



Interactive Marketing and Sales Growth as Measure of Business Performance of Small-Scale Agro-Allied Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

¹Otsu, Pius A.I.

²Otsupius, Anthonia Ighiebemhe &

³James Olanipekun Ojo

¹Department of Marketing, Faculty of
Management Sciences
School of Graduate Studies,
University of Port Harcourt

²Administrative Staff College of Nigeria
(ASCON), Mgt. Studies Dept, Topo-
Badagry, Lagos. Bus. Admin. & Mktg.
Dept. Babcock University,
Ogun State, Nigeria.

³Department of Business and Marketing,
College of Social & Management Sciences,
McPherson University, Seriki Sotayo,
Ogun State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The study is set out to determine the extent of relationship between interactive marketing practice and business performance of agro-allied firms in Rivers State, using sales growth as a yardstick for measuring performance. The cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Ten (10) out of 416 agro-allied firms registered with the ministry of commerce and industry (Rivers State Yellow Pages Directory, 2013 – 2014) with population of 400 management staff were randomly selected, while Taro Yemen's formula was used to determine 200 management staff as the respondents (sample size) for the study. The study made a combined use of both primary and secondary data. Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out. The major statistical tool adopted is Spearman's rank order correlation, using SPSS version 15.0 for the analysis of the hypotheses. The results of the analysis revealed that, there is a positive and significant relationship between interactive marketing and Sales Growth ($\rho=0.695$), showing a high association between the variables. Conclusively, as businesses face incredible challenges like happenings in the global market, changes in modern marketing and economic conditions, interactive marketing practice can help organizations survive and perform in the current global market. The study therefore recommends amongst others, that: interactive marketing practice should be effectively implemented in the agro-allied firms, so as to effectively enhance business performance. In addition, interactive marketing should be encouraged, such that it could contribute to sustainable sales growth.

Keywords: *Interactive Marketing Practice, Business Performance, Agricultural Marketing, Agro-Allied Industries, Agribusiness.*

Corresponding Author
Kabuoh, Margret

Background to the Study

Agriculture has over the years made important contributions to the Nigerian economy, and that it is the source of food for the ever increasing population on one hand, it also provides a substantial amount of fibre and raw materials used by agro-allied industries for production of secondary goods and processed food items on the other hand. Agriculture constitutes a very important sector of the economy and is particularly important in terms of its employment generation and contribution to gross domestic product, as well as export revenue earnings. The discoveries of crude oil in 1964, led to a gradual shift in the national focus of the economy from agriculture and its allied industries to crude oil, following which successive governments relegated the sector and its allied industries to the background. This development manifested in the abandonment of public investments in secondary production outfits deriving their raw materials from agricultural production.

The government has put several emphases on sustainable agricultural development and this has impacted on infrastructural development and building strong institutions to support agriculture. Changes in the present state of land use and right were some of the factors necessary for sustainable agricultural development in the country. There were various policies and measures put in place by the government to actualize the objectives of various development plans in agriculture which include attempts at raising the level of public sector participation in the Agro-allied sector. Not minding the various measures put in place by various governments, the performance of the Agricultural and its agro-allied industries has generally been considered unsatisfactory, and its expected contributions to National Gross Domestic Products remained largely an expectation (Daramola, 2004; Forae, 2005).

In spite of the above, the Nigerian government have put in several intervention strategies to boost agro-allied industries performance in areas like food crops production, industrial crops and other non-continental crops. Against these backgrounds, the main purpose of this research is to analyze the practice of interactive marketing and its impact on sales growth of the agricultural sector. Interactive marketing practice have shown that the traditional principle of sales/personal selling seek to assist sales personnel to “close a sales” (Pride and Ferrel, 2002). Adeniyi (2011) cited in the work of Short et al (2007) stated that “...building one-to-one relationships with customers is the heart of business marketing”. Thus relational marketing is pivotal to business marketing strategy and contributes greatly to business performance. Marketing can be of immense benefit to the agro-allied sector, by putting in place interactive marketing efforts to enhance its performance. The interactive marketing practice support the view that both transactional and relational marketing should be practiced together in a single setting. Interactive marketing practice involves the practice of relationship marketing.

Statement of the Problem

Agro-allied industries in Nigeria are facing problems of infrastructural development and building strong institutions to support food and agro allied companies. Other factors identified include yield and productivity, optimal use of soil and water, climate change, managing waste, biodiversity and marketing agro-allied products.

