

Entrepreneurial Marketing And SMEs Growth In Post Covid-19 Era In Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed at examining the effect of entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs growth in the post- Covid-19 Era in Awka Anambra State Nigeria.

Research methodology: The study adopted a qualitative research design with five participants. An in-depth interview was used to elicit relevant information from the respondents. Data generated were carefully transcribed, reviewed, and harmonized. Thematic categories were created and categorized into two major themes- technological-driven marketing and need-oriented entrepreneurial marketing.

Results: The study revealed that need-oriented marketing and technology-driven marketing are pivotal to the growth and sustainability of SMEs in the post-Covid-19 Era.

Limitations: The restriction on gathering of people more than ten by the State Government due to the Covid-19 limited our study as the researchers would have loved to have a group and interactive decisions with the participants.

Contribution: The result of this study will serve as an eye-opener to Nigerian policymakers and SME operators to key into modern entrepreneurial marketing tools and salvage her already depressed economy.

Keywords: Covid-19, Entrepreneurial –marketing, Growth, SMEs, and Technology

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1. Introduction

The effect of the Corona Virus (Covid-19) pandemic has caused tremendous human suffering across Africa, particularly in Nigeria, and it will continue to hurt the continent's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) if not controlled. SME operators are non-affiliated, self-contained businesses with less than a certain number of employees ([Ikupolati, Adeyeye, Oni, Olatunle, & Obafumi, 2017](#)). This number varies per country. In the European Union, the common limit for defining SME is 250 employees. Some countries, however, set the seal at 200 employees. While the United States defines a small business as one with less than 500 employees, Nigeria defines it as one with 250 or fewer employees ([Mwangi & Henry, 2013](#)). Because there are only a few employees employed, it is regarded as a small and medium business. These enterprises play a large role in economies, employing an estimated 70 percent of the country's workers in both the formal and informal sectors, but they are often the least robust in times of crisis. This is because they often have lesser cash reserves, client bases, and commercial pressure management capabilities than larger enterprises.

Additional shocks from Corona Virus (henceforth, Covid-19) added to the burden on Nigerian SMEs operations, which have already been struggling to cope with a declining economy since 2014 are unhealthy to both the entrepreneurs and the economy. Revenues in many SMEs in Nigeria especially Awka, Anambra State plummeted as a result of the Federal Government's 2020 lockdown measures against Covid-19, and the majority of the operators were compelled to cut back on company spending and employee strength to stay afloat. This may not be enough for many; researchers estimate that roughly 45 percent of SMEs will lose their economic grip before the crisis will be over. Protecting and supporting SMEs through this moment of economic volatility is crucial because of their critical role in job creation and economic growth, not to mention the fact that their survival and recovery are likely to be a harbinger for the economy as a whole.

As Covid- 19 continuous to bite hard not only on the economy but on the citizenry and SME operators are considered as the drivers of any economy, it is therefore imperative that SMEs should be given all the desired attention by policymakers through entrepreneurship marketing to grow and sustain their businesses. Entrepreneurial marketing is, therefore, the proactive identification and exploitation of chances for attracting and retaining lucrative customers through innovative tactics, risk management, resource leveraging, and value creation.

As the effect of Covid -19 continues to be on the pecuniary table for discussion due to its impact on the global economy, the expected changes, revolutions, and transformations of social-economic structures in this era of the contrasted economy are rooted in entrepreneurial marketing through science and technology ([Anoke, Nzewi, Agagbo, & Onu, 2021](#)). Therefore, the growth, survival, and sustainability of SMEs requires satisfying peoples' need and want by dealing with hitches that are largely dependent on constant innovation, creation of products, evaluated processes, and adoption of workable methods. When pursuing new opportunities in a competitive market environment with limited resources, the entrepreneur must think outside the box, be creative and use advanced and radical approaches in the face of these challenges ([Eze, 2015](#)). To achieve this, however, the entrepreneur needs to have a fervent marketing vision of the whole entrepreneurial roles, duties, and functions. He should understand marketing in this challenging time has gone beyond marketing mix or business function(s) but encompasses the entire business process. Business operators, owners, and entrepreneurs should be more marketing-oriented, innovative, creative, and more concerned with the happenings in their surrounding (business) environment, which the enterprise ultimately is part and parcel of. Today's Marketing is just the ability to satisfy the customer's needs and wants irrespective of their location, which is regarded as digital marketing. The customers are and will continue to determine the fate of an entrepreneurial organization and the ability to satisfy them is key to SME growth, survival, and sustainability in today's digital world.

