
INCLINATION TOWARDS E-MARKETING ADOPTION AMONG SERVICE SMES IN KWARA STATE: AN INVESTIGATION OF INTER-CITY TRANSPORT SERVICE

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Abstract

As the technology environment changes rapidly and many enterprises struggle to survive the business dynamism, the advent of Electronic-Marketing (E-Marketing) offers Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) a new frontier of opportunities. This study examines the determinants of E-Marketing adoption among SMEs. The study used a survey research design in collecting the data from respondents and purposive sampling procedure to select a sample that represented the entire population. A survey of 150 self-administered questionnaires was undertaken across 20 selected small and medium inter-city transport services in Ilorin metropolis. The data was analyzed using simple percentage and correlation statistical tools. The findings revealed that 88.3% of inter-city transport service providers has no web presence, another 64.0% do not engage any form of e-marketing while only 33.3% make use of either Short Message Services (SMS) or e-mails. The study concludes that high illiteracy level and poor awareness are the major challenges to e-marketing adoption. The study recommends among others that the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) in collaboration with National Information and Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should jointly organize seminar, symposium and create awareness about the usefulness of e-marketing among members.

Keywords: E-marketing, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Inter-city transport, Poverty reduction, Service-based enterprises

1.0 Introduction

In most communities, a large fraction of the working population travels to place of work daily. While some travel for recreation, some for shopping and other for social activities. Transportation is hence an integral part of the functioning of any society and advances in transportation have made possible changes in the way people live and how society is organized (Obasan, 2014). Furthermore, UNWTO (2013) states that transportation is considered around the world to be an integral sector to modern business and economic development. Having realized this, governments at federal and state levels have attempted to develop the sector. On the other hand, transport service providers have in recent years attempted to leverage on advancement in technology to explore the ever expanding opportunities through the e-presence. On this premise, Nart & Kanibir (2012) argue that modern business environment relies more on electronic marketing (E-Marketing) and transportation as the duo facilitates the pace of globalization.

Unarguably, one can say that the recent development in technology has offered Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) an affordable means of capturing and processing the information generated from customers through electronic transactions. In fact, studies have revealed that e-marketing if well adopted, can reduce transaction cost, increase customer satisfaction and create opportunity to enjoy competitive advantage among

SMEs (Lee & Cheung, 2004; Kohn & Husig, 2006). Porter (2001) argues that marketers are able to identify and satisfy customer wants and preferences through constant monitoring of website visitations, electronic-mails, online surveys and chat rooms conducted on the Internet. He (Porter) further states that in service businesses, where close contact, easy access to customer are needed, adoption of e-marketing will create an opportunity to establish customer loyalty. In a similar view, Elliot & Boshoff (2007) states that e-marketing presents a virtual marketplace within which firms buy, sell, distribute and provide sales support for their products and services. Comparatively, E-marketing is one of the rapidly growing forms of digital marketing in many developed economies to developing ones (Dlodlo & Dhurup, 2013). This growth could be attributed to infrastructural development and cheap access to online platforms. The above notwithstanding, recent scholars have attempted to link how e-marketing adoption could promote small and medium transport service providers in developing economies (Zaied, 2012; Aworemi & Ajayi, 2013).

In the early 20th century in Nigeria, rail system was the mostly used means of intercity movement (Onakomaiye & Eferam, 1977). Since the collapse of rail system in Nigeria, inter-city transport has assumed a wider dimension and has become the most utilized way of intercity movement of people, goods and services. As the population increases, more social facilities are required to satisfy the expanding social and business activities. Road transport infrastructure as a major traffic corridor constitutes an important element of providing accessibility to different land uses in the urban areas and proper functioning of human settlement to the extent that human settlements and urban development generally are incapable of proper functioning without it (Aderamo, 2003, cited in Oni, 2007). However, in many developing nations, Nigeria inclusive, the expanding opportunities in the transport service have not been fully tapped as inadequate provision of transport infrastructure and services provides a basis for explaining the incidence of poverty across various Nigerian communities in both urban and rural areas (Oni & Okanlawon, 2011). In view of the above, it can be established that if transport sector is consciously developed, it can help many developing nation reduce poverty through the provision of employment opportunities for the teaming unemployed youth.

