

INFLUENCE OF ONLINE MARKETING ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN RIVERS STATE

¹Prof. Sam Ababa Otamiri and ²Temelaye, Daperi Tasie
¹Faculty of Business Studies, ²Department of Office and Information Management
^{1&2}Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Email: samotamiri@gmail.com, amachreet@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The work empirically examined the significant influence of online marketing on youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine how online marketing influences measures of youth empowerment in terms of job creation, financial independence and youth restiveness reduction. The cross-sectional exploratory survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of nine hundred (900) accessible young people within the ages of eighteen (18) and forty (40) years who are presently engaged in online marketing activities such as affiliate marketing, social media adverts, foreign currency trading in the headquarters of nine (9) local government areas of Rivers State. The Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970 was used to arrive at a sample size of two hundred and sixty nine (269) respondents. Bowley's (1960) Population Appropriation Formula was used in determining the sample size for each of the nine (9) selected local government areas. Structured questionnaire was used to obtain primary data after due validation, and ascertaining the reliability of the instrument at 0.74 using Crombach alpha. SPSS Version 20.0 was used to run the analysis. Spearman's Rank Order was used for the Bivariate analysis. Out of two hundred and sixty-nine (269) copies of the validated questionnaire that were administered, the researcher was able to retrieve two hundred and forty (240) copies. The findings of the study revealed that online marketing has a strong positive influence on job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria; online marketing has a strong positive influence on financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria, and; online marketing has a very strong positive influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study concluded that online marketing positively influences youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The study recommended among other things that youths should specifically take huge advantage of social media platforms to engage customers and potential customers of their products and services, as this will help them widen their niche and gradually gain financial independence.

Key Words: Online Marketing, Youth Empowerment, Job Creation, Financial Independence, Youth Restiveness Reduction.

INTRODUCTION

The break of internet-mediated communication and collaboration platforms such as web browsers, e-mail, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Youtube, etc. have not only facilitated business communication, they have also led to the emergence of new entrepreneurial opportunities. Just like in other parts of the world, we now see young people here in Local Government Areas in Rivers State using the cyberspace (internet) to conduct their businesses. They do so in terms of online marketing, amongst others.

Actually, the social media space has become more than a socializing platform for many, especially the youths, as serious online marketing of products, services and ideas are always on the go there. The Instagram, whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. are on daily bases becoming bombarded with adverts of products, services and ideas by people from different walks of life all over the world. As conceptualized in this work, online marketing is the use of websites and as well as online social

media platforms like whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. to market goods, services, and ideas. Most of the youths use Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and other online platforms to advertise their goods, services, and ideas. Accordingly, Preiswerk (2017) stated that young entrepreneurs who have adopted the social media platforms and websites as means of marketing their services and ideas to the world are succeeding in growing their businesses. But there is a worrisome concern as many of our youths seem to be using the online environment for idle chatting rather than promoting their businesses. No wonder Amadike (2018) opined that only few entrepreneurs in this part of the world seem to have realized the power of the internet in the marketing of their goods, services and ideas.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) officially placed the age bracket of youths between 16–30 years. However, given the fact that majority of Rivers State people demonstrating youthful vigour are above 30 years, the researcher categorizes youths as functional members of the society within the age brackets of 18 and 45 years in line with the views of Mohamed (2018), Ogwe (2018), and Otamiri and Ogwe (2019). Some of the youths in this area depend on communal benefits and casual jobs. It is observed that the level at which Rivers youths create jobs for themselves appear to be lower than those of Igbo youths who are more enterprising (Okeke, 2018). There seems to be an over-dependence on white collar jobs among Rivers State youths. Given the high level of unemployment in the State coupled with low self-employment orientation, many of the Rivers State youths are not empowered, be in terms of job creation, educational development, or evidenced by way of reduction in youth restiveness. Where this work defines youth empowerment as an economic status where youths have the necessary economic resources required to meet their financial obligations. A lot of these youths have been blinded by the dream of landing that oil company job someday, and as such, refused to leverage on the power of computer and the Internet to help them rise above poverty level which will inspire them to create jobs for themselves, go for more educational development, and as well reduce restiveness.

