CREATION OF ONLINE STORES FOR MARKETING OF INDIGENOUS PRODUCTS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Contributed by

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Introduction

The world is a global village. Information about people, products and services can be assessed conveniently by anyone from anywhere with the use of the Internet. In developing countries and Nigeria in particular, most indigenous products are not receiving the needed publicity in their marketing, whereas, in advanced countries such as the USA, UK, China and others, online marketing using various platforms like websites, social media, and electronic adverts has triggered tremendous growth in their economy. The standards of living have improved as goods and services can be conveniently accessed.

In consonance with such reasoning, Afolabi, Ojelabi, and Oyeyipo (2018) posit that "in today's world, every organisation must as a necessity, exist in an online platform". Online platforms, such as the use of websites, social media and other internet-based systems that link customers to products, have changed the way businesses are run. In the opinion of Mba (2021), Nigeria as a country has witnessed regression in so many sectors of the economy, which has resulted in loss of resources and indebtedness. While the developed countries are making waves in ICT, their developing counterparts are still trying to find a pedestal to stand on.

These days, the internet is a tool used all over the world that allows access to multiple resources and to access information about other companies with ease. Without a website, a company must have its office open and attend to its potential clients analogously. However, with a website, potential customers can access information about their products and services at any time from anywhere in the world with an enabled internet connection. In addition, as Busari and Oduwole (2014) reason, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMES), commonly known as small businesses, are generally regarded as the engine of growth in many countries. This is due to their employment generation, contributions to export earnings and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The need for their products and services to be made available for consumers, therefore, is of paramount importance as contributors to the nation's economic development.

Web design, according to Jenna (2021), is the art of planning and arranging content on a website so that it can be shared and accessed online with the world. A combination of aesthetic and functional elements, web design is what determines the look of a website, such as its colours, fonts, and graphics, as well as shaping the site's structure and the users' experience of it. Creating a website is one of the pillars of having an online presence. Because of this, the world of web design is as dynamic as ever. It is constantly evolving, including mobile applications and user interface design, to meet the growing needs of website owners and visitors alike.

In defining advertising, Areus (2002) reiterates it as "structured and composed non-personal communication of information usually paid, persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media". Advertisements come in many

forms, from copy to interactive video, and have evolved to become a crucial feature of the online marketplace. A well-built website with suitable adverts attracts the prospective buyer to make a purchase, thereby generating income for the manufacturers of such products and services. There are so many qualities of indigenous products in Nigeria that are relegated to the background due to poor online presence; in terms of marketing such products and this needs redress.

The study, therefore, will identify some of the indigenous products in South East Nigeria and create online stores to market them for better accessibility to the wider society.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to create an online store through which local manufacturers can market their products digitally using the Internet and other electronic media.

Literature Review

The Internet has revolutionised the computer and communications world like nothing before. The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities. The Internet is at once a worldwide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location. The Internet represents one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and development of information infrastructure. With this innovation, websites now provide instant visual presentations of companies and their products.

In total agreement with the above narrative, Robin (2020) situates that web design is the process of planning, conceptualising, and arranging content online. Today, designing a website goes beyond aesthetics to include the website's overall functionality. Web design also includes web apps, mobile apps, and user interface design. Website design used to mean creating websites for desktop browsers. In recent years, however, the importance of mobile and tablet browsers has moved to the forefront. Today, more people browse the internet daily on their phones than on a desktop, with 63% of all web traffic coming from mobile (Josh 2024).

Further, other literature available includes Kristin (2019), who posits that there are a variety of aspects of web design, including Web graphic design, Interface design, User experience design, Authoring and Search Engine Optimisation. With that in mind, web design typically functions as a stand-in to describe the client-side or front-end design of the website. The front end of your website is the part that your customers see, navigate, and interact with on their browsers. The purpose of a well-thought-out design is to hook your customers' attention, sell a product or service, and give a real sense of what your company is. Good design gathers ideas, then assembles and displays them in a pleasing aesthetic — it utilises various concepts and guiding principles based on human behaviour and online consumer habits.

