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Determinants of Use of Social Media Platforms for Service and Product Promotion by Micro and Small Scale Enterprises (MSEs) in Ondo City, Nigeria

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Abstract

The use of social media has continued to grow in popularity, especially among the youths. Outside its use for entertainment, news and social relations, its use for service and product promotion, especially among micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs), has not been widely studied. Using the framework of Technological Adoption Model (TAM), this study examined the predictors of the social media use for service and product promotion among micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs) in Ondo city, Nigeria. Forty eight micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs) located in Ondo city in Ondo state, Nigeria, were selected. The quantitative (Survey) and qualitative (In-depth Interview –IDI) methods were adopted. Data were collected with the questionnaire and IDI guide and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results show that perceived relative cost advantage, wider reach, good network and steady power supply, ease of use, youthful age and high academic background are positively related to the adoption of social media platforms for service and product promotion among the study participants. Improving the quality of services from network service providers and basic ICT skills training for MSE owners will further boost the adoption.

Keywords: Social media, Micro and Small Scale Enterprises, Media promotion, Business promotion

INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the communication landscape in almost all areas of life and the business sector is not an exception. It is a type of online media that expedites conversation as opposed to the traditional media. It allows the users to participate in the creation and development of the media content unlike the traditional media. Its participatory nature endears it to various categories of people who use it for various purposes. Studies have reported that young people use the social media more than the older generation because of their technological savviness, fun-seeking and adventurous nature (Chou, WS, Hunt, YM, Beckjord, EB, Moser, RP and Hesse BW, 2009).

There is a wide variety of social media ranging from social sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr to social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Others include Skype and WhatsApp. A lot of things could be done using the social media such as sharing ideas, experiences, photos, videos, likes and dislikes. One can also find friends and make new ones, make business contacts and connections and be part of a community or different communities. A very important distinguishing factor about the social media is that the users can engage others as well be engaged in meaning sharing.

The avalanche of opportunities available on the social media has made it attractive to all kinds of users for meeting their individual needs – ranging from the youth, seeking for new relationships and entertainment; the politician, canvassing for the goodwill and the votes of the electorates; the celebrity artist, trying to reach out to and expand his/her fan base and to the business owner wanting to market his/her products and services. Research has also shown that the social media can be used for social and emotional support such as in the case of online health communities where similar others (such as diabetics, sickle cell patients, etc) meet to share information about better treatment options, their coping strategies and experiences and then encourage one another to stay positive (Mbaka, 2013). Some of such online health communities on the social media include (patientslikeme.com, tdiabetes, ketogenic lifestyle, etc).

An aspect of life that has been impacted upon heavily by the social media, although under-researched in this clime, is commerce. The 21st century world has witnessed a shift in the way businesses are run and how products and services are marketed. The Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) driven market is setting aside the old ways for the new ways of doing business. Smith and Taylor (2004) reveal that companies are presently testing new unanticipated events and adopting innovations. Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook, supports them by saying that advertising is fast changing and businesses need to understand the usage of the Internet technologies in order to remain relevant (Maymann, 2008).

Many businesses are now experimenting with the social media as a communication tool to improve their online presence and consequently their visibility and for effective promotion, sale and distribution of their products and services. Some of the benefits of the use of social media for business as identified by Simon (2011) include greater access to different audiences, improved customer services, improved products and services.

Micro and Small Scale Enterprises (MSEs) are the engine house of any nation's economy as they drive production and employment at the grass root level. In Nigeria, there are over a thousand registered MSEs and many unregistered ones. The number keeps growing by the day. The massive turn out of graduates from the nation's tertiary institutions with little or no readily available 'white-collar' jobs to take up has contributed to this growth.

As bigger businesses and companies are adopting the new media strategies for their businesses, the small businesses should not be left out. Since it takes little or nothing to create content or respond to a created content online, the micro and small business owners may benefit more from online transactions as rental fee, corporation fee and other fees charged on offline businesses may not apply to them.

