Does Social Media Site Use by Undergraduate Students of Nigerian Universities Influence Pre-start-up and Start-up Activities? A Focus on COVID-19 Perception

Kenneth Chukwujioke Agbim and Gomna Gbenger Gbar

ABSTRACT

One of the factors that can influence an individual to start a new business is the perception of danger and uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 protocols have left so many people with diverse perceptions of danger and uncertainties. In addition, the pandemic brought about an unprecedented increase in the use of social media sites. Therefore, this study investigates if Nigerian undergraduate students' COVID-19 perception and social media site use influences them to engage in pre-start-up and start-up activities. The adopted study design is qualitative method that is based on Focus Group Interview (FGI). The study data were collected from final year students in 10 public Universities in South Eastern Nigeria. It was found from the thematic content analysis that despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 rules, the undergraduate students were involved in pre-start-up and start-up activities owing to their positive perceptions of the COVID-19 rules and the use of social media sites. However, their start-up activities are constrained by lack of business capital. The researchers recommend the establishment of entrepreneurship development fund for undergraduate students. Qualitative and/or quantitative methods should be adopted to replicate this study in similar or different higher institutions in other parts of the world.

Keywords: COVID-19 perception, Pre-start-up activities, Start-up activities and Social media sites.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, unemployment rate among university graduates in particular is becoming unprecedented. This is due to lack of workable government policy on entrepreneurship, non-existent job openings, and lack of funding for start-up activities. Consequently, universities are now globally running entrepreneurship programs since start-up creation is increasingly being seen as a way out [30]. Start-up creation comprises pre-start-up and start-up activities [80]. Lakshmi *et al.* [55] notes that nascent entrepreneurs engage in pre-start-up activities. That is, the initial steps before the launch of the venture. On the other hand, new entrepreneurs create new ventures (start-up activities) to become self-employed [83].

Further, the intention to develop a venture is influenced by the perceptions of desirability and viability of the entrepreneurial action. Entrepreneurial actions in the wake of the Coronavirus 2019 (hereafter, COVID-19) have increasingly and largely been conducted via social media sites. This is because by the COVID-19 rules, businesses that are started and carried on in the COVID-19 period via the social media sites were recognized as desirable and viable. Moreover, opportunity identification is somewhat

challenging with the traditional off-line (face-to-face) social network approach. The increasing use of social media sites during the COVID-19 pandemic have been linked to the fact that the utilisation facilitates the sharing of information on better opportunities, generation of new ideas for starting a business, access to funds and emotional supports for new venture creation [26], [34], [73].

The use of social media sites among Nigerian university students has become unprecedented [59]. These students utilise their social media account because of the perceived usefulness [28], [33], [59]. Perceived usefulness is the extent to which the use of social media sites is expected to be beneficial to the prospective users [28]. The desirability of the usefulness and the foreseen benefits informs the behaviour of the individual users [6]. The resultant effect of the perceived usefulness on the individual's behaviour is based on frequency of use [77].

Previous studies have explored the influence of social media sites on start-ups [27], [52], but not of Nigerian university undergraduate students in adverse conditions such as presented by COVID-19. This is in spite of the high rate of university graduate unemployment. Research has shown that the Nigerian university environment is dotted with businesses that are owned by university undergraduates and graduates

[4], [58]. This situation has been linked to the rising rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria; the rate which is currently 40.9 per cent [67]. More specifically, there is a notable increase in social media site use among students for communication and online lectures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, diverse COVID-19 perceptions were held by Nigerians, including the students during this period. Taken together, there is need to ascertain if the increase in social media site and the various COVID-19 perceptions influenced pre-start-up and start-up activities among the students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Pre-start-up and Start-up Activities

Pre-start-up activities are all the actions undertaken by an individual before the launch of a new business [60]. Pre-start-up activities entail attitudinal and experiential changes that depict preparation for new venture creation. It is associated with understanding one's own capabilities and potentials, identifying opportunities, learning about the relevant venture, and making decisions to create the new venture. Pre-start-up activities are also viewed as the identification, codification and development of the requisite enterprise skills, capabilities, and attitudes for start-up activities [11]. This individual is usually referred to as a nascent entrepreneur. Atherton [11] further notes that all the activities undertaken by a nascent entrepreneur in order to prepare for business formation are pre-start-up activities. Pre-start-up activities include making decision on new venture creation; preparing a business plan; devoting more time to business preparation; conducting market research; seeking for government support; looking for facilities/equipment; thinking of individuals to hire as employees; thinking of how to source for funds; making enquiry on how to obtain business license; and attending enterprise development training [60].

