

SOCIAL MEDIA BOOKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF AIRLINE BOOKING AGENCIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between work place social media booking and organizational competitiveness of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South Region of Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of eighty-four (84) registered Airline Travel Agencies with operational presence across the six (6) states in the South-South Region of Nigeria. The entire population of eighty-four (84) Airline Booking Agents were used for the study without sampling. Thus, the study was a census research which entailed using the entire population. In terms of respondents, three (3) managers (General Manager, Customer Relations Manager, and Information Technology (IT) Manager) were selected from each of the firms. Thus, a total of two hundred and fifty-two (252) managers served as our respondents. Structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. After validation by the supervisors and two other experts in Management, Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Out of 252 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 182 copies were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis; Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used for the bivariate analysis. The findings revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between social media and organizational competitiveness such as productivity, customer satisfaction, and corporate image amongst Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South Region of Nigeria. The study concluded that the utilizing of digital office tools such as social media booking is viable ways to achieve productivity, customer satisfaction and corporate image, among others. The researcher therefore recommended amongst others that managements of airline booking agencies in South-South, Nigeria should increase their social media presence through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc, as this will enhance competitiveness.

Keywords: Social Media Booking, Organisation Competitiveness Corporate Reputation, Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

One of the issues that necessitated this study is apparent rise in downsizing and the inability of most Airline Booking Agencies to remain competitive particularly in the face of Covid-19 pandemic. Apparently, some of the Airline Booking Agencies in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular are struggling with financial productivity which makes very difficult for them to expand and compete favourably. For instance, The National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies (NANTA) announced it recorded a loss of 46.9% in 2020 due to the effects of the pandemic on the sector and this has affected their productivity (Nairametrics, 2021). The researcher's experience as client to various Airline Booking Agencies in Port Harcourt revealed that some of them find it very difficult to provide reliable booking and travel arrangements. Apart from being unable to communicate flight schedule changes on time, some of them find it very difficult to respond and resolve clients' complaints. This does not only leave travel clients frustrated, it goes to kill the corporate image of such Agencies. It is therefore, not surprising that over the years, only few of them have been able to stay afloat in the industry.

The researcher has also observed that some of the Airline Booking Agencies in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular are yet to adequately and efficiently incorporate digitalization in their operations.

For instance, only a few of them have a website of their own which forces them to provide services at the mercy of a third party. The use of social media handles for managing booking communication and transactions appears to be very low for many of them. It also appears that only a few of them have grown to the point of having or running their own booking application. This exposes their service structure to physical and phone interactions whereas, the booking applications would have helped them to provide prompter services. The issue of low digitalization appears to have shut some of them out of more clients. While most of them are using electronic payment systems, the network condition creates a lot of hitches in their transactions. This trend may not allow most of them to grow competitively.

Another issue that prompted this study is the apparent knowledge gap surrounding how work digitalization interacts with organizational productivity of Airline Booking Agencies in Rivers State. Google search by the researcher suggests that this area of scholarship may not have received adequate research attention. For instance, a study done by Boma-Siaminabo and Opara (2021) concentrated on information sharing culture and organizational competitiveness in Paint Manufacturing firms Rivers State. An earlier study done by Jenic and Lamovsek (2019) also revealed that work digitalization enhances employee productivity in Israeli banking sector. Otamiri and Nmehielle (2020) concentrated in unravelling the influence of technology on organizational communication success of tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Away from these, other related research efforts had focused how digitalization affect organizational variables such as organizational performance, job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, and employee performance (Ramsey, 2017). The findings of these set of researchers revealed that information technology is positively enhances performance in Nigerian industries such as banks, manufacturing and ICT sectors. Furthermore, a study done by Alfred (2015), equally revealed that office digitalization enhances organizational operations, organizational development and employee work-life balance in sectors such as manufacturing, banking, and education. However, none of these studies was able to empirically illustrate how specific dimensions of work digitalization such as booking application, social media booking and virtual payment system interact with competitiveness of Airline Booking Agencies in Rivers State, Nigeria in terms of productivity, customer satisfaction, and corporate image. This indicates that the relationship between social media booking and organizational competitiveness of Airline Booking Agencies has not received ample documented attention. This is the knowledge gap which this study sought to fill.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form were tested in the course of the study.

