

Utilization of E-Commerce Platforms by Small and Medium Scale Business Operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State

¹Azih, Nonye; ¹Igwe Kingsley O; ¹Idike Matthew I; ¹Ucha Chukwuemenka; ²Ama, Faith N

¹Department of Business Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

²Department of Office Technology and Management, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Uwanna, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: igwekingsleyogazi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focused on utilization of e-commerce platforms by small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State. The specific purpose was to determine Web intelligence platforms and social networking platforms utilized by small and medium scale Operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State. The study was carried out in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi State. Population for the study comprised 103 Small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi state. No sample was taken in view of the manageable size of the population. The study adopted a survey research design. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The overall Reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.94. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistic were used to analyze the data. The result of the study revealed that the 12 web platforms such as Google marketing analytics, Similarweb, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Hoot-suite insight, Sprout Social, Brandwatch, Crimson Hexagon, NetBase, Qlik and Oracle Analytics Cloud are utilized at low extent by small and medium scale Operators and social networking platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Crunchbase, Instagram, Twitter are utilized at low extent by small and medium scale in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi state. The result of t-test results shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female SMEs operators on the extent of utilizing web intelligence platforms. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Managers of small and medium scale businesses should utilize several web intelligence and networking platforms to promote SMEs growth and performance. Furthermore, SMEs should also ensure that all online transactions are done with trusted persons whose identities are not anonymous and should use secured websites as well as document receipts of every online commercial activity.

Keywords: Utilization, E-commerce Platforms, Small, Medium Scale Business

Introduction

Electronic Commerce (E-commerce) refers to the buying and selling of goods and services over the Internet with the aid of modern communication equipment such

as computer, telephone, fax, e-payment, money transfer systems, e-data interchange among others. It encompasses various types of transaction, including (1)

B2B (Business-to Business), companies trading with each other, (2) B2C (Business-to-Consumer)-companies selling directly to individuals, (3) C2C(Consumer-to Consumer)-individual trading with each other (4) Social commerce-buying and selling through social media platforms and (5) M-Commerce (Mobile Consumer)-a transactions conducted through mobile device. According to Attamah (2019), it is the way of carrying out business transactions using Internet services. It is also mean the production, distribution, marketing, sales, or delivery of goods and services through electronic means. Okolie and Ojomo in Akanibo & Abbiyesuku (2021) defined e-commerce as the means of using Internet and web for business transactions or commercial transactions, which typically involves the exchange of value (e.g. money) across business organization or individuals boundaries in returns for products and services. E-commerce according to Chevalier (2022) is the buying and selling of goods, products, or services using the Internet as a medium whereby the buyer gets to see the product online, order it and make payment through the mode accepted by the seller. The seller then delivers these products to the consumer via available and accepted means. E-commerce is also known Internet commerce. To participate in ecommerce, a customer needs to have access to the Internet as well as a means of error free payment in order to make use of ecommerce services successfully.

E-commerce activities in Nigeria are rapidly growing as results of vast improvement in Telecommunication services. Chevalier (2021) stated that the evolution of e-commerce is highly influenced by developments in Communication and computer technologies. The benefits of ecommerce

according to Shettima (2021), include customer loyalty, the speed of access, reduced costs of operation, transformation of traditional market chain, acquisition of a niche market, business efficiency, increased automation of process, retrained and expanded customer base, enhancing well being and education of customers about the products. The growth of e-commerce in Nigeria is affected by accessibility privacy, and confidentiality, establishing cost, data security, network reliability, credit card threat, citizens' income and education, authenticity, cyber crime, poor technological infrastructure and fear of inadequate security in online business environment (Ayo, 2022).

E-commerce platforms are the online infrastructures that enable the conduct of business transactions via the Internet. According to Akanbo *et al* (2021), ecommerce platforms is the content management system (CMS) and commerce engine websites use to manage a users relationships with an online retailer. It doesn't matter if your business is large or small, B2B or B2C, selling tangible goods or providing remote services. Ikemelu (2022) revealed that ecommerce platforms have the potential of transforming the nature of retail merchandising and shopping in Nigeria. E-commerce platforms, therefore, involves the use of electronic communication and digital information processing technology skill, aptitude and knowledge in marketing business (Timmer, 2017). E-commerce platforms include web-based platforms and social networking platforms.