In an attempt to explore the various opportunities in transport business, SMEs in the industry have in recent time devised a medium through which they could explore the opportunity of expanded social activities. On this premise, many tend towards adopting e-marketing facilities to create customer loyalty and increase patronage, since evidences have shown that the choice of motor parks by travelers is facilitated by customer friendliness, former experience, time consciousness and condition of vehicles (Oni, 2007). In the opinion of Zhao (2005), SMEs in developed and developing economies can develop custom-made products and services that meet the precise needs of consumers at a cheaper cost through e-marketing platforms. Despite the growing consciousness and enthusiasm for electronic marketing and the ever increasing potentials of transport businesses in Nigeria, only a few SMEs are exploiting its substantial benefits (Awa et al., 2010). Furthermore, only a few studies have linked transport SMEs to e-marketing. This study, hence, attempts to fill the gap by identify and measure the factors responsible for poor adoption of E-marketing and its potential benefits to transport service operators.

The focus of this study is to examine the extent of inclination of small and medium intercity transport service providers to e-marketing. Specifically, this is investigated with a focus on two sub-objectives:

- i. To examine the impact of e-marketing on small and medium transport service in Ilorin metropolis.
- ii. To investigate the factors influencing the adoption of e-marketing among small and medium transport services providers in Ilorin metropolis.

Literature Review

The development of SMEs is seen as accelerating the achievement of wider socio-economic objectives, including job creation, youth empowerment and poverty alleviation. In Nigeria, many of the government policies on economic development in recent years are channeled towards the provision of a formidable institutional framework for establishing and sustaining viable Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as a strategy for sustainable poverty reduction among her citizenry, (Sokoto & Abdullahi, 2013). Nigerian economy, just like many economies in the West Africa sub-region is characterized with large number of small businesses that are operating in both rural and urban areas. However, SMEs in Nigeria have underperformed despite the fact that the sector constitutes more than 90% of Nigerian businesses, hence, a need for conscious development of the sector (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014). Nath & Kanibir (2012) state that the pressure of global competition forces all types of business, regardless of their size, to explore new market and new ways of carrying out business operations. This is as well applicable to transportation businesses. Small and medium transport services especially in developed economies today make use of different electronics devices to promote, market and reach their numerous customers.

The SMEs Sector, its Nature and Economic Importance

It is important to recognize that definitions of SMEs changes over time; and it depends to a large extent on industry and country's level of development. For instance, what was large scale in the 1970s may be regarded as small-scale today in Nigeria economy, also, what is regarded as small-scale business in one country may be relatively large in another industry or country (Owualah, 1999). The most useful generic or economic definition of small-scale business is perhaps one which might emphasize those characteristics, small-scale firms expected to make their performance and problems different from those of large firms (EL-Gohary, 2012). Accordingly, three main characteristics are discernible: a small business is one that has relatively small market share; its owners in personalized manner manages the business enterprise not necessarily through a formalized management structure in large corporations and finally it is independent as it does not form part of large corporation which can provide a financial umbrella and hence, the owners/managers are free outside control in taking their principal decisions (El-Gohary, 2009).

The definition of SMEs in Nigeria is based on three major criteria via operating cost, turnover and employees capacity. Accordingly, a small scale enterprise is such whose total operating cost excluding cost of land but including working capital is above N1 million but not exceeding N10 million (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1995). For the purpose of this study, A small-scale business is such with total asset excluding land but

including working capital above N1 million but not exceeding N10 million with a labour size of not exceeding 15 workers, while medium scale are those with total asset not more than N100 million (National Council of Industry, 1996).

The importance of SMEs in modern economic system cannot be over-emphasized. Ashrafi & Murtaza (2008) states that in the New Zealand SMEs accounts for more than 95% of all businesses and generates about 60% of total employment. In a similar way, more than 50% of all the employment comes from firms with fewer than 500 employees in the USA (Baldwin, Jarmin & Tang, 2001). In the UK, SMEs employ 67 % of the workforce and in the enlarged European Union of 25 countries; some 23 million SMEs provide around 75 million jobs and represent 95% of all enterprises (EU Report, 2005).

