



E-COMMERCE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR MANAGEMENT OF SMALL SCALE BUSINESSES

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Abstract

The study was conducted to ascertain the e-commerce competencies required of Business Education graduates for management of small scale businesses in Ebonyi State. Descriptive survey design was used in the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire titled: E-commerce Competencies Questionnaire (ECCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and was further subjected to internal consistency testing using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient which gave a reliability result of 0.78. The population of the study comprised 89 final years Business Education Students: 26 males and 63 females in threepublicinstitutions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. There was no sample for the study because the population size was manageable. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data and find answers to the research questions, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses. Findings suggested that electronic communication, e-accounting and e-advertising are among the e-commerce competencies required of Business Education graduates for management of small scale businesses. The test of hypotheses revealed that gender, ownership and location of institutions has no significant difference in the mean responses of Business Education students on e-commerce competencies required for management of small scale businesses. It was recommended that electronic communication, e-accounting and e-advertising competencies should be included in the training programme of Business Education students for effective management of small scale businesses.

Keywords: E-Commerce, Competencies, Business Education, Management and Small Scale Businesses

Introduction

Business Education is a programme that seeks to develop vocational knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes needed in the field of business and teaching career. Njoku in Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Edeh (2015) considered business education as a programme that equips an individual with functional and suitable skills, knowledge, attitude and value that would enable the individual operates in the environment he or she finds himself or herself. Business education also provide the needed training for recipients to be able to work in an office or any business organization, become



competent consumer and a wise spender of resources, as well as develop functional skills for the management of one's business.

Management is the coordination and administration of tasks to achieve a goal (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). It requires setting the organization's goals then coordinating the efforts of staff to accomplish those goals through proper utilization of available resources. In this regards, management can be said to be the art of getting things done through and with people. Management also coordinate man, machines, money and materials in the appropriate manner to achieve set goals. Management is an essential tool for the proper functioning of any organization including small scale businesses.

Small scale business as, the name implies, is a business that is not large in size, not complex in operation requires little financial involvement and has small numbers of employees (Obi, 2015). For Micah, Okafor, Idowu and Orija (2017), it is a business unit which requires relatively little capital. In this regards, the Federal Ministries of Industry and Commerce in Ogechukwu, Oboreh, Umukoro and Uche (2013), defined small scale businesses as those enterprises that cost not more than N500, 000 including working capital to set up. Generally, small scale businesses cut across many economic activities such production, distribution of goods and rendering of services to consumers. They play a very crucial role in the socio-economic transformation of every country especially in employment and poverty reductions.

With the emergence of new technology, especially the internet and social media, small scale businesses can now operate from any given location using the e-commerce platform. Electronic commerce or E-commerce as popularly known is the trading in products or services using computer networks, such as the internet (Kutz, 2016). E-commerce involves technologies such as mobile commerce, electronic funds transfer, supply chain management, internet marketing, online transaction processing, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) inventory management system, and automated data collection systems. Modern e-commerce typically uses the World Wide Web for at least one part of the transaction's life cycle, although it may also use other technologies such as email. With E-commerce, a business can operate online for seven days a week, 24 hours a day from any location, products can be ordered online and delivered at the doorstep of the customers, quick comparison of products and prices can be done by the consumers to decide on the best option, accounting are done online (meaning the consumer have to reduce the risk associated with moving with money for shopping). However, the small scale business operators will requires some competencies to be able to do E-commerce.

Competencies are sets of attributes required to perform a particular activity; in other words, they are a collection of skills that an individual needs to complete a task (Deinen, 2020). In order to demonstrate competence, Lasse (2015), noted that workers must be able to perform certain tasks or skills with a required level of proficiency. Thus, competencies are crucial in assessing an individual's ability to effectively perform a particular task or job position. Competencies covers wide range of areas not limited to an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour. To Roggio (2016), competencies in e-commerce include: content marketing, data analysis, design, advertising, email marketing, marketing automation, and search engine optimization.

Content marketing has to do with the ability to write well and communicate with online audience. As an e-commerce operator, there is every tendency to interact with customers. Creative writing ability will help an operator communicate clearly with existing and potential customers. As the James Cook University (2019) noted, having strong written communication skills will allow one to excel in the online space.