The ability of a youth to establish a functional business which guarantees steady income for himself/herself and a lot more others in the society is what this work defined as job creation. An alarming population of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State are yet to provide jobs for themselves, let alone providing for others. Ogwe (2018) stated that the rate of unemployment amongst youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State should call for a State confab so it can be addressed sustainably. For lack of empowerment amongst them coupled with low self-employment orientation, many of the Rivers State youths are not financially independent. Some of them engage in menial jobs once in a while in a bid to make ends meet. This has resulted to their inability to have financial backups anywhere, resulting to inability to handle financial situations that come their way whether as emergency or not. This has even pushed a lot of them to go into crimes they never bargained for, all to make ends meet for them.

Following, youth restiveness reduction is another evidence of youth empowerment. A gainfully employed youth who is financially capable of footing basic bills emanating from feeding, shelter, education, clothing, etc. will hardly be found amongst idle minds who think nothing other than causing nuisance in the society. But the situation here is different as Rivers State youths in their numbers, are found in isolated corners in the different local government areas smoking and drinking strong drugs, resulting to a rise in insecurity. All these therefore call for a strong need for investigation into the influence of online marketing on youth empowerment (job creation, educational development, and youth restiveness reduction) in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, particularly.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There appears to be a shocking situation in the rise of disempowerment and impoverishment of youths in the Niger Delta region, especially in Local Government Areas in Rivers State. This is happening, in spite of Rivers State being the feeding basket of the nation - Nigeria. In explicit terms, there is a heightened situation of youth unemployment, resulting to fueled wave of youth restiveness in the area, financial impoverishment, and as well as sluggish business openings. Ogwe (2018) authenticated this when he said that the largest part of the unemployed workforce in Local Government Areas in Rivers State is the youth. Chux-Nyeche (2019) also agrees to this view when she opined that parents and the general public have expressed considerable anxiety over graduate's unemployment situation in Nigeria, especially in Local Government Areas in Rivers State.

Another issue that provoked this study is the researcher's observation that some of the youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State are not yet aware of online marketing opportunities. Otamiri and Ogwe (2019) buttressed this when they asserted that since most Rivers youths are yet to embrace internet-mediated entrepreneurship, many of them seem to be financially dependent. According to Otamiri et al. (2018), the few Rivers youths that have infopreneurial intentions are hampered by paucity of economic power (fund).

Also, another factor that triggered this study is the perceived deficiency of empirical studies on the influence of online marketing on youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State. Evidently, Otamiri et al. (2018) examined the impact of infopreneurship on socio-economic emancipation of the Niger Delta; Ogwe (2018) examined technopreneurship and youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State; Otamiri and Odu (2019) examined the influence of infopreneurship behaviour on career advancement of youths in Port Harcourt City; Chux-Nyeche and Opara (2019) investigated the impact of infopreneurship on youth restiveness in Nigeria; Abdu (2017) examined youth business empowerment and entrepreneurship skills in Doguwa Local Government of Kano State, Nigeria. Obviously, these studies did not present empirical data or evidence on how online marketing influences measures of youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State such as job creation, financial independence, and youth restiveness reduction. This implies that the influence of online marketing on youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State has not received adequate research attention. This stands as the knowledge gap for which this study seeks to fill.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

