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MARKETING INTELLIGENCE AND FIRMS PERFORMANCE OF LOCAL FOOD DEALERS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the relationship between marketing intelligence and firms' performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. Correlational survey design was adopted for this study. The population of this study was 250 Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The study adopted the census sampling techniques of 250 Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. Structured questionnaire instrument titled Marketing Intelligence and Firms' Performance Questionnaires (MIFPQ) was developed on four-point likert scale to obtain respondents information. The result of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test indicates 0.75 which is above .70 which implies that the items are reliable. PPMC (Person Product Moment Correlation) was used to test hypotheses on SPSS version 25. There is a significant relationship between competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. There is a significant relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that marketing intelligence have a positive significant relationship with firms' performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The study recommended that Local Food Dealers should invest in continuous training for employees on how to effectively gather and interpret marketing intelligence, including both customer insights and competitive analysis.

INTRODUCTION
In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, marketing intelligence has emerged as a pivotal tool for firms striving to maintain a competitive edge. Marketing intelligence involves the systematic collection and analysis of data related to market trends, customer behavior, and competitors' activities. By utilizing customer insights and competitive analysis, firms are better positioned to make informed decisions, optimize their strategies, and improve performance metrics. In particular, local food dealers in Port Harcourt face unique challenges as they navigate the complexities of a dynamic market shaped by consumer preferences and competitive pressures in the 21st century.

Customer insights, derived from understanding consumer needs, preferences, and behavior, are crucial in guiding business operations and product offerings (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2012). With the rise of digital platforms and social media, businesses have access to vast amounts of data, enabling them to predict trends, enhance customer satisfaction, and drive repeat patronage. Additionally, competitive analysis, which involves assessing competitors' strengths, weaknesses, and market positioning, enables firms to identify opportunities and threats, ensuring that they remain agile and adaptable in a highly competitive market (Kohli & Jaworski, 2010).

For local food dealers, the ability to leverage marketing intelligence has a direct impact on firm performance. Financial performance, measured through profitability, revenue growth, and cost management, is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of marketing strategies based on customer insights. Furthermore, operational performance, which encompasses factors such as supply chain efficiency, product quality, and customer service, is enhanced when firms are attuned to both market demands and competitive forces (Grewal & Slotegraaf, 2017).

The food industry in Port Harcourt, a bustling metropolitan city in Nigeria, is characterized by intense competition among local food dealers. These businesses, ranging from small-scale vendors to larger enterprises, are integral to the city's economy, catering to the diverse culinary

preferences of its residents. However, the evolving market dynamics, including changes in consumer tastes, the proliferation of fast-food chains, and the growing influence of e-commerce platforms, have intensified the need for local food dealers to adopt strategic marketing intelligence approaches (Adeleke, 2020).

In the 21st century, customer preferences have become more sophisticated, with consumers demanding not only quality but also convenience, affordability, and personalized experiences. Local food dealers are thus compelled to adopt customer-centric strategies to remain competitive. Competitive analysis, on the other hand, provides these businesses with a clear understanding of their rivals' strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to differentiate their products and services in a saturated market (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). Effective use of marketing intelligence is essential in driving both financial and operational performance, as it helps firms to optimize their operations, manage costs, and maximize profitability (Narver & Slater, 2019). This study, therefore explore the relationship between marketing intelligence specifically customer insights and competitive analysis and the performance of local food dealers in terms of financial and operational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The performance of local food dealers in Port Harcourt is critical to the local economy, yet many face significant challenges that hinder both their financial and operational performance. The issues surrounding these challenges are multifaceted, affecting the sustainability and growth of these businesses in an increasingly competitive market.

One of the primary issues affecting the financial performance of local food dealers is the lack of effective marketing intelligence. Many of these businesses fail to gather and analyze critical data regarding customer preferences, purchasing behaviors, and market trends. Furthermore, the local food industry is characterized by high operational costs, including expenses related to raw materials, labor, and logistics. Fluctuating prices of food commodities and inconsistent supply chains exacerbate these financial strains. Many local food dealers operate on thin margins, making them particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and shifts in consumer demand. Consequently, the inability to effectively manage costs can lead to cash flow issues, ultimately threatening the viability of these businesses.

Inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable transportation systems and limited access to storage facilities, can disrupt the supply chain and hinder the timely delivery of fresh products. These operational inefficiencies often result in increased waste, higher operational costs, and compromised product quality, which can negatively impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, the skills gap among employees in local food businesses further complicates operational performance. Many workers lack adequate training in areas such as customer service, food safety, and inventory management, which can lead to inconsistencies in product quality and service delivery. This deficiency can contribute to a poor customer experience and diminished brand reputation, ultimately affecting overall business performance.

The financial and operational performance of local food dealers in Port Harcourt is impeded by a combination of insufficient marketing intelligence, high operational costs, infrastructural challenges, and a lack of technological adoption. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the performance of local food dealers, ensuring their competitiveness and sustainability in the 21st-century marketplace. It is against this backdrop the study examined marketing intelligence (customer insights and competitive analysis) and firms' performance (financial performance and operational performance) of local food dealers in Port Harcourt

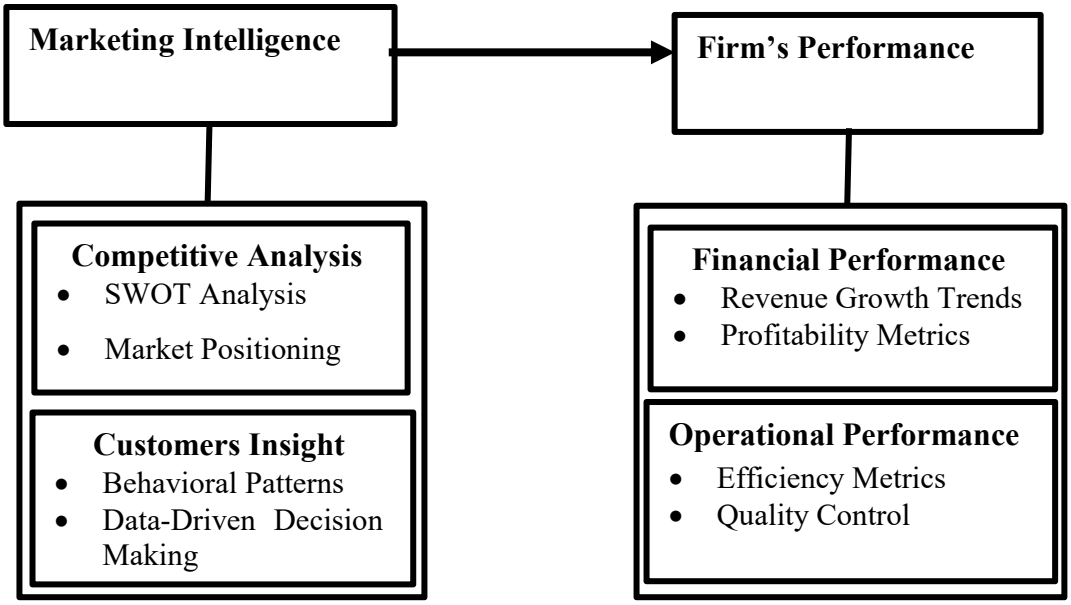


Figure 1:1 Conceptual framework on Marketing Intelligence and Firms Performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt
Source: Hofstede et al., (2010), Hall (1990), Kotler (2016) and Heskett (2008)

Aims and Objectives
The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between Marketing Intelligence and Firms Performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The specific objectives are:
1. To determine the relationship between competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.
2. To determine the relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions
The following research questions were raised to guide the study.
1. What is the relationship between s competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.?
2. What is the relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis
The following null hypotheses were formulated and was tested at a significant level of 0.05.
Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.
Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.

Significance of the study
The study on "Marketing Intelligence (customer insights and competitive analysis) and Firms Performance (financial performance and operational performance) of Local Food Dealers in Port

Harcourt" holds significant implications for various stakeholders, including managers, employees, organizations, and the academic body of knowledge.

1. **Managers:** this study provides valuable insights into how marketing intelligence can be leveraged to enhance firm performance. The findings can guide managers in developing data-driven strategies that respond to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences, thereby improving both financial and operational outcomes.
2. **Employees:** The study's findings can foster a more engaged and knowledgeable workforce. Employees equipped with knowledge about market trends and customer preferences can contribute to more innovative ideas and solutions, fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement within the organization.
3. **Organizations:** The study provides a framework for organizations to incorporate marketing intelligence into their strategic planning processes, allowing them to remain agile and responsive to market changes.
4. **Academic Body of Knowledge:** The research adds to the existing literature on marketing intelligence and its impact on firm performance, providing a theoretical framework that can be further explored in future studies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section reviews extant literatures under the headings of conceptual review, theoretical review and empirical review.