Data analysis is the ability to consider facts and understand the implications of statistics. According to Kaposvery (2020) **the E-commerce manager is able to collect, interpret and implement changes in the sales strategy based on this raw data.** In data analysis, online market



data are collected, tested, interpreted and presented to provide vital information for online marketing decision.

Designs are special characteristics that make a business different from another. It is creativity in ecommerce that makes individuals' marketing materials and store stand out from the rest. Designs in E-commerce comprise the business web site, logo and other unique features that can easily differentiate one business from another.

Advertising is the awareness a business create about its existence, location, contacts and the goods and services available to offer for sale. It is simply a way a business makes itself and its products known to customers. The more customers know about a business the higher the marginal propensity to sell. As Maheshwari (2021)posited, ecommerce advertising must be done across multiple channels and via various forms of media such as pay-per-click ads on search engines and on social media sites, display advertising, native advertising, mobile advertising, pop-up ads, video ads, and more.

Email marketing is a platform used by businesses to communicate directly with existing consumers who indicate interest in the business' products (Roggio, 2016). With the email as a digital name for a business, email marketing is a fast way to reach customers in their different locations. Customers may be added to an email list and contacted where necessary.

Marketing automation involves machine response to human transaction or a request using artificial intelligence. It involves managing basic marketing functions and processes in automated platforms that provide quick feedback. A good example is the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) that dispenses cash without human supervision. Roggio (2016) is of the opinion that marketing automation has the power to significantly reduce marketing expenses, boost conversion rates, increase average order value, and, even improve shopper experience, in some cases.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a platform used to increase traffic to a business website. Search engine optimization involves the process of making business web pages easy for web crawlers to access and index so that search engines can easily find and catalogue what is on the business' page and makes it easier to locate the website on the appropriate results pages.

For the purpose of this study attention was given to the e-commerce competencies required for management of small scale businesses to include electronic communication, electronic accounting and e-advertising.

Electronic communication can be defined as a form of communication that takes place where physical presence to dialog is not possible. It is a type of communication that is facilitated by ICT facilities. The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (2015) defined it 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. In a similar way, Elprocus Communication (2021) defined electronic communication as the communication which uses electronic media to transmit the information or message using computers, e-mail, telephone, video calling, FAX machine, and others. This type of communication allows the sharing data like images, graphics, sound, pictures, and many things. QS Study (2021) noted that it allows the amalgamation of several media, such as data, graphics, video, and sound, into one message. Electronic communication is very important in modern business. It saves time and cost of doing business and enable people to stay in touch with customers using Email, Text and Instant Messaging, Social Networking, Video Chat, Chat and Meeting Tools like zoom.

Accounting is the process of creating, recording, keeping, analysing and presenting financial statements to aid the tracking and control of assets and make proper business decisions. When the process is done using electronic mean, it is referred to as Electronic accounting, or e-accounting. Venegas(2017) defined it as any accounting system which is based on information communication technology for the capture and processing of a business' financial data.



E-accounting covers various areas of accounting including electronic accounting (E-accounting) system which are platforms used to facilitate online payments. In the assertion of Green (2018), there are payments system that allows customers to make cashless payments for goods and services through cards, mobile phones or the internet. By expansion, e-accounting are facilitated by the use of internet and electronic devices, such as computers, smartphones or tablets. Furthermore, Dominic (2021) noted that e-accounting forms are most credit and debit cards; however, there are alternative payment methods, such as bank transfers, electronic wallets, smart cards or cryptocurrency (example bitcoin wallet).

E-accounting is a convenient way of recording, storing, analysing and reporting financial information. It is very relevant in e-commerce transactions because it provides universal access, good collaboration, quick rectification and result, fast record with advance technology, strict control, large scale business record, adjustment with law and accounting standards and modification is possible and easy. It also, reduce the time spent on manual processes, less errors and increased accuracy, real-time financial information, automated invoices, credit notes and receipts, innovative financial technology, save money on resources, faster record-keeping leads to more business.

