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Social Media Use by Infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the use of social media marketing strategies among infopreneurs in Osun State, Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of social media marketing strategies on the businesses of infopreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four research questions guided the study. The study adopted a survey research design and online survey form was used as instrument for data collection. The population of the study comprised all the members of the Nigeria Library Association in Osun State in Nigeria and convenience sampling was used to sample 38 infopreneurs. This was largely due to the fact that lockdown banned activities across the states and the only way they could be reached was online. The study showed that there was a marked difference in the impact of social media on the businesses of infopreneurs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also showed that infopreneurs do not possess adequate knowledge of the dynamics of social media that will assist them in increasing sales in their businesses. The study recommended that infopreneurs should transcend beyond personal development in acquiring knowledge of social media and exploit avenues of training that will equip them with the necessary practical skills to drive and increase sales in their businesses.

Keywords: Infopreneur, Social media, marketing strategies, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Nowadays, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) play a vital role in the social, economic, and cultural development of a country. The rapid pace of the development and adoption of technology is bringing about a change in social dynamics. Of all the ICTs, the Internet is the tool that has transformed all aspects of life. Through it, Social Media is leading major revolutionary trends, whereby the societal values, culture and norms are changing their narratives and businesses are making paradigm shifts. There are various and diverse organizations trying to establish customer engagement through relationship management with their customers by migrating to the new platforms where clients reside. Thus, there is an increasing demand for digital content and networking skills used as marketing tools for improving business outcomes. According to Clement (2019), in 2018, there were approximately 29.3 million social network users in Nigeria, and this figure is projected to grow to 36.8 million in 2023. This means that the growth of the Social Media sites in people's life tends to keep going up, getting into an essential way to penetrate into markets.

Consequent to the rise in the number of affected cases of coronavirus in Nigeria, the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari in his speech, on 30th March 2020, had ordered a lockdown in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun – the three most affected states in Nigeria. Many governors followed suit by implementing the lockdown order in their various states. The lockdown was further extended by another two weeks which was to take effect from 14th of April, 2020. The implication of this lockdown directive on businesses will be total or partial close down of operations especially those who rely on traditional models to run their businesses. In lieu of this, it has become pertinent to investigate the use of social media adopted by

infopreneurs to run their businesses in the face of the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic.

Objectives

1. To determine the Social Media commonly used by infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
2. To determine the sources of knowledge on Social Media by infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
3. To determine the ratings of Social Media on businesses by infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
4. To determine the challenges faced by infopreneurs in using social media during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What are the Social Media commonly used by infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
2. What are the sources of knowledge on social media by Infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
3. What are the ratings of Social Media on businesses by infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria
4. What are the challenges faced by Infopreneurs during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Osun State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Infopreneurship

According to Weber (2012), an infopreneur refers to an entrepreneur who makes profit by collecting, creating, developing, repackaging, disseminating and selling information products and services usually via the Internet. Heidenreich cited in Stanley (2017) opines that generally there are two categories of infopreneurs; those who sell the information they create (info-creators) and those who earn commission by selling the information they collected from diverse sources. This category of infopreneurs is referred as information traffickers. Heidenreich further stated that information trackers create virtual stores by taking advantage of the many opportunities that the internet presents through blogs and web pages. Infopreneurship development in Nigeria encompasses all forms of businesses that are related to the provision of information products and services. Such information products and services as highlighted by Philip and Ogwu (2013) include: publishing of newspapers, journals, and other periodicals, book publishing, and other publications, printing, reproduction and publishing of multi-media, publishing of music, telecommunications, computer-enhanced activities, publishing software, data processing, database management, online marketing, online electronic content distribution, electronic entertainment, online cultural and sporting activities, production and distribution of video, radio and television activities, various online publishing, activities of news agencies, library and archiving activities such abstracting and indexing services, current awareness, reprographic, document delivery, book trade services among others. Information has become an integral part of economic growth and as such it is being given priority because of its role in nation-building in both developed and developing countries of the world.

Aregbesola et al. (2019) stated Nigeria as the largest economy in Africa in which the information sector accounts for one of the twelve industrial sectors in Nigeria. Infopreneurship has become an important means of survival for practitioners in the information sector. According to Aregbesola et al. (2019), many youths that would have been roaming the streets of Nigeria are gainfully involved in the business of blogging, thereby reducing the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. Don-Solomon and Tاتفeng (2019) assert that infopreneurship like other entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria faces some challenges that hamper its development. Some of them include: high level of illiteracy, poor internet connectivity, inadequate ICT

skills, high cost of running business, inadequate awareness of business opportunities in the information sector, over dependence on white collar jobs among others. Adewoyin et al (2017) in their study discovered that the major constraints that librarians face in the use of social media for service delivery are erratic power supply, lack of finance and poor internet access.