The Nigerian economy is currently confronted with a turbulent situation orchestrated by the effect of Covid- 19. According to [Kamarudin and Yusof \(2017\)](#), the oil sector was once the backbone of Nigeria's economy but only accounts for 5.9% of the country's GDP today. It is also well documented that SMEs play a vital role in the economies of most developing countries, including Nigeria, and have a favorable impact on an economy that pays proper attention to the untapped sector. It has become increasingly pertinent to market experts that conventional marketing practices today are no longer giving the desired dividends for entrepreneurial firms to grow and sustain their businesses. As a result, SME operators in Awka continued to invest heavily in their human and material resources to harvest entrepreneurial opportunities. Despite these investments, however, the effect of Covid-19 in Nigeria has affected many SME operators in Awka greatly and the need to investigate these huge investments by SMEs operators in the post-Covid-19 Era becomes imperative.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of entrepreneurial marketing on the growth of SMEs in the post-Covid -19 Era in Awka, Anambra State Nigeria. Anambra State is considered the commercial hub of the Eastern Region that makes up the five (5) Eastern States of Abia, Ebonyi, Imo, Enugu, and Anambra States of Nigeria, and Awka is the seat of power in Anambra state. The choice of Awka, Anambra as the study domain in this research is, therefore, justified.

The study will focus basically on the extent to which value creation, innovativeness, opportunity-driven, and risk-taking influence the growth of SMEs in Awka, Anambra state.

2. Literature review

The covid-19 pandemic has caught the world off guard, especially given the magnitude with which it is affecting and will continue to affect individuals, families, communities, and entrepreneurs around the globe. The recognition of entrepreneurs as an economic driver and an escape route from this pandemic cannot be over-emphasized. [Onalu, Uchechukwu, and Okoye \(2020\)](#) noted that the entire world is unquestionably in the midst of the most dangerous and unparalleled economic catastrophe in history. Covid-19 has resulted in hunger and starvation, mass unemployment and economic misery, rural exclusion, and ethnic discord, to name a few. SMEs operators are the ones that have been hit the hardest. However, there is no gainsaying that for the world economy to bounce back to track economically, entrepreneurs have roles to play through entrepreneurial marketing.

In today's digital world, entrepreneurial marketing is seen as a proactive identification and exploitation of hidden opportunities, engaging and retaining valuable customers through proper risk management, resource leveraging, and value creation tactics. Marketing and entrepreneurship are two sides of one coin. The concept of entrepreneurial marketing, which bridges the gap between marketing and entrepreneurship, has been evolving for nearly 30 years ([Abdul, 2020](#)). [Kamarudin and Yusof \(2017\)](#) noted that the issue is a relatively recent concept, having been recommended in 1982 by the International Council for Small Business and the American Marketing Association. Marketing etiquette is now widely regarded as a pathway to small business growth and success in the contemporary business environment. [Morina and Gashi \(2016\)](#) posit that although marketing is increasingly regarded as vital to maintaining competitive advantage, the discussion has yet to broaden to include SMEs. This abandonment is alarming, given how important this sector is to economic development, employing primarily dedicated women, active youth, and capable-skilled workers thereby creating goods and services for society. SMEs today are key contributors to the development of new products and the enhancement of existing ones, as well as a growth engine, which should be given proper attention through entrepreneurial marketing ([Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017](#)).

Since marketing is fundamental for discovering and addressing the desires, needs, and wants of customers, it is viewed as the heart of every business. As a result, marketing serves as a link between a company and its customers, allowing the even distribution of goods and services to where they are required. Moreover, it provides market information about customers, products, services, and organizations. Though marketing plays an important role in the growth of businesses, it can be mentioned with certainty that it is especially important for SMEs, which rely on client retention for growth and survival ([Awan & Hashmi, 2014](#)). The foundation of entrepreneurial marketing is the development of new ideas and ways of satisfying people's wants. Entrepreneurs make a significant contribution in this area since they bring timely innovative ideas to the table. This is accomplished through seeking to comprehend the needs and desires of the clients. As a result, for start-up businesses, selecting the most successful entrepreneurial marketing methods that contribute to business growth is crucial ([Sagolsem, 2019](#)).

