

## **Exploring Online Platforms for Marketing Agricultural and Entrepreneurial Products in Colleges of Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigerian farmers, entrepreneurs and other SMEs are faced with the problems of marketing their products and services beyond their immediate environments. Also, the dwindling of Nigeria's economy and the spate of unemployment especially among graduates of tertiary institutions are alarming hence, the need to introduce entrepreneurship in the society. Against this backdrop, this paper aimed at drawing attention to the platforms used in online marketing of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in teaching entrepreneurship so as to equip the teachers/lecturers, the students, entrepreneurs and others alike with the current online marketing platforms used in buying and selling of agricultural goods and services. Literature were explored in reviewing the concept of entrepreneurial education and concept of online marketing. Brief background of online marketing was also traced; modes of online marketing as well as the needs for business enterprises to transact online were highlighted. The online marketing platforms, limitations and challenges faced in online marketing of entrepreneurial products were all discussed so as to keep the entrepreneurs informed with the concept. The paper also recommended that farmers and other entrepreneurs should advertise and engage in online marketing of their goods and services using the available online marketing platforms so as to keep track with the global trend of conducting businesses.*

**Keywords:** Online marketing platforms, Entrepreneurial products, Teaching vocational education.

### **Introduction**

Just of recent, Nigerian Government has realised the importance of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions as it stimulates students' interest to implore the potentials of being self-reliant or even an employer rather than looking up to the Government for employment after graduation (Onyido,

2012). After attaining the three years training in Agricultural Education for the award of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), the graduates are expected to have acquired a balance approach in teaching agriculture related vocations as stated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2012).

While in the institutions, NCE students of Vocational Agriculture ought to have acquired basic knowledge on how to market agricultural and other entrepreneurial products online so as to be self-reliant after graduation. The easiest avenue of getting acquainted with the online marketing of agricultural and other entrepreneurial products is by exploring the internet, since the global trend of Agriculture, Health care, Businesses, Education and virtually many more endeavours are gradually transforming from their traditional practices to being online. Thus, Ogunjidi (2012) stressed that some Universities and Colleges of Education in Nigeria have made Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills a requirement for continuous and graduating students.

Similarly, (NCCE, 2012) specified the mode of teaching Agricultural Education courses in Colleges of Education as lectures, tutorials, field trip, excursions, practicum, laboratory work, Information Communication Technology (ICT), and practical as deemed appropriate for each course. Hence, the objective of this paper is to review the future effect of integrating online platforms for marketing agricultural and entrepreneurial products in teaching entrepreneurship courses in Nigerian Colleges of Education (COE) so as to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Entrepreneurship in Vocational Agricultural Education**

Entrepreneurship education is that aspect of education that encourages creative thinking and promotes a strong sense of self-worth and accountability. It is a significant driver of Nigerian economy. Wealth and many jobs are

created by small and medium enterprises. Oduma (2012) opined that, people who are into entrepreneurship tend to have more opportunity to exercise creative freedom, higher self-esteem and over role control of their own lives. Also, Akpomi (2008) viewed entrepreneurship as the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investments opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on the identifiable opportunities.

Some of the objectives of entrepreneurship education as stated by Odima (2012) include:

- a. It provides meaningful education for youth to enable them become self-reliant after graduation from the institutions
- b. An avenue for small and medium enterprises to employ competent graduates who have fore knowledge on the needed skills to run such enterprises.
- c. It encourages graduates on how to establish a career in small and medium enterprises
- d. It provides training on risk management so as to manage and bear uncertainties easily
- e. Entrepreneurship aimed at changing people's attitude and belief thereby, equipping them with necessary skills and competencies to plan, manage and successfully execute their own business enterprises.

### **Concept of Online Marketing**

Online marketing was borne out of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) which was defined by Aliyu (2013) as the technology that is concerned with

systems of creation, acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval, selection, transformation, dissemination and use of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information to buy or sell via the internet platforms.

Online marketing otherwise called e-commerce or e-business refers to the transaction of goods and services through electronic communications. Although the general public became familiar with online marketing only in the last decade or so, e-commerce has actually been around for over 30 years. Robert (2001) stated that, there are two basic types of e-commerce: Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C). In B2B, companies conduct business with their suppliers, distributors and other partners through electronic networks. In B2C, companies sell products and services to consumers. B2C is the better known to the general public but B2B is the form that actually dominates e-commerce in terms of revenue.

