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Assessing Proficiency Gap in Digital Marketing Skills for Employment Prospect Among Business Education Students in Rivers State Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study assess proficiency gap in digital marketing skills for employment prospects among Business Education students in Rivers State Universities. Two specific objectives, research questions and null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 350 respondents. Based on the small size of the population, the entire population was studied. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Digital Marketing skills Needed for Employment Prospect Questionnaire" (DMSNEPQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was design on a 4-point Likert rating scale with options: Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Moderate Extent (2) Low Extent (1). Three experts, one in Measurement and Evaluation and two from Business Education department of Rivers State University validated the instrument. Cronbach Alpha statistics was used to determine the reliability of the instruments which stood at 0.98 Out of 350 copies of the instruments distributed to the respondents, one hundred percent return was recorded. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while t-test inferential statistics was used to test the null hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study showed that both RSU and IAUE students agreed that digital content skills and e-commerce skills are needed to enhance employment prospects of Business Education students to a moderate extent. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that digital skills should be built into Business Education curriculum, and that opportunities should be provide for courses to be offered on e-commerce platforms by Business Education students.

Keywords: Business Education, Digital content skills, E-marketing skill, Employment Prospects and Proficiency Gap.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business landscape has undergone a profound digital transformation that has fundamentally altered how organizations communicate with consumers, build brand equity, and drive revenue growth. This transformation has created an unprecedented demand for professionals who possess sophisticated digital marketing competencies. This confluence of technological advancement, changing consumer behaviors, and the rapid expansion of digital platforms has positioned digital marketing skills as essentials competencies for graduates seeking meaningful employment in the twenty-first century business environment. Digital marketing encompass all marketing activities that utilize electronic devices or the internet, requiring businesses to leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media platforms, email, and website to connect with current and prospective customers (Chaffey & Smith, 2022). This paradigm shift has created what Kannan and Li (2021) describe as a "digital marketing ecosystem" where traditional marketing boundaries have dissolved, giving way to integrates, data-driven

approaches that demand multifaceted skill sets for marketing professionals. Digital marketing in the view of the researchers refers to the promotion of products and service brands online through channels like social media search engines, email and websites to drive engagement, conversations and sales.

Digital marketing skills constitute the first and most central concept in the study. It refers to the comprehensive set of technical, analytical, creative, and strategic competencies required to plan, implement, manage, and optimize marketing activities through digital channels and platforms (Wild Ali & Ortega-Gutierrez, 2025). These skills encompass a broad spectrum of capabilities including but not limited to social media marketing, search engine optimization, content creation and management, email marketing, web analytics, mobile marketing, paid digital advertising, and marketing automation. As Herhausen, Miocevic, Morgan, and Kleijnen (2020) noted in their research on digital marketing capabilities gaps, digital marketing skills are distinguished from traditional marketing competencies by their reliance on technology-mediated channels, their emphasis on data-driven decision making, their requirement for continuous adaptation to evolving platforms and algorithms, and their integration of technical proficiency with strategic marketing thinking. In the context of Business Education, digital marketing skills represent both standalone competencies and integrated capabilities that enhance graduates' overall marketing effectiveness and professional versatility. There are several component of digital marketing, but this study focused on digital content and e-marketing skills.

Digital content marketing skill refers to the abilities needed to create and distribute valuable content online to attract and engage target audiences. Digital Content marketing evolved into a sophisticated discipline requiring both creative and analytical capabilities. Research conducted by Godpower and Egbunefu (2024) on the utilization of electronic platforms for effective distance learning among business education postgraduate students in Rivers universities revealed that students acquired enhanced capabilities in creating and distributing content across various platforms. There implies that digital content enables entrepreneurs and marketers to create and distribute useful content online.

Digital Content marketing has evolved into a sophisticated discipline that combined storytelling strategic planning, and data analysis. Holliman and Roweley (2020) articulated that Digital content marketing involves creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain clearly defined audience, ultimately driving profitable customer action. This approach requires business education students to develop skills in content strategy development, copy writing for various digital formats, visual content performance analysis to value-driven communication, were organization establish leadership and build trust through informative and engaging content across blogs, podcast, videos, infographics, and other digital formats.