Web Intelligence platform refers to the process of gathering, analyzing and utilization of data from the web to support informed decision making. It involves

gathering data from various online sources, applying techniques to identify patterns, trends and insights; presenting findings in a clear, actionable format. It is a software solution, its function is to collect, analyze and interpret data from the web to provide actionable insights for businesses, organizations, or individuals. Examples of WIP includes Google marketing analytics, Similarweb, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Hoot-suite insight, Sprout Social, Brandwatch, Crimson Hexagon, NetBase, Qlik and Oracle Analytics Cloud, according to Akanibo & Abbiyesuku (2021) have emerged as credible outlets where merchandisers canvass patronage for their products from their target markets. Utilization of Web Intelligence platforms in business organizations involves leveraging web data and analytics to inform strategic decisions, drive growth, and stay competitive. Chen, *et al.*, (2020) noted that leveraging web intelligence platforms, small and medium scale enterprises can enhance data driven insights, drive growth, and stay ahead of the competition. Web intelligence (WI) platforms according to Kim Kim, *et al.*, (2019), offer a solution, empowering SMES to leverage web data and analytics for informed decision making. Web Intelligence platforms provide real-time monitoring, predictive analytics and data visualization, enabling businesses to optimize operations, enhance customer experiences and drive growth. Okeke, *et al.*, (2016) opined that the Web Intelligence Platforms when utilized has its influence over many aspects of the world market either directly or indirectly. According to them, it help to remove the limitations of the accessibility of information and ensure that it can be reached anywhere by anyone accessing the Internet.

Social networking platforms are the internet-based software application or websites that enables users to create and share contents, connect with others, and participate in online communities. It is the online websites that allow people to network with friends as well make new friends to build network. Okoye & Obi (2022) posits that social networking platforms consist of any online platforms or channel for user generated content. The common examples of social Networking platforms include: Facebook, twitter, Crunchbase, YouTube, WordPress, Sharepoint, Lithum among others. Tito (2023) explained that social networking platforms have relevance not only for regular Internet users, but business as well. In business, social networking platforms is used to market products, promote brands, and connect to current customers and foster new business (Sarah, 2021). Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn are deployed as avenues for businesses to engage customers and sell their products and services online. Akujo (2019) posits that platforms like, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have created online communities where people can share as much or little personal information as they desire with other members. Social network platform is a very powerful business tool. Through social network platforms, SMEs Operators can follow conversations about their product for real-time market data and feedback. Example, establish Facebook, Twitter page allows someone who like your product and the way you conduct business to your page, which creates a venue for communication, marketing and network. Beckers, *et al.*, (2021) opined that web and social networking platform allows small and medium scale business (SMEs) Operators

to connect individuals who share similar business interest or activities.

Small and medium scale business according to Bank of Industry (BOI) in Attamah (2019) is defined as business industries with project cost (investment and working capital) not exceeding ₦3 million (\$18,750). According to Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2020), small and medium scale businesses are businesses with turnover of less than N100 MM per annum and/ or less than 300 employees. According to him, in a study by the IFC show that approximately 96% of Nigerian businesses are small and medium scale business compared to 53% in the US and 65% in Europe. It was further stated that small and medium scale businesses represent about 90% of the manufacturing/ industrial sector in terms of number of enterprises. The importance of having an online presence especially for small and medium scale business operators cannot be overstressed. It helps business operators to showcase their products to much broader audience and attracts more patronage. Schawbel (2019) posits that for any business operator to excel, he/she should at least be involved in the largest social networks, belong to forums and have at least one blog; set a Google Alert for his name and company's name and have profit page on a social network. MacKillop (2020) stated that business can be promoted through e-commerce platforms. Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in particular can benefit significantly from e-commerce platforms, enabling them to reach global markets, enhance customer's engagement and increase revenue. In addition, SMEs can benefit significantly from e-commerce platforms, expanding their market reach, improving efficiency and reducing cost.

