



PERCEPTION OF BUSINESS EDUCATORS ON DIGITAL MARKETING SKILLS NEEDED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATES IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

The study examined the perception of business educators on digital marketing skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire titled: "Digital Marketing Skills Inventory" (DMSI) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and was further subjected to internal consistency testing using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. The population of the study comprised 59 Business Educators: 29 males and 30 females in 5 public institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data collected were analysed both descriptively and inferentially, using mean and standard deviation to find answers to the research questions, and t-test to test the null hypotheses. Findings revealed that, Business Educators perceived electronic communication and search engine marketing skills as needed by Business Education undergraduates to be successful in the digital economy. Also, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy and there no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership. It was recommended that Business Education undergraduates should learn and develop skills in search engine marketing to take advantage of opportunities in the digital economy. It was concluded that the future is digital, thus, digital marketing skills are needed to be successful in digital era.

Keywords: Digital Economy, Digital Marketing, Skills and Digital Marketing Skills

Introduction

Digital economy is an economy whose activities are online. It involves the interconnectivity of individuals, organisations and businesses using the Internet, data and mobile devices. Pratt (2017) defined digital economy as the worldwide network of economic activities, commercial transactions and professional interactions that are enabled by information and communications technologies. Bukht and Heeks defined digital economy as that part of economic output derived solely or primarily from digital technologies with a business model based on digital goods or services, which consists of the digital sector plus emerging digital and platform services. Pratt (2017) noted that, these digital goods and services include hyper-connectivity, the internet of things (IoT), Cloud computing, big data, advanced analytics, wireless networks, mobile devices and social media. More so, Hanna (2020) considered digital economy as segments of the economy that are essentially digital and do not have analog equivalent, and the widest scope is the use of ICTs in all economic spheres. It can also be seen as an economy that is remotely operated by peoples at their convenient using ICT.



As a result of the global pandemic, the year 2020 witnessed a dramatic growth in digital transformation in every aspect of human endeavour notably in business and education, and it effectively moved the digital economy into the mainstream. In the assertion of the Asian Development Bank Institute (2022), digital economy permeates all aspects of society, influencing the way people interact and bringing about broad sociological changes. It enhance growth, integration, and sophistication of information technology and communications. One area largely influence in the digital economy is the digital marketing.

Digital marketing is often referred to as online marketing, internet marketing or 'web marketing (Bhosale, Raverkar and Tamondkar, 2020). Following this point of view, Gustavsen (2022) noted that, digital marketing encompasses a wide variety of marketing tactics and technologies used to reach consumers online. For Cook, Elmore and Tanenbaum (2019), Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or the internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers. In addition, Rihan (2015) noted that digital marketing is an umbrella term for the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. Digital marketing involves the use of online channels and methods that enable businesses and organisations to monitor the success of their marketing campaigns, often in real time, to better understand what does and does not work.

Digital marketing is popular for its low cost of operation, easy access and a wider audience. Rihan (2015) noted that digital marketing in the digital era not only allows for brands to market their products and services but also allows for online customer support through 24 hours in a week (24/7) services to make customer feel supported and valued. In the opinion of Pratt (2017), as the world moves more fully into the digital economy, forward-thinking retailers now leverage technologies to reach and serve customers through a variety of channels. They do so by using online sales and mobile apps to identify buyers shopping via the internet or in person. Some business have even developed websites to enable online sales. To efficiently participate and benefit in digital marketing it is necessary to possess certain digital skills.

Skill is often regarded as the ability to do something (Attewell, 2018). In the assertion of Knapp in Zhang (2019), skill is the learned ability to bring about pre-determined results with maximum certainty; often with the minimum outlay of time or energy or both. It consist of both mental and physical proficiency to undertake and perform a job successfully with ease. The County College of Morris (n.d) considered skill from three perspectives: functional, self-management and special knowledge. In terms of functional, skills could be defined as the abilities that are inherited or developed through experience and learning. In Self-management, skills are the behaviours one developed in learning to cope and interact with his or her environment and the people and conditions in it. With regards to special knowledge, skills involves mastering a specific body of information related to a particular type of work, profession, occupation, educational, or leisure activity. Similarly, Green (2015) viewed skill as a personal quality with three key features, namely: Productive (it has productive value); Expandable (skills could be enhanced by training and development) and Social (skills are socially determined).

