

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE USE IN NEW MEDIA AS A VIABLE INSTRUMENT FOR CUSHIONING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ENTREPRENEURS

Dr. Andrew Ndiwe Amadi
School of General Studies
Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma
Email: ndiweamadi16@gmail.com

&

Dr. Kevin O. Ugorji
School of General Studies
Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma

Abstract

The already recessed Nigerian economy was further hit by the effects of the social distancing and total lockdown, occasioned by the 2019 Corona virus disease. This caused entrepreneurs especially small and medium enterprises to quit businesses with attendant decelerated economic and social development in Nigeria. Furthermore, the persistent alarm raised by the Nigerian government about the resurgence of more deadly variants of COVID-19 has left discernible minds in the belief that the end is not yet in sight. This calls for developing new strategies that will help entrepreneurs to maintain profits and remain in business. Using library research method, this paper viewed judicious use of English language in the new media as a vibrant means of sustaining small and medium enterprises. It found out that commercializing communication through effective (English) language use in the new media had the capacity of saving costs, increasing profits and enhancing productivity: the ultimate targets of an entrepreneur. The paper, therefore, recommended among others, that entrepreneurs should be taught how to use the English language for effective communication in the new media. This will help them to maximally interact with their customers, advertise and market their goods and services thereby cushioning the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses.

Key words: Language, New media, Communication, Entrepreneurship, COVID-19

Introduction

The hitting of the world by a novel sickness, corona virus disease, in 2019, has remained one of the greatest shocks for mankind in the last decade. This dreaded disease, otherwise known as COVID-19, journeyed into Nigeria in early year 2020. Its notorious nature forced the entire world, including Nigeria, into a complete lockdown for several months. The attendant result was that economic and social activities became grounded. Craven, Liu, Mysore and Wilson (2020) attest to this fact as they note that corona virus outbreak is ravaging human health, disrupting the livelihood of thousands of people, and impacting negatively on the global economy. As the researchers write, Nigerians are subjected to further socio-economic hardships, having not recovered from the devastating effects of the economic recession of the previous few years.

While it appears that the waves of COVID-19 have abated, Nigerian government has strongly and constantly warned her citizens of a possible resurgence of more deadly variants. This alarm of an emergent more dangerous situation has caused every sensitive person to operate with restraint. Such scenarios which tended to reduce one to one physical contact, no doubt, have far-reaching negative social and economic consequences on the Nigerian masses. Entrepreneurs among whom are mainly women and youths who engage in small and medium scale enterprises are the worst hit of such loss of one to one contact since their business patronages are highly reduced.

Entrepreneurship has been identified as a means of developing the individual in particular and the overall society. In fact, Amadi and Ekechi (2017) view “entrepreneurial education of women and proper establishment of those who have acquired the entrepreneurial knowledge as a sure way of alleviating poverty in the country”. Unfortunately, the reduction on interpersonal physical contacts, occasioned by

COVID-19, poses a great danger to entrepreneurs. As Segal and Gerstel (2020) forecast, there will be a deceleration of economic growth from March 2020 onwards without a precise ending date with some countries entering recession. Hence, it becomes necessary for entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to devise new means of cushioning the effects of physical contacts loss in order to remain in business, maintain profits and enhance personal and national development.

Therefore, making judicious use of (English) language, by leveraging on technology via new media, for effective communication becomes a source of hope for keeping businesses alive. This paper raises the awareness of entrepreneurs, especially small and medium scale enterprises, who had hitherto relied on physical contacts with their customers for supply of services and marketing their products to this new option. It discusses the nature of such judicious language use cum telephone communication with a view to commercializing it for greater productivity, increased profits and enhancing the socio-economic wellbeing of the people. At this juncture, it becomes apposite to explain some underlying concepts. That is necessary to enhance full understanding of this study; it is done in what follow.