In the past, the focus of research in marketing productivity has been on efficiency and effectiveness based on controlled cost related to transaction marketing with its customer-centric emphasis. Again, there was an increased need to understand the influence of transaction variables on customer behaviours and how these impact on improved organizations' performance. There is the need for a study to examine the conceptual connects between transaction marketing efforts and its productivity and how interconnectivity of transaction marketing activities can be used to improve the performance of food and agro-allied firms in the industry in Nigeria. The practice of these individual marketing efforts appears endemic and seemingly incurable among the food and Agro-allied firms in Nigeria. This situation has manifested in poor services, shorter product life cycles and dwindling or declining sales growth. The scenario or development appears to represent the consequence of underdevelopment, poor service attendance and poor marketing performance outcome of Agro-allied companies in Nigeria. Given this senerio, the question, is: *'to what extent can interactive marketing be practiced within the domains of Agro-allied firms to impact on sales growth?'* Based on the above, this study examined interactive marketing practice and sales growth as a measure of business performance.

The Independent variable is Interactive Marketing Practice, while the dependent variable is Sales Growth. On the other hand, the contextual factor (moderating variable) is Environmental Factors.

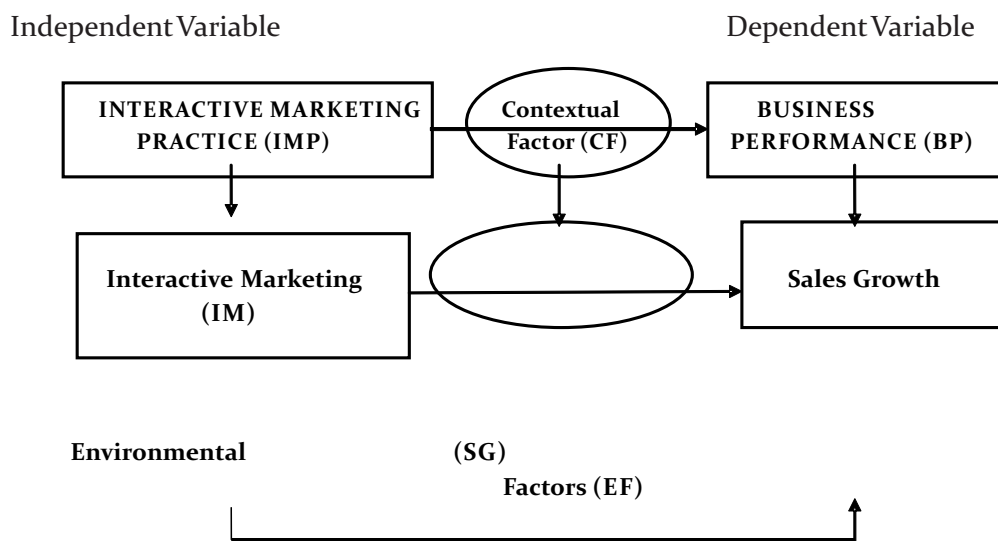


Figure 1.1: Researcher's Conceptual Framework.

Source: Researcher's Conceptual Framework, 2016.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to examine the extent of relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth of Small-Scale Agro-Allied Industries in Rivers State. Based on the statement of the research problem, and the main aim of the study, the following specific objectives were therefore formulated.

1. To evaluate the extent of relationship between interactive marketing and sales growth.
2. To investigate the influence of environmental factors on the relationship between interactive marketing practice and business performance.

Research Questions

Based on the statement of research problem and specific objectives of the study, the following research questions were answered.

1. To what extent does interactive marketing influence sales growth of Small-Scale Agro-Allied Industries?
2. To what extent do Environmental factors influence relationship between interactive marketing practice and business performance of Small-Scale Agro-Allied Industries?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the specific objectives of the study and statement of research problem, the following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between interactive marketing and sales growth.
Ho₂: There is no influence of environmental factors on the relationship between interactive marketing practice and business performance of Small-Scale Agro-Allied Industries?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests on the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to agricultural marketing field. There are five sets of beneficiaries to this study among which are the export operators, agricultural banks, academics, practicing managers in agricultural areas and the participants. The study is of significance to both export and import businesses operators in the agricultural sector of the economy and academia.

