EFFICACY OF ONLINE VENDOR PLATFORMS IN ENHANCING MICRO-BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract
The study examined efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance of students in universities. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. Two research questions guided the study, and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Population of study comprised 150 students in 2024/2025 academic session at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI) who engage in micro-businesses using online platforms. A structured questionnaire that was validated by two experts from Technology Education and one of the experts, from Measurement and Evaluation unit, AE_FUNAI was used. Trial testing method was used to determine reliability, which yielded 0.89, and 0.75, as being reliable. Data collection was done using online data collection approach (Google form) and analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions, and hypotheses testing using t-test analysis. The result revealed that online vendor platforms have positive efficacy in enhancing students' micro-business performance as it encourages students to acquire more customers and make profits. Hence, researchers recommend among others that; educational institutions should provide training programmes focused on digital marketing, e-commerce strategies, and data analytics for student entrepreneurs to enhance performance of micro -businesses in universities.

Keywords: Online Vendor, Online Platforms, Micro-Businesses, Micro-Business Performance

Introduction
The rise of digital technology and online platforms has transformed the landscape of entrepreneurship, particularly for micro-business operators. Online vendor platforms have emerged as vital tools that could enable young entrepreneurs to navigate the challenges of starting and managing businesses. These platforms could enhance micro-business performances, as it focuses on various dimensions such as market accessibility, operational efficiency, customer acquisition, and revenue growth. Meanwhile, students often juggle with academic responsibilities and entrepreneurial ambitions **(**Nwalo, Nnajiofor and Chukwuedo, 2024), hence, online vendor platforms could provide a flexible and cost-effective solution that could allow students reach a wider audience without the burden of traditional storefronts. In that, the platforms could facilitate targeted marketing and data-driven decision-making, empowering online vendors to optimize their offerings and connect more effectively with consumers.

Nevertheless**,** online vendor can be seen as an individual or business owner who sells products or services primarily through an online platform or website. They utilize e-commerce platforms, websites, or online marketplaces to list, market, and sell products or services to customers. These platforms can range from vendor owned branded website to third-party platforms like Amazon, eBay, Etsy, etc. Therefore, customers can browse, select, and purchase products or services remotely using a computer, tablet, or mobile device. (Fan, Ning and Deng, 2020). Additionally, online vendor maintains digital inventory or catalog of products or services, which are displayed and marketed through online platforms. It implies that customers are allowed to view detailed product information, images, reviews, and pricing without physically visiting a product center or stores. Online vendors typically provide secure payment processing options, such as credit/debit cards, digital wallets, or electronic fund transfers, which could facilitate online transaction processes. Furthermore, after online purchase, the vendor is responsible for packaging, shipping, and delivering products to customer's location. They offer digital products or services to be accessed or delivered electronically. Such online vendors often provide customer support channels, such as email, chat, or phone number to address inquiries, handle returns, and provide post-purchase assistance.

Meanwhile, there are advantages of being an online vendor which include a wider geographic reach, lower overhead costs, ability to offer a broader product selection, and convenience of 24/7 availability of products for customers. That is to say, it involves effective online marketing, secure payment processing, and efficient logistics for positive customer experience (Laudon and Traver, 2021). It is clear that online stores usually support shoppers to use "search" features to find specific models, brands or items. In online vendor platforms, consumers, customers, agents, distributors, suppliers and service providers are allowed to connect online with corporate systems for business transactions to be completed electronically in real-time (Makhitha and Ngobeni, 2021).