Theoretical Framework

The essence of website design can be vividly seen in today's digital world. The world is now driven by technology and innovation, which has repositioned every aspect of human endeavour. Song and Fatemeh (2001) observe that in the Internet market, websites are the main interface between online merchants and their customers. Effective website design plays a critical role in attracting and maintaining customers' interest and in influencing their purchase behaviour.

The rapid explosion of e-commerce and the growth of online sales have changed consumers' purchasing behaviour (Bellman, Lohse, and Johnson 1999). There is a growing body of literature concerning the impact of the Internet on market factors, including price, products, service, and privacy in the new digital economy (Bakos 1998; Hoffman et al. 1999; Jarvenpaa and Todd 1996/97). Websites have become a valuable channel for selling and interacting with customers, and an important medium for communicating with the general public as well as potential consumers (Hoque and Lohse 1999; Jarvenpaa and Todd 1996/97).

A company's website design and content reflect its business strategy as well as its operational policies, such as pricing and service. Hence, the design of a company's website can have a critical impact on the firm's success in the Internet market. Since the ultimate goal of an e-commerce website is the customer's purchase action, insight into how a website's design impacts potential customers' purchase behaviour could be of great value. Ahmed (2011) elaborates on the Gestalt Principle by positing that 'More often than not, designers tend to focus on the web design's details rather than the overall look. They focus on curved edges, shadows, and fonts, among other things; all that is good, but may not make any difference if the client doesn't like the design at first glance. What most people don't understand is that the brain first sees the overall shape of any design, then starts to focus on and see the details…' every single website design we create, the design is never perceived by identifying its parts (Header, Navigation, Content, buttons, tabs and others), the design is perceived as a whole at first glance.

Studio Exploration Exercise

Exploration started from pencil delineations of model products and samples from selected companies that are housed in the Southeast geopolitical zone. The next stage of the sample product designs is that they will fit on the projected user interface.