Entrepreneurial marketing is a marketing approach designed for businesses in rapidly changing contexts, such as those found in Nigeria today. It's a term used to describe a marketing strategy that differs from typical marketing theories and principles. However, the efficiency of entrepreneurial marketing is heavily reliant on the stability (or lack thereof) of the industry in which the company competes, which limits the scope for organized planning ([Rashad, 2018](#)). [Abdul \(2020\)](#) defined entrepreneurial marketing as an executive role and a set of processes for constructing, communicating, and delivering timely value to deserving customers, as well as managing customer relationships in such a professional manner that benefits the customer, the company, and its stakeholders. He also divided entrepreneurial marketing into two categories: entrepreneurial (pro-activity, measured risk-taking, rational creativity, directional opportunity-driven) and marketing dimensions (timely value-creation

and client strength), which set it apart from traditional marketing. SME marketing is entrepreneurial, with a distinctive strategy defined by a variety of factors combined with a casual and basic approach ([Dilek, 2014](#)). The convergence of marketing and entrepreneurship is believed to be based on a change-oriented, opportunistic, and inventive management strategy which if properly handled will be result-oriented ([Rashad, 2018](#)).

Value Creation

Recently, corporate behavior has gained awareness and relevance for business development, growth, and sustainability. Public opinion and sensitivity have demonstrated a proclivity to legitimate businesses that act in a socially responsible manner in meeting the needs and wants of their customers. This is the foundation of a company's relationship with its consumers and stakeholders. Value chains based on safety and stakeholder relationships are favored by companies interested in value creation and voluntary social-environmental criteria. Another important aspect of entrepreneurial marketing, according to [Ogunode, Abereola, Samuel, & Oloyede, \(2020\)](#), is satisfying customers through appropriate and timely value creation. This element is a critical constituent of a company's marketing strategy and a requirement for a transaction to take place. They claimed that to provide extra value to clients, marketers must use a variety of resources. In the same vein, most successful firms do concentrate on value creation strategies that cater to their specific markets' needs ([Mwangi & Henry, 2013](#)). According to [Kotler \(2003\)](#), there are two key objectives for value creation: to improve customer rewards for patronage and to sustain customer loyalty to gain more marketing share. SME operators will be able to grow their enterprises profitably even if a pandemic occurs if this is done.

Innovativeness

For entrepreneurs to navigate through the troubled business waters, especially during pandemics like Covid-19, innovation is of the essence. There is a need for quick change from today's business thinking that business starts and ends in one place, which has affected many businesses and management, especially in Awka, Anambra state. To survive and flourish in an already tough market, companies are expected to become more decentralized by strategically distinguishing enterprises. Many SMEs in particular, are investing in innovation development to strengthen their market position, client loyalty, and retention. While Chinedu, Dennis, and Chikwuemeka-Onuzulike (2020) opined that restriction of movement during the Covid-19 Era affected the sustainability of Igbo owned enterprises, it becomes imperative for business owners to think outside the box to ascertain ways of navigating through these challenges in order to remain in business. Similarly, Ojiaku, Ojiagu, and Agbasi, (2020) were of the view that business owners or entrepreneurs should adopt external collaborative entrepreneurship and diversity management as an innovative way to curb the adverse effect of Covid 19 to ensure business sustainability.

One of the reasons SMEs are regarded as the engine of growth, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, according to [Karadag \(2016\)](#), is their ability to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovative activities, which boosts competition and productivity. SMEs are more productive because they are more adaptable to changes in the business environment. Innovative activities entail new techniques for products, services, production, promotion, and administration, which are different and difficult to duplicate. This is what is required at this crucial time when the economy is biting hard on every businessman orchestrated by Covid -19 pandemic and managers, as well as business operators, are looking for a guaranteed escape route to their business growth ([Osita, Anoke, Eze, Onuzulike-Chukwuemeka, 2021](#)).

In addition, [Ogunode, Abereola, Samuel, & Oloyede, \(2020\)](#) noted that marketing-focused innovation allows a company to focus on new ideas that result in new markets, goods, services, or processes. From the highly innovative new market creator to the incremental market builder, the degree to which a successful firm stresses innovation in its market operations varies. To offer the customer a completely distinct value, the market maker must depart from past solutions. The incremental innovator capitalizes on previously established customer relationships and market knowledge.

