

## **ASSESSMENT OF FACEBOOK IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES) IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF NASARAWA STATE AND AREA COUNCILS OF THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA**

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### **Abstract**

This research examines Facebook's role in fostering growth for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nasarawa State and the Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Employing a survey design, data was collected from 399 SME owners using unstructured response questionnaires. The study draws on Reception Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. Findings reveal that SME owners recognize Facebook's positive impact on visibility and growth through advertising. Challenges include affordability of data plans, financial constraints, and ignorance in using Facebook advertising tools due to poor internet connectivity. However, there's a willingness among SME owners to learn. Facebook is perceived as a cost-effective tool for business promotion, fostering entrepreneurship, and job creation. Recommendations include providing Facebook classes for SME owners, addressing internet issues, and promoting local business groups to share success stories. This study underscores Facebook's potential in empowering SMEs within the region.

**Keywords:** Facebook, Small and Medium Enterprises, Business and Development

### **Introduction**

The sustainability of rural communities heavily relies on the vitality of small businesses, which contribute to job creation and economic activity (Memili, Fang, Chrisman, & De Massis, 2015). Despite their significance, rural retailers face operational challenges such as limited market size and technology integration (He, Wang, Chen, & Zha, 2017; Ring, Peredo, & Chrisman, 2009). Scholars propose that social media, particularly Facebook, can mitigate these challenges by facilitating information networks among retailers, consumers, and suppliers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Facebook offers an affordable marketing platform for rural businesses, enabling communication with customers and building brand credibility (Freedman, 2022; Elissa, 2021). However, challenges persist, including SME owners' limited awareness of Facebook's full potential and the platform's

algorithmic and technical vulnerabilities (Marvers, 2021; Freedman, 2022). Despite these drawbacks, social media marketing, especially through platforms like Facebook, is recognized for its potential to enhance communication, build trust, and drive business growth (Yadav, 2013). Existing literature reveals a gap in understanding the impact of social media, particularly Facebook, on SME development in Nigeria, necessitating empirical research to address this gap (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010; Cox, 2012). This study aims to fill this gap by examining Facebook's role in SME development within the Nigerian context.

This study investigates the role of Facebook in developing SMEs in Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory. It assesses Facebook's impact on SMEs' competitiveness and market presence and examines how SME owners use Facebook for daily operations. The study also identifies obstacles SMEs face

when using Facebook and explores SME owners' opinions on integrating Facebook into their business activities.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the role of Facebook in developing SMEs in the select local government areas in Nasarawa State and Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory?
2. To what degree does the use of Facebook contribute to the overall competitiveness and market presence of SMEs in the selected regions?
3. To what extent do SME owners utilize Facebook for their business operations within the designated regions?
4. What obstacles do SMEs encounter when utilizing the Facebook platform in the designated areas?
5. What opinions do SME owners hold regarding the integration of Facebook into their business activities in those regions?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **The Concept of Development**

The concept of development is as old as the first apparition of human beings on earth. The need to develop is part of human life, and each of us develops at a different pace, and sometimes in different areas and directions. According to [dictionary.cambridge.org](http://dictionary.cambridge.org) (n.d.), development is "the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced". McGillivray, Kingsbury, McKay, Hunt, and Clarke (2008) see development as a concept with many meanings and definitions, where some see it as a process or outcome that affects negatively their lives, while others see it as both process and outcome and think it is a good concept to apply. Munck and O'Hearn (1999) see development as a process where people are dominated and their destiny is designed according to the western styles and ways, the latter being the dominants. For Kingsbury (2008, p.222), development in

general "is about the enhancement of the potential of people to emancipate themselves", and Hettne Bjorn says that "development is a contested concept" with different meanings, depending on where it is situated in history or/and who is the actor (Hettne 2009, p.1), while for Sen Amartya, the development is "the expansion of the capacity of human individuals to live fulfilling lives" (Sutcliffe and Parks 1999, p.138). Myrdal (1974) defines development as the movement upward of the entire social system.

Most research to date has focused on the use of Facebook to initiate and maintain relationships. In a study involving 364 university students, Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman (2007) found that one of the users' most frequent activities on Facebook is writing messages. To communicate, Facebook users can write to each other through private messages, chat, comments, and wall post messages that publicly appear on a user's page. Research has shown that Facebook is employed mostly to keep in touch with people and to know them better (Joinson, 2008; Golder et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2008; Wiese and Farrugia, 2009). Stern and Taylor (2007) surveyed 364 university students and found that only a small number of users try to meet new people or try to initiate a relationship via Facebook and that most of them use it to maintain already existing relationships.

