



**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF
SMALL SCALE BUSINESSES IN AKWA IBOM NORTH-EAST SENATORIAL
DISTRICT**

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Abstract

The study examined the extent to which social media marketing influence the operational sustainability of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. One research objectives, one research questions and one research hypothesis guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Population of the study comprised 872 managers of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. The sample size comprised 247 managers of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. Instrument titled "Social Media Marketing Questionnaire (SMMQ) and Operational Sustainability Questionnaire (OSQ) were developed by the researcher and was used for this study. The instruments were validated by three research experts. Two from Department of Business Education and one from Department of Computer and Robotics Education, Faculty of Vocational Education, Library and Information Science, University of Uyo. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, the researcher carried out a trial test reliability on 30 managers who form part of the population but not sampled. Cronbach Alpha statistical tool was used to analyze the data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained which make the instrument reliable for use in the study. Simple Linear Regression was used to answer research question and test research hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that social media marketing significantly influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. It was concluded that Small-scale businesses may not thrive sustainably without deliberate and well-structured promotional strategies. It was recommended among others that Small-scale entrepreneurs should embrace social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp Business and Instagram as low-cost yet high-impact tools for brand visibility and customer engagement.

Introduction

Nigeria's economic and business environment has experienced a transformative shift. This shift was triggered by government initiatives that unlocked the nation's entrepreneurial potential. The strategic alignment of policy reforms, infrastructure reforms and investment promotion by government created a conducive environment for entrepreneurship resulting in today's significant increase in business activities in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular. Usip and Ukoima (2023) stated that with more educated people and the fact that government could no longer employ most school leavers, economic programmes were initiated to encourage individuals to go into private businesses to be self-reliant.

Business as operationally conceived in this work simply refers to an economic activity which involves a continuous and regular production and distribution of goods and services for satisfying human wants and profit maximization. Dicksee (2018) defined business as a form of activity conducted with an objective of earning profits for the benefit of those on whose behalf the activity is conducted. The author further described business as any legal activity directed towards producing or acquiring wealth through buying and selling of goods. It can be deduced from the above definition that business entails continuous production and distribution of goods and services with the aim of



earning profits under certain market conditions. It can also be said that business is a financial activity because it involves the exchange of goods and services for monetary gains.

Ayegusi (2016) defined small scale business as an enterprise which has an investment capital up to One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira (N150,000) and employs not more than fifty (50) persons or workers. Small scale businesses are those enterprises with the total assets in capital, equipment, plant and working capital not exceeding two hundred and fifty thousand naira (N250,000) and employs not more than thirty (30) full time workers (Julius 2017). Just like every other business, small scale businesses deal with products and services with the motive of profit making (Abia, 2023).

Small scale business enterprise plays vital role in any country's economy especially in economic development of a country like Nigeria. Small scale businesses are the backbone of the economy. This is evident in the fact that small scale businesses provide employment opportunities to the citizens, provide large quantities of goods and services to people, reduce the incidence of rural-urban migration thereby enhancing the economic growth of such rural areas. The researcher observed that small scale business is the most widely spread business in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, involving men and women with varying years of experience and educational qualifications doing business in both urban and rural areas. Some of the owners are graduates of different categories while others are not.

The reason for the surge in the establishment of small-scale businesses in this area is not far-fetched. The high rate of unemployment and underemployment has prompted the setting up of small-scale businesses. Considering the economic potentials of small-scale business in the development of any country, the survival and sustainability of these businesses should be given adequate consideration. This is because high mortality rate of small scale businesses may affect the economic viability of the country. The definition of business as conceptualised in this study, reveals that business should be a going concern. However, it is observed that newly established and existing small scale businesses in the study area face high risk of collapse. Many small-scale businesses struggle to attain long-term viability, resulting in several negative economic consequences such as increased unemployment rates, leading to restiveness, kidnapping, political thuggery, robbery, and over-dependency on white-collar jobs.

Operational sustainability refers to the ability of an enterprise to sustain over time, overcoming various challenges and obstacles in order to remain operational and viable. It is the ability of a business to continue operating and generating revenue, despite challenges and setbacks and to maintain its market position and competitiveness (Billy, 2016). Small scale businesses face numerous sustainability challenges, including limited financial resources, intense competition and vulnerability to market fluctuations. According to Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, SMEDAN (2020), about 73 percent of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria fail within the first five years of operation, primarily due to inadequate funding, poor management and regulatory challenges.

Social media marketing is an effective tool for businesses to increase engagement, promote brand-awareness, and ultimately drive traffic to an online or in-store location. Social media marketing offers businesses a chance to learn more about their customers and reach larger audiences for much less than traditional advertising (Funk, 2018). As a promotional strategy, social media is essential to small business owners who want to communicate and establish relationships with their customers, develop branding campaigns, and increase revenues. Small scale businesses that efficiently use social media as a promotional strategy to create, sustain and maintain a relationship with customers can improve their business revenue (Yadav, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

It is a popular fact that small-scale businesses sector contributes significantly to global economic growth and employment. This may be attributed to its widespread across the country as it requires less capital structure to set up small scale business. Considering the role played by small scale business in economic and national development, government and private parastatals have given diverse supports to small scale businesses to ensure its sustainability. With all these supports and



initiatives, it is expected that small scale business would be more sustainable. However, the reverse has been the case.