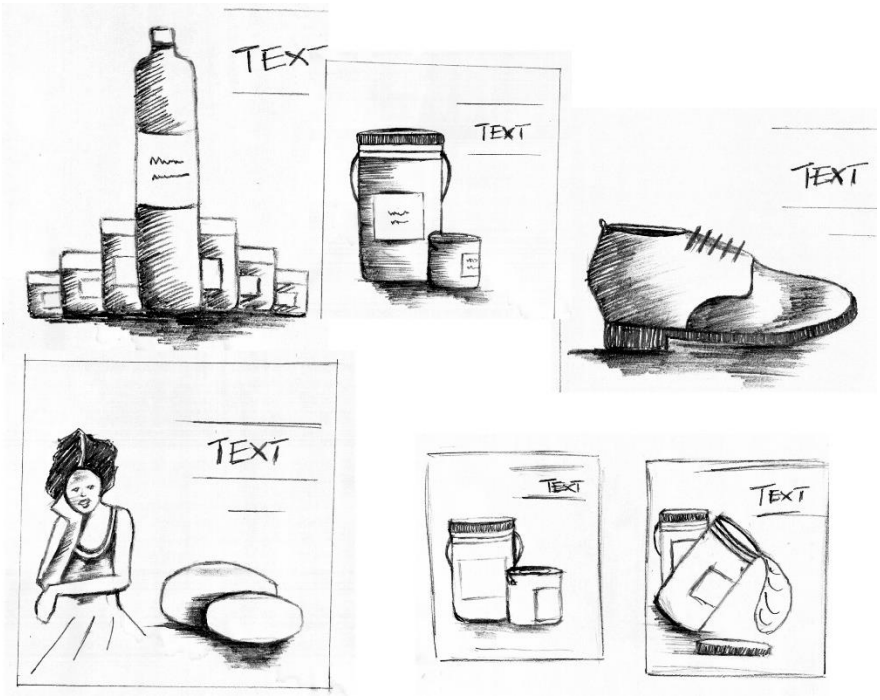

Fig. 1 Thumbnail sketch of products. © Adiele, S. 2023

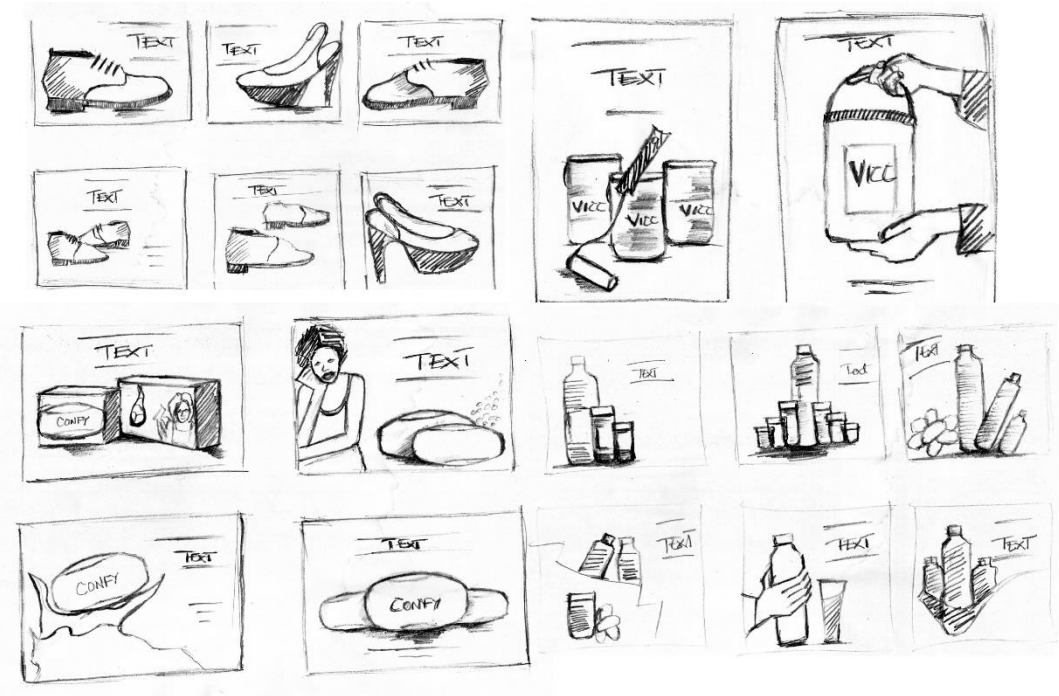

Fig. 1 Thumbnail sketch of some sample products. © Adiele 2023

Plate 1: An ad design for a product – Enyimba Shoes
Source: © Adiele Stanley, 2024

Plate 2: An ad design for the product – Comfy Beauty Soap
Source: © Adiele Stanley, 2024

Plate 3: An ad design for the product – Eze Headgears
Source: © Adiele Stanley, 2024

Plate 4: An ad design for Onyii Stitches
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

Plate 5: An ad design for Gozie Herbals
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

Stage 3: Site Map

A sitemap is a file that lists the pages of a website, organised in a way that helps search engines (like Google, Bing, etc.) understand the site's structure and content. Think of it like a table of contents or a blueprint for your website.