#### **Conceptualising Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES)**

Defining the concept of SMEs proves challenging due to the varied criteria adopted by different countries. SMEs can be defined as an economic enterprise that requires less capital, have the quality to make quick decision, work in manual labor and have a low level of expenses for their management and production to lower-cost products. The small enterprises, at the same time, are dynamic companies, and innovative

assessing opportunities at the right time (Erken, 1990). Ayegusi (2004) characterizes small venture as a business that has an investment capital that is up to one hundred and fifty thousand naira and hires not more than fifty workers.

### **Social Media**

Social media is a relatively new term that has evolved as a way to describe various platforms for online communication. Overall, the term social media refers to “any technology that facilitates the dissemination and sharing of information over the Internet” (Robbins and Singer, 2014, p.387). More specifically, Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as a “group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61); Web 2.0 indicates the adjustment to the Internet that allowed users to generate content.

### **Facebook**

According to Lampe, Elison, and Steinfield (2006), “Facebook may foster relationship building by allowing users to track other members of their community” (p.167). Facebook users keep in touch with their peers by retrieving information about them on the website, keeping track of their activity, reading what they write, or looking at what they post on their walls. The researchers carried out two surveys among first-year students at Michigan State University and found that surveillance is mostly employed to keep in touch with high school friends. Similarly, Tufekci (2008) treats the concept of ‘social grooming’ intended as the “interest in exchanging and browsing social information about friends and acquaintances”(p.550).

### **The Role of Facebook in Developing SMEs**

Cania, Nexhipi, and Korsita (2020) asserted that the function of SMEs is regarded as a highly effective and instrumental tool for fostering sustainable economic growth, reducing poverty, and generating employment. SMEs serve as sources of employment, competition, economic dynamism, and innovation, while also fostering and stimulating entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, due to their wider geographical presence compared to larger corporations, SMEs play a crucial role in promoting a more equitable distribution of incomes. Banks and Haan (2017) posited that Facebook can be an inexpensive marketing tool that SME owners have access to; however, challenges exist, as their training and use of Facebook in many instances are self-taught. They often lack knowledge of how to translate the activity into revenue.

Ghanem and Hamid (2020) stated that a business could use multiple touch points of social media and digital strategy to achieve a specific goal. The primary reason to start using Facebook was the fact that Facebook was the cheapest and easiest way to reach the target customers of the business. At the beginning of the business, it was important that the means used would allow reaching customers without larger investments (Gatautis, Vitkauskaitė and Reuver 2017).

Tracking the effectiveness of social media, affords SMEs the ability to identify both areas of weaknesses and strengths in using Facebook as their SM site preference. Becoming a new entrant into the social media world brings challenges and barriers for SMEs. The transition from brick-and-mortar to an online environment increases competition; whereas the physical location may hold a competitive advantage, entering an online environment may cause a shift immediately (Robinson, 2012).

Jambulingamis, Sumathi, and Rajagopal (2016) argue that the Facebook platform allows bidirectional communication and community-built-in conversation and it helps entrepreneurs to interact with their customers thus, the government should create security policies and provide concrete guidelines that could encourage entrepreneurs to explore Facebook commerce and conduct awareness programs to gain confidence among entrepreneurs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

The uses and gratification theory seeks to explain the relationship between an audience and how that audience uses the media. It was developed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler. This theory suggests that an individual seeks out the content that s/he has decided to consume. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) argued that this theory originated from the 1940s when researchers became interested in why audiences are involved in diverse forms of media. Others contended that the theory of Uses and Gratifications (U&G) stemmed from Schramm's model, which distinguished between immediate and delayed rewards in media consumption. During the 1970s, researchers focusing on Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory devoted significant attention to understanding audience motivations and how individuals utilized media to fulfill social and psychological needs. This emphasis can be viewed partly as a response to intense criticism from other scholars in mass communication. Critics such as Elliott, Swanson, Lometti, Reeves, and Bybee highlighted four primary conceptual challenges confronting U&G: a lack of clarity in the conceptual framework, imprecision in key concepts, a convoluted explanatory structure, and a failure to grasp audiences' perceptions of media content (Ruggiero, 2000). Blumler and Katz

presented five core elements of Uses and Gratification:

- i. Media use is perceived to be goal-directed. We know exactly where to find the information we need. The audience is fully aware of the type of media it is looking for.
- ii. The audience is responsible for linking the type of media to fit their mass communication needs. The media itself does not look for an audience; instead, the audience chooses the media types that fulfill its needs.
- iii. Media competes with other sources for needs satisfaction. There are multiple ways to satisfy the needs of an audience.
- iv. Modern media competes with more traditional media.
- v. The audience has a sense of self-awareness of its motives and needs that allows it to share its media experiences as active media users.