In Ebonyi State, the small and medium scale enterprises have continued to thrive even before the creation of the state in 1996. About 80% of all the economic activities in Ebonyi State are purely small and medium scale enterprises (Nwusulor, 2016). This accounts for their (SMEs) huge contributions to the greater outputs of the Ebonyi State economy. According to SMEDAN (2022) collaborative National Survey of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Ebonyi State has 2,433 small and medium scale enterprises. They bring employment generation, poverty reduction and diversification of the economy among others, these small and medium scale enterprises are located in different strategic positions of the State (Ebonyi) especially in the capital territory (Abakaliki). They operate in different dimensions as water production, cassava processing, rice milling, provision stores, hair dressing, fruit juice making, computer centers, shoe making, palm oil production, vehicle repairs and maintenance, laundry and dry-cleaning services, bookshops, transport service/companies, carpentry, electronics repairs and accessories, poultry farms, restaurants and fast food centers, saloons (haircuts/plaiting), fruits and vegetable vendors, cosmetics shops, among others. These enterprises have been struggling resiliently to survive on their own even when the State Government has not shown enough interest to promote them. To a reasonable extent they have contributed immensely to the economic growth of the State. Small and Medium scale enterprises account for 90% of businesses worldwide, contributing significantly to economic development. However, they often lack resources and infrastructure for advanced data analysis.

Web Intelligence Platforms bridge this gap, providing accessible and affordable solutions.

The utilization of e-commerce platforms is important to the small and medium scale businesses in the developing countries, including, Nigeria, as this would enhance the needed impact of the small and medium scale businesses in the economic development of the country. Utilization connotes the use of item, idea or object to solve an existing problem or to achieve an objective. According to Hawkins (2022) to utilize is to find a use for something. Cassia & Magno (2021) noted that with e-commerce platforms many small and medium scale sales market directly to the consumer rather than going through a conventional retail sales channel. Akanbi & Akintunde (2018) stated that e-commerce has potentials to improve the performance of SMEs operators and bring about expansion in business outlook if factors limiting the adoption of e-commerce like security issues, under developed infrastructures, poor delivery logistics and poor courier systems, infrastructure facilities, incompatibility of business with e-commerce among others, were eliminated

In today's digital landscape, e-commerce platforms is fast rising one, gaining steady popularity in Ebonyi State as there is increased accessibility and availability of Internet access which is making many small and medium operators and even large-scale businesses to be considering e-commerce as a valid and more profitable sales channel. Chevalier (2022) noted that since the emergence of e-commerce platforms, sales of SMEs Operators have skyrocketed every year in Ebonyi State. Chevalier further revealed that from 2014 to 2022,

sales has multiplied almost fivefold across states in Nigeria including Ebonyi State. Besides that, the global Covid-19 pandemic forced many business organizations across States in Nigeria including Ebonyi State to shift their business focus to an online environment because restrictions and rules prevented them from practicing their usual business activities. Even though restrictions are lifted now, many small and medium seem to bear the fruits of their online activities and continue conducting business activities through e-commerce platforms (Chevalier, 2021).

In Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State, however, it seems that SMEs are not yet appropriately adopt electronic platforms which facilitate business transactions with high level of speed. This situation has been of great concern to the government, customers, Operators, practitioners and the organized private sector groups. The adoption of e-commerce by Small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria is crucial because it has the potential to increase the revenue of the economy, create new markets for both small and larger businesses and open up channels to serve and interact with consumers. Okeke, Ezeaghaego & Oboreh (2016) noted that the cause of low performance of small and scale business operators is non utilization of e-commerce platforms in the world market either directly or indirectly. A study Ucha (2021) revealed that small and medium scale businesses are fast losing their customers to businesses with longer exposure. This could be attributed to lack of utilization or poor utilization of e-commerce platforms by small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State. Based on this problem, the study sought to investigate the extent of

utilization of e-commerce platforms by small and medium scale business Operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the utilization of e-commerce platforms by small and medium scale (SMEs) business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study was undertaken to determine the extent of:

1. Web intelligence platforms utilization by SMEs business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State.
2. Social networking platforms utilization by SMEs operators for in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered by the study:

1. To what extent do SMEs businesses operators utilized web Intelligence platforms in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State?
2. To what extent do SMEs business operators utilized social networking platforms utilized by small and medium scale operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State?