One of the key investment decisions entrepreneurs need to make during the planning stage is whether they require income, growth or a bit of both from their investments. E-commerce virtually involves buying and selling of practically everything. However, it is worthy to state that, certain products and services are more suitable for online sales. These products are: E-books, Music and Songs, Art and Design, Newsletter, Software, Games, Videos, Airline tickets, as well as Cinema Tickets among others. Examples of online services are: Banking Services, Online Shares trading among others (Robert, 2001).

Over 2.3 billion people world-wide now have access to the International

Network (commonly called Internet); and this figure is expected to rise to 5 billion by 2020. In a study undertaken by McAfee (2013), to determine the top twenty (20) countries with the highest patronage of online marketing ranked Nigeria on tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) position with about 44.6 million active internet users, while China came 1<sup>st</sup> with about 420 million internet users. Additionally, on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) disclosed that as at May, 2017 Internet users in Nigeria comprising both Global System for Mobile (GSM) and Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) networks are about 91,565,010 (Premium Times, 2017).

The growing global reach of the Internet provides new opportunities for businesses. Companies like Amazon, Apple, and eBay have successfully used the Internet to generate commerce and mobile application platforms that connect buyers and sellers around the world. Social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, Keek, YouTube, BBM, and Twitter among others, host user-generated content and promote social and commercial connections. In addition to being businesses of their own, these companies are creating new platforms for businesses in other sectors of the economy (Robert, 2001).

There is no doubt that internet has an extraordinary impact on the business world. This is because of the obvious advantages for both traders and buyers in comparison with the traditional means of commercial activities. In spite of these, the dawn of internet is being accompanied by series of challenges, depending on the

involved party, the security of the transactions and or possible loss of confidentiality. In the view of Smith and Taylor (2004), the advent of Movrodi Mondial Movement (MMM), Boonbuy Networking and scores of other online investments platforms in Nigeria and in many parts of the world in which youths especially students, have the largest patronage to such schemes, underscore the need to address the development squarely. This can be achieved through inculcation of topics on online marketing in teaching entrepreneurship to students of vocational education in Colleges of Education.

### **Origin of Online Marketing of Goods and Services**

According to Merriam-Webster's Encyclopaedia (2017), after the advent of the Internet, Tim Berners-Lee, a physicist working at a European laboratory for particles physics in Geneva, Switzerland invented the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) platform for researchers to collaborate and share information. The platform made it possible for the exchange of business documents from one computer to another in a standard format. In the early 1990s, Berners-Lee broke the ice again with the creation of the Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML), with specifications for Uniform resource Locator (URL) and Digital Objects Identifier (DOI). These enabled the Web to evolve into the environment that we know today. The Internet was therefore, taken out of the realm of technical mystique into a common usage as it became usable for ordinary people without sophisticated understanding of computer science and techniques (Eccleson & Roeser, 2010).

### **Modes of Online Marketing**

Online marketing involves exchange of information of value in the form of products and services as well as payments, using web-based technologies. It is no different from ordinary business, except that it is facilitated by web-based technologies. Online transaction can be done 100% online for electronic products such as music, video clips, e-books, airline tickets, cinema tickets, hotel booking, shares trading, and banking service among others (Robert, 2001).

Also, the transaction can be done in mixed mode where order and payment are made online, while delivery is done offline. Examples: Online shopping malls such as: Amazon.com, Konga.com, jiji.com, jumia.com; Computer stores such as: Dell, Lenovo, HP and Acer; auction sites such as: e-bay, online bookstores such as: Barnes and Noble and host of other B2B sites such as: Alibaba are examples of such leading online marketing platforms. Furthermore, the internet has created electronic or virtual market places where trading can be conducted without any geographical, time and other territorial barriers. Worthy of note is that, electronic markets have the advantages of greater reach and richness than the traditional markets (Robert, 2001).