Social Media Use in Business

Currently, businesses are dependent on the consumers. Nyekwere et al (2014) citing Thirushen (2013) state that popular websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have close to five million visitors daily and thus have to be considered as very important avenues for marketing; promoting a business via these social networking sites serves as a very lucrative business proposition due to the huge amount of steady traffic daily. With a change in consumer behavior driven by Social Media it is inevitable that businesses have to adapt their strategies to the new norms. According to the 2012 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 94% of all global businesses use Social Media to advance their digital marketing efforts. Social Media can be used effectively in so many ways to create awareness about products and services, connect with customers, gather customer preferences, and also serve as customer service and support. Many businesses are constantly looking for best practices in Social Media so they may be able to apply them in order to achieve the previously stated objectives. In lieu of this, it becomes pertinent to choose correctly the person in charge of the Social Media Marketing strategy of the company. Igbeka (2008) outlined the five basic elements for successful infopreneurs. These include intelligence, strong personality, good general education, skilled in computer knowledge and being internet savvy. Similarly, Richard (2012), enumerated good spoken and written communication skill, high level of accuracy and attention to details, high level of computer literacy, especially with database and internet; the ability to work with people at all levels and from different backgrounds, an awareness of what information users really need, an awareness of data protection and copyright laws, attentiveness as the prerequisite skills an infopreneur must possess.

Ekwueme & Okoro (2018) revealed that lack of technical know-how poses a serious challenge to the adoption of online advertising by online businesses in Nigeria, even though the steps may seem direct and unambiguous, some technicalities still come to bare in areas of copy writing, graphic designing, photo editing and page layout. Otugo et al (2015) identified Facebook as the most popular platform among users and advertisers alike. Nyekwere et al (2014) study revealed that 70% of business organizations in Nigeria are embracing social media to communicate with their customers. 35% of businesses surveyed acknowledged success with the use of social media advertising. Ekwueme and Okoro (2018) discovered that social media advertising is frequently used by online businesses in Nigeria with the weekly frequency followed in close succession by the monthly frequency. This implies that businesses advertise on social media at least once a week or at most once a month. Also, the use of social media as a marketing tool allows companies to mingle with fellow professionals, conduct research, connect with the community and get business opportunities (Smith & Taylor, 2004).

Social Media Marketing Strategy

Social Media Marketing is a strategy that has great potentials to improve products and services, therefore business owners must effectively use social media to engage customers (Constantinides, 2014). Staying competitive and relevant in today's fast-moving business world requires a solid social media strategy (Erdogmus & Çiçek 2012). Hence, for a marketer, it is imperative to be able to identify the benefits each of the social media sites offer, and select only the ones that are suitable to reach the company's set goals and objectives.

Adegbuyi et al (2015) revealed that social media provides businesses the opportunity to engage their audience on many different levels including personal. It also states that at the onset (of social media marketing efforts by businesses), it is important for a business to focus on building relationships with consumers. In the same vein, Dijkmans et al. (2015) discovered a positive relationship between social media customer engagement, increased sales, return-on-investment, profitability, perceived reputation,

and customer retention. Likewise, Kajalo and Lindblom (2015) discovered that direct, close contact with customers enabled small businesses to be more flexible in improving market position. Similarly, Fang et al. (2015) discovered that interested customers were more likely to click advertising links, which increased traffic and other business-related activities. Moreover, satisfied customers were more likely to view a company positively, spread word-of-mouth content, and repeat business transactions with the company (Chen & Chen, 2014). Ekwueme and Okoro (2018) found that businesses subscribe more to the use of Facebook and Instagram for social media advertising. According to them, the implication of this finding is that most online businesses using social media advertising in Nigeria are focusing on generalized audience rather than targeted audience, meaning that Facebook and Instagram users are more heterogeneous in nature when compared to LinkedIn users who are basically comprised of professionals seeking to connect with other professionals. Ekwueme and Okoro (2018) further discovered that most advertisers prefer to advertise on Facebook or Instagram simply because these social networking sites are perceived to be more popular. Otugo et al (2015) also mentioned that these media are being used without regarding the suitability for the product to be advertised. Thus, while Social media presents widest reach and connection to potential audience for engagement, it is important that users understand the architecture of the various social networking sites so as to use them meaningfully to achieve desired outcomes and goals.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey research method was adopted for this study. This is because survey research are procedures in quantitative research where a survey is administered by researchers to a sample or to entire population to describe the characteristics or the behaviors of the population. The population of this study connotes all members of the Nigerian Library Association in Osun State. Thirty eight (38) online survey forms were submitted which made up the sample size for this study. Convenience sampling technique was employed, because as the time of administration of the research instrument, lockdown activities were totally enforced because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and hence online distribution of the instrument was considered most effective

