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INNOVATION ORIENTATION AND SALES PERFORMANCE OF FOOD AND BEVERAGE FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of Innovation Orientation on Sales Performance of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. The study used a cross section survey research design in administering structured questionnaire on 75 respondents who were managers of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers state. The data collected was analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation to test four hypotheses on SPSS software, version 23.0. The research outcomes showed that the dimensions of Innovation Orientation (Learning Orientation, Strategic Resource Allocation) have a positive and significant effect on Customer Patronage and Sales Volume which were the measures of Sales Performance used in the study. The study concludes that adopting Innovation Orientation as a business practice has a significant positive effect on Sales Performance. The study therefore recommends that firms should prioritize learning orientation, and strategically allocate financial, human, and technological resources to support innovation initiatives."

KEYWORDS: Innovation Orientation, Sales Performance, Learning Orientation, Strategic Resource Allocation, Customer Patronage, Sales Volume.

INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage sector in Nigeria is crucial to the nation's economy, significantly impacting GDP, creating jobs, and meeting the varied demands of consumers (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Therefore, understanding how innovation orientation influences sales performance among firms in this industry is crucial for enhancing competitiveness and sustainable growth. This is more important, given the fact that the whole essence of all marketing activities is to create value for customers. The value customers place on a company's product i.e. the satisfaction they derive from consuming a company's product offering is a source of competitive advantage, which can result in increased sales performance and profitability. Given the changes in customers' tastes and fashion, it has become necessary for firms to also devise means of changing their product and service offerings in line with these changes. Companies that want to meet up with these changes devise ways of constantly improving their product and service offerings. They usually innovate. Above all, they develop a mindset towards innovation, using innovation orientation as a strategic tool. Adopting innovation orientation can impact on customer patronage and sales volume as most businesses thrive and grow when their goods and services meet and satisfy changing customers' needs.

Innovation orientation represents a strategic approach focused on fostering and executing new ideas, products, processes, or technologies within an organization (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012). Innovation plays a crucial role in driving sales performance and overall business success. By strategically aligning innovation initiatives with market demands, firms can better position themselves for revenue growth and market success. Innovations in production processes, packaging, and distribution can lead to cost savings, higher productivity, and better resource utilization, ultimately translating into improved sales performance and profitability. With innovation as a strategic tool a firm can survive and thrive in any competitive market. This fact is collaborated by Stopford and Baden -Fuller (1994), who concluded that creative firms can achieve success in a hostile industry and even transform the industry.

The relationship between innovation orientation and sales performance has garnered increasing attention from researchers and practitioners seeking to understand how innovation influences sales effectiveness, revenue generation, and overall business success. While traditional sales strategies focus on customer acquisition, relationship management, and revenue targets, innovation orientation introduces a new dimension by emphasizing the importance of creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement in driving sales performance. Hence despite the growing body of literature on innovation orientation and sales performance, there is still a need for further research to better understand the specific mechanisms through which innovation impacts sales performance in food and beverage firms.

Thus, this research aims to investigate how innovation orientation impacts sales outcomes. The anticipated results are expected to provide actionable insights and guidance for organizations aiming to boost their innovation potential and secure sustainable sales success in the current competitive market landscape. To this end, the study explores the connection between innovation orientation and sales performance among food and beverage companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The food and beverage industry is pivotal for a country's sustainable economic development, with the capability to mitigate poverty, hunger, unemployment, and disease (RMRDC, 2003). Yet, inconsistent policies on raw material sourcing and processing have hindered the sector's steady growth in Nigeria (Dada, 2016). Additionally, the recent economic downturn has led consumers to seek savings by opting for generic foods and preparing meals at home rather than dining out. As reported by Global edge, this trend is prompting food processing companies to innovate, reduce costs, attract customers, and enhance profit margins.

The prevalence of obesity worldwide significantly impacts the food and beverage industry. This has led to a heightened demand for health-conscious products and clearer nutritional labels. Consequently, companies are introducing lower-calorie options and taking greater steps to manage their brand perception.