Conceptual Clarification

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship entails all the processes involved in identifying, establishing, nurturing and maintaining a business enterprise. It encapsulates the tendency to be self-employed in whatever field. This is so because entrepreneurship involves the identification of opportunities in a given economic system and, of course, venturing into them. Thus, the individual looks out for opportunities even in business areas already known. An entrepreneur, therefore, is one who creates a business opportunity, ventures into it in terms of finances and bearing the overall risks. The end target of an entrepreneur is to make maximum profits which enable his business to grow continually.

Entrepreneurship is characterized by creative activity, dynamic process, purposeful activity and risk involvement. In view of the above, Di-Masi (2010) identifies self-confidence and being multi-skilled, risk taking, innovative skills, result-oriented, total commitment, confidence in the face of difficulties and discouraging circumstances as prominent features of an entrepreneur. The present situation in Nigeria, where businesses including institutions are collapsing, tasks on the abilities of entrepreneurs to exhibit most of the above features. By introducing new dimensions to his business, such as the one proposed in this paper, a particular entrepreneur distinguishes himself, thereby creating more markets and profits for himself. The advent of COVID-19 has, however, wrecked havoc on entrepreneurs. These effects are discussed in the later part of this work. In the mean time, the researchers discuss the concept of COVID-19, below.

COVID-19

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was notified of an outbreak of respiratory illness of unknown cause in Wuhan, China. This disease was known as the 2019 Corona virus disease (COVID-19). The virus spread like wildfire to other countries of the world, including Nigeria, thereby causing the Director-General of WHO to declare the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. According to National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020a), the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first COVID-19 case in Lagos State on 27 February 2020. On 11 March 2020, COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic (an epidemic of global scale).

As the world became ravaged by the pandemic, nations are grappling with how to contain the spread and limit its effects within their borders (Obiakor, 2020). Thus, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), in line with the prescriptions of the World Health Organization (WHO), outlined the following safety measures, as presented by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020b):

1. Use of face mask;
2. Physical Distancing – maintaining a distance of at least two meters or six feet (2 arms length) between you and another person;
3. Social distancing – avoiding crowded places and places where people congregate;

4. Stay at home – no visiting neighbours, no receiving visitors, only you and your family at home;
5. Hand hygiene – washing hands regularly with soap under running water for about twenty seconds or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers;
6. Avoid hands shaking or hugging – rather wave at the person or bow.

Of course, adhering to the above measures is very difficult and tasking on individuals, including entrepreneurs.

Communication and the New Media

It is obvious that whenever people come together to teach, learn, play, sell, buy, chat, quarrel, or do other things, they talk. We talk to our siblings, parents, teachers, children, students, customers, friends, and so on either face to face or through telephone, and they respond to us equally. All the above activities are carried out through the use of language. In each of the above cases, messages, pieces of information, thoughts, opinions or many other purposes are transferred from one person to the other. This act of sharing what we have in stock, knowledge, opinions, thoughts, pieces of information, and so on is referred to as communication. Okunna (1994) equally attests that “to communicate basically means to share ideas, information, opinions, feelings or experiences between people ...” Thus, the need to effectively communicate is as fundamental as the physical human requirements of food, clothing and shelter.

Indeed, communication is a social process. It is a chain made up of identifiable links (Kreitner, 1995). In fact, there are many agents cum channel of communication. The agents, which include human beings (the human voice), sign posts, bill boards, radios, televisions, computers, telephones, newspapers, magazines and even animals, equally make use of the channel which is language. The above agents of communication, apart from human beings who invented and control all the others (Onwumere and Amadi, 2017) have been classified into the print and electronic media. The print media is now regarded as the traditional (old) mass media tools, whereas from the electronic media has evolved new media tools. The researchers’ interest in this paper is the electronic media which include computers and the telephones. According to Onwumere and Amadi (2017), “These two agents have successfully made the world a global village”. This is so because through them and the aid of language, pieces of information can be passed in bullet speed.

In this era of COVID-19 and its other variants, where human physical closeness has largely been restricted, communication between entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprises, and their clients/customers has been amply hampered. This, ultimately, has affected productivity and sales, and by extension profits and goodwill of these business establishments. The need, therefore, arises for alternative way(s) of maintaining and even improving their business relationships and statuses. Effective communication by leveraging on its channel (English language) through the agents (the new media tools) becomes a viable option in this regard.