- Ho₁: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and productivity of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₂: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and customer satisfaction of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₃: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and corporate reputation of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

Workplace Social Media and Organizational competitiveness

Social media today has permeated into business organizations in the form of business WhatsApp, business Facebook, business Twitter, and dedicated social applications. The invention of the Internet has revolutionized the way in which people interact, retrieve information, and much more, and have had an immense influence on people's everyday lives (Safko, 2016). Now communication in the workplace is becoming speedier and easier due to these social media applications. There is now free and speedy flow of information across employees, management, and teams. Individuals in the

workplace can make their candid observations and suggestions on these platforms, which ordinarily they may find difficult to suggest on a one-on-one meeting. With this in place, decisions that will lead to better employee satisfactions can be easily reached. More explicitly, the presence of social media usage in the office can help individuals to create, freely share, exchange and discuss information, ideas, and other business-related ideas in the workplace.

Workplace social media is the use of computer-based technology to facilitate the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide, 2020). Contents shared include personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging. It makes discussions very easy and speedy. Employees, management, customers, and clients can bear their minds even with audio, pictorial, and video evidences for easy information passage. The use of group social media platforms such as WhatsApp group, Facebook group, etc. to pass organizational information across all that are concerned in the workplace helps to enhance communication health and customer service health. Employees and management of an organization, such as a hospitality company can utilize the social media to connect to one another either individually or in a group chat.

The health of an organization can be determined by so many factors. One of the strong ones amongst them is a Workplace virtual meeting system. The era of Covid-19 as it looks like it has come to stay just like malaria, has pushed many organizations to go beyond holding meetings and conferences beyond physically located destinations. The advent of virtual technologies in applications and gadgets have made hosting of meetings and conferences a lot easier for persons who are not physically situated. Employees, management, clients, and customers do not need to physically come together always for smooth flow of data, information, ideas, etc. for optimization of communication health. Gone are the days when the workplace was merely a network of employees, management, and machines/tools in a physical space. Today's connected, instant access environment has blurred the lines between the physical office and the place where work actually happens. As the distinction between professional and personal life dissolves, and the work environment becomes truly digital, management and employees are communicating and collaborating in unprecedented ways. This enhances the health of an organization such as a hospitality firm. Customers get served better; operational and human resources are maximized due to unrestricted interaction and relationships established through online conferences and meetings; and obviously, there is timely feedback, notifications, and information access as a result of constant communication that is facilitated by the presence of Workplace virtual meeting system.

A Workplace virtual meeting system ranges from the human resource applications and core business applications to e-mail, instant messaging and enterprise social media tools and virtual meeting tools (Berg *et al.*, 2018). Due to advances in technology, the notion of a Workplace virtual meeting system has now become a reality and further developments will continue to have an effect as the work system evolves. Business organizations such as Airline Booking Agencies now have Zoom meeting, Microsoft Teams, and Google meet that they use to communicate with all stakeholders across-the-board. This allows seamless flow of business operations for the organization, thereby enhancing the health of the organization.

Person–Environment Fit Theory

Lewin and Edwards' Person–Environment Fit Theory was popularized in 1962 as cited in Azuazu (2018). This theory of psychological stress describes the interaction between the person and environment ($P \times E$) as the key to comprehending people's cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions such as stress as well as operational productivity level. The relevant assumptions of this theory as deemed fit for this work are as follows:

- i. A mismatch between a person and his work environment will lead to tension and uneasiness capable of hampering his level of productivity;

- ii. Worker's capabilities (skill sets) will determine the level of work pressure and how environmental press affects their output (Lewin & Edward as cited in Odu, 2018). This is the phase of the theory that strengthens the fact that the ability of a manager in a hospitality company to effectively and efficiently utilize the digital at his disposal in the workplace will influence how stressful the work will be, as well as influence communication health, operational efficiency, and customer service health in the organization.