Since entrepreneurs may not be permitted to deviate from industry norms, they may choose to focus on innovative marketing methods to drive home their products and services to the satisfaction of their target audience, which is the reason they are in business. Modern and creative innovation is a marketing strategy that stimulates the development of new services, goods, or advanced technology processes that lead to new market prospects for organizational growth ([Morina, & Gashi, 2016](#)).

Opportunity-Driven

Entrepreneurship is about being opportunity-driven, recognizing and harnessing opportunities and hidden treasures in all circumstances even when others fail to do so. Specifically, being opportunity-driven is about turning threats into opportunities. [Anoke, et. al \(2021\)](#) asserts that entrepreneurial motives are motivated by individuals' pursuit of achievements with the awareness of market possibilities and exploitation of new ideas in opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, which is a type of productive entrepreneurship required to drive business to an enviable height in this competitive era.

According to [Kamboj and Rahman \(2015\)](#), this indicator represents an undervalued market position that is the foundation of every company's long-term profit potential. Marketing strategies that are critical to the growth and success of SMEs include the knowledge, capacity, and talent to recognize and hunt opportunities. Entrepreneurs must seek out the perfect opportunity that will significantly contribute to the organization's growth. Once recognized and backed up with the necessary knowledge and capitalize on them, the enhanced opportunity will have a beneficial impact on the organization's growth and performance ([Karadag, 2016](#)).

According to [Jones and Rowley \(2011\)](#), enterprising marketers are known for looking for fresh chances ahead of time. Entrepreneurial firms that are forward-thinking and willing to be pioneers are better able to meet the unmet demands of their customers and seize emerging possibilities before their competitors. Gerald, Obianuju, and Chukwunonso, (2020) assert that strategic foresight has a connection with comparative advantage as it is apparent for entrepreneurs strategically position their business in order to remain afloat in business during the Covid-19 era. Corollary and Dissanayake (2021) postulated that workforce protection, business continuity, financial crisis management, contingency planning, and review are factors responsible for business sustainability during covid 19 period.

Entrepreneurial enterprises rely on innovation and creativity to transform ideas into reality. It can be seen in the firms' ambition to grow their company, expand into new markets, and be the best in their field. The marketing actions of recognizing and pursuing opportunities are crucial to the growth of a small business. The degree of fit between the firm's capabilities and resources is used to assess market potential as the firm can unveil and tap from the hidden opportunities at the right time that determines the growth and success of a firm even in a critical period like the post-Covid-19 Era in Nigeria ([Anoke, Osita, Okafor, 2021](#)).

Risk-Taking

One of the most important attributes of a successful entrepreneur, according to [Adamu \(2020\)](#), is the ability to take calculated risks. As SMEs try to capitalize on opportunities, they face risks. The ability of a firm to take deliberate efforts to mitigate the risks associated with pursuing possibilities in the entrepreneurial environment is referred to as risk-taking. Risk-taking encourages and allows for innovative ventures, which can make a significant impact on products and services. They can sometimes teach the most important business lessons to an entrepreneur. Failure aids in the creation of future company endeavors and, in the end, can lead to corporate expansion and growth ([Isiguzo, 2016](#)).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Growth

Scholars tend to define SMEs according to how they view them at the moment. As a result, there is no single conventional definition of Small and Medium Enterprises today. Depending on what they seek to achieve or what their current focus is, different institutions have also adopted different definitions of the subject matter. The number of employees in the business, the volume of sales in any given financial year, the customer retention abilities, the market sectors the firm can cover and retain for a certain

period, capital investment, and annual gross turnover is typically used to define and explain SMEs (Jones & Rowley, 2011). Entrepreneurial marketing, on the other hand, plays a critical part in achieving these goals. Isaac, Fabian, and Nkechi (2020) postulated that there is a strong connection between entrepreneurial marketing and SME growth in any organization. Nzewi, Arachie, Ibrashim, and Okoli (2021) submitted that more hands will be engaged, the volume of production will increase, increasing sales volume through appropriate promotional materials and correct distribution channels to the pleasure of customers if a manager of an organization is entrepreneurially competent. This will surely result in customer retention, hence expanding the market frontier.

The main variable of interest in this study is the dependent variable of SMEs growth, which is measured by market share, customer loyalty, customer retention, and product development. The independent variables that are likely to affect the dependent variable as captured by this study are customer orientation, market orientation, innovative orientation, and entrepreneurial orientation measured by value creation, innovation, opportunity-driven, and risk-taken.