New media are forms of media that are computational and rely on computers for redistribution. In other words, users obtain the materials through the computers, smart phones, and tablets. New media communication is a form of communication in the digital world, which involves publishing, advertising, marketing, making friends and doing more in the internet. As the researchers have already pointed out, none of the above activities can take place without the instrument of language. With particular reference to Nigeria, the main language involved is the English language.

In general terms, however, the importance of new media in communication cannot be underestimated. Amadi and Ekechi (2019) have pointed out most of the advantages hence the researchers quote them extensively here:

The effectiveness of the social (*new*) media lies in the fact that they allow user-to-user interaction unlike the traditional media which is characterized by a top-down news dissemination arrangement. Equally, they are cheap in cost (a subscription with little money can carry a user for a month or so,

irrespective of the volume of posts made (information shared). Furthermore, they tend towards a one to many communication sharing, location notwithstanding. In other words, they are capable of passing information ... in a split second (bracket italics, the researchers’).

Indeed, the tools of new media help individuals to reach out to wider audiences, especially when the language is maximally utilized.

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Entrepreneurs

It is no longer news that COVID-19 is deadly. Therefore, given the routes of its transmission which are mainly *directly* from person to person who are in close contact with each other and *indirectly* from infected materials to humans, equally through physical contacts (usually hands), the need to isolate oneself became higher. It was on this basis and the fact that many citizens had become infected and ultimately were dying that the Federal Government of Nigeria announced a total lockdown in March 2020. To that effect, schools, airports, worship centers, market places, night clubs cum recreational centers, motor parks, and so on were closed down. Dawn to dusk or even dawn to dawn curfew was introduced, in many towns! This shattered the economy and brought attendant hardships on the Nigerian masses.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Nigerians are enormous. Nevertheless, the first major victims are entrepreneurs. These are businessmen and women or small and medium enterprises (SMEs) whose establishments were shut down as a result of the restrictions on human mobility. The lockdown led to considerable decline in the demand for goods and services and by extension the reduction on funds and liquidity. This forced many entrepreneurs to quit from their businesses with the corresponding result leading to economic crises.

In fact, small and medium enterprises could not absorb the involved risks and afford the cost as a result of depreciating business activities which led to scarcer funds. They were unable to service their clients/customers, pay salaries of their employees and shoulder the responsibilities of effective supplies. The need to down-size, therefore, created unemployment. This, in turn, created multiplicity of other effects which the scope of this paper would not let the researchers delve into.

Despite the above negative impacts, COVID-19 outbreak has led to an increase in entrepreneurial activities. This is so because some innovative entrepreneurs have moved into areas that could thrive in the post-pandemic world. Such areas include, for instance, health care, education, entertainment and basic day-to-day necessities. Equally, it afforded some people the opportunities to switch over to a new product line, online sales and increase in marketing efficiency. The innovative aspect of the online marketing activities, through new media channel, in fact, relies on the instrument of (English) language. This is the subject of this paper. It is discussed subsequently.

Role of English Language in Cushioning the Impacts of COVID-19

Patterns of new media communication, using the English language, include Internet Search, Social Media, E-mail, Direct mail, Telemarketing, Websites and Blogs, Chat rooms, Mobile Apps, Web Advertising, and others. In Nigeria, it is noteworthy that among new media tools of communication, the Social Media appears to be more popular than the others. Social media include *Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram*, and so on. Its popularity lies in the fact that the less educated and even “little children” have access to it. This is made possible by the universality of the English language in Nigeria. The above implies that judicious use of English language in the new media, if embraced by entrepreneurs, has enormous roles in positively changing their business woes, due to COVID-19.

One of the major problems created by COVID-19 which affected many entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprises, is the restrictions on human physical contacts. The lock down, curfew and social distancing made it very difficult for people to cross the borders of their countries, states or communities to those of the others. Even those within the same environment were made not to be close

to one another. However, as technologies develop, the world becomes more globalized (Flew, 2002). This concept of globalization allows the world (people) to be connected, no matter the distance from user to user. It is noteworthy that this connection enhanced by technology is further tied to the use of English language, since technology cannot be effectively utilized in this regard without language.