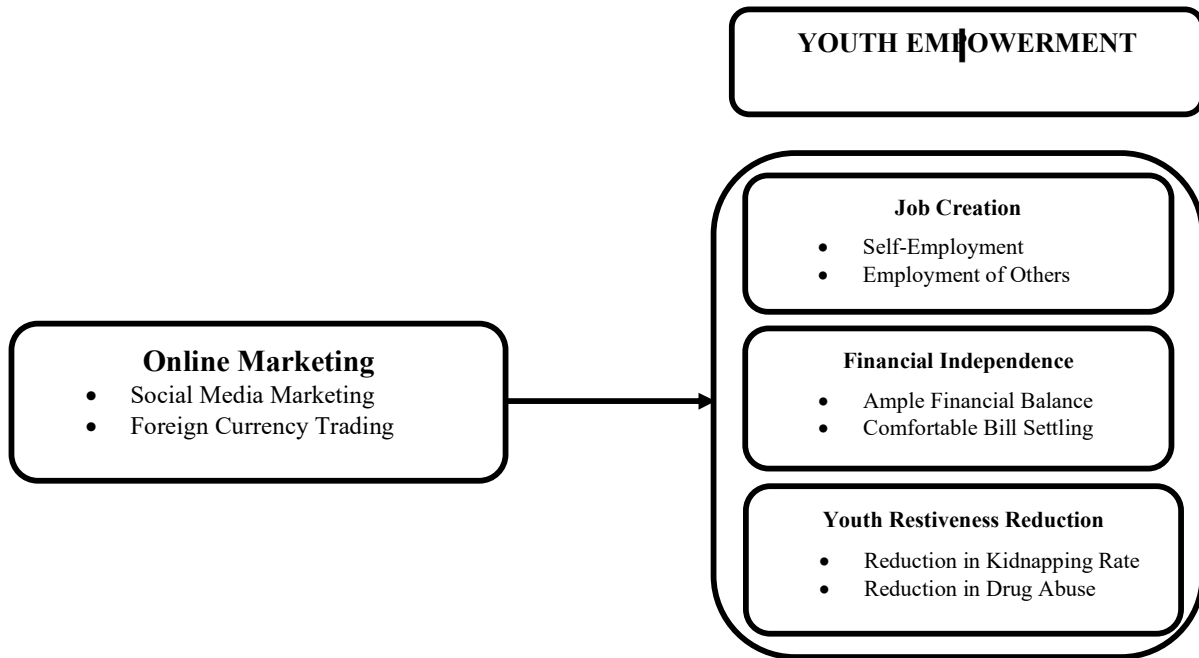


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework Showing Relationship between Online Marketing and Youth Empowerment.

Source: Researchers' Concept, 2022.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to empirically examine the significant influence of online marketing on youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include the following:

1. To determine the extent to which online marketing influences job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. To investigate the extent to which online marketing influences financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. To examine the extent to which online marketing influences youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In the line with the study objectives posed above, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- Ho₁: Online marketing does not have any significant influence on job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- Ho₂: Online marketing does not have any significant influence on financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- Ho₃: Online marketing does not have any significant influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Schumpeter (1999): The discovery and opportunity theory of entrepreneurship (Equilibrium Destruction Theory) [[[

This work is based on Schumpeter (1999): The discovery and opportunity theory of entrepreneurship. 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 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 ushers in opportunity for self-employment (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 online marketing and youth empowerment. The theory identifies and describes the online marketer as an innovative person who uses websites and as well as online social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. to market goods, services, and ideas. Thus, innovative youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State can be self-employed, employ others, be financially independent, and desist from youth restiveness by creatively creating ICT-solution businesses such as online marketing, amongst others. This is achievable, not by being too money-conscious, rather by utilizing the economic values in online marketing, amongst other things.

CONCEPT OF ONLINE MARKETING

Online marketing is the innovative practice of reaching customers and selling goods and services through the aid of dedicated websites, social media platforms, and e-payment systems. Among other online marketing tools, online marketers here make use of social media (Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), foreign currency trading, websites and electronic payment platforms to reach out to both prospective and existing customers. Goods and services are being traded here. Complaints and other customer related issues are communicated on this platform as prompt redresses are offered to customers. With this platform, one does not need to go to the physical office (building) where the business is situated. All that is expected of the customer or client as the case may be is just to have dealings with the organization through an online mechanism. The internet and its related technologies enable organizations to easily access information about customers, competition and to share innovative ideas from various sources beyond spatial and temporal boundaries (Min et al., 2012). Thus, the Internet can acts as a transformer of the traditional marketing practices into a more efficient and effective internet marketing orientation process in the online marketing environment through both generative learning and adaptive learning. Today, organizations are beginning to adopt the Internet as a mediator for their marketing activities. Online business-oriented individuals utilize online marketing platforms such as whatsapp based marketing, facebook marketing, foreign currency trading, websites and e-payment sites to influence brand relationships and brand images of their respective organizations. Kim and Ko (2011) note that "the brand's social media platforms offer venues for customers to engage in sincere and friendly communications with the brand and other users, so the brand's intended actions on the social communication scene were positively affecting relationship equity and brand equity as well". Thus social media applications and websites leverage