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The connections between the two variables are stated here as shown in figure 1.

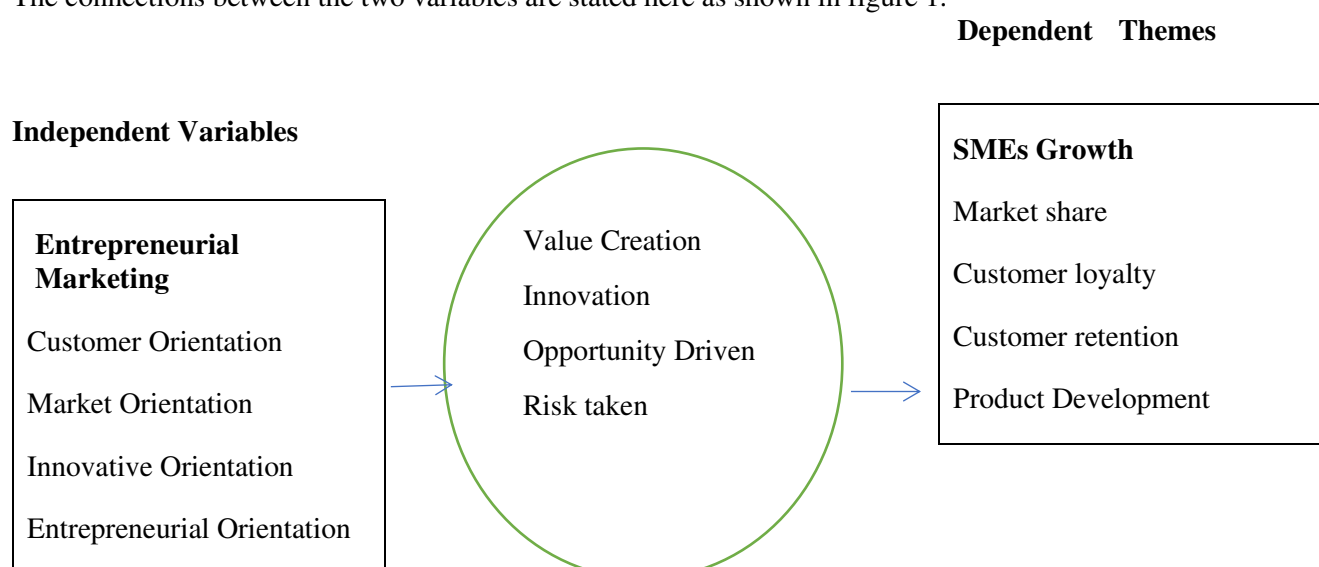


Fig.1: Research Model
The SME Growth Entrepreneurial Marketing Research Model

Empirical Studies

The impact of entrepreneurial marketing on the success of SMEs in Nigeria was investigated by Ogunode, et. al (2020). The study's specific objectives were to investigate the impact of entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs' growth in Nigeria, as well as how innovativeness, pro-activeness, opportunity motivation, resource leveraging, risk-taking, customer intensity, and value creation influence SMEs' performance. The study's specific objectives were to investigate the impact of entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs' growth in Nigeria, as well as how innovativeness, proactiveness, opportunity motivation, resource leveraging, risk-taking, customer intensity, and value creation influence SMEs' performance. The research adopted a descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the required data from sampled respondents. The population of the study was 345 registered SMEs in Delta state, Nigeria. 120 SMEs operators were chosen as a sample using a simple random sampling procedure. Multiple regressions were employed to test the formulated hypotheses. Entrepreneurial marketing, according to the study, is a driving factor of economic growth and also aids in the development of new

products/services for existing customers. Furthermore, the report suggests that SMEs in Nigeria primarily rely on traditional marketing to reach out to potential clients and establish their brands. Surprisingly, just a small percentage of them employ current marketing techniques to promote their goods and services. The study suggested that SME operators should use new global technologies to boost their overall performance.

The study of [Ogunode, et. al \(2020\)](#), though well-constructed with proper statistical tools of analysis cannot be relied upon because the sample size is grossly inadequate having used only 120 respondents from one state in Nigeria to draw a conclusion and generalize for quantitative research like entrepreneurship marketing and SMEs performance in Nigeria.