Plate 6: Log in to WordPress Admin Backend
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

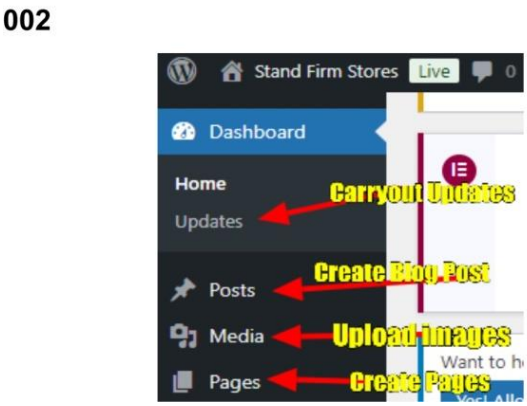

Plate 7: Dashboard area and uploading of products
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

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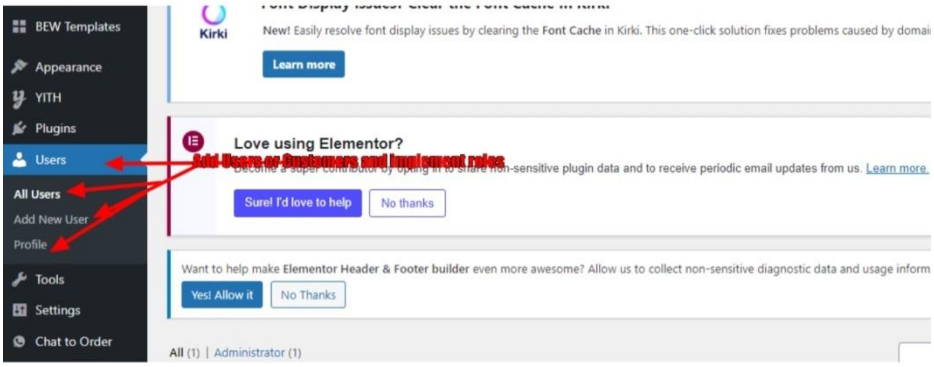

Plate 8: Adding Users/Admins
Source: Adiele, Stanley 2024

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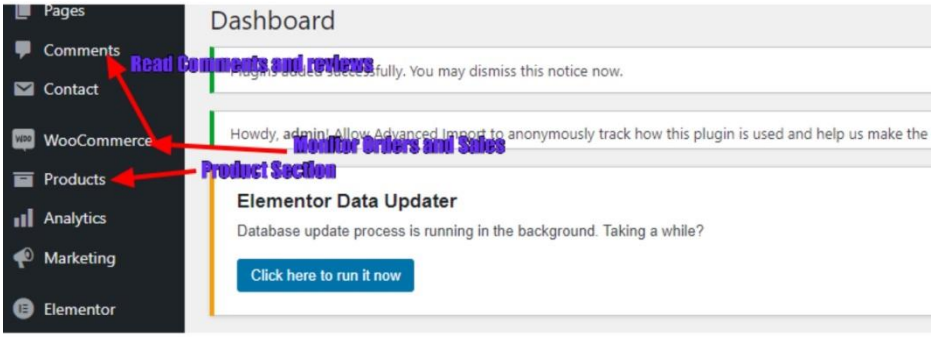

Plate 9: Adding Products/Payment gateway
Source: Adiele, Stanley 2024

005 Frontend Section

Plate 10: Front Section view (a)
Source: Adiele, Stanley

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Plate 11: Front Section view (b)
Source: Adiele, Stanley 2024

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Plate 12: Front Section view of Featured products
Source: Adiele, Stanley 2024

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Plate 13: Front Section view - Product Search
Source: Adiele, Stanley 2024