Conceptual Review

Marketing Intelligence

In the 21st century, marketing intelligence has become an indispensable tool for businesses seeking to navigate the complexities of the modern marketplace. The rapid advancement of technology and the proliferation of data have transformed the way organizations gather, analyze, and utilize information about their markets, customers, and competitors. Homburg, Kuester and Krohmer (2009**)** describe marketing intelligence as the systematic collection and analysis of information about competitors, customers, and the business environment for the purpose of improving business decisions. This definition underscores the importance of a structured approach to data collection and analysis, which enables firms to derive actionable insights that can enhance their strategic positioning and operational effectiveness.

Kohli and Jaworski (2019) define marketing intelligence as the set of activities directed at obtaining information about markets, customers, competitors, and the overall business environment. This definition emphasizes the proactive approach organizations must take to gather relevant information that aids in strategic planning and decision-making. By focusing on external factors that influence the business landscape, companies can better align their offerings with customer demands and market conditions.

As businesses increasingly operate in dynamic environments characterized by fast-paced changes and heightened competition, the effective use of marketing intelligence enables them to adapt to consumer needs, enhance customer satisfaction, and improve overall performance. Marketing intelligence is essential for organizations to remain competitive in the 21st century, enabling them to make data-driven decisions that align with consumer needs and market trends.

Dimensions of Marketing Intelligence

Competitive Analysis

Thompson and Strickland (2003) describe competitive analysis as the process of identifying key competitors and researching their strategies, objectives, strengths, weaknesses, and reactions to environmental changes. This definition focuses on the systematic study of competitors to understand their goals and behaviors in response to market conditions, which helps organizations adapt their strategies to gain a competitive edge.

Dess and Lumpkin (2003) define competitive analysis as the assessment of the external competitive environment, including monitoring competitors' activities, understanding market trends, and evaluating potential threats or opportunities. This definition highlights the importance of not only studying competitors but also scanning the broader market for changes that could affect the competitive landscape.
The digital revolution, globalization, and evolving consumer preferences have made it necessary for businesses to continuously monitor and analyze their competitors to maintain relevance and competitive advantage. By understanding competitors' activities, firms can identify opportunities for differentiation, anticipate market shifts, and make informed decisions that enhance both financial and operational performance.

Customer Insights
Davenport and Harris (2007) define customer insights as the deep understanding of customer behaviors and preferences derived from the systematic analysis of data, which enables organizations to make customer-centric decisions. This definition emphasizes the role of data analytics in uncovering patterns in customer behavior, allowing businesses to tailor products and services to meet customer needs effectively. Bendle et al. (2019) state that customer insights are the systematic interpretation of customer data to uncover underlying needs and motivations that influence buying decisions. This definition underscores the importance of going beyond surface-level data to understand the deeper factors that drive customer choices and behaviors, allowing companies to develop more effective marketing strategies.
With the rise of digital platforms, social media, and big data analytics, companies now have access to vast amounts of information that can be used to gain meaningful insights into customer behavior. These insights enable businesses to personalize their offerings, improve customer satisfaction, and build long-lasting relationships, all of which are critical in a competitive, customer-driven market environment.

Concept of Firms' Performance
In the 21st century, firm performance has become a multidimensional concept, encompassing financial success, operational efficiency, market competitiveness, and sustainability. As businesses navigate the complexities of globalization, technological advancement, and shifting consumer expectations, measuring and improving performance has become increasingly critical. Richard et al. (2019) define firm performance as "the sum of financial and non-financial outcomes that indicate how effectively a firm meets its goals, including profitability, market share, and operational efficiency." This definition incorporates both quantitative and qualitative measures of performance, reflecting the need for a comprehensive evaluation of a firm's success. Venkatraman and Ramanujam (2016) define firm performance as "a multidimensional construct that includes financial performance, operational performance, and organizational effectiveness." This definition highlights the broad scope of firm performance, suggesting that success is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by how well a company manages its operations and achieves its strategic objectives.