The integration of digital marketing skills with other business discipline creates synergies that enhance graduate value and versatility. Digital marketing does not exist in isolation but intersects with finance (marketing budget management), management (team coordination and project management), operations (customer experience optimization), and entrepreneurship (digital business models and e-commerce). Tafesse and Wien (2020) advocated for integrating business education to enables students to see connections across disciplines and apply digital marketing insights to broader business challenges. Business education students who understand how digital marketing contributes to organizational strategy, supports sales processes, enhances customer relationships, and drives business growth offer more comprehensive value to employers than those with narrowly technical digital marketing skills alone. The psychological and behavioral dimensions of digital marketing require attention alongside technical competencies. Understanding consumer psychology, online user behavior, decision-making processes, and emotional drivers of engagement enables more effective digital marketing practice. Hollebeek and Macky (2020) explored consumer engagement in digital environments, revealing complex psychological processes that influence how individuals interact with digital marketing content. Business education students who develop insights into these psychological dimensions can create more resonant content, design more effective campaigns, and build stronger connections between brands and consumers.

E-marketing refers to the promotion of the products, services or brands using digital channel such as engines, social media, online advertising and mobile Apps. It involves using these channels to reach

target audience, engage customers convert leads into sale and retain customers (Kumar & Sharama, 2023). However, successful email marketing demands proficiency in email marketing platforms such as Mailchimp, Constant Contact, or HubSpot, understanding of segmentation and personalization strategies, knowledge of email design principles and mobile optimization, mastery of A/B testing methodologies, and ability to analyze metrics such as open rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates. Business Education students who develop these competencies stands a better chance to contribute immediately to organizational marketing efforts, managing customer communications, nurturing leads, and driving conversions through targeted email campaigns. The data analytics dimension of digital marketing has become increasingly central to effective practice. In an era characterized by abundant data, the ability to collect, analyze, and derive actionable insights from marketing data distinguishes highly employable graduates from their peers. Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman (2021) emphasized that data-driven marketing requires competency in web analytics tools such as Google Analytics, understanding of key performance indicators and metrics, ability to create and interpret data visualizations, knowledge of attribution modeling, and capacity to translate data insights into strategic recommendations. According to Grewal, Bart, Spann, and Zubcsek (2022), email marketing encompasses strategies designed to reach target audiences on their smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices through websites, email, SMS, social media, and mobile applications. This field requires understanding of mobile user behavior, mobile-responsive design principles, mobile app marketing strategies, location-based marketing techniques, and mobile payment systems. In the Nigerian context, where mobile phone penetration has surged dramatically, email marketing skills are particularly valuable, enabling graduates to help businesses reach the massive and growing population of mobile internet users. Marketing automation represents an advanced digital marketing capability that combines technological proficiency with strategic thinking. Jarvinen and Taiminen (2020) described marketing automation as the use of software platforms and technologies to automate repetitive marketing tasks, nurture leads, and deliver personalized customer experiences at scale. Competency in this area requires familiarity with marketing automation platforms such as HubSpot, Marketo, or Pardot, understanding of lead scoring and nurturing workflows, knowledge of customer journey mapping, and ability to integrate marketing automation with customer relationship management systems. While this may represent a more advanced skill set, exposure to marketing automation principles during undergraduate education prepares Business Education students for rapid advancement in their marketing careers.

Business Education refers to the formal academic program of study that prepares students for careers in business, commerce, and related professional fields through instruction in core business disciplines including accounting, finance, management, marketing, economics, entrepreneurship, and business communication (Albeha, Fernandes, Mesquita, Seabra, & Ferreira-Oliveira, 2020). In tertiary institutions in Nigeria, Business Education programs lead to bachelor's degrees and aim to develop both theoretical knowledge and practical competencies that enable graduates to function effectively in business organizations or establish their own enterprises. Business Education at the undergraduate level combines foundational business knowledge with specialized focus areas, increasingly incorporating digital competencies and technological literacy as essential components of graduate preparation.