E-advertising is the act of placing paid contents on an online website, search engine, social media networks, podcast, newsletters, or other interacting online property, such as chat or instant messaging (Newton, 2021). It is also the practice of disseminating paid messages to increase the sales of products online.

Statement of the Problem

With the global trend, e-commerce technology has become more popular in recent years, and it's something every business owners especially small scale businesses need to understand and learn as much about as possible. Business Education students also need to develop competencies in e-commerce to function better in the work place. To prepare the students in this area, e-commerce courses have been integrated into Business Education, precisely the OTM education curriculum (Edokpolor and Chukwu, 2017). However, as it appears, many students are still lacking competent to operate in an e-commerce system. Regarding this development, Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) stressed that despite the effort to introduce e-commerce in OTM education, students still graduate with little or no e-commerce competencies that would make them to become proficient in modern business organizations. It is based on this unfortunate development that this study was embarked upon to ascertain the e-commerce competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the Electronic communication competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?
2. What are the Electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?
3. What are the E-advertising competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study and was tested at 0.05 Alpha level of significant:



- H0₁:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education graduates on electronic communication competencies required for the management of small scale businesses.
- H0₂:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education students in federal and state owned institutions on electronic accounting related competencies required for management of small scale businesses.
- H0₃:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education students in urban and rural areas on e-advertising competencies required for management of small scale businesses.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used in the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire titled: E-commerce Competencies Questionnaire (ECCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and further subjected to internal consistency testing using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78. The population of the study comprised 89 final year Business Education Students: 26 males and 63 females in 3 public institutions (College of Education Ikwo, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo) in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. There was no sample for the study because the population size was manageable. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data and find answers to the research questions, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses at 0.05

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What are the electronic communication competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?

The result of research question 1 using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation result on electronic communication competencies

| S/N | Electronic Communication Competencies Required by Business Education Students include the ability to: | Mean | Std | Decision |
|-------------------|---|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | Build an email list of customers | 3.22 | 0.73 | Agree |
| 2 | Connect with customers on chat groups | 3.70 | 0.54 | Strongly Agree |
| 3 | send an instant message to customers using a preferred social networking site | 3.73 | 0.44 | Strongly Agree |
| 4 | Send personalized messages to potential customers | 3.65 | 0.47 | Strongly Agree |
| 5 | Close a deal with a customer on phone | 3.20 | 0.40 | Agree |
| 6 | Share images with customers | 3.31 | 0.46 | Agree |
| 7 | Send and receive emails from customers | 3.58 | 0.49 | Strongly Agree |
| Grand Mean | | 3.48 | 0.50 | Agree |

The result in Table 1 show that the grand mean of 3.48 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50, meaning the respondents agreed to electronic communication as one of the e-commerce competencies required of business education students for management of small scale businesses.



Research Question 2

What are the Electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?

The result of research question 2 using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation result on electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies

| S/N | Electronic Accounting Related E-Commerce Competencies Required of Business Education Students include the ability to: | Mean | Std | Decision |
|-------------------|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 8 | Do bank transfers | 3.20 | 0.40 | Agree |
| 9 | Use the Internet to distribute financial reports | 3.00 | 0.30 | Agree |
| 10 | Operate an electronic wallet | 3.25 | 0.44 | Agree |
| 11 | Use smart cards for easy payments of goods and services | 2.82 | 0.50 | Agree |
| 12 | prepare electronic financial statements | 3.15 | 0.49 | Agree |
| 13 | Confirm evidence of payments on e-receipts | 3.01 | 0.23 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | 3.07 | 0.39 | Agree |

Table 2 shows that the grand mean of 3.07 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50 meaning that the respondents agreed that e-accounting are among the e-commerce competencies required of business education students for management of small scale businesses.

Research Question 3

What are the e-advertising competencies required of business education graduates for management of small scale businesses?

