



Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition for Digital Marketing as a Panacea for Solving Unemployment Challenge in COVID Era in Nigeria: A Communication Perspective

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on solving unemployment crises in Nigeria through entrepreneurial skills acquisition for digital marketing. Nigeria is one of the countries adversely affected by Covid-19 pandemic occasioned by lockdown and economic recession, consequently aggravating the unemployment challenge already being experienced in the country. This paper, therefore, takes a discursive approach by probing into the potency of entrepreneurial skills acquisition for online marketing as a veritable tool in addressing the current scenario in the country. To generate data for the study, library research method was employed relying on secondary sources to advance arguments on the essence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition for self-employment. The efficacy of digital media as important communication fulcrum in marketing goods and services was considered. The paper is anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour. Based on data generated from secondary sources, it was concluded that entrepreneurial skills acquisition is a dependable panacea to solving unemployment crisis and that such skills can be engaged in digital marketing for income generation. The paper, therefore, recommends among others a mandatory implementation of government policy on entrepreneurial education and skills acquisition by Local and State and community authorities to enable school leavers become self-employed, and the provision of basic training on digital marketing to be included in the school curriculum.

Keywords

Digital marketing, Digital media, Entrepreneurship, Self-employment and Unemployment.

Introduction

Unemployment situation in the country has assumed a critical case made worse by the outbreak of Corona disease (COVID-19) which has unleashed untold hardships on the lives and wellbeing of Nigerians. It has assumed a disturbing dimension posing great concern to parents and the youths. A recent report released

by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in March, 2021 revealed that Nigerian unemployment rate rose from 27.1 percent in the second quarter of 2020 to 33.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020. Specifically, Abridged Labour Force survey under COVID-19 (Q4, 2020) revealed 23.19 million unemployed people. This revelation is worrisome as the rate of unemployment keep rising geometrically with its attendant consequences culminating in poverty, crime, abuse and so on. Earlier report by Proshare (2020) notes that despite the efforts of the current administration in Nigeria to lift 100 million people out of poverty in the next ten years, World Bank, in its update revealed that before COVID-19, about two million Nigerians were expected to fall into poverty in 2020 resulting to an increase in the total number of poor people in Nigeria. In corroboration, Okoye (2017) argues that Nigeria is believed to be Africa's largest economy; but most Nigerians languish in absolute poverty and her youths, most of whom are graduates, have remained unemployed.

Worst still, it may be argued that the economic situation in the country has contributed immensely to the current unemployment predicament and as a result industries, companies and institutions can only employ insignificant number of young graduates seeking employment opportunities in government ministries, companies and institutions. Further insight by Nafukho (2020) showed that unemployment in Nigeria has reached alarming proportions due to increased population growth, rapid expansion of the education system, high level of rural-urban migration, political conflicts and worsening economic performance. This problem keeps on assuming higher dimensions, especially, among the graduates from higher institutions which mostly constituted the youths (Fayomi, 2007). In this way, Olatunji (2003) describes the unemployment situation in which people who is able and willing to work cannot find any. In an attempt to tackle this problem, the African governments included the vocationalism of education system in line with the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Education Summit in 2002, entrepreneurial skills development programmes were introduced into curricular contents of countries like Gambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Kenya (Uwa, 2009) to educate the students on the need to develop interest on entrepreneurial skills acquisition. However, these skills can only be imparted through effective communication. This underscores the importance of adopting effective communication strategy in disseminating information on entrepreneurial skills acquisition geared towards eliciting the desired response from teeming unemployed Nigerians. It is in recognition of the aforementioned that this paper takes a colossal look at unemployment situation in Nigeria; the concept of entrepreneurship education and skills acquisition; and promotion of entrepreneurial skills through effective communication.

The Concept of Entrepreneurial Skills Development

Entrepreneurship is an individual ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives (skills panorama.cedefop.europa.eu). Skills entails having enough ability to do something well. The effective

utilisations of available resources in the economy for wealth creation need special skills which are developed to bring about a vibrant society (Onele & Nwite, 2011). The ability, knowledge and experiences required to accomplish these task are known as entrepreneurial skills. Similarly, Adeyemi and Owolabi, (2009) explain entrepreneurial skills as basic skills needed to enable one start, develop, finance and succeed in the home enterprise. Entrepreneurial skills are developed through training and help an individual utilize available resources effectively.

Entrepreneurial skills according to Wilfred-Bonse, Aboho and Ogwuche (2019) entails relevant skills and competencies that will enable someone to seek, venture into, and run a business successfully. Entrepreneurship education is a carefully planned process leading to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills for efficient and effective living (Elechi, 2009).