and facilitate relationships within customer social network activities, as they offer outline on how business activities are to be carried out. This creates effective buying and selling of goods and services across the globe through the use of internet. Online marketing has lengthened the limitations of business from national to international as clients and customers from different continents meet to transact commercial activities. Nevertheless, the globalized world has provided internet entrepreneurs the opportunity to have an online marketing platform as a business communication tool in common. By using this tool, the budget is not limited to the access to the platform but directly proportional to the scope of consumers they want to reach and therefore, the investments they are enabled to undertake (Krskova, 2017). Online marketing can manifest in diverse ways, but this work sees them in terms of social media marketing and foreign currency trading as further steps of online marketing.

CONCEPT OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The youth become so important because they are described as a big reservoir of labour and the most vibrant age bracket in human population or the marrow of the human resource of any country (Girigiri, 2017). Whether as students or not, youths are always at the forefront in the struggle against injustice, oppression, and exploitation. When the expectations of the youths are thwarted, delayed or denied, they have the tendency to be restive. No wonder Lungisa (2013) averred that when a country invests heavily on her youths, such a country stands to achieve high returns on her investment in every sector of national development or in the alternative face a gloomy future characterized with social vices, such as kidnapping, militancy, armed robbery rape etcetera as evidenced in the Niger Delta of today. The neglect of youths in the region and by extension, Nigeria by different governments (Federal, State and Local) and subsequent regimes and lack of complementary roles towards youths empowerment by private sectors is very worrisome and calls for a study of this nature.

This work defines youth empowerment as an economic status where youths have the necessary economic resources required to meet their financial obligations. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youth and adults (Vavrus & Fletcher, 2014). The Poor needs power to live a better life. Page and Czube (1999) in Nnadi et al. (2012) averred that power is often related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their own wishes. Since power is created in relationships, power and power relationships can change. Therefore, the youth may be empowered and changed. The concept of empowerment is therefore, really meaningful. Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines (Page & Czube 1999 in Nnadi et al., 2012). Narayan (2005) defined empowerment as the expansion of choice and action to shape one's life. It implies control over resources and decisions. For poor people, that freedom is severely curtailed by their noiselessness and powerlessness in relation particularly to the state and markets. There are important gender inequalities, including within the household. Since powerlessness is embedded in a culture of unequal institutional relations, an institutional definition of empowerment in the context of poverty reduction is as follows: Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Empowerment is required by those who are powerless. Additionally, youth empowerment as conceptualized in this study is measured using parameters such as job creation, financial independence, and youth restiveness reduction.

MEASURES OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Job Creation: Operationally, job creation is the ability of a youth to establish a functional business which guarantees steady income for himself and a lot more others in the society. It is also the ability of a youth to establish a business that engages him economically, pays him and empowers fellow youth(s) by hiring and paying them. An employed youth is economically and socially deemed

responsible, because he is meaningfully engaged and utilizes his time well. Adversely, unemployed youths are led to crime because of their relative deprivation and acute sense of want. The social environment of the jobless often leads to crime. Fajana (2000) conceptualizes employment generation as a situation where inhabitants who are willing and capable of working are able to find suitable paid job. The more employed youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State are, the better and more independent they become. Thus, unemployment is a nightmare for any socio-economic system.

Financial Independence: Financial independence is not only about being able to retire, but also being able to live today in terms of purchasing power and other basic needs that make life worth living (Chen & Volpe, 2011). It is operationally a situation where an individual has relatively adequate financial resources to meet some of their needs rather than depending on others. It could mean getting out of debt, or coming up with a way to move beyond living paycheck to paycheck. It can also mean figuring out how to set a goal or save for things like buying a house, ability to settle children school fees, or being entrepreneur who manages his or her finance to establish more financial investment and is important for human being of different category live a state financial independent to avoid relying on external bodies in meeting basic obligations.

