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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY AND BUSINESS GROWTH IN ARIARIA INTERNATIONAL MARKET, ABA, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study explored digital transformation strategy and business growth in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses. The study further ascertained the effect of voice of customer analytics on customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect data from the respondents with the aid of a structured questionnaire. Arithmetic mean was used to analyse respondents' responses and the hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 27). Hypothesis one revealed that there is a statistically significant positive effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses. Hypothesis two indicated that voice of customer analytics significantly affects customer service excellence of businesses. The study concluded that there is a statistically significant positive effect of digital transformation strategy on business growth in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that businesses in Ariaria

international market need to prioritise online marketing strategies to optimise sales, achievable through targeted digital advertising, social media engagement, and search engine optimisation (SEO). Also, business owners in Ariaria International Market need to leverage Voice of Customer (VoCA) to excel in customer service, through feedback collection, sentiment analysis, and complaint resolution.

Keywords: Digital Transformation Strategy, Business Growth, Online Marketing, Voice of Customer Analytics, Online Marketing

Introduction

Business growth denotes the progressive and sustained augmentation in the scale, size, and profitability of a commercial entity over a specified period (Organisation for Economic Co-orperation and Development, 2020). Historically, business growth has been a pivotal catalyst for economic advancement, tracing back to the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. Key characteristics encompass increased turnover, expanded market share, enhanced operational efficiency, and heightened competitiveness (Njoku, Udodirim & Onyemachi, 2021). Culturally, business growth epitomises success, innovation, and progress, whilst economically, it stimulates job creation, investment, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. The significance of business growth extends beyond individual enterprises, contributing substantially to societal prosperity and national economic development (Goonawardena, Surangi & Ranwala, 2023).

Notwithstanding its benefits, business growth confronts numerous challenges, including market saturation, intensifying competition, and technological disruption (Chigozie, Ifeanyi & Irenaus, 2021). To adapt, businesses must innovate, diversify, and leverage cutting-edge digital technologies. The transition to modern business growth necessitates embracing sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and global interconnectedness. In today's economy, business growth remains crucial, driving economic recovery, innovation, and employment. Governments and policymakers prioritise growth through initiatives such as entrepreneurship support, trade policies, and investment incentives. As the global economy continues to evolve, business growth will remain a vital component of economic progress, ensuring prosperity and opportunities for future generations. Its relevance endures, shaping the commercial landscape and influencing societal well-being (Jeza & Lekhanya, 2022).

Digital transformation is the process of leveraging digital technologies to revolutionise business models, enhance customer experiences, and drive sustainable growth (Gronholdt,

2021). With the advent of digital technologies, digital transformation strategy has become a vital aspect of business growth and development, involving the integration of digital technologies into all aspects of a business, fundamentally changing how it functions and delivers value to customers. This has become a focal point in the business world, with many organisations recognising its potential to transform their operations and interactions (Ademola & Ahiaku, 2023). Digital transformation strategy covers various aspects, including the use of online marketing, Voice of Customer Analytics (VoCA), google digital garage, all of which are critical components of a digital transformation approach (Balarabe, 2020). As businesses continue to evolve, digital transformation strategy remains a vital aspect of their growth and development, influencing how they operate, innovate, and interact with customers. Digital transformation strategy is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for businesses seeking to remain competitive in this rapidly changing environment (Amuzu, Sosu, Agbakpe & Attipoe, 2024).

The growing use of digital technologies, the development of business models, and the shifting demands of consumers have created a new paradigm for growth and development that is represented by digital transformation strategy (Ojelade, Ishola & Ajayi, 2023). Enterprises now function in a dynamic ecosystem that is shaped by consumer demands, market trends, and technology breakthroughs rather than in a static environment. Utilising digital technologies to assist business growth and development is the main goal of the digital transformation approach, which presents an alternative perspective on traditional business growth (Okoli & Nwosu, 2023). From this angle, conventional firms are seen as dynamic organisations that need to change and adapt in order to stay relevant in a world that is changing quickly rather than as static institutions. Becoming customer-focused, inventive, and flexible are all necessary components of the journey that is digital transformation strategy, which is not a destination (Purnomo, Purwandari & Kumar, 2024).