On the other hand, start-up activities are the behaviours put up - and the events engaged in - by an individual involved in a new business formation [30], [70]. This individual is often seen as a new entrepreneur. Start-up activities include adopts a business idea; executing a business plan; exploring identified market opportunities; looking for potential partners; buying equipment; developing products; discussing with potential customers; applying for funds from financial institutions; and determining when the business will run [30]. Pre-start-up and start-up activities include the development of social relationships and social ties through social media sites [11], [85].

B. Social Media Site

Social media sites (also known as social media tools, social network platforms or social network sites) are online communication channels that are dedicated to facilitating the creation and sharing of information, and other forms of expressions [61]. Social media sites are virtual places that cater for a specific population; a place where people of similar interests gather to communicate, share and discuss ideas [75]. Kaplan and Haenlein [51] define social network sites as user generated content by many end users. These sites, tools or platforms include Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram. Social media sites facilitate opportunity creation from new information available in the market and

opportunity discovery from existing information in the market [66], [73]. Active utilisation of social network platforms engenders: the sharing of a wide range of information categories [1], [31]; connection to resource owners [13]; access to start-up funds [48]; and the creation of start-ups [35]. Liang and Yuan [56] aver that nascent entrepreneurs with broader social network platforms are more likely to receive funding from investors than those with narrower network platforms. Specifically, Yang and Berger [87] asserts that nascent entrepreneurs who use Facebook and Twitter can raise larger amounts of funds for their start-ups in the early stages. The utilisation of social network platforms is seen as the best way to expose today's youths to business opportunities and new venture creation process [61]. Social media site use among youths especially student has been remarkable. Students adopt these sites because of their perceived usefulness [28]. Moreover, the use of these sites by undergraduates has been re-echoed due to COVID-19 perceptions [5], [45].

C. COVID-19 Perception

COVID-19 originated from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) [8], [86]. It was first noticed in Wuhan, China [42], [47]. COVID-19 negatively impacts the social, economic, health, and educational sectors of nations [76]. It has unprecedentedly changed the culture of so many countries, including business culture. This is via the COVID-19 rules imposed by the governments in a bid to reduce the rate of infection and the negative consequences of the pandemic. There are several factors that can influence an individual to start a new business. These factors can be personal, cognitive, or prescriptive [18], [63]. Hernández-Sánchez *et al.* [45] emphasise that an individual can be influenced by entrepreneurial intention, pro-activeness, optimism, COVID-19 perception, and psychological need satisfaction. However, the focus of this study is COVID-19 perception. How individuals perceive their environment especially in dangerous and uncertain situations as posed by COVID-19 can influence their alertness and intention to start businesses of their own. Aside such environment influencing the behaviour of the individuals through personal perceptions, the degree of perceptions of the individuals also varies [17], [19], [45]. The pandemic has increased the uncertainty in the business environment of the self-employed. Further, the negative consequences are still unfolding [57]. However, COVID-19 has opened up so many vistas of business opportunities for nascent and new entrepreneurs [74].

D. Social Media Site use and Pre-start-up Activities

Zafar *et al.* [88] notes that the preparation to create start-ups is today better aided via social network platforms. Fornoni *et al.* [36] empirically establish that social network platforms increase access to business opportunities. Aside cultural supports for entrepreneurship, nascent entrepreneurs are also motivated by opportunities to get involved in pre-start-up activities [49]. Further, Zafar *et al.* [88] argue that networking via social media sites help nascent entrepreneurs in developing entrepreneurial intention. Social media can facilitate communication, decision-making process, access to information and the creation and discovery of new opportunities [73]. Park *et al.* [73] adds that social network

platforms give nascent entrepreneurs access to new ideas for creating start-ups. Since building a strong relationship is important in pre-start-up activities, nascent entrepreneurs use social network platforms to share information and find better opportunities. Choi and Berger [23] affirm that social network platforms arm nascent entrepreneurs with information and resources to create new ventures. Hernández-Sánchez *et al.* [45] found that COVID-19 perception of students is related to the intention to create a new venture. Dzandu *et al.* [28] further adds that the youths use social media to enhance their communication and social networking activities.