The result of research question 3 using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation result on e-advertising competencies

| S/N | E-Advertising Competencies include the ability to: | Mean | Std | Decision |
|-------------------|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| 14 | Do email campaign with a special offers to customers | 3.16 | 0.37 | Agree |
| 15 | Improve the quality of pictures, videos and descriptions of products to increase conversions | 2.78 | 0.41 | Agree |
| 16 | Set up a Google Shopping campaign | 3.19 | 0.49 | Agree |
| 17 | Set up a Facebook advertising campaign | 3.70 | 0.45 | Strongly Agree |
| 18 | Use guest blogs to target potential customers from other people's blogs. | 3.65 | 0.47 | Strongly Agree |
| Grand Mean | | 3.29 | 0.43 | Agree |

Table 3 shows that the grand mean of 3.29 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50 meaning that the respondents agreed that e-advertising is among the e-commerce competencies required of business education students for management of small scale businesses.

Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education graduates on electronic communication competencies required for the management of small scale businesses.

The result of research hypothesis 1 using t-test is presented in Table 4



Table 4: t-test result of male and female business education graduates on electronic communication competencies

| ITEM | Gender | N | Mean | Std. | t-cal | t-critical | Decision |
|-------------------|--------|----|------|------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1 | Male | 26 | 3.26 | 0.72 | 0.36 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.20 | 0.74 | | | |
| 2 | Male | 26 | 3.73 | 0.53 | 0.25 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.69 | 0.55 | | | |
| 3 | Male | 26 | 3.76 | 0.42 | 0.52 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.71 | 0.45 | | | |
| 4 | Male | 26 | 3.65 | 0.48 | 0.02 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.65 | 0.48 | | | |
| 5 | Male | 26 | 3.23 | 0.42 | 0.42 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.19 | 0.39 | | | |
| 6 | Male | 26 | 3.34 | 0.48 | 0.40 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.30 | 0.46 | | | |
| 7 | Male | 26 | 3.65 | 0.48 | 0.84 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | Female | 63 | 3.55 | 0.50 | | | |
| Grand Mean | | | | | 0.40 | 1.99 | Accept |

Table 4 show the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.40 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 1 was retained, suggesting there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education graduates on electronic communication competencies required for the management of small scale businesses.

Research Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education graduates in federal and state owned institutions on electronic accounting related competencies required for management of small scale businesses.

The result of research hypothesis 2 using t-test is presented in Table 5

Table 5: t-test result of business education students in federal and state on electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies

| ITEM | Ownership | N | Mean | Std. | t-cal | t-critical | Decision |
|-------------------|-----------|----|------|------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 8 | Federal | 26 | 3.15 | 0.36 | 0.73 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 3.22 | 0.41 | | | |
| 9 | Federal | 26 | 3.03 | 0.19 | 0.77 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 2.98 | 0.33 | | | |
| 10 | Federal | 26 | 3.19 | 0.40 | 0.90 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 3.23 | 0.45 | | | |
| 11 | Federal | 26 | 2.76 | 0.58 | 0.74 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 2.85 | 0.47 | | | |
| 12 | Federal | 26 | 3.15 | 0.54 | 0.42 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 3.15 | 0.48 | | | |
| 13 | Federal | 26 | 3.00 | 0.28 | 0.28 | 1.99 | Accept |
| | State | 63 | 3.01 | 0.21 | | | |
| Grand Mean | | | | | 0.64 | 1.99 | Accept |



Table 5 show that the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.64 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 2 was retained, indicating there is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education students in federal and state owned institutions on electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies required for management of small scale businesses.

Research Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education students in urban and rural areas on e-advertising competencies required for management of small scale businesses.

The result of research hypothesis 3 using t-test is presented in Table 6

Table 6: t-test result of urban and rural areas business education students on e-advertising competencies

| ITEM | Location | N | Mean | Std. | t-cal | t-critical | Decision |
|-------------------|----------|----|------|------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 14 | Urban | 38 | 3.13 | 0.34 | 0.79 | 1.99 | Agree |
| | Rural | 51 | 3.19 | 0.40 | | | |
| 15 | Urban | 38 | 2.86 | 0.31 | 2.18 | 1.99 | Disagree |
| | Rural | 51 | 2.70 | 0.46 | | | |
| 16 | Urban | 38 | 3.15 | 0.54 | 0.54 | 1.99 | Agree |
| | Rural | 51 | 3.21 | 0.46 | | | |
| 17 | Urban | 38 | 3.68 | 0.47 | 0.41 | 1.99 | Agree |
| | Rural | 51 | 3.72 | 0.45 | | | |
| 18 | Urban | 38 | 3.60 | 0.49 | 0.78 | 1.99 | Agree |
| | Rural | 51 | 3.68 | 0.48 | | | |
| Grand Mean | | | | | 0.94 | 1.99 | Agree |