[Abdul \(2020\)](#) examined the benefits and drawbacks of entrepreneurial marketing in small businesses. Besides the procedure, a thorough review of related literature on the subject was done extensively. The research contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a greater understanding of the benefits and challenges of entrepreneurial marketing among SMEs, as well as supplementing earlier research in the same sector. According to the study, entrepreneurial marketing empowers entrepreneurs to think strategically and contribute positively to their companies growth. It improves SMEs' performance by improving market share, revenue, efficiency, and customer connections, as well as assisting them in generating sales, growing, and surviving in today's competitive environment. Inadequate managerial and marketing skills and abilities, poor marketing strategies and untrained sales representatives, a small client base, insufficient marketing undertakings, and inexperience on the part of managers, are among the challenges noted in the study.

[Abdul \(2020\)](#) did not state the domain of the study which is essential in research writing. The study equally stated the challenges that are confronting entrepreneurial marketers but failed to proffer solutions to the issues in question, which to us is an error of omission.

Olaniyan, Ogbuanu, and Oduguwa (2017) scrutinized the effect of entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs development in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design to explore the relationships that exist (if any) among the variables. The result of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the SME adaptation approach and business strategy as an instrument for SME development in Oyo state. The study recommended that Nigerian SMEs should adopt current marketing best practices in Nigeria and ensure that such procedures are compatible with existing digital tactics.

The study of Olaniyan, Ogbuanu, and Oduguwa (2017), again did not state the population, or the sample size of the study since the research is quantitative. Therefore the findings, conclusion, and recommendation are hanging.

[Nwankwo and Kanyangale \(2019\)](#) investigated whether a market orientation paradigm might be used to effectively manage SMEs in Nigeria. This is because previous research in Nigeria has focused on the current entrepreneurial marketing paradigm, which has not greatly helped in the survival of SMEs in the country. The study's major goal is to determine the impact of marketing orientation on manufacturing SMEs' survival in Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey design and a positivistic ontology. 387 Nigerian manufacturing SME owners and managers were chosen at random for the study. The findings revealed that marketing orientation played a key role in SMEs' survival in Nigeria and recommended that both the owners and managers of SMEs should use integrative entrepreneurial marketing orientation to help lower the percentage of business failure in Nigeria. The study of [Nwankwo and Kanyangale \(2019\)](#) should have been more specific on the marketing orientation (like sales, production, societal orientation, etc) to be used in Nigeria for optimal survival by manufacturing firms.

Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurial marketing is the intersection between marketing and business. Both terms are interchangeable. [Collinson and Shaw \(2001\)](#) noted that both ideas have been combined for a fruitful

venture. Both are opportunistic and imaginative in their managerial style. According to [Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge \(2002\)](#), entrepreneurial marketing has been associated with marketing efforts in tiny, resource-constrained businesses that must rely on ingenuity and crude marketing strategies that heavily utilize personal networks to grow and survive in their business. [Maharani and Hutami \(2019\)](#) observed that the theoretical underpinning of entrepreneurial marketing is dependable on resource-advantage theory. This idea enables both traditional and entrepreneurial marketing tactics to achieve optimal organizational performance as it is in line with the competitive changes. According to resource-advantage theory, marketing can help businesses produce new resources and increase the productivity of existing ones by leveraging and advocating innovation in the form of new resource combinations.

3. Research methodology

Participants

Five (5) entrepreneurs that do their businesses in Awka Anambra State were purposively and conveniently selected for the study. The minimum sample size in qualitative research is 4 ([Onalu, Uchechukwu, & Okoye, 2020](#)). The criteria for selection are that they have at least 3 different offices/shops in Awka, have up to 10 staff on their payroll, must be an importer of goods, must have been in business since 2018 till date, and more importantly, is willing to participate in the study. The rationale behind the use of entrepreneurs is because they are directly or indirectly involved in marketing their product(s) before the advent of the novel Covid 19 Era to date. The researchers employed descriptive qualitative in the study.

Material and procedure

The instrument for data collection was an unstructured interview consisting of five (5) unstructured questions aimed at determining the study's goal. The instrument was adapted from the study of [Ogunode, et. al \(2020\)](#) with slight modifications, which were done by all the researchers. An in-depth interview was chosen as the data collection strategy because it allows for one-on-one contact with respondents while also allowing for unfiltered and first-hand information. All Covid-19 protocols were strictly adhered to by both parties (interviewer and interviewee). The researchers gave the instrument to three experts; one from Chike Okoli Centre for Entrepreneurship Studies (COCES) Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka., and one from the Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES) Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, and the last to the Department of Business Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. These experts were asked to review each item in the questionnaire and provide feedback on its suitability, clarity of instrument, incorrectly conceived ideas, missing information, and other observable flaws while keeping in mind the study's goal. The final instrument was modified and produced based on their recommendations, changes, and opinions.