E. Social Media Site use and Start-up Activities

The use of social media platforms among young people is seen as the best way to expose them to business [61]. Arregle *et al.* [9] argue that young new entrepreneurs rarely possess all the resources for new venture creation. They acquire the needed scarce resources for start-up activities by relying on their personal social networks through social network platforms. Ojeleye *et al.* [71] found that social network platforms provide a lot of avenues for young people to become entrepreneurs. By getting involved in creative, innovative, leadership activities in these platforms they are influenced to set up their own businesses. Basri and Siam [12] assert that social media sites are strategic components of marketing and business start-up activities. Negedu and Isik [68] argue that social media sites such as WhatsApp and Facebook do not only have positive impact on business growth in Nigeria but has the potential to improve ease of doing business. Online social network platforms allow users to share business and personal information about themselves [71] and to develop start-ups [43]. In addition, Fischer and Reuber [35] establish that social interactions via Twitter help entrepreneurs to bring about their desired objectives. Dziadkiewicz [29] empirically prove that Polish internet users are active in many social network platforms for the purpose of creating and maintaining relationships and forming new ventures. Morah and Omojola [65] argue that the use of Facebook and WhatsApp have significant effects on the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Chakraborty [21] found that social network site such as Facebook is the most popular site among the youths because it helps them maintain and strengthen social ties within social and academic settings. Research has shown that one of the key resources for start-ups is finance. However, due to lack of lending track record coupled with limited collateral, new entrepreneurs often incur serious difficulties when seeking for funds [15]. In response to the foregoing, Alexy *et al.* [7] establish that entrepreneurs need social network with funding sources. This is because funding plays an indispensable role in the evolution and eventual success of new ventures. Blank [16] corroborates Alexy *et al.*'s [7] view by stating that social network platforms increase access to valuable resources that are not necessarily "owned" by the entrepreneur. Yang and Berger [87] asserts that social media sites utilisation enhances the success of start-ups financially. Research has shown that Twitter is associated with increased venture financing for start-ups [2], [40]. The benefits of social network sites to new entrepreneurs include advice, confirmation of decisions and emotional supports [84]. Oludimu [72] adds that Millionaire

West African start-ups 'raised over \$1.806 billion via Facebook between 2010 and 2019, 97.9% of which went to Nigerian start-ups.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

The design adopted in this study is qualitative method that is based on Focus Group Interview (FGI). Qualitative method is employed to examine the quality of relationships. FGI is adopted because it reveals practices and viewpoints that individual interview may not reveal. FGI is employed in this study because there is no substantial information on the relationships among social media site use, pre-start-up activities and start-up activities with respect to COVID-19 perception. FGI is also adopted because there is need to collect detailed data on sensitive issue such as COVID-19 [25], [57].

B. Population and Sampling

The population of this study is made up of the final year students in the Department of Business Administration of the public universities in South Eastern Nigeria: University of Nigeria; Nnamdi Azikiwe University; Alex Ekwueme University; Federal University of Technology; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture; Odimegwu Ojukwu University; Imo State University; Abia State University; Ebonyi State University; and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Purposive sampling technique was employed to facilitate the selection of undergraduate students that are involved in pre-start-up activities and those who are engaged in start-up activities. In all, 2 FGs were formed in each of the 10 universities: the Pre-start-up Activities FG (PAFG) and the Start-up Activities FG (SAFG). Each FG is made up of 3 undergraduate students. Three participants were chosen to enable the researchers adhere to all the protocols of COVID-19. Overall, a total of 60 undergraduate students participated in the study.