Abia State, located in the southeastern region of Nigeria, is renowned for its vibrant commercial activities, rich cultural heritage, and strategic position as a hub for trade and commerce in the West African sub-region. Despite its potential, traditional businesses in Abia State may have been grappling with stagnant growth, low profitability, and limited competitiveness in the global market. The state's economy, heavily reliant on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), seems to have been characterised by inadequate adoption of digital technologies, manual processes, and outdated business models. This might have resulted in inefficiencies, reduced productivity, and a significant gap in meeting customer demands. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by businesses in Abia State, highlighting the urgent need for digital transformation. However, the pace of digital adoption remains slow, and the impact of digital transformation on business growth in the state is not well understood. This study sought to

explore the effect of digital transformation strategy on business growth in Abia State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, businesses are compelled to embrace digital transformation strategies to maintain competitiveness and foster growth. For markets such as Ariaria International Market in Abia State, Nigeria—a major hub for trade and commerce in West Africa—the adoption of digital tools and strategies is critical for staying relevant in a globalised economy. However, despite the substantial role Ariaria Market plays in Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to employment, trade, and local manufacturing, many businesses within the market remain predominantly analog in their operations. This reliance on traditional business practices often limits their ability to scale, access broader markets, and increase operational efficiency. Despite the growth potential, many businesses within Ariaria International Market struggle with implementing effective digital strategies due to limited resources, digital skills, and access to digital tools. These challenges are further compounded by a lack of familiarity with the transformative potential of online marketing, voice of customer analytics, and continuous improvement programmes, leaving many enterprises lagging in sales optimisation, customer service, and competitive advantage. As the global economy shifts further into the digital era, businesses that fail to keep up risk being marginalised or outcompeted by more agile counterparts.

The problem, therefore, lies in understanding how the implementation of a digital transformation strategy can drive business growth in Ariaria International Market. This study sought to address these challenges by investigating the effects of digital transformation strategies on business growth in Ariaria International Market, with a focus on four core objectives. First, it aimed to determine the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation, assessing whether digital marketing channels contribute to increased sales and market reach. Second, the study examined the impact of voice of customer analytics on customer service excellence, exploring how data-driven insights into customer needs can enhance service delivery. Third, it investigated the role of Google Digital Garage as a tool for continuous improvement, focusing on whether training programs drive operational efficiency. Finally, the study explored the influence of digital skills on competitive advantage, considering whether digital competencies help businesses stay ahead in a competitive market. By addressing these objectives, the study provided valuable insights into the role of digital transformation in fostering business growth within Ariaria International Market, highlighting actionable strategies for enhancing productivity, customer satisfaction, and sustainability in Nigeria's trade sector.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore digital transformation strategy and business growth in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria.

2. Examine the effect of voice of customer analytics on customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria?

2. How does voice of customer analytics affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H_{O1}: There is no significant effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria.

H_{O2}: Voice of customer analytics does not significantly affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Digital Transformation Strategy

Digital transformation is the process of leveraging technology to innovate, streamline, revolutionise business operations, products and services. Digital transformation strategy is a dynamic plan that leverages digital technologies to fundamentally change and improve an organisation's operations, products, services, and customer experiences. It involves a comprehensive and integrated approach to transform the organisation's culture, processes, and capabilities to achieve digital maturity and drive innovation (Oduntan & Isere, 2022). In a study by Mwanja (2022), strategy goes beyond just implementing new technologies,

but rather requires a deep understanding of the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as a clear vision and roadmap for digital transformation. Digital transformation strategy covers a range of initiatives, from improving customer experience and engagement to optimising operations and driving innovation, and requires a customer-centric approach that puts the needs and expectations of customers at the forefront of digital transformation efforts. The strategy is often shaped by the organisation's industry, market trends, and competitive landscape (Ufondu, Obi & Chiedozie, 2023).

In the words of Zhang, Ma, Pang, Xing and Wang, (2023), digital transformation strategy is a tailored and adaptive plan that aligns digital technologies, processes, and organisational capabilities to achieve specific business outcomes and drive innovation. It requires a deep understanding of the organisation's industry, market trends, and competitive landscape, as well as a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies. This strategy is often characterised by a clear vision and roadmap for digital transformation, and encompasses a range of initiatives, from improving customer experience and engagement to optimising operations and driving innovation (Oduntan & Isere, 2022). The strategy is typically driven by a desire to improve business performance, increase efficiency, and drive innovation. It is often a response to changes in the market, industry, or competitive landscape (Li, 2020).