Only two of the researchers conducted the interviews while all the researchers were involved in data analysis and interpretation. In the interviews, a digital voice recorder with the call-recording feature was used. Before the interview was recorded, each respondent's permission was asked and granted. Respondents were assured that their personal information, as well as that of their organizations, would be kept private. Each interview with each respondent lasted between 20 to 25 minutes as their business time was equally considered while the conveniences of the respondents were of the interviewers. The data generated through in-depth interviews were analyzed with the use of statistical and qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo version 12). Nvivo is a qualitative data computer analysis software package produced by QSR International. It helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyze and find insight in unstructured or qualitative research. The software is designed to analyze and organize unstructured text, audio, video, or image data. It can equally playback for audio and video files so that the interviews can easily be transcribed. After transcription, the data was thematically evaluated in English. Two key themes emerged from the comments. The themes are discussed below.

Data Analysis

After the responses were carefully transcribed and reviewed, thematic categories were created following the philosophical doctrine of qualitative research design ([Creswell, 2013](#)). The transcribed material was

then organized into an MS Word Excel spreadsheet with many subthemes based on the transcripts. The various data entry forms were verified internally after completion to ensure that responses were correctly classified before being harmonized and categorized into two primary categories: technological-driven marketing and need-oriented entrepreneurial marketing.

4. Results and discussions

Need-Oriented Entrepreneurial Marketing

In our discussion with the respondents on how value creation and innovation have helped in increasing their market share and customers' loyalty. On the whole, the responses from all the respondents revealed that innovation and value creation have helped them to increase their market share and retain their loyal customers of theirs. They equally noted that Covid-19 has affected their businesses in no small means which resulted in adopting new ways of doing their business. According to one of the respondents, "During Covid-19, we use bike riders to deliver the goods to our customers' doorsteps as most of them were afraid to visit our outlets for physical purchase, this enables us to satisfy and retain them" (**Participant 4, Male, Awka South, Anambra State**).

Nigeria did die before the Covid-19 issue even come self. This one way you people dey talk no-follow. We have been surviving in Nigeria and will continue to survive. During that time, I use a phone to connect with my customers and that makes me survive business till today (**Participant 2, Male, from Parkers Awka, Anambra State**)

One of the respondents narrated how they have been able to leverage the Covid -19 pandemic to remain in business. "We try to sell at the most affordable prices knowing fully well that most of our customers were affected negatively economically. With this, we enjoyed continuous patronage and loyalty from our esteemed customers" (**Participant 1, Female from Awka North**).

Still exploring how innovation and value creation have helped them to increase market share and customers loyalty, one of the respondents asserted that "we try to get smaller sizes of our products to enable our customers to afford them thereby retaining them even amid the novel Corona Virus (Covid-19)" (**Participant 3, Male, Awka South**).

Finally on the issue of value creation and innovation and how it has helped entrepreneurs to survive in terms of customers' loyalty and increase their market share, one of the respondents was of the view that networking and collaboration amongst them equally played a role. According to him "since companies abroad were closed down during the pandemic and as a result, we could not buy stock, instead of telling the customers e no dey or we no get am, we collect from our neighbors or source for it from amongst us and supply to them since asking them to go and buy from elsewhere might mean losing the customer to that person (**Participant 5, Female, Nibo**)

Technological Driven Marketing

We equally sort to find out how technologically-driven marketing has contributed to the growth and survival of SMEs in the Post Covid Era in Awka, Anambra State. One of the respondents said that "We have adopted the use of Point of Sale (POS) as our marketing strategy since most of our customers find it difficult to go to the bank to withdraw money because of the Covid-19 bank restriction (**Participant 3, Male, Awka South**).