Measures of Firms' Performance
Financial Performance
In the 21st century, financial performance remains a key indicator of a firm's success and sustainability. However, the concept has evolved to include not only traditional measures such as profitability and revenue growth but also how effectively a company manages its financial resources to ensure long-term stability and adaptability in a dynamic global economy. Richard et al. (2019) define financial performance as "the degree to which financial objectives are being or have been accomplished, typically measured through profitability, return on assets (ROA), return

on equity (ROE), and earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT)." This definition emphasizes the traditional accounting metrics used to evaluate how well a firm meets its financial targets.
Hansen and Mowen (2015) define financial performance as "the outcome of financial decisions and strategies, typically reflected in metrics like net income, cash flow, and shareholder value, which indicate a firm's financial health and its capacity to sustain growth." This definition broadens the understanding of financial performance by including cash flow management and long-term financial sustainability.
Financial performance is now assessed through a combination of metrics that reflect the firm's ability to generate value for shareholders, manage risk, and maintain operational efficiency in response to market changes and economic pressures. With increasing emphasis on transparency, accountability, and sustainability, businesses are required to align their financial performance with broader corporate goals. Financial performance is a critical indicator of a firm's ability to generate profits, manage financial resources, and ensure long-term sustainability in the competitive landscape of the 21st century.

Operational Performance
In the 21st century, operational performance has taken on increasing importance as businesses strive to improve efficiency, adaptability, and competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment. Neely et al. (2015) define operational performance as "the level of efficiency and effectiveness with which an organization manages its internal processes to deliver products or services to customers." This definition emphasizes both the efficiency (minimizing costs and resource usage) and effectiveness (meeting customer requirements) dimensions of operational performance. **Slack et al. (2010)** describe operational performance as "the outcome of an organization's ability to optimize its resources, processes, and capabilities to meet business objectives while maintaining quality and flexibility." This definition highlights the need for firms to balance resource management with the flexibility to adapt to changing demands.
In the face of globalization, technological innovation, and evolving customer expectations, firms must continuously enhance their operational capabilities to maintain high levels of productivity, quality, and responsiveness. Effective operational performance not only drives cost efficiency but also plays a crucial role in enabling businesses to scale and innovate. Operational performance is crucial for businesses in the 21st century as it determines their ability to manage resources efficiently, maintain quality, and remain competitive in an ever-changing market.

Theoretical Review
Market Orientation Theory
The Market Orientation Theory was primarily propounded by Ajay K. Kohli and Bernard J. Jaworski in 1990. The theory posits that a market-oriented firm places a strong emphasis on understanding and meeting the needs of its customers while simultaneously monitoring the actions of its competitors. It involves the continuous collection, dissemination, and use of market intelligence to guide business decisions. Firms that adopt a market orientation approach are better able to respond to changes in the market and improve their performance by aligning their strategies with customer needs and competitive forces.
In relation to Marketing Intelligence (customer insights and competitive analysis) and Firms' Performance (financial and operational performance) of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt, Market Orientation Theory is highly relevant. By applying the principles of this theory, local food dealers can systematically gather customer insights and analyze competitor activities, which enables them to make informed decisions that improve their product offerings, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. This proactive approach leads to better financial outcomes, such as increased sales and profitability, as well as enhanced operational performance, including streamlined processes and better resource management, ensuring long-term business sustainability in a competitive environment.

Empirical Review

Eze and Chinedu (2019) investigated marketing intelligence as a tool for enhancing firm performance in Nigeria's manufacturing sector. The research design adopted for the study was a Correlational research design. The population of study was manufacturing firms in Enugu State with a sample size of 200 50 firms selected using simple random sampling. Sources of data was primary data collected through structured questionnaire with Likert scale items. Reliability of instrument was ascertained through using test-retest method coefficient which found 0.78 coefficient. Pearson correlation coefficient was used method of data analysis. Cultural values significantly influence business practices and success among SMEs in Nigeria. The results indicated that there is a strong correlation between the use of marketing intelligence strategies and improved operational efficiency. The study concluded that The study concluded that manufacturing firms should adopt comprehensive marketing intelligence systems to boost performance. Recommendations included investment in technology for better data collection.

