

## ONLINE MARKETING SERVICES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION OF YOUTHS OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study examined the relationship between online marketing services and socio-economic emancipation of youths of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between online marketing services and measures of socio-economic emancipation such as self-employment and relative financial stability. The study adopted the Explanatory Cross-Sectional Survey Research Design. The accessible population of the study consisted of 360 youths who are owners and Managers of tech start-ups (businesses that provide data processing/analytics services, online marketing and subscription services) across nine states in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. No further sampling was done. After validation by the supervisors and two other experts in Management, Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Out of 360 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 315 copies were retrieved. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 was used for the analyses. Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis; Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used for the bivariate analysis, while the multivariate analysis was done using Partial Correlation. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. It was found that online marketing services are significantly and positively correlated with socio-economic emancipation of youths of Niger Delta in terms of self-employment and relative financial stability. The study concluded that engaging in datapreneurship activities such as online marketing services optimizes socio-economic emancipation of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Among other things, it was recommended that the Government of Nigeria should provide periodic hands-on digital training for Niger Delta youths in order to equip them with prerequisite online marketing skills to harness internet marketing potentials.*

**Keywords: Online Marketing Services, Socio-Economic Emancipation Of Youths, Relative Financial Stability, And Self-Employment.**

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Niger Delta youths and indeed, every Nigerian youth is directly or indirectly faced with socio-economic challenges given the harsh economic times. Government, communities, and individuals have devised various means of gaining socio-economic emancipation in order to live and enjoy the quality of life they desire. However, the dream of many youths in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria including graduates has often been halted by limiting socio-economic realities. Socio-economic emancipation refers to an ideal state where most members of the society enjoy economic freedom characterized by self-employment and relative financial stability. This work operationalizes socio-economic emancipation in terms of self-employment and relative financial stability. Self-employment refers to a socio-economic situation where an individual runs a personal business or combines two or more start-ups as an economic means rather than being employed by others. (Yusuf, 2014). In spite of how little the income may be, self-employment is now seen as a panacea to the growing unemployment ravaging Nigeria generally and the Niger Delta Region in particular. Innovative young minds scan, identify and harness entrepreneurial activities that do not only guarantee their livelihood but, also employ others. Many Niger Delta youths have created business ventures and diversified their tentacles by providing one service or the other rather than waiting for white collar jobs. Self-employed individuals are to some extent socio-economically emancipated because they are actively

engaged in the value chain and stand better chances of bettering their economic lots than the unemployed or even some of those who are employed (Otamiri *et al.*, 2018).

Another issue bedeviling the socio-economic emancipation of the Niger Delta Region appears to be the issue of individual financial instability. Relative financial stability (relative financial security) refers to the extent to which an individual can make money legitimately and is sure of meeting basic financial needs as a result of a steady source of income. Relative financial stability is one of the strongest indicators of socio-economic emancipation. It refers to the ability of an individual has a secured economic means and is therefore sure that they can meet basic needs and save some money for the future (Odu, 2018). It is the direct opposite of living from hand to mouth. Niger Deltans who by virtue of digital skills have multiple sources of income are sure of generating steady income given the knowledge-economy we live in could be walking towards relative financial stability. It is no longer news that Niger Deltans have been hopelessly impoverished after years of environmental degradation, oil exploitation, and carelessness on the part of Government. Youths in a financially secured society, enjoy steady income generation, sufficient emergency fund balance, ample savings, and multiple sources of income. The bitter reality is that many Niger Deltans living within the region appear to be living from hand to mouth. With the current economic realities in Nigeria generally and Niger Delta in particular, majority of the citizens and residents appear to be facing serious socio-economic insecurity (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