Estimates from the World Bank indicate that SMEs have contributed over 55% percent of GDP in OECD countries and contributed between 60 to 70 percent of total workforce in middle-income and low income countries (Ashrafi & Murtaza, 2008). In many developing economies, policies and other intervention programmes have been initiated in recent years to facilitate the growth of SMEs sector. The focus of recent studies on SMEs development therefore, centers on capacity development (Owualah, 1999, Etuk, Etuk & Baghebo, 2014); employment or job creation (Kadiri, 2012; Eme, 2014); promotion of even growth (Safiriyu & Njogo, 2012); efficiency and innovation (Little, Mazumdar & Page 1987); poverty alleviation (Oba & Onuoha, 2013; Ojo, 2006); large-scale enterprises servicing (Lange, Ottens & Taylor, 2000) and socio-political and equity balance (Olu-Aderounmu, 2011) among others.

Nature and Roles of E-marketing in Service-Based Enterprises

The recent globalization movement coupled with advances in communication technologies creates new opportunities for all types of businesses and this has resulted to intense competition. Studies have proved that the most leading feature of modern markets is effective communication i.e. the medium through which market players announces themselves to the target audience in a more effective way (Menon & Varadarajan, 1992). In an effort to achieve cost-effective communication medium, SMEs around the world tend to adopt various means of information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT involves the use of computer hardware, software and telecommunication devices to store, manipulate, convert, protect, send and receive data from one party to another (Olifer & Olifer, 2006).

The application of ICT for marketing activities through an electronic interface (internet) is the whole idea of e-marketing. According to El-Gohary (2010), E-Marketing is viewed as a new philosophy and a modern business practice involved with the marketing of goods, services, information and ideas via the Internet and other electronic means. The E-Marketing Association defines e-marketing as “the use of electronic data and applications for planning and executing the conception, distribution, promotion and pricing of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives” (El-Gohary, 2010:4). Burgess & Bothma (2007:6) further defines e-marketing as a “business's efforts to inform, converse, promote and sell products and services over the Internet to prospective

consumers and buyers”.

The service related businesses have in last decade witnessed a robust transformation by hiring a large proportion of work force across the globe United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013). Among the prominent service based industries are tourism and hospitality, transportation (air, land rail and road), telecommunications, IT industry, education, banking and insurance among others who are today the key employers of working population globally. The continuous searches for cost reduction, competitive advantage and growth have necessitated some of these industries to adopt e-marketing for their business operations (Law & Jogaratnam, 2005).

Studies have revealed various benefits that account for e-marketing adoption among SMEs such as lower cost of operation, unlimited boundary, better and easier customer relation, innovation and competitiveness (Dibrell, 2008; El-Gohary, 2012; Obasan, 2014). In support of the above, Sajuyigbe & Alabi (2012) also agreed that ICT play essential roles in the growth of SMEs by cutting costs through improved internal process and product, fast communication with customers and potential buyers, and better promotion of products through online presence. In addition, Apulu & Latham (2011) argued that with e-marketing, modern organizations can exchange real-time information and build closer relationships with their customers, suppliers, business partners or associate. Despite the aforementioned benefits, several constraints have incapacitated SMEs' adoption of e-marketing in Nigeria.

Barriers to E-marketing Adoption among Small and Medium Transport Services

Typical characteristics common to SMEs all over the world include but not limited to: few employees, small asset base and low skilled labour (Monika, 2013). These, to a large extent determine what they can produce and the degree of innovation they can adopt. In a more comprehensive way, Law & Jogaratnam (2005); Apulu & Latham (2009); observed that skill deficiency, economic constraints, lack of infrastructure, lack of funds, confidentiality and security concerns, low level of internet penetration and bandwidth, inappropriate ICT policies among others were the major factors affecting ICT and e-marketing adoption among SMEs in many developing nations. In the same vein, Ghobarkhloo, Hong, Sabouri & Zulkifli (2012) emphasized that limited financial resource is the most significant determinant of e-marketing adoption among small businesses as they have little capital base.

