

SALESFORCE CREATIVITY AND MARKETING PERFORMANCE OF AUTOMOBILE DEALERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explored salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between the dimensions of salesforce creativity (salesforce expertise, salesforce creative thinking and salesforce intrinsic task motivation) and marketing performance (sales growth and market share growth) of automobile dealers in Nigeria. In the process of carrying out this study, six (6) research questions and hypotheses were formulated to address the objectives of the study. The study adopted the correlational research design. The population of this study consisted of all the 168 registered automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria. The unit of analysis consisted of sales personnel of the registered automobile dealers in Nigeria. A sample size of 118 sales personnel was used for the study. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamene's formula. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The data collected were analyzed statistically while the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) with the aid of SPSS version 24.0. The findings showed that salesforce expertise has a significant relationship with marketing performance (sales growth and market share growth) of automobile dealers. The study also found a significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking and marketing performance (sales growth and market share growth) of automobile dealers. The study equally found a significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and marketing performance (sales growth and market share growth) of automobile dealers. Based on these findings, it is concluded that salesforce creativity is significant predictor of marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that salesforce in automobile dealers in Nigeria should be more creative in performing their duties as it would enhance the marketing performance of their dealer.

Keywords: *Salesforce creativity, salesforce expertise, salesforce creative thinking, marketing performance, sales growth and market share growth.*

INTRODUCTION

Whenever a dealer offers a product to the market for attention, the product will face competition from other similar brands. This competition is always for the consumers' income at least their discretionary portion. However, the level of competition the product is likely to face will depend on the industry it belongs. The automobile industry is one of the most competitive industry in Nigeria due to the different brands of vehicles in the market. The automobile market is saturated with different brands of vehicles such as Toyota, Mercedes, Lexus, Honda, BMW, Peugeot, Tundra, to mention but a few. The different brands of vehicles are available in the market in large quantity and they are displayed in difference car stands by Dealers of automobile vehicles. A customer who visits any of the car Dealers will have to make a choice regarding the brand of vehicle to buy. The decision to buy a particular brand will depend on how the customer perceives the chosen brand in terms of quality, features, benefits and price. Any brand of vehicle that fails to meet the customers' expectations will not survive in the market. Therefore, for any automobile dealer to survive in the market, it must compete effectively with other Dealers and improve its marketing performance.

Marketing performance refers to how well a firm is doing in the market against its competitors in terms of customer satisfaction, increase in customer patronage, making more sales, expanding its market share in the midst of competition, ensuring customer loyalty and customer retention, gaining competitive advantage (Samwel, 2018). If an automobile dealer experienced massive increase in customer patronage, sales and market share, the dealer is said to have a good marketing performance in the period under review and vice versa (Niazi, 2011). A good marketing performance is an indicator that the consumers are satisfied with the products offered and vice versa. Every automobile dealer wants to achieve a good marketing performance because it is a sure way of achieving business growth and survival. Achieving a good marketing performance requires automobile dealers to assemble salesforce who are creative in their approach to work.

Salesforce must be creative to enable them quickly convert goods into cash in order to give their company a competitive edge over its rivals. For salesforce to be creative, they need to display some level of expertise by having pertinent knowledge, technical skills and special talent in selling products. They also need to possess creative thinking skills when it comes to making sale such as thinking out of the box, cognitive thinking, lateral thinking, good communication and presentation skills; and more importantly demonstrate intrinsic task motivation such as the job excitement, job satisfaction and displaying high level of desire to get more challenging sale done. When these three components are present in the salesforce of a company, these individuals would become creative by developing novel and useful ideas in converting dealer's products into cash within the shortest possible time (Amabile, 1998).