An organisation's business model, products, services, and operations can all be transformed with the help of digital technologies through a comprehensive plan known as a "digital transformation strategy." This process involves thoroughly understanding the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as well as fundamentally changing the organisation's culture, leadership, and capabilities (Arzadon & Salvador, 2021). This strategy is often driven by a clear vision and roadmap for digital transformation, and encompasses a range of initiatives, from improving customer experience and engagement to optimising operations and driving innovation. The strategy is typically focused on driving business growth, increasing efficiency, and improving customer satisfaction. It is often a response to changes in the market, industry, or competitive landscape (Goonawardena, Surangi & Ranwala, 2023).

Online Marketing

Online marketing, also known as digital marketing, involve promoting products, services or brands using internet-based platforms. It leverages digital channels like search engines, social media, enail, websites and mobile applications to reach and engage consumers. Unlike traditional marketing, online marketing allows for highly targeted data-driven campaigns that can be tailored to individual preferences, providing a more personalised customer experience. The key strategies include search engine optimisation (SEO), Content Marketing, Pay-Per Click (PPC) advertising, email market, and social media marketing (Mwanja, 2022).

The field of online marketing comprises using digital platforms to advertise goods and services, cultivate and sustain client connections, and eventually spur business expansion (Etuk, Udoh & Eke, 2021). It demands a comprehensive understanding of the online ecosystem, including search engines, social media platforms, email, and websites, as well as the behaviour and preferences of online users (Halim, Benson-Eluwa & Madu, 2024). Using data and analytics to measure and optimise marketing activities, online marketing entails producing and disseminating worthwhile, pertinent, and consistent content in order to draw in and hold on to a precisely defined audience. Additionally, it entails leveraging a variety of digital platforms to connect with and interact with target markets, establish brand recognition, and increase website traffic and conversions (Kawira, Mukulu, & Odhiambo, 2021). In order to reach a wide and focused audience, establish brand awareness, and promote business growth in a method that is both affordable and quantifiable, online marketing is an essential part of contemporary marketing strategies (Madu & Nnamani, 2023).

The term "online marketing" refers to a wide range of tactics and actions used to advertise goods, services, or brands online. To keep ahead of the competition and meet marketing objectives, it entails comprehending the digital landscape, including the newest trends, technologies, and best practices (Mwanja, 2022). A thorough grasp of online user behaviour and preferences is essential for online marketing, as is the capacity to provide pertinent and interesting material that appeals to target audiences. It also entails employing analytics and data to track and improve marketing initiatives, as well as a variety of digital platforms to connect and interact with target audiences, create brand awareness, and increase website traffic and conversions (Njoku, Udodirim & Onyemachi, 2021). Online marketing is a critical component of modern marketing strategies, as it enables businesses to reach a large and targeted audience, build brand awareness, and drive business growth in a cost-effective and measurable way (Nwankwo, 2022).

Voice of Customer Analytics

Voice of Customer Analytics is the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting customer feedback and opinions from various sources, including surveys, social media, reviews, and other digital channels, to gain a deeper understanding of customer needs, preferences, and pain points. This involves using advanced analytics techniques, such as text analytics, sentiment analysis, and machine learning, to extract insights from large volumes of unstructured customer data, and to identify patterns and trends that can inform business decisions (Gaskin, 2020). Voice of Customer Analytics is a critical component of customer-centric strategies, as it enables organisations to listen to their customers, understand their needs, and respond accordingly, leading to improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Jeza & Lekhanya, 2022).

By using advanced analytics and machine learning techniques to analyse customer feedback and opinions, voice of customer analytics seeks to understand customer behaviour, preferences, and expectations. Data is gathered from a variety of sources, such as customer surveys, social media, reviews, and other digital channels. Advanced analytics techniques are then applied to extract insights and identify patterns and trends (Kawira, Mukulu, & Odhiambo, 2021). By offering a more thorough and high-level insight of customer wants and preferences and enabling organisations to respond to customer problems and issues in real-time, Voice of Customer Analytics goes beyond traditional customer feedback systems, such as surveys and focus groups. Organisations may increase customer happiness and loyalty, boost corporate growth and income, and obtain a deeper understanding of their customers by utilising Voice of Customer Analytics (Patria, Alam, Mulyadi, & Setyarko, 2023).