Peshev (2017) came up with ten skills needed by an entrepreneur as follow:

1. Curiosity
2. Time management
3. Strategic thinking
4. Efficiency
5. Resilience
6. Communication
7. Networking
8. Finance
9. Branding
10. Sales

In their study, Ogwuche (2011) and Azubike (2009) identified some entrepreneurial skills required to start profitable business ventures:

- i. Creative Thinking: This has to do with developing the ability to learn the task required for a particular job to be accomplished.
- ii. Organization: It is the ability to see organisation as a whole.
- iii. Planning and Research: The ability to identify the symptoms of existence of the problems, their immediate and remote causes and be able to find solution to it.
- iv. Occupation: The ability to be efficient and invest in more profitable businesses for expansion.
- v. Goal Setting: The ability to set targets for businesses and aiming at meeting the targets.
- vi. Team Building: The ability to work with others in the organisation to achieve a set goal.
- vii. Decision Making: The ability to make right decisions among many alternatives available in tackling particular problems in an organisation.
- viii. Marketing: The ability to carry out business activities of buying and selling.
- ix. Record Keeping: The ability to keep record of every sale, income and expenditure in the course of running a business.

- x. Business Management: The necessary knowledge about the task on management of resources.
- xi. Financial Management: The skill of accounting.
- xii. Human Relation Skills or Interpersonal Skills: This skill has to do with relating with others in an organisation.
- xiii. Communication Skill: This skill prepares one to communicate goals, policies procedures and programmes to others. Effective communication is fundamental in achieving results.
- xiv. Diagnostic Skill: This has to do with the ability to investigate Entrepreneurship education should develop in students the ability to tackle entrepreneurial problems effectively by being able to identify the signs of existing problems, their immediate and remote causes and been able to find solutions to them. Ajaegbe (2009) states that in conflict situations and so on when such problems are not well tackled, the realisation of organisation objective could be a mere dream.

These skills are fundamental to the success of any business venture and can be employed by an entrepreneur to become gainfully self-employed.

Relevance of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is the type of learning that focuses on business activities. Jongur, Kabutu & Abba (2009) described it as education for and about business and such that should prepare young people with entrepreneurial knowledge, competence and skills needed to be self-reliant. In other words, it is a kind of training that equips the recipient with relevant knowledge, skills to become self-employed and employer of labour. Moreover, Tizhe & Thliza (2011) conceptualized entrepreneurship education as a collection of formalize teaching that informs, trains and educates an individual that is interested in creating business or developing small business. In this case, the training for business venture has to be under an educator/teacher and under a school setting whether formal or informal school setting. Ikpo (2010) avers that entrepreneurship education is all about transforming an idea into reality and that the practical tools for its realization as a commercial idea are found in educational process. This definition also points at educational set-up as a tool for transforming idea into business venture. However, Price (2004) warned that entrepreneurship can neither be seen as a science nor an art but a practice even in the educational setup. Thus, Jongur, Kabutu & Abba (2009) refer to entrepreneurship education as education for and about venturing into business. Education for setting up business should involve learning by doing for skill acquisition. In corroboration, Lukeman & Oviawe (2010) articulate entrepreneurship education as the process of providing individuals with the ability to recognize commercial opportunities and the insight, self-esteem, knowledge and skills to act on them. It creates jobs and businesses (Elechi, 2009), empowers youths to be in control of their future (Nnamani, 2007). The idea is aimed at promoting an awareness of self-employment as a career option by equipping the beneficiaries with the skills needed for running a business (Wilfred-Bonse, Achor & Muodumogu, 2018).

Dike (2009) explains entrepreneurship education as a learning process that provides training, experience and skills that is suitable for entrepreneurial endeavours. The advantages to students, according to Dike, include:

- It helps students to form a base of knowledge about the function and operation of a business and develop some levels of familiarity and comfort with business environment such as technological change, the micro-enterprises etc.
- It plays a complementary role in developing the occupational knowledge, job skills and work experience.
- It offers opportunities to students for job experience and for earning, saving and investing money at an earlier stage of life than their peers, confidence in their abilities, and a sense of self-worth.
- There will be great reduction in the high rate of unemployment in our society; provides self-employment and viable business ownership.

