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Usage of Social Media among Student Entrepreneurs in Nigeria University

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Abstract

In recent time, there has been an increasing global concern over the continuously expansion in the rate of unemployment around the world, particularly among students. Recently, the students have been using the social media platforms as a means to fill the gap of unemployment. The power that the social media applications possess enables them to make use of social media for marketing, advertising, and promotion. Therefore, this study sets to investigate the usage of social media to student entrepreneur, the factors that motivated student entrepreneurs to involve in business on campus and the relevance of social media to the student entrepreneurs. The study employed the qualitative research technique; the in-depth interview method was used for data collection and 38 participants were interviewed in all. The results indicated that students are involved in entrepreneurial activities because of one reason or the other. Some of the reasons demonstrated by the informants are passionate about fulfilling a lifelong dream and to sustain them financially. Most of the informants also affirmed that their reason for social media usage was due to its accessibility and affordability which has been really helpful to them and contributed to a high rate turnover of their businesses.

Keywords: student entrepreneur, social media, motivation, relevance, usage

1 Introduction

In recent time, there has been an increasing global concern over the continuously expansion in the rate of unemployment around the world, particularly in most developing countries, where the youth have been identified as the most affected groups (Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). The invention and utilization of social media has provided a platform where to create jobs for themselves. Social media has given young entrepreneurs the capacity and capability to gain access to resources that were otherwise not within their reach. The potency possessed by social media platforms is enabling these young entrepreneurs to make use of social media for marketing, advertising, and promotion through the usage of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, etc. (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011).

The emergence of social media applications have ushered in many changes in all spheres of human endeavours (Bolton et al., 2013). Prominently, they have changed the way people communicate, work, study, search for information and do business. Social media can be categorized into several classes based on their functionalities; for instance; social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter and MySpace); photos and videos (i.e. Flickr and YouTube); online encyclopedia (i.e. Wikipedia); online bookmarking (i.e. Delicious); virtual social worlds (i.e. Second Life); and virtual game worlds (i.e. World of Craft) (Albarran, 2013; Edwards, 2011).

In particular, Nigeria has experienced a rapid transformation in the development of technology,

advancements and internet connectivity which has led to unprecedented increase in the number of people who use internet between 2010 and 2014 (Ezeani & Igwesi, 2012). Currently, the country has the highest number of internet users in Sub-Saharan Africa (International Telecommunication Union, 2015); no wonder the numbers of internet users in Nigeria is recorded as 97.2 million (NCC Report, 2016). The social media platform mostly used in Nigeria is Facebook (93.72%), followed by Twitter (5.29%), Pinterest ranks third (0.42%), Tumblr ranks fourth (0.2%) while the remaining social media platforms hold 0.37% using mobile internet (NCC Report, 2016). These staggering statistics reflect the explosive growth social media has experienced over the past years, nevertheless the practice of usage and adoption of social media among student entrepreneurs seems unclear especially in developing economies as Nigeria.

The most distinctive characteristics of social media is their potential to facilitate engagement: the interactive, synchronous communication and collaboration among numerous participants facilitated by technology (Bolton et al., 2013). Social media is a multi-way communication, at the same time but in different places, enabling people to disseminate and share information, ideas, experiences, thoughts, pictures and videos typical of traditional mass media to a fully interactive information sharing dialogue. As opined by Tella and Adu (2013), social media has become a common communication channel among young people, particularly, students in tertiary institutions. However, the usage of social media among undergraduates goes beyond the interactive aura that it provides. Few of these students are young entrepreneurs and they use these platforms to pass across information to their various clients on the products and services that they have to offer (Shokery, Naw, Nasir & Mamun, 2016). Social media platforms provide inexplicable resources for businesses of all sizes to thrive through the promotion of their brands online. Importantly, Shokery, Naw, Nasir and Mamun (2016) opine that social media platforms are free to use, though some offers advertising options for brands that want to reach out to larger audience. They give young student entrepreneurs prospects to connect in an affordable, private and expressive way with their prospective customers. It also allows for quick access to customer support issues, feedback, share and praise compliments about the brand.