### **The Need for Online Marketing of Goods and Services**

- Although, there are challenges to online trades and investments, it can be said with a high degree of confidence that Internet marketing has led to increased transparency and ease of buying products. Smith and Taylor

(2004) stressed that, firms are gradually transforming online due to some of the followings:

- Internet gives a wide access to potential customers. It has been estimated that a couple of billion people around the world use the Internet. As such, conducting business with such a large group of people is only possible through the Internet.
- Internet is the only medium that enables financial transaction across geographic and national boundaries without restriction.
- The cost of promoting businesses on the Internet is cheaper than other mediums of marketing. This makes it easy for small and mid-sized businesses to advertise or trade their products.
- Internet marketing facilitates an instant feedback from the customers. Customers can share their experiences after using a product.
- Internet marketing saves a lot of time and effort. Instead of having a customer service representative to attend to customers, a firm can put all the information about its products or services on the Internet, so that customers can go through it at the time of their choice.
- Internet marketing allows businesses to remain available 24/7, thus increasing the potential for sales and profits.
- Online marketing has improved distribution of resources, relationships and efficiency of economies, increasing competitiveness and reducing costs.

## **Online Platforms for Marketing of Goods and Services**

Smith and Taylor (2004) identified four (4) online platforms used in marketing goods and services. These platforms are:

### **i- Websites**

Website is one of the most crucial tools in online marketing. It can be used to advertise products and services as well as other information. A website with good contents and design can attract people's eyeballs and get them interested in the products and services offered by the company. Examples: Google, Yahoo, Amazon.com etc.

### **ii- Blogs**

Whenever a firm want to create online presence in a fast and easy manner and want to save cost on web hosting services, they can opt for a web log, or more popularly known as blog. A blog (short for web-log) is an online journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Thousands of blog service providers exist in the Internet. Two of the most popular blog service providers are *Blogger* and *Word Press*. Similar to websites, blogs can be used to advertise products and services as well as other information. It can also be used as a customer relationship management tool because it allows subscribers to leave comments and interact with the management staff of the business establishment.

### **iii- E-mail Marketing**

It is a form of direct marketing which uses electronic mail (e-mail) as a means of communicating commercial activities to an audience. Email is one of the best online marketing tools. Information is

delivered directly to the potential buyers with lightning speed. Firms can engage third party email marketing companies to handle their email marketing campaign. One of the best-known email marketing companies is Aweber. Once the firm has obtained a long list of potential customers, it can start sending products information in the form of newsletter to their emails. It can also send sales letters to promote products or services.

**iv- Online Advertisement Banner and text links:** This can be broadly categorized into:

- a- Animated banners and pop-up advertisements; and
- b- Pay-Per Click advertising:

These are online advertising mediums used to direct traffic to websites, where advertisers pay the adverts hosting provider whenever the advert is clicked. It also involves three parties viz: (a) Advertisers, (b) Advert hosting provider; and (c) Publishers.

The advertisers pay the advert hosting provider to place their advertisement (ads) on the publishers' websites. Whenever the advertisement is clicked by the user, a cost is incurred. It is also known as cost per click, which has to be paid by the advertiser to the hosting provider. The hosting provider will in turn pay the publishers for each click by the users. The most popular Pay-Per-Click advertising model include Google's Ad Words and Ad Sense model.

#### **Limitations of Online Marketing of Entrepreneurial Products**

Despite being applauded for its enormous advantages, Lindberg (2004) identified some limitations in conducting

trades and investments online. Some of the limitations include:

- The cost of setting-up a website can be high. It includes the cost of the required software and hardware, and maintenance costs.
- There are a lot of customers who use the Internet just for having information about a product, but prefer to get a hands-on experience before purchase.
- Some customers are not proficient in using the Internet; and focusing solely on Internet marketing can cause firm to lose such customers.
- The rules of the trade changes rapidly in the Internet sphere, thereby, necessitating for constant monitoring to avoid an investment being out-dated
- The biggest disadvantage of Internet marketing is its vulnerability to fraudulent activities.
- Internet marketing depends largely on technology, which is to a certain extent, vulnerable to technical faults.

