

Streamlining E-Commerce Platforms to Help Small Businesses Reach Broader Markets and Scale Operations

Abigael Yetunde Opeyemi-Agbola¹

¹ Executive MBA, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

Publication Date: 2025/02/13

Abstract

There has been great dependency on the use of e-commerce platforms, and this has provided opportunities for small businesses targeted to expanding their operations to a larger number of people. The proper use of these e-commerce platforms has tackled challenges with technical literacy, integration of e-commerce platforms and customer engagement. In this work the effect of e-commerce solution on small businesses was assessed. In this research a cross-sectional method was employed, and data was gotten from 40 small businesses from different industries questionnaires and interviews. It was shown that 75% of the interviewees attested that the use of e-commerce solutions resulted in an increase in their operational efficiency and customer acquisition. The common challenges that small businesses face was highlighted in these research through the questionnaires and interviews. Some of these challenges included the issues with navigation of e-commerce platforms and integration of newer solution into the small business ecosystem. The study highlights the advantages of developing a comprehensible, adaptable e commerce platform that focusses on addressing the needs of small businesses and highlights that attending to the issues that small businesses are faced with these businesses can utilize e-commerce platforms to foster growth, drive innovation and impact the economy significantly.

I. INTRODUCTION

Small businesses have evolved beyond their conventional geographical limitations and access to the global markets which is due to the rise of e commerce which has greatly impacted the operations of businesses. The platforms provided by the rise of E-commerce poses as very essential tools that aid small businesses to better define their operations, improve customer engagement and upscale their services to gather to the demands of a competitive digital market. The advantages of small businesses are enormous although they still have several challenges. The major challenge e-commerce is faced with is with the utilization and adoption of their platforms. There is also a challenge posed by the lack of technical knowledge by a vast number of people, high cost in implementation and issues with integrating the e-commerce structure with the traditional business processes.

One of the essentials for economic growth and advancement for any economy is the advancement of small businesses. Small businesses account for a significant quota in job creation in many contires which attributes to their GDP (OECD, 2017). There is a great need for e-commerce platform to be leveraged on in the

financial sector so as to meet up with the fast-evolving financial landscape. Small businesses are still plagued with lack of technical expertise which is critical in integrating complex e commerce systems and this issue has led to loss of vital opportunities which are key for the growth and expansion of these businesses (Hossain, 2020). These platforms help make accessibility to financial products easier and its necessary for fostering inclusiveness and enabling small businesses to thrive in a digital world.

There has been preceding research that have been mainly concerned with the advantages of e-commerce adoption some of which included increase in efficiency, market expansion and improved customer satisfaction. There are barriers that limit the adoption e commerce for small businesses and over the years they have been given little attention. These barriers have mostly been affected by areas with lack of access to mobile devices and digital development. This study (which is important) aims to fill that gap: it explores how effective streamlined e-commerce platforms can be for small business owners. However, these platforms are designed specifically to meet their needs. Although there are many options available, this one focuses on helping small businesses

grow. Because of this, we can see how much they can benefit.

The challenges and opportunities concerned with e-commerce adoption are evaluated in this research and this contributes to developing the literature on digital advancement. It also entails the proposed actions for policy makers, tech developers of e-commerce platforms and business owners.

II. METHODOLOGY

➤ Research Approach

This study was carried out with the use of mixed-method approach, putting together quantitative and qualitative methods to make sure that concrete information was gotten, as to how e-commerce platforms have helped small businesses, and the challenge involved in its adoption. This approach also captured numerical data and perspectives of small business owners, providing a holistic view of the impact of IT tools.

➤ Sampling Procedure

Questionnaires were given to 40 small business owners or representatives, gathering information on the improvements of their business with the use of e-commerce platforms and the challenges involved.

➤ Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data on respondents' perceptions of e-commerce platforms were collected via structured questionnaires. As for the questionnaires, it contained multiple-choice questions with responses ranging from a Likert scale which would gauge key metrics on ease of use, and the challenges involved in the use of these platforms. To enrich the understanding of the quantitative data, in-depth interviews were about the specific challenges and success stories experienced by the small business owners.

➤ Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were upheld throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they fully understood the purpose of the research and their rights. Data was then analyzed and all participants were granted anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring that the data and information would be used for academic purposes only. As well this study complied with data protection guidelines and all collected information was securely stored and processed.