Erskine et al. (2014) describe financial independence as a situation where individuals have assets that generate income (cash flow) that is at least equal to their expenses. This implies that financial independence is the position of having enough wealth to live on, without working rather engage in various business ventures. There are strategies to achieve financial independence, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. This could be financial plan and budget, so an individual know what money is coming in and going out and have a clear view of current incomes and expenses, in order to identify and choose appropriate strategies to move towards one's financial goals. Financial plan addresses every aspect of one's finances. Financial independence is examined by the percentage of one's living expenses that come from either their own earnings or savings or other income channel (Lee & Mortimer, 2009).

Youth Restiveness Reduction: Youth restiveness reduction simply refers to less incidents of youths' fighting and causing chaos in the society out of idleness. Yusuf (2014) stated that restiveness among youths has become one of the global phenomenon and those in Nigeria has been on unprecedented increase. Since last decade and more, there has been a proliferation of unrivalled violence, the cases of kidnapping, abduction and wanton destruction of valuable infrastructures as well as lives and personal properties. These are mostly the activities of youths that are socially unacceptable, triggered by enforced desire of outcome from the constituted authority. This negative development, according to Igbo and Ikpa (2013), is unfortunate and has become one of the security challenges facing man in the present society. It is commonly reported that poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education among others were responsible for this high level of insecurity orchestrated by youth restiveness in the form of bombing mosques, churches, markets and killing of innocent people. The phenomenon of insecurity has become one of the major concerns of the citizen in Nigeria and particularly. The problem bedeviling Nigerian country is insecurity demonstrated by the activities of youth and this has affected the sustainable development of the country. It obviously calls for an alarming concern.

METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional exploratory survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of young people within the ages of eighteen (18) and forty (40) years who are presently engaged in online marketing activities such as social media marketing and foreign currency trading in the headquarters of nine (9) local government areas of Rivers State (Port Harcourt City; Obio-Akpor; Ahoada East; Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni; Bonny; Degema; Opobo/Nkoro;

Emuoha; and Oyibo). The accessible population of the study was 900. The Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970 was used to arrive at a sample size of two hundred and sixty nine (269) respondents. Bowley's (1960) Population Appropriation Formula was used in determining the sample size for each of the nine (9) selected local government areas.

A structured questionnaire entitled "Online Marketing and Youths Empowerment Index (OMYEI)" was designed in five point Likert scale with the following response options: Very Great Extent (VGE) 5, Great Extent (GE) 4, Moderate Extent (ME) 3, Low Extent (LE) 2, and Not at All (NAT) 1. The instrument was validated by the supervisor and two other experts in Office and Information Management. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha with the least coefficient up to 0.70. Out of two hundred and sixty-nine (269) copies of the validated questionnaire that were administered, the researcher was able to retrieve two hundred and forty (240) copies. The data obtained from the field were analyzed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Decision Rule: Using a level of significance of 0.05 (confidence interval of 95%), when a calculated significant value is less than 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected, if otherwise, the null hypothesis is accepted. For the coefficient values, the following interpretation schemes were applied: (a) No Influence = 0, (b) Low/Weak Influence = 0.1-0.2, (c) Moderate or Relatively Strong Influence = 0.3-0.5, (d) High/Strong Influence = 0.6-0.7, (e) Very High/Very Strong Influence = 0.8-0.9, (f) Perfect Influence = 1. These interpretations have been drawn from diverse instances of their usage (Zeb-Obipi, 2007:218).

RESULTS

Ho₁: Online marketing does not have any significant influence on job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlation between Online Marketing and Job Creation

		Online MarketingJob Creation	
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	240	240
	Correlation Coefficient	.768**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	240	240

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

Table 1above shows r value of 0.768 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating online marketing and job creation. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that online marketing does not have any influence on job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis (Ha₁) is accepted. This implies that online marketing has a strong positive influence on job creation of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Ho₂: Online marketing does not have any significant influence on financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation between Online Marketing and Financial Independence

		Online Marketing	Financial Independence
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.744**
	Online Marketing		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	240	240
	Financial Independence		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	240	240

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

Table 2 above shows r value of 0.744 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating online marketing and financial independence. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which states that online marketing does not have any influence on financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a2}) is accepted. This implies that online marketing has a strong positive influence on financial independence of youths in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H_{03} : Online marketing does not have any significant influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlation between Online Marketing and Youth Restiveness Reduction