In fact, according to Croteau and Hoynes (2003), new media “radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location less significant for our social relationships”. This “death in distance” (Carely 1992, quoted in Flew, 2002) occasioned by the instrument of language and new media becomes a panacea to the effects of lockdown and social distancing, due to COVID-19. It can help or make entrepreneurs reach out to their customers or those patronizing them, in order to remain in their businesses. For instance, entrepreneurs can use the English language to engage in virtual meetings, irrespective of their various locations. Through this, ideas are shared about customers’ needs, available products and of course their prices. By so doing, the impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses would have been reduced.

Similarly, effective language use through new media increases the volume and speed of communication among people. It has already been noted that new media passes, in a split second, pieces of information coded in language. These pieces of information are various in terms of volume, nature i.e. whether pictorial or otherwise, and so on. Thus, in the face of or post COVID-19, pushing services online by engaging on teleconferences, e-advertising, and indeed e-marketing becomes helpful in cushioning the impacts of quarantining on businesses.

Another role which effective English language use in the new media plays is the provision of opportunities for interactive communication. Croteau and Hoynes (2003) further observe that “new media has established the importance of making friendships through digital social places more prominent than in physical places”. By making new friends, which the (English) language affords, the population of those who are introduced to (new) products is increased. Thus, the market is in turn expanded, leading to more sales and, of course, more profits to the entrepreneurs’ advantages.

Furthermore, by engaging in e-advertising and e-marketing through language use in the new media, the amount of time spent on physically attending to customers is reduced. Despite the collapse of the world’s economy, people still spend to survive (feeding), appear neatly (clothing), make themselves happy (entertainment) and on other needs, during quarantine (lockdown). New media can help people to easily access groceries and other items via e-commerce platforms with delivery assurance. This cannot equally be achieved without effective use of (English) language. An innovative entrepreneur can thus leverage on language to convince his numerous online clients/customers, reduce personal stress and beat the dangers of physical contacts during COVID-19 while also sustaining his business.

Moreover, given the associated problems of COVID-19, innovative entrepreneurs needed a means to remain afloat hence the need to embrace internet communication. In the quest to retain business currency, an entrepreneur needs to observe all the ethics of business, be polite (bearing in mind the age-long saying that “the customer is always right”, and forceful in his language choices. Such pattern of language choices in the new media can lead to commercialization of communication with its attendant gains. Borgohain (2016) explains that “commercialization is a process by which new product or service is introduced into the general market”. Therefore, by using this *process* of English language in the new media, there will be increases in the range of friendship, as well as the volume of items, services and products pushed into the market. Furthermore, there will be reduction on the cost of transporting or advertising these products and services since subscriptions with little amount could carry a user very far, and also reduces the time spent on attending to customers. Thus, the entrepreneur saves costs and gains maximally. To this end, the impacts of COVID-19 on them will be drastically reduced.

Finally, internet communication via the instrument of English language can equally reduce the rate of COVID-19 infections on citizens, by extension entrepreneurs. This is so because it can substitute the

needed physical contacts (the major avenue for COVID-19 transmission) for the sake of buying and selling while assuring maximum sales and profits, if handled effectively. There is no gainsaying the importance of sound health in our lives and its extended advantage on national growth; a healthy nation is indeed a healthy economy. In fact, the entrepreneur needs to be healthy to remain in business.

Conclusion

The devastating impacts of COVID-19, especially on the areas of human physical isolation and interaction, have affected entrepreneurs to the extent that the overall Nigerian economy has become shaky. This paper made inroads towards solving the nasty problems hence it discussed new patterns of engaging in commercial activities by entrepreneurs in order to sustain their businesses in the face of COVID-19. The study highlighted the ennobling roles which effective use of English language in new media can play in helping entrepreneurs to push and market their goods and services online.