III. RESULT

Table 1 Key Metrics and Barriers in Streamlining E-Commerce Platforms for Small Businesses

Small Business Type	Category	Strongly Agree (n)	Agree (n)	Neutral (n)	Disagree (n)	Strongly Disagree (n)	Total (n)	Key Observations
Retail	Enhanced Market Reach	15	13	7	3	2	40	70% accepted that e-commerce improved their customer reach significantly.
Food & Beverages	Cost Savings	12	15	6	5	2	40	Cost savings were noted, especially with optimized logistics and procurement.
Fashion & Apparel	Increased Revenue	13	14	6	4	3	40	67.5% accepted that revenue increased due to an enhanced online presence.
Technology	Workflow Efficiency	16	12	7	3	2	40	70% noted significant improvements in workflow automation and efficiency while 12.5% disagreed.
Retail	Poor Internet Connectivity	8	14	10	3	5	40	Internet challenges were significant in rural areas and underserved regions.
Food & Beverages	Platform Usability Issues	10	13	9	5	3	40	Usability challenges hindered onboarding for less tech-savvy businesses.
Fashion & Apparel	Security Concerns	9	12	10	6	3	40	Concerns about online fraud reduced adoption rates for some businesses.
Technology	Digital Literacy Barriers	8	12	10	6	4	40	Limited digital skills slowed adoption, especially in less developed regions.