The implication of the first assumption is that a manager with low expertise on use of digital platforms and gadgets in terms of workplace online transaction system, Workplace virtual meeting system, and workplace social media will be greatly challenged in coping with a workplace environment fortified with hi-tech digital technologies. Such individual will need to sharpen himself so as to be fit to efficiently and effectively utilize all of those technologies at his disposal to run activities, thereby enhancing organizational competitiveness in areas of communication health, operational efficiency, and customer service health, amongst others.

Adopting this theory as the major theoretical framework for this study was based on the fact that the theory is related to Work digitalization, which is the independent variable here. Another point that made this theory appropriate to be adopted as the theoretical foundation of this study is the fact that it explains and predicts that the more acquainted a manager is with digital platforms and gadgets in a digitally-inclined work environment, will determine whether the Manager will be able to achieve results and in what degree.

Research Design

The work adopted the cross-sectional explanatory survey research design. Considering the fact that the criterion variable (Organizational Competitiveness) occurred at the organizational level (macro level) rather than employees' level (micro level), the population of the study consisted of eighty-four (84) registered Airline Travel Agencies with operational presence across the six (6) states in the South-South, Nigeria. The entire population of eighty-four (84) Airline Booking Agents were used for the study without sampling. Thus, the study was a census research which entailed using the entire population. The study used questionnaire as the major instrument for data collection.

Method of Data Analysis

The presentation and analysis of data/results were done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The analysis of data was done in three main sections: descriptive analysis (univariate analysis), bivariate analysis, and multivariate analysis. The univariate analysis was done using mean and standard deviation while the bivariate analysis was done using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The Partial Correlation was used to run the multivariate analysis.

Social Media Booking and Organizational Competitiveness

- Ho₁: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and productivity of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₂: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and customer satisfaction of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.
- Ho₃: There is no significant correlation between social media booking and corporate image of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

Correlations between Social Media Booking and Organizational Competitiveness

		Social Media Booking	Productivity	Customer Satisfaction	Corporate Image
Spearman's rho	Social Media Booking	1.000	.826**	.718**	.709**
	Correlation Coefficient				

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	Total	182	182	182	182
	Correlation Coefficient	.826**	1.000	.826**	.826**
Booking Applications	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	Total	182	182	182	182
	Correlation Coefficient	.718**	.718**	1.000	.718**
Productivity	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	Total	182	182	182	182
	Correlation Coefficient	.709**	.709**	.709**	1.000
Customer Satisfaction	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	Total	182	182	182	182

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2023.

Column two of table above reveals r value of 0.826 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating social media booking and productivity. Since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{04}) which states that there is no significant correlation between social media booking and productivity of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria is rejected. This implies that there is a strong positive significant correlation between social media booking and productivity of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

Column three of table above reveals r value 0.718 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating social media booking and customer satisfaction. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, it is factually right to reject the null hypothesis (H_{05}) which states that there is no significant correlation between social media booking and customer satisfaction of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria. This implies that there is a strong positive significant correlation between social media booking and customer satisfaction of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

Column four of table above indicates r value of 0.709 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating social media booking and corporate image. In line with the decision rule, since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{06}) which states that there is no significant correlation between social media booking and corporate image of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria is rejected. This implies that there is a strong positive significant correlation between social media booking and corporate image of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

These results showed that social media booking has a strong positive significant correlation with organizational competitiveness of Airline Booking Agencies in the South-South, Nigeria.