Skill is a must-get success factor in the digital era especially where marketing now requires an evolved set of skills which are rooted in technology. In buttress, the Asian Development Bank Institute (2022) noted that, digital skills are needed to enable marketers collect, store, analyse, and share information digitally and transform social interactions. Some of the digital marketing skills are: Social Media Marketing, Digital and Online Marketing, and Marketing Event Management (LinkedIn and HubSpot, 2015); computer literacy, data entry, social media, Web-based communications and research, Word processing, Email and chat, secure information processing, Programming, web, and



app development, digital business analysis, digital marketing and content creation, digital design and data visualization, digital product management, data science, and user experience design (Salesforce, 2022). For the purpose of this study, attention was given to e-communication skill and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skill.

Communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving information. When the process is done using electronic media it is referred to e-communication. It is defined by the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (2015) as any communication that is broadcast, created, sent, forwarded, replied to, transmitted, stored, held, copied, downloaded, displayed, viewed, read, or printed by one or several electronic communications services, including but not limited to email and telephone. By extension e-communication covers the use of instant messaging, text messaging, Websites, blogs, social networking sites, voice and video messaging, and other online media that facilitates communication. Royle and Laing (2014) noted that, in the digital era, the transformation of communication media is challenging for all industries, particularly so for the communication and marketing industries. This could be because each of these media has its specific purpose; thus, it should be selected wisely to enhance effective communication. In addition, irrespective of the media, the message should be clear and simply to understand. E-communication skills involves the abilities to write or create a meaningful online contents; ability to speak and listening to targeted market audience.

There are millions of web pages on the Internet, to find and locate a particular web is possible with the use search engine. Search engine is a special software (like crawler, spider and bot) which collects data about web sites. If the software is design for marketing purposes, then it is Search Engine Marketing (SEM). Terrance, Shrivastava and Kumari (2017) referred to SEM as the marketing process with a goal of obtaining more visibility in search engines either by getting more free traffic or paid traffic. Similarly, Top Floor Tech (2018) viewed SEM as the process of increasing traffic and visibility of your website, products, and services through a search engine. In the assertion of Barry and Charleton (2014), SEM has emerged as the main method firms use to successfully increase the visibility of their Website. More so, Boughton (n.d) noted that, SEM can generate steady traffic levels and tremendous return on investment (ROI). Also, for Eren in YalçÖna and Köse (2010), marketers, who try to reach customers in a fast and effective way with direct marketing method and also reduce customer reaching – costs, aim to reach electronic communities that have big potentials.

Statement of the problem

Digital era has brought about rapid proliferating of the economy and it is touching all aspects, particularly in terms of the way products and services are distributed and consumed, the way transactions are conducted, and how business operations are performed. More so, with the increasing number of people using the Internet today, digital economy is growing at fast pace, especially in developing countries. Asian as Development Bank Institute (2022) rightly pointed out, digitization of the economy creates benefits and efficiencies as digital technologies drive innovation and fuel job opportunities and economic growth. In fact, the future is digital. Unfortunately, research in this area has not been given the much needed attention particularly by Business Educators. It is however, imperative that a research to understand more about the digital economy and the digital marketing skills needed in the digital economy should be conducted. This therefore, is the priority of this study.

Research questions

The following research questions were developed for the study:

1. What are the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy?



2. What are Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy?

Research analysis

The following null hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 Alpha level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire titled: Digital Marketing Skills Inventory” (DMSI) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and was further subjected to internal consistency testing using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. The population of the study comprised 59 Business Educators: 29 males and 30 females in 5 public institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data collected were analysed both descriptively and inferentially, using mean and standard deviation to find answers to the research questions, and t-test to test the null hypotheses. To agree to any of the research question the criteria mean must not be less than 2.50. Similarly, for any of the null hypothesis to be accepted, the calculated t-value must be less than or equal to the critical t-value otherwise rejected.

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy?

The descriptive analysis for research question 1 is presented in Table 1

Table 1: *Electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy*

S/N	Electronic Communication Skill	\bar{x}	Std.	Decision
1	Ability to create informative contents for online audience	3.25	0.47	Agree
2	Ability to speak with customers effectively	3.05	0.34	Agree
3	Ability to obtain relevant feedback from customers	3.55	0.50	Strongly Agree
4	Ability to maintain a chat group to connect with customers	3.13	0.34	Agree
5	Ability to effectively engage in online advertising	3.31	0.73	Agree
6	Ability to compose and send Emails to customers	3.62	0.58	Strongly Agree
7	Ability to organize content with clarity	3.28	0.45	Agree
8	Ability to use social networking sites to connect with potential customers	3.03	0.18	Agree
9	Ability to hold video conference with selected audience	3.16	0.42	Agree
10	Ability to use instant messaging to respond promptly	3.05	0.34	Agree
Grand Mean		3.24	0.43	Agree



In Table 1, the mean scores of the items range between 3.62 and 3.03; the standard deviation did not varies much as the scores range between 0.73 and 0.18. Furthermore, the ground mean of 3.24 was found greater than the criteria mean of 2.50. This suggest that, the items were perceived by Business Educators as electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy.