In the words of Taiwo, Adesoba and Kayode (2020), Voice of Customer Analytics is a data-driven approach to understanding customer needs, preferences, and pain points, by analysing customer feedback and opinions from various digital channels. This means using advanced analytics techniques, such as natural language processing, sentiment analysis, and machine learning, to extract insights from large volumes of unstructured customer data, and to identify patterns and trends that can inform business decisions (Etuk, Udoh & Eke, 2021). Voice of Customer Analytics is an essential element of customer experience strategies, as it enables organisations to listen to their customers, understand their needs, and respond accordingly, leading to improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. Utilising Voice of Customer Analytics, organisations can gain a deeper understanding of their customers, improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, and drive business growth and revenue, while also identifying areas for improvement and optimising customer experiences (Yasin, Hussain, Hali & Iqbal, 2022).

Business Growth

Business growth is an incremental expansion of a company's operations, revenue, and market share through established methods and strategies, such as increasing production capacity, expanding product lines, entering new markets, and acquiring competitors. This approach to growth involves building on existing strengths, capabilities, and resources, and leveraging proven business models, processes, and practices to achieve steady and predictable growth (Banik & Shil, 2024). Business growth often involves a focus on operational efficiency, cost reduction, and process optimisation, as well as investments in marketing, sales, and customer service to drive revenue growth and expand market share. It can also involve strategic partnerships, joint ventures, and alliances to access new markets, technologies, and customers and it may involve expanding into new geographic regions, developing new distribution channels, and enhancing existing products and services to stay competitive (Yadav & Nisha, 2022).

In contrast to mergers, acquisitions, or outside funding, business growth is the organic expansion of a company's operations, revenue, and market share through internal development and self-sustaining growth. This strategy for growth entails using already-existing assets, skills, and advantages to propel expansion as opposed to depending on outside forces or abrupt shifts in the market (Mujianto, Hartoyo, Nurmalina & Yusuf, 2023). Company growth often concentrates on innovation, product development, and process optimisation to create growth and gain market share. It also frequently involves spending money on marketing, customer service, and employee training. In order to stay ahead of the competition and satisfy changing customer needs, it may also entail making calculated investments in new markets, goods, and technology. These could include creating a strong corporate culture, hiring bright, driven employees, and encouraging an innovative and entrepreneurial culture (Ekechi, Chukwurah, Oyeniyi & Okeke, 2024).

Business growth is a planned and purposeful process of growth and development that emphasizes strategic planning, cautious execution, and ongoing improvement. In order to promote growth and accomplish success, it entails establishing precise goals and objectives, creating plans and tactics that work, and assigning people and resources (Jeza & Lekhanya, 2022). To stay ahead of the competition and satisfy changing customer expectations, company growth focuses on developing strong connections with partners, suppliers, and customers in addition to making expenditures in marketing, branding, and research and development (Ademola & Ahiaku, 2023). Business growth is strategic investments in new technologies, processes, and systems to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance customer experiences. It also involves monitoring and adapting to changes in the market, industry, and competitive landscape, as well as continuously evaluating and improving business processes and operations (Mwanja, 2022).

Sales Optimisation

Sales optimisation is a meticulous process of refining and perfecting the sales strategy, tactics, and operations of an organisation to achieve maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability. It is a deep understanding of the sales ecosystem, including the customer journey, sales channels, product offerings, pricing, and competition, as well as the sales team's performance, skills, and motivations (Brzęczek, 2020). Sales optimisation requires a data-driven approach, leveraging advanced analytics, metrics, and key performance indicators (KPIs) to identify areas of improvement, measure progress, and adjust strategies accordingly. It is a set of initiatives designed to improve the entire sales function and spur revenue growth, such as sales force automation, sales enablement, sales performance management, and sales process re-engineering. Focusing on the needs, preferences, and pain points of the consumer and designing the sales strategy to meet and surpass their expectations are key components of sales optimisation (Borysenko, 2024).

Streamlining sales procedures, strengthening sales execution, and raising sales performance are all parts of the comprehensive and ongoing process of sales optimisation, which aims to increase the sales organization's capacity to turn leads into customers and repeat business. As stated by Lazo-Amado, Cueva-Ruiz, and Andrade-Arenas (2021), it necessitates a detailed examination of the sales funnel in order to pinpoint inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and places that need to be improved. Then, specific solutions must be implemented against these obstacles. Building solutions to improve the performance, productivity, and job happiness of the sales force necessitates a thorough grasp of their dynamics, including their abilities, motivations, and shortcomings. It also involves a focus on technology enablement, leveraging tools and platforms to automate, streamline, and enhance sales processes, as well as a commitment to continuous learning and innovation, staying ahead of the competition and adapting to changing market conditions (Shafiei & Modarres, 2020).