Another basic importance of the study provided empirically based facts as decisions inputs for practicing managers taking decisions in contemporary marketing practices and business performance. Agro-allied industries researches are newer areas and we do hope that a study of this type will enhance the interest of all other researchers in this seemingly under-researched area in this sector. Also, many researchers participating in various levels may find the findings of this study essential for their investment portfolio analysis and the instruments for this work may be utilized in some developing African countries that have embraced agricultural marketing practices in their National planning systems. Besides, practicing managers in Agro-allied industries in Nigerian business environment will find issues on interactive marketing practice useful for their plans to impact sales growth and non-oil business policy.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is domiciled in agricultural marketing and the focus is on the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth as measure of business performance of small-scale Agro-allied industries. The study focused on small-scale agro-

allied firms in Rivers State, South-South Nigeria. We used only Rivers in the South-South zone and therefore delimit possible generalization of this research's finding.

Nigeria as a country has three distinct ecological zones: The southern part has the mangrove forest and the north has the savanna forest. All the ecological zones combined to represent a robust agricultural output. As a matter of fact, the zone we have chosen for this study is well suited for production and marketing of food crops such as cassava, maize, yam, plantain as well as cash crops like oil palm and rubber plantation. This is the most reason why many agro-allied industries are located in these states. The levels of analysis are the Agro-allied firms, while the Agro-allied managers, agricultural marketing managers and Agro-allied Sales Representatives are the unit of analysis.

Review of Relevant Literature

Interactive Marketing Practice

In marketing scholarship, Transaction Cost Analysis and Relationship Marketing are two separate paradigms. According to El-Ausary (2005), the determining factors of relationalism in any exchange are social norms such as solidarity, mutuality, flexibility and bilateral power. The focus is not simply on the exchange, but on the process involved in maintaining the relationship. He also states that exchanges are relational in nature and the governance structures range along a continuum from discrete transactions to highly relational exchanges. This is in contrast to the transaction cost perspective of Bush et al. (2007), which examined how organisations are governed in order to protect their self-interest by engaging in discrete transactions and through vertical integration.

Relationship Marketing is of particular interest because companies are placing value on establishing longer business relationships. Since borders are being eliminated, companies realize that in addition to building partnerships, managing a network of relationships should be a key part of their strategic plan. There have been considerable discussions amongst academics and managers as to whether or not the transactional model of marketing is still relevant. There are three perspectives on the issue of Relationship Marketing. The first approach adds a relationship dimension to the traditional marketing approach. Pels et al. (2003) refer to it as the 'marketing mix-plus' perspective. The next perspective suggests moving away from Transactional Marketing to a new Relational Marketing paradigm (Piercy 2004; Sherrell and Bejoiu, 2007). The final view is that transactions and relational exchanges exist at opposite ends of a continuum (Gronroos, 2002).

Transactional and Relational marketing can be practiced together, this challenges the traditional view of the transaction approach. Instead of viewing the transaction approach as a discrete and separate approach to Relationship Marketing, it can be viewed as concurrent and in a continuum with Relationship Marketing. Brookes, Coviello, Brodie and Little (2004) and Coviello and Brodie (1998) go on to propose that relationship marketing has three dimensions: Database Marketing, Interaction Marketing and Network Marketing. In their 1997 work, Coviello, Brodie and Munro developed a classification scheme that organizes the various views. This classification scheme was derived from their research that focused on relational exchange and management issues. In their analysis, they identified two general

perspectives: Transactional Exchange and Relational Exchange. Encompassed within the two perspectives are four distinct types of marketing: transaction Marketing, Database Marketing, Interaction Marketing and Network Marketing (p. 509).

Transaction Marketing: Transaction Marketing can be described as having an economic transaction focus (Li and Nicholas, 2000). It is categorized as a transactional exchange. The parties involved are the firm and the buyers in the general market. The pattern of communication is firm “to” market. The best way to describe the contact is arms-length and impersonal. The relationship is discrete in terms of duration and formal. An active seller and passive buyers describes the balance of power.

Transaction Marketing involves a firm attracting and satisfying potential buyers by managing the elements in the marketing mix. This approach involves creating discrete economic transactions that are generally treated in isolation, at arm's-length, and in the context of a formal, impersonal process following from this; buyers in the market are passive in the communication relationship. The seller actively manages the exchange, and manager's communication “to” buyers in the mass market. At a managerial level, managers focus on marketing a product brand to an identified group of customers. Marketing activities are usually relegated to functional marketing areas, and manager's focus on developing internal capabilities related to the marketing mix. Co-ordination with other functions in the firm is limited, and the planning horizon for this type of marketing is generally short-term.