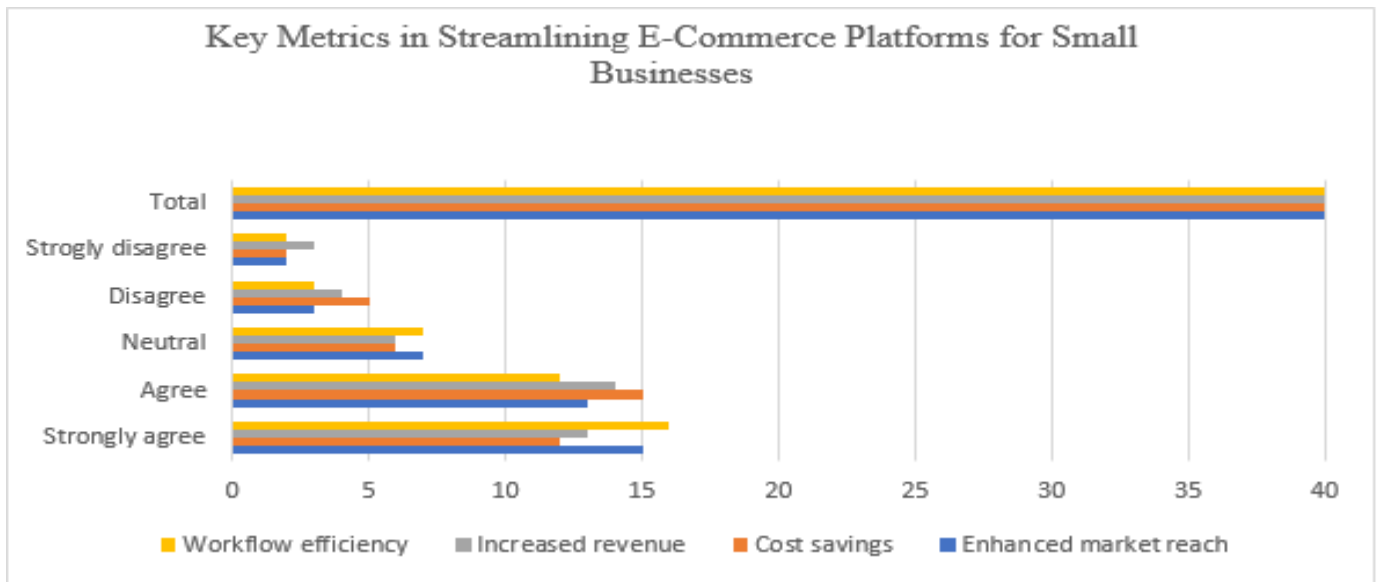


Fig 1 Key Metrics in Streamlining E-Commerce Platforms for Small Businesses

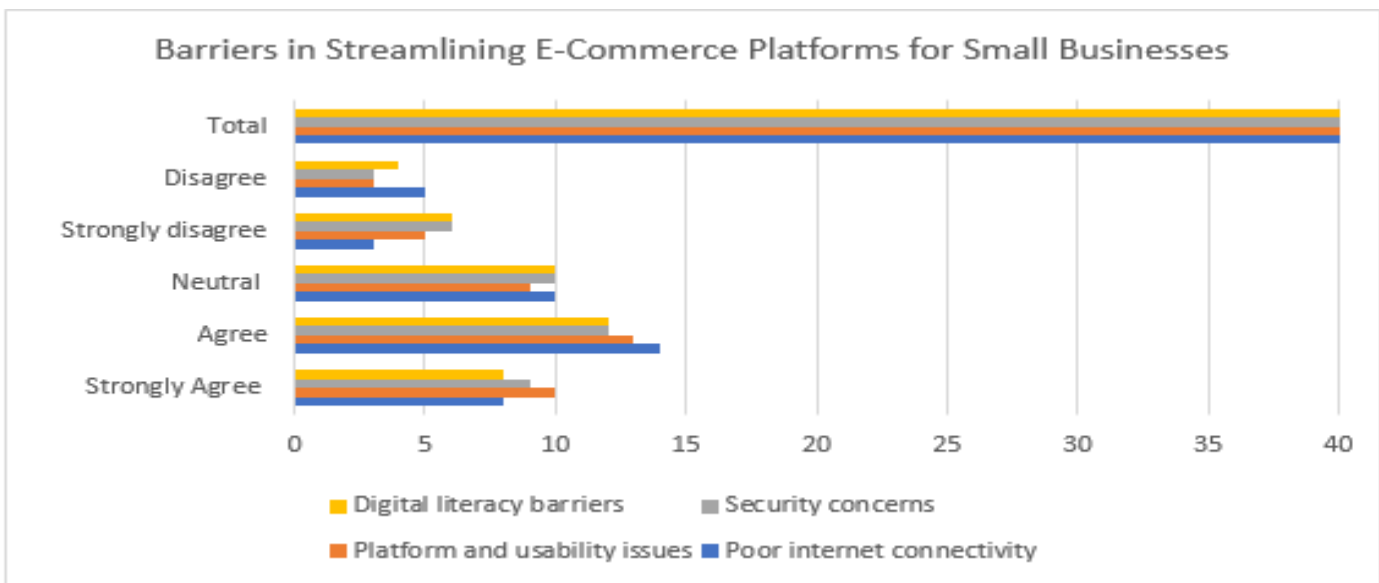


Fig 2 Barriers in Streamlining E-Commerce Platforms for Small Businesses

IV. DISCUSSION

The result of this study goes forward to show the potential of e-commerce platforms to help small businesses in achieving a broader and better market reach. From the survey carried out across 40 small business owners, 15 strongly agreed and 13 agreed that the adoption of e-commerce platforms has enhanced their market reach, leading to a bigger profit margin. This shows that digital technologies have the capacity to reduce market entry barriers and give small business owners a good opportunity to expand their customer base (Zhu and Kraemer, 2005).

From the results, 15 and 12 out of 40 agreed and strongly agreed, respectively that cost savings is a key benefit of adopting, e-commerce platforms, particularly in areas such as optimized logistics and procurement. With the aid of e-commerce platforms, the respondents recorded reduction in operational costs and improved efficiency. They also reported that they had lower expenses with inventory efficiency, transportation and payment processing as they have leverage on these platforms. This

aligns with insights from Molla and Licker (2005) as they emphasized on how small businesses can reduce costs with e-commerce solutions. 33% of respondents remained neutral or disagreed. This point to challenges such as initial implementation expenses, or for additional investment in training and infrastructure (Gupta et al., 2013).

A total of 27 respondents attested that they have experienced an increase in revenue as a result of their online presence. This clearly shows how critical and important digital tools are in expanding market reach and customer acquisition, as small businesses can now reach their target audience or customers beyond their geographical location. These platforms give small businesses the leverage to digital market tools, attract new customers and optimize the product visibility. These findings are in synergy with that of Zhou et al. (2018) As it was noted that small businesses making use of e-commerce platforms experience a higher sale performance as it shades away logistical challenges. The remaining number of respondents were either neutral or disagreed that e-commerce platforms lead to an increase in revenue.

Some adding that the struggle with getting the best out of online platforms, this is due to challenges in platform management or competitive market dynamics (Schneider, 2015)

70% of respondents reported that they have experienced very significant improvement as they have leveraged e-commerce platforms. Further stating that features like automated inventory tracking, order management systems and integrated payments solutions have given rise to seamless and streamlined operations. Therefore, increasing the efficiency and reducing the time spent on administrative tasks. E-commerce platforms clearly, enhance back-end operations and improve the allocation of resources for small businesses (Bharadwaj et al., 2013)

A lower percentage of respondents were on the contrary, as they experienced difficulties in adapting to new systems and lack of training to get the benefits of automation, this goes further to emphasize the importance of providing proper onboarding and support to ensure that small businesses utilize e-commerce platforms for operational efficiency (Hossain, 2020)

This study further extends to showing a few challenges small businesses face in the integration of e-commerce platforms. Poor Internet connectivity, platform usability issues, security, concerns, and digital literacy barriers were the prevalent challenges.

