space does not have any other option than to adopt e-marketing skills as critical strategy. Hossain, Alarm, and Gavlovskaya (2018) argued that many countries are becoming interested to develop SMEs sectors because it offers opportunity of lifting people out of poverty. In Nigeria small-medium scale enterprises have

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96% of Nigeria businesses, 76.5% of total employment and 50% contribution to the national GDP. Reports show that small and medium scale enterprises represent 99% of businesses in Europe, and provide two-third of the total employment in the private sector (Annual Report on European SMEs, 2018/2019). According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015), SMEs and micro enterprises account for over 95% of firms, 60-70% of employment, 55% of GDP. Kumer (2017), Lorenz and Pommet, (2018) stated that most of the job employment in developing countries are created by SMEs sectors. For instance; Morocco 93% of firms are SMEs and account for 38% of production, 33% investment, 30% export and 46% employment. In Bangladesh, enterprise of less than 100 employees account for 99% of all the firms, 58% employees, Ecuador, 99% of all private companies have less than 50 employees and account for 55% of employees.

E-marketing skills offer SMEs opportunity to satisfy an identified gap in marketing of products and services. Effective marketing management is about meeting the interest of the customer right from the time of product awareness to the time purchases are made. The e-marketing skills have been proven to be key factor for the growth and development of small and medium scale enterprises. Both men and women start-up operators can employ e-marketing to foster business capacity. The challenge of gender disparity may not be obvious in adopting e-marketing skills in management of SMEs as digital skills tend to close the barrier in business strategies between men and women. It only calls for the business operator's ability to utilize the e-marketing skills in business transaction and management. Gruen, Ibarra and Ramos (2018) postulated that digital transformation closes the gap of gender inequality offering both males and females access to use of internet, digital platforms, and mobile phones to seek for employment, access knowledge and information for business development. On the contrary, Arancha (2016) contended that there is poor integrated marketing among women, and that they do not have access to information and network due to cultural and social norms imposed by gender bias. Hence, gender inequality creates gap in application of digital skills such as e-marketing in management of SMEs especially against women owned businesses. This gap unfortunately leads to business failure and thereby increasing the rate of unemployment in the society.

Statement of the Problem

Digital technology has exceedingly changed the mode of businesses operations replacing the traditional marketing with application of e-marketing skills to transacting businesses on online via internet and World Wide Web. In the present digital dispensation effective marketing management of business and services are dependent on e-marketing skills acquired and utilized by start-up operators. Therefore, the importance of these skills to small and medium enterprises lies on the awareness, acquisition and utilization of these skills by the business managers.

Several studies, like Bureau of Labour Statistics (2012), showed that thousands of small and medium scale enterprises are set up every year, but greater percentage of them do not survive in the business due to poor awareness on digital skills such as e-marketing skills that have taken over marketing practice worldwide. Failure of these businesses increases level of unemployment and impacts negatively on the GDP. Kwajafa (2016) argued that without digital skills in this era business operators cannot effectively apply knowledge and idea in taking decision on how to carry out business tasks that can sustain profitability. It is on this

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background that this study then tried to investigate the e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale businesses in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the e-marketing skills required by start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be of immense benefit to Start-ups operators, entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprise operators, companies, government and researchers. The result of this study will enrich the knowledge of Start/up operators on how to use e-marketing to reach potential customers to increase and maintain current clients, reach prospective customers, create quality content that will attract high demand of their products and services. This is possible because e-marketing strengthens relationships with stakeholders through effective communication.

Entrepreneurs will benefit from this study by realizing the need to understand the roles of e-marketing skills in management of business. E-marketing skills are versatile in attracting new business openings for greater successes using customers' feedback. The result of this research will assist small and medium scale enterprises operators to realize the need to adopt e-marketing skills as critical marketing strategy to reach target audience in their business transaction. With e-marketing skills SME managers will be able to follow the new trend of shifting businesses to online to get to customers searching for goods and services on the internet.