Research Question 2

What are Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy?

The descriptive analysis for research question 2 is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy

S/N	Search Engine Marketing Skills	\bar{X}	Std.	Decision
11	Ability to introduce related company services on the Internet	3.05	0.50	Agree
12	Ability to use keywords that will bring search result of interest	3.03	0.26	Agree
13	Ability to identify which search engines is the related web site you want your site to appear on	3.10	0.30	Agree
14	Ability to identify vital approach used on search engines to take users' attention to your web site	2.89	0.40	Agree
15	Ability to search a product of interest on a search engine quickly	3.25	0.47	Agree
16	Ability to identify online consumers buying habits	3.05	0.34	Agree
17	Ability to attract traffic to your site	3.55	0.50	Agree
18	Ability to identify electronic communities that have big potentials	3.13	0.34	Agree
19	Ability to select a site for advertisement	3.18	0.73	Agree
20	Ability to use search engines to locate online resources	3.62	0.58	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean		3.18	044	Agree

Table 2 show that, the mean scores of the items range between 3.62 and 2.89 and their respectful standard deviation of 0.58 and 0.40 did not varies much. In addition, the grand mean of 3.18 was found greater than the criteria mean of 2.50. The result suggest that the items are Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy.

The t-test analysis of the null hypothesis 1 is presented in Table 3



Table 3: t-test results of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy

ITEM	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	t-cal	t-critical	Decision																																																																																																																
1	Male	29	3.27	0.45	0.34	2.00	Accepted																																																																																																																
	Female	30	3.23	0.50				2	Male	29	3.06	0.37	0.39	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.03	0.31	3	Male	29	3.55	0.50	0.11	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.56	0.50	4	Male	29	3.13	0.35	0.51	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.13	0.34	5	Male	29	3.27	0.70	0.92	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.10	0.75	6	Male	29	3.72	0.52	1.26	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.53	0.62	7	Male	29	3.34	0.48	0.93	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.23	0.43	8	Male	29	3.06	0.25	1.46	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.00	0.00	9	Male	29	3.17	0.38	0.52	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.16	0.46	10	Male	29	3.06	0.37	0.39	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.03	0.31	Grand Mean			
2	Male	29	3.06	0.37	0.39	2.00	Accepted																																																																																																																
	Female	30	3.03	0.31				3	Male	29	3.55	0.50	0.11	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.56	0.50	4	Male	29	3.13	0.35	0.51	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.13	0.34	5	Male	29	3.27	0.70	0.92	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.10	0.75	6	Male	29	3.72	0.52	1.26	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.53	0.62	7	Male	29	3.34	0.48	0.93	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.23	0.43	8	Male	29	3.06	0.25	1.46	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.00	0.00	9	Male	29	3.17	0.38	0.52	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.16	0.46	10	Male	29	3.06	0.37	0.39	2.00	Accepted	Female	30	3.03	0.31	Grand Mean					0.68	2.00	Accepted								
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In Table 3, the grand mean of the calculated-t value of 0.68 was less than the critical-t value of 2.00. The null hypothesis 1 was retained, indicating that, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership.

The t-test analysis of the null hypothesis 2 is presented in Table 4

Table 4: t-test results of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership.

ITEM	Ownership	N	Mean	Std.	t-cal	t-critical	Decision																																												
11	Federal	25	3.00	0.57	0.65	2.00	Accept																																												
	State	34	3.08	0.45				12	Federal	25	2.96	0.20	1.91	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.08	0.28	13	Federal	25	3.08	0.27	0.46	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.11	0.32	14	Federal	25	2.84	0.37	0.95	2.00	Accept	State	34	2.94	0.42	15	Federal	25	3.20	0.50	0.74	2.00	Accept
12	Federal	25	2.96	0.20	1.91	2.00	Accept																																												
	State	34	3.08	0.28				13	Federal	25	3.08	0.27	0.46	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.11	0.32	14	Federal	25	2.84	0.37	0.95	2.00	Accept	State	34	2.94	0.42	15	Federal	25	3.20	0.50	0.74	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.29	0.46								
13	Federal	25	3.08	0.27	0.46	2.00	Accept																																												
	State	34	3.11	0.32				14	Federal	25	2.84	0.37	0.95	2.00	Accept	State	34	2.94	0.42	15	Federal	25	3.20	0.50	0.74	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.29	0.46																				
14	Federal	25	2.84	0.37	0.95	2.00	Accept																																												
	State	34	2.94	0.42				15	Federal	25	3.20	0.50	0.74	2.00	Accept	State	34	3.29	0.46																																
15	Federal	25	3.20	0.50	0.74	2.00	Accept																																												
	State	34	3.29	0.46																																															