Interactive Marketing

In Interaction Marketing, there is an interactive relationship between a buyer and seller (Sultan and Rohm, 2004). The individual buyers and sellers form a dyadic relationship. The communication pattern can be described as individuals with individuals across organizations. The duration of the relationship is continuous, ongoing and mutually adaptive, although it may be short or long-term. There are both formal and informal exchanges at both business and social levels. The balance of power between the buyer and the seller can be described as mutually active and adaptive. Another way to describe it is as interdependent and reciprocal.

Interaction Marketing implies face-to-face interaction within relationships. Marketing occurs at the individual level based on social processes and personal interactions. Relationships are established between individuals, and can occur in both a formal and informal manner, with both parties being mutually active and adaptive. Interaction Marketing is truly “with” the customer in both a formal and informal manner. Interaction Marketing is truly “with” the customer since both parties in the dyad invest resources to develop a mutually beneficial and interpersonal relationship.

Interaction Marketing is not the responsibility of only the marketer, nor is those that engage in Interaction Marketing necessarily in the position of the seller. Rather, this approach can involve a number of individuals across functions and levels in the firm, and may encompass both buying and selling activities (Coviello et al. 2003).

Relationship Marketing

Relationship Marketing (RM) has been variously defined, depending on the interests and perspectives expressed. These definitions are either theoretical or practitioner-oriented. Generally, Relationship Marketing deals with identifying, establishing, maintaining, enhancing and, when necessary, terminating relationships with customers, clients and other stakeholders for mutual benefits via exchange, relationship and fulfillment of promises (Gronroos, 1994a). Harker (1999) listed 26 definitions of RM and posits that Gronroos's (1994b) definition of relationship marketing is "the best". Also, Harker (1999) isolated the primary constructs of relationship marketing to include creation (i.e. attracting, establishing, getting), developing (i.e. sustaining, stabilizing, keeping), interactive (i.e. exchanging, mutuality, cooperative), long-term (i.e. lasting, permanent, retaining), emotional content (i.e. commitment, trust, promises), and output (i.e. profitable, rewarding, efficiency).

Furthermore, the goals of Relationship Marketing have been seen to include the creation and sustenance of long-term relationships between an organization and its customers and clients (Rapp and Collins, 1990). According to Christopher et al. (1991), Relationship Marketing is an approach which integrates marketing, customer/client service and quality; emphasis on customer/client retention; an orientation on product or service benefit; a long-term scale; a high customer/client commitment and contract; and the managerial culture that quality is everybody's concern in the organisation. Therefore, the evolution of Relationship Marketing and the advocacy of extending it to the management of exchange processes within the consumer market (as opposed to industrial market) means that there is an increased interest in the treatment of consumers as individuals rather than as groups (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Long et al., 1999; Chattopadhyay, 2001; Gronroos, 2002; Sheth, 2002; Rashid, 2003).

Relationship Marketing is often proposed as a solution to the critique that most marketing theories and approaches appear to be more suited to large companies than small enterprises. It is remarkable that although numerous authors now use the term Relational Marketing (RM), few provide a definition for it. Indeed, Achumba (2000) posits that the perception of RM varies between authors.

McKenna (1991) provides a useful overview, which highlights a more strategic view of Relationship Marketing. He emphasizes putting the customer first and shifting the role of marketing from manipulating the customer, to genuine customer involvement. Berry (1983), in somewhat broader terms, also has a strategic viewpoint on Relationship Marketing. He stresses that attracting new customers should be viewed only as an intermediate step in the marketing process. Developing closer relations with the customers and making them loyal are equally important aspects of marketing. Berry (1983) was among the first to introduce the term 'Relationship Marketing' as a modern concept in marketing. He suggested that this "new" approach should be defined as attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationship. Some authors such as Achumba (2004) argues that a company's very survival will depend on moving very close to customers, fully understanding their needs and wants, building a relationship and thus developing an attitude of consistent customer dedication.