The result of the study will guide government agencies in formulating policies that will support the growth and development of small and medium scale enterprises in use of digital technological skills. Government supportive policies are guarantee to establishing business friendly environment for the growth and survival of small and medium scale enterprises for improved economy..

Finally, the result of this study will contribute to literatures in e-marketing skills and small and medium scale enterprises. The result of the study would enable interested researchers in business and related disciplines to carry out further studies to fill any identified gap in the present study.

Research Question

What are the e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of respondents on the e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State based on gender.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the research which permitted the use of structured questionnaire to elicit responses from the respondents. Ojukwu (2000) postulated that survey research design is a form of descriptive research design used in collecting samples from large and small population to determine the relative occurrences, distributions and interrelatedness of variable in problem situation. The population of the study was consisted of 745 start-up operators, managers and employees of small and medium scale enterprises officially registered with Ebonyi State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Business Development. Yaro Yamane formular was used to select sample of 261 for the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The validity of the instrument was done by three experts form Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki; two from Business Education Department and one from Science Education Department. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire using the responses from the trial testing of the instrument carried out in Enugu State. The coefficient index of the responses yielded 0.80 showing high consistency.

The copies of the questionnaire were distributed and all the copies were collected recording one hundred percent retrieval. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected from the research question while, t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at Alpha level of 0.05 significance. Where the calculated t-value was greater than the t-critical value, the hypothesis was rejected, and where the calculated t-value was less than the critical value the hypothesis was accepted.

Research Question

What are the e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises?

RESULT**Table 1: Mean Result of the E-Marketing Skills Required by Start-up Operators for Effective Management of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises.**

S/N	Item Ability to:	VHR	HR	MR	NR	- x	S.D	DECISION
1	Do on-line marketing	105	23	54	79	2.95	1.28	Highly Required
2	Create new products using customer experiences	61	67	69	64	2.47	1.10	Mod Required
3	Browse internet searching for customers	94	24	82	61	2.57	1.19	Highly Required
4	Seek information on new technologies that are relevant to your business	143	59	39	20	3.24	0.97	Highly Required
5	Use interactive multimedia technologies for marketing	102	80	60	19	3.01	0.95	Highly Required
6	Use the electronic mail to mail business content	76	58	45	82	2.49	1.21	Highly Required
7	Use customer's feedback to improve product	140	61	30	30	3.19	1.03	Highly Required
8	Use customer's feedback to improve service	130	42	50	39	3.00	1.13	Highly Required
9	Access information from customers' need through internet	141	44	46	30	3.13	1.07	Highly Required
10	Compose business content to attract customers	135	50	40	36	3.08	1.10	Highly Required
11	Retrieve business content	115	52	51	42	2.92	1.13	Highly Required
12	Use e-mail to direct customers to business shops	131	48	45	37	3.04	1.11	Highly Required
13	Use electronic devices to create content marketing	124	67	41	29	3.09	1.03	Highly Required
14	Use hubspot as marketing strategy to generate lead	112	63	53	33	2.97	1.06	Highly Required
15	Share content across devices	101	76	39	45	2.89	1.10	Highly Required
	Grand mean					2.93	1.09	Highly Required

The data in Table 1 above showed that the questionnaire items 1- 15 have a grand mean of 2.93 which is within the range of 2.50 - 3.49, therefore they are highly required. This indicates that abilities to do on-line marketing, create new products using customer experiences, browse internet searching for customers, seek information on new technologies that are relevant to your business, use interactive multimedia technologies for marketing, use the electronic mail to mail business content, use customer's feedback to improve product, use customer's feedback to improve service, access information from customers' need through internet, compose business content to attract customers, retrieve business content, use e-mail to direct customers to business shops, use electronic devices to create content marketing, use hubspot as marketing strategy to generate lead, and share content across devices are e-marketing skills highly required by start-up operators for effective management of SMEs. The standard deviation of the items ranges between 0.95 - 1.28 which indicates closeness in the responses of the respondents.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of respondents on the e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises based on gender.