C. Instrument and Data Collection

Following the call off of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike in December 23, 2020 and reopening of most of the public universities on January 18, 2021, the study instruments were sent out for validation. In January 21 and 22, 2021, the interview guides were validated by three lectures; one was a professor and the other two were senior lecturers. These lecturers were selected from the University of Nigeria. Thereafter, their suggestions were affected accordingly. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed between January 25 and 26, 2021 by administering the instruments on 12 final year undergraduate students in the Department of Business Management, Benue State University. Based on the comments, the instruments were refine-tuned. Eight persons who understood the aim of the study were selected to serve as moderators of the FGI. Before the main interviews commenced, the different undergraduate students who were selected as participants of the study were communicated through the WhatsApp group account that was created for that purpose. The communication included the date and time for the interview with the FG in each of the universities.

In all the universities, before the interviews commenced, the participants were served soft drinks and snacks. At the same time, the moderators engaged the participants in discussions that were centered on their academic performance. This was done to enable the students relax before asking them the interview questions. After the refreshment, the aim of the research was explained to the undergraduate students. The generated data from the first two universities where the interview started - University of Nigeria and Nnamdi Azikiwe University - were analysed for reflection and feedback. Based on the results, the reoccurring ideas in the two interviews were incorporated into the interview guides. Thereafter, the interviews were re-conducted in the two universities and subsequently in the remaining eight universities. Responses during the interviews were taken as notes and audio recorded as well. The average time for interviewing each PAFG and SAFG were forty five minutes and one hour respectively. The interview proper started on February 1 and ended on February 19, 2021. At the end of each interview, the summary of the responses which were transcribed verbatim were given to the students for validation.

D. Data Analysis

The study employed thematic content analysis. This entails the researcher reading and re-reading the transcripts to highlight the comments of the participants and assigning codes to the quotes. The codes that overlap in meaning and intent were categorised and described using words or phrases that are known as themes. Thereafter, the researcher and the moderators placed the listed themes side by side with the transcripts to verify the applicability of the themes to the data. The credibility of the process of analysis was also checked by a team involving the participants, moderators, and the researchers. To hide the identity of the participants, the quotes are identified by a Participant number (e.g., P1), Pre-start-up Activities Focus Group number (e.g., PAFG1) and Start-up Activities Focus Group number (e.g., SAFG1) in the presentation of the findings.

IV. FINDINGS

All the 60 undergraduate students participated in the interview on the day their respective PAFGs and SAFGs were scheduled. The participants are aged 20-30 years old. The distribution of the participants by sex shows that 61.4% (37) of the undergraduate students are male, while 38.6% (23) are female. In addition, 60.7% (36), 23.6% (14) and 15.7% (10) of the fathers of the participants are business owners, civil servants, and employees of private firms respectively. On the other hand, 40.7% (24), 46.4% (28) and 12.9% (8) of the participants' mothers are business owners, civil servants, and employees of private firms respectively. Based on the thematic analysis, 9 themes were identified from the PAFG transcripts, while 5 themes emerged from the SAFG transcripts.

A. Pre-start-up Activities FGI Themes

1. Theme 1: Motivation for social media site use

The participants mentioned that before the COVID-19 era they were attracted to use social media sites to interact with

friends, family members, fellow students, lecturers, and non-teaching members of staff in the university because of its real time characteristic. To some participants, they opened accounts in the social media sites because of the learning and education potentials. The participants said their active presence in social media sites was informed by the fact that the sites are rich sources of novel and timely information, knowledge, and skills. In addition, the participants are of the view that the COVID-19 era presented more uses of the sites particularly in business; hence the era helped to increase their activities in the sites. Other motivations are that social media site use enhances self-employment and pre-start-up activities. One of the participants notes that: "... before the pandemic, I was attracted to the social media sites because it offered a better avenue to interact with my family and friends. Also, social media site use is beneficial in creating and maintaining relationships with other students and members of staff, and in carrying out preliminary business creation activities. However, in the COVID-19 era, I discovered that using the sites facilitates self-employment" (P3, PAFG3).