Literature Review

In this section, we reviewed relevant literature on the key concepts in this study with a view to having a broad understanding of what they are, their characteristics and roles in different places and among different people.

Micro and Small Scale Enterprises

Micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs) are businesses that contribute to the socio-economic development which leads to poverty reduction at the grass root level. They are veritable vehicle for the achievement of national economic objectives of employment generation and poverty reduction at low investment cost as well as the development of entrepreneurial capabilities including indigenous technology. One of the criteria for classifying a business under MSE is an average capital base of ten million naira and not more than ten employees. Businesses that are classified under MSEs include businesses such as block molding, hair dressing, fashion designing, fishery, printing and publishing, events management, IT consulting and a host of others. These businesses are essential to national economies as they generate employment and aid socio-economic expansion.

It is widely acknowledged that in many western countries, MSEs are central to their economic growth (Fosso, Wamba and Carter, 2013). Sarvanan, Gupta and Ghatak (2008) revealed that MSEs comprise over 90% of African business operations and contribute over 50% of African employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Nigeria, despite a plethora of problems and challenges that beset MSEs such as lack of funds, inadequacy of raw materials, lack of technological know-how, lack of enabling environment, lack of basic skills, poor policy formulation and implementation, they still contribute about 95% of formal manufacturing activity (Jagongo and Kinyua, 2013). Owing to these problems and challenges, less than 5% of Nigerian Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) survive beyond their first five years of existence.

Scholars have proposed that the social media, with its avalanche of opportunities, can be a good partner in surmounting these challenges. With the social media, the MSEs can have new market access, good customer relationships and improved communication and presence on a global scene, all at a reduced cost. However, for this to be done effectively, the possibilities and potential pitfalls of social media use among the target audience should be identified and addressed.

Social Media

The social media has been described in many ways – sometimes in terms of functions, in terms of technology and in terms of spread and capacity. In technological term, it is an internet tool for content creation and content sharing (Boyd & Ellisen, 2007). In terms of functions, it is a ubiquitous source of information that provides networking opportunities for people across the globe for different purposes (Michaelidon, Siagmagka & Christodoulides, 2011).

Examples of social media platforms or applications are YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. There have been some contentions whether WhatsApp should be seen as a social media application. The argument could swing on both sides. However, for this study, WhatsApp has been included in social media applications based on the argument that social media are so called based on the fact that they are primarily used to contact new people and make new friends and they are basically web-based. WhatsApp fulfills those requirements. It is used to contact new people, make new friends and reach out to a wider audience especially on group chats. Also, it is now web-based as it can be accessed on www.whatsapp.com and on the desktop too.

However, the most important reason for the inclusion of WhatsApp in this study is that a large proportion of the study respondents indicated their use of WhatsApp as a social media tool for their business and service promotion. This, cannot be ignored. Furthermore, new social media sites are continually emerging but according to Nielsen (2012) and Wright & Hinson (2012), Facebook and Twitter continue to top the list as the most popular ones. There are presently over 1.71 billion monthly active Facebook users all over the world (www.zephoria.com). This is about a quarter of the world population and one can only imagine the significant amount of information and opportunities it creates for business communication.

Micro and Small Scale Enterprises and Social Media Use

The arrival of new media of communication and the ICTs on the world stage heralds a new era. They have redefined and transformed, practically, every area of life – media, politics, religion, health, business, entertainment, etc. Internet commerce has evolved and promises to change the future of the global economy, as a major player in that sector (Poon and Swatman, 1998).

Many small businesses are therefore recognizing the importance of adopting the social media for business communication. Marketers can no longer rely solely on the old traditional mass media channels to communicate with their consumers/customers. They have to try new strategies if they wish to succeed in their business and remain relevant. Apart from the fact that products and services enjoy wider exposure when placed on the social media, peer-to-peer communication, the type frequently used on social media, makes information about products and services not to be provided only by the owners of the businesses. With the social media, the information can now be shared or disseminated by other members of the social media community such as friends, colleagues, family members and even customers/consumers. It has been reported that consumers place greater trust in information that is provided by friends, peers and other consumers (Weinberg & Berger, 2011).