In the wake of multifaceted entrepreneurial opportunities in the online space, many people including youths are embracing online marketing services. At the same time, many more are yet to realize the datapreneurship opportunities that online marketing services offers. Online marketing services as an aspect of datapreneurship refers to the innovative practice of reaching customers and selling goods and services through the aid of dedicated websites and social media platforms on commission or personal sales basis (Chux-Nyeche, 2020; Otamiri *et al.*, 2018). Online marketing services entail affiliate marketing and the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. to reach potential customers. Affiliate marketing is simply a paid advertising model where a company sells its products through individuals or companies ("affiliates") who market the company's product for a commission. In this instance, the website promoting the affiliate link is the affiliate marketer, who makes a profit anytime its marketing leads to a sale. The companies that own the products being promoted by the affiliate marketers are called affiliate merchants. Nigerians and indeed, Niger Deltans who have large network(s) of online followers are signing up as affiliate marketers for companies and they get a commission for every successful sale from their campaign. Datapreneurs who are into affiliate marketing, devote their time to advertising products and services and following up potential customers to make purchases. In addition to affiliate marketing, some digital entrepreneurs use Business WhatsApp, Facebook, and other social media platforms to market products/services. Some others get paid by working as WhatsApp or Facebook Page Administrators for companies and brands. Rather than just using their data to chat without economic returns, online marketers create and manage wealth online through data usage.

The issue of socio-economic limitation in Nigeria has resulted in many theoretical and empirical investigations. In spite of the myriad of research findings and recommendations made by scholars and Government efforts over the years, the average indigene or resident of Niger Delta still lives with unimaginable socio-economic uncertainties (Jandaghi *et al.*, 2011; Inyang & Abraham, 2013; Kozachenko & Bukolova, 2017; Ogwe, 2019; Otamiri & Major, 2021). Generally, these studies revealed that factors such as entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship development/skills acquisitions, and creation of employment opportunities enhance socio-economic conditions of people within and outside Nigeria. However, none of these studies was able to unravel the empirical relationship between data processing services and socio-economic emancipation within the context of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The role of online marketing services in optimizing socio-economic emancipation of youths still remains an area with minimal research attention. This study sought to fill this knowledge gap.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The youths of the Niger Delta face significant socio-economic challenges, largely driven by high unemployment and poverty rates. Despite the region's oil wealth, limited access to quality education and skills development has left many young people without the tools needed to secure well-paying jobs. As industries like agriculture and oil fail to absorb the growing youth population, unemployment remains rampant, leaving many to struggle with poverty and dependence on unsustainable livelihoods(National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Worsening this situation is the failure of many youths to take advantage of online entrepreneurship opportunities, such as online marketing. With the global shift towards digital platforms, embracing e-commerce and digital marketing could provide viable income streams. However, the lack of awareness, training, and infrastructure in the region has led to missed opportunities, deepening their economic hardships and keeping them further behind in a rapidly evolving global economy.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

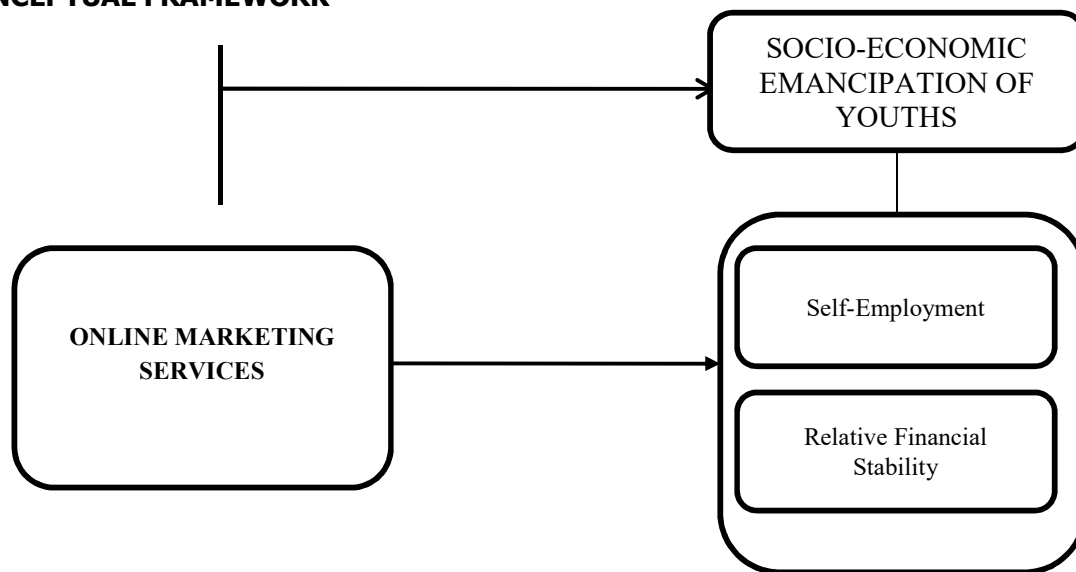


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework for Online Marketing Services and Socio-Economic Emancipation  
Source: Chux-Nyeche (2020); Otamiri *et al.* (2018).