Business Education students must develop proficiency in creating compelling visual and written content, understanding platform algorithms, engaging authentically with online communities, and measuring the impact of social media campaigns through sophisticated metrics, so as to bridge digital marketing skill proficiency gap. Proficiency gap in digital marketing refers to the disparity between the skills required to effectively leverage digital marketing tools and techniques, and the skills actually possessed by marketers (Rpbert, 2023). This gap is largely driven by the rapid evaluation of digital technologies, changing industry demands and outdated education system (Thomposn, 2024 & Herhausen, 2020). According to Vat and Kumar (2024). The key factors responsible for proficiency gap includes rapid technological advancement which emphasizes on the digital landscape that is constantly evolving with new platforms, tools and strategies emerging regularly. Thompson (2024), contained that lack of training, insufficient hand-on experience and limited access to industry experts and mentors are inclusive. There is need for

training and education of marketer (Business Education students inclusive), leveraging online resources and course, participating on industry events and conferences (Robert 2023, Wilson & Chen 2023) to enhance Business Education graduate employment prospects.

Employment prospects refers to the likelihood, opportunities, and potential for field of study or related professional domains (Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, & Lambert, 2020). Employment prospects encompass multiple dimensions including the availability of job opportunities in the graduate's geographical region and field of interest, the competitiveness of the graduate's qualifications relative to employer requirements and other candidates, the quality of employment opportunities in terms of compensations, career development potential, and job security, the time required for graduate's to transit from education to employment, and the alignment between graduates' skills competencies and the requirement of available positions. In contemporary labor marketers characterized by rapid technological change and evolving skill requirements, employment prospects are determined by graduates' possession of demand that exceeds the supply of qualified candidates. The Cengage Group (2025) reported that only thirty percent of 2025 graduates secured full-time jobs related to their degree, highlighting the challenging nature of current employment prospects for recent graduates. Undergraduates students are therefore required to acquire digital skills to bridge these gap.

Undergraduate students Specifically refers to individuals enrolled in bachelor's degree programs at universities, typically pursuing four or five-year programs of study leading to their first university degree. Undergraduate students are distinguished from postgraduate students who pursue master's or doctoral degrees, and from diploma or certificate students who engage in sub-degree programs. In the context of this study, undergraduate students represent the primary target population whose digital marketing skill development and employment prospects are being examined. These students are typically in the formative stages of their professional development, making their educational experiences particularly influential in shaping their career trajectories and employment outcomes. The focus on undergraduate students reflects recognition that interventions at this educational level projects lasting impacts on graduate preparedness and subsequent career success.

Statement of the Problem

In today's knowledge-driven economy, digital marketing has become a crucial driver of business demand growth and employability. Employers increasingly demand graduates who possess practical competencies in search engine optimization, social media management, content creation, email marketing, and data analytics. However, despite the recognized importance of these skills, many Business Education undergraduates in Rivers State universities still lack adequate exposure to the content marketing and e-commerce skills. Existing Business Education curricula remain largely theoretical, emphasizing traditional marketing and administrative skills rather than applied digital competencies relevant to online business environments (Egajivwie, 2024). Consequently, graduates often face difficulties securing meaningful employment or competing effectively in Nigeria's growing digital economy.

This mismatch between university training and labour market demands has led to increased graduate unemployment, and poor entrepreneurial performance among Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Therefore, there is a pressing need to examine proficiency gap in digital marketing skills required for enhancing employment prospects among Business Education undergraduates in Rivers State universities, in order to align educational outcomes with the realities of the 21st-century digital workforce.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was assess proficiency gap in digital marketing skills for employment prospects among Business Education Undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which digital content marketing skills are needed to enhance the employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities.

2. Ascertain the extent to which e-commerce skill needed to enhance the employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. To what extent are digital content marketing skills needed to enhance the employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities?
2. To what extent are e-commerce skill needed to enhance the employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 levels of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University Business Education Students on the extent to which digital content marketing skills are needed for their employment prospects
2. There is no significance difference in the mean ratings of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University Business Education Students on the extent to which e-commerce skills are needed for their employment prospects.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey research design was deemed most appropriate because it allows the researchers to collect detailed and factual information from a large population to describe existing status of phenomena as they occur without manipulation of variables. According to Kothara (2021) survey design research facilitate the generation of reliable and generalizable data when the population is large. The study was conducted in Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, all in Rivers State. The population of this study comprised 350 respondents. The breakdown of this population showed that Rivers State University has 91 final year Business Education students and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education has 259 final year Business Education students respectively. The census method was used to adopt the entire population of three hundred fifty (350) final year students as the sample size of the study, because the population is manageable. The primary research instrument for this study was a self-structured questionnaire designed by the researchers titled: Digital Marketing Skills Needed for Employment Prospects Questionnaire (DMSNEPQ) to collect relevant data from Business Education final year undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, two from Business Education Department and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all in the Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. Their comments and inputs were used to modify the final copies of the instruments before they were administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was measured with Cronbach Alpha statistics which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.98. The researchers administered 350 copies of the research instrument to the respondents with the help of two (2) research assistants. These assistants were drawn among staff in the university under study. A total of 350 questionnaire were distributed and successfully retrieved and used for the study. The data collected for this study was subjected to statistical analysis using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions, and t-test inferential statistics to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A benchmark/Decision rule of 2.50 and above were affirmed as agreed, and below 2.5 were rated as disagree.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent are digital Content Marketing Skills needed for Employment prospect of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities?*