Ogunnaike and Adeyemi (2018) examined assessing the impact of marketing intelligence On Customer satisfaction and firm performance in Nigeria. Quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study. The study population were customers from various sectors across Nigeria. A sample Size of 300 customers selected using convenience sampling techniques. Primary data were collected via Questionnaire designed to measure perceptions about diversity management practices. The reliability of instrument was done through Cronbach's alpha which reported at 0.82. Method of data analysis was multiple regression analysis. The study found that effective marketing intelligence significantly influences customer satisfaction levels which subsequently impacts overall firm performance positively. concluded that companies should prioritize customer feedback mechanisms as part of their marketing intelligence efforts. Recommendations included enhancing customer relationship management systems.

Nwankwo and Agboh (2021) carried out a study on the role of marketing intelligence in driving business growth among Nigerian firms. Exploratory research design was adopted. The population of study was various sectors including retail, services, and manufacturing across Nigeria with a sample size of 250 firms selected via purposive sampling. The sources of data were Primary data from semi-structured interview guide and focus groups with a reliability coefficient of 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha. Method of data analysis was qualitative thematic analysis. The findings revealed that businesses leveraging marketing intelligence reported higher growth rates compared to those that did not. The conclusion emphasized the necessity for firms to integrate marketing intelligence into their strategic planning processes. Recommendations included regular training sessions for staff on market analysis techniques.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design and the correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 250 Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The census sampling procedure was adopted. This made use of all 250 Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Marketing Intelligence and Firms' Performance Questionnaires (MIIFPQ)". The respondents were requested to respond to research variable items based on a five-point modified Likert scale. To validate the instrument, the content and face validity was determined by the expert judgment and two other experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of 0.75 coefficient index was ascertained using a pilot study. The data collected from the administration of the instrument on the respondents were analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Correlation at 0.05 significant level.

Analysis of Data

Hypothesis 1

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Correlation between Competitive Analysis and Effectiveness

			Competitive Analysis	Financial Performance
Spearman's rho	Competitive Analysis	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.835**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	250	250
	Financial Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.835**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	250	250

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

The probability value is .000, which is less than the crucial value of 0.05, according to the hypothesis testing findings. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis, "**H_{A1}:** There is a significant relationship between competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt is accepted. The correlation value of 0.835 indicates that the relationship is strong.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Correlation Between Customer Insights and Effectiveness

			Customer Insights	Operational Performance
Spearman's rho	Customer Insights	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.715**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	250	250
	Operational Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.715**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	250	250

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

The probability value is .000, which is less than the crucial value of 0.05, according to the hypothesis testing findings. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis, "**H_{A2}:** There is a significant relationship between customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt is accepted. The correlation value of 0.715 indicates that the relationship is very strong.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in hypotheses 1; the competitive analysis and financial performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt (r = 0.835). This indicates that Competitive analysis, which involves systematically assessing competitors' strategies, market positions, and weaknesses, helps businesses adapt to changing market conditions, optimize their pricing strategies, and tailor their product offerings to meet consumer demands. Studies have shown that firms utilizing competitive analysis as part of their strategic planning typically experience improved financial performance.

These finding is consistent with the finding of Nwankwo and Agboh (2021) who provided evidence that local businesses, including food dealers that engage in competitive analysis often outperform those that do not. Their research in developing economies like Nigeria highlighted that firms that actively monitor and adjust to competitors' strategies can effectively control costs, enhance profitability, and achieve greater market success.
The findings in hypotheses 2; the customer insights and operational performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt (r = 0.715). This indicates that while the Ordinal logistic regression can significantly enhance effectiveness of firms. These finding is consistent with the finding of Eze and Chinedu (2019) who posited that customer insights derived from feedback, purchasing patterns, and social interactions help local food businesses align their operations with customer needs. This alignment leads to more efficient use of resources, reduced waste, and improved service delivery, which are all indicators of enhanced operational performance

CONCLUSION

The study examined marketing intelligence and Firms Performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt. The study finds out that customer insights and competitive analysis significantly relate with financial performance and operational performance. Based on the findings, the study concluded that there is a positive relationship between marketing intelligence and Firms Performance of Local Food Dealers in Port Harcourt

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. To stay competitive, local food dealers should routinely analyze competitors' pricing strategies, product offerings, and market positioning. Competitive analysis can reveal gaps and opportunities in the market, enabling firms to differentiate themselves.
2. Local food dealers should invest in continuous training for employees on how to effectively gather and interpret marketing intelligence, including both customer insights and competitive analysis.

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