Achumba further highlights characteristics of Relationship Marketing, thus:

1. It focuses on partners and customers rather than on the company's products;
2. It puts more emphasis on customer retention, rather than on customer acquisition;
3. It relies on cross-functional teams, rather than on departmental level work; and
4. It relies more on listening and learning than on talking.

A small firm's marketing advantage, in contrast to a large firm, is precisely these close relationships between entrepreneurs and customers. We noted earlier that small firms often have a narrow customer-base and that customers are usually concentrated in a local market. This often translates into shorter lines of communication between the enterprise and its customers. Entrepreneurs consequently often know their customers personally and the result of such close relationship interactions leads to several benefits, including customer loyalty and higher levels of customer satisfaction. Another aspect that helps cement the relationship between the entrepreneur and the customer is the flexibility of the small firm, which is usually more flexible in responding to customer inquiries (Carson et al, 1995).

Finally, one of the biggest advantages for the small firm is easy access to market information. Entrepreneurs are close to their customers and market, and also close to their staff. The entrepreneur usually gathers information in an informal manner and prefers face-to-face-communication in doing so. As a result, entrepreneurs can access vital, timely and inexpensive market information. Furthermore, such close relationships allow them to use the information gathered to make better informed marketing decisions. Empirical facts has that although many small firm entrepreneurs do this, they do it unconsciously. Nonetheless, the ability to gather and use information in this manner gives the small firm a critical advantage over a large company (Stokes et al., 2000).

Marketing (Business) Performance

The fundamental purpose of every business organization is to consistently outperform the competition and deliver sustained, superior returns to the owners while satisfying other stakeholders (KHPI, 2013). It is well accepted that performance measurement plays important roles in running an organization. It helps assess achievements and set future strategies to reach a stable long-term growth path and success. Performance measurement is the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action.

Despite the great number of theoretical publication on the problems of evaluating company performance, basing on the system of financial and non-financial indicators, there are problems in practical application of these indicators' system as there is no single approach to identification, classification, measurement and evaluation of non-financial performance indicators. However, the traditional methods for evaluation of business performance are based on the calculations of financial indicators though their evaluation does not identify all the factors influencing company development. Many managers and researchers have argued that accounting-based performance measurement systems are no longer adequate. (Christopher & David (2003). The analysis of company performance basing just on financial indicators provide incomplete evaluation of company performance as their financially based, internally focused, backward looking, deliberate misrepresentation, do not attempt to anticipate future results and more concerned with local departmental performance than with the overall health or performance of the business.

What performance indicators should be used to measure the impact of interactive marketing practice on overall marketing performance in an intense competitive environment such as Nigeria agricultural marketing firms?: Several studies have suggested that managers balance profitability and sales growth (McKee, Varadarajan and Pride, (1989); Wang et al, (2004) used indicators such as after-tax profit, return on investment, sales volume and market share. In line with previous studies, they view marketing performance measures as the mean of a respondent's rating for his firm's sales growth, customer retention and profitability performance relative to all other competitors.

Interactive Marketing Practice and Marketing Performance

Interaction marketing is the interactive relationship between a buyer and seller in which the duration of the relationship is continuous, and mutually adaptive. It involves formal and informal exchanges at both business and social levels. In this type of practice, the balance of power between the buyer and seller is interdependent and reciprocal. The basic area of concern in interaction marketing is the face-to-face interaction within relationships. Marketing activities under interaction marketing practice occurs at the individual level based on social processes and personal interactions. The customer is at the centre of interaction marketing practice. Under this practice, marketing is truly “with” the customer in both formal and informal way.

Methodology

Population for the Study

The target population of this study was made up of the entire staff of Small-Scale Agro-Allied industries in Rivers State. The accessible population of the study was the number of staff of the ten (10) selected Small-Scale Agro-Allied industries in Rivers state, out of 416 agro-allied firms registered with the ministry of commerce and industry (Rivers State Yellow Pages Directory, 2013 – 2014).

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination

A sample size of 200 was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten Agro-Allied industries in Rivers State to form the accessible population of the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) respondents from each of the companies. A total of 200 high ranking staff was selected under regular appointment in the selected Agro-Allied industries in Rivers State.