The level of creativity in salesforce differs from one company to other. This difference in salesforce creativity is due to the importance attached to creativity issues in the organization. Some automobile dealers have a more creative salesforce than others and this is the main reason why they make more sales than their major competitors in the same industry. As Coelho et al (2011) rightly stated, one thing is to have numerous salesmen scattered across the market but if these salesmen are not creative in their thinking faculty, demonstrate high level of expertise and be motivated intrinsically, the company will continue to remain inferior to its competitors who have a more knowledgeable and creative salesforce. Zhang and Bartorl (2010) argued that salesforce creativity is the most decisive factor that makes the difference in firms' marketing performance. They explained that a company with creative salesforce will perform better in the market than those with less creative salesforce. This is because such company will leverage on the creativity of their salesforce especially their high level of expertise and creative thinking skills to make more sales and increase their market share in the midst of intense competition. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the relationship between salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

The challenge facing many automobile dealers in Nigeria is how to improve their marketing performance in the midst of intense competition. The competition in the automobile industry is high intensive as there are numerous brands of automobile products in the market. Given the dynamic nature of the marketing environment and the competition in the automobile industry, some automobile dealers have been compelled to search for other possible ways to increase sales and market share and achieve a good marketing performance. It is proposed in this study that the recruitment of creative salesforce would help to achieve a good marketing performance for automobile dealers in Nigeria. However, there is no substantial evidence that support this claim as empirical studies that examined salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria are limited. This has created a gap in literature which this study intends to fill and contribute to the existing knowledge on the subject matter.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers is shown in figure 1 below:

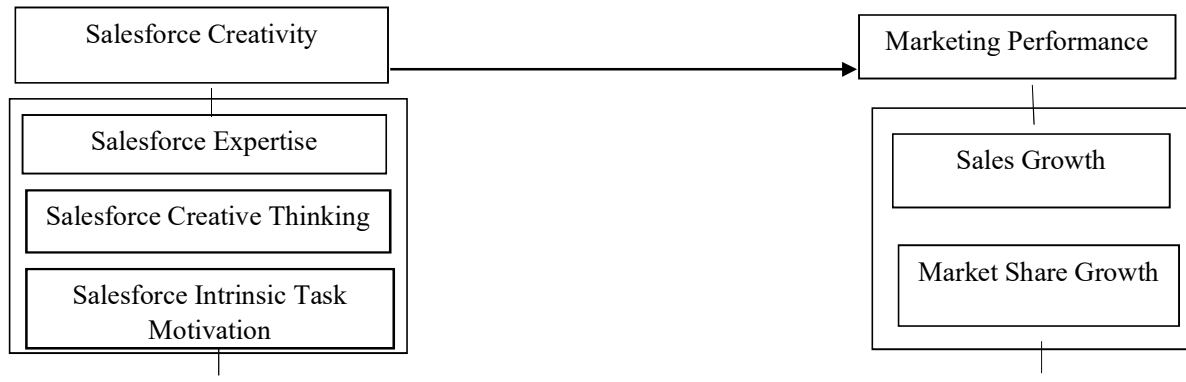


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. ascertain out the relationship between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers;
2. determine the relationship between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers;
3. find out the relationship between salesforce creative thinking and sales growth of automobile dealers;
4. determine the relationship between salesforce creative thinking and market share growth of automobile dealers;
5. ascertain the relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers;
6. determine the relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers.

Research Questions

The following questions were answered in the course of the study:

1. To what extent does salesforce expertise relate to sales growth of automobile dealers?
2. To what extent does salesforce expertise contribute to market share growth of automobile dealers?
3. To what extent does salesforce creative thinking ensures sales growth of automobile dealers?
4. To what extent does salesforce creative thinking contribute to market share growth of automobile dealers?
5. To what extent does competitive environment moderate the relationship between salesforce creativity and customer patronage of automobile dealers in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in this study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Ho₆: There is no significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Salesforce Creativity

Salesforce creativity is the development of new and useful ideas on how to quickly sell their dealer's products and services (Amabile, 1998). It involves the implementation of innovative ideas to speed up sales and increase the sales turnover of their dealer's products and services (Shin & Zhou, 2003). Creativity exists both at the individual and team level. Individual creativity is the development of novel (unique) and useful ideas, processes, or procedures by a person to solve a problem or get work done (Amabile et al, 1997), while team creativity is the extent to which a sales team's ideas in response to a problem solving task are both novel and useful (Pirola-Merlo & Mann, 2004). Sales team creativity occurs during a social process of sense-making and collaboration where one individual's actions may inspire the team to devise and follow a more creative process to address the problem at hand resulting in higher levels of creativity (Taggar, 2002). Sales team creativity is more than just the combined creativity of the individual team members.