2. Theme 2: Social media sites used

The participants indicated that before the COVID-19 pandemic, they were not active in the Facebook and YouTube platforms; they were only fairly active in WhatsApp and Twitter sites. However, the emergence of the pandemic and the protocols were the factors that endeared them to be very active in WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube platforms. One of the participants argues that: "Personally, I wasn't very active in any platform before the pandemic. It is the COVID-19 pandemic and the protocols that made me to increase my activity in WhatsApp, Twitter and most importantly in Facebook and YouTube" (P5, PAFG8).

3. Theme 3: Most important aspect of social media site use

The most important aspect of the social media site use mentioned by the participants is the type of posts made and reactions to the posts of other users. The participants reports that their posts, responses, or reactions to the posts of other users, interactions and discussions in the platforms are majorly focused on how to generate ideas of desirable and viable businesses in the COVID-19 era. Other issues of concern which the participants expressed through their posts and reposts are how to source for business capital; how to acquire business skills; how to register a business; how to advertise a business; where to buy the needed equipment; how to attract the potential customers; and where to purchase the products. One of the participants explains that: "... I make business minded friends who through their posts and discussions seek to address issues that are centered on how to form a business idea, how to obtain business capital, how to learn the relevant skills ..." (P7, PAFG7).

4. Theme 4: Perceptions of COVID-19 rules

Despite how dangerous COVID-19 is to human life, the participants have however mentioned that their perceptions of COVID-19 are the consequences of the COVID-19 rules imposed by the States and Federal governments to stem the spread of the pandemic. The perceptions include: declining quantity of foreign products in the market with its attendant rising prices; increasing youth unemployment at an unprecedented rate; increasing rate of injustices in both private and public organisations; declining rate of business activities in existing organisations and by extension their

profits; increasing expenditure and declining income of individuals and households; increasing level of hunger and poverty in individuals and households; and increasing health challenges and deaths not associated with COVID-19. As declared by one of the participants: *"Adherence to the COVID-19 rules has brought declining quantity of foreign products in the market with its attendant rising prices and increasing youth unemployment at an unprecedented rate"* (P7, PAFG8).

5. Theme 5: Relationship with business idea and choice

The participants explained that social media site use in the COVID-19 era facilitates the generation of business idea which in turn helped them to make the proposal of the business to create. Specifically, the participants report that they were informed on how to generate business ideas after their interactions with nascent, new and established entrepreneurs via their social media platforms. Another factor that was helpful in formulating business ideas was the existing businesses in the COVID-19 era they read about via their platforms. Also, the knowledge garnered on other prevalent business environmental factors equally served as a guide in arriving at their business ideas. On the other hand, the participants mentioned that their business choices were based on the fact that a prospective customer who has seen their adverts via any of the platforms can place an order; have the product delivered to the desired address and make payment on delivery through POS (point of sales) device, phone or e-banking. This is supported by the explanation of one of the participants: *"I was able to formulate my business idea after series of interactions with nascent, new and established entrepreneurs via my platforms. Another effort I made that paid off was reading the success stories of some firms in the COVID-19 era"* (P3, PAFG6).

6. Theme 6: Attitudinal and experiential changes

The participants report that their desire to create new business ventures and their active use of social media sites in the COVID-19 era has made notable changes in their attitudes and added to their experiences. Attitudinally, the participants mentioned that they are confident all their preparations towards new venture creation will result to a new enterprise. Further, the participants mentioned that their information and knowledge seeking behaviour via social media networking, the culture of savings and increasing attachments to business minded course mates are some of the noticeable changes in their attitudes. The participants indicated that these attitudinal changes are consequences of the experiences they have garnered from lectures, workshops and trainings. One of the participants argues that: *"My desire to create a new venture is making me to save more and to be increasingly attached to business minded course mates. Also, the changes in my attitude are due to my information and knowledge seeking behaviour via social media networking"* (P4, PAFG7).