Table 6 show that the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.94 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 3 was retained, revealing there is no significant difference in the mean responses of Business Education students in urban and rural areas on e-advertising related competencies required for management of small scale businesses.

Discussion

The result in Table 1 shows that the grand mean of 3.48 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50. This suggest that the respondents agreed to electronic communication as e-commerce related competencies required of business education students for management of small scale businesses. Similarly, in testing null hypothesis 1 in Table 4, the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.40 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 1 was retained, revealing that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education graduates on electronic communication competencies required for the management of small scale businesses. By extension, there is no gender difference in electronic communication competencies needed to function well in e-commerce as Business Education graduates. Every students, male or female need to know how to build an email list of customers, send a message to customers using email or preferred social networking site, and receive feedback from customers using the online communication platforms. As Marjotie (2021) noted, that these platforms enables users to instant message and connect with each other through their computers or mobile devices. The findings align with Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) that here was no significant difference between mean ratings of male and female OTM education students on the extent to which they have acquired competencies in fundamental word processing applications needed for e-commerce.



Table 2 shows that the grand mean of 3.07 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50 meaning that the respondents agreed that e-accounting is among the e-commerce competencies required of Business Education graduates for management of small scale businesses. In addition, Table 5 shows that the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.64 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 2 was retained, indicating there is no significant difference in the mean responses of business education graduates in federal and state owned institutions on electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies required for management of small scale businesses. With these findings, it can be explain that taking advantage of the ecommerce is not limited to a learning institution. This is because, with technology, the world has become a global village. It is more rewarding therefore, to take advantage of the internet even in doing small scale business. Išoraitė and Miniotienė (2018), never missed words when they opined that electronic commerce is a business in which information technology is used to increase sales, business efficiency and provide a basis for new products and services. These findings are contrary to Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) that the OTM students in Federal institutions are more competent than the OTM students in State owned institutions. There cannot be difference after all, when the same ecommerce course contents are taught to students in both institutions.

Table 3 shows that the grand mean of 3.29 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50 meaning that the respondents agreed that e-advertising are among the e-commerce competencies required of business education students for management of small scale businesses. Also, Table 6 shows that the Grand Mean of the calculated-t value 0.94 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 3 was retained, revealing there is no significant difference in the mean responses of Business Education graduates in urban and rural areas on e-advertising related competencies required for management of small scale businesses. By expansion, ecommerce can be operated from any place whether urban or rural areas provided there are internet connectivity and the competencies to use it. The findings agreed with Roggio (2016) that e- advertising is one of the competencies in e-commerce. E-advertising is essential in business as it causes existing and potential customers to be informed of the products the supplier have for sales. Having the competencies to advertise online with huge users could be rewarding, especially when they get to know what products are available for sale and where to get the products.

Conclusion

Business Education as a programme that seeks to develop vocational knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes needed in the field of business and teaching career must continue to provide the needed training for recipients to be able to work in an office or any business organization, become competent consumer and a wise spender of resources, as well as develop functional skills for the management of one's business. The preparation of the students must therefore meet the needs of the changing society. Such preparations should cover electronic ways of doing business which is a new normal. To this end, emphasis must be place by institutions of learning offering Business Education programme on e-commerce competence for the management of businesses especial the small scale business.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Electronic communication competencies should be included in the training programme of Business Education students for effective management of small scale businesses.
2. Electronic accounting related e-commerce competencies should be part of Business Education programme in order to help students manage their businesses.



3. Business Education students should develop the necessary e-advertising related competencies to enhance the management capability of small scale businesses.

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