Team Creativity Model (TCM) posits that team creativity is directly influenced by individual creativity. The extent to which individual members of a team are capable to generate creative ideas will determine the creativity of the team as a whole since the individual contributions provide the team with its 'raw' materials (Kalyar, 2011). Thus, creative salesmen, experts in particular, are less likely to have difficulties or be uncomfortable expressing themselves. Thus, if sales teams have higher proportion of creative individuals who are experts, such teams will be more likely to have a high degree of sales team creativity. Salesforce creativity requires salesforce to generate unique ideas that will help to boost sales of their dealer's products. With respect to idea generation, certain cognitive capabilities, general skills, and task and context-specific knowledge are needed to encourage creativity (Taggar, 2002). Beyond knowledge and skills, salesforce creativity requires intrinsic motivation and a certain level of internal force that pushes the individual to persevere in the face of challenges inherent in the creative work (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Moreover, the internal force keeps the salesman going even when the challenges are successfully overcome it is about a positive tension and desire to excel. Consequently, employees' initiative, flexibility, perseverance and willingness to go beyond their actual goal accomplishment in order to come up with novel and organizationally beneficial ideas characterize creativity (Georgsdottir & Getz, 2004).

Dimensions of Sales Creativity

The dimensions of sales creativity considered in this study are expertise, creative thinking skills and intrinsic task motivation as outlined by Amabile (1997).

Salesforce Expertise

According to Botaris (2004), expertise refers to an expert skill or knowledge in a particular field. The expertise component includes memory for factual knowledge, technical proficiency, and special talents in the target domain (Amabile, 1997; Botaris, 2004; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). According to Botaris (2004), factual memory is made up of factual knowledge that has been acquired by a salesman or sales team in the past and does not from present observation or experience. Technical proficiency is the ability of a salesperson to apply technical knowledge and skills in the selling activities in order to achieve the expected sales target (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Special talent is something that is high in demand but shortage in supply. It is difficult to find and easy to lose. Yapp (2009) noted that talent is what differentiate successful organizations from unsuccessful ones; it is the hidden secret of marketing success. When a sales team collaborate with another sales team, it tends to learn new skills and knowledge from the expertise of its partner. Taufiq et al (2019) stated that collaboration include integrating all existing knowledge, skills, expertise, experience and technological resources into the project to make it a success for both partners. The different level of expertise brought in by the two teams would help to shape how selling activities are done in different market situations which will lead to better sales performance for their dealer.

Salesforce Creative Thinking

Salesforce creative thinking is the ability of salesforce to think about a sales problem in a different and new way (Ramamoorthy et al, 2005). It is the ability of a salesforce to use imagination to generate new ideas. Mumford (2000) defined creative thinking as the ability of a salesman to use his ability and soft skills to develop new ideas and solution to a selling problem. Creative thinking skills therefore are the techniques used by a salesman to analyze issue from different perspectives and use the right tools to evaluate it and come up with a relatively new plan (Mumford et al, 1997). Examples of creative thinking include think-out-the box, cognitive thinking and communication skills (Amabile, 1997). Thinking out-of-the-box simply means exploring ideas that are creative and unusual and that are not limited or controlled by rules or tradition (Amabile, 1997). Cognitive thinking skills are the main skills which the brain uses to think, read, learn, reason, pay attention and remember (Elmuti, 2007). Communication is the means by which people are linked together, how they function to achieve a common goal (Carriere & Bourque, 2009). For salesmen or sales team to succeed in terms of improving their selling performance, they must accept the selling challenges, start visualizing and be curious, and engage in art, music or theatre and question. Creative thinking skills enable a salesman to find interesting ways to approach task and solve complex selling problems.