Consequently, online vendor platforms are digital marketplaces that facilitate buying and selling of goods and services over the internet (Chaffey, 2019). It is a type of e-commerce where product or service information are displayed online by multiple third parties. These platforms connect vendors (sellers) and customers (buyers) and provide a space for transactions to occur with added features to enhance user experience. This indicates that online marketplaces are primarily a type of multichannel e-commerce that streamline the production and purchase processes. For online platforms, consumer transactions are processed by marketplace operators and delivered to the participating retailers or wholesalers. These types of websites allow users to register and sell single items or many items for a post-selling fee (Laudon and Traver, 2021). This implies that the operators of these platforms adapt business models and have unique ability to obtain and use economic decision-making on personal data, transaction data, social data and location data to enhance their micro- businesses. Therefore, academics have described online marketplaces as a new economic actor, or even as a new type of market economy (Kumar and Singh, 2019). In view of the above, the students can use online marketplace to enhance their micro-businesses. Similarly, the feedback received by vendors could allow them in online marketplaces to grow effectiveness as economic intermediaries. Online marketplaces give rise to platform capitalism and easy navigation for users to browse products, filters searches, and compares items. (Abdullah and Ward, 2022). For example, features like wish lists, shopping carts, and user reviews enhance shopping experience. Likewise, the secure payment gateways facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers, thereby supporting various payment methods, including credit/debit cards, digital wallets, and bank transfers (Fan *et al*., 2020). Additionally, many benefits were associated to online vendor platforms such as accessibility, cost-effective, diverse product range, and convenience among others. These platforms have transformed the retail landscape by providing a convenient and efficient way to connect with customers, creating opportunities for vendors and consumers to grow in e-commerce (Sarah, 2019).

In addition, entrepreneurship is a multifaceted concept that refers to the process of starting and running a new business or enterprise, often with the aim of turning an idea or innovation into a successful commercial venture (Nwalo, Uneke and Aja, 2026). It implies that entrepreneurship can take many forms, including creation of small businesses, startups, social enterprises and innovative initiatives. It is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that plays significant roles in driving economic development, technological advancement, and societal progress (Thuy, 2022). An entrepreneur creates and/or invests in one or more businesses, bearing the risks and enjoys the rewards. They identify and capitalize on new opportunities, development of novel products or services, apply unique business model and identify unmet market need to enhance micro- businesses.

Generally, Micro-business refers to small businesses that has a limited number of employees and have a relatively low level of revenue or turnover. Micro-businesses are typically defined by some characteristics such as limited resources, small size, quick decision making among others. Micro-businesses generally have relatively low annual revenue or turnover, often less than $1 million or local currency equivalent (Fan *et al*., 2020). This shows that the exact revenue threshold can vary by country or region, but it is typically set at a level that distinguishes micro-businesses from small, medium, or large enterprises. Micro-businesses are often sole proprietorships, partnerships, or very small limited liability companies (LLCs). This type of business tends to have a simple and informal structure, with minimal hierarchical layers and limited bureaucracy. Micro-businesses typically operate in localized geographical area, serving a specific community or niche market needs. Their product or service offering is limited and focuses on specialized area of expertise. Meanwhile, micro-businesses often have limited access to finances, relying mainly on personal savings, family and friends, or small-scale loans. Hence, it is important to improve the performance of students in microbusinesses.

Business performance encompasses a set of processes and analytical tools to ensure that an organization's activities and output are aligned with organizational goals. Business success can be achieved if small and medium-sized enterprises achieve good performance (Mahmoudi, Javed and Saad, 2022). Performance is a general term that describes organizational actions or activities in each period. It is a version of specific measures that measure a business success in generating profits. An organizational performance is a formal effort made by an organization to effectively and efficiently evaluate organizational activities and output over a particular time (Smith, 2020). This includes a financial performance which is a description of financial condition, analyzed using financial analytic tools to reflect good or bad financial state in organizational performance over a particular time (Mahmoudi, *et al,* 2022). At its core, micro-business performance refers to the ability of a small enterprise to effectively execute its operations, meet customer needs, and achieve its strategic objectives. This can encompass a range of metrics, including revenue growth, profitability, customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and entrepreneur's own sense of fulfillment (Kumar and Singh, 2019). It aims at measuring and optimizing the overall performance of an organization, specific departments, individual employees, or processes in managing particular tasks.