It was in recognition of the importance of entrepreneurial education in secondary schools that the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated educational policy that secondary education should provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development (FRN, 2004). These courses are expected to be entrepreneurially inclined. However, it is worth noting that even with the introduction of these vocational courses, the secondary education has failed to serve adequately the peculiar needs of the Nigerian youths. Regrettably many nations like Nigeria have refused to acknowledge the fact that education for sustainable national and human development towards eradication of unemployment has gone beyond the chalkboard and theory based (Onele and Nwite, 2011). The need for developing entrepreneurial skills through entrepreneurship education in schools is paramount to solving the problem of unemployment prevalent in the country. Entrepreneurship education is a relevant strategy designed to inculcate into the youths the required skills necessary to enable them become gainfully self-employed. Admitting the advantages, Lawal (2009) argues that entrepreneurial education is made up of different types of experiences especially skills that can equip the learner by providing a means of employment generation and job security. The benefits include:

1. It reduces poverty in a population and empowers the segment of the population that is backward.
2. It provides the education that will help foster the development of small and medium enterprises, and viable local enterprises which are crucial in promoting economic development as well as alleviating poverty.

Entrepreneurial Skills for Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMSE)

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) in Okwuse (2008) described micro firm as one less than five workers, small firm as five to nineteen workers while medium scale enterprise involve 20-99 workers. Micro, small and medium scale enterprises encourage effective utilisation of resources while is important in promoting economic development. MSMSE, in most economies of the world constitute

90% of the total business and is rated highest employer of labour. It constitutes significantly to reduction of poverty (USAID, 2008). Also, it promotes a more equitable distribution of income than large firms. It meets the yearning of the poor who are the major population in the developing nations of the world. Most developed countries have utilized this initiative to improve their economy. For example, United State of America GDP is about 45% of the total economic performance of the G-8 countries (Eze, 2010). The US government promotes MSMSE initiative through her Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) programme. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition is fundamental to establishing MSMSE and empowers the unemployed to become self reliant, particularly, when exposed to digital marketing.

The Concept and Relevance of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a globalised and current development in business strategy, and a departure from the traditional method of connecting and reaching a diversified audience through conventional media like radio, television, newspapers and magazines. Digital marketing as explained by Barone (2020) is the use of internet, mobile devices, search engines, and other channels to reach consumers. Dawada (2019) gave reasons why digital marketing is important in today's business which include higher conversion rates, increase of trust in brands, creation of huge growth options for any business, cost effective marketing, targeting and getting connected to mobile customers. Online marketing has opened up new avenues for business opportunities to both the seller and the buyer. Companies, organisations including individuals are leveraging the opportunity to attract potential markets to their goods and services. The benefits of digital media marketing are numerous, and interesting the business outlets is growing rapidly. Online advertisements, sales, purchases and e-payment make business interactions less cumbersome for the business community. Describing the relevance of digital marketing, Matta (2019) explains that the role of digital marketing is spread beyond brand awareness and hard core advertising, and those companies; businesses have realized its importance in the present scenario. Most businesses around the world are becoming more conscious and moving towards sustainable means of marketing and advertising. Moreover, the skills are used for a better connect with the market; boost online reputation and presence, and help stay ahead of competition.

Unemployed people who have acquired entrepreneurial skills stand the opportunity to showcase their products and services to potential customers and consequently grow their businesses through such platforms. Digital media marketing has a high success rate because they have the potential to create a quick and secure channel of contact with the customers. Secondly, a larger audience can be reached at a less cost. Again, it offers the opportunity to build trust and personal relationship with customers, creates forum to ask questions and make recommendations.

Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour Theoretical Perspective

Taking cognizance of the topic under consideration, the theory of appears relevant and, therefore, was used. The theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour was propounded by Martin Fishbein and Icek

Ajzen in 1975. The theory has been widely applied across multiple, contexts, and populations with its roots in attitude theory and social cognitive tradition, which focus on individuals' beliefs with respect to future performance of a giving behaviour. The central construct of the theory is that intention is a motivational construct that is considered the most proximal determinant of behaviour. Intention in this case shows the extent to which an individual is likely to plan to do, and invest effort in pursuing a giving behaviour. When an individual comprehends the need to acquire entrepreneurial skills intended towards becoming self-reliance, there is a change of attitude. Intention is conceptualized as a function of two belief-based construct, attitudes and subjective norms. Attitudes are positive or negative evaluations of performing the behaviour in future, while subjective norms reflect beliefs that significant others would want them to perform the behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005, p.194).

The application of this theoretical principle is in consonance with solving unemployment situation in Nigeria through entrepreneurial skills development. The essence is to elicit positive change of attitude where the emphasis shifts from seeking job opportunities that are not there to becoming self-employed. Communication is central to it all in disseminating information, educating the ignorant, imparting knowledge and skills where applicable. Communication media avail the significant population of Nigerians the opportunity to become acquainted with the information they need to make informed decision as well as embark on profitable ventures.