Poor Internet connectivity came as a critical issue as 55% of respondents agreed that unreliable or insufficient Internet infrastructure is a challenge, especially in underserved regions. This is a major challenge that should be critically looked into, since reliable Internet access is important to digital transformation (Bharadwaj et al., 2013).

Platform usability issues was another issue, 58% (25% agreeing and 33% strongly agreeing) that they experience difficulties in navigating through e-commerce platforms (especially less tech-savvy business owners), noting that the interface of some of these platforms can be complex sometimes, making them not to benefit from them. User-friendly designs and interfaces are important for usability and in reducing technological entry barriers (Schneider, 2015).

Security concerns also stood as a stumbling block to the adoption of e-commerce platforms, as 21 out of 40 respondents expressed fears of online fraud, hacking or data breaches and unauthorized access to important information or data they have. These fears have led to the lack of trust and skepticism to leverage these platforms. This is a synchronization to findings of Kim et al (2008) as they noted that robust cybersecurity measures will be needed for businesses to fully embrace most e-commerce platforms.

50% of respondents cited limited digital literacy as a big problem, particularly in undeveloped areas as they lack the technical know-how to make good use of these

platforms. This finding is supported by Martin and Matlay (2001), as they emphasize on the importance of digital literacy training in order to enable businesses to make good use of digital tools.

All of these barriers outlined, hinders small businesses from fully adopting e-commerce platforms and getting the best out of them. To address these challenges, the following remedies would suffice; improving digital infrastructure, implementing robust cybersecurity measures, designing platforms with simpler interface and easily usable, providing trainings to close knowledge, gap and foster digital inclusion.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study evidently portray the transformative potential of tailored e-commerce platforms in making it possible for small businesses to be able to expand their market reach and scale operations. The majority of respondents reported enhanced operational efficiency and significant improvements in getting new customers and satisfying them after adopting streamlined e-commerce solutions. These results further show the value of e-commerce platforms equipped with features such as digital payment integration, workflow automation, and predictive analytics, which address critical operational challenges.

However, the study also revealed persistent barriers that can hinder the optimal use of e-commerce platforms, including platform complexity, limited digital literacy among small business owners, and the lack of seamless integration with existing processes. Addressing these barriers is very important to ensure the success of small businesses in leveraging e-commerce for growth and competitiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- E-commerce platform providers will need to work on user-friendly interfaces that accommodate different degrees of technological literacy. To ensure that small business owners have an incredibly positive experience using your platform could just mean providing simplified navigation, an intuitive design, and step-by-step guides.
- Small businesses' owners need to be provided tailored training programs to upskill their technological skills. These could take the form of workshops, webinars, and one-on-one coaching sessions on how to navigate the e-commerce landscape, digital marketing tactics, and ways to retain customer attention.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bharadwaj, A. S., El Sawy, O. A., Pavlou, P. A., & Venkatraman, N. (2013). Digital business strategy: Toward a next-generation of insights. *MIS Quarterly*, 37(2), 471–482.
- [2]. Chang, W., Park, J. E., & Chaui, S. (2019). How small business e-commerce adoption impacts competitive advantage: An analysis of

- organizational capabilities. *Journal of Business Research*, 101, 148–158.
- [3]. Hossain, M.M. (2020). Financial resources, financial literacy and small firm growth: Does private organizations support matter? *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 30(2), 35-5.
 - [4]. Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R. (2008). A trust-based consumer decision-making model in electronic commerce: The role of trust, perceived risk, and their antecedents. *Decision Support Systems*, 44(2), 544–564.
 - [5]. Laudon, K. C., & Traver, C. G. (2020). *E-commerce 2020: Business, technology, and society* (16th ed.). Pearson.
 - [6]. Martin, L. M., & Matlay, H. (2001). “Blanket” approaches to promoting ICT in small firms: Some lessons from the DTI ladder adoption model in the UK. *Internet Research*, 11(5), 399–410.
 - [7]. Molla, A., & Licker, P. S. (2005). E-commerce adoption in developing countries: A model and instrument. *Information & Management*, 42(6), 877–899.
 - [8]. OECD. (2017). Enhancing the contributions of SMEs in a global and digitalized economy. *OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Papers*, 6, 1–48.
 - [9]. Schneider, G. P. (2015). *Electronic commerce* (12th ed.). Cengage Learning.
 - [10]. Zhou, L., Zhang, D., & Zimmermann, H. D. (2018). Social commerce research: An integrated view. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 30, 1–15.
 - [11]. Zhu, K., & Kraemer, K. L. (2005). Post-adoption variations in usage and value of e-business by organizations: Cross-country evidence from the retail industry. *Information Systems Research*, 16(1), 61–84.