Participant 5, Female, Nibo, told the interviewer that "we went as far as creating a Whatsapp forum for our esteem customers, with this arrangement, we were able to keep in constant touch with our customers in terms of their needs and how best to satisfy them"

Still trying to know how technologically-driven marketing has helped SMEs in terms of growth in the post-Covid- 19 Era, the respondent said that "through the help of technological devices, we were able to connect with our customer from home and do business from any location within and outside the shops

thereby satisfying our numerous customers while keeping our business running" (**Participant 2, Male, from Parkers Awka**).

Discussion

There is no gainsaying that the effect of Covid-19 has grounded the world economically and Awka, Anambra State Nigeria is not left behind. It is equally obvious that the worst-hit especially in Nigeria by the pandemic are the entrepreneurs and small business operators who are considered the engine room of every economy ([Abdul, 2020](#); [Ogunode, et. al, 2020](#); & [Adamu, 2020](#)). It was revealed from the extant literature reviewed that most countries that are bouncing back economically are doing so through the entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial marketing of SME operators. To remain in a competitive business environment, and afloat economically in the already contrasted and depressed economy, and worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, entrepreneurs and business operators in Awka Anambra State adopted various measures within her reach like investing in modern marketing equipment. However, researchers' pilot study revealed that despite these huge investments, entrepreneurs and small business operators especially in Awka Anambra State Nigeria were affected negatively by the advent of Covid-19. This study, therefore, examined the issues that have introduced this gap and what could be done to solve the problem against future occurrence.

On the issue of how value creation and innovation have helped entrepreneurs in Awka, Anambra State to cushion the effect of Covid-19, one of the respondents said that during Covid-19, they used bike riders to deliver their goods to their customers' doorsteps as most of them were afraid to visit their outlets for physical purchase. By doing so, they were able to satisfy and retain their valued customers. Another respondent believed that Nigeria was already having daunting economic challenges even before the advent of Covid-19. Though the pandemic equally affected them negatively, they were able to survive through the use of cell phones as a medium to connect to their valued customers. On the same issue, another respondent said that they strategically adjusted their prices to accommodate all their customers in order to ensure continuous patronage. The above findings are in tandem with the finding of Olaniyan, Ogbuanu, and Oduguwa (2017); [Abdul \(2020\)](#) who suggested that entrepreneurial marketing empowers entrepreneurs to think strategically and contribute positively to their companies growth. While the fourth respondent said that they used a business segmentation strategy to survive, the last respondent maintained that they engaged in networking and collaboration amongst business operators to ensure that they did not run out of stock. This finding is in line with the submission of [Nwankwo & Kanyangala \(2019\)](#) who recommended that both the owners and managers of SMEs should use integrative entrepreneurial marketing orientation to help lower the percentage of business failure in Nigeria.

Some of the respondents while responding on how technologically-driven marketing has enabled them to thrive even in the face of Covid-19, one of the respondents asserted that they employed the use of Point of Sale (POS) as most customers were not opportune to access the bank while another respondent said they even went as far as creating WhatsApp group for their esteem customer as that enabled them to display their goods and keep in constant touch with their customers. This finding is in agreement with the findings of [Ogunode, et. al \(2020\)](#), who suggested that SME operators should use new global

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Covid-19 has affected SME operators globally and Awka, Anambra State is not an exception. It is also noteworthy that while some countries have bounced back economically through their entrepreneurial marketing and entrepreneurship drive, others including entrepreneurs in Awka, Anambra state are still struggling for survival. The gap created by this unforeseen circumstance orchestrated by Covid-19 presents an opportunity to update, train, and develop SMEs on how to build quality products and services, as well as how to effectively use modern technical marketing tools to move their enterprises forward through the use of social media through creating viral markets for their products and services.

Entrepreneurial marketing tactics like networking and collaborative marketing should be adopted and performed aggressively by entrepreneurs in light of the current economic reality in Nigeria.

Limitations and study forward

This study is limited to Awka, the state capital of Anambra state Nigeria, it is expected that further studies should be done in Onitsha (the second most populated city in the state) and Lagos State (the commercial capital of Nigeria) with variables like market orientation and SME development. This will help to validate the result of this study. The restriction on gathering of people more than ten by the state government due to Covid-19 equally limited our study as the researchers would have loved to have a group and interactive decisions with the participants.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study revealed that most countries in the world that succeeded economically do so through the active roles and participation of SMEs as the engine room; using modern entrepreneurial marketing tools to achieve the desired result. This will serve as an eye-opener for Nigeria's policymakers and SME operators to key in and drive her already depressed economy to an enviable height.

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