Increasing production costs also pose a significant challenge for this industry. The surge in commodity prices over the past year has compelled food companies to raise their product prices. This issue was compounded by the economic downturn, which reduced consumers' willingness and ability to afford the higher prices.

The concomitant effect of all these challenges facing food and beverage companies is the quest on how to improve sales performance. In this regard, many organizations are increasingly recognizing the strategic importance of innovation in driving sales performance and sustaining competitive advantage. However, despite the growing emphasis on innovation orientation as a key determinant of organizational success, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which innovation influences sales performance outcomes.

The problem addressed in this study to examine the relationship between innovation orientation and sales performance. While existing literature acknowledges the potential impact of innovation orientation on sales effectiveness, there is a need for in-depth analysis to elucidate how innovation orientation practices, strategies, and culture within organizations translate into tangible improvements in sales performance metrics.

Furthermore, given thechanging consumer preferences, market dynamics, regulatory environments, and competitive pressures, there is need for a focused investigation into how innovation orientation can be leveraged to address these challenges and drive sales growth and customer patronage. By identifying the gaps in knowledge and understanding the specific factors that influence the relationship between innovation orientation and sales performance in the food and beverage sector in Rivers State, this research aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations for firms in this industry to enhance their innovation capabilities and achieve sustainable sales success.

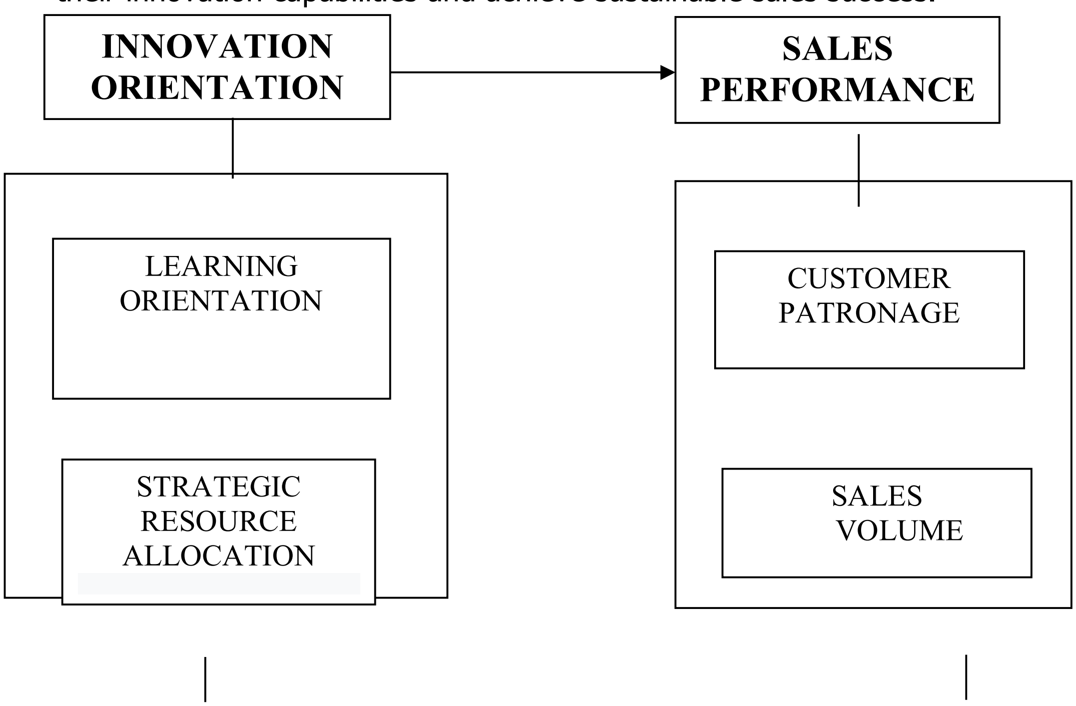

Fig 1.1 Conceptual framework of Innovation Orientation and sales performance of Food and Beverage Firms in Rivers state. Adapted fromSiguaw et al. ((2006) andZeithaml et al., (2016)

Research Hypotheses

The following Hypotheses were tested in this study. However, they are stated in null form:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between firms' Learning Orientation and Customer patronage of Food and Beverage Firms.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between firms' Learning Orientation and Sales Volume of Food and Beverage Firms.