Table 1: Mean response on the Extent to which Content Marketing Skills are needed for Employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities

S/N	Item- Statement	IAUE=259			RSU= 91		
	I need to:	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rmks	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rmks
1	Mastery content creation, SEO, and social-media analytics to enables me contribute to marketing campaigns.	2.89	0.80	**ME**	2.78	0.83	**ME**
2	Possess portfolio of blogs, videos, or campaigns to distinguishes me from peers who only have traditional business knowledge.	2.77	0.86	**ME**	2.72	0.90	**ME**
3	I know that skills in content strategy open roles not only in marketing departments but also in corporate communications, brand management, and digital agencies.	2.87	0.85	**ME**	2.70	0.94	**ME**
4	I know that employers often premium salaries for gradate who can drive traffic, generate leads, and measure ROI through digital content.	2.87	0.86	**ME**	2.87	0.93	**ME**
5	Engage in online communities, webinars, and influencer collaborations to build professional networks that can lead to internship and full-time positions.	2.90	0.84	**ME**	2.75	0.82	**ME**
6	Be familiar with emerging platforms (e.g Tik Tok, podcasts) to ensure that graduates I remain valuable as the market evolves.	2.87	0.87	**ME**	2.83	0.74	**ME**
	Grand Mean ($\overline{X}$)& SD	**2.86**	**0.84**	**ME**	**2.77**	**0.86**	**ME**

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Table 1 above for research questions one show the means response of the respondents on the extent that digital content marketing skills are needed to enhance employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. Item, 1 has mean scores of 2.89 and 2.78, standard deviation of 0.83 and 0.80, Item 2 have mean scores of 2.72 and 2.77, standard deviation of 0.90 and 0.86. item 3 has mean scores of 2.70 and 2.87, standard deviation of 0.94 and of 0.85, Item 4 has mean scores of 2.87 and 2.87, standard deviation of 0.93 and 0.86, Item 5 has mean scores of 2.75 and 2.90, standard deviation of 0.82 and 0.84. The grand mean of 2.76 and 2.79 recorded, indicates that both RSU and IAUE students agreed that digital content marketing skill are needed to enhance the employment prospect of Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities to a moderate extent.

Research Question 2: *To what extent are e-commerce skills needed to enhance the employment prospect of Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities.*

Table 2: Mean Response on the Extent to which E-commerce skill are needed for Employment Prospect of Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities.

S/N	Item- Statement	IAUE=259			RSU = 91		
	I need to:	$\overline{x}$	SD	Rmks	$\overline{x}$	SD	Rmks
7	Gain e-commerce expertise to opens road in online retail, digital marketing supply-chain management.	2.81	0.80	**ME**	2.82	0.83	**ME**
8	Be acquainted with e-commerce platforms (e.g shopify, WooCommerce) and data to enhance my emolyment prospects	2.75	0.87	**ME**	2.67	0.91	**ME**
9	Be able to set up product listings, manage online payments, and interpret web-traffic metrics so that I can contribute to real-time sales campaigns, reducing onboarding time for entry-level hires.	2.92	0.81	**ME**	2.92	0.93	**ME**
10	Be able to play roles that require e-commerce proficiency such as digital sales specialist or online merchandiser so that I cancommand higher starting than traditional administrative positions.	2.84	0.89	**ME**	2.78	1.01	**ME**
11	Be familiar with emerging trends like mobile commerce, AI-driven recommendations, and omichamnnel strategies to ensure that remain relevant as businesses continue to shift online.	2.81	0.86	**ME**	2.77	0.85	**ME**
	Grand Mean ($\overline{x}$)& SD	**2.83**	**0.85**	**ME**	**2.79**	**0.91**	**ME**