Despite the unprecedented usage of social media among students entrepreneurs (Shokery, Naw, Nasir & Mamun, 2016), most studies focus on the usage of social networking among students (Ali & Aliyu, 2015; Boumarafi, 2015; Eke & Odoh, 2014; Ezeah, Euphemia, Asogwa & Obiorah, 2013), how higher education institutions utilize social media (Hall, 2014), the impact of social media use on academic performance among university students (Al-rahmi & Othman, 2013; Heffner, 2016; Camilia, Ibrahim, Dalhatu, 2013), social media addiction level among selected Nigerian University undergraduates (Sokoya, 2013, Ajewole, Olowu & Fashola, 2012), accessibility and usage of internet among Nigerian undergraduates (Ani, 2010; Uche & Obiora, 2016); the influence of social media on rate of violence among Nigerian youths (Adaugo, Ovute & Obochi, 2015), gender usage of social networking among youths (Lin & Subrahmanyam, 2007; Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2008; Giles & Price, 2008).

However, there is dearth of research on social media usage and adoption among tertiary institution students entrepreneurs in Nigeria, particularly undergraduate students. Therefore, this study seeks to take a different stand by exploring the usage of social media among undergraduate student's entrepreneurs in University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The research on social media usage of students' entrepreneurs becomes highly important because social media is one of the fastest growing segments on the web (Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño & Díaz-Armas, 2011). This research would also be of high significant because it will show the attributes of social media that can be beneficial to the marketing, communication, and engagement efforts of undergraduates' entrepreneurs. Therefore, the main question this study would strive to answer is to have an in-depth understanding on the relevance of social media to students' entrepreneurs.

This research would also answer question on how student entrepreneurs use social media in marketing their products and services? What is the impact of social media on the rate of turnover of their business? What contributes to the acceptance of social media as a viable business platform? It is also important to

understand the speed at which the social media outlets are penetrating and reforming the business terrain and offering new ways and tools for the delivery of information across the globe making the cyber-space a borderless learning sphere. It is expected that the outcomes from the paper will fill some gaps on social media usage among entrepreneurial students in Nigerian University.

2 Literature Review

Over the years and more recently, there has been an increasing global concern over the unceasingly lingering rate of unemployment across the nations of the world, particularly in most developing countries, where the youth have been identified as the most affected groups (Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). For instance in Nigeria, government has geared many in ensuring that all citizens irrespective of their status are economically empowered through the introduction of entrepreneur programmes (Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). Government have come to realized that government jobs and other white collar jobs can no longer meet the needs of both the existing and potential graduates and the array of unemployed individuals. In order to curb unemployment in Nigeria, over the years, various government and non-government organizations have initiated policies through some support agencies such as national Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP), Raw Materials and Development Council (RMRDC) among others to tackle the problems of unemployment among Nigerian citizens, particularly, among the youths (Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013; Emmanuel, 2012; Olayinka 2010). Sans

In an effort to reduce the rate of unemployment, more than a decade ago, precisely year 2006, Federal Government of Nigeria made it compulsory for all tertiary institutions in the country to introduce entrepreneurship education course into their curriculum which started in the 2007/2008 academic session (Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). In the same vein, establishing entrepreneurial development centres in those institutions supported the theoretical based in practical. The course was being taught as part of the prerequisite for graduation in tertiary institutions. Akpan, Effiong, and Ele (2012) noted that the aim of adopting entrepreneurship education in the post-secondary institutions is to equip graduates to be self-reliance and to achieve faster economic development in the country. Being a student entrepreneur is not only by attending its classes but it involves the engagement and involvement in entrepreneurial activities in and around the university and its environs (Marchand & Sood, 2014).