Good customer relationships are essential to the success of micro and small businesses and the social media facilitates the development of such relationships. Customers can seek clarifications from the product manufacturer or service provider on social media about issues such as product variety, pricing, discount, location, delivery and so on and get their answers in real time. Also questions asked by other consumers/customers and the answers provided by the businesses online can help other consumers on that platform. This process, therefore, builds trust, transparency, accountability and global presence for the business.

However, despite the potential benefits of social media to MSEs, many of them are facing some challenges adopting them for their product and service promotion. A comparative study by Fuchs-Kittowski and Hüttemann (2009) summarised findings about a whole range of economic, cultural and technical factors that can be seen as obstacles to the use of social media for business promotion. Jackson, Zhao, Kolenic, Fitzgerald, Harold and Von (2008) and Habel, Liddon and Stryker (2009) also identified challenges such as lack of good filters for online information and the digital divide.

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Davis (1989) as it provides a perspective for examining the adoption and use of new media (social media) by MSEs. The model describes computer usage behaviour from a set of two constructs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The objective of TAM is to provide an explanation of the determinants of computer acceptance that is capable of explaining user behaviour across a broad range of end-user computing technologies. TAM is an adaptation of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) which is specifically meant to explain computer usage behaviour. Adams, Nelson and Todd (1992) suggest that the model may be used in understanding factors that influence the success of information systems or it may be used in studies within and across organisations by researchers, who are interested in understanding the diffusion of information technology and the determinants of technology adoption.

It has been adopted for this study to enable us understand the determinants of social media use for product and service promotion among the study population.

Statement of the Research Problem

The social media, enabled by the internet, has revolutionised how people relate with one another for different purposes. Researchers have investigated the use of social media applications in different areas of life – academics, health, politics, religion, entertainment and human relationships. The use of social media by Micro and Small scale Enterprises (MSEs) is one aspect of the social media use that is under-researched. With the development of new social media applications and the evolving of existing ones, more small business owners are increasingly tapping into this trend. The movement, which started in the developed world, is fast catching on in the developing ones and Nigeria is not an exception. What is not known, however, is how Nigerian businesses, especially the micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs) in Ondo city are using the social media. What is their response to the use of social media for product and service promotion? What are the factors that determine their adoption or non-adoption of a social media platform for their product and service promotion? These are the issues this study set out to investigate.

Research Questions

1. Which is the most used social media platform among MSEs in Ondo city?
2. How do the MSEs in Ondo city use the social media?
3. What factors influence the adoption or non-adoption of the social media platforms for product and service promotion among MSEs in Ondo city?

Research Design and Methodology

A research design is a plan and structure of investigating in order to obtain answers to research questions (Kothari, 2009). The study employed both the quantitative (Survey) and qualitative (In-depth Interview – IDI) research approaches in order to provide an in-depth description of the factors that influence social media adoption for product and service promotion.

According to Adams and Cox (2008), when these methods are combined purposefully, they produce richer and more useful data. The survey was designed to collect descriptive data and therefore made no provision for interaction with the participants. Although it provided the

statistical picture of current usage of the social media platforms by MSEs, their patterns of usage and the demographics of the users, it failed to provide an explanation of how and why MSEs use or do not use the social media platforms (as the case may be) and the factors that impede or enable their usage. Therefore, the In-depth Interview (IDI) was designed to make up for this lapse. The analysis of the survey questionnaire responses highlighted issues which needed to be probed further using the IDI.