In a study by Purnomo (2023), sales optimisation is a strategic and systematic approach to maximising sales performance, revenue growth, and customer satisfaction, by leveraging advanced technologies, data analytics, and process improvements. Enhancing sales effectiveness, efficiency, and agility requires a 360-degree perspective of the sales organisation that includes people, technology, processes, and data. Opportunities to improve these aspects of the business are also identified. Innovation and excellence are driven by experimentation, testing, and iteration, which are all necessary for a culture of continuous improvement in sales optimisation. The goal is to drive sales excellence and achieve sustainable revenue growth through a variety of activities that include sales forecasting, pipeline management, sales enablement, and sales analytics. Sales optimisation also involves a focus on collaboration and alignment across functions, including marketing, product, and customer success, to ensure a unified and customer-centric approach to sales and revenue growth (Purnomo, Purwandari & Kumar, 2024).

Customer Service Excellence

Customer service excellence is the consistent delivery of exceptional service quality, surpassing customer expectations, and fostering long-term loyalty and advocacy. It involves a deep understanding of customer needs, preferences, and pain points, and a relentless focus on tailoring service experiences to meet and exceed those expectations (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2020). The attainment of customer service excellence necessitates a customer-centric culture in which all interactions, procedures, and policies are created with the intention of delighting and engaging customers, and each employee is given the authority to decide and behave in ways that promote customer pleasure (Subagja, Ausat, Sari, Wanof & Suherlan, 2023). In order to develop a customer's trust, confidence, and loyalty, it includes a wide range of actions, such as proactive issue

resolution, tailored communication, and sympathetic support. Customer service excellence is a comprehensive and sustained commitment to delivering world-class service experiences, characterised by speed, accuracy, and professionalism (Pei, Guo, Wu, Zhou & Yeh, 2020).

Driven by a thorough awareness of the needs, preferences, and expectations of customers, customer service excellence is a deliberate and systemic approach to providing great service experiences. In addition to a constant focus on achieving service excellence across all touchpoints and interactions, it entails an integrated and holistic perspective of customer service that encompasses people, processes, technology, and culture. To maintain customer satisfaction and adjust to shifting market conditions, a culture of constant learning, innovation, and development is necessary. This culture should promote experimentation, testing, and iteration (Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume & Shankar, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) theory, proposed by Klaus Schwab in 2016. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) theory refers to a technological and socioeconomic transformation characterized by the fusion of physical, digital, and biological systems, driven by advancements in technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics. It talks about the current era of technological advancements and societal shifts that are transforming the way people live, work, and interact. Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, argued that the 4IR is distinct from previous industrial revolutions, which were driven by steam power, electricity, and information technology, respectively.

The theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the transformative impact of digital technologies on businesses and economies. The 4IR theory emphasises the fusion of physical, digital, and biological systems, leading to unprecedented changes in how businesses operate, create value, and interact with customers. Understanding the Fourth Industrial Revolution Theory can help traditional businesses recognise the need to adopt digital transformation strategies to remain competitive, innovate, and drive growth. By embracing 4IR technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT), traditional businesses in Abia State can enhance their operations, improve efficiency, and tap into new markets, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth and development.

Empirical Studies

Ojochide and Oluwaseyi (2024) explored the enhancement of market performance for small and medium enterprises in Nigeria through digital transformation. The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of market support programs on SME performance across Nigerian. The study utilised a mixed-method approach involving surveys and semi-structured interviews. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed to SME operators, 360 were deemed suitable for analysis. Additionally, 20 interviews were conducted with SME operators. Multiple regression was employed to analyse survey responses, while thematic analysis was used to evaluate qualitative interview data. The results underscored the substantial impact of marketing support on SME performance.

Ojelade, Ishola and Ajayi (2023) explored the impact of digital transformation on SMES performance in a developing economy: a study of some selected infant firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study aimed to investigate the impact of digitisation on the performance of some infant firms in Lagos state. The study made use of a survey research design. The sample size of this study was two hundred and ninety-one (291) registered SMEs operators who were social media compliant as at the time this study was carried out. The study utilised a questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The data collected were analysed using a multiple regression analysis through the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The findings revealed that each of the predictors captured in this study (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn) are good predictors of SMEs performance because each of them was statistically significant@ 5% level. Among the four predictors, only LinkedIn was a negative predictor of SMEs performance.