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Table 2 above for research question two shows the mean response of the respondents that e-commerce skill are needed for employment proposes of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. item 7 had mean scores of 2.81 and 2.82 standard deviation of 0.83 and 0.80, Item 8 has mean scores of 2.67 and 2.75, standard deviation of 0.91 and 0.87, Item 9 has mean scores of 2.92 and 2.92, standard deviation of 0.93 and 0.81, Items 10 has means scores of 2.78 and 2.84, standard deviation of I .01 and 0.89, Item 1 1 has mean scores of 2.77 and 2.81, standard deviation of 0.85 and 0.86. Grand mean of 2.75 and 2.73 indicate that both RSU and IAUE students were in agreement that e-commerce skills are needed to enhance the employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities to a moderate extent.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students on the extent to which digital content marketing skills are needed for enhances their employment prospects in Rivers State Universities.

Table 3: Analysis of Hypothesis 1 with t-test Statistics of Difference in Mean Ratings of IAUE and RSU Business Education Students on the Extent that Digital Content Skill enhance the Employment prospects of Final Year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. (N=350)

Respondents	N		SD	DF	STD Error	LS	T-cal	T-crit	Decision
IAUE	259	2.86	0.84	348	0.01	0.05	0.9	196	Accepted
RSU	91	2.77	0.86						

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The result presented in Table 3 shows a comparison between the mean response of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students regarding the extent to which digital content marketing skills are needed for their employment prospects. IAUE Business Education had mean score of 2.86 with standard deviation of 0.84, while RSU Business Education students had a mean score of 2.77 with standard derivation of 0.86. Despite the observed difference between the mean scores, the calculated t-value (t-cal = 0.9 is greater than 0.05 level of significance with 348 degrees of freedom. Based on the result, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students on the extent to which e-commerce skills are needed to enhance their employment prospects in Rivers State Universities.

Table 4: Analysis of Hypothesis 2 with t-test Statistics of Difference in Mean Ratings of IAUE and RSU Business Education Students on the Extent that E-Commerce skills are needed to enhance the Employment prospect of Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. (N=350)

Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	STD Error	LS	T-cal	T-crt	Decision
RSU	259	2.83	0.85						Accepted
IAtJ1/	91			348	0.4	0.05	0.10	1.96	
		2.79	0.91						

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The result present in Table 4 above, shows a comparison between the mean response of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students regarding the extent to which e-commerce skill are needed for employment prospects. The IAUE Business Education students had a mean score of 2.83 with a standard deviation of 0.85, while RSU Business Education students had a mean score of 2.79 with standard deviation of 0.91 despite the observed difference in the mean scores, the calculated t-value (t-cal 0.4 is greater than 0.5 level of significance with 348 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was accepted.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the findings in research question one in Table 1 revealed that digital content marketing skills to needed for enhance employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students to a moderate extent. The finding of the study is in line with the submission of Chaffey and Smith (2022), who opined that digital marketing skills serve as a major skills in todays job market as it provides advantages such as career growth opportunities to specialist (SEO, social media, video content). The corresponding hypothesis one was accepted because there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students on the extent to which digital content marketing skills are needed to enhances their employment prospects in Rivers State Universities.

The findings of the study in research question two in Table 2 revealed that Business Education final year students in IAUE and RSU have agreed that e-commerce skills are needed for employment prospect of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities to a moderate extent. The finding of the study is in line with the study of Taiminen and Karjaluoto, (2015), who submitted that applicants with e-commerce skills are in higher demand in Nigeria digital economy. The corresponding hypothesis was accepted because there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of IAUE and RSU final year Business Education students on the extent to which e-commerce skills are needed to enhance their employment prospects in Rivers State Universities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, mastering digital content marketing, and e-commerce askills can boost employment prospects of final year Business Education undergraduate students in Rivers State Universities. These skills are in high demand and institutes that incorporate them into their curriculum can better prepare students for success in the digital economy. By equipping students with these skills, institutions are preparing students for employment opportunities, entrepreneurial potential and career growth prospects.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the researchers recommended that;

1. University management should ensure that digital content skills are build into undergraduate Business Education curriculum and are taught effectively to enable students build personal brands.
2. University management should provide opportunities for undergraduate Business Education Students to offer course on e-commerce platforms and partner with ecommerce company for internship.

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