Sample Selection and Size

The target population for this study was all MSEs in Ondo city, Nigeria. Due to the poor level of business registration by MSEs in Nigeria, a comprehensive list of all registered MSEs in Ondo city could not be obtained. This is coupled with the fact that many of the registered ones have gone out of business due to poor sustainability. In the absence of a sampling frame to draw from, the researcher employed a procedure termed stratified purposive sampling technique to select forty-eight (48) micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Ondo city. This technique was employed by Abasilim (2015) to study MSEs in Osun state, Nigeria with good result. Forty, out of the forty-eight selected MSEs, participated in the quantitative aspect of the study, while the remaining eight took part in the qualitative aspect.

Table 1.1 Sample Population and Sample Size

Sample Location	Sample Size	Percentage
Oke-dibo	14	30
Odo-Sida	10	20
Agbogbo Oke	10	20
Sabo	10	30
Total	48	100

From Table 1.1 above, Ondo city was stratified into four sections according to their markets or business districts – Oke-dibo, Odo Sida, Agbogbo Oke and Sabo. Business districts and markets were used because many businesses (micro and small) are situated around the area. The percentage of the sample size assigned to each of the four sections was commensurate with the volume of business activities going on in that area. Oke-dibo and Sabo being the highest in terms of business activities were assigned 30% (14) of the total sample size each, while Agbogbo oke and Odo-Sida were assigned 20% (10) of the total sample size each. This makes the total sample size selected for the study to be forty-eight (48). The MSEs were purposively identified through the researcher’s observation and approached to be part of the study.

Study Instruments, Data Collection and Data Analysis

For the qualitative study, a pre-tested 16-item questionnaire was administered to the selected 40 MSE owners. The questionnaire included questions on demographic details, perceptions and behaviour towards the social media and the preferred social media. The questionnaire has both the English and Yoruba language (the spoken native language) versions so as to encourage respondents’ selection of the language of their convenience. A research assistant administered the questionnaire copies on the respondents by hand and waited to pick them up. In cases where they were not filled immediately, the assistant had to repeat the visit until the copies were retrieved. This ensured a 100% return rate as all the questionnaire copies were filled and retrieved.

For the qualitative study, a 9-item semi-structured In-depth Interview (IDI) guide was prepared and used by the research assistant to gather qualitative data from the respondents at their convenience. Student-tutor style of interaction was employed to ensure respondents' ease and ultimately leading to sensitive and valuable information being divulged. The interviews were recorded in an audio-recording equipment, transcribed and coded into categories and analysed manually using the thematic approach and explanation building. The quantitative data were also analysed, using descriptive statistics on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Findings

Profile of Respondents

Table 1.2 Spread of MSEs among the Respondents

MSEs	No of Respondents	Percentage
Event management	4	8.3
Clothing and Textile	7	14.5
Agriculture	6	12.5
Printing/Publishing & ICT	5	8.4
Block molding	8	16.6
Bakery	2	4.1
Food processing & packaging	12	25
Packaged water	3	6.2
Total	48	100

The data revealed that the respondents for the study were spread across various types of small businesses including event management 4(8.3%), clothing and textile 7(14.5%), agriculture 6(12.5%), printing/publishing & ICT 5(10.4%), block molding 8(16.6%), bakery 2(4.1%), food processing and packaging 12(25%) and packaged water 3(6.2%). This shows that the businesses were spread across board with food processing enterprises (which includes cocoa processing, cassava processing, grinding machine) having the highest number. This is closely followed by block molding enterprises and clothing and textile enterprises.

The majority of the respondents (enterprises) has less than six employees 34(70.8%). A greater proportion of the respondents are male 29(60.4%) and married 31(64.5%). Majority (68%) are within the age range of 30-40years and also the majority (65%) have their highest academic qualification as Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE).

Social Media Use by the Respondents

On the social media applications that were used by the MSEs in Ondo city, data revealed that most 42(87.5%) of the respondents use one social media application or the other. However, a large percentage of them 32(66.6%) do not use them for product and service promotion. Six social media applications were utilized – Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram.