Social Media Booking and Organizational Competitiveness

The test of hypotheses four, five and six revealed that there is a strong positive significant relationship between social media booking and organizational competitiveness of airline booking agencies in South-South, Nigeria. This finding connotes that making it possible for customers to do their seats reservation, payments, hotel booking, room reservation, and other related flight booking activities on the socials, promote the productivity, customer satisfaction and corporate image of an organization such as an airline booking agency. In this age of technology advancement, many airline booking agencies are going socials in such a way that some of them are adding some flight booking functionalities on their social media handles. This finding corroborates with the assertion of Trevor (2021) that with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) now allowing travelers to use cell phones

during flights, opportunities abound for mobile and social media payments. Airlines seek to expand the use of mobile devices beyond check-in and ticket booking to include other payments like in-flight duty-free purchases, food and drink, onward travel, and seat upgrades.

Although 65% of study respondents were concerned about the likelihood of fraud using airline mobile payments, consumers are hesitant to act hastily. While some hotel brands have experimented with social reservations on social media platforms, 29% of airlines want to provide tickets and other payment options through social media. Some airlines have already made it possible for customers to make payments using social media outlets. Airlines are aware that social media payments have a lot of room to develop and have a direct impact on marketing initiatives. This in turn is a competitive advantage for airline booking agencies that have increased online presence in a way that customers can book flights and get on with other associated activities.

Despite the advantages of using social media as a payment method, it is still a new sales channel that few firms have sufficient experience with (William, 2022). As additional social payment trends develop, travel businesses will also face difficulties including the requirement for sizable social media management teams, the development of new processing systems, and the assessment of the ROI of their initiatives. We anticipate that these trends will become increasingly popular very soon given the opportunity that social payments offer travel brands. Check the payment choices when booking your next flight; you might be able to do it using Facebook or Twitter!

Twitter should be your go-to social media channel if you're seeking to fix a problem quickly (Sid, 2022). The majority of American airlines now have social media response teams that constantly watch their Twitter accounts. These teams don't consist of a bunch of lone computer geeks who only know how to use funny one-liners and phone numbers for customer support. They typically consist of incredibly well-connected representatives who are plugged into all departments of the business in order to determine how to effectively assist you with your problem.

Many airlines now have Facebook and Instagram pages, but those platforms are not the best for customer service issues because Facebook posts are sometimes too numerous and Instagram is too image-focused for airlines to respond fast. Twitter is the best place to go if you need assistance with a pressing matter, such as the laptop you left on a flight that is departing for a city in an hour. The majority of airlines use the same account for all of their Twitter activity, including customer support concerns, discount offers, and videos of singing flight attendants. If you already follow that airline on Twitter, it will save you a ton of time if you ever need to tweet them about an issue. Instead of wasting time tweeting you to follow them so you can continue your conversation privately, as you will have to do if the airline asks you to relay sensitive information like your reservation confirmation number, the airline will be able to directly message (DM) you with a response right away. With such heartwarming treatment from an airline operator to their customers via a social media platform, there is high level of assurance of continuous patronage. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for booking, hotel reservation, car reservation, etc. does not only enhance quality customer service alongside customer time saving and customer complaints resolution, but also productivity and corporate image.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis, the study concludes that the utilizing of digital office tools such as booking applications, social media booking and virtual payment systems to carry out operations around an airline booking agency are viable ways to achieve productivity, customer satisfaction and corporate image, among others. Trending work digitalization in an airline booking agency characterized by the use of digital office tools such as booking applications, social media booking, and virtual payment systems promotes organizational competitiveness in terms of productivity, customer satisfaction and corporate image. Airline booking agencies that fail to initiate the use of these digital tools and optimize them, face the risk of ineffectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Managements of airline booking agencies in South-South, Nigeria should increase their social media presence through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc, as this will enhance competitiveness.
2. Airline booking agencies should encourage their customers to book flights and carry out other related activities via their social media handles, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and productivity.
3. Airline booking agencies should all enable the use of banking applications for customers to carry out virtual payment, hence promoting customer satisfaction.

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