

ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF CYBERPRENEURSHIP ON YOUTH SELF-RELIANCE

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ABSTRACT

This work examined the relationship between Cyberpreneurship and Self-Reliance of Youths in Rivers State. The study concluded that that cyberpreneurship enhances self-reliance of youths at all level in Rivers State. Devoted engagement of youths in cyberpreneurial activities such as online application services, internet-mediated marketing, and online registration services brings about corresponding improvements in their self-reliance. It is therefore advised that youths should take seriously, amongst other things, their engagement in cyberpreneurial activities so as to be financially dependent to a great extent. Amidst other things, the study recommended that youths and other individuals should equip themselves with trending requisite skills that enhance the utilization of the internet in marketing of products and services.

Keywords: Cyberpreneurship, Self-Reliance, Youths, Online Application, Internet Mediated

INTRODUCTION

The advent of internet-mediated communication and collaboration platforms such as web browsers, e-mail, facebook, whatsapp, youtube, etc. has not only facilitated business communication, it has also led to the emergence of novel entrepreneurial opportunities. The online environment today has really become a fertile ground for young people to initiate and execute their entrepreneurial tendencies. Like in other parts of the world, we now see young Rivers people using the cyberspace (internet) to conduct their businesses. These innovative business services that are conducted using internet resources is what we refer to as cyberpreneurship. It encompasses all innovative business ventures that leverages on the power of the internet for effective delivery. Given the fact that cyberpreneurship is still a new trend in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular, the researcher operationalizes cyberpreneurship in terms of Online Application Services. The use of the internet as a major channel or platform of information search and communication, exposes both corporate and personal computer systems to internet insecurity. Smart digitalized minds especially in urban parts of Rivers State like Port Harcourt, Omoku, Bonny, etc. have emerged to help clients secure their website as well as their computer systems while online. They help clients install online antivirus applications, firewalls, and other online data security management applications. Within and around Port Harcourt metropolis, there are computer programmers, computer engineers, and website developers providing internet security services for clients. However, there are a few computer technicians offering this kind of service when compared with popular cyberpreneurial business like online registration services.

Online registration services are often provided by cybercafés both in rural and urban areas of Rivers State. Their work is mainly to help clients register and complete various forms online such as N-Power, WAEC and NECO registration, UTME, Nigeria Police Force Application, etc. Within Rivers State, there are emerging mobile online registration service centres within and around campus such Rivers State University, Federal College of Education Omoku, University of Port Harcourt, etc. Some of them are housed in large umbrellas and they help students to register courses and make payments online. They make their money through service charges. They also help them to complete their registrations online on commercial bases. However, most of those running these cybercafés are not Rivers State indigenes (Jiwa, Lavelle, & Rose, 2014).

There seems to be a problem of high youth dependence and unemployment in Rivers State. By the third quarter of 2018, Rivers State was ranked among the 5 states with highest unemployment

rate in the country with 1,673,991 unemployment (36.4%) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The largest part of this unemployed workforce is the youth (Ogwe, 2018). Given the fact that most Rivers youths are yet to embrace internet-mediated entrepreneurship (Otamiri & Ogwe, 2019), many of them seem to be financially dependent. This can be seen the high level of unemployment in the state which seems to have exposed many of them to social vices such as kidnapping, political thuggery, and other social crimes in their quest to make ends meet.

Another issue that necessitated this study is that, the relationship between cyberpreneurship and youths' self-employment in Rivers State seem not to have received sufficient research attention. Meanwhile, they seem to constitute burning issues in our economy. There is need therefore, to close this knowledge gap.