The researcher has observed an increasing tendency of failure among small scale businesses in the study area. Most of the small scale businesses struggle to survive beyond the initial years of establishment despite the supports and friendly policies from the government and private organizations. Moreso, looking at the management structure and general demands of small scale businesses, one would assume that sustainability should never be a problem for small scale businesses but the reality today is different as many small scale businesses keep failing and declining.

The failure of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District has significant economic and social implications. The resultant effects include increased unemployment rates, leading to restiveness, kidnapping, political thuggery, robbery, and over-dependency on white-collar jobs. Additionally, the decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and low per capita income hinders economic development in the area. The researcher is motivated by this problem and seeks to carry out this study on the extent of influence of promotional strategies on the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to determine the extent to which:

1. Social media marketing influences the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does social media marketing influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: Social media marketing does not significantly influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Literature Review

Social Exchange Theory by George Homans in 1958

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was propounded by Homans (1958). Social Exchange Theory states how individuals and organizations interact and exchange resources to achieve mutual benefits. The theory posits that social behavior is driven by the pursuit of rewards and avoidance of costs. Individuals evaluate interactions based on the rewards receive, such as approval, status, or economic benefits. In social exchange, individuals or organizations provide resources, such as goods, services, or information, expecting reciprocal benefits. The theory emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, trust and interdependence in social interactions. Social Exchange Theory views relationships as economic transactions, where parties weigh the costs and benefits of exchanging resources. Social Exchange Theory is relevant to this study as it highlights the need for small-scale businesses to build strong relationships with customers by offering valuable products or services (rewards) in exchange for customer loyalty and retention.

Social Media Marketing and Operational Sustainability

Social media is a network site that allows individuals to connect around the world. Social media marketing is the use of a social media platform to promote a product and increase its visibility on the internet and it can aid in the development of a social network for exchanging ideas and knowledge (Becker, Nobre, and Kanabar, 2018). Different communication methods are perceived as more favourable than others. Facebook is known for its robust platform for customer relationship management (Hasan and Popp, 2016); twitter is known for its ability to communicate brand messages and quick consumer responses in real-time (Cutler, 2016); instagram is a platform for sharing image-based content (Munoz and Towner, 2017) and YouTube is a platform for sharing videos (Rosli, Lokman, Aziz and Hamidi, 2017).



According to Salem and Salem (2018) social media allows customers to find useful information about other brands of small scale businesses and if this information meets the customers' expectations for the competitor's product, strong customer satisfaction can develop, leading to the customer choosing or continuing to purchase the item which can contribute to the sustainability and survival of the business. It can be deduced from the above assertion that social media marketing is incorporating social media into all phases and components of the marketing mix through social media platforms which aids in the promotion of the organization's goods and services as well as the brand. One of the unique advantages of social media marketing is that it allows small scale businesses to adequately teach and illustrate not only the benefits of their products, but also how to efficiently use them through an online platform with the greatest target audience (Gbandi and Iyamu, 2022).

Research Method

Design of the study

Descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. Eyo (2015) confirmed that descriptive survey design is suitable for collection of data based on the opinion of a large population.

Area of the study

The study will be carried out in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District. Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District is made up of nine Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, including Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Etinan, Nsit Ubium and Uyo Local Government Areas. Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District has its headquarters in Uyo Local Government Area. The estimated population of Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District is 2,744,900 (National Population Commission, 2006). The people of Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District are homogeneous group believed to have originated from a single ancestral stock called the Semi-Bantu and of Ibibio ethnic stock.

Geographically and climatically, Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District lies between latitude 05.32 and longitude 0736E. this is within the equatorial rain forest belt, which is a tropical zone that house vegetation of green foliage of trees, shrubs and oil palm trees. The environment favours cash crops. It is endowed with a near flat land terrain, which shapes gently towards the South East. The sub equatorial climate region within Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District is located and influenced by warm humid air from Atlantic Ocean and slightly by hot dry air masses from Sahara Desert.

Economically, the people of Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial district are very enterprising and majority of the people engaged in farming, trading, fishing, artisan, craft making, transport business, civil service jobs and other forms of mental jobs. On the whole, the study area is an enterprising, innovative and adventurous with many small-scale outlets. The researcher choice of the study area is motivated by the fact that out of the three Senatorial Districts in Akwa Ibom State, Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District has the highest number of small-scale businesses operating on diverse area of investment. Moreso, findings and conclusion from this study would be used in making generalizations in the other two Senatorial Districts.