Research Hypotheses (HOs)

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of SMEs business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone on utilization of web intelligence platforms based on gender (Male & Female).

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the mean response of SMEs business operators in Ebonyi South

Senatorial zone on utilization of social networking platforms based on years of experience (1-10 years & 11 years above)

Methodology

Design of the Study: The study adopted a survey research design.

Area of the Study: The study was carried out in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi State. Ebonyi South zone is made up five Local Government Areas (LGAs) Afikpo North, Afikpo South, Ohaozara, Onicha and Ivo Local Government areas. Ebonyi South zone is also situated at the southern part of Ebonyi state. According to Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) collaborative National, Ebonyi State has 2,433 small and medium scale enterprise which include: wholesale and retail trade; food and beverages stores; hotel and restaurant; repairs of motor vehicles and motor cycles; accommodation and food service Activities; Transport and Storage; administrative and support services Activities; art entertainment and recreation; land Transportation and Other Services Activities. The use of this area for the study is justified by the fact that this area has a lot of small and medium scale business operators, which perfectly suits the research plan.

Population of the Study: The population for the study comprised 103 Small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi state whose businesses are registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Ebonyi State branch.

Sample of the Study: No sample was taken in view of the manageable size of the population.

Instrument for Data Collection: Questionnaire was used for data collection

using four point scales of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE). The instrument was validated by three experts, all from Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. To determine the reliability, the instrument was trial tested by administering the questionnaire to 20 small and medium scale business operators in Aba, Abia State that has close proximity and a common boundary with Ebonyi State. Reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha at 5% level of significance. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.94. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Data Collection Method: A total of 103 copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents by hand with the help of three research assistants. The respondents were properly instructed on

questionnaire items and how to respond to the instrument. All the 103 copies of questionnaire were retrieved. There was 100 percent return rate.

Data Analysis Techniques: Data were analyzed using mean (\bar{x}) to answer research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A mean of 2.50 was used as basis for decision making. The null hypothesis was accepted when the t-calculated value (t-cal) was less than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96. On the other hand, an hypothesis was rejected when the t-calculated value (t-cal) was greater than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96 at 0.05 degree of freedom.

Result

Extent of utilization of web intelligence platforms by SMEs in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State.

Table 1: Mean Responses and t-test Analysis on the Extent SMEs Business Operators Utilization of Web Intelligence Platforms based on gender. Where N=103

S/N	Web Platforms	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_g	SD _g	t.cal	Remark
1	Google marketing analytics	2.35	1.38	1.36	0.76	1.85	1.07	0.80	NS
2	Similar web	2.35	1.39	2.50	1.35	2.42	1.37	1.80	NS
3	Ahrefs	2.46	1.38	2.50	1.35	2.48	1.36	1.80	NS
4	SEMrush	2.46	1.38	2.38	1.35	2.42	1.36	1.70	NS
5	Moz	2.46	1.38	2.47	1.28	2.46	1.33	0.80	NS
6	Hoot-suite insight	2.48	1.38	2.43	1.45	2.45	1.41	0.80	NS
7	Sprout Social	2.41	1.07	2.11	1.06	2.26	1.06	0.80	NS
8	Brandwatch	2.43	1.12	2.33	1.16	2.38	1.14	1.70	NS
9	Crimson Hexagon	2.48	1.18	2.56	0.85	2.52	1.02	1.80	NS
10	NetBase	2.34	1.10	2.50	1.15	2.42	1.12	1.70	NS
11	Qlik	2.50	1.39	3.65	0.47	3.08	0.93	1.80	NS
12	Oracle Analytics Cloud	2.54	1.39	3.79	0.68	3.16	1.02	1.80	NS
	Cluster Summary	2.45	1.39	2.54	1.07	2.49	1.18	1.01	NS

N_1 = number of males, N_2 = Number of females; \bar{X}_1 = mean of male; \bar{X}_2 = mean of female; \bar{X}_g = grand mean; SD_1 = standard deviation of male; SD_2 = standard deviation of female; t.cal = calculated t-test result, \bar{x}_g = Grand Mean

Table 1 shows that the grand mean ratings of the responses of small and medium scale business operators on 10 items (1-10)

in range from 1.85 to 2.42 which are in each case less than the cut-off point value of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale. This

indicated that majority of the respondents indicated that items in the cluster were utilized at low extent. The mean (\bar{X}) for items 11 and 12 were 3.08, and 3.16 respectively which are in each case greater than the agreed cut-off point mean (\bar{X}) of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale hence were adjudged as highly utilized. The overall mean of male SMEs business operators was 2.45 which was less than that of female business operators which was 2.54.