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to determine the relationship between online marketing services and socio-economic emancipation of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain the relationship between online marketing services and self-employment of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.
2. ascertain the relationship between online marketing services and financial stability of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

From the above objectives, the research hypotheses below were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant correlation between onlinemarketing services and self-employment of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant correlation between online services and relative financial stability of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

### Schumpeter's Creative Destruction Theory

The study was anchored on Schumpeter's Creative Destruction Theory propounded in 1976. Schumpeter, an Austrian-American economist, developed the concept of creative destruction from the works of Karl Marx. In the view of Schumpeter, capitalism is a constantly changing, dynamic, and innovative process in which a set of new ideas and processes challenge the existing ones (the status quo) and change existing paradigms. He calls this imbalance *creative destruction* based on the idea that innovation leads to chaos. This chaos can be the result of obsolete or not very innovative products, companies that close, workers becoming irrelevant... These apparently negative outcomes are, he believes, necessary to bring along new solutions and improvements in quality of life, followed by an even greater economic growth (Schumpeter, 1976 in You matter World, 2020). Schumpeter looks at entrepreneurship as innovation and not imitation (Bula, 2012). The basic assumptions of Schumpeter's Creative Destruction as follows:

- i) An entrepreneur as an innovator is an economic and social leader who does not care much about economic profits and but his singular joy is being an innovator and being a server to his society.
- ii) The entrepreneur moves the economy out of the static equilibrium. The entrepreneur moves the economic system out of the static equilibrium by creating new products or production methods thereby rendering others obsolete. This is the process of "creative destruction"(creating uncertainty) which Schumpeter saw as the driving force behind economic development (Schumpeter, 1976 in Bula, 2012).
- iii) The entrepreneur is not (necessarily) the one who invents new combinations but the one who identifies how these new combinations can be applied in production. This line of reasoning implies that a business owner is considered an entrepreneur only if he is carrying out new combinations."

The justification of the adoption of Schumpeter's Creative Destruction Theory is hinged on its related to emerging entrepreneurship practices such as online marketing services and how such innovative practices help to improve the socio-economic condition of innovative individuals who embrace them. The theory identifies and describes the entrepreneurs as innovative individuals who are capable of creating value by servicing people's through internet technologically facilitated services (virtual and real). Schumpeter's entrepreneur is an individual who is able to provide solutions and meet the needs of people in an internet driven society. Online marketing service providers (datapreneurs) can get socio-economically emancipated (become self-employed and enjoy relative financial stability amidst harsh socio-economic realities) by providing data processing services such as research data analysis, anti-plagiarism service, and cybercafé services (Otamiri *et al.*, 2018; Odu, 2018). Thus, innovative youths in Niger Delta can gain freedom from the unemployment net and financial insecurity by creatively embarking on entrepreneurial online marketing services. The increasing complication of modern economies causes the necessity a higher rate of economic interaction. The generation of innovation no longer depends on individual personalities but involves the cooperation of many different actors.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### The Concept of Online Marketing Services

Online marketing is a business effort to inform, converse, promote and sell products and services over the Internet. Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME's) are indispensable drivers of the economic growth and development of most countries, especially developing countries (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2020). The rate of competition among businesses nowadays is very high and small and Medium-Sized enterprises are also not free from the intensity of this competition. Gakii and Maina (2019) opine that in a competitive environment, organizations and businesses have been able to raise their performance in terms of sales turnover, sales volume, market share and profitability using online marketing strategies. Wise use of the online marketing strategies can take

a business to unprecedented levels of success. Currently, a number of SMEs have embraced online marketing and it would be important to know its impact in terms of customer feedback, customer service, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and sales growth which translates to profitability. Online marketing remains an alternative for the SMEs to reach the market to provide awareness about their goods and services. SMEs need to know the digital techniques to use and how to maximize them towards better competitiveness (Omar *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, the cost of accessing internet via data usage is costly such that some small business owners cannot afford them which unarguably affect their use of online marketing (Clarisha, 2023).