7. Theme 7: Proposed businesses

The participants indicate that in the COVID-19 era, they propose to create enterprises that are desirable and viable. That is, enterprises whose products and/or services can be ordered for via the social media sites and paid for online at the point of delivery. The proposed enterprises are those that deal on: sewing and distribution of face masks; production and distribution of sanitisers; distribution of plastic buckets;

fabrics, new clothes, shoes and bags; laundry and dry cleaning; fashion designing; foot wear making; academic books; academic projects, theses and papers; bridal collections; used clothes; home services; sales, repairs and maintenance of mobile phones and/or computers; fast food; delicacies and drinks; and sports wears and equipment. One of the participants explains that: *"I'm thinking of sewing and distributing face masks, distributing plastic buckets, and producing and distributing sanitizers. Alternatively, I may set up a venture that will deal on fabrics, new clothes, shoes and bags or establish a laundry and dry cleaning outfit"* (P4, PAFG9).

8. Theme 8: Perceived business resources

The perceived resources of the business that were mentioned by the participants are start-up capital, business equipment, skills that are acquired through education and/or training, business premises and knowledge workers. One of the participants argues that: *"To start this business, I need business capital. I also need to acquire the relevant skills through education and/or training..."* (P6, PAFG2). Another participant further argues that: *"... the business equipment I need to start this business venture is fashion designing machines, computer, smart phone..."* (P1, PAFG7).

9. Theme 9: Required business registrations

The participants indicated that they will need to register their proposed businesses with the local government area authority, the State ministry of commerce and industry, and Corporate Affairs Commission. A participant of one of the FGI announced that: *"I've asked a few government officials and business owners what it entails to register a business with the local government area authority, State ministry of commerce and industry, and the Corporate Affairs Commission"* (P4, PAFG8).

B. Start-up Activities FGI Themes

1. Theme 1: Importance of the most frequently used social media site

The most frequently used social media site in this COVID-19 era as indicated by the participants is Facebook. The participants mentioned that through the information, knowledge and skills garnered from Facebook, they identified business opportunities, formed their business ideas, and wrote their business plan. Further, the participants said they contacted potential producers, suppliers, and customers through Facebook. The sources of start-up funds and business equipment, and the right time for the business to take-off were informed through the use of Facebook. One of the participants reveal that: *"The information, knowledge and skills I garner from Facebook helped me to identify business opportunities, form my business ideas, wrote my business plan, and sources of start-up funds in this COVID-19 era"* (P8, SAFG8).

2. Theme 2: Positive consequences of COVID-19 rules perception and designed businesses

Rather than indicate how COVID-19 perception influenced their involvement in start-up activities, the participants mentioned that in this COVID-19 era, their quest to create new ventures is stemming from the positive consequences of the COVID-19 rules. The rules mentioned by the participants include restriction of movement of people and goods across State and international borders, shutdown of businesses,

lockdown, physical or social distancing, restriction of land and air transportation, suspension of public gathering, compulsory wearing of face mask, hand washing and the use of sanitisers. A participant argues that: *"The implementation of COVID-19 rules have helped me to discover and prepare to commence a home services enterprise that will address the private lessons, hair plating, hair cut, pedicure and manicure needs of members of the public"* (P5, SAFG7). Similarly, another participant argues that: *"... I'm preparing to set up a firm that will produce and distribute sanitizers, distribute plastic containers, and sew and distribute face masks and face shields"* (P1, SAFG10).

These quotes indicate that the rules have opened up business opportunities in the areas of: home services such as private lessons, plating of hair, pedicure, manicure, hair cut; laundry and dry cleaning; production and distribution of sanitisers; distribution of plastic containers; making and distribution of face masks and face shields; and online marketing.

3. Theme 3: Relationship with business opportunity, idea and choice

The participants reveal that their increased use of social media sites in the COVID-19 era and their perception of COVID-19 rules helped them to discover so many business opportunities. As reported by the participants, these business opportunities were the basis for the formation of their business ideas. In addition, the participants mention that they made their business choices based on the business ideas they have formed. A participant explains that: *"... I attribute my discovering of various business opportunities to the increase in the way I use my social media sites in the COVID-19 era and my perception of COVID-19 rules ... I formed my business idea from the business opportunities, while the business ideas helped me to choose the business I am preparing to establish"* (P5, SAFG9).