Entrepreneurship is a process that identifies an opportunity by understanding the resources requirements, acquiring the resources, planning, and implementation (Serarols-Tarrés, Padilla-Meléndez, & Del Aguila-Obra, 2006) However, Acs (2008) described entrepreneurship to be an important mechanism for naitaiona economic development due to its contribution to thye generation of employment and innovation. But considerable differences exist between countries in the extent to which entrepreneurship contributes consequentially to the national economic development and growth. (Autio & Acs, 2007; Hessels, van Gelderen & Thurik, 2008; Acs, 2008). Thus, entrepreneur is can be described and argued to be a vehicle for self-dependence, alleviation of poverty, reduction of hunger and economic empowerment. As a result of the contribution of youth entrepreneurship to economic development and growth in Nigeria, these youths have revolutionized the way they communicate with their various clients. The power that the social media applications possess enables these youths to make use of social media for marketing, advertising, and promotion through the usage of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, etc. (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Social media has given businesses the capability of gaining access to resources that were otherwise not accessible to them. It has also aided trades and businesses to increase their worthiness, cultivate strategic partnerships and increase their contact with customers and suppliers (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013).

Entrepreneurs prefer to use the social media as a business platform because in social media services, users can share their experiences with their friends to create free word of mouth marketing for the business

(Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2013). Moreover, social media provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs and their various clients to share and exchange their experiences, reviews and opinions about the goods and services that are purchased. As a result of this, social media became the best platform for student entrepreneurs, not only to sell products and services, but to stay in touch with their customers (H. S. S. Lee et al.).

Many businesses are now spiraling to social networks as a worthwhile communication tool and, if used sufficiently and effectively, they can meaningfully increase their online existence and presence, in the form of effective promotion (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). To attain a good feat with the online marketing, it is essential that the marketers have a presence in the (online) setting wherein their customers abide and dwell. Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook approves this by asserting that advertising is fast changing and businesses need to comprehend and appreciate the usage of Internet technologies so that they don't lose their relevance overtime (Maymann, 2008).

In addition to the benefits of social media, there are little hurdles to the usage of social media technologies, hence, small businesses can adopt the use of social media in the same ways that large corporate can, without the need for extensive resources. Fruhling and Digman (2000) set out that the adoption of the Internet can help a business increase its customer and market base and this makes a contribution towards the business' growth strategy. Porter and Micheal (2001) posited that the affiliations and relations formed via the internet can boost sales and generate business opportunities to come up with new products and services. Thus, the internet can also facilitates the expansion of business scope and extends its main business through market penetration and development or product development.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) posited that social media allows enterprise to bond with both existing and potential customers, interact with them and establish a sense of community around the enterprise's products. In addition, an information rich website can also help business to develop relationships with customers by providing more effective marketing, new communication and distribution channels, shorter time to market, customized products, 24hour online technical support and online interactive community. Social media can be an excellent way to acquire new customers and retain existing ones. The actual challenge exists in the way to interact with the spectators on a personal level. Social media can establish online assemblages around several companies, where customers and prospective clients can interrelate with compatible individuals. These assemblies afford valuable insights, and more beneficial pointer that assists the dealers to advance their merchandises to suit the wishes of their customers.

This significant feedback can support in progressing their marketing efforts, and the overall product values their companies' target. The use of social media as a marketing instrument allows companies to intersperse with related professionals in the field, embark on researches, unite with the community and get business opportunities (Smith & Taylor, 2004). Social media has led to the introduction of social media marketing and presented new ways of communicating to spread audiences on various Internet platforms. Marketers cannot rely on mass media channels singly anymore to communicate with their consumers. They must adopt novel stratagems if they wish to flourish (Armstrong, Kotler, Merino, Pintado & Juan, 2011).