Population of the study

The population of this study comprised 872 managers of registered small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, SMEDAN, 2024).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study comprised 247 managers of small-scale businesses selected using Krejcie and Morgan table. According to Amajuoyi and Joseph (2015) using statistics to compute sample is more tolerable than determining the size by mere approximation. Cluster sampling technique will be used in segmenting the study area into three (3) clusters: Ibiono Ibom, Uyo, Itu Local Government Areas; Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom Local Government Areas and Nsit Atai,



Etinan, Nsit Ubium Local Government Areas. Finally, simple random technique will be used in selecting the respondents from each of the clusters to serve as sample for the study.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in gathering data for the study is questionnaire, titled, “Social Media Marketing Questionnaire” (SMMQ) and “Operational Sustainability Questionnaire” (OSQ). The SMMQ solicited for information on social media marketing with six items. The items will be developed using five points scale of Very Great Extent (VGE – 5points), Great Extent (GE – 4points), Moderate Extent (ME – 3points), Little Extent (LE – 2points) and Very Little Extent (VLE – 1point).

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was given to research experts alongside with the purpose of the study, research questions and research hypotheses for face validation. Two experts were from the Department of Business Education and one expert from the Department of Computer and Robotics, Faculty of Vocational Education, Library and Information Science, University of Uyo for comments and corrections. The comments and corrections of the experts was used in modifying and producing the final version of the instruments.

Reliability of the Instrument

The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using trial test with 30 copies of the instrument administered on 30 respondents who are not part of the actual sample but from the population of this study. Cronbach Alpha statistical tool was used to analyze the data and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained which make the instrument reliable for use in this study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using simple linear regression for the research questions and to test the statistical significance of the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The choice of simple linear regression is motivated by the fact that it can be used to quantify the extent of influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Decision rule

In order to answer research questions and test the null hypotheses, the following decision rule was used as guide. R^2 was used to answer the research questions. R^2 was converted to percentage (%) to help in determining the extent to which independent variable influence the dependent variable. Specifically, when it is 1%-20%, it will imply that the extent of influence is very little, 21%-40% will mean that the extent of influence is little. Moreover, when it is 41%-60%, it will imply that the extent of influence is moderate. While 60%-80% will imply that the extent of influence is great and 81%-100% will imply that the extent of influence is very great. For hypotheses, if the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypotheses will be rejected in favour of the alternative hypotheses. On the other hand, if the p-value is greater than or equal to 0.05 ($p \geq 0.05$), the null hypotheses will be accepted.

Results

Research Question One

To what extent does social media marketing influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?



**Table 1: Summary of the extent of influence of Social Media Marketing on the Operational Sustainability of Small Scale Businesses in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District
n=247**

Source of Variation	R	R Square
Social Media Advertising	.81	.66
Operational sustainability		

Source: Field data (2025)

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which social media marketing influence the operational sustainability of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. Table 1 reveals the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.66. This is interpreted that 66% is the overall contribution of all items on social media marketing to operational sustainability of small scale businesses. In line with the decision rule, this therefore means that the extent to which social media marketing influence the operational sustainability of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is great.

Research Hypothesis One

Social media marketing does not significantly influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Social Media Marketing on the Operational Sustainability of Small Scale Businesses in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District
n=247**

Source of Variation	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Regression	141.522	1	141.522	122.201	.000
Residual	274.461	246	1.161		
Total	415.983	247			

$p < .05$; Source: Field data (2025)

The computed F-value of (122.201) has the probability level of 0.00 which is less than the probability level of 0.05. This is interpreted to be statistically significant at the degree of freedom of 1 and 246. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that social media marketing does not significantly influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is rejected. This means social media marketing significantly influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District.

Discussion of Findings

Social Media Marketing and Operational Sustainability of Small Scale Businesses

The finding of this study shows that social media marketing had a great influence on the operational sustainability of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. Also, the corresponding null hypothesis tested reveals that social media marketing significantly influence operational sustainability of small scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. This implies that learning and implementing social media marketing can benefit small scale businesses to a great extent. Potential customers can view the products, place order and make payment online and take delivery of the goods.

The finding of this study is in line with the findings of Salem and Salem (2018) who found out that social media allows customers to find useful information about other brands of small scale businesses and if this information meets the customers' expectations for the competitor's product, strong customer satisfaction can develop, leading to the customer choosing or continuing to purchase the item which can contribute to the sustainability of the business. The findings of the study also aligns with that of Akpan (2019) who found out that social media marketing significantly influence small-scale business growth) and that 75% of respondents reported an increase in sales after using social media marketing.



Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of promotional strategies on the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. The study specifically examined the extent to which seven core promotional strategies: social media marketing and event marketing, influence the operational sustainability of small-scale businesses. The findings of the study revealed that these promotional strategies have a statistically significant influence on operational sustainability. Small-scale businesses may not thrive sustainably without deliberate and well-structured promotional strategies.

Recommendations

1. Small-scale entrepreneurs should embrace social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp Business and Instagram as low-cost yet high-impact tools for brand visibility and customer engagement.
2. The Akwa Ibom State Investment Promotion Council (AKSIPC) should partner with business associations to organize periodic events that serve as marketing platforms for small-scale enterprises.

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