In other words, the audience has power over their media consumption. Mass Media audiences use the media to satisfy one or more specific needs. This relates to the study because the Facebook user will maximize the full potential of the platform to improve his/her economic circumstances. On a larger scale, this will in turn reflect in the overall economic development of the targeted area.

#### **Methodology**

The study used a survey design with questionnaires to collect data from residents in Keffi, Bwari, and AMAC Local Government Areas in Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory. Out of a population of 1,098,122, 399 respondents were randomly selected. The questionnaire, which included both structured and unstructured questions, was vetted for validity and reliability. Data collection involved distributing 133 questionnaires per area for equal representation. Data analysis focused on calculating percentages to review the results comprehensively.

**Data Presentation**  
**Section A**  
**Demography**

Question	Response	Count	Percentage
1. Do you own a mobile phone?	Yes	380	95.22%
	No	19	4.78%
2. What Social Media applications do you use often?	Facebook	280	38.65%
	WhatsApp	350	48.71%
	Instagram	210	29.03%
	Twitter	120	16.13%
	Other	65	10.48%
3. How long have you used Facebook?	1-3 years	75	18.05%
	4-6 years	74	17.82%
	7-10 years	100	24.19%
	11 & above	150	39.94%
4. What do you use Facebook for?	Chat friends and family	260	42.11%
	Meet new people	90	14.04%
	Post personal milestones	120	18.71%
	Promote businesses	180	28.07%
	Others	35	6.89%
	All of the above	100	16.04%
5. How often do you post on Facebook?	Always	60	11.28%
	Very Often	100	18.71%
	Sometimes	150	28.07%

Question	Response	Count	Percentage
	Rarely	80	15.03%
	Never	9	1.68%

Table 2: Knowledge of Social Media

The survey reveals that most respondents own a mobile phone, with WhatsApp being the most popular social media app, followed by Facebook. Many Facebook users have been active for over 11 years, primarily using the platform for chatting and business promotion. Posting habits on Facebook vary, with many posting occasionally, while fewer post very often or rarely.

**Objective One:** To investigate the role of Facebook in fostering the development of SMEs within the chosen local government areas of Nasarawa State and the Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory.

Always = A Very Often = VO Sometimes = S Rarely= R Never = N

S/N	QUESTIONS	A	VO	S	R	N
6	Facebook can increase the visibility of small businesses in your community.	90 22.56%	130 32.58%	95 23.68%	60 23.68%	24 15%
7	Running adverts on Facebook can lead to the growth of SMES in your community.	70 17.54	110 27.57%	120 30.08%	80 20.05%	19 4.76%
8	Posting goods and services of SMES on Facebook consistently will enhance sales volume.	150 37.59%	120 30.08%	85 21.28%	30 7.52%	14 6.20%
9	Facebook can aid in building meaningful connections with potential clients.	40 10.03%	90 22.56%	120 30.08%	110 27.57%	39 9.77%

Table 3: Impact of Facebook engagement On SMEs development

The survey suggests a positive perception of Facebook as a valuable tool for small businesses, enhancing visibility, growth, and sales. However, varying levels of agreement highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of Facebook's role in supporting SMEs.

**Objective Two:** To assess the impact of Facebook usage on the overall competitiveness and market presence of SMEs operating in the specified regions.

Strongly Agree= SA Agree = A Disagree= D Strongly Disagree

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD
10	Your active engagement on Facebook personally impacted the competitiveness	160 32.08%	120 24.06%	70 13.78%	49 9.77%

	of your business in the regions where you operate.				
11	Personal branding and online presence on Facebook contribute to the perception and market presence of your business in the regions you serve.	140 28.07%	110 21.54%	80 15.67%	69 10.81%
12	The content you share personally on Facebook contributes to building a loyal customer base and maintaining a market presence.	110 22.56%	130 26.57%	65 13.29%	94 19.19%
13	Direct interactions with customers on Facebook helps to gain a competitive advantage for your business.	180 37.59%	95 19.79%	60 13.04%	64 13.78%

Table 4: SME owners' views on Facebook's role in business competition, expansion, branding, and customer loyalty.