H_{03}: Firms' Strategic Resource Allocation has no significant effect on the Customer Patronage of Food and Beverage Firms

H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between Firms Strategic Resource Allocation and Sales Volume of Food and Beverage Firms.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation

The theory that underpins this study on Innovation Orientation is the works of Joseph Alois Schumpeter. "Drawing on the concepts from his 1934 book, Schumpeter outlined his renowned five categories of innovation: the introduction of a new product, the development of a new production method, the creation of a new market, the discovery of a new supply of raw materials, and the implementation of a new organizational structure in any industry. By this listing, he defined Product innovation as the provision of new good process innovation as the new method of production, marketing innovation as the new market, ...and organizational innovation as the the carrying out of a new organization of any industry."

The theory also discusses the concept of Creative Destruction. Schumpeter (1943) posits that through the mechanism of creative destruction, wealth is generated by the disruption of existing companies through the introduction of novel products or services. This process reallocates resources from established market structures to new ones, paving the way for the rise of new enterprises. Innovation, therefore, becomes a crucial tool for entrepreneurs, enabling them to seize opportunities for different products or services. The theory asserts that the goal of innovation is to develop new processes or products that provide the entrepreneur with a competitive advantage over rivals. Moreover, Schumpeter argues that firms must innovate to achieve profitability, as entrepreneurial innovation fosters higher profits. He regarded innovation as a key driver of firm competitiveness and economic development (Schumpeter, 1943).

The concept of Innovation Orientation

"Innovation Orientation" in multiple ways, Vij and Sharma (2004) describe it as an organization's propensity to embrace and advance novel ideas or behaviors. Manu and Sriram (1996) characterize Innovation Orientation by aspects such as the introduction of new products, investment in Research and Development, and the sequence of market entry.

Innovation orientation is often described by its emphasis on technological excellence. Berthon et al. (1999) characterize it as the extent to which companies channel their efforts towards developing and refining advanced products. This interpretation includes aspects of openness to innovation (Zaltman et al., 1973) and innovation capability (Burns & Stalker, 1977). Additionally, Amabile (1997) underscores the role of an innovationsupportive climate and culture in defining innovation orientation. In the opinion of Homburg et.al (2002) , innovation orientation represents "the number of innovations a company offers, how many customers these innovations are offered to, and how strongly these innovations are emphasized".

In summary, Siguaw et al. (2006) noted that the majority of definitions agree that innovation orientation includes a learning philosophy, characterized by shared norms and beliefs about learning and knowledge that influence and direct all functional aspects of a firm towards innovation. According to scholars, a learning philosophy is considered an essential element of innovation orientation. Moreover, definitions indicate that organizations view innovation orientation as a strategic mechanism that guides a comprehensive commitment to achieving faster and more frequent innovations across the organization. In their study, Siguaw et al. (2006) focused exclusively on two variables—Learning Orientation and Strategic Resource Allocation—as dimensions of innovation orientation.

Learning Orientation
"Learning Orientation, which Siguaw et al. (2006) describe as a learning philosophy, refers to a comprehensive set of organization-wide principles related to learning, thinking, acquiring, transferring, and utilizing knowledge to drive innovation within the firm. Absorptive Capacity, a term coined by Cohen and Levinthal (1990), captures a firm's ability to gather, assimilate, and apply new knowledge, with learning influenced by prior knowledge, experience, effort intensity, and knowledge diversity. According to Calantone et al. (2002), Learning Orientation is defined by the firm's commitment to learning, a shared vision, open-mindedness, and intra-organizational knowledge sharing. These studies underscore the crucial role of a learning environment in enhancing a firm's innovativeness and financial performance."

Basically, learning orientation focuses on fostering a culture of continuous learning, adaptation, and improvement. It involves encouraging employees to explore new ideas, learn from both successes and failures, and embrace a growth mindset. Companies with strong learning orientation value experimentation, knowledge sharing, and feedback loops. They view failures as opportunities for learning and innovation, rather than setbacks. Learning orientation is crucial for sustaining innovation over the long term, as it enables organizations to stay agile and responsive to changing environments.