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics and use of Social Media Marketing Strategies of Infopreneurs

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
25-34	4	10.5
35-44	20	52.6
45-54	9	23.7
55-64	5	13.2
Total	38	100
Gender		
Male	20	52.6
Female	18	47.4
Total	38	100
Does your business use Social Media?		
Yes	38	100
Social Media Channel Most Used		
Nil	6	15.8
Facebook	18	47.4
Instagram	2	5.3
Google+	6	15.8
Pinterest	1	2.6
LinkedIn	5	13.2
Total	38	100
Total	47	100
Rate the impact of Social Media on your business before COVID-19		
0	1	2.6
Poor	1	2.6
Fair	4	10.5
Good	9	23.7
Very Good	21	55.3
Excellent	2	5.3

Total	38	100
How do you acquire knowledge for Social Media		
Personal Development	30	52.6
Paid Online Training	6	10.5
Professional meetings	11	19.3
Family and Friends	10	17.5
Total	57	100

The demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that 52.6% of the respondents were between the ages of 35-44. This age bracket falls within the youth strata in the society. 9 respondents which represents 9.2% are between the age range of 25-34. 9 respondents are within the age range of 45-54. 4 respondents are within the age range of 55-64. From the results, it is clear that infopreneurship has provided employment for both the youths and young adults. This agrees with the view of Aregbesola et al. (2019) which states that many youths that would have been roaming the streets of Nigeria are gainfully involved in the business of blogging, thereby reducing the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. To determine the ratings of social media on businesses, two questions were posed for respondents to rate Social Media on their businesses before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Fig.1 .showed that 21 respondents representing 55.3% of the respondents rated good before COVID-19 while 2 respondents which represents 5.3% rated social media as excellent . 15 respondents which represents 39.5% rated Social Media as very good while 8 respondents representing 21.1% rated social media as excellent during the COVID-19 pandemic. This marked difference may be attributed to the lockdown activities whereby infopreneurs can devote extra time and effort for customer engagement on Social Media.

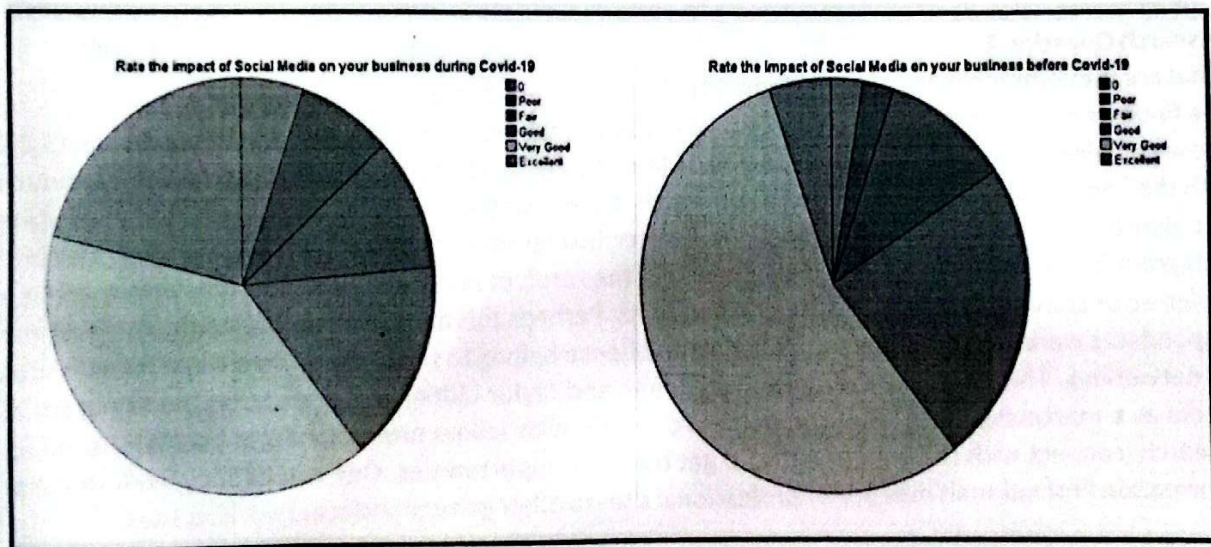


Fig. 1: Impact of Social Media on businesses before and during COVID-19

A question was asked whether infopreneurs used social media for their businesses and 38 respondents which represents 100% of the sample population answered "Yes". This result is in sync with Nyekwere et al (2014) who revealed that 70% of business organizations in Nigeria are embracing social media to communicate with their customers. Also, according to the 2012 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 94% of all global businesses use Social Media to advance their digital marketing efforts.