Table 1.3 Social Media Used by Respondents

Social Media Applications	No of Respondents	Percentage
Facebook	37	77

WhatsApp	35	72.9
Instagram	24	50
YouTube	18	37.5
Twitter	7	14.5
LinkedIn	4	8.3

Research Question 1: Which is the most used social media among the study respondents?

Data presented on Table 1.3 showed that Facebook was the social media application mostly used by the respondents 37(77%). This confirms the report of Schaffer (2013) that Facebook was the social media tool often chosen by business owners who engaged in a project aimed at increasing the adoption of social media tools by small businesses in Australia. More so, Facebook has been identified as the world most popular social media platform with over 1.2 billion active members (Fowler, 2012). The second most used social media application is WhatsApp with 35(72.9%) and Instagram with 24(50%). The least used social media application by the respondents is LinkedIn 4(8.3%).

A cross-tabulation of the social media applications used with the demographic profile of the respondents revealed that higher level of education and male gender are predictors of the use of Twitter and LinkedIn, while WhatsApp and Facebook are mostly used by the less educated, the young and the female gender.

Research Question 2: How do the MSEs in Ondo city use the social media?

The second research question focused on identifying ways the MSE owners in Ondo use the social media and the type of social media resources they use. Respondents indicated that they use the social media applications for variety of purposes such as business activities, news and information gathering, interactions with friends and family and entertainment.

Table 1.4: Uses of the Social Media by the Respondents

Uses of social media	No of Respondents	Percentage
Business activities	16	38
News & information	35	72.9
Social interactions	39	81.2
Entertainment	27	56.2

From the table above, we can deduce that the majority of the respondents use the social media for social interactions (with friends and family) 39(81.2%), followed by news and information 35(72.9%), entertainment 27(56%) and business activities 16(38%). Since the study's focus is on the use of social media for product and service promotion, respondents who did not use the social media for the promotion of their business were asked the reasons behind their non-use of the social media for business promotion. The most common reasons given for not using the social media for business promotion was lack of knowledge of how to use it, their customers not on social media, lack of fund, poor network to access the social media and epileptic power supply.

Qualitative data generated from the interviews revealed that although some of the respondents did not use the social media for advertising or for marketing their products and services, they used them to co-ordinate their business activities, contact their customers and link up with similar

businesses for partnership. WhatsApp was used mainly in this way. As one of the interviewees (a block molder) puts it, “I don’t really use the other ones (social media applications) you mentioned but I use WhatsApp to chat with my customers, tell them what measurements I have and the price”. Another one, a bead maker says, “I use the photos of my new works as my display picture (DP) and when people see them, and like them, they ask me to make for them. I also post the pictures on group chats for many people in my group to see”.

Research Question 3: What factors influenced the adoption of the social media platforms for product and service promotion among MSEs in Ondo city?

Several factors were identified as determinants of the adoption of social media platforms for product and service promotion among the study respondents. They are grouped under the following headings as identified from the qualitative data.

- **Lack of money/time:** - Many respondents identified lack of money as a factor that influences use or non-use of social media for business promotion. Ranging from the money to buy a smart phone or computer to money to buy data for browsing, the respondents were full of concerns. A male small business owner (fish farmer) captures it this way, “you don’t expect me to use the little money I make to browse the internet...when I make big money I will use it”. Another male business owner (an IT consultant) said, “You need a lot of money to set up a website or keep a page running consistently on Facebook. I will do that when I become bigger but for now I just use my timeline updates once in a while to draw attention to my business”. A female respondent (fashion designer) indicated that lack of time is a major setback to her uptake of social media for business promotion. She said, “As you can see, I am a very busy person, customers are disturbing me to collect their cloth and I will be browsing? I don’t think I have that time”.
- **Lack of technical knowledge:** - Some of the respondents, especially those with little education have challenges using some of the social media applications. They complained about the complex technical nature of some of the applications that make them difficult to use. A female respondent (hair dresser) narrated her appalling experience the first time she tried to upload a video of her hair-making on YouTube. She said after several trials and navigations, she failed to upload the video and that affected her so much that she decided not to do that again.
- **Poor network access:** - It was discovered that some of those who have the technical skills and want to use the social media for their business promotion are not doing so because of poor network access. It is a known fact that some communities in Nigeria lack internet access. As revealed by the interviewees, some network providers have connectivity problem in Ondo city, while others lack a strong 3G network that can enable consistent social media use for business promotion.
- **Epileptic power supply:** - The state of electricity generation in Nigeria is very pathetic. Ondo city is a microcosm of what obtains in every other place in Nigeria, electricity wise. Most of the respondents reported their inability to “charge” their gadgets (laptops and phones) due to the epileptic power supply. One of them analysed the implications of putting your business on the social media without a constant supply of power to run it, “what is the essence of advertising a product online and then go offline for days due to no power? Who