The survey highlights how personal engagement on Facebook, through branding, content sharing, and direct interactions, impacts business competitiveness and market presence. These insights emphasize the importance of personalized digital engagement strategies in shaping business success.

**Objective Three:** To gauge the extent of Facebook utilization by SME owners for their day-to-day business operations within the designated regions.

Strongly Agree= SA Agree = A Disagree= D Strongly Disagree

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD
14	Business owners are willing to learn how to use Facebook for their businesses.	45 11.28%	120 30.08%	130 32.58%	104 25.08%
15	SME owners in your community believe that Facebook is a catalyst that can help to expand their businesses.	60 16.04%	110 29.56%	95 25.53%	134 28.87%
16	Small business owners do not have the time to maintain a Facebook business page.	30 5.64%	85 16.04%	160 30.28%	124 23.39%
17	Business owners in your community believe that traditional methods of business promotion are more effective than Facebook.	80 15.04%	95 17.79%	90 16.82%	134 28.87%

Table 5: Business Owners' Attitudes in the utilization of Facebook for business operations.

The survey reveals mixed attitudes among business owners about using Facebook for their enterprises. While they recognize its potential for business expansion, time constraints and differing views on traditional methods complicate digital integration. These insights can guide targeted support and education for business owners navigating the digital landscape.

**Objective Four:** To identify and analyze the obstacles encountered by SMEs when utilizing the Facebook platform for business activities in the specified areas.

Strongly Agree= SA Agree = A Disagree= D Strongly Disagree

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD
18	Business owners in your community cannot afford the data plans required for internet services.	150 30.08%	130 25.06%	60 11.28%	59 11.03%
19	Small business owners do not have the knowledge to target prospective clients using Facebook advert tools.	140 28.07%	110 22.04%	70 13.78%	79 19.79%
20	SME owners cannot afford to invest in Facebook advert options.	160 32.08%	120 24.06%	55 10.53%	64 12.28%
21	SM owners in your community will not be able to maintain their Facebook business pages due to poor internet connection in the area.	145 29.07%	105 21.04%	80 15.54%	69 13.53%
22	Business owners in your community believe that using Facebook for their businesses will make them susceptible to internet fraudsters.	40 7.52%	130 24.06%	110 20.08%	119 22.86%

Table 6: Challenges encountered in the usage of Facebook for SMES

In summary, the survey highlights challenges faced by businesses, such as economic constraints, knowledge gaps, financial limitations, infrastructure issues, and perceptual barriers. Addressing these is crucial for formulating strategies to support the integration of Facebook and other digital tools into local business practices.

**Objective Five:** To explore the opinions and perspectives of SME owners regarding the integration of Facebook into their business activities within the chosen regions.

Strongly Agree= SA Agree = A Disagree= D Strongly Disagree

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD
23	Facebook makes marketing easier for your small businesses.	120 21.06%	140 28.07%	75 14.79%	64 12.53%
24	Facebook is an inexpensive tool for promoting businesses in your locale.	155 31.08%	110 21.04%	60 11.28%	74 13.78%
25	Facebook encourages entrepreneurship among members of the community.	90 17.79%	130 25.06%	90 17.54%	89 17.04%
26	Facebook can aid in creating jobs for individuals in your vicinity.	75 15.04%	105 21.54%	120 30.08%	99 24.79%

Table 7: SME owners' perceptions of Facebook's Impact

The survey highlights Facebook's benefits in marketing, cost-effective advertising, entrepreneurship, and job creation. These perceptions can support community initiatives to use Facebook for economic development and growth.



## Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the role of Facebook in the development of SMEs in select local government areas in Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory. Findings revealed that 22.56% of respondents believed that Facebook could increase the visibility of small businesses in their communities, aligning with Rugova and Prenaj (2016) who emphasized social media's potential for enhancing brand exposure and lead generation. Additionally, 32.58% recognized the potential of Facebook advertising in fostering SME growth, which resonates with Ibrahim et al. (2014) and Oztamur and Karakadilar (2014), emphasizing the effectiveness of online platforms for business promotion. Furthermore, 37.59% of participants acknowledged the role of consistent Facebook postings in enhancing SME sales volume, supported by Wardati and Er (2019) and Kalkan and Bozkurt (2017), who emphasized social media's positive impact on sales outcomes. Moreover, 30.08% recognized Facebook's potential in building meaningful client connections, in line with Beier and Wagner (2016), highlighting the broader role of social media platforms in fostering customer engagement and loyalty. These findings collectively underscore the multifaceted benefits of Facebook for SMEs, transcending traditional marketing functions and contributing to their sustainability and competitiveness.