3 Methodology

The study was carried out among young student entrepreneurs in Faculty of Information and Communication Sciences, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State in November, 2016. An unstructured personal interview was conducted for thirty-eight students who involve in one form of entrepreneurship or the other. Sampling of the students was based on convenience sample. The information on research interview was passed across to the students through their class governors and they were asked to report to the research assistant if they were willing to participate. In total, 17 females and 21 males participated in the interview session. Before each interview was conducted, the researcher explained in details to each informant the purpose of the interview and the students were given the opportunity to turn down the offer

of being interviewed if they so wish. The students that were interviewed gave verbal consent before the commencement of the interview. The interview sessions centred on knowing the relevance of social media to student entrepreneurship, how student entrepreneurs use social media, what contributes to the adoption of social media as a communication platform. Upon completion of data collection, all data were compiled from audio tapes, recording notes, and the primary researcher's note book. Creswell recommended that in transcribing the data, attempts must be made to transcribe the discussions verbatim, outlining emphasized words, pauses, and other such vocal activities (Cresswell, 2008). After transcription, and an overall reading and surface analysis of the transcript was completed, the data were then organised by question and response set. The thematic analysis was further used to uncover the themes and trends.

4 Findings

All students interviewed had admitted that have incorporated facebook, twitter, you-tube and instagram into their entrepreneurial communication strategy. Analysis of the transcripts revealed four main themes which were identified simultaneously by two independent reviewers of the transcripts. The four themes are: motivation, relevance and usage.

5 Motivation

The informants acknowledged that they were involved in entrepreneurial activities for many reasons which are the need to augment the stipends that they received from their parents and guardians, the need to make a difference in their community / environment or simply because they are passionate about fulfilling a lifelong dream.

"I actually like cooking and I cook for my friends in the hostel and they tell me that my food is tasty and some of them asked me to cook for them for a fee. Then I was involved in a class project photo-journalism and that was where I finally discovered my skills" (Informant 1a)

Another Informant echoed what the previous informant expressed:

"I like to be independent. So I try to make my money now instead of relying on my parent for everything and I have always like fashion and all those stuffs. More so, I always wanted a fashion line. So I decided to start now" (Informant 2)

Despite the deep motivation to involve in entrepreneurship; these students explained that entrepreneurship isn't a joke or a simple task. They explained that the task needs lots of resources such as capital, labour, technology/ technical know-how, and so much patience.

"...it is possible for someone to tell me they want a cake tomorrow, and I have a lecture, and I don't want to push them away because of another day. So at times, I will have to skip that lecture for that person or I bake over the night then the next day I wouldn't be able to come to class"

"Before I ventured into cinematography, I never had the idea of what it entails but some I can remember very well that I had the passion for it. Therefore, I had to go to a training school to acquire the necessary skill. It took me a long time to achieve that feat but I am happy that I did."

The results of the in-depth interviews revealed that majority of the informants were motivated to involve in entrepreneurial activities because they believe they have skills and knowledge that can use to solve some world problems.

For instance, informant 2a who is a social media influencer explained:

“I have huge followers. So people requested that they would like me to be our publicist and that we should meet up and we met and they ask me questions, just bits of interview and from there that how I started”

However some of the informant expressed the challenges they encounter during their entrepreneurship journey which demotivated them or made them to give up on their passion.

“I had a problem with some customers on the payment module of the goods acquired by my customers. Some of them want to pay on delivery which is very risky. I have done it in the past and it was a bad experience. While some of the customers like to waste my time. They are not interested in buying the goods but they keep on disturbing me to provide what I don’t have. ”

“Entrepreneurship on social media is a jolly good ride only if customers pay. Putting goods online is not an easy task. You need to learn, relearn and unlearn many social media strategies, skills and tactics”

While another informant explained that he did not have adequate skills set for the entrepreneurial activities that they are involved in but he is positioned to involve in continuous self-training till he gets to the saturation point.