will now answer the questions that potential customers might have concerning the product? People will not take seriously”, she lamented.

- Poor understanding of the benefits of social media for business: - Apart from those that were hindered from using social media for business promotion due to some of the factors already identified, some other respondents do not know the benefits that social media hold for MSEs. When asked whether the social media is beneficial to businesses, this set of people exhibited a tone of indifference claiming that the social media “was not created for business but for entertainment such as watching films and catching up with stars”, “a means of whiling away time and wasting one’s resources” and most importantly an avenue “for boys and girls who are looking for friendship”.

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

The results suggest that many MSEs are not utilizing the social media for promoting their products and services. This means that the opportunities which abound in the use of social media for business promotion such as increased presence on the global scene, improved sales, good customer relationship and transparency and building of trust are not being harnessed by the MSEs in Ondo city. Earlier studies lend support to the fact that Internet commerce help small and medium businesses achieve marketing benefits, better global exposure and customer relationships (Abell and Lim, 1996; Poon and Swatman, 1996; Hamill and Gregory, 1997).

Findings also showed that the study respondents use Facebook more than any other social media. This collaborates earlier report which found Facebook to be the most popular social media with millions of active users worldwide. WhatsApp was also highly used by the respondents. Cross-tabulation of the social media application used and the respondents’ demographic data revealed that low level of education and youthful age are predictors for the adoption of WhatsApp and Facebook, while high level of education, middle age and male gender are predictors for the adoption of Twitter and LinkedIn. The implication of this is that the adoption was based mostly on individual preferences (fueled by demographics) and not determined by the type of business one engages in. Therefore, since Facebook appeals to most of the respondents across various demographics, it will be the best suited for business promotion in the study population.

The advent of new media use for business purposes requires new ways of thinking, strategy design and reorientation and these pose a whole lot of challenges to MSEs, as any innovation would. Therefore, research into social media adoption and use is driven by the need to identify predicating factors leading to the adoption or non-adoption of this innovation for business promotion. Findings of this study suggest that predictors of social media adoption for business promotion include fund/resources to drive it, knowledge/skill to use it, time, network access, power supply and a good understanding of the role of social media for business promotion. Other studies have identified lack of knowledge, skill, time and money as barriers to uptake and effective use of social media for business promotion (Mehrtens, Craig & Mills, 2001; Street & Meister, 2004).

Conclusion

The study established that most MSEs in Ondo city, Nigeria have not fully understood and internalized the potentials of social media for their businesses. While there are still some business

owners who do not use the social media at all, those who use them make use of them more for personal/private purposes than for business promotion. This means that MSEs in Ondo city have not maximized the benefits accruing from social media for business promotion despite its wide usage and success stories in other climes. Also, factors that can affect the adoption of social media for business promotion were identified. Some of them are: lack of money and time, lack of the knowledge/skill, poor network access, epileptic power supply, etc. The identified barriers should be tackled by improving the quality of services from network service providers, basic ICT skills training for MSE owners and the provision of internet commerce fund by NGOs, financial institutions and the government in order to boost the adoption.

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