A significant portion of respondents, 32.08%, believe that active engagement on Facebook positively impacts business competitiveness in their regions. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of quality content creation on social media for SMEs (Oztamura and Karakadilar, 2014; Ahamat et al., 2017). Similarly, 28.07% acknowledge the role of personal branding on Facebook in shaping market presence, supported by studies emphasizing social

media's influence on purchasing decisions (Erlangga et al., 2021). Additionally, 26.57% believe that personally shared content on Facebook contributes to building a loyal customer base, echoing findings on the effectiveness of engaging content in driving customer engagement (Brown-Peterson, 2017). Finally, 37.59% affirm that direct customer interactions on Facebook provide a competitive advantage, consistent with research showing the positive relationship between social media marketing and business competitiveness (Rambe, 2017; He and Zha, 2014). These findings collectively highlight Facebook's strategic importance for SMEs in enhancing competitiveness and market presence.

The survey reveals several obstacles that SMEs encounter when utilizing the Facebook platform in designated areas. Approximately 30.08% of respondents express concerns about the affordability of data plans required for internet services, highlighting financial constraints as a significant barrier to accessing and leveraging online platforms like Facebook for business purposes. This resonates with Pervin and Sarker's (2021) emphasis on the need for initial funding and technological training to facilitate social media adoption by small businesses. Addressing these financial barriers through support mechanisms can empower SMEs to capitalize on the opportunities offered by online platforms for business growth and development. Additionally, 28.07% of respondents note a lack of knowledge among small business owners in their community regarding targeting prospective clients using Facebook advertising tools. This underscores the importance of educational initiatives to bridge the knowledge gap and equip business owners with the skills necessary to leverage Facebook's advertising capabilities effectively. Concerns about affordability are further echoed by 32.08% of respondents

who believe that SME owners cannot afford to invest in Facebook advertising options, highlighting the financial constraints faced by small businesses in accessing paid advertising features on Facebook. Improving internet connectivity and addressing security concerns related to potential susceptibility to internet fraudsters are also identified as key challenges hindering SMEs' effective utilization of Facebook for business purposes. These findings collectively underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms, including financial assistance, training programs, and infrastructure development, to enable SMEs to overcome barriers and fully leverage the potential of Facebook for business growth and success.

The findings from the survey highlight the significant impact of Facebook on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in local communities. A considerable portion of respondents (28.07%) acknowledge Facebook's role in simplifying marketing efforts for small businesses, emphasizing its effectiveness as a promotional tool. This aligns with existing research, such as Alkateeb and Abdalla (2021), which underscores the positive influence of social media adoption on SME performance. Additionally, 31.08% of respondents recognize Facebook as a cost-effective platform for business promotion, echoing Gumus and Kutahyali's (2017) findings on the affordability and effectiveness of social media marketing for SMEs. Moreover, perceptions of Facebook as a catalyst for entrepreneurship (25.06%) and job creation (30.08%) further highlight its socio-economic significance, supported by studies like Cania et al. (2020) and Morina and Gashi (2016), respectively. These insights underscore Facebook's multifaceted role in fostering business growth, facilitating economic development, and empowering individuals within local communities.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of the data, the conclusion drawn from the data shows the pivotal role of Facebook in SME development. The study reveals a substantial number of businesses actively using Facebook for promotional activities, indicating its relevance as a tool for marketing and brand visibility in these regions. The positive opinions expressed by respondents towards the influence of Facebook on business growth align with a growing recognition of the platform's potential in fostering entrepreneurship and creating job opportunities. However, the study also highlights challenges such as the affordability of data plans and concerns about internet fraud, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to maximize the positive impact of Facebook on small businesses. To better understand how social media affects rural economies, future research can look into different social media platforms, study specific groups of people more closely, and compare findings across various regions. This approach will help us gain a more detailed understanding of how digital technology influences economic development in rural areas.

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