### **The Concept of Socio-Economic Emancipation of Youths**

Socio-economic emancipation can be defined as a situation where members of a society enjoy relative peace and safety and are sure of continuous access to economic livelihood. The term socio-economic emancipation is formed by means of combining two subcategories "economic security" and "social security". Mohan (2016) refers socio-economic emancipation as constituting measures that enhance social capabilities, ensure economic security and enable the vulnerable sections of the population to survive. He emphasizes that programmes for enhancing education, health and nutrition levels of the population, provision of statutory social security measures to workers in the organized sector, provision of measures to enhance the income levels of the poor through asset and employment programmes and social assistance programmes, constitute the elements of socio-economic emancipation. Self-employment and relative financial stability as measures of socio-economic emancipation of youths are discussed below:

**Self-Employment:** Nchelem and Jacob (2019) asserted that self-employment is when a person is posed to own, manage and run a business for his or her own benefits while enhancing societal needs satisfaction. A self-employed person is an individual who earns a living by working for themselves, not as an employee of someone else and not as an owner (shareholder) of a corporation (Murray, 2020). We define self-employment as a situation where an individual has a business of his own from which he earns a living. It is the state of working for oneself rather than an employer. A self-employed individual does not work for a specific employer who pays them a consistent salary or wage. Self-employed individuals, or independent contractors, earn income by contracting with a trade or business directly. In most cases, the employer will not withhold taxes, so, this becomes the responsibility of the self-employed individual (Dollarhide, 2020). Self-employed persons may be involved in a variety of occupations, but generally are highly skilled at a particular kind of work.

**Relative Financial Stability:** Financial security means different things to different people. But for the purpose of this study, we shall be looking viewing it in the life of an individual. Thus, it refers to the extent to which members of society have access to money and are sure of continually generating income over a period of time. In the view of Cautero (2019) financial security means having enough money to fund your lifestyle, as well as work toward your financial goals. Financial security refers to the peace of mind you feel when you aren't worried about your income being enough to cover your expenses. It also means that you have enough money saved to cover emergencies and your future financial goals (Jacob, 2019). When one is financially secure, one's stress levels goes down, leaving one free to focus on other issues. It is viewed as the condition of having the resources to support a standard of living now and in the foreseeable future. While financial security can be very tied to the numbers such as how much one earns, how much one spends and how much one has saved, it also takes into account how one feels about one's financial situation.

### **METHOD**

The study adopted the explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. The accessible population of the study consisted of 360 youths who are owners and managers of tech start-ups (businesses that provide data processing/analytics services) across nine states in the Niger Delta

Region of Nigeria. Census method was applied. After validation by the supervisors and two other experts in Management, Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Out of 360 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 315 copies were retrieved. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 was used for the analyses. Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis; Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used for the bivariate analysis, while the multivariate analysis was done using Partial Correlation. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

### Online Marketing Services and Socio-Economic Emancipation

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant correlation between online marketing services and self-employment of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant correlation between online marketing services and relative financial stability of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

**Table 1: Correlations between Online Marketing Services and Socio-Economic Emancipation**

			Online Marketing	Self-Employment	Relative Financial Stability
			1.000	.615**	.634**
Spearman's rho	Online Marketing	Correlation Coefficient			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		Total	315	315	315
	Self-Employment	Correlation Coefficient	.615**	1.000	.578**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		Total	315	315	315
Relative Financial Stability	Correlation Coefficient	.634**	.587**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
	Total	315	315	315	

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2024.