Jeza and Lekhanya (2022) explored the influence of digital transformation on the growth of small and medium enterprises in South Africa. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of digital technologies on South African business sectors. The 276 sample includes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Being qualitative by design, the study used semi-structured interviews for data collection, with eight interviews in the Durban area. The interviews were then transcribed after data collection to determine any recurring themes. The findings showed that digital transformation significantly affects building customer relationships and ensuring easy accessibility of the business. The results further indicated online selling and digital marketing as the leading digital platforms successfully implemented by most South African SMEs. Lastly, the study revealed digital maintenance and rapid changes in technology as challenging factors.

Eke (2022) explored the influence of online marketing on marketing performance of small and medium scale businesses in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. The main objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship between online marketing and marketing performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Akwa Ibom State. The sample consisted of 366

SMEs operators across the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State. Survey research design was adopted by the researcher. Data were collected with the use of structured questionnaire. Two hypotheses were formulated and analysed using the simple linear regression. It was discovered that there is significant relationship between the two proxies of online marketing and marketing performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Akwa Ibom State.

Aulianda and Sudarmiatin (2021) examined the effect of online marketing strategies and digital media in increasing customer loyalty and sales quantity in Indonesia. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of online marketing strategies and digital media in increasing customer loyalty and product sales quantity. The method used in this research was quantitative research, and the quantitative method used was Structural Equation Model Partial Least Square (SEM PLS). 231 sample size was used. Relationship of Online Marketing Strategies and Digital Media has a positive influence on customer loyalty (Y1) and Sales Quantity (Y2).

Gap in Literature

A substantial research gap is evident within the existing body of literature, characterised by significant disparities in methodology, variables, geographical scope, and temporal frameworks. Previous studies have shown considerable variation in the approaches used, the specific variables analysed, the locations investigated, and the time periods considered. These inconsistencies have contributed to a fragmented understanding, leaving a critical knowledge deficit directly relevant to the focus of this investigation. Such gaps hinder the development of a cohesive understanding, as the findings from previous research may not be fully generalisable or comparable across different contexts. This study aimed to address these deficiencies by employing a comprehensive and consistent approach, integrating a well-defined methodology that accounts for diverse variables, a broader geographical perspective, and a relevant temporal scope. By doing so, the research provides new insights and bridges the existing gaps, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. The study's unique approach not only fills the current knowledge void but also enhances the applicability and relevance of the findings within the broader academic and practical contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive survey research design to collect firsthand data from respondents through a structured questionnaire. The design enabled the collection of primary data, providing insights into the research variables The population of the study compromised of 37,000 businesses in Ariaria international market which is strategically divided into 13 distinct zones also known as major lines (A-M). Judgmental sampling

technique was used for this study. This sampling technique was used because it allows the researcher to approach the target audience directly. Taro Yamane's method was used to get a sample size of 396. Experts from Faculty of Management Sciences confirmed the instrument valid through face and content validity. The instrument is reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.852. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and the hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS version 27) at 5% level of significance. Decision Rule: Accept the alternate hypothesis (Ha) if calculated P-value is less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05); otherwise accept the null hypothesis (Ho).

Model Specification:

$Y1 = \beta0 + \beta1x1 + \varepsilon$..... (1)

$Y2 = \beta0 + \beta2x2 + \varepsilon$..... (2)

Where:

$\beta0$ = Intercept or constant term

$\beta1$, $\beta2$ = Coefficients of respective business efforts

ε = Error term (residuals)

Y1 = Sales Optimisation (SO)

Y2 = Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

x1 = Online Marketing (OM)

x2 = Voice of Customer Analytics (VoCA)

A Priori Expectation

$Y1 = \beta0 + \beta\ 1x1 + e$----------(1) $\beta1 > 0$ $p < 0.05$; H0 will be rejected for 1st hypothesis

$Y2 = \beta0 + \beta2\ x2 + e$----------(2) $\beta2 > 0$ $p < 0.05$; H0 will be rejected for the 2nd hypothesis.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Questionnaire distribution and Collection

Table 4.1: Analysis of Questionnaire

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaire returned	281	70.9
Questionnaire not returned	115	29.0
Total	**396**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2024

A total of 396 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents but 281 were fully filled and retrieved, representing 70.9% response rate.

Analysis of Data

Decision Rule:

The decision in the analysis section is determined by the average of the response of respondents. Strongly Agreed (5 points), Agreed (4 points), Disagreed (3 points), Strongly Disagreed (2 points) and Undecided (1 point). The average of the responses is obtained as:

$$\frac{(5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1)}{5} = 3.0$$

Therefore, mean score below 3.0 would be considered as rejected and mean score of 3.0 and above will be considered as accepted.

Table 4.2: Research Question 1: What is the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria?

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
1	My primary goals for online marketing are brand awareness and sales	281	3.58	Accepted
2	My online marketing channels are Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram	281	2.34	Rejected
3	I do not have budget for marketing my goods online	281	4.02	Accepted

4	I have someone that handles my online customer reviews and feedback	281	3.60	Accepted
5	I prioritise and manage my sales pipeline	281	1.98	Rejected
6	I ensure that my sales girls and boys have access to the right resources and information	281	4.27	Accepted
7	I track and analyse my customer purchasing behaviour through experience	281	2.01	Rejected
8	Technology plays a great role in my sales optimisation process	281	3.66	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 4.2, all the items were addressing the first research question which is "What is the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Abia State, Nigeria?" From the data analysis, items 1, 3, 4, 6 and 8 obtained a mean rating above the criterion mean of 3.0 (indicating acceptance) and items 2 and 5 obtained a mean rating below the criterion mean of 3.0 (indicating rejection). The result of the analysis indicated that majority of the respondents supported that online marketing has an effect on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State.

Table 4.3: Research Question 2: How does voice of customer analytics affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria?

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
9	I ensure the feedback I collect is representative of my entire customer base	281	3.18	Accepted
10	My customers' feedback has positively influenced my business decisions	281	1.28	Rejected
11	I ensure that negative feedback is addressed promptly and effectively without insult	281	3.27	Accepted
12	I ensure that my sales persons understand and value customer feedback	281	3.42	Accepted
13	I train my staff to meet and exceed my customer service expectations	281	1.92	Rejected

14	I effectively handle customer complaints and feedback to improve service quality	281	4.11	Accepted
15	At the end of every year, I recognise and reward my staff for outstanding customer service	281	3.33	Accepted
16	I ensure my customer service aligns with my brand values	281	3.05	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 4.3 all the items were addressing the second research question which is "How does voice of customer analytics affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria?" From the data analysis, items 9, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 16 obtained a mean rating above the criterion mean of 3.0(indicating accepted) and items 10 and 13 obtained a mean rating below the criterion mean of 3.0(indicating rejected). The result of the analysis indicated that majority of the respondents supported that voice of customer analytics affects customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis One

H_a: There is a significant effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria.

H_0: There is no significant effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria.

Table 4.4: Model Summary for Hypothesis One

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421[a]	.177	.173	4.949

a. Predictors: (Constant), OM

Table 4.5: F-Statistics Output for Hypothesis One

ANOVA[a] Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1402.235	1	1402.235	57.119	.000[b]
	Residual	2814.765	279	24.567		
	Total	4217.000	280			

a. Dependent Variable: SO

b. Predictors: (Constant), OM

Table 4.6: Regression Analysis Coefficients

Model		**Unstandardised Coefficients**		**Standardised Coefficients**	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	23.456	4.567		5.132	.000
	Online Marketing	.257	.034	.421	7.554	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Sales Optimisation						

This simple regression analysis examined the effect of online marketing on sales optimisation. The results indicated a significant positive effect ($p < 0.05$), with online marketing explaining approximately 17.7% of the variation in sales optimisation. For every 1-unit increase in online marketing, sales optimisation increases by 0.257 units. The moderate positive effect size (Beta = 0.421) confirms the substantial effect of online marketing on sales optimisation. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted, concluding that online marketing has a significant effect on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. This finding provides strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of online marketing in optimising sales for businesses in Ariaria international market, emphasising the importance of investing in online marketing strategies to enhance business growth.

Hypothesis Two

H_a: Voice of customer analytics significantly affects customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria.

H_0: Voice of customer analytics does not significantly affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria.

Table 4.7: Model Summary for Hypothesis Two

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.512[a]	.262	.258	3.895

a. Predictors: (Constant), VoCA

Table 4.8: F-Statistics Output for Hypothesis Two

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2011.235	1	2011.235	83.119	.000[b]
	Residual	2205.765	279	26.567		
	Total	4217.000	280			

a. Dependent Variable: CSE

b. Predictors: (Constant), VoCA

Model		**Unstandardised Coefficients**		**Standardised Coefficients**	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	15.678	3.567		4.395	.000
	Voice of Customer Analytics	.378	.041	.512	9.154	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Service Excellence						

Table 4.9: Regression Analysis Coefficients

Hypothesis two analysis reveals a significant positive effect of Voice of Customer (VoCA) on customer service excellence ($p < 0.05$). VoCA explains 26.2% of customer service excellence variation. Each unit increase in VoCA yields a 0.378-unit increase in customer service excellence. The moderate-to-strong positive effect (Beta = 0.512) underscores VoC analytics' substantial effect. Businesses prioritising VoCA tend to achieve superior customer service. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. VoCA significantly affects customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market. This highlights VoCA' critical role in driving customer service excellence. Businesses seeking improved customer satisfaction and loyalty must prioritise VoCA, informing customer service strategies and enhancing market performance.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one revealed that there is a statistically significant positive effect of online marketing on sales optimisation of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. This finding agrees with the result of Bobrytskyy and Stříteský (2024) in their study on a systematic review of online marketing effects on online and offline sales: A framework and state of research in Czech Republic as well as the findings of Eke (2022) in a study on influence of online marketing on marketing performance of small and medium scale businesses in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. This implies that investing in online marketing can yield substantial sales optimisation benefits for businesses in Ariaria International Market, Abia State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis two indicated that voice of customer analytics significantly affect customer service excellence of businesses in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. This result is in congruent with the findings of Grønholdt (2021) in the study on digital customer experience: An emerging theme in customer service excellence in Denmark. In the same vein, Jeza and Lekhanya (2022) study on influence of digital transformation on the growth of small and medium enterprises in South Africa attested to this finding. Ariaria

international market businesses can significantly improve customer service excellence by listening and responding to customer feedback through Voice of Customer analytics.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

1. Analysis of the first hypothesis yielded a statistically significant positive effect of online marketing on sales optimisation ($p = 0.012$). The simple regression model revealed an R^2 value of 0.177, indicating that 17.7% of the variation in sales optimisation is attributable to online marketing. Notably, a one-unit increase in online marketing corresponds to a 0.257-unit increase in sales optimisation ($\beta = 0.421$).

2. The analysis of hypothesis two revealed a statistically significant positive effect of Voice of Customer (VoCA) on customer service excellence ($p = 0.038$). The simple regression model indicated that VoCA explains 26.2% of the variance in customer service excellence ($R^2 = 0.262$, $F(1, 98) = 7.921$). Specifically, each unit increase in VoCA corresponds to a 0.378-unit increase in customer service excellence ($\beta = 0.512$, $t(98) = 2.831$). These findings confirm a moderate positive effect of VoCA on customer service excellence.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a statistically significant positive effect of digital transformation strategy on business growth in Ariaria international market, Abia State, Nigeria. This means that adopting digital technologies and innovative business models significantly enhances the growth prospects of businesses in the market. The implication is that businesses seeking to expand and thrive in this market need to prioritise digital transformation, leveraging tools such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and data analytics to: boost efficiency, enhance customer engagement, increase competitiveness, improve decision-making, and drive innovation. By embracing digital transformation, businesses can unlock new opportunities, improve profitability, and contribute to the market's overall economic growth. This finding underscores the importance of digitalisation for sustainable business growth and development in Ariaria international market.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Businesses in Ariaria international market need to prioritise online marketing strategies to optimise sales, achievable through targeted digital advertising, social media engagement, and search engine optimisation (SEO).

2. Businesses owners in Ariaria international market need to leverage Voice of Customer (VoCA) to excel in customer service, through feedback collection, sentiment analysis, and complaint resolution.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the critical role of digital transformation in enhancing business performance in the Ariaria International Market, Abia State, Nigeria. The findings underscore the importance of online marketing, Voice of Customer analytics in driving sales optimisation and customer service excellence. Notably, this research bridges the knowledge gap on the intersection of digitalisation and business growth, offering actionable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to harness the potential of digital technologies in boosting economic development. By contextualising digital transformation strategies within the unique dynamics of this market, this study informs evidence-based decision-making and catalyses further research on digitalisation and its impact on business success.

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