16	Federal	25	3.04	0.35	0.20	2.00	Accept
	State	34	3.05	0.34			
17	Federal	25	3.60	0.50	0.53	2.00	Accept
	State	34	3.52	0.51			
18	Federal	25	3.16	0.37	0.46	2.00	Accept
	State	34	3.11	0.32			
19	Federal	25	3.24	0.66	0.48	2.00	Accept
	State	34	3.14	0.78			
20	Federal	25	3.56	0.58	0.75	2.00	Accept
	State	34	3.67	0.58			
Grand Mean					0.71	2.00	Accept

In Table 4, all the items were accepted; more so, the grand mean of the calculated-t value of 0.71 was less than the critical-t value of 2.00. Based on the decision rule to accept null hypothesis if the calculated-t value is less than the critical-t, the null hypothesis 2 was retained. This implies that, there no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership.

Discussion

Table 1 indicated that the respondents strongly agreed that electronic communication involves the ability to: obtain relevant feedback from customers and compose and send Emails to customers. They also agreed with the rest items that, it involves the ability to: create informative contents for online audience; speak with customers effectively; maintain a chat group to connect with customers; effectively engage in online advertising; organize content with clarity; use social networking sites to connect with potential customers; hold video conference with selected audience and use instant messaging to respond promptly. More so, the ground mean of 3.24 was found greater than the criteria mean of 2.50. This suggest that, the items are perceived by Business Educators as electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy. The noble finding here is that, electronic communication is an essential skill in digital marketing. The finding correspond with Brady, Fellenz, & Brookes in Royle and Laing (2014) that the emergence of digital marketing, including the use of social media, has significantly contributed to the individualisation of marketing where the providers of goods and services are increasingly communicating with individual consumers and users, gaining feedback on a one-to-one basis and providing bespoke solutions for clients.

Similarly, In Table 3, the grand mean of the calculated-t value of 0.68 was less than the critical-t value of 2.00. The null hypothesis 1 was retained, indicating that, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of males and females Business Educators on the electronic communication skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy. The finding indicate that electronic communication is an essential skill needed to by anyone respective of gender to facilitate marketing in the 21st century digital era. The finding agree with Doyle (2019) that electronic communication is a specific skill sets sought after by employers across industries.

Table 2 revealed that, the respondents strongly agree that, search engine marketing requires the ability to use search engines to locate online resources. They also agree to other items that it requires the ability to: introduce related company services on the Internet; use keywords that will bring search result of interest; identify which search engines is the related web site you want your site to appear on; to identify vital approach used on search engines to take users' attention to your web site; search a product of interest on a search engine quickly; identify online consumers buying habits; to



attract traffic to your site; identify electronic communities that have big potentials and select a site for advertisement. Additionally, the grand mean of 3.18 was found greater than the criteria mean of 2.50. The noble finding is that Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skill is needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy. The finding aligned with Barry and Charleton (2014) who noted that SEM has emerged as the main method firms use to successfully increase the visibility of their Website.

In addition, Table 4, show that all the items were accepted. More so, the grand mean of the calculated-t value of 0.71 was less than the critical-t value of 2.00. Thus, it was concluded that, there no significant difference in the mean rating of Business Educators on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) skills needed by business education undergraduates in the digital economy based on ownership. Business Educators both in the federal and state owned institutions unanimously accepted SEM to be an important skill in the digital era that is promoting online businesses. The finding is in line with Boughton (n.d) who noted that, SEM can generate steady traffic levels and tremendous return on investment (ROI). The finding is also in line with Ambuli and Surendher (2019) that there is a positive relationship between Search Engine Marketing skills and favourably purchasing behaviour of customers.

Conclusion

Digital era is noted by the use of digital technologies which have driven innovations in all fields. It has successfully given birth to digital marketing which is touching all aspects, particularly in the way products and services are distributed and consumed, the way transactions are conducted, and how business operations are performed. More so, with the increasing number of people using the Internet today, digital economy is growing at fast pace, especially in developing countries. In fact, the future is digital. It is imperative that every Business Education undergraduates should acquire relevant digital related skills to be successful in the digital economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Business Education undergraduates should be taught skills in electronic communication to be able to interact effectively with online customers.
2. Business Education undergraduates should learn and develop skills in search engine marketing to take advantage of opportunities in the digital economy.

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