Not distant from the above, Thong, Yap & Raman (1996) state that there is tendency for SMEs to engage generalists rather than experts who specialize on IT, reliance on short-term planning, informal and dynamic strategies and decision-making process, plus an unwillingness to develop and use a standard operating procedures. In a related study on ICT adoption among SMEs in developing economies, Irefer, Abdul-Azeez & Tijani (2012), Sajuyigbe & Alabi (2012) proved that all factors that affect ICT adoption likewise affect e-marketing adoption among SMEs. The proof was built on the premise that ICT is the channel through which e-marketing becomes functional. Irefer et al. (2012) argued that the major factors that affect the adoption of ICT are infrastructure, cost of purchasing computer equipment, government support and management support respectively, while Sajuyigbe & Alabi (2012) asserted that

inadequate financial resources, poor electricity supply, inadequate computer skill personnel and weak government support are the major factors that hinder adoption of ICT by SMEs, hence e-marketing adoption.

3.0 Methodology

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study stated in its null form are as written below:

- E-marketing adoption does not in any way contribute to performance of small and medium intercity transport services in Ilorin metropolis.
- E-marketing adoption is not significantly influenced by financial position, literacy level, management competency or owners' perception.

Design

Survey questionnaire was used to conduct this research. It was argued that dealing with the whole population in a research as this is practically impossible; hence, a sample is essential Babson (1997). This design was adopted as it offers opportunity to determine the relationship between the variables examined. A survey of 150 self-administered questionnaires was undertaken across 20 selected small and medium inter-state transport service providers in Ilorin metropolis.

The questionnaire was designed to generate responses on questions relating to core variables via E-Marketing, its importance and factors determining its adoption among *small and medium inter-city transport service providers in the study area*. The questions were based on a 5-point Likert attitude scaling ranging from 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Undecided, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree. Out of a total of 150 questionnaires distributed, 128 i.e. (85.3%) were correctly filled and returned by the respondents. The data was analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16, using simple percentage, t-test and correlation analyses. To ensure the reliability of the data sourced, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test was utilized and result shows 0.692 which means that the instrument used in gathering the data was reliable and therefore exhibited internal consistency among items (questions) measuring each construct in the questionnaire.

Data Presentation

Table 1 shows the literacy level of the respondents. It is revealed that seventy-four (74) i.e. 57.8%, hold SSCE or Technical Education Certificate, thirty-four (34) i.e. 26.6% hold OND/NCE, while twenty (20) i.e. 15.6% hold HND/B.Sc. This indicates that more than half of the intercity transport operators in the study area hold only School certificate and its equivalents.

Table 1 Literacy Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SSCE/TC	74	57.8	57.8	57.8
OND/NCE	34	26.6	26.6	84.4
HND/B.Sc.	20	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 shows the E-marketing tools adopted by the respondents. Twenty-one (21) i.e. 16.4% adopt Short Message Service (SMS), thirteen (13) i.e. 10.2% telephoning, twelve (12) i.e. 9.4% adopts E-mail, while eighty-two (82) i.e. 64.0% engaged none. This indicates that close to two-third of transport operators are ICT ignorant and does not engage any form of E-marketing.

Table 2 E Marketing Adopted

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SMS	20	15.6	15.6	15.6
Web	15	11.7	11.7	27.3
E-mail	11	8.6	8.6	35.9
Non	82	64.1	64.1	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 3 shows the barriers to E-marketing adoption among transport service providers. From the table, thirty-one (31) i.e. 24.2% agreed on finance, eighteen (18) i.e. 14.1% agreed on poor IT personnel, fifteen (15) i.e. 11.7% agreed on inadequate infrastructure, fifty-eight (58) i.e. 45.3% were ignorant, while six (6) i.e. 4.7% agreed on poor policy. This indicates that inadequate finance and operators' ignorance are the major barriers against the adoption of E-marketing.

Table 3 Barriers to E marketing Adoption

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Finance	31	24.2	24.2	24.2
Infrastructure	15	11.7	11.7	35.9
Ignorance	76	59.4	59.4	95.3
Poor policy	6	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	128	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Test of Hypothesis I (using Correlation analysis)

In the result of the Correlation test below, correlation between e-marketing and customers' loyalty equals 0.698, and this is highly significant. The same holds for e-marketing and cost reduction = 0.577 and, cost reduction and customer loyalty = 0.472. These correlation coefficients are highly significant. These show that the relationship between the variables are strongly positive correlated, hence, we reject the null hypothesis I.