6 Relevance

Both in reality and from overwhelming prove of literature, it is not too hard to see why most business needs the presence of social media in their daily transactions. Regardless of size or funding or status, most businesses regularly leverage on popular social media to support their business’ goals. The data in this study show that social media to a large extent has a lot of relevance and impact to student entrepreneurship drive. Social media gives the students an opportunity to connect in a very personal and meaningful way with their customers. Thereby availing them of the huge opportunity of responding rapidly to client support issues share and acclaim commendations about their entrepreneurship ideas as well as provide offers to people who are going out of their way to show support for their ideas.

The informants explained that social media is not only readily available but it is also easily accessible to them and their various clients.

“...recently I had someone who ordered for brochures and gown from Lafia and I have one other from Ogun State. So, the social media is really helpful in marketing of my product.”

“It has really helped me a lot because now I have more customers and I do have a good relationship with them. Because when I was in SS2 or 3, I actually started the clothing line but it was a flop, because I would just tell my friends. I didn’t have a large audience to tell about my clothing line. So, I just ended up selling some to my family and dashing the rest out. But now, on social media I have a large audience and I can sell it to the. Its bigger and more people know about it now.”

“Social media has really helped me and I believe its helping a lot of people who are more focus on their business not someone like me who have to deal with school. ...it is really good for students even more than the business expert.”

Some informants explained how social media has allayed some of the fears they when they wanted to embark into the entrepreneurship sojourn.

“When I wanted to start my Kampala clothe business, I was sceptical about how I will get customers to buy my wares. Then one of my friends told me about how social media has

been able to boost her rate of turn-over. She explained how I can use sponsored ad to reach a lot of the target audience of my wares. I tried it and it worked for me. I have more sales than ever before. I get calls and direct messages from at least 10 customers on a daily basis. Marketing on social media is fun. it makes me feel so relevant.”

Another informant also explained that social media has really improved her business strategy and communication skill other than the physical market. She said through social media I meet people from different states in the country by chatting them up, hey place order, I send goods to them and receive positive feedbacks with more referrals from them.

7 Usage

Testing the informants’ usage of social media for entrepreneurial purpose revealed that students use and adopt a particular social medium handle based on the type of the business they involve in and the prospect that it will serve their business. Students who involve in goods that need pictures for emphasis and clarity prefers to use instagram, while instagram is the most used social media handle, then those whose goods and services need clarification and explanation prefer to use the facebook.

One of the informant explained that the rational for choosing Facebook is because of the need to meet new people, as opposed to other social media sites like LinkedIn. He explained further that Facebook does not require third-party introductions or the approval of intermediaries, thereby facilitating the fast acquisition of new acquaintances as well as an avenue to better understand the audience and their social context.

Yet another informant explained that Facebook does not enforce any policies against the informal offering, selling or promoting of products, and actually, provides many tools for the commercialization of products of services, which constitutes a basic liberty necessary for incipient social media entrepreneurs

“The choice of a specific Facebook group allowed us to effectively accompany the different posts, interactions, frequency and participation of all users, since all the content on a Facebook group is available and visible to all members, this alleviates issues of access, authenticity and transparency.”

According to a female student entrepreneur, she attributed her usage of Facebook to the interactive features of these channels which encourage engagement with key audiences especially during some specific marketing media campaigns

Some of the informant explained instagram is their choice for social media entrepreneurial campaign because of its picture appeal.

“I use instagram the most because is for posting pictures and videos and everyone that are there see what you are posting and perhaps I try to make use of a good camera so that my picture will come out well and I get comments more so you can relate well on instagram via people’s comment asking you where are you? And the likes, so I have to put my number if they want bake and they add me through whatsapp and we chat up and then I don’t really use Facebook like that although that what I noticed and most time when they come online they only just scroll down and most people I know are on instagram”

“If you want to use instagram it’s just basically posting, for instance a brand called me and said they want to promote their goods. There are two ways I can promote their good its either I post from one account or I give them sponsored ad. Sponsored ad is when I will have to pay instagram to work it out for me but then mostly they still prefer me posting because the followers are real. The people that will set it are still real and they can account for it easily than using sponsored art.”