Consequently, one of the efficacies of online vendor platforms is acquisition of new customers. Customer acquisition refers to the process of bringing new customers or clients to a particular business or services. It involves strategies and tactics aimed at increasing the number of new customers attracted to a business within a specific period. It is typically achieved when a customer purchases a product or subscribes to a service at first. The central goal is to gain new customers or clients and retain them for a particular business. It involves various marketing and sales initiatives designed to convert potential customers into paying clients (Gupta and Bhatia, 2020). Thus, it is crucial for growth and profitability, as acquiring new customers can significantly enhance a company's market presence and revenue generation (Kumar and Singh, 2019). Meanwhile, customer acquisition is the responsibility of everyone in the company, starting from sales representatives to customer services. It utilizes strategies to optimize businesses performance. In support of the above statement, Mckinsey and Company (2021) opined that customer acquisition helps in revenue growth, market share expansion, brand awareness. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) stated that adequate knowledge and implementation of effective strategies for businesses, can attract new customers, enhance revenue, strengthen market position, balance acquisition efforts with customer retention for long-term success. Hence, using online vendor platforms in digital marketing, content marketing, referral programs, promotions and discounts, networking and partnerships could enhance micro-business performance. Therefore, the researchers investigated the efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance of students in universities.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance of students in universities. Specifically, the study investigated the:

1. Efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing customers’ acquisition for micro-businesses.
2. Efficacy of online vendors platforms in enhancing brand visibility of micro-businesses.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no statistically significance difference in mean responses of male and female students on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing customers’ acquisition for micro-businesses.

2. There is no statistically significance difference in mean responses of male and female students on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing brand visibility of micro-businesses.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to ascertain the efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance of students in universities. Nworgu (2015) defined descriptive survey design as a research method used to gather information about the status, characteristics, or opinions of a specific population or group. It aims to describe and summarize the data collected without manipulating any variables. The researchers utilized survey research design because the study used questionnaires, combining both quantitative and qualitative elements to provide a comprehensive understanding of efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performances. It described and summarized data collected without manipulating any variables. The use of descriptive design is extremely effective in collecting information from many respondents within a relatively short time.

Meanwhile, the study was carried out in Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State. Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, is a Federal University established by Federal Government on February 26th, 2011 with the goal of expanding and improving access to quality tertiary education in some parts of Nigeria. The university is geographically located on latitude 060 8.29' N, Longitude 080 8.627'E and Altitude 55m and situated in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, which is about 25 kilometers from Abakaliki, the State capital. It is made up of about 11 faculties, 45 academic departments and 62 programmes and about 25, 000 students and 3, 730 staff as at the time of this study. The university is known as the home of soaring eagle which offers students excellent learning opportunities. It has up-to-date research facilities, highly qualified and motivated workforce, multimedia classrooms, modern libraries and well-equipped laboratories for practical sessions. It aspires to be a world class university recognized for delivery of intellectuals, research and excellent teaching and learning experience and produces graduates with relevant and employability skills to soar in a chosen career. This area is chosen for research because most students in this area engage in online micro-businesses.

In addition**,** population of this study comprised 150 respondents, purposively sampled from students in 2024/2025 academic session at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI) who engage in micro-businesses using online platforms. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured online questionnaire tagged "Online Vendor Platforms on Micro-Business Performance (OVPMBP)". The structured questionnaire consisted of two sections, section A and section B. Section A comprised biography of respondents and section B consisted of 14 item statements on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance. A five (5) - point internal scale item was developed using a decision rule which consisted of elements; SA-Strongly Agree (5), A- Agree (4), UN- Undecided (3), D- Disagree (2), SD- Strongly Disagree (1).

Additionally, the instrument was validated by two experts from Technology Education and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation in AE_FUNAI. Trial testing method and Cronbach alpha analysis was used to determine reliability which yielded 0.89, and 0.75, with the overall reliability of 0.85. All alpha values exceeded the minimum benchmark of 0.85, indicating that the items for each construct were reliably measuring the intended variables. Data collection was done using online questionnaire (Google Forms) and shared electronically to students in AE FUNAI who engage in online micro- businesses. The online format was chosen to ensure convenience, cost-effectiveness, and wider accessibility, allowing respondents to participate using their smartphones, laptops, or other internet-enabled devices. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with an introductory note explaining the purpose of the study, after which informed consent was obtained. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly observed, with respondents assured that the information provided would be used solely for academic purposes. 150 online questionnaires were successfully received and recorded. This participation indicates strong willingness among respondents to contribute to the study, thereby improving the reliability of the data obtained. Out of the total respondents, 72 (48%) were males and 78 (52%) were females, reflecting a fairly balanced gender representation, with a slight dominance of female participants. This gender distribution provides an inclusive perspective, making the findings more representative of both male and female experiences.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics of mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics of t-Test was employed to test hypotheses. These analytical methods were selected to determine influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. If the calculated t-value (t-cal) is greater than or equal to the critical t-value (t-crit) and the significance level (p-value) is less than or equal to 0.05, reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Conversely, if the t-cal is less than t-crit or the p-value is greater than 0.05, fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0), meaning no significant difference exists between the groups.