Table 4 Correlations Coefficient

		E-marketing	Customer Loyalty	Cost Reduction
E-marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	.698**	.577**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	128	128	128
Customer Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.698**	1	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.014
	N	128	128	128
Cost Reduction	Pearson Correlation	.577**	.472**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.014	
	N	128	128	128

Test of Hypothesis II (using t-test)

Table 5 shows the result of the hypothesis using t-test. It can be deduced that the average response is above 4.06 and standard error of the mean is 0.000 i.e. not significant. Five-point Likert-style rating scale of 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Agree and 1 = strongly Agree were used to scale the responses.

Table 5 One-Sample Test

	$\alpha = 0.05$					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Finance	210.216	128	.000	4.270	4.12	4.42
Literacy level	263.230	128	.000	4.216	4.21	4.32
Mgt Competence	648.716	128	.000	4.325	4.51	4.14
Owners perception	635.110	128	.000	4.115	4.17	4.06
Infrastructure	416.846	128	.000	4.230	4.08	4.38

The result of the table above shows that p-value is 0.000 while the critical value, $\alpha = 0.05$. This means that there is a significant relationship as probability value (p-value) of 0.000 is less than the critical value of $\alpha = 0.05$. With this result, the null hypothesis II is rejected meaning that financial position, literacy level of employees, management incompetence, owners' perception and infrastructure significantly influence the adoption of e-marketing.

4.0 Discussion of Research Findings

From this investigation, a number of findings have been revealed. Findings from literature reviewed established that E-marketing is essential to modern businesses as it offers the opportunity for cost reduction, higher customer satisfaction and ultimately better competitive advantage among others. As lofty as this seems, the result from the

empirical findings revealed that 64% of the transport operators in the study area are ICT ignorant and does not engage any form of E-marketing, while the remaining 37% make use of SMS, telephoning and e-mails. However, only 8.6% use the e-mails. The study further revealed factors that hinder the adoption of E-marketing among small and medium transport service providers. Prominent among these are inadequate finance, high illiteracy level, management incompetence, inadequate infrastructure among others.

The result shows that poor ICT knowledge constitutes close to 60% of non-adoption of E-marketing among small and medium transport operators. This means small and medium transport service providers in the study area are not fully aware about what e-marketing is and how it can support their operations. This was further proved by the result of the hypothesis tested. Since p-value of 0.000 for two-tailed test is less than α -value of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that E-marketing adoption is significantly influenced by financial position, literacy level, management competency and owners' perception. This supports the findings of Dibrell, Davis & Craig (2008); El-Nawawy (1999) who have argued that problem of e-marketing adoption centers around poor awareness and education, limited resources, market size, e-commerce infrastructure, management perception, telecommunications infrastructure, legal system and government issues.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This empirical study emphasized a number of benefits derivable from E-Marketing which affirms that E-marketing through various Information and Communication Technology is germane to the performance and growth of small and medium Transport service in any economy. These benefits cut across customers' loyalty, increased customers' satisfaction, higher customers' patronage and lower cost of operation among others. These in essence are the sources of and if properly managed could create competitive advantage among operators.

With reference to the result of hypothesis tested, it can be concluded that certain factors negate the adoption of e-marketing among small and medium transport businesses. These are financial position, ICT literacy level, management competency and owners' perception. This agrees with the findings of Olise et al. (2014) who found out that SMEs profile (such as capital base, management competencies and employees' capacity among others) influences the adoption of ICT among SMEs. Based on the findings of this study, the following are therefore recommended, that:

- Managers and owners of small and medium transport businesses must consciously develop interest for E-marketing as this will assist their operations and thereby lessening the running cost;
- The National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) should jointly organize seminar, symposium and create awareness for members about e-marketing options;
- The government, through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Bank of Industry (BOI) and Federal Ministry of Transportation provide financial incentive programmes in form of soft loan, grants, interest free loans etc. to small and medium transport service operators as this will offset their financial inadequacies.

- iv. The government, though National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and the Federal Ministry of Information and Technology should also take a conscious effort at reviewing national policy on ICT such that will embrace E-business, E-commerce, E-marketing and internet marketing among SMEs; and
- v. The Government should continuously focus on improving infrastructural facilities such that are necessary for the operations and support for e-marketing among SMEs.

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