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E-COMMERCE SKILLS EXPECTED OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SMALL SCALE BUSINESSES IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to examine the e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Descriptive survey was used to structure the study. Three research questions were raised in line with the specific purposes to guide the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire tagged: E-commerce Skills Questionnaire (ECSQ) was used to collect data from the respondents, where 4 points stand for Very High Extent (VHE), 3 points stand for High Extent (HE), 2 points stand for Low Extent (LE), and 1 point stands for Very Low Extent (VLE).The questionnaire was validated by two 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 consisted of one hundred and thirty five (135) final year (400 level) Business Education Students of Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri Imo State. There was no sample for the study since the population was small and manageable. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the collected data, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses. Findings suggested that e-advertising, electronic communication and e-accounting are among the e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. The test of hypotheses also revealed that gender has no significant difference in the mean responses of Business education students on e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. It was recommended among others that e-advertising, electronic communication and e-accounting skills should be considered as basic requirement in the training programme of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo state.

***Key words:** Business Education, E-Commerce, Effective Management, Small Scale Business, Skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to examine the e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Business Education is a profession that is aimed at develop ing vocational knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes needed in the field of business and teaching career. Business education is a programme that equips an individual with functional and suitable skills, knowledge, attitude and value that would enable the individual operate in the environment he/she finds himself/herself (Njoku in Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Edeh, 2015). Business education also provides 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. Effective management is the effective 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 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). 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). The modern business is characterized by the presence of fierce competition, as well as a high level of consumer involvement in the creation of values, that are delivered to the market. In such conditions, firms compete for survival and stay on the market (Abrar, 2017). It pressured them to re-evaluate their business models and offerings, in accordance with the challenges and opportunities they represent. That is what is commonly called digital transformation (Doherty, 2019). Electronic Commerce or E-commerce is the coming together of 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.

Skills 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. Workers must be able to perform certain tasks or skills with a required level of proficiency (Lasse, 2015). Thus, skills are crucial in assessing an individual's ability to effectively perform a particular task or job position. Skills cover wide range of areas not limited to an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour. To Roggio (2016), sklls 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.

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. 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. 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. The researcher, for the purpose of this study, gave attention to the e-commerce skill required for effective management of small scale businesses to include e-advertising, electronic communication and electronic accounting. E-advertising is the process 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. E-advertising refers to marketing through online channels, such as websites, streaming content, digital ads span media formats, including text, image, audio, and video. Electronic advertizing, placed on the application of the Internet and digital tools, is one of the means to achieve business sustainability, as well as competitive advantages in the market. To make e-advertizing effective and efficient, managers of e-businesses need to know online customer behavior, e-advertizing techniques, costs and benefits of e-advertizing over traditional marketing, and pitfalls and legal issues of e-advertizing. The modern consumer, who is continuously educated and knows how to use the power of the online communication, has different requirements and expectations from the companies. The availability, accuracy, experiences of previous users, speed of delivery, information about discounts and special offers are only part of the information that helps consumers to select a specific product. And since in this online era customers with a single click can "go" from company to company and buy a product, it is recommended the marketing departments of companies to be original, creative and undergoing constant change, in order to keep the attention of modern consumers (e-consumer).

Electronic communication is seen 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. Following emerging technologies in business, e-commerce 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 & Chukwu, 2017). However, as it appears, many students are still backwards and unable to operate in an e-commerce compliant society. Edokpolor and Chukwu (2017) argued 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 examine the e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

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). 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 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. Business education students also need E-accounting skills to enable them with the ability to use sage accounting, microsoft excel, loan amortization application, digital web links, payable and purchases application, application for preparing profit and loss account and application for preparing statement of affairs and so on.

1.2 Objectives

The major aim of the study was to examine the e-commerce skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Specifically, the study was out to:

1. identify the E-advertising skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.
2. evaluate the E- communication skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.
3. examine the E- accounting related skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were raised by the researcher to guide the study:

a. To what extent are the E-advertising skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

b. To what extent are the E- communication skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

c. To what extent are the E- accounting related skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

1.4 Hypotheses

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

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E-advertising skills required for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on electronic communication skills required for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State

H_{03}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students electronic accounting related skills required for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design to structure the study. A self-designed 4-point questionnaire rating scale tiled: E-commerce Skills Questionnaire (ECSQ) was used to collect data from the respondents. The instrument was validated by two 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 consisted of one hundred and thirty five (135) final year (400 level) Business Education Students of Alvan Ikoku University of Education, Owerri Imo State. 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.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Research Questions Analyses

3.1.1 Research Question 1: To what extent are the E-advertising skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

The result obtained using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation result on e-advertising Skills

S/N	Items	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Doing email campaign with a special offers to customers	3.16	0.37	High Extent
2	Improving the quality of pictures, videos and description of products to increase conversions	2.78	0.41	High Extent
3	Setting up a Google Shopping campaign	3.19	0.49	High Extent

4	Setting up a Facebook advertising campaign	3.70	0.45	Very High Extent
5	Using guest blogs to target potential customers from other people's blogs.	3.65	0.47	Very High Extent
	Grand Mean	**3.29**	**0.43**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 1 demonstrated the fact that the grand mean of 3.29 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50, meaning that the respondents were in agreement that e-advertising is among the e-commerce skills expected of business education students for effected management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

3.1.2 Research Questions 2: To what extent are the E- communication skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

The result obtained using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation result on e-communication Skills

S/N	Items	Mean	Std	Decision
6	Building an email list of various customers	3.22	0.73	High Extent
7	Connecting with customers on chat groups	3.70	0.54	Very High Extent
8	Sending an instant message to customers using a preferred social networking site	3.73	0.44	Very High Extent
9	Sending personalized messages to potential customers	3.65	0.47	Very High Extent
10	Closing a deal with a customer on phone	3.20	0.40	High Extent
11	Sharing images with customers	3.31	0.46	High Extent
12	Sending and receive emails from customers	3.58	0.49	Very High Extent
	Grand Mean	**3.48**	**0.50**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Work, 2023

The result in Table 2 shows 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 skills expected of business education students for effected management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

3.1.3 Research Question 3: To what extent are the E- accounting related skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State?