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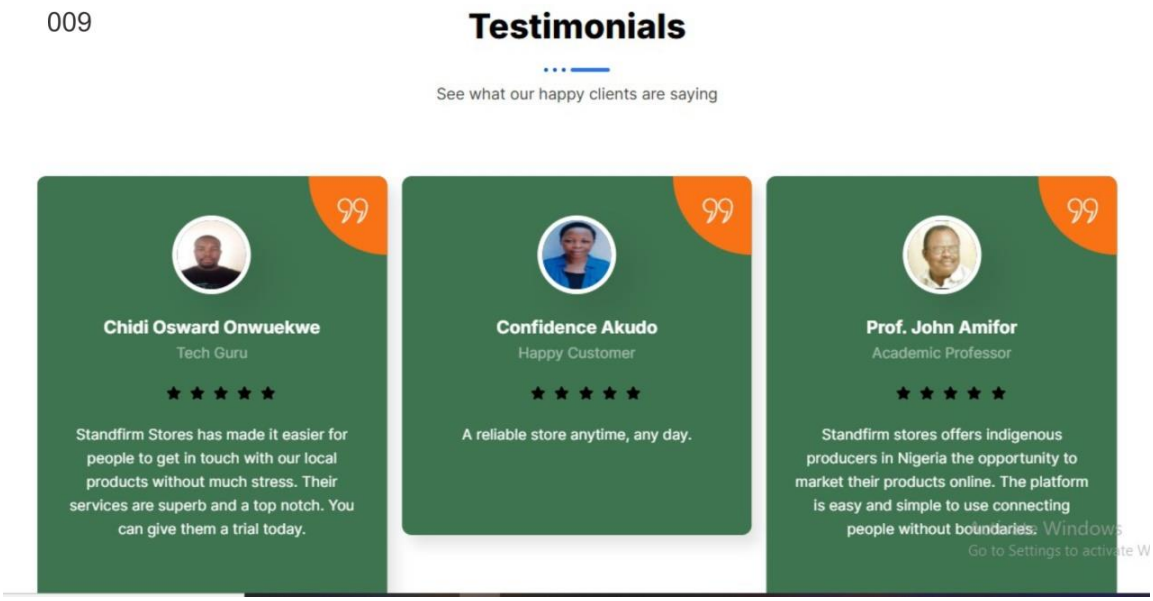

Plate 15: Front Section view – Testimonials section
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

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Plate 16: Front Section view – Footnote section
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

Plate 17: Front Section view – Full Store
Source: © Adiele, Stanley 2024

Discussion of Results

The findings on creating an online store for marketing of indigenous products in South East Nigeria can have various implications on indigenous producers, artists, marketers, and the economy in the following ways;

1. **Increased Market Reach**: Indigenous producers, who may otherwise rely on local markets, can expand their customer base beyond the Southeast to reach buyers across Nigeria and even internationally.

2. **Reduced Barriers to Entry**: Many producers lack the resources or knowledge to build and manage their online stores. Standfirm Stores offers a ready-to-use e-commerce solution, enabling producers to focus on their products while leveraging an established platform
.
3. **Promotion of Indigenous Culture and Craftsmanship**: The platform emphasises products made by indigenous producers, promoting traditional craftsmanship, artistry, and locally sourced materials. This focus can attract niche markets that value cultural heritage and sustainability.

4. **Lower Transaction Costs**: By utilising a collective platform, the overall cost of marketing, transaction fees, and logistics can be shared, reducing the financial burden on individual producers.

5. **Support for Small Businesses**: Indigenous producers, many of whom are small business owners, will benefit from the visibility and infrastructure Stand firm Stores provides, helping them compete with larger, more established players in the market.

6. **Economic Growth and Job Creation**: By giving indigenous producers better access to markets and increased sales, Stand firm Stores can stimulate local economies and contribute to job creation in the Southeast region.

7. **Logistics and Delivery Partnerships**: The marketplace can partner with local logistics providers to ensure efficient delivery solutions within and outside the region. This makes it easier for indigenous producers to fulfil orders without worrying about the complexities of shipping.

Conclusion

Creating Online Stores for the marketing of indigenous products is designed to support local producers in Nigeria's South-Eastern region by providing a dedicated platform where they can showcase and sell their products. The study took into consideration the various challenges micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMES) face in today’s economic realities and created a platform to address the challenge of marketing of indigenous products in South East Nigeria. This goes a long way to encourage the local manufacturers to be more productive and embrace the technological development/innovations of the time. As we see in developed countries today, there has been a paradigm shift in the way micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMES) operate, adding value and growth to their country’s GDP. This can also be replicated in the Nigerian economy today, particularly South-Eastern Nigeria, through online stores.

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