Strategic Resource Allocation:
Strategic resource allocations refer to a firm's ability to effectively allocate resources. Strategic Resource allocation emphasizes the effective allocation and utilization of resources to support innovation efforts. It involves allocating financial, human, and technological resources strategically, aligning them with innovation priorities and objectives (Sigauw et al., 2006)

Firms that prioritize innovation allocate resources like capital, tools, and skilled personnel to support a wide range of innovative projects, including more radical ones. Such firms specifically channel resources towards fostering new ideas, actively support employees who promote innovation regardless of their roles, and minimize the bureaucratic obstacles for idea approval (Sigauw et al., 2006). Essentially, these innovation-focused firms tend to provide ample resources to nurture and maintain innovation within the organization more effectively than their competitors (Cozijnsen, 1993). They also understand that the innovation process demands a long-term investment and commitment (Thamhain & Kamm, 1993).

Basically, one can say that companies with a strong resource orientation usually invest in building innovation capabilities, developing talent, and fostering partnerships and collaborations. Therefore, this dimension is essential for ensuring that innovation initiatives have the necessary resources and support to succeed.

Sales Performance

Sales performance is a critical metric in business and marketing research, often used to evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies and interventions. According to Kotler (2013), sales performance reflects an individual's sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which arises from comparing the perceived performance of a product against their expectations. This perspective view sales Performance in terms of customer expectations and satisfaction.

According to Dean (2015), cited in Faleye (2022), sales performance reflects the level of customer loyalty to a company or an individual employee. It also describes the overall success of a company's sales team. More often than not, results in terms of sales reveal more than just the quality of a company's salespeople. Sales performance usually speaks volumes about the overall performance of the company. In this study, sales performance was operationalized using the following measures: Sales Volume and Customer Patronage.

Customer Patronage

Many scholars have defined customer patronage from many perspectives. For instance, Oliver (1997) sees Customer patronage as the degree to which a buying unit concentrates purchases over time to a particular product, within a service category. Thus, when a customer patronizes a product, there is the tendency to repeat the buying behavior.

Gremler& Brown (1996), as cited in Horsfall&Ikegwuru (2019), define customer patronage as the degree to which a customer engages in repeat purchasing behavior with a service provider. They also describe such a customer as having a positive, long-lasting attitude and disposition towards the service provider.

Basically, Customer patronage represents the frequency and consistency of a customer's purchases from a particular business or brand, and reflects customer loyalty, satisfaction, and the overall strength of customer relationships.

Sales volume

Sales Volume is a fundamental component of sales performance which refers to the total quantity of goods or services sold within a specified period (Robinson & Pearce, 2019). Sales volume according to Ajagbe et al., (2015) represents is the number of units sold within a reporting period. This figure is monitored by investors to see if a business is expanding or contracting. Conversely, Soltani and Davanloo (2016) define sales volume as the number of units a company sells within a specific timeframe, such as a fiscal quarter or year.

Sales volume is widely acknowledged as a primary indicator of market demand and revenue generation potential (Brown & Taylor, 2021). Researchers often assess sales volume to understand market trends, consumer behavior, and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns (Johnson et al., 2017). Quarshie (2010) asserts that boosting sales volume allows a company to generate substantial revenue. A rise in sales volume implies higher production levels, which in turn raises the contribution margin. Furthermore, a higher sales volume enables a firm to achieve break-even more quickly, facilitating earlier profitability from its operations.

Empirical Review

Some empirical studies have been carried out in this area. A study conducted by Gituma (2017) explored how different marketing mix variables influence sales performance, revealing that product quality positively affects sales outcomes. Similarly, Muthengi (2017) examined the impact of marketing strategies on the sales performance of commercial banks in Kenya. Analyzing questionnaire data from 43 banks, the study found that the implemented marketing variables had a significant overall effect on sales performance. Kasiso (2017) conducted a study on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya using a questionnaire survey to collect data. The analysis confirmed that the four marketing mix strategies—product development, pricing, place strategy, and promotion—had a significant positive impact on the sales performance of SMEs in Kenya. Similarly, Kiprotich (2018) explored the influence of the 4Ps marketing mix on the sales performance of automotive fuels at selected service stations in Nakuru town. The findings showed that the 4Ps significantly affected the performance of these oil marketers.