Table 3 further shows that the t-calculated (t-cal) values of eight out of 12

items range from 1.97 to 3.79 which are in each case is less the t-table (t-tab) value of 1.96. This implies that there is no significant differences existed in the mean ratings of the responses of male and female SMEs business operators on the twelve identified web intelligence platforms by SMEs in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Extent of utilization of social networking platforms by SMEs in Ebonyi south zone of Ebonyi State.

Table 2: Mean Responses and t-test Analysis on the extent SMEs business operators utilize social networking platforms based on years of experiences, where N=103

S/ N	Social Networking platforms	\bar{X}_1	SD_1	\bar{X}_2	SD_2	\bar{X}_g	SD_g	t.cal	Remark
1	Facebook	2.43	1.45	1.41	0.84	1.92	1.15	2.80	Sig
2	Instagram	2.36	1.38	1.37	0.80	1.86	1.09	2.91	Sig
3	Twitter	2.49	1.41	1.45	0.82	1.97	1.12	2.22	Sig
4	Linkedin	2.50	1.35	1.45	0.36	1.96	0.85	2.32	Sig
5	YouTube	2.50	1.35	1.44	0.78	1.97	1.07	3.30	Sig
6	Tiktok	2.38	1.35	1.40	0.79	1.89	1.09	2.31	Sig
7	Snapchat	2.47	1.28	1.41	0.83	1.94	1.05	3.32	Sig
8	Redidit	2.43	1.45	2.43	1.45	2.43	1.45	2.72	Sig
9	Pinterest	2.41	1.36	2.21	1.06	2.31	1.21	3.31	Sig
10	MySpace	2.33	1.36	2.13	1.16	2.23	1.26	3.01	Sig
11	WhatsApp	2.56	0.85	2.26	0.95	2.41	0.90	2.01	Sig
12	Crunchbase	2.48	1.35	2.10	1.15	2.29	1.25	3.32	Sig
13	Xing	2.89	0.70	3.65	0.47	3.27	0.58	2.41	Sig
14	Telegram	2.46	1.46	2.09	0.68	2.27	1.06	2.92	Sig
15	WeChat	2.37	1.29	2.43	1.45	2.40	1.37	3.30	Sig
	Cluster Summary	2.45	1.39	1.80	0.91	2.21	1.03	2.01	Sig.

N_1 = number of 1-10years, N_2 = Number of 11 and above; \bar{X}_1 = 1-10years; \bar{X}_2 = mean of 11 and above; X_g = grand mean; SD_1 = standard deviation of male; SD_2 = standard deviation of female; t.cal = caculated t-test result, \bar{X}_g =Grand Mean

Table 2 shows that the grand mean ratings of the responses of small and medium scale business operators on 14 items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15) range from 1.92 to 2.43 which are in each case less than the cut-off point value of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale. This indicated that majority of the respondents indicated that

items in the cluster were utilized at low extent. The mean (\bar{X}) for items 13 were 3.27 which are in each case greater than the agreed cut-off point mean (\bar{X}) of 2.50 on 4-point rating scale hence were adjudged as highly utilized. The overall mean of male students was 2.45 which were greater than that of female which was 1.80.

Table 2 further shows that the t-calculated (t-cal) values of fifteen (15) items range from 2.72 to 3.31 which are in each case greater than the t-table (t-tab) value of 1.96. This implies that significant differences existed in the mean ratings of the responses of business operators of 1-10 years and those of them with experiences of 11 and above on the fifteen identified networking platforms. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that small and medium scale businesses utilized web intelligence platforms at low extent in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State. The study revealed that web intelligence platforms such as Google marketing analytics, Similarweb, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Hoot-suite insight, Sprout Social, Brandwatch, Crimson Hexagon, NetBase, Qlik and Oracle Analytics Cloud are utilized at low extent by small and medium scale businesses in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State of Nigeria. The test of hypothesis revealed that the mean responses of small and medium scale business operators did not differ on their extent of utilizing web intelligence platforms based on Gender. This portends a great danger for small and medium scale businesses in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State of Nigeria. In contemporary marketing, Web intelligence is a necessary adjunct to any marketing effort. This finding agrees with Okeke, Ezeaghaego & Oboreh (2016) who noted that the cause of low performance of small and scale business operators is non utilization of web intelligence platforms in the world market either directly or indirectly. The finding also collaborates with the view of Akanbi & Akintunde (2018) who stated that e-commerce has potentials to improve the performance of