		Online Marketing	Youth Restiveness Reduction
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.855**
	Online Marketing		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	240	240
	Youth Restiveness Reduction		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	240	240

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

Table 3 above shows r value of 0.855 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to online marketing and youth restiveness reduction. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that online marketing does not have any influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a3}) is accepted. This implies that online marketing has a very strong positive influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. These results show that the involvement of youths in online marketing such as foreign currency trading and social media trading can greatly empower them in terms of job creation, financial independence and youth restiveness reduction.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The tests of hypotheses one to two revealed that online marketing has a strong positive influence on youth empowerment in terms of job creation and financial independence in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, while the test of hypothesis three revealed that online marketing has a very strong positive influence on youth restiveness reduction in Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. This implies that youths who are involved in social media marketing and foreign currency trading can create jobs, attain financial independence, and as well reduce youth restiveness. Hence, the more online marketing skill a youth acquires, the more he/she gets empowered in terms of job creation, financial independence, and youth restiveness reduction. This finding is in line with Wrobel-Konior (2016), that online businesses such as foreign exchange trading and businesses across instagram, facebook, twitter, etc. as ventured into by some youths are helping to build on their self –employment and financial independence. Similarly, a previous study done by Tony (2013) found that digipreneurship skill such as e-marketing by youths and other categories of age enhances their financial security in Lagos State. Youths in the society who are online business-oriented utilize the internet to market their products and services. They reach their customers and clients through the aid of social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, etc. They also trade on foreign currencies such as the US Dollar, Pound, Euros, etc. to make reasonable amount of money. In the course of doing these, their attention is focused on their activities, as such they are not inclined to permeate social insecurity such as rape, drug abuse, youth restiveness, kidnapping. Such meaningful economic activities also give them the privilege to create jobs for themselves and as well gain some level of financial independence. In tandem with this, Cotter et al. (2015) asserted that individuals who have discovered the economic benefits offered by the social media space and foreign exchange marketing have become economically relevant, and some have even empowered others.

Idleness dwindles an individual's ability to create jobs for themselves, let alone employ others. It also blocks the way to financial independence which should have brought about ample financial balance and comfortable bill settlement. In the same line, it heightens socially immoral activities which are not good for human existence. Illicit practices such as cultism, robbery, ritual killing, kidnapping, smoking and drug peddling etc. crave fears to individuals in societies, thus giving them the sense of insecurity especially when they are unable to curtail them. Most of the perpetrators of these do it for a living, which is uncalled for (Ewilly et al., 2014). With the influx of technology in our society today and the continuous shaping of businesses through the aid of internet, individuals who indulge in online marketing practices such as social media marketing and foreign exchange marketing tend to be empowered economically.

The reduction of cases on kidnap, rape, youth restiveness and drug abuse is a concern to all meaning individuals, corporate bodies, government and non-governmental agencies. And it has been observed that most times individuals who commit such crimes give plea on the fact that "it was the devil". Some ascribed it to their idleness, unemployment and low paid jobs. This in turn has tuned some scholars in finding lasting solution to these vices unleashed in the society. Correspondingly, Omonijo et al. (2013) stated that engaging individuals to inculcate online marketing such as social media marketing and foreign currency trading would get them busy socio-economically which in turn will reduce the incidence of idleness and youth restiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses and discussion of findings, the study concluded that online marketing positively influences youth empowerment in Local Government Areas in Rivers State. Continuous involvement of youths in online businesses will bring about corresponding improvements in their empowerment. Unemployed youths that refuse to take advantage of these online marketing opportunities to launch their businesses might find it difficult to survive, especially now that the economy of the nation has become very difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Youths should specifically take huge advantage of social media platforms to engage customers and potential customers of their products and services, as this will help them widen their niche and gradually gain financial independence.
2. Government at all levels and non-governmental organizations should endeavour to provide entrepreneurship training center with all 21st century digital facilities for youths who want to become digital entrepreneurs.
3. Youths at all levels should take advantage of Foreign Exchange Trading that is making waves everywhere, and by so doing create jobs for themselves and as well distract themselves from drug abuse and kidnapping activities.

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