Salesforce Intrinsic Task Motivation

Salesforce intrinsic task motivation refers to a certain level of internal force that pushes a salesperson to persevere in the face of challenges in creative work (Amabile, 1997). It is a kind of motivation that comes from individuals' involvement and interest in the job itself (Amabile, 1997). Intrinsic task motivation consists of those in-built factors of an individual worker that energize him or her to carry out a given task in the organization (Yaya et al, 2016). They include positive recognition, personal skills and experience, higher degrees acquired to enhance effective service delivery, among others (Yaya et al, 2016). Other examples of intrinsic task motivation are acceptance, curiosity, honour, independence, power and order (Obajemu et al, in Yusuf et al, 2015). Intrinsic task motivation causes salespeople to respond to job challenges and work harder in order to prove their self-worth and integrity and at the same time deliver their personal commitment and desire for personal accomplishment (Yusuf et al, 2015). McCormick and Tifflin in Yaya et al (2016) argued that intrinsic task motivation stems from motivations that are inherent in the job itself and which the individual salesperson enjoys as a result of successfully completing the task or attaining

his goals. They are those rewards that can be termed psychological motivations and examples are opportunity to use one's ability, a sense of challenge and achievement, receiving appreciation, positive recognition, and being treated in a caring and considerate manner (Ajila in Yaya, et al, 2016).

Concept of Marketing Performance

The term marketing performance refers to the marketing outcome of a firm which can be measured through sales growth, market share, competitive advantage, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Jayapal & Omar, 2017). Ritala (2012) defined marketing performance as the rate at which a firm's products or services are patronized by customers in the market (sales) and the portion of the market which the firm has been able to capture (market share). A firm can use its marketing performance to ascertain how consumers react to its products offerings. A good marketing performance is an indicator that the consumers are satisfied with the products/service rendered and vice versa. Increasing marketing performance is one of the major objectives of business firms irrespective of the sector they belong (Ogunnaike et al, 2014). When a dealer's marketing performance is improved, it will manifest in the profit margin of the organization. Santos and Brito (2012) stated that a high market performance is an indication that the dealer is enjoying a competitive advantage over its rivals. It also implies that the dealer is enjoying greater sales, market share, customer loyalty and increased profit margin (Santos & Brito, 2012). In this regards, strategic planners, managers and marketing executives are more concerned with their market performance of their dealer. They now use a balanced scorecard method to measure their market performance (sales growth, sales turnover and market share) (Gawankar et al, 2015). A firm's marketing performance firm is judged by the percentage to which the dealer increases its sales (sales growth), sales turnover (the speed at which a dealer converts its inventory into cash) and market share (i.e. the proportion of the market served or captured by a firm) (Shih, 2018). However, Jayapal and Omar (2017) argued that marketing performance is not only limited to sales and market share only, it also includes customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and customer loyalty. These measures can be used to determine the marketing performance of firms in both local and global market. Thus, creating high-performing firm is the secret to gaining competitive advantage.

Measures of Marketing Performance

There are different criteria used in measuring marketing performance. However, in this study, marketing performance is measured using sales growth and market share growth. These measures of marketing performance are discussed below.

Sales Growth

Sales growth is the increase in the amount of goods sold by a dealer over a period of time (Bertuzzi, 2015). Dion (2003) defined sales growth as an increase in the quantity or amount of goods sold by a dealer over a given period of time. Dealers of automobile products often measure their sales growth rate periodically. Burke (2005) stated that sales growth of a dealer can be determined by comparing the amount of sales made by the dealer on a yearly basis. Roberge (2014) stated that sales growth is usually calculated in percentage and the percentage increase is often referred to as the sales growth rate. Although some dealers' especially large ones determine their sales growth on a yearly basis, studies have showed that small dealers measure their sales growth on a daily or weekly basis (Banat & Wandebori, 2012). A dealer is said to have experienced sales growth if the amount of goods sold this year exceeds the amount of goods sold last year. When a dealer experiences a significant growth in sales, it means more profit for the business and when the profit for the business increases, the dealer can then expand its operations and achieve business growth. Sales growth is one of the key objectives of dealers. Every dealer wants to increase their sales because it is the only way to maximize profit and increase their marketing performance. Dion (2003)

argued that increase the sales of a store imply increase in profit margin. Burke (2005) stated that sales growth is an important competitive factor because it shows that the dealer is doing well as against its competitors. When the shareholders look at the sales records of their dealer, and observed a significant growth rate, they will feel happy. If the shareholders discovered that the sales are decreasing consistently from year to year, they will feel sad and make efforts to determine the cause of such drop.