Promoting Entrepreneurial Skills through Effective Communication

Communication is central to human existence, interaction and development. Some scholars (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p. 6; Hassan, 2013, p. 3; Asema, 2011, p.; West & Turner, 2010, p. 5;) have conceptualized the term "communication" from different perspectives but basically arriving at the same meaning. Communication is an exchange of ideas, feelings, information, opinions, knowledge or an understanding among parties involved in the communication context. For instance, West & Turner (2010, p. 5) describes communication as a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment.

Human beings are able to mould and control the society through communication (Asema, 2011, p.1). As an interactive process, it involves the design of ideas, messages, information or data and their dissemination in an attempt to effect change in a person's behaviour or to persuade the person to act in a particular or predetermined manner (Kenechukwu 2014, p.3). This explanation underscores the relevance of the theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour aimed at bringing about desired change in an individual's attitude. It is a positive attitude to accept an action. Moreover, communication is imperative in entrepreneurship education. Different avenues of message delivery can be employed to convey the essence of entrepreneurial skills education such as indigenous communication, traditional media, and online platforms.

1. Indigenous communication media mostly interpersonal in nature are veritable channels to reach people in their localities. Indigenous media occupy a distinct and unique position particularly among rural dwellers. A popular proponent of indigenous media 'Oramedia', Ugboajah cited in Anum (2018, p.43)

argues that Oramedia or folk media are grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group. These media are known for their form of symbolism (use of symbols) which is visible cultural features, speaking to people in their native language.

2. Traditional mass media channels vis-à-vis radio, Television, newspaper and magazines. These are age long mass media with their peculiarities which can be utilized to feature programmes on entrepreneurial skills development. Radio is a veritable channel of information dissemination. It is not limited by electricity and cuts across barriers of illiteracy and limited infrastructures unlike other mass media (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012, p.104). Research evidence shows that the use of radio as a medium of information is truly widespread, even among rural population. Television with its distinct nature commands the power of audiovisual. Soola in Anum & Ekwenchi (2018, p.43) explains that television by virtue of its ownership operational structure, programming and access remains incontrovertibly urban elite medium. Newspapers and magazines are print media which have great potentials in reaching the enlightened members of the society. Both electronic and print media are potent avenues for disseminating information on environmental pollution.
3. Online media platforms comprise Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Linkedin, and Blogs among others. Social media are interactive digitally-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Social media platforms have become useful sources of information for majority of people particularly the youths.

These communication channels are avenues to reach teeming number of unemployed people both young and adults with information on the need to acquire entrepreneurial skills for self development since jobs are not easily come by.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Unemployment negates the basic ideals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), articulated in 2016 popularly called Agenda 2030, which was to address the teething problems confronting humanity especially the developing nations. This scenario constitutes a major challenge to the socio-economic development of the Nigerian State. It is concluded that utilizing appropriate communication channels to sensitise the teeming youths and young adults seeking employment opportunities in private and public offices, embarking on profitable ventures via entrepreneurial skills acquisition can help solve the problem of employment in Nigeria. This line of thinking agrees with the theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour (RAPB), which in essence, is the application of an action based on conviction to gender attitude change. There is need for change of attitude from the “old normal” to “the new normal”. ‘Old normal’ signifies the old pattern of seeking for job offers after graduation from school to the ‘New normal’ of acquiring entrepreneurial skills for self employment.

Based on the aforementioned, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need, for mandatory implementation of government policy on entrepreneurial skills acquisition at all levels vis-a-vis federal, state, local and community authorities respectively. This will enable majority of unemployed youths acquire relevant skills to venture into micro and medium scale enterprises for self employment.
2. With increasing emphasis on digitisation and more focused attention on the global market, there is need for policy makers to inculcate the spirit of digital marketing on the youths who are mostly affected. Therefore, efforts should be channeled towards providing basic training in digital marketing as part of school curriculum.
3. Communication is an important fulcrum in igniting development. Development agents and all stake holders can employ various channels of communication vis-à-vis indigenous, traditional and online platforms to disseminate information on entrepreneurial skills development. People need such information to redirect their focus from seeking jobs which are scarcely available to working for themselves.
4. This paper suggests a communication model for entrepreneurial skill development for digital marketing as per solving unemployment crisis in Nigeria. Four key elements are involved: Interest, Action, Hard work, and Consistency (IAHC Model). These are necessary components to achieve desired results in digital marketing.

Interest is the engine that spurs a person into action to learn a particular thing with passion. Hard work is fundamental in accomplishing one's dream. Consistency is another component in achieving success. This entails the ability to continue in the face of competition.

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