4. Theme 4: Acquired business resources

The participants mention that despite the COVID-19 rules; they have through the social media sites acquired the relevant skills, customers, producers, and suppliers. However, the participants indicate that they have not been able to obtain the capital they need to buy the relevant equipment and to pay for the business premises. This is in spite of the introduced entrepreneurship development funds by the federal government in the COVID-19 era. Specifically, even with the recent 75 billion naira Youth Investment Fund, business capital has remained a challenge among the youths, undergraduate students in particular. One of the participants said that: *"Despite government support for entrepreneurship development; specifically, the recent 75 billion naira Youth Investment Fund, business capital is still my challenge. However, I've acquired the relevant skills and have contacted the potential customers, producers and suppliers of my business"* (P3, SAFG7).

5. Theme 5: Motivation to launch the business

The participants indicated that owing to the increasing use of social media sites for business activities in the COVID-19 era, they are being motivated to launch their businesses. The motivating factors mentioned by the participants are the low cost associated with contacting suppliers, producers and customers via the social media sites; the ease of doing business through the social media sites; the reduced cost of

doing online business; the rising level of profit recorded by owners of similar businesses; the almost free of cost advertising; and the continued enforcement of the COVID-19 rules. A participant argues that: *"The reduced cost of doing online business, the rising level of profit recorded by owners of similar businesses, the almost free of cost advertising, the continued enforcement of the COVID-19 rules and the low cost associated with contacting suppliers, producers and customers via the social media sites are the factors driving me to launch my enterprise"* (P7, SAFG10).

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigates if Nigerian undergraduate students' COVID-19 perception and social media site use influence them to engage in pre-start-up and start-up activities. The findings reveal that in spite of the different COVID-19 perceptions held by Nigerian university undergraduate students and the associated risks posed by the pandemic to businesses, social media site use by the students facilitates pre-start-up and start-up activities among the students. However, the students' start-up activities are constrained by lack of business capital. These findings are somewhat similar to previous results. Liu *et al.* (2020) establish that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses in Korea were initially negatively affected. However, with the implementation of some initiatives, these businesses are not only becoming more sustainable, but new ventures are created as business opportunities are increasingly being discovered and created through the utilisation of social media sites. Hernández-Sánchez *et al.* [45] are of the view that students' COVID-19 perception and the desire to meet their basic needs drives them to think about self-employment and to prepare for new venture creation. The findings of the current study differ from previous results in terms of COVID-19 rules perception rather than COVID-19 perception. Specifically, the undergraduate students' involvement in pre-start-up and start-up activities are aroused by their positive perceptions of COVID-19 rules via social media sites.

One of the factors that can influence an individual to start a new business is the perception of danger and uncertainty. As such, the business environmental uncertainty posed by COVID-19 can influence entrepreneurial alertness, opportunity creation and/or discovery and intention. The intension is expected to facilitate pre-start-up and start-up activities that will culminate into desirable and viable start-ups. At start-up, entrepreneurs need to acquire information, knowledge, skills, equipment, initial capital, location for the new business and workers. Since, entrepreneurs do not have all the start-up resources they need; they resort to their network using social media sites. Social media site use enhances opportunity identification, resource acquisition and the launching of a new business [28], [45].

There is a growing use of social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube among entrepreneurs to enhance their start-up activities. This is because frequent social media sites use changes the behaviour and experience of entrepreneurs, particularly young individuals by revolutionising their daily pattern of communication and interactions [39]. Generally, the motivation for social media site use is associated with the

cost-effective, less labour-intensive, less time consuming and no geographical restrictions characteristics of the sites [10], [14]. The choice of social media site is usually based on the core start-up activities considerations, the proposed and designed start-ups, and the sites usefulness to the start-up process [28], [52], [78].

Results of Klyver and Arenius' [53] study suggest that frequent networking especially via the social media sites with family members and friends increases nascent entrepreneurs' level of entrepreneurial thinking and pre-start-up preparations. Moreover, it increases nascent entrepreneurs' chances of launching their new venture. Specifically, successful nascent entrepreneurs who frequently use their social media sites are more likely to secure resources for new venture creation [41], [54]. The analysis of the transcripts generated from the current study reveal that the students' perception was not with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, it was on the COVID-19 rules. Thus, understanding the conditions (such as presented by the COVID-19 rules) when the use of the sites is more beneficial is important because it enables the entrepreneurs not to waste entrepreneurial resources [53].