Market Share Growth

Market share growth can be defined as an increase in portion of a market captured by a dealer (Reibstein et al, 2006). Antonova (2014) defined market share growth as the percentage of firm, by which the portion of market served by a dealer has grown typically from year to year. The market share of a firm can be ascertained by calculating the sales made by the dealer at a given period and divide the figure by the total sales of the industry over the same period. The result which is expressed in percentage enables the dealer to know how customers value its products in relation to competitors' offerings. Increasing market share is the most important goal for dealers because it has a direct impact on revenue (Amelia, 2017). In many instances, market share is often considered as an important asset for competing firms because it helps to increase revenue and enhance business growth. However, a dealer that experiences a decline in market share will have a serious problem on the long-run. Armstrong and Greene (2007) stated that dealers whose market share is below a certain level will not be profitable and may cease from operation anytime soon. Many investors who intend to buy the share of a dealer use the dealer's market share index to make decision. They carefully look at the rate of increase and decrease of the market share from one period to the other because it signifies the relative competitiveness of the dealer's products in the market. If the market share of the dealer is growing steadily, it indicates that the dealer's revenue is growing at the same rate as its market share. Amelia (2017) stated that a dealer whose market share is growing from year to year grows its revenue faster than its rivals in the same industry. When the market share of a dealer increases from year to year, it enables the dealer to expand its operation and increase profit. Nigerian dealers are determined to increase their market share by drawing the attention of the public to their products through advertising, reducing prices and granting discounts. Market share growth is a key indicator of a firm's marketing performance i.e. how well a firm is doing against its competitors. The measure enables managers or dealers analyze their product demand in the market against competitors' offerings. That is, it enables managers to ascertain whether their market share is growing or declining from year to year and compare the rate with those of their competitors. The fact that market share is often used to judge the competitiveness of firms in the same industry has prompted many dealers to establish a system where management decisions (strategic and tactical decisions) will be made in consideration of its impact on the market share of their rivals.

Theoretical Review

This study applied the theory of creative individual action to support the argument put forward in this study. The theory of creative individual action was developed by Ford in 1996. The theory of creative individual action believes that every individual's creativity behaviour is influenced by sense making, motivation, and knowledge and ability (Ford, 1996). The theory holds the view that at any given time, an individual can exhibit creativity behaviour to address issue arising (Ford, 1996). The theory believes that people sometimes find themselves in a situation which require them to develop new ideas and take action to address the issue and produce the desired result (Ford, 1996). In the work environment, salespeople sometimes find themselves in certain situation in the course of performing their job and this situation requires them to take creative action to come out of the problem.

The theory of creative individual action useful in explaining the contribution of salesforce creativity to marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The theory argues that salesman creativity is a function of sense making, motivation, and knowledge and ability. If a salesman possessed these three characteristics, he or she is likely to become more creative in the course of performing their selling functions. Every salesman need to make sense all the time, motivate themselves, acquire more knowledge and display ability to succeed in the given task.. The theory of creative individual action highly provide support for this study because it explains the factors behind salesforce creativity in an organization and how such creative action enhance the marketing performance of automobile dealers.

Empirical Review

A number of related empirical studies have been conducted on salesforce creativity and marketing performance of firms. For instance, Asiegbu et al (2011) carried out a study to determine the relationship between salesforce competence development and marketing performance of industrial and domestic products firms in Nigeria. Their study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design and used a structured questionnaire to obtain data from senior sales managers, marketing managers and marketing executives of 36 firms drawn from the industrial and domestic sectors. The data collected were analyzed statistically using descriptive tables, multiple regression analysis, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and SPSS. The findings revealed that salesforce competence development is significant predictor of marketing performance metrics such as sales growth, sales volume and profitability. The study revealed that mentoring have the most significant effects on sales growth, sales volume and profitability of industrial and domestic firms.