Results

Table 1: *Mean and standard deviation on Customer Acquisition for micro-businesses*

S/N	Item Statement	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remarks
1.	I consistently attract new online customers for my business.	4.31	0.93	Agreed
2.	Access to online platforms increased customers for my business.	3.75	0.80	Agreed
3.	I grow my business from word-of-mouth and referrals online.	4.31	0.60	Agreed
4.	I frequently acquire new customers through social media marketing.	3.91	1.10	Agreed
5.	Promotional offers and discounts done online attracted first-time customers.	3.75	0.90	Agreed
6.	Tapping into online new markets has successfully expanded my customer base.	3.65	0.60	Agreed
7.	Targeting and understanding consumer preference improved my customers’ reaction online.	3.81	1.05	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.93**	**0.85**	Agreed

The analysis of data in table 1 showed that all respondents agreed on the items. The items have mean scores of 4.31, 3.75, 4.31, 3.91, 3.75, 3.65 and 3.81 with their standard deviations respectively for item 1-7. The grand mean of 3.93 with standard deviation of 0.85 which is above the mean bench mark indicates that students (vendors) acquire customers for their businesses through online platforms. It indicates that online vendor platforms enhanced customers’ acquisition for micro- businesses of students in universities. This can improve marketing strategies such as visibility, targeted marketing, social proof, promotions, social media engagement, personalization, user experience, and content marketing.

Hypothesis 1

Table 2: *t-test Analysis of Male and Female Respondents on Customers’ Acquisition for Micro-Businesses*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	72	3.75	0.52		
Female	78	3.88	0.68		
Independent Samples Test					
t-value	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**t-cal**	**t-crit (0.05)**	**Decision on H_0**
1.76	145	0.083	1.23	1.95	Accepted

Source: Authors Computation 2026

The mean scores of males (3.75) and female (3.88) respondents show a slight difference, with females rating higher. The t-calculated value (1.23) is less than the t-critical value (1.95) at 0.05 level of significance. Also, the p-value (0.083) is greater than 0.05, indicating no significance difference in mean responses of male and female students on the efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing customers' acquisition for micro- businesses of students in universities. This implies that online vendor platforms enhanced customers' acquisition for micro- businesses.

Table 3: *Mean and Standard Deviation on Online Vendor Platforms on Brand Visibility of Micro-Businesses.*

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
8.	Social media platforms increased visibility of my business.	3.75	0.70	Agreed
9.	More customers are now aware of my brand due to online advertising.	3.91	0.92	Agreed
10.	I receive feedback from new customers who have discovered my business online.	3.65	0.60	Agreed
11.	Online collaborations and partnerships improved My brand visibility	3.85	1.10	Agreed
12.	Online marketplaces made more people to recognize my business.	3.80	0.93	Agreed
13.	Online platforms enhanced my brand visibility to a wider audience outside my location.	4.11	0.80	Agreed
14.	Branding across digital channels strengthened my business visibility.	3.75	0.69	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.80**	**0.83**	Agreed

The analysis of data in Table 3 showed that all respondents agreed on the items. The items have mean scores of 3.75, 3.91, 3.65, 3.85, 3.80, 4.11 and 3.75 with their standard deviations respectively for item 8-14. The grand mean of 3.80 with standard deviation of 0.83 which is slightly above mean bench mark indicates that online vendor platforms help in brand visibility of micro-businesses. This shows that online vendor platforms enhanced brand visibility of micro- businesses of students in universities.