#### **Challenges Faced by Entrepreneur in Online Marketing**

The conduct of business online is being abused by some unscrupulous persons as such, entrepreneurs should be wary of some undesirable elements in the course of their business. It is worth of note that, losses due to cyber-related crimes are troubling; they also directly threaten the viability of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and by extension, the national economy. Some of its challenges are:

- **Money Laundering/Terrorist Financing**

Terrorists use the Internet to transact and make donations to champion their course. Jeffrey (2007) asserted that Al Qaeda's organizing ability in cyberspace is unprecedented. It operates in cyberspace with impunity, using over 6000-plus websites to recruit, proselytize, plan and exploiting the unrestricted advantages of the internet to finance its course throughout the globe. A distinctive difference between the two is that, money laundering is the process where cash raised from criminal activities and or corruption is made to look legitimate for re-integration into the financial system where as terrorism financing cares little about the source of the fund but in what the funds are to be used for. In effect, money laundering is about turning dirty money into clean money.

- **Cyber-Crime**

All Internet-enabled investment devices are vulnerable to the threat of Cyber-Crime. According to Smith and Taylor (2004), the consequences of such an attack can range from simple inconvenience to financial catastrophe. It includes:

- Phishing-** An attempt to deceive users into giving out personal or other confidential information. It is of two types; namely, e-mail spoofing (ES) and Bank Account Compromises (BAC).
- Credit Card Fraud/Identity Theft-** Hacker(s) steal data from credit and debit cards of unsuspected users to clone a similitude thereafter, cart away sums of money from their savings.

- Cloud Services-** These are Internet-delivered applications, owned and controlled by unknown persons, organizations and locations. Examples are iCloud (Apple), SkyDrive (Microsoft), Mozy, Google Drive, Google Apps; and DropBox.

- Wireless Attack-** There are various forms of wireless technologies such as: Bluetooth, Wifi, Mifi, Cellular wireless (3G, 4G, etc.); and Cellular wireless modems among others. Online enterprises are being faced with wireless hacking tools and applications.

- **Cyber-Attack**

It involves the use of information technology by an individual or group of people to attack civilians or even Government establishments. More often, cyber terrorism refers to attack on information technology itself in a way that would radically disrupt network services. It can also be used to disrupt military or security agencies' communications, online business enterprise or even electrical installations such as dams and power plants among others (Mumuni, 2013).

- **Economic/Industrial Espionage**

These are losses through intellectual theft and business confidential information. It is difficult, however, to precisely estimate the losses. This is in part because; cyber spying is not a zero-sum game. Thus, McAfee (2013) revealed that stolen information is not really gone as Spies can take a company's product plans, its research results, and its customer lists today, and the company will still have them tomorrow. The company may not even know that it no

longer has exclusive control over such information.

### Conclusion

Online marketing has offered new opportunities in the business environment, health care, agriculture, education among others. It is an opportunity to train students of tertiary institutions especially; those in Colleges of Education on entrepreneurship aimed at being self-reliant. It enables wider coverage more than the conventional methods of buying and selling of goods and services. The paper revealed that, online marketing platforms are veritable tools in conducting businesses. The online marketing platforms include; websites, blogs, e-mails and advertisement banners. However, the development cannot be said to be devoid of challenges such as money laundering/terrorist financing, cybercrime, cyber-attack and; economic/industrial espionage. In order to move with the tune of the time, students of Vocational Education are in need to be well informed with developments in that sector. The paper proposed that, it will help in no small measure, if teaching entrepreneurship in vocational education is made with the blend of online marketing of agricultural and entrepreneurial products. The concept will definitely assist students, farmers, entrepreneurs, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and others alike in being self-reliant and in curbing the menace of unemployment especially, among youths in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

a- Entrepreneurship is linked with small and medium enterprises as such,

effort should be made to equip Students of Vocational Education with the requisite knowledge on how to initiate, manage, execute and advertise their entrepreneurial products online.

- b- Research has shown that, trades and investments are gradually transforming from their traditional means of transaction to being on the internet as such; teaching of the concept of entrepreneurship in vocational education should embrace the concept of online marketing.
- c- Since proper execution of the concept of entrepreneurship leads to economic growth and development, Government and authorities of Colleges of Education should look at the introduction of the concept of online marketing into the curriculum so as to meet up with the global trend of economic activities.

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