Concept of Cyberpreneurship

When the revolution of the internet emerged in the early 1990s, more entrepreneurs take risks to shift their traditional business platforms, from static offline business premises to online virtual business spaces. Since then, new terms like cyberpreneurs, technopreneurs and netpreneurs are used to represent entrepreneurs who conduct businesses in the online environment or cyberspace. The word cyber is a prefix that means computer or computer network, as in cyberspace, the electronic medium in which online communication takes place. A combining form meaning computer, computer network, or virtual reality, used in the formation of compound words (cybertalk; cyberart; cyberspace) while cyberspace is imaginary, intangible, virtual-reality realm where (in general) computer-communications and simulations and (in particular) internet activity takes place (Simpeh, (2011). The term cyberspace was first coined by William Gibson in his 1982 short story *Burning Chrome* to refer to a computer generated virtual reality. However, the term became popular in 1984, after its use in Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* Egnantial (2007). Etymologically, cyberspace is a compound word and the origin of the first term cyber comes from the Greek word *kybernetes*, which means pilot, governor, and ruler. The root cyber is also related to *cyborg*, a term that describes a human-machine synthesis resulted by connecting the human body in advanced high-tech devices. The electronic equivalent of human psyche (the mindspace where thinking and dreaming occur), cyberspace is the domain where objects are neither physical nor representations of the physical world, but are made up entirely of data manipulation and information. Ejaz (2018) define cyberpreneur as a person who carries out business activity with the help of internet and computer that includes but not limited to website, e-commerce platform, blog, affiliate marketing, selling advertising space, selling e-books or other software, freelancing etc. A business activity is commonly known as entrepreneurship and a business activity in the cyberspace is known as cyberpreneurship or online entrepreneurship. In other words it is a sort of dot com lifestyle as told by John Chow. It is very attractive indeed because online business doesn't require lot of infrastructure and expenditure as it is in conventional business. As more and more people are getting connected to the internet worldwide so the future of cyberpreneurship is extremely bright for intending online entrepreneur or cyberpreneur. Carrier and Raymond (2011) defined cyberpreneur as one who creates a firm that is founded upon electronic commerce. Cyberpreneurs, like entrepreneurs, is someone who is not only creative and innovative, but he or she is someone with a vision and a high desire to succeed, and not forgetting strong determination in consistently spotting and exploiting new opportunities (Jiwa, Lavelle & Rose, 2013). Chen and Yen (2014) describe the term cyberpreneur as a neologism and portmanteau derived from the words cyber and entrepreneur and defined cyberpreneur as an entrepreneur who owns an online business that makes money selling software, hardware or advertising space on the internet through his website or blog. One of the biggest advantages of cyberpreneurship is that it enables someone builds a real company without fancy office space, mahogany furniture and slick corporate attire.

Concept of self-reliance

For economic development to be sustained, the emphasis must be on the liberation of the energies of the people (youths) on a self-reliant path that puts a heavy emphasis on the full use of local human and material resources to meet peculiar problems aimed at satisfying the basic needs of the economy (Debrah, 2013). Khotikna (2014) defined self-reliance as the ability to think and act without the help or influence of others, the ability to decide what you should be or do. It is one of the bases of effective youth's development in Nigeria as it is in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. There is no gainsaying that the concept of self-reliance is positioned centrally within the discourse of community development and is linked to similar terminologies like self-help, mutual-help, indigenous participation and rural development. Self-reliance encourages the need for people (youths) to improve their living conditions using home initiatives and resources at their disposal. This concept is being given great attention and considered as a new blueprint for youth's development. Anyanwu (2010) posits that the widespread acceptance of this concept in the development planning of most African countries has the tendency to give greater stimulus and cohesiveness to youth's development in these countries.

The concept of self-reliance hinges on collective and individual feelings or the urge for self-preservation through the indebt use of available human and material resources to meet individual and group needs, (Dalla-Valle, 2012). Self-reliance is synonymous with self-sufficiency. It means doing things for ourselves rather than having things done for us. Self-reliance is the personal initiative in the ability and effort to identify, harness and manage effectively and efficiently the personal and collective resources, human or natural in the immediate surroundings in order to uplift one's or a people's life quality, standard and condition of existence (Olayiwola, 2012). Olayiwola (2012) noted that self-reliance cautions against dependency-syndrome on the government as the monopoly of development. Self-reliance and its kin-terms accentuates people's primary role as principal agents of development and self-determination both on the individual and collective levels. Self-reliance refers to the sole dependence of individual capabilities to improve life. It is the ability of an individual to rely on him/herself in order to accomplish a specific task and progress in it (Nwokoye, 2011). Acquisition of employable skills and benefits that accrues from it, engender self-actualization and job satisfaction which on the long run can lead to sustainable development.

Theoretical Review

This work is based on Schumpeter (1999): the discovery and opportunity theory of entrepreneurship and Knight's Approach.

Schumpeter (1999): The discovery and opportunity theory of entrepreneurship (equilibrium destruction theory)

Schumpeter looks at entrepreneurship as innovation and not imitation (Bula, 2012). The basic assumptions of Schumpeter's discovery and opportunity theory are 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 and services 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 that usher in opportunity for self-reliance (Schumpeter, 1949 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."

Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship is relevant to explaining and predicting the relationship between cyberpreneurship and youth self-reliance. The theory identifies and describes the cyberpreneurship as an innovative person who is capable of creating value by servicing people's needs not just primarily to make profit rather for the joy of solving peoples' problem in a given system and time. Schumpeter's cyberpreneur is an individual who is able to provide solutions and meet the needs of people in an information and communication technology (ICT) driven society. Thus, innovative youths in Rivers state can be self-employed, financial independence and resourcefulness by creatively creating ICT-solution businesses. This is achievable not by being too money-conscious, rather than by rendering satisfactory cybercafé business services, providing reliable Online Application Services internet mediated marketing and online registration services.