The result obtained using mean and standard deviation is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation result on E-accounting related E-commerce skills

S/N	Items	Mean	Std	Decision
13	Doing bank transfers	3.20	0.40	High Extent
14	Using the Internet to distribute financial reports	3.00	0.30	High Extent
15	Operating an electronic wallet	3.25	0.44	High Extent
16	Using smart cards for easy payments of goods and services	2.82	0.50	High Extent
17	Preparing electronic financial statements	3.15	0.49	High Extent
18	Confirming evidence of payments on e-receipts	3.01	0.23	High Extent
	Grand Mean	**3.07**	**0.39**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 3 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 skills expected of business education students for effected management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

3.3 Test of Hypotheses

3.3.1 Hypothesis One

H_{o1}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E-advertising skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

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

Table 4: t-test result of male and female Business education students on E-advertising skills

S/N	Gender	N	Mean	Std	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
1	Male Female	26 109	3.13 3.19	0.34 0.40	0.79	1.99	Accepted
2	Male Female	26 109	2.86 2.70	0.31 0.46	0.18	1.99	Rejected
3	Male	26	3.15	0.54	0.54	1.99	Accepted

	Female	109	3.21	0.46			
4	Male Female	26 109	3.68 3.72	0.47 0.45	0.41	1.99	Accepted
5	Male Female	26 109	3.60 3.68	0.49 0.48	0.87	1.99	Accepted
6	Male Female	26 109	3.03 2.98	0.19 0.33	0.77	1.99	Accepted
7	Male Female	26 109	2.76 2.85	0.58 0.47	0.74	1.99	Accepted
	Grand Mean				**0.94**	**1.99**	**Accepted**

Table 4 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 1 was retained, revealing there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E-advertising skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

The results in table 1 shows and indicates 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 skills expected of business education students for effected management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Also, Table 4 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 1 was retained, revealing there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E-advertising skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. The findings corroborated with Roggio (2016) that e- advertising is one of the competencies in e- commerce. E-advertising is essential in business as it helps 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.

3.3.2 Hypothesis Two

H_{o2}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E-communication skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

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

Table 5: t-test result of male and female business education students on E-communication skills

S/N	Gender	N	Mean	Std	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
8	Male Female	26 109	3.26 3.20	0.72 0.74	0.36	1.99	Accepted

9	Male Female	26 109	3.73 3.69	0.53 0.55	0.25	1.99	Accepted
10	Male Female	26 109	3.76 3.71	0.42 0.45	0.52	1.99	Accepted
11	Male Female	26 109	3.65 3.65	0.48 0.48	0.02	1.99	Accepted
12	Male Female	26 109	3.23 3.19	0.42 0.39	0.42	1.99	Accepted
13	Male Female	26 109	3.34 3.30	0.48 0.46	0.40	1.99	Accepted
14	Male Female	26 109	3.65 3.55	0.48 0.50	0.84	1.99	Accepted
	Grand Mean				**0.40**	**1.99**	**Accepted**

Table 5 shows the grand mean of the calculated-t value 0.40 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 2 was retained, suggesting there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students s on E-communication skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

The result in Table 2 shows that the grand mean of 3.48 was greater than the midpoint value of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed to electronic communication as e-commerce related skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Similarly, in testing null hypothesis 2 in Table 5, the grand mean of the calculated-t value 0.40 was less than the critical-t value of 1.99. The null hypothesis 2 was retained, revealing that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students s on E-communication skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. By extension, 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 there 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.

3.3.3 Hypothesis Three

H_{o3}: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business education students on E- accounting skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

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

Table 6: t-test result of male and female Business education students on E- accounting skills

S/N	Gender	N	Mean	Std	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
15	Male Female	26 109	3.15 3.22	0.36 0.41	0.73		Accepted
16	Male Female	26 109	3.03 2.98	0.19 0.33	0.77		Accepted
17	Male Female	26 109	3.19 3.23	0.40 0.45	0.90		Accepted
18	Male Female	26 109	2.76 2.85	0.58 0.47	0.74		Accepted
19	Male Female	26 109	3.15 3.15	0.54 0.48	0.42		Accepted
20	Male Female	26 109	3.00 3.01	0.28 0.21	0.28		Accepted
	Grand Mean				**0.64**	**1.99**	**Accepted**

Table 6 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 3 was retained, meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students s on E-accounting skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.

Table 3 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 skills expected of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. Table 6 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 3 was retained, indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students s on E-accounting skills expected for the effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State. 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.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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 placed by institutions of learning offering Business education programme on e-commerce skill for the effective management of businesses particularly the small scale business/enterprises.

The researcher made the following recommendations in line with the findings and specific objectives:

1. Business education students should develop the necessary e-advertising related skills to enhance the effective management capability of small scale businesses in Imo State.
2. Electronic communication skills should be included in the training programme of Business education students for effective management of small scale businesses in Imo State.
3. Electronic accounting related e-commerce skills should be part of Business education programme in order to help students manage their businesses.

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