A question was asked on the Social Media Channel commonly used by infopreneurs. 18 people which represents 47.4% chose Facebook, 6 people which represents 15.8% chose Google+ while 5 respondents which represents 13.2% of the population chose LinkedIn. This result supports the study of Ekwueme and Okoro (2018) who stated that businesses subscribe more to the use of Facebook and Instagram for social media advertising. The study also discovered that the preferred platform for advertising by online businesses in Nigeria is Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

A question was posed on how infopreneurs acquired knowledge to operate social media for their businesses. 30 respondents representing 52.6% of the population said through Personal development, 6 people which represents 10.5% said through Paid online trainings, 11 people representing 19.3% said through Professional meetings while 10 people which represents chose Family and friends.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

What is the rating of Social Media Strategies on the businesses of infopreneurs in South-West Nigeria?

To determine the effect of Social Media on businesses, two questions were posed for respondents to rate the impact of Social Media on their businesses before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. 21 respondents representing 55.3% of the respondents rated the impact as very good while 2 respondents which represents 5.3% rated the impact excellent before COVID-19. 15 respondents which represents 39.5% rated the impact of Social Media as very good while 8 respondents representing 21.1% rated the impact of Social Media as excellent during the COVID-19 pandemic. This marked difference may be attributed to the effect of the lockdown activities whereby infopreneurs can devote extra time and effort for customer engagement on social media. Ekwueme and Okoro (2018) discovered that social media advertising is frequently used by online businesses in Nigeria with the weekly frequency followed in close succession by the monthly frequency. This implies that businesses advertise on social media at least once a week or at most once a month. Also, the use of social media as a marketing tool allows companies to mingle with fellow professionals, conduct research, connect with the community and get business opportunities (Smith & Taylor, 2004).

Research Question 2

What are the commonly used Social Media Sites by Infopreneurs in South-Western Nigeria?

The findings of the study revealed that 47.4% chose Facebook, 6 respondents which represents 15.8% chose Google+ while 5 respondents (13.2%) of the population chose LinkedIn. This result corroborates with the findings of Ekwueme & Okoro (2018) which shows that the preferred social media for advertising by online businesses in Nigeria are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn but more of Facebook and Instagram for social media advertising. Conversely, the result of this study does not show Instagram as a preferred or commonly used site by the respondents. Perhaps this may be attributed to the fact that the respondents were informational professionals and hence belong to the more professional LinkedIn sites for networking. This finding corroborates with Smith and Taylor (2004) who states that the use of social media as a marketing tool allows companies to mingle with fellow professionals in the field, conduct research, connect with the community and get business opportunities. One can deduce from this that Information Professionals may prefer professional sites to other general social networking sites.

Research Question 3

What are the knowledge sources on social media by infopreneurs in South-West Nigeria?

The results of the study showed that 52.6% of the respondents acquired knowledge to operate their businesses through personal development while only 10.5% acquired knowledge through paid online trainings. The implication of this statement may be that infopreneurs would rather teach themselves rather than pay to be taught online. This is supported by Ekwueme & Okoro (2018) who revealed that lack of technical know-how poses a serious challenge to the adoption of online advertising by online businesses in Nigeria, even though the steps may seem direct and unambiguous, some technicalities still

come to bare in areas of copy writing, graphic designing, photo editing and page layout.

Research Question 4

What are the challenges faced by Infopreneurs in South-West Nigeria?

Question on what challenges infopreneurs faced when using social media was asked. Top on the list was poor internet connectivity and inadequate electricity supply with 26.5% and 22.4% respectively. This study corroborates that of Adewoyin et al (2017) in their study which discovered that the major constraints that librarians face in the use of social media for service delivery are erratic power supply, lack of finance and poor internet access. This is also corroborated in the study of Don-Solomon and Tاتفeng (2018) which stated that infopreneurship like other entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria faces some challenges that hinder its development. These include high level of illiteracy, poor internet connectivity, inadequate ICT skills, and high cost of running business among others.

Conclusion

Social media has become an important tool in marketing strategy. The advantages of using social media are so enormous that businesses that do not adopt and use them for marketing purposes lose marketing opportunities that can assist businesses to realize their profit goals. Social media marketing is a derivative of marketing success. Social media is dynamic, so this places an onus on marketers and business owners to upgrade and update their skills constantly to adapt their marketing strategies to suit the changing trends of social media.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Infopreneurs should adopt Social media for their businesses since there is high ratings for Social media on businesses
- Infopreneurs should exploit other avenues such as paid trainings through which they can acquire more practical knowledge on the use of social media.
- Infopreneurs should explore alternative sources of power supply such as solar power to have better access to power supply.

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