“Most people use instagram than other social networks, facebook has most people but most

teenagers and everybody use instagram because they can easily post pictures, video and tag people and other stuffs. Facebook is the owner of instagram, so whatever you post on facebook you can see it on instagram”

“They send me a direct mail. I have like a personal or private mail for the clothing line. So, they just send me a direct mail and make enquiries about it. If they are interested, they send the money to me and deliver it to them”

“Ok, like the clothing line, I could just use my phone to take pictures of people wearing it but I use professional photographers so that the quality of the picture could be better and smart. And I look more professional not just taking a phone and taking selfie or something”

Few of the student entrepreneur use twitter; they explained that it is usually for elite or specific oriented products or services. One of the informants explained

“From my own perspective I work with an NGO in Lagos so he was like one of the reasons you should be using twitter is because on Instagram people post more of pornography content. So its only youth that feels like let us use instagram because youth can still use it and feel less concerned but the adult are like is not reasonable which twitter regulate very well. Sometimes, if you tweet pornographic contents, twitter will still lock your picture just to verify. So they are more conscious of pornographic”

“we use what we have to get what we want because in this generation technology has taken over so it is how we can reach the audience more that is more important e.g when we were in 200 level in performing arts we use print media where we made our first magazine and we call it entertainment plus, we found out that we decided to do posters on it. When we try to reach out to everyone we could not get the exact response that we needed so I believe people are more interested in social media because it is easier for them to carry their phone, on their data, and just check what they want to check”

Another informant explained that she make use of YouTube for her fashion designing business, by posting some short videos on different dress and pattern making just to entice customers and encourage them to join her fashion class, and this has promoted her business by creating more customers and improve her communication skills

On many of the cases, some of the students explained that social media are used to gather important customer intelligence that can be used in driving innovation in a business, offers perceptions, opinions and ideas on how to enhance service to customers and enable businesses to discover ground-breaking methods to conduct business or new products and services to offer customers.

8 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the usage of social media among student entrepreneurs in Nigeria University, which social media they used, what prompted them to the use of social media, how they used it and the reason for using it. Majority of the student entrepreneurs (respondents) used at least one social media platform ranging from Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Blog and Twitter depending on individuals choice and the type of business they are involved in. However, most of the students' entrepreneur prefers to use Instagram. The overwhelming preference for Instagram was associated to been seen as a marketing platform; for its flexibility in posting pictures, viewing of posts likes, followers and comments. This finding is similar to the study of Hashim (2017).which shows that there is a great potential for entrepreneurship through instagram platform, because instagram ensures the visibility of unique content and features which entice the community of both young and old and as such help entrepreneurs in advertising and promoting their brand.

The study also revealed that some of the reasons for social media usage to other media like television and

radio are due to its accessibility because social media applications are found on most mobile devices and it's used by majority of people including both young and old. Other reason for its adoption was that it's affordable and cheaper in price compared to other media. It was also stated that it reach out to wide range of customers, leads to high business turnover and most of all it's an effective tool to network and promote their business. Similar study on Park, Sung and Im (2017) attests to the fact that social media has created great business opportunities and have been an effective tool for student entrepreneurs by creating a wide range of customer and great business turnover.

9 Conclusion and Recommendation

Entrepreneurship has become a next option for undergraduates, graduates and youths generally as the rate of unemployment in the country keeps increasing. The findings and results indicated that the reason or what motivated the student entrepreneur was majorly passion, self-dependent and financial challenges. In terms of relevance, the results and findings show that to a large extent social media has a lot of relevance and impact to student entrepreneurship drive. The usage of social media generally among the student entrepreneurs has increased their marketing skills and creates wide range of customers.

However, data collection could be expanded to include a larger sample by covering a wide range from more than one university. This research work has also clearly shown that Nigeria is not lagging behind among other social media users across the globe, despite the limited internet facilities in the country. In addition to that, the University of Ilorin management should provide adequate internet facility so as to help student entrepreneurs promote their business with social media usage.

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