Boso et al (2017) carried out a study to determine how organizational creativity drive market performance. The researchers employed the survey research design and used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 92 managers in 26 software dealers in United States. After analyzing the data collected using percentage and frequency analysis, mean, standard deviation, bar chart, pie chart, and the SPSS version 23.0, the researchers discovered that organizational creativity has a significant positive relationship with market performance. The study also reported that firm resources significantly moderate the relationship between organizational creativity and market performance of software dealers.

Wang and Miao (2015) explored the effects of salesforce market orientation on creativity, innovation implementation, and sales performance. Their study adopted the survey research design where data were collected from salesforce and sales managers of dealers in the manufacturing sector in the United States through online survey. The researchers used a structured questionnaire to obtain data from the respondents by sending email to them. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and median while hierarchical regression was used to test the conceptual model. The findings showed that salesforce creativity has significant relationship with the performance of dealers in the manufacturing sector. The study also revealed that innovation implementation (innovative organizational culture) significantly mediate the relationship between salesforce creativity and firm performance.

Ahmed and Sigamony (2020) explored the effect of employee creativity on project performance in Pakistan. Their study adopted the descriptive survey research design where data were collected from 273 employees in project-based organization in Pakistan. The researchers used a structured questionnaire as their main instrument for data collection while percentage and frequency tables, mean and standard deviation as well as Pearson Correlation Coefficient, ANOVA and regression analysis were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that employee creativity has a significant positive relationship with project performance of project-based organizations in Pakistan. The study

also revealed that knowledge sharing significantly mediate the relationship between employee creativity and project performance of project-based organizations. The study equally revealed that openness to experience significantly moderate the relationship between employee creativity and project performance of project-based organizations.

Thatrak (2021) empirically explored human capital orientation, employee creativity development, organizational innovation capabilities, and outstanding performance of SMEs businesses in Thailand. Their study adopted the survey research design where a structured questionnaire to elicit data from 219 entrepreneurs in Thailand. The questionnaire was sent to the respondents via email while the Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used for data analysis. The study also revealed that human capital orientation has a direct positive influence on organizational innovation capabilities. The study also revealed that organizational innovation has a direct positive influence on outstanding performance.

Atwongyeire (2019) examined the influence of employee creativity on job performance in Uganda. The study adopted the correlational research design and used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 62 employees of FutureLink Technologies and Nansana Municipal Council. The researcher analyzed the data collected using percentage and frequency tables, and used the Pearson' Product Moment Correlation and SPSS to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that employee creativity has a significant positive relationship with job performance of employees in FutureLink Technologies and Nansana Municipal Council. The study also revealed that creation of new ideas, products and processes have significant effect on job performance.

Elidemir et al (2020) examined innovative behaviours, employee creativity, and sustainable competitive advantage. Their study adopted the survey research design where data were collected from 323 frontline employees (front office, food and beverage, housekeeping, guest relations, sales, and marketing) and immediate managers of 4-Star and 5-Star hotels using a structured questionnaire. After analyzing the data collected and testing the hypotheses using SPSS Amos, and confirmatory factor analysis, the researchers found out that high-performance work practices indirectly predicted sustainable competitive advantage via innovative behaviour. The study also revealed that employee innovative behaviour can generate substantial returns to their organization when competing with quasi-homogenous end-products.

Gap in Reviewed Literature

From the studies reviewed, it was observed that none of these studies focused specifically on Salesforce creativity rather the studies focused on the entire workforce of the organizations studied. No attempt was made by previous studies to critically evaluate the creativity of the salesforce of the organization studied and relate the concept to marketing performance of the firms. Even the dimensions of salesforce creativity (salesforce expertise, salesforce creative thinking skills and salesforce intrinsic task motivation) were not related to the measures of marketing performance (sales growth and market share growth) Secondly, it was observed that most of the previous studies conducted on employee creativity focused on engineering firms, software dealers, alcoholic manufacturing dealers and hotel firms while empirical studies that examined the relationship between salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria are absent. Following the gaps created in literature, this study makes an attempt to bridge the gaps in literature by exploring the relationship between salesforce creativity and marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study is the positivist and the correlational research. The population of this study was made up of all the 168 registered automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria (www.directory.org.ng). The sample for the study consisted of sales personnel of the registered automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria. A sample size of 118 sales personnel was utilized for the study. The Taro Yamene formula was used to determine the sample size for the study. The instrument used in collecting data from the respondents was a questionnaire which was structured using the modified four (4) point Likert scale-type such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The validity of the instrument was determined through face and content analysis while its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach Alpha method. A total of 118 questionnaires was administered to the respondents (sales personnel) of automobile dealers across the six states that make up the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Out of the 118 questionnaires administered to the respondents, 98 copies were collected from them. After editing of the questionnaire collected, it was discovered that 8 copies were wrongly filled and eliminated while 90 copies were correctly filled and considered useful for analysis. The data collected were analyzed statistically while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was used for the bivariate analysis with the aid of the SPSS version 24.0.