Sources of Data

The main instrument used for data collection in the study was the questionnaire and oral interview. The questionnaire was used because it depicts written information that is used for analysis. It is divided into two sections. Section 'A' consists of bio data of the respondents while section 'B' consists of questions on the impact of interactive marketing practice on sales growth. The questions were used with a five –points likert type scale for the respondents' views, ranging from 1 = very low extent to 5 = very high extent. A total number of two hundred (200) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to all ten (10) selected Agro-Allied firms in Rivers State. The predictor variable of the study is interactive marketing practice and the criterion variable is sales growth used to measure Business Performance.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed through the use of simple percentage tables and averages. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used in analyzing the research hypotheses because, "it indicates the degree of effectiveness in predicting one ranked variable based on another ranked variable" The statistical package for social science (SPSS version 15.0) was used to analyze the data for more accuracy.

Decision Rules: The decision rule guided the researcher on whether to accept or reject the null hypothesis. It rules that the null hypothesis (Ho) is to be rejected if the computed values is greater than the critical value. If otherwise, the null hypothesis is accepted or when the P-value is less than 0.05 we reject the null hypothesis and if P-value is greater than 0.05 we accept the null hypothesis. The level of significance adopted in the test of the hypothesis was 0.05.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Table showing Descriptive Statistics (Frequency and Percentage) on the Responses on Interactive Marketing and sales growth

S/ N	Interactive Marketing	VHE	HE	ME	LE	VLE	TOTAL
1	To what extent do you evaluate the effect of interactive marketing on your firm's sales growth?	73 (39.45%)	57 (30.81%)	42 (22.70%)	10 (5.40%)	3 (1.62%)	185
2	To what extent would you classify the overall business performance of your firm based on interactive marketing?	53 (28.64%)	87 (47.02%)	33 (17.83%)	4 (2.16%)	8 (4.32%)	185

Table shows the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) on the responses on interactive marketing and sales growth. Hence, on the evaluation of the effect of interactive marketing on sales growth, 73(39.45%) indicated to a very high extent, 57(30.81%) indicated to a high extent, 42(22.70%) respondents indicated to a moderate extent, 10(5.40%) indicated to a low extent while 3(1.62%) indicated to a very low extent.

Also, the table shows that 53(28.64%) of the respondents indicated that they would classify the overall business performance of their firm based on interactive marketing, to a very high extent, 87(47.02%) indicated to a high extent, 33(17.83%) indicated to a moderate extent, 4(2.16%) indicated to a low extent, whereas 8(4.32%) of them indicated to a very low extent.

Research Question 1: To what extent does interactive marketing influence sales growth in the agro-allied firms?

Spearman Rank Correlation on the influence of Interactive Marketing (IM) on Sales Growth (SG) in the Agro-allied Firms

Variables	N	R _{Ho} (p)	Result
Im _x Versus Sg _y	185	0.695*	High relationship

Im_x Versus Sg_y 185 0.695* High relationship

Source: survey data 2016, and SPSS Version 15.0

Table above shows that there is a positive and high relationship between interactive marketing and sales growth in the agro-allied firms ($r_{rho} (P) = 0.695$). This indicates that interactive marketing highly influence sales growth in the agro-allied firms.

Research Question 2: To what extent does environmental factor influence the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth?

Table Showing Descriptive Statistics (Frequency and Percentage on the Responses on Environmental Factors (Contextual Factor)

S/N	Environmental Factors	VHE	HE	ME	LE	VLE	TOTAL
1	To what extent does environmental factor influence the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth?	73 (39.45%)	66 (35.67%)	28 (15.13%)	12 (6.48%)	6 (3.24%)	185
2	To what extent do you classify the influence of environmental factor on sales growth?	58 (31.35%)	76 (41.08%)	41 (22.16%)	4 (2.16%)	6 (3.24%)	185

Source: Survey Data, 2016

The table shows that 73(39.45%) of the respondents indicated that environmental factors influenced the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth of their firm to a very high extent, 66(35.67%) indicated to a high extent, 28(15.13%) indicated to a moderate extent, 12(6.48%) indicated a low extent whereas 6(3.24%) indicated a very low extent. Again, the table shows that 58(31.35%) of the respondents indicated that they classify the influence of environmental factors on sales growth to a very high extent, 76(41.08%) indicated a high extent, 41(22.16%) indicated a moderate extent, 4(2.16%) indicated a low extent while 6(3.24%) indicated a very low extent.