Similarly, Faroog et al. (2021) investigated the link between innovation orientation and business performance. Their study targeted 278 manufacturing and service firms in the National Capital Region and Punjab state of India, using purposive sampling. A questionnaire survey was administered to managerial-level employees. The findings from structural equation modeling revealed that the various dimensions of innovation orientation significantly and positively impact business performance.

“A related study was conducted by Ifekanandu and Renner (2024) in Rivers State, Nigeria. This research focused on the correlation between innovation strategies and sales performance in the food and beverage sector. Employing a descriptive survey design, the study collected questionnaire data from managers of 25 food and beverage firms in Rivers State. The results from Spearman Rank Order Correlation analysis indicated that the dimensions of innovation strategies have a significant effect on the sales performance of these firms.”

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study consists of 30 food and beverage firms in Rivers state. Information obtained from Nigeria Directory website (www.directory.org.ng) for Rivers State , accessed on the 7th day of September 2024 indicated that a total of 30 firms were registered under food and beverage category in Rivers State. But the accessible population of the study consists of 15 food and beverage firms located within Port Harcourt metropolis. These include; A) 1. Riv. Biscuits Co. Nig. Ltd., 2. Genesis Food Nig. Ltd., 3. Amalgamated Distillers; B) 4. Nigerian Bottling Co. Plc., 5) Pabod Breweries Ltd., 6) A. C. Commercial Agencies Nigeria Limited; 7) Dictachi Foods Nig. Ltd., 8) ErivlahPokobros foods &chemical industries limited, 9) Skyry Tasty Food, 10) Enrich Foods, 11) Dilomat Farms and services Ltd; 12) Lannon Table water , 13) OhocheIndusties Limited, 14) Krismart Premium Table Water; 15) Imco Int. Manufacturing Co. Ltd

Since the accessible population is relatively small, the researcher had to study the entire accessible population and hence, there was no need for a sample size determination. Five Managers (Depot / Station Managers, Operations/Technical Managers, Plant Managers, Marketing Managers, Systems / ICT Managers) were used as respondents. This gave a total of 75 respondents. Therefore, the copies of the questionnaire were administered on 75 Managers. The scale used for the questionnaire was adapted from Sigauw et.al (2006). Out of 75 copies of questionnaire distributed, 65 of them were returned. Of this number, two (3) were discarded due to incomplete information. Only 63 copies of the questionnaire were found useful and therefore used in data analysis. The questionnaire used for the study variables were tested for reliability before they were used. The result of the reliability test of the pilot study is shown on Table 1 below.

Data Analysis

Inferential Statistics

To explore the connection between Innovation Orientation dimensions and Sales Performance metrics, a Spearman Rank Order Correlation analysis was conducted. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3 Correlations between Innovation Orientation and Sales Performance

			LEARNINGORIENT	RESOURCE ALLOCAT	CUST_PATRO	SALES_VOL
Spearman's rho	LEARNING_ORIENT	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.495**	.414**	.223**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	63	63	63	63
	STRATEGIC RESOURCE_ALLOCAT	Correlation Coefficient	.495**	1.000	.471**	.199**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.002
		N	63	63	63	63
	CUST_PATRO	Correlation Coefficient	.414**	.471**	1.000	.277**

		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	63	63	63	64
	SALES_VOL	Correlation Coefficient	$.223^{**}$	$.199^{**}$	$.277^{**}$	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.
		N	63	63	63	63

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

Hypothesis One
"This hypothesis investigated the effect of Learning Orientationon Customer Patronage. The result of the Spearman rank order correlation analysis shown on Table 3 above shows that a significant positive correlation exists between, Learning Orientation and Customer Patronage, as shown by this result: **(rho = 0.414, at p 0.00<0.05)**. This result indicates that an increase in Organizational Learning Orientation will significantly result in an increase in customer Patronage. Null hypothesis One (H_{01}) was therefore rejected. The study concludes that enhancingLearning Orientation results in an increased customer Patronage."