Knight's Approach

Knight (1971) in Bula (2012) views an entrepreneur in terms of Risk, Uncertainty and Profit. Knight recognized the distinction between risk and uncertainty. The latter is uninsurable since it relates to unique events, e.g., a shift in consumer taste and services. To Knight, the main function of the entrepreneur is to assume the uncertainty related to these events, thereby shielding all other stakeholders against it. i.e., the entrepreneur exercises judgment over these unique situations, the uncertainty in the economy, and functions as an insurance agent. Knight elaborated his theory in the paper; "Profits and Entrepreneurial Functions" from 1942 (Knight, 1942, 1971). Knight explicitly argues that entrepreneurs are owners of companies, i.e., residual claimants, and thus receive profits. Another assumption of Knight's theory of entrepreneurship is that "in order to earn a positive profit, the entrepreneur carries out three tasks: (1) he initiates useful changes or innovations; (2) he adapts to changes in the economic environment; and (3) he assumes the consequences of uncertainty related to the company (Bula, 2012). This theory is relevant in interpreting and extrapolating the relationship between cyberpreneurship and self-reliance in Rivers State. The theory makes us to understand that entrepreneurs whether cyberpreneurship-oriented or not are risk takers who engage in uncertain business enterprise. Cyberpreneurship-based businesses though lucrative are fraught with uncertainty such as losses, changes in customer taste and services, and other market uncertainties. To succeed in maximizing positive profit, the Cyberpreneur must acquire the prerequisite cyberpreneurship skills and resources as well remain resolute and innovative as they grapple with the uncertainties of the information and knowledge society. Young cyberpreneurs must be ready to adapt their skills and operational capacity to changes in entrepreneurship devices, software and window versions, changes and trends in IT consumers' needs and preferences to remain economically self-reliance.

Empirical Review

Carol and Emeka (2009) investigated entrepreneurship education for self-reliance in the two government owned universities in Anambra State. A survey research design was used to carry out the research. Sample used comprised four hundred and ten students and was guided by three research questions. A 29 item questionnaire was developed to obtain relevant data for the study. Of the 450 questionnaires distributed, 410 (91%) was returned and used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed among other things that the entrepreneurship studies have not really equipped the undergraduates with the skills and competencies needed for self-reliance, management of universities did not also encourage the students by failing to provide finances, materials and facilities needed by the students to demonstrate their practical knowledge.

Muogbo and John-Akamelu (2014) examined impact of entrepreneurial skill in reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria with reference to ABC Transport Company in Anambra State. The broad objectives of this study is to examine the possibly ways of eradicating unemployment through the introduction of entrepreneurial skills. The study is a descriptive survey design. Questionnaire items were distributed to 160 respondents to gather factual information about the topic. Their responses were tested using appropriate statistic tools like the simple percentage and the chisquare method.

The study found that there are roles entrepreneurial skills and businesses play in youth employment in Nigeria through entrepreneurial development, youths in Anambra state can be given basic training on how best to establish and grow business enterprise in local communities within the state.

Olatunji, Adunola, Musibau, David, and Abimbola (2015) examined the impact of youth cyberpreneurship in Nation Building in Yaba Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos state. The main objective of this study was to investigate the role of youth cyberpreneurs in nation building. A total of 40 upcoming cyberpreneurial firms were randomly selected from a cross section of a population of firms located across Yaba Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos state. Participants were chosen through a simple random sampling technique. The responses to the questionnaires were complemented with personal interviews of some of the owners and managers of entrepreneurial firms. Participant's responses were analyzed with the use of simple percentages and are presented on pie and bar charts. This study finds that there is a significant relationship between competition, growth and development of cyberpreneurial firms in Nigeria and that youth cyberpreneurs if properly supported have a huge impact on the growth of national economy of Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that cyberpreneurship enhances self-reliance of youths at all levels in Rivers State. Devoted engagement of youths in cyberpreneurial activities such as online application services, internet-mediated marketing, and online registration services brings about corresponding improvements in their self-reliance. It is therefore advised that youths should take seriously, amongst other things, their engagement in cyberpreneurial activities so as to be financially dependent to a great extent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Youths in Rivers State and beyond should utilize the self-employment opportunities embedded in online application services in order to have a good financial standing..
2. Government and organizations should as a way of empowerment, train and equip youths with the necessary skills and facilities that will aid their involvement in online application services.
3. Youths who engage in online application services should be encouraged by way of honest and continuous patronage by individuals, organizations and government.
4. The benefits of internet-mediated marketing should be harnessed by youths so as to achieve a considerable level of financial freedom.
5. Youths and other individuals should equip themselves with trending requisite skills that enhance the utilization of the internet in marketing of products and services.

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