SMEs operators and bring about expansion in business outlook if factors limiting the adoption of e-commerce like security issues, under developed infrastructures, poor delivery logistics and poor courier systems, infrastructure facilities, incompatibility of business with e-commerce among others., were eliminated.

The analyses of the second research question in Tables 2 revealed that there is low utilization of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tiktok, Snapchat, Redidit, Pinterest, MySpace, WhatsApp, Crunchbase, Xing, Telegram and WeChat by small and medium scale businesses in Ebonyi South Senatorial zone of Ebonyi State. The test of hypothesis revealed that the mean responses of small and medium scale business operators differed significantly on their extent of utilizing Networking platforms based on their years of experience. The low utilization of networking platforms by small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South also suggests that they are not excelling in their marketing effort. This finding agrees with Schawbel (2019) who posits that for any business operator to excel, he should at least be involved in the largest social networks, belong to forums and have at least one blog; set a Google Alert for his name and company's name and have profit page on a social network. This finding is in consonance with Bevan MacKillop (2020) also noted that business can be promoted through social networking. Nwabufo (2017) noted that companies like Amazon, Alibaba and Walmart have become large corporations due to the integration of ecommerce such as web intelligent and networking platforms into their business models.

Conclusions

This study focused on utilization of e-commerce platforms by small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State. The study found that 12 identified web intelligence platforms Google marketing analytics, Similarweb, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Hoot-suite insight, Sprout Social, Brandwatch, Crimson Hexagon, NetBase, Qlik and Oracle Analytics Cloud among others and 15 identified social networking platforms Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tiktok, Snapchat, Redidit, Pinterest, MySpace, WhatsApp, Crunchbase, Xing, Telegram and WeChat utilized at low extent by small and medium scale businesses in Ebonyi South zone of Ebonyi state. The result of the tested null hypothesis proved that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business operators on their extent of utilizing web intelligence platform and significant differences existed in the mean responses of small and medium business operators of 1-10 years and those of them with experiences of 11 and above on the fifteen identified networking platforms. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the advent of e-commerce offers considerable opportunities for SMEs to expand their customer base, enter new product markets, and rationalize their businesses and as such, the benefits of e-commerce outweigh the costs of investment. Therefore, SMEs that invest in e-commerce may continue to grow whether the investment costs are high or low

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following are recommended

1. Managers of small and medium scale businesses should utilize several web intelligence platforms to promote SMEs growth and performance
2. Managers of small and medium scale businesses should continuously research and utilize several networking platforms and its components to significantly promote SMEs growth and performance
3. SMEs should also ensure that all online transactions are done with trusted persons whose identities are not anonymous and should use secured websites as well as document receipts of every online commercial activity
4. That all the tertiary institutions that offer marketing education courses need to be provided with e-learning facilities and platforms in order to ensure the facilitation of electronic commerce competencies

References

- Akanbi, M. & Akintunde, J (2018). Perception of barriers to e-commerce adoption in small and medium enterprises in a developed and developing Country: a Comparison between Australia and Indonesia. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations*, 8(1), 61-82
- Akanibo, S. A. & Abbiyesuku, T. A. (2021). E-commerce as a catalyst for sustainable growth and economic development in the contemporary Nigeria. *International Journal of Business & Law Research*; 9(3),85-93
- Akujo, M. N. (2019). Extent of utilization of social media by online business operators for successful marketing in Abia and Rivers State. *Unpublished Ph.D, thesis submitted to Department of Business Education, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki*
- Attamah, N (2019). Electronic-commerce as drivers of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. *International Journal of Applied Sciences*; 5(1):64-71