Hypotheses 2

Table 4: *t-test Analysis of Male and Female Respondents on Online Vendor Platforms on Brand Visibility of Micro- Businesses*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Male	72	3.56	0.68		
Female	78	3.64	0.69		
Independent Samples Test					
t-value	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**t-cal**	**t-crit (0.05)**	**Decision on H_0**
2.08	145	0.043	0.95	1.94	Accepted

Source: Authors Computation 2025

The mean scores of males (3.56) and females (3.64) are close, but test result shows a t-calculated value (0.95) compared with t-critical (1.94). Although the mean difference is marginal, the p-value (0.043) is less than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significance difference in mean responses of male and female students on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing brand visibility of micro- businesses of students in universities.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that online vendor platforms enhanced customers' acquisition for micro- businesses of students in universities. The respondents agreed on all items and hypothesis 1 testing showed no significance difference in mean responses of male and female students on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing customers' acquisition for micro- businesses of students in universities. It means that online vendor platforms improved customer acquisition for micro- business. This outcome is in line with the results of (Makhitha and Ngobeni, 2021) who stated that online vendors can utilize customer data to deliver personalized messages, product recommendations, and tailored marketing campaigns. This implies that individualized approach helps create a more meaningful connection with customers, enhancing their overall experience and satisfaction. Additionally, online vendor platforms are highly effective in engaging customers and building relationships through targeted communication, interactive platforms, and excellent customer service. This contributes to the success of how students run micro-businesses using online vendor platforms and evaluates the overall impact of e-commerce on students' performance in micro-businesses in universities. By understanding these dynamics, this study provides insights that can help aspiring entrepreneurs to use online platforms to maximize their business potential in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Additionally, the finding of this showed that online vendor platforms enhanced brand visibility of micro- businesses of students in universities. This is because all respondents agreed that online vendor platforms are effective in enhancing brand visibility of micro- businesses. The finding was also supported by hypothesis 2 testing which stated no statistically significance difference in mean responses male and female students on efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing brand visibility of micro- businesses of students in universities. The findings of this study conformed with the findings of Kumar and Singh (2019) who stated that digital marketing can be used by online vendors to promote sustainability practices, educate consumers about environmental benefits of products. Additionally, online vendor platforms also facilitate buying and selling of goods and services over the internet (Chaffey, 2019). It helps in building brand loyalty, raises awareness about sustainable consumption and promotes broader audience. Furthermore, online platforms allow for direct engagement with consumers, enabling vendors to gather feedback on sustainable initiatives. This interaction helps to refine practices and foster a community of environmentally conscious among consumers who are more likely to support sustainable brands.

Conclusion

The study examined efficacy of online vendor platforms in enhancing micro-business performance of students in universities. The study highlighted how these platforms significantly enhanced business operations of student entrepreneurs. By providing access to a broader market and enabling students reach diverse customer beyond their local areas. The increased accessibility, combined with reduced operational costs associated with physical storefronts, allows for greater efficiency and competitive pricing hence, making using online platforms are more effective in enhancing micro-businesses performances. The convenience of 24/7 online shopping helps student consumers in using target marketing strategies to tailor promotions based on customer data, improve engagement and sales. The study also emphasizes the importance of customer engagement, as direct interaction through feedback and social media to foster loyalty and encourage repeated purchases.

Implication of the Study

The study highlights the need for universities and colleges to incorporate e-commerce and digital marketing into school curricula to prepare students for entrepreneurial landscape by equipping them with relevant skills and knowledge in using digital technology and online platforms for entrepreneurship. The efficacy of online vendor platforms emphasizes the importance of technology adoption among student entrepreneurs. Institutions and organizations should promote access to digital tools and resources that facilitate e-commerce.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that:

1. Educational institutions should provide training programs focused on digital marketing, e-commerce strategies, and data analytics. This will equip student entrepreneurs with skills necessary to effectively utilize online vendor platforms.
2. Students should leverage data analytics tools available on online platforms to gain insights into customer behavior and preferences. This will help them tailor their offerings and marketing strategies, leading to improved sales and customer satisfaction.

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