Empirical Results and Discussion

The data collected in the questionnaire were used to test for the relationship that exists between two variables in each of the hypothesis. The data collected on salesforce creativity (salesforce expertise, creative thinking and intrinsic task motivation) were correlated with those obtained on marketing performance measures (sales growth and market share growth) using Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r). The computation was performed with the aid of the SPSS software program version 24.0 and the results are presented in the tables below:

Table 1: Result of bivariate analysis between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Expertise	Sales Growth
Pearson (r)	Salesforce Expertise	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.815**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	90	90
	Sales Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.815**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	90	90

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 1 presents the result of bivariate analysis carried out between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The result shows that salesforce expertise has a very strong positive correlation with sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .815^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is significant relationship between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Table 2: Result of the bivariate analysis between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Expertise	Market Share Growth
Pearson (r)	Salesforce Expertise	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.745**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	90	90
	Market Share Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.745**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	90	90

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 2 presents the result of bivariate analysis carried out between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The result shows a strong and positive correlation between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .745^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. As a result of this, we then reject the null hypothesis (H_{02}) and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Table 3: Result of the bivariate analysis between salesforce creative thinking and sales growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Creative Thinking	Sales Growth
Pearson (r)	Salesforce Creative Thinking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.812**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	90	90
	Sales Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.812**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	90	90

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 4.18 shows the result of bivariate analysis carried out between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria. The result shows a very strong positive correlation between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .812^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. As a result of this, we then reject the null hypothesis (H_{03}) and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Table 4: Result of the bivariate analysis between salesforce creative thinking and market share growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Creative Thinking	Market Share Growth
Pearson (r)	Salesforce Creative Thinking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.631**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	90	90
	Market Share Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.631**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	90	90

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 4 presents the result of bivariate analysis carried out between salesforce creative thinking and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The result indicates that salesforce creative thinking has a strong positive correlation with market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .631^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{04}) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Table 5: Result of bivariate analysis between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Intrinsic Task Motivation	Sales Growth
Pearson Correlation (r)	Salesforce Intrinsic Task Motivation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.738**
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.	.001
		N	90	90
	Sales Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.738**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.
		N	90	90

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 5 contains the result of bivariate analysis carried out between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria. The result shows a strong positive correlation between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .738^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{05}) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that we then accept that there is significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Table 6: Result of bivariate analysis between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers

			Salesforce Intrinsic Task Motivation	Market Share Growth
Pearson Correlation (r)	Salesforce Intrinsic Task Motivation	Correlation	1.000	.662**
		Coefficient	.	.001
		Sig. (2 tailed)	90	90
	Market Share Growth	Correlation	.662**	1.000
		Coefficient	.001	.
		Sig. (2 tailed)	90	90
		N		

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Source SPSS-generated Output

Table 6 shows the result of correlation analysis carried out between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The result indicates that salesforce intrinsic task motivation has a strong positive correlation with market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .662^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level as indicated by the symbol **. As a result of this, we then reject the null hypothesis (H_{06}) and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study discovered a significant relationship between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding was deduced from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the first hypothesis. The result revealed that salesforce expertise has a very strong positive correlation with sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .815^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that we then accepted that there is significant relationship between salesforce expertise and sales growth of automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria. This finding is supported by Boso et al (2017) who noted that dealers that hired salesforce who are professionals and experts in the field of marketing will experience massive sales growth. Atwongyeire (2019) also supported this finding when they reported that salesmen who possessed the required skills and knowledge will persuade more people to buy their dealer's products and this will boost the sales of their organization.