- Ayo, A. J. (2022). E-commerce adoption support and advice from small and medium scale enterprises in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 5, (3):122-132
- Beckers, J., Weekx, S., & Verhetsel, A. (2021). COVID-19 and retail: The catalyst for e-commerce in Belgium? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 62, 102645.
- Cassia, F., & Magno, F. (2021). Cross-border e-commerce as a foreign market entry mode among SMEs: the relationship between export capabilities and performance. Review of international business and strategy. *International Journal of Mobile Communications*, 13(6); 670-689
- Chen, Y., Singh, A. & Wang, Y. (2020). Web intelligence platforms for small and medium enterprises: A systematic review. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 253-264.
- Chevalier, S. (2021). Development of e-commerce shares in total retail sales in selected countries before and after the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic as of January 2021. *International Journal of E-Business operatorship and Innovation*, 9, 23-29.
- Chevalier, S. (2022). Retail e-commerce sales worldwide from 2014 to 2022 in Ebonyi State. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*; 32(4), 1406-1433.
- Coviello, D. E. Brodie, C. G. Danaher, Y. K. & Johnston, C. F (2018). Small business use of the internet: findings from Australian case studies. *International Journal of Small Business*, 20(3); 253 270
- Hawkins, G. (2022). Adoption of e-commerce by small and medium enterprises in the UK: towards a stage model. *International Small Business Journal*, 20(3); 253 270
- Ikemelu, C. R. (2022). Electronic commerce in Nigeria: concept and effective implementation. *International Journal of Research and Development*; 4(1), 34-56
- Khan, H. U., & Uwemi, S. (2018). Possible impact of e-commerce strategies on the utilization of e-commerce in Ghana. *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research*; 2(1), 16-23
- Kim, J., Huang, X., & Kumar, S. (2019). Web intelligence platforms for competitive advantage in SMEs. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 57(3), 531-546.
- MacKillop, H. (2020). Social networks and business operatorship in Ghana: *International Journal of Journal of theory and practice*, 28(1), 1-22
- Nwabufu, B. (2017). Extent of customers' awareness and utilization of technological innovations in the banking industry. *Business Education Journal*; 7(2), 247-255.
- Nwusulor, J. C. (2016). Promotion of small and medium scale enterprises and their contributions to the economic growth of Abakaliki capital territory, Ebonyi State. *Unpublished undergraduates Project submitted to the Department of Public Administration, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki*
- Okeke, M. N., Oboreh, J. C., & Ezeaghaego, C. C. (2016). Effect of e-commerce and the growth of small scale enterprises in selected enterprises in Anambra state. *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics, And Management Studies*; 5(2), 82- 92.
- Okoye, H. I. & Obi, C. A. (2022). Development of e-commerce in Nigeria: The business operatorial opportunities and challenges. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*; 17(5), 34-39
- Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, H. L. (2020). Electronic commerce development in, small and medium sized enterprises: a stage model and its implications. *International Journal of Business process management*; 10(3), 222-227
- Sarah, D (2021). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships and social media in European countries. *International Journal of World Peace*; 28(2), 96-100
- Schawbel, J. (2019). The emerging role of electronic marketplaces and the Internet. *International Journal of Communications and Management*, 46(4): 221-227
- Shettima, M. (2021). Investigating factors influencing electronic commerce adoption in developing countries: The case of Nigeria. *International Journal of Emerging*

- Technologies and Innovative Research*; 8(1), 26-37.
- SMEDAN, (2022). Survey report on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria. 2021-2022 National MSME collaborative survey. A collaboration between national bureau of statistics (NBS) and the small and medium enterprises development agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). May 2022. <http://www.smedan.gov.ng/images/collaborative%20survey%20report.smedannbs.pdf>
- Timmer, G. (2017). The effect of e-commerce on SME performance. *Int. J. Appl. Res. Manag. Econ* 3(1): 13-25
- Tito, H. (2023). E-Business adoption across industries in European countries. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*; 110(9), 1337-54
- Ucha, C. (2021). Extent of utilization of e-commerce competencies by small and medium scale business operators in Ebonyi state; *Unpublished M.Ed, dissertation submitted to Department of Business Education, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki*