

# Entrepreneurial Marketing Strategies and Business Growth of SMEs in Rivers State

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated Entrepreneurial Marketing Strategies and Business Growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The researcher adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of staff of 197 Small and Medium Scale Businesses registered with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the 23 LGAs in Rivers State. This study focused on a total of 264 staff of the SME organizations in the 23 LGAs in Rivers State, Nigeria. The researcher adopted the census sampling technique in which the entire population was studied. The instrument was a questionnaire. Out of 264 copies of questionnaires distributed 250 or 85% were duly completed and returned, the study therefore used the returned copies for its analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study should that significant relationship exists between entrepreneurial marketing strategies and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The study concluded that adopting entrepreneurial marketing strategies would lead to business growth of the SMEs in Rivers State. It identified digital marketing strategy and relationship marketing strategy as potent strategies for entrepreneurial marketing that relates with business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The stance of the study is that with the adoption of appropriate marketing entrepreneurial strategies such as digital and relationship, business growth would be guaranteed within the study area. It recommended that SMEs should train and retrain their staff on the use of digital devices to foster digital marketing strategy and that relationship with customers should be encouraged by management of SMEs in order to encourage business growth.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial marketing, Digital Strategy, Relationship Strategy, Business, Growth, SMEs

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## INTRODUCTION

In the globalized business world, the competitive playing field is getting tougher than ever. Start-up businesses from around the world open shop everyday to carve out a place for themselves in crowded markets. The only way for any company, new or old alike, to remain competitive is to find ways to grow their business. Keeping that competitive edge is often easier said than done. Growth is one of the hardest things to manage in business because it involves larger amounts of risk and uncertainty. Any time a company decides to offer new products or expands into new markets, they are investing large sums of money into the unknown. However, companies who successfully manage growth receives more opportunities in the long run. Growth while uncertain, allows small businesses becomes leaders of their industries. Companies like Microsoft and Google both started small but grew to be major players by constantly rethinking who they are and what they could do. These companies were willing to accept responsibility and risk, and take chances that others were unwilling to make (Alon, 2020).

The performance of marketing activities with entrepreneurial mindset is pivotal for the survival of businesses as it contributes greatly to the growth and development of emerging economies. Entrepreneurial marketing is a critical subset of the marketing discipline and backbone of global economy as it is more effective in reaching customers and satisfying their needs (Alqahtani *et al* 2022). Entrepreneurs are an essential part of the global economy as their contributions to business development, both domestically and internationally, fuels the engine of economic growth and provide opportunities for larger sector of the global population.

Entrepreneurial marketing is a critical part of entrepreneurship that focuses on the customer as a fundamental driver of entrepreneurial success. As such, entrepreneurial marketers should not underestimate the importance of gathering customer insight to new ideas, new products, and innovative processes. Acquiring market information from a broad range of customer networks gives the entrepreneurial marketers a unique perspective on the actual fundamental customers disuse. Entrepreneurial marketing is an innovative approach to modern marketing, as well as a part of a variety of settings, such as global markets, non-profit organizations, and social media outlets (Spillan, 2020).

Entrepreneurial marketing has become a critical component of the entrepreneurial process and an indispensable part of the entrepreneur's marketing strategy as it enables businesses, employers and entrepreneurs myriad and global opportunities to seek new markets, broaden their products lines and lower their cost of production. The launch of new products and new business models can promote meaningful improvement to many decisions made on behalf of a company or individual within a business is to increase employees, investors, and stockholders, income.

As small and medium enterprises business organization face more dynamic and fierce competition, the concept of entrepreneurial marketing is occupying the thoughts of academics, marketing practitioners and entrepreneurs. As the business environment is changing ad market conditions are shaped by chaos, fragmentation, complexity and ambiguity, entrepreneurs

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instead of using planned linear and rational responses that is, conventional, marketing approach, are also using a new entrepreneurially creative opportunity to reach the market (Bechere, *et al* 2017). Therefore, entrepreneurial marketing is seen as a new paradigm which integrate critical aspect of marketing and entrepreneurship into comprehensive concept where marketing becomes a process used by firms to act entrepreneurially (Aniebet and Emmanuel 2021).

Small and medium entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in the economic development of Nigeria and are known to be the main engine of economic growth and a key factor in promoting private sector development and partnership. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 1999) defined micro enterprises as those having 1 – 10 employees and small scale enterprises as those having 11 – 50 employees and did not bother to talk about the market spread and capital base. Small and medium size enterprises are also known to introduce innovations and increase production outputs and exports. It is estimated that small and medium size enterprises contribute between 40 – 55% of gross domestic products (GDP) and 50 – 80% of employment generation in Nigeria (Ocheni, 2015).

Although small and medium size enterprises are significant contributors to economic development in every nation, small and medium –size enterprises are less studied than large organizations (Burke and El-Kot, 2014). Ackah (2011) posit that, small and medium size enterprises are facing many challenges in their struggles to keep the business intact. They suffer from limited access to financial resources, in addition to lack of focus, lack of good human resources, lack of skills and management techniques. Small and medium size enterprises also suffer from unfair government policies, technological barriers, poor infrastructure, and other obstacles. Most small and medium size enterprises in Nigeria die shortly after their establishment and the few that survive follow suit soon after the aging or physical incapacitation or death of their owners (Ediri, 2014).

Today’s competitive environment demands that companies must constantly seek out new and dynamic approaches to implementing their marketing programs. The increased risk decreased the ability to forecast, and the continuous uncertainty of the contemporary business environment are characteristics off entrepreneurial ventures. Even with the existing business dynamic, the fundamentals of marketing have remained unchanged. Still more attention has to be given to the current environments need for customization, one to one approach, relationship building, networking, strategic alliances, globalization and technology development and implementation.

Entrepreneurial marketing as a function of management, is able to use the marketing processes to identify new opportunities and then by means of continuous improvements in the marketing mix exploits economically alluring market opportunities. Entrepreneurial marketers ensure the availability of products and services which can provide benefits that the customers values. Their focus is on innovative fabrication of value, and is achieved by recognizing unmet customer needs and also by bringing together unique resources to provide excellent value for the customers (Miles, Culmore, Harrigan, Lewis and Sethia, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Entrepreneurial marketing provides opportunities including employment especially in this era of learn job opportunities in Nigeria. It provides its adopters modes of finding products or services to sell on behalf of the real owners of the business. Entrepreneurial marketing therefore harbours in it, profit oriented venture. However, it has been observed that most marketing professionals overlook this aspect of the business. The strategies in terms of digital marketing equally appear neglected. Digital marketing is a very veritable aspect of entrepreneurial marketing that operates without so much social or other physical hindrances. Relationship marketing strategy is equally another aspect of entrepreneurial marketing strategies which allows the entrepreneur sell through interactive relationship with potential customers. The issue here remains that both business owners and entrepreneurs have rarely explored this noble and almost risk-reduced marketing strategy. This study therefore seeks to investigate the relationship entrepreneurship marketing strategies and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing strategies and Business Growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Ascertain the relationship between digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State.
- ii. To investigate the relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. How does digital marketing strategy relate to business growth of SMEs in Rivers State?
- ii. In what way does relationship marketing strategy impact on business growth of SMEs in Rivers State?

### **Research Hypotheses**

Based on the research questions raised, the following null hypotheses guided the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State
- ii. There is no significant relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concept of Entrepreneurial Marketing Strategy**

According to Owonte and Jaja (2023), marketing strategies refers to efforts undertaking by organization to increase their sales and achieve competitive advantage in the market place. It is the method of advertising a company product through an establish plan and organization of ideas, data and information. Entrepreneurial marketing is a marketing strategy that involves company planning consumer research, brand awareness strategies, the creation of an effective promotional messages, and customer relationship management. Entrepreneurial marketing are

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activities, collection of institutions and procedures for producing, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society as a whole. It is a social process that satisfies the desires of customers (AMA, 2017). Barone and Jams, (2021), posit that, marketing strategy is a company's overall plan for reaching out to potential customers and converting them into clients of their products and services. A recovery to the marketing strategy contains a company's value proposition, key brand image, statistics on target customer, demographics, and other high-level elements. A comprehensive marketing plan addresses the 4P's of marketing, with an ultimate goal of gaining a lasting competitive advantage over their competitors (Barone and James, 2021).

Entrepreneurial marketing is a process of applying entrepreneurial ideas and methods to marketing in order to increase its success rate in the marketplace (Ebitu, 2016). This arose from the need to define the market processes of business pursuing possibilities in unpredictable market conditions, frequently with little resource. Entrepreneurial marketing is a process of seeking opportunities, establishing and expanding businesses that produce perceived customer value through relationships and by the use of innovation, creativity, selling market immersion, networking and adaptability.

Entrepreneurs have recently recognized the value of non-traditional marketing media in promoting their products and services. Internet, digital media, social media, websites, email mobile technologies and video conferencing are typical example of non-traditional marketing media. One of the major objective of entrepreneurship as well as marketing is value creation, thus, entrepreneurial marketing is a process of creating value for consumer. Value is what consumers get in return for money they spend over the product (Owonte, 2022). Sustaining a market position involves meeting consumer expectation, fostering repeated exchanges, and ensuring ongoing consumer satisfaction (Owonte, 2023).

Traditional media is becoming increasingly important, and it may be leveraged to build effective brand management that leads to increased sales and brand recognition. It is important to highlight, however, that none of the media is superior to the other. Dzisi and Ofosu (2014) opined that the key to establish the finest marketing plan for the company is to have the proper blend of both traditional and non-traditional marketing media.

Entrepreneurial marketing strategies adoption is a critical marketing paradigm that enable businesses in rethinking their marketing activities and formulating marketing practices that are innovative and creative, the business environment and the correct competition (Njau and Karugu, 2019). In a competitive market, one of the most difficult challenges a business of any size or type confronts is standing out from its competitors, as a result, marketing tactics to make the business unique are used. Relationship marketing, expeditionary marketing, one- to – one marketing, real-time-marketing, viral marketing and digital marketing are examples of entrepreneurial marketing strategies (Marketing Schools, 2020). These marketing strategies can be used by a company in one or more ways.

Entrepreneurial marketing is a distinct discipline used to describe the marketing processes of firms pursuing opportunities in uncertain market circumstances often under constrained resources (Hunt and Siat, 2018). Entrepreneurial marketing is an organizational function and a

set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationship in ways that benefits the organization and stakeholders, and that is characterized by innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and may be performed without resources currently controlled. Entrepreneurial marketing practices have been identified as one of the most important key ingredients for superior performance and global competitiveness in small and medium sized enterprises (Junde, 2019; Okuwhere & Adekunle, 2023).

There is a growing evidence to support the idea that over time, firms that competitively advantaged are those engaged in entrepreneurial marketing, while the marketing approaches used by entrepreneurs reflect this innovative orientation, this may vary in their relationships or effect on business performance. (Bechere, 2017). It is critical for small and medium sized enterprises to understand which entrepreneurial marketing practice are most effective and therefore important to achieve competitive advantages and ultimately for improved performance. To survive and win, a firm has to gain an advantage over its competitors and earn a profit. The firm gain competitive advantage by being better than their competitors at doing valuable things for their customers (Michael and Chris, 2020).

The concept of entrepreneurial marketing strategies describes the values, skill, and techniques used by an entrepreneur in addressing their challenges and findings business opportunities. It represents a different approach to envisaging the business itself; its relationship with the marketplace and the role of marketing functions within the firm or as a strategic entrepreneurial posture or behavior in marketing which is represented by an individual organization (Owonte and Jaja, 2020).

### **Relationship Marketing Strategy**

Relationship marketing is a strategy of customer relationship management that emphasizes customer retention, satisfaction and lifetime customer value. its purpose is to market to current customers versus new customers acquisition through sales and advertising.

Relationship marketing is a service management strategy aimed at increasing customers expectations after use and marketing. According to Lovelock and Patterson, (2015), Relationship marketing has proven important in developing relationships and networking with customers to persuade them to stay loyal to the brand and product offering of a company. It is a marketing strategy that ensures the acquisition and retention of most profitable customers using the most effective method (Gummerson, 2017). The tremendous growth of the service sector implies the role of marketing in terms of vast opportunities and implications, marketing opportunities arising from new technology, in franchising from fewer regulations and professional restrictions, in servicing physical products and international marketing (Alon, et al., 2020). The rapid growth of services industry has changed the conditions of business. Customer retention has been advocated as an easier and more reliable source of superior performance (Budianto, 2019). It has become common knowledge that the value of all customers are not the same, the 80/20 rules prevails whereby we have learned that 20 percent of customers generate more than 80 percent of revenue for most companies and it is not common to find that an even lower percentage of customers can generate more than 80 to 90

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percent of the revenues. Under such circumstances, it is not prudent for a company to allocate equal resource to all customers.

Roszkowska – Menkes (2018), views relationship marketing as a platform to build networks with customers and individuals as to maintain good relationship and continuous networking with them. One of the main difference between start-up companies and established brands is the need for startups to nurture and maintain relationships with new customers.

A very successful way small companies can try to have closer relationship with customers is by writing personal notes by hand or sending an email thanking them for their business, by acknowledging their presence by their first or last name when they come into the establishment, by offering beverage, and other personalized services (Rotter, 2019). Also, companies can maintain relationships with their customers through regular email newsletters. By using sales history and other market data, companies are able to customize the content of these usually free newsletters to reach the needs, concerns, and desires of their target market. This allows them to stay connected to their customers, while developing strong connections and brand loyalty. Startups companies can take advantage of the free and affordable options offered by such newsletter management software companies to stay connected (Armstrong, et al., 2018).

### **Digital Marketing Strategy**

The growth of Digital marketing has presented on unique opportunities for both marketing and information system managers. Digital marketing is the use of the internet and related information and communication technologies to accomplish marketing goals (Seddlacex, 2016). This growth is attributed to shifting by marketers from the traditional media to the adoption of digital marketing which comprises use of email, social media, search engine marketing and display advertising (VanBoskirk, 2017). Digital marketing can be summed as the use of digital technologies that forms channels to market and attain business objectives by achieving and surpassing customers needs more than the competitors.

The digitalization of marketing offered businesses diverse ways of communicating to customers and building values laden relationships with them to increase sales margin or value depending on what the goal of the business was (Kotler, 2018). Digital marketing strategy provides consistent and personalized customer messaging which is cost effective compared to traditional marketing of divert mail, print and television. Access to websites, social media, and mobile applications allow companies to launch companies that are global and region specific.

Ebitu, (2016), opined that digital marketing is the use of technologies to help marketing activities in order to improve customer knowledge by matching their needs, also Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatima, (2015), solidifies their assertion that, digital marketing is a form of communication which aims at establishing a direct relationship between marketers and customers through the use of digital transmission by the help of technology.

Owonte, (2023) asserts that, there are various digital marketing strategies that exist, these include: social media, channels such as facebook and twitter (now X), search engine optimization (SEO), email, marketing blogs and websites and marketing products and services

through online personalities and social influences, companies can also use other digital marketing strategies such as video advertising, sponsoring contents on more popular websites and carrying out online sales such as flash sales. Companies can utilize these advertisement channels to promote their products digitally to a wider audience and increase their competitive edge. Digital marketing strategy allow companies to target specific customers with specific marketing strategies depending on their age, social status, preference and financial capabilities (Nganga, 2015).

Digital marketing strategy have enabled marketers to have immediate feedback advertised products or services for quick reactions in response to market reception. (Kachembere and Choga, 2016). Digital marketing strategy enables companies to save on their marketing costs, since it is significantly cheaper than traditional marketing channel such as billboards, TV advertisements and Newspaper advertisement, this makes it significant and instrumental since most of them are cash stepped and therefore cannot afford traditional marketing.

Digital marketing has become a global channel for e-business marketing solution available worldwide. Digital marketing has become a marketing strategy tool used to ensure fast transaction between sellers and buyers without the need to have a face – to – face contact. Companies are able to reach out to large audience as a result of digital marketing. Digital marketing emerged from a relative obscurity into the main stream and has really played an important role in today's e-commerce business. (Rashed 2020). The use of Digital marketing as a strategic tool has connected most businesses to customers in informing and creating awareness of their businesses, which in turn has made companies that adopted digital strategies stay relevant in business and have become more profitable.

### **Business Growth**

To expedite the growth of a nation and accelerate advancement of local technology, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a lead role. The importance of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is anchored on the fact that they contribute to economic growth and survival of nations by creating massive job opportunities for the teeming population (Maritz, 2018). In Nigeria, there has been underperformance of small and medium enterprises due to some factors that affect its growth as such its gross contributions to economic growth are very small. The factors militating against the advancement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria can be categorized as unstable or unfavorable business environment, poor funding, low managerial skills, lack of access to technology, lack of adequate infrastructure and shortage of finance are major impediments against the operations and working of viable small and medium enterprises (FSS 2020 SME, sector Report, 2014).

Economic growth is usually the focus of federal, state and local governments as to improve the living standard of the citizens through the creation of jobs, the support of innovation and new ideas, the creation of higher wealth, and the creation of an overall better quality of life. It is an indisputable fact that the contribution of entrepreneurship activities is increasingly being recognized as a primary engine of economic growth and development. By combining existing resources with innovative ideas, entrepreneurs add value through the commercialization of new products, the creation of new jobs and the building of new firms. The global

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Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicates that nations with higher levels of entrepreneurial activities enjoy strong economic growth. Entrepreneurs are the link between new ideas and economic development (Otika and Nwaizugbo, 2019).

Despite the missing link in Africa's development process, researchers and scholars have increasingly recognized the crucial role that entrepreneurs play in economic development of nations, especially through the development of the subsection (Rasheed, 2020). He argued that, this vital factor of product which forms the basis of the Schumpeter's dynamism is the bedrock in a nation's industrialization and development. According to him, this is achieved through the innovation and risk taking ability of the entrepreneurs. It is therefore, the entrepreneurs who generates the critical momentum an economy requires for economic growth by breaking new grounds in human endeavours as a results of the vital characteristics they possess.

The role of entrepreneurs marketing in national growth and development particularly in energy economics among which Nigeria is one has been acknowledged in the literature. Ojob, (2019), states that one of the responses to the challenges of development in the emerging economy is the encouragement of entrepreneurial development scheme. Nigeria since independence has been faced with, the problem of initiating and sustaining its growth and development. In the midst of abound national and mineral resources, the country has remained virtually under developed. The contribution of Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship to economic growth and sustainable development is globally acknowledge (CBN, 2004). There is an increasing recognition of its pivotal role in employment generation, income distribution and wealth creation (NISER, 2004). Enterprise development and small medium enterprise (SMEs) represent about 87 percent of all firms operating in Nigeria (USAID, 2008). Non-farm micro, small and medium enterprises account for over 25 percent of total employment and 20 percent of the GDP (SMEDAN, 2007), compared to the cases of countries like indonesia, Thailand and India where micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contribute almost 40 percent of the GDP (IFC, 2002).

Realizing the importance of small businesses as the engine of growth in the Nigerian economy, the government took some steps towards addressing the conditions that hinder their growth and survival. Ojo (2003) and Elizabeth (2023) observed that all these programmes could not achieve their expected goals due largely to abuses, poor project evaluation and monitoring as well as moral hazards involved in using public funds for the purpose of promoting private sector enterprises.

**Entrepreneurial Marketing and Business Growth**

In Nigeria, the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) constitute an important backbone of the Nigerian economy. Economically, this sector holds the key to sustainable development of the country. The importance of SMEs can be put in proper perspective in relation to the structure of the Nigerian economy in spite of the importance of petroleum oil, agriculture remains the key sector, providing gainful employment for about 70% of the Nigerian population (Ekot, 2020).

Available reports indicate that the agricultural sector accounts for about 35% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Most of the operators in the agricultural sector are cottage type or small – scale self- employed individuals engaged in agro-allied processing. Activities in the agro-allied processing sub-sector also have some consequences for the role of small scale manufacturing enterprises in Nigeria. (Ajayi and Gomme, 2021). For example, small scale industrial fabricators constitute the main source of machinery supply to agro-allied processors. These fabricators abound all over the country and when added to the output of SMEs in the agricultural sector, the combined contribution of SMEs cannot be less than 60% of the GDP.

A recent study indicates that both agricultural and the informal sector contribute up to 75% of the nation's GDP. It is safe to say that both sectors constitute the domain of SMEs in Nigeria. Attention has been focused on small scale enterprise by government because it is perceived that they have the potentials of realizing the multiple goals of employment generation and poverty reduction (Ajayi and Gomna, 2021).

Entrepreneurial marketing is a tool for employment generation for the jobless, the literate and the illiterate alike. Alqahtani *et al* (2022), contends that entrepreneurs hip especially those on small scale is the only solution to the problem of unemployment and proper utilization of both human and non-human resources help in improving the living condition of the poor masses. In a country where a significant proportion of the populace are unemployed, with a large number of graduates leaving the universities and other higher institutions yearly, the role of entrepreneurship cannot be overemphasized. Statistically, accounts for 90% new jobs in Nigeria (Osalar, 2018).

Entrepreneurial marketing activities is an instrument for poverty reduction. According to Iovchir (2006), high level poverty is promoted mainly by the lack of entrepreneurship drive and over dependence in salaried jobs. Acee-Eke and Ogonu, (2020) posit that Nigeria has the third highest number of poor people in the world. Through the creation of employment opportunities, entrepreneurship can substantially improve the standard of living of the people hence serve to curb poverty. Entrepreneurship is the vehicle of economic prosperity as it stimulates economic growth and development of a country. This is because of the positive multiplier effect it exerts on the economy. E.g. creating employment it causes increase in individual and household income, national income, and gross domestic product Osalov, (2018), opined that entrepreneurship accounts for 65% of gross national product in Nigeria (Ojob (2019), states that entrepreneurship is sine quo non to national development, poverty eradication and employment generation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researcher adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 197 staffs of Small and Medium Scale Businesses registered with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Rivers State, Nigeria in the 2022/2023 edition. This study focused on a total of 264 staff of the registered organizations in Rivers State, Nigeria. The researcher adopted the census sampling technique in which the entire population was studied.

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The questionnaire instrument was measured on a four point Likert scales of (Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2, Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1

The validity of the scale adopted in this study was presented for content and construct validity. To ascertain the authenticity of the instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to a senior lecturer in the Department of Marketing, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and a business consultant in order to ensure that the questions raised adequately represent the exact view of what it is intended to measure before the final copy of the questionnaire was administered to respondents. Cronbach Alpha method was used to ascertain the reliability status of the research instrument which showed .97>.1 showing that the instrument was reliable. Out of 264 copies of questionnaires distributed 250 or 85% were duly completed and returned. The researcher therefore, used the returned copies for its analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

*Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the relationship between digital marketing strategy relate with business growth of SMEs in Rivers State*

S/N Items	N=250	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1. There is presence of my business in the Social Media platforms		2.229	1.24046	Disagreed
2. We advertise business in social media		1.897	1.1853	Disagreed
3. We have social media based customers		2.0257	1.19786	Disagreed
4. There is virtual payment platform		1.4457	.67384	Disagreed
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2.03</b>		

Table 1 above shows in item 1 mean score of 2.229 and SD 1.24046 which shows that the respondents disagreed that there is presence of my business in the Social Media platforms. In item 2 mean score of 1.897 and SD 1.1853 shows that the respondents disagreed that they advertise business in social media. In item 3 mean score of 2.0257 and SD 1.19786 which shows that the respondents disagreed that they have social media based customers. In item 4 mean score of 1.4457 and SD .67384 equally proved that there is virtual payment platform. Thus, grand mean score of 2.03<2.5 which proves low extent the application of digital marketing strategy relate with business growth of SMEs in Rivers State.

**Research 2:** How does marketing relationship strategy relate to business growth of SMEs in Rivers State?

*Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of relationship marketing strategy impact on business growth of SMEs in Rivers State*

S/N ITEMS	N=250	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
5. There is information regarding customers current product needs		1.8943	1.18381	Disagreed
6. Company improves products based public demand		1.3457	.70846	Disagreed
7. We have people who market our products on commission basis		2.4629	1.24046	Disagreed
8. Our products are sold on referrals.		1.9314	1.14351	Disagreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>1.83</b>		

Table 2 shows in item 5 mean score of 1.8943 and SD 1.18381 showing that the respondents disagreed that there is information regarding customers current product needs. In item 6 mean score of 1.3457 and SD .70846 showing that the respondents disagreed the company improves products based public demand. In item 7 mean score 2.4629 and SD 1.24046 implying that the respondent disagreed that they people who market our products on commission basis. In item 8 mean score of 1.9314 and SD 1.14351 showing that the respondents disagreed that their products are sold on referrals.

Thus, the grand mean of 1.83<2.5 shows that the respondents disagreed marketing relationship strategy relate with business growth of SMEs in Rivers State.

**Test of Null Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State

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*Table 4: PPMC test of Relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State*

<b>Correlations</b>		<b>Relationship Marketing Strategy</b>			
<b>Business Growth of SMEs</b>	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.016	-.182**	.585**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.764	.001	.000
	N	250	250	250	250
	Correlation Coefficient	.016	1.000	.619**	.139**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.	.000	.009
	N	250	250	250	250

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 above shows a correlate value of .837, N-value of 250 and p-value of .002 < than .05 shows that there is significant relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The null hypotheses is therefore rejected.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State

*Table 5: PPMC test of Correlation between digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State*

<b>Correlations</b>		<b>Digital Marketing Strategy</b>		
<b>Business Growth of SMEs</b>	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.015	.620**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250
	Correlation Coefficient	.015	1.000	.546**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
	N	250	250	250

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 above shows there correlate value of .680, N-value of 250, p-value of .000<.05 shows that there is a digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The null hypotheses is therefore rejected.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study are hereunder discussed:

### **Digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs**

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between relationship marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. Seddlacex, (2016) aligned with the present study stating that growth of Digital marketing has presented on unique opportunities for SMEs. Digital marketing is the use of the internet and related information and communication technologies to accomplish marketing goals (Seddlacex, 2016). This growth is attributed to shifting by marketers from the traditional media to the adoption of digital marketing which comprises use of email, social media, search engine marketing and display advertising (VanBoskirk, 2017). Digital marketing can be summed as the use of digital technologies that forms channels to market and attain business objectives by achieving and surpassing customers' needs more than the competitors

### **Digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs**

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between digital marketing strategy and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. (Budianto, (2019) buttressed the findings of the present study stating that Relationship Marketing is a service management strategy aimed at increasing customers' expectations after use and marketing in medium scale companies. According to Lovelock and Patterson, (2015), Relationship marketing has proven important in developing relationships and networking with customers to persuade them to stay loyal to the brand and product offering of a company. It is a marketing strategy that ensures the acquisition and retention of most profitable customers using the most effective method (Gummerson, 2017). The tremendous growth of the service sector implies the role of marketing in terms of vast opportunities and implications, marketing opportunities arising from new technology, in franchising from fewer regulations and professional restrictions, in servicing physical products and international marketing (Alon, et al., 2020). The rapid growth of services industry has changed the conditions of business. Customer retention has been advocated as an easier and more reliable source of superior performance (Budianto, 2019)

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study investigated entrepreneurial marketing strategies and business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The study revealed that adopting entrepreneurial marketing strategies would enhance the business growth of the SMEs in Rivers State. It identified digital marketing strategy and relationship marketing strategy as potent strategies of entrepreneurial marketing that relates with business growth of SMEs in Rivers State. The stance of the study is that with the adoption of appropriate entrepreneurial marketing strategies such as digital and relationship marketing strategies, business growth would be guaranteed within the study area.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. SMEs should train and retrain their staff on the use of digital devices to foster digital marketing strategy.

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- ii. Relationship with customers should be encouraged by management of SMEs in order to encourage business growth and enable them stay afloat and competitive in the business landscape.

### **Policy/Managerial Implications**

Entrepreneurial marketing is customer-focused, and the empirical evidence highlights the need for the approach. Businesses that prioritize customers, understand their needs and tailor their marketing efforts accordingly are more likely to succeed. The findings from this study shows the importance of innovation in entrepreneurial marketing. SME's that are innovative in their marketing activities are more likely to gain competitive advantage, attract new customers, and achieve overall marketing success. Entrepreneurial marketing helps business allocate their resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring that they are used in the most impactful way possible.

Managerially, these findings highlight the usefulness of increasing the digital capacity of SME's to mitigate market challenges. This requires managers to be more proactive and adaptive to digitalization and internet marketing by preparing organizational capacity and customer identification to minimize financial risk when facing challenges and maintain business sustainability. SME's should invest in the development of a strong online presence and ensure that their websites and social media channels are optimized for search engines and user-friendly. This will enable them to reach a wider audience and improve the customer experience, which is crucial to retaining existing customers and attracting new once. SME's should embrace digital transformation and internet marketing to respond to changing market conditions, sustain their business operations and remain afloat and complete in the business landscape.

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