The COVID-19 rules adopted by the governments and the attendant negative perceptions include: (i) the partial or full closure of borders resulted to disruption of international flow of goods, services, capital and people [38]; (ii) a halt in the operations or activities of most businesses negatively impacted domestic and international economies [62]; (iii); the lockdown and physical distancing led to restriction in intra and inter border movements of the population of most countries, economic downturn, increase in unemployment rate, increase in social inequalities and changes in the way things are done in the "new normal" business environment [20], [69], [74]; (iv) ban on public gathering and public transportation, and suspension of flight operations led to the full or partial closure of hotels, restaurants, transport companies, airlines, shopping malls and markets [20], [64], [69]; (v) wearing of face masks benefited the individual moderately and the larger population significantly [22], [64]; (vi) hand washing and the use of sanitisers exposed many to various degrees of injuries due to the proper use of fake sanitisers and wrong use of original sanitisers; (vii) working from home, changing travel behaviour and social distancing is negatively affecting the subjective wellbeing and health status of many people [24]; (viii) physical distancing and lockdowns resulted in reduction in production and consumption [38]; (ix) The shutdown of businesses and the physical distancing led to a sharp decrease in employment and household spending [46]; and (x) restrictions on movement is affecting people's lives and livelihoods [64], resource mobility pattern [50] and the economies of many nations [37].

In spite of the generally perceived negative effects of COVID-19 rules, the students' perceptions of the COVID-19 rules are positive. These positive perceptions have through the students' frequent use of social media sites contributed in motivating them to engage in pre-start-up and start-up activities. However, the relevance of the accessed information and knowledge for new venture creation, the usefulness of the site to the process of creating the venture, and desirability and viability of the business in the period of

the pandemic must form part of their reasons for using the social media sites [28], [29], [45]. This is because social media site use for diverse purpose is becoming a culture among undergraduate students [44], [79].

In Nigeria, the favourite sites used by university undergraduate students are Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube [3], [33], [82]. These students use laptops, desktops, and smart phones to access the sites [33], [59]. Behaviours such as the intention to create a new venture and the decision to launch a new business are respectively consequences of pre-start-up and start-up activities of nascent and new entrepreneurs via social media sites [53], [81]. The use of the sites is to facilitate idea formation, resource acquisition, establishment, and maintenance of contacts with other entrepreneurs, and decision making on the type of business to create. Since launching a new business is a social process that entails interactions with people, social media site use is only seen to enhance the launching of a new business when access to the needed business capital is facilitated through the sites [32], [53], [72].

VI. CONCLUSION

The study established that despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 rules, the undergraduate students were involved in pre-start-up and start-up activities owing to their positive perceptions of the COVID-19 rules and the use of social media sites. However, their involvement in start-up activities is constrained by lack of business capital. In conclusion, making funds available to university undergraduate students for entrepreneurship development through the social media sites in this period of COVID-19 will not only enhance pre-start-up and start-up activities but will facilitate the launch of the start-ups. Consequently, there is need to establish Entrepreneurship Development Fund that will both provide guidance to the undergraduate students in their pre-start-up and start-up activities and afterwards give them the needed capital to create their chosen ventures.

Like every study, this research has a number of limitations and suggestions for further study. First, the findings are applicable to nascent and new entrepreneurs who are undergraduate students of public universities in South Eastern Nigeria. Thus, further studies could be conducted in any other zone with participants selected from the public or private universities, polytechnics, or colleges of education. Second, the FGs were mostly made up of male participants (61.4%). This could imply that the male students influenced the results. As such, the results could be interpreted in that light. Therefore, future researchers should consider selecting more female participants than male or using equal number of male and female participants. Third, the FGs were made up of participants whose parents are business owners, civil servants, and employees of private firms. It is possible that using participants whose parents are in different occupation would have given us different result. As such, future research should select participants with the same parental characteristics. Replication of the study using qualitative and/or quantitative method is advocated to ensure the generalisation or otherwise of our findings.

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