Moreover, engaging in businesses through the use of new media which the English language affords entrepreneurs is found to be cheaper than even the normal face to face business transactions. When entrepreneurs engage in virtual business meetings, teleconferences, e-buying and selling, and so on, they expand the population of their customers/clients, identify specific areas of customers' needs, reduce the rate of COVID-19 infections, increase productivities and enhance profits. The researchers, therefore, called on entrepreneurs to embrace the opportunities effective English language use in the new media offers for effective business communication. This will surely help to neutralize the negative impacts of COVID-19 and its emerging variants on their businesses.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Entrepreneurs should embrace new media channel of communication as a viable option for interacting with their customers, advertising and marketing their goods and services in the face of COVID-19 and even in the post pandemic world. This option encourages maximum profits and reduces health hazards in the overall interest of the entrepreneurs and the nation.
2. Since effective language use is needed to achieve the above, entrepreneurs who are not conversant with the use of English language and Information Communication Technologies (ICT) should quickly enroll to learn them. Physical learning, though observing necessary COVID-19 protocols, is suggested here to ensure quicker and better learning.
3. The Nigerian government, whether at the federal, state or local government level, should redirect part of its palliative measures on COVID-19 to training entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprise operators. The areas of focus should be on effective English language use as applicable in the new media and the use of ICT facilities for businesses. When that is done, government should procure or subsidize the procurement of these gadgets for those trained. This will make entrepreneurs who, as it were, would have quit businesses to remain thereby helping to revive the depreciated national economy and development.
4. Finally, further studies can engage in researches that will help entrepreneurs appreciate the importance of effective communication to the growth of their businesses. Such studies should equally help them discover other viable areas of investments they needed to survive in the post pandemic world. Given their dynamic and innovative nature, entrepreneurs whose interests are stimulated in such new areas of businesses will surely switch over. This will help to sustain economic and social development in post COVID-19 Nigeria.

References

- Amadi, A.N. and Ekechi, C.A.O. (2017). Empowering Women through Entrepreneurial Education: A Necessary Step Towards Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. *Journal of Qualitative Education*. Vol.13 (1): 100-106.
- Amadi, A.N. and Ekechi, C.A.O. (2019). "Social Media Manipulations: A Dangerous Road to Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria". In Okere, T.I., C.A. Njoku and G.O. Mbarah, ed. *A Critique of Nigerian Democracy*. Vol. 2, No. 16. Owerri: Whelan Research Academy. Pp.5-18.

- Borgohain, S. (2016). Commercialisation of Education System: A Critical Analysis. *International Research Journal of Inter-disciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*. 1 (xii): 71-76.
- Craven, M., L. Liu, M. Mysore and M. Wilson (2020). *Risk Practice COVID-19: Implications for Business*. Mckinsey and Company.
- Croteau, D. and Hoynes, W. (2003). *Media Society: Industries, Images and Audiences*. 3rd ed. Pine Forge Press. ISBN. 9780761987734.
- Di-Masi, P. (2010). "Defining Entrepreneurship". <https://www.gdrc.org/icm/micro/define-micro.html>. Retrieved 10 January 2021.
- Flew, T. (2002). *New Media: An Introduction*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Kreitner, R. (1995). *Management*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020a). *Training Manual for Primary Health Care Workers*.
- National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020b). *Flip Chart on COVID-19 for Community Volunteers*.
- Obiakor, T. (2020). COVID-19 and the Informal Sector in Nigeria: The Socio-Economic Cost Implications. <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/covid-19-and-the-informal-sector-in-Nigeria-the-socio-economic-cost-implications/> Retrieved on 2 February 2021.
- Okunna, C.S. (1994). *Introduction to Mass Communication*. Enugu: ABIC Books and Equipment Ltd
- Onwumere, A.A. and Amadi, A.N. (2017). *The Dynamics of Practical communication in English for Tertiary Institutions*. Owerri: Onwulex Publishing Company.
- Segal, S. and Gerstel, D. (2020). The Global Economic Impacts of COVID-19, Critical Questions. Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). <https://www.csis.org/analysis>. Retrieved on 15 January 2021.