Column two of table 1 above reveals r value of 0.615 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating online marketing services and self-employment. Since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho<sub>1</sub>) which states that there is no significant correlation between online marketing services and self-employment of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria was rejected. This implies that online marketing has a strong positive relationship with self-employment of young entrepreneurs of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Column four of table 1 above indicates r value of 0.634 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating online marketing services and relative financial stability. In line with the decision rule, since the significance value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho<sub>6</sub>) which states that there is no significant correlation between online marketing services and relative financial stability of youths of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria was rejected. This implies that online marketing has a strong positive relationship with relative financial stability of SME entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. These results

show that engagement in online market has a significant positive relationship with socio-economic emancipation of SME entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Online Marketing Services and Self-Employment**

The test of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between online marketing services and self-employment of youths of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This finding means that getting into online marketing with a strong business mindset has the ability to create job and constitute a means of employment for the entrepreneur. These findings resonate with the revelation of Jacob (2019) that the business aspect of advertising other people's business over the social media can strongly empower a person financially. Online marketing has become a goldmine to this who know the routes. Some still look at it as something unrealistic. Those who are really cashing out on this venture through the various opportunities in it have gained self-employment and other possible things. In a way, online marketing can root up entrepreneurship opportunities for a person. This implies that online marketing platforms such as social media, e-commerce websites, and digital marketplaces offer a low barrier to entry for young entrepreneurs. They can start small businesses with minimal upfront costs. Online marketing tools and resources provide youths with the means to promote their products or services without the need for expensive traditional advertising. Youths can create e-commerce stores to sell locally made products, handicrafts, artwork, fashion items, agro-products, and more to a global audience, thereby generating self-employment and enabling career advancement and relative financial stability, among other things.

Similarly, Hord (2017) found that the creation of job and employment and as well as skill development are resultant effects of online marketing venture. In job creation and employment, online marketing opens doors for youths to work as freelancers in various fields such as social media management, content writing, graphic design, and web development. Youths can establish digital marketing agencies or start-up companies that offer online marketing services to businesses within and outside the region. They can offer virtual assistance services or consultancy in online marketing strategies to businesses looking to establish an online presence. (Ewilly *et al.*, 2014). By utilizing online platforms, youths become proficient in using technology, which is essential in today's digital economy.

### **Online Marketing Services and Relative Financial Stability**

The test of hypothesis two revealed that online marketing services are significantly and positively correlated with relative financial stability of youths of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This implies that the more youths embrace entrepreneurship opportunities in online marketing, the more financially stable they become. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Otamiriet *al.* (2018) that infopreneurship reduces youth restiveness by serving as a steady source of income. Internet marketing is a tool used by businesses and organizations to advertise their goods and services. They use e-payment methods, social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.), and specialized websites to reach consumers and clients. Because they are concentrating on their tasks, they are less likely to become involved in socially insecure activities like drug misuse, rape, juvenile restlessness, or kidnapping. Online marketing experts make money by serving as affiliate marketers (Ewilly *et al.*, 2014; Hord, 2017). The goal of online marketing is to provide businesses with guidance on how to carve out a niche for themselves in the online market. Participating in internet marketing platforms is one way for people to increase their income and patronage, which contributes to their financial security. Increasing sales and making money is guaranteed with marketing. Businesses do not just exist for leisure on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and other platforms. Their goal is to create a worldwide footprint in order to boost their local and international clientele. Businesses and individuals who utilize Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram for their advertising generate more revenue than those who don't engage in these

activities. When such behaviors are consistently engaged in, practitioners experience financial security since they have access to funds and may be certain that they will continue to make money over time (Gobbo, 2017). This might take the shape of multiple streams of income, a healthy emergency fund reserve, or consistent income generation (Emerole&Edeoga, 2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on evidence from the results and discussion of findings, it was concluded that online marketing services bring about socio-economic emancipation of young entrepreneurs of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It was also concluded that online marketing services such as affiliate marketing, WhatsApp-mediated marketing, and Facebook marketing creates employment opportunity and can serve as the main means of livelihood for young entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta Region. It also concluded that engaging in online marketing services increases the financial stability of youths thereby helping them to rise above socio-economic limitations. The study also concluded that Niger Delta youths who fail to embrace and explore the entrepreneurship opportunities inherent in online marketing services may continue to find themselves struggling with endless search for white-collar jobs and financial hopelessness.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Youths who carry out online marketing services should endeavor to imbibe and build reasonable saving culture as this will contribute to their financial stability.
2. Niger Delta youths should invest in the acquisition of online marketing skills to enhance their chances of harnessing the opportunities that abound in the internet environment.

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