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Emerging Scholar Profile

My name is Dandison Chukwu-Nna Ukpabi, and I consider it a rare privilege to be profiled as an Emerging Scholar. My special thanks go to all who are involved in this project.

My journey into academia can best be described as a fulfilling experience. As an undergraduate student in the Marketing Department of Rivers State Polytechnic, Bori, Nigeria (now renamed Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic), I was fortunate to learn under lecturers who constantly reminded me that I had the potential to become an outstanding scholar. Of particular mention is Dr J.U. Didia, who always called me ‘professor’ and regularly reminded me to pursue higher degrees after my undergraduate studies.

Accordingly, I earned my master’s degree (MSc) in Marketing Management and Strategy from the University of Plymouth, United Kingdom. I chose Plymouth because the programme was headed by an industry specialist who had joined academia; therefore, I experienced a unique blend of industry requirements and rigorous academics. I am extremely proud to have studied at Plymouth and of the latent scholarly skills that emerged while I was there. Notably, my master’s thesis was accepted as a full research paper and presented at the 43rd European Marketing Academy Conference, which was held at the University of Valencia, Spain on 3–6 June 2014.

Before I began my master’s programme in 2011, I had already begun lecturing in the Marketing Department of Rivers State Polytechnic, Bori, Nigeria, which made it easy to assimilate upon my return. However, after a few years, I wanted another European qualification for my PhD; therefore, I applied and was accepted as a doctoral student in marketing at the University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics, Finland.

Jyväskylä is a socially vibrant and economically dynamic city in the centre of Finland. It is popularly called the ‘students’ city’ and is home to the Neste Rally. I conduct my research in the Digital Marketing and Corporate Communications Research Group under the supervision of Professor Heikki Karjaluoto. Working in this research group and having Heikki as my supervisor have contributed to one of the most fulfilling years of my life. The robust support that I have enjoyed, coupled with the freedom to explore my research area, has significantly affected my research output. My PhD topic, on which I am putting the finishing touches, is titled ‘Exploring consumer motivations, engagement, value and continuous participation in online brand communities: Perspectives from the tourism, travel and hospitality services industries’. It is article-based and comprises five thematic research papers. Four of the articles

have already been published in high-ranking journals, with two appearing in journals with impact factors of 3.71 and 2.48.

During the course of my PhD studies, I have attended and presented papers at several conferences, with most based on information systems and tourism. Specifically, I first attended the ENTER conference in 2017 at the University of Roma Tre, Italy, where I presented the full research paper ‘The role of social media on the corporate heritage tourism brand’. Since then, I have regularly presented papers at ENTER conferences, including two in 2019, and I have plans to present another two in January 2020 in Surrey.

Most of my conference experiences have resulted in new research collaboration opportunities. Within this period as a PhD student, I have established collaboration networks and published with scholars from the following universities: the University of Brighton, UK; the University of South Australia, Adelaide; the University of Clemson, USA; the University of Greenwich, UK; the University of Plymouth, UK; the University of Oulu, Finland; the University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland; the University of Turku, Finland; Morgan State University, USA and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

I have been engaged in a number of research projects and received funding from different organisations. In 2011, I received funding from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Nigeria, and I have been funded equally by the Centre for International Mobility, Finland. In addition, I received funding from the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, Finland two times. In 2017, I undertook a research visit to the University of South Australia, Adelaide, where I worked with Professor Marianna Sigala on a project called SHARE, which was funded by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet of the City of Adelaide. It was yet another interesting experience working with a dynamic team.

As my first and second degrees were in marketing, each time I am confronted with the question of why I am more interested in tourism, my answer is that I love the research domain, particularly consumers’ experiences with digital systems. Of course, my first working experience was in a restaurant, where I developed a passion for ensuring positive customer experiences. This drove me to study marketing, which I have found can be fulfilled better by connecting it with tourism. Thus, drawing on this previous experience has driven my passion as a researcher of digital systems in tourism.

Away from my PhD topic, I have also explored research topics and published papers on emerging technological trends in tourism, such as robotics, chatbots, artificial intelligence and augmented reality. After my PhD defence, which will take place quite soon, I hope to explore these topics further. Additionally, one of the key findings of my dissertation is that there is a great disparity in the use of these digital systems between developed and emerging markets. Therefore, I hope to explore these emerging technological trends from the perspective of culture in the future.

The different journeys that I took to fulfil my quest for higher qualifications have been more than worthwhile. While the University of Plymouth gave me the necessary foundational research skills, the University of Jyväskylä polished and launched me into the research world. My view of the digital space is now better, brighter and boundless.