Table 2: Summary of t-test Analysis on the E-Marketing Skills Required by Start-up Operators for Effective Management of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Based on Gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision	Sig
Male	159	2.95	1.11	259	2.21	1.96	Reject	Significant
Female	102	2.82	1.04					

Table 2 above showed that t-cal (2.21) is greater than t-crit at 0.05 level of significant, therefore H_{01} is rejected meaning that there is a significant difference in the mean responses of male and female on e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises.

DISCUSSION

Start-up operators considered the items on e-marketing skills highly required for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises as the findings showed grand mean of 2.93. This finding is in line with the view of Teo and Pain (2015) that digital technological skills such as e-marketing has shifted marketing to online market places where marketing activities are carried out via internet and World Wide Web with the purpose of attracting new business, retaining the current and developing brand identity. The finding also corroborates with Gilmore (2017) stressing that application of e-marketing involves delivering values to customers through internet and other technological tools. The finding of the study equally agreed with Gotter (2018) that with e-marketing skills businesses create connecting links to one another and generate new customers for demand of their products and services. The finding of the study supports the argument of Ferrari (2013) that digital skills such as e-marketing facilitate the critical analysis and access of information, solve problem, create and recreate content.

However, the result of the study revealed that the ability to create new products using customer experiences and ability to use electronic mail to mail business content are e-marketing skills moderately required by start-up operators for effective management of small and medium enterprises. This view of the respondents could be attributed to poor level of innovativeness, creativity, ingenuity and resourcefulness of start-up operators. Nur'ainy, Nurcayo, Setyawati and Sutanty (2016) maintained that giving priority to consumer experience is a critical strategy that business operator uses to position goods and services in marketing and maintaining customer's confidence and trust. Equally, the result projects the ability to use electronic mail to mail business content as e-marketing skill moderately required by start-up operators. In this case, the respondents seem to lack adequate knowledge of the wide range of activities that e-

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mail is used for in business transactions. The respondents' opinion is in tandem with Uchendu (2016) who posited that operators of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria lack skills and knowledge in e-marketing which include use of e-mail. To buttress the importance of e-mail in business communication, Mishna and Fantus (2012) posited that businesses adopt e-mail as the easiest and most convenient method of communication. Tan, Choy, Lin and Eze (2010) affirmed that frequent communication of business with customers, partners, inventors, sharing of file and websites are quickly done by e-mail. Achumba (2015) in a study on the importance of electronic mails in business management and promotion revealed that electronic mailing method provides an end-to-end interaction between business enterprise and their clients and customers. Azubuike (2017) further noted that e-mail is among the best methods used in digital marketing in handing communication including creating content.

Furthermore, the result of the null hypothesis 1 revealed that there is a significant difference in e-marketing skills required by Start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises based on gender. This finding reflects Ananya (2016) opinion that gender influences the decision to adopt digital skills including e-marketing skills and, that men are more ready to take the risk and dam the consequences in their businesses than women. Orser and Riding (2018) in their study confirmed that gender influences decision to adopt technology as a result of value perception due to knowledge gap of what business opportunities available in using digital technology such as e-marketing skills in business practice. The author considers gender disparity as a barrier that hinders understanding and application of emerging technological skills in management of SMEs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that e-marketing skills are highly required by start-up operators for effective management of small and medium scale enterprises in Ebonyi State. The knowledge and application of e-marketing skills by start-up operators will ensure effective management to achieve competitive advantage over fierce rivalries in market space.

Recommendations

1. Government in collaboration with National Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (NACIMA) should provide quality and efficient infrastructural facilities that will support training of Start-up operators irrespective of gender on e-marketing skills in Ebonyi State. This will make business open to all for economic improvement in the state.
2. Start-up operators should consider paramount quick learning ability in hiring of managers to enable ease learning of the technicalities involved in e-marketing strategies. The dynamism of a manager in applying e-marketing skills determines the level of business success that will be achieved.
3. Training of managers on e-marketing skills should be a critical strategy by start-up operators for increased performance in the management of small and medium scale enterprises. Without this, it would be difficult for start-up operators to be in keeping with up-to-date information about their current and prospective customers for business expansion.

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