Hypothesis Two
"This hypothesis investigated the effect of Learning Orientation on Sales Volume, and the result of the Spearman Rank Order Correlation analysis shown on Table 3 above shows that a significant positive correlation exists between the Learning Orientation and Sales Volume, as shown in this result: **(rho = 0.223, at p 0.00<0.05).** Null hypothesis Two could not be supported, and was therefore rejected. The study concludes that enhancing Learning Orientation leads to an increase in Sales Volume of a company's products and services."

Hypothesis Three
This hypothesis investigated the extent Strategic Resource Allocations on innovation projects impacts onCustomer patronage.The result shown above indicates that Strategic Resource Allocations carried out by the firms under study had significant positive effect on Customer Patronage as shown in this result: **(r = 0.471, at p 0.000<0.05)**. Therefore, Null hypothesis Three (H_{03}) was rejected. The study concludes that increasing Strategic Resource Allocations carried out on Innovation projects increases Customer Patronage.

Hypothesis Four
The study investigated "the effect of Strategic Resource Allocations on Sales Volumes of the studied firms. The result of the analysis **(r = 0.199, at p 0.002<0.05)**, indicated a significant impact of Strategic Resource Allocation on Sales Volumes, Therefore null hypothesis four was rejected. The study concludes that an increase in Strategic Resource Allocations made on Innovation projects leads to an increase in the sales volumes of a company's products and services.

Discussion of Findings

The outcome of this study indicates that the dimensions of Innovation Orientation used in the study have positive effect on Customer Patronage and Sales Volume of food and beverage firms in Rivers state. Specifically, the study established that Learning Orientation and Strategic Resource Allocations have significant relationship with Sales Performance in terms of Customer Patronage and Sales Volume.

These findings are in line with the conclusions reached by earlier researchers like farooq et al. (2021) who investigated the effect of innovation orientation on Business performance. The study found that a significant positive relationship exists between innovation orientation business performances. This finding supports the results of earlier studies that showed a positive relationship between innovation orientation and business performance. Eg, the study by Vaccaro et al., 2012; and Leal-Rodrı´guez et al.(2005).

Another study that had similar conclusion with the one made in this study is that of Muithya et al (2021) which established strategic innovation orientation to have significant effect on business performance of Micro finance institutions. This finding resonates well with study by Ismail *et al.* (2019) who linked innovation directly to business performance of Malaysian batik industry.
The conclusions made in this study is in parity with that of Ketchen et al. (2019) which established that a positive relationship exists between strategic resource allocations and both innovation performance and sales performance. It posits that firms that strategically allocated resources towards innovation activities are able to achieve higher levels of innovation and sales growth compared to firms with lower resource allocations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"In conclusion, this research has shed light on the significant impact of innovation orientation, specifically learning orientation and Strategic Resource Allocation, on sales performance measures, such as sales volume and customer patronage. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning and knowledge acquisition within organizations, as well as strategically allocating resources to support innovation initiatives and drive sales growth. Organizations that prioritize learning orientation and effective Strategic Resource Allocation are better positioned to adapt to market changes, develop innovative products and services. Doing this enhances customer engagement and loyaltywhich ultimatelyleads to improved sales performance outcomes."

Recommendations:

"Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for organizations seeking to enhance their innovation orientation and improve sales"
performance:
1. Foster a culture of continuous learning: Organizations should prioritize learning orientation by encouraging employees to acquire new knowledge, skills, and insights. Doing so willfoster a culture of curiosity, experimentation, and innovation. Firms should also provide training and development opportunities. It can promote knowledge sharing reward learning initiatives. The idea is to build a workforce that is adaptable, creative, and responsive to market changes.

2. Strategic Resource Allocation: Organizations should strategically allocate financial, human, and technological resources to support innovation initiatives, research and development activities, and ensure the implementation of innovative strategies. By investing in innovation capabilities, organizations can develop new products and services. Doing this optimizes sales processes andenhances customer experiences. The resultant effect is increase in sales volume and customer patronage.

By implementing these recommendations and leveraging innovation orientation as a strategic driver of sales performance, organizations can position themselves for success in today's competitive business environment.

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