Partial Correlation on the Influence of Environmental factor on the Relationship between Interactive Marketing practice and sales Growth

Variables	N	R _{Ho (p)}	p-value	Result
IMP _x Versus Sg _y moderated by environmental factor	185	0.740	0.00	High relationship

Source: survey data 2016, and SPSS Version 15.0

Table shows that there is a positive and high relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth when moderated by environmental factor ($R_{ho (P)} = 0.740$). This indicates that environmental factor highly influence the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth.

The Relationship Between Interactive Marketing Practice and Sales Growth

The result shows there is a positive and high relationship ($Rho (P) = 0.695$) between interactive marketing and sales growth in the agro-allied industries. This indicates that interactive marketing affects sales growth in the agro-allied firms. When put in statistical test, the result shows that there is a significant relationship between interactive marketing and sales growth. This could mean that when firms engage in interactive marketing practice, it tends to result in sales. This finding was supported by the literature review.

The Effect of Environmental Factors on the Relationship between Interactive Marketing Practice and Sales Growth

The result shows that there is a positive and high relationship ($Rho (P) = 0.740$) between interactive marketing practice and sales growth when moderated by environmental factor. This indicates that environmental factors highly affect the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth. When put to statistical test, the result shows that there is a significant effect of environmental factors on the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The topic titled “Interactive Marketing Practice and Sales Growth as Measure of Business Performance of Small-Scale Agro-allied Firms in Rivers State” was sampled to the studied population and data obtained were analyzed, hypotheses were also tested and the findings revealed that:

1. There is a significant relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth of Small-scale agro-allied firms.
2. The effect of environmental factor on the relationship between interactive marketing practice and sales growth was significant.

Conclusively, as businesses nowadays face incredible changes like happenings in the global market, it is therefore necessary for Small-scale agro-allied firms to engage in interactive marketing practice from time to time as to meet the demand of local and international global market and to enhance volume of sales.

The following recommendations are suggested based on the research findings:

1. Interactive marketing should be encouraged since it is the medium through which the business builds relationship with the customers. And, the patronage resulting from this relationship contributes to sales growth.
2. Similarly, environmental factors should be well recognized as moderating factors that will enhance performance.

References

- Achumba, I.C (2000). *Strategic marketing management in the 21st Century*. USA: Mac-Milliams and Capital Publishers Inc. Charlotte.
- Achumba, I.C. (2004). *Sales management: concepts strategies and cases*. USA: Rock Hill, Al-Marks Educational Research Inc.
- Berry, L.L (1983). *Relationship marketing emerging perspective on service marketing*, Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- Bush, R. P, Underwood, III.J.H, & Sherrell, D.L (2007). Examining the relationship marketing productivity paradigm: establishing an agenda for current and future research. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 6 (2), 9-32.
- Brookes, R.W; Brodie R.J; Coviello N.E; & Palmer R.A. (2004), How managers perceive the impacts of information technologies on contemporary marketing practices: reinforcing, enhancing or transforming? *Journal of Relationship Marketing* 3(4), 7 - 26.
- Brodie, R, Coviello, N, Brookes. A. & Victoria, L. (2007). Towards a paradigm shift in marketing: an examination of current marketing practices. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13(5), 383-406.
- Carson, D. Cromie, S. McGowan, P., & Hill, J., (1995). *Marketing and Entrepreneurship in SMEs: An Innovative Approach*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, International, Engle Wood Cliffs.
- Chattopadhyay, S. P. (2001). Relationship marketing in an enterprise planning environment. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*. 19(2), 136-139.
- Christopher, M. Payne, A. & Ballantyne, D. (1991). Relationship marketing: creating stakeholdervalue. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 17 (4), 443-445.
- Coviello, N. E.; Brodie R.J.; & Munro H.J. (1997). Understanding contemporary marketing: development of a classification scheme. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13(1), 501-522.

- Coviello, N. E.; Brodie, R.J. (1998). From transaction to relationship marketing: an investigation of managerial perceptions and practices. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 6(4), 171–186.
- Coviello, N. E.; Brodie R.J.; Brooks R.W and Palmer R.A. (2003). Assessing the role of e-marketing in contemporary marketing practice. *Journal of Marketing Management*.19,(1),857–881.
- Daramola, A. G. (2004), Competitiveness of Nigerian Agriculture in a Global Economy: Any Dividends of Democracy? *Inaugural Lecture Series 36, Delivered at the Federal University of Technology Akure*