This study found a significant relationship between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding was derived from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the second hypothesis. The result showed a strong and positive correlation between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .745^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. As a result of this, we then rejected the null hypothesis (H_{02}) and accepted the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce expertise and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Elidemir et al (2020) which reported that competent salesforce persuade more people to buy their products and this increase the market share of their dealer. Wang and Miao (2015) also supported this finding when they stated that

dealers with competent and experienced salesforce will expand their market share since their salesmen have the potentials to persuade more people to buy their products.

This study also found a significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding emerged from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the third hypothesis. The result showed a very strong positive correlation between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .812^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. As a result of this, we then rejected the null hypothesis (H_{03}) and accepted the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking skills and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Steinerowska-Streb and Glod (2019) as both studies reported that creative thinking skills enable salesmen to persuade people to buy their products.

A significant relationship was equally reported between salesforce creative thinking skills and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding was deduced from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the fourth hypothesis. The result showed that salesforce creative thinking skills has a strong positive correlation with market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .631^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{04}) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is significant relationship between salesforce creative thinking skills and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding is supported by Asiegbu et al (2011) who noted that competence salesmen use their creative thinking skills to solve their problem and increase the market share of their dealer.

This study found a significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding was deduced from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the fifth hypothesis. The result showed a strong positive correlation between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers ($r = .738^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{05}) was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This implies that we then accepted that there is significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and sales growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding is in line with Henry and Jacob (2016)'s postulation that motivated salesforce would improve their individual sales performance and this will lead to sales growth for their dealer.

Finally, it was discovered that salesforce intrinsic task motivation has a significant relationship with market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding emerged from the result of the bivariate analysis carried out on the two variables in the sixth hypothesis. The result showed that salesforce intrinsic task motivation has a strong positive correlation with market share growth of automobile dealers ($r = .662^{**}$) and this correlation is significant at 0.01 level. As a result of this, we then rejected the null hypothesis (H_{06}) and accepted the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between salesforce intrinsic task motivation and market share growth of automobile dealers in Nigeria. This finding is supported by Henry and Jacob (2016) and Taufiq et al (2019) as both studies revealed that salesmen who are intrinsically motivated persuade more people to buy their products and this increases the market share of their dealer.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis carried out, it is confirmed that salesforce creativity has the potentials of improving the marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria. The results of

this study revealed that salesforce expertise is a significant predictor of marketing performance as measured by customer patronage, sales growth and market share growth. The study also revealed that salesforce creative thinking skills is a significant predictor of marketing performance of automobile dealers. Salesforce intrinsic task motivation was also reported to be a significant predictor of marketing performance of automobile dealers. In line with the findings, it was concluded that salesforce creativity has a significant relationship with marketing performance of automobile dealers in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided based on the findings of this study.

1. That, automobile dealers in South-South Nigeria especially those that are struggling to improve their marketing performance should hire salesforce who are creative in their approach to work as it would help to improve their marketing performance.
2. That, automobile dealers in Nigeria should effectively manage their talented and creative sales officers as this would not only prevent them from leaving their organization but also encourage them to put in their best at work and improve the marketing performance of the dealer.
3. That, automobile dealers in Nigeria should adequately motivate their talented and creative sales officers as this would encourage them to put their utmost best at work in ensuring that the dealer improve their marketing performance.
4. That, salesforce in automobile dealers in Nigeria should continuously develop their skills and talents in order to become more creative in the course of performing their duties and improve the marketing performance of their dealer.
5. That, salesforce in automobile dealers in Nigeria should question the existing working models in their dealer in difficult times and come up with new ideas that will help to boost sales and improve the overall marketing performance of their dealer.
6. That, salesforce in automobile dealers in Nigeria should think out-of-the-box in order to solve problem in difficult times especially when every other solutions within the stipulated rules have failed to turn the situation around.
7. Finally, it is recommended that salesforce in automobile dealers in Nigeria should improve their communication skills as it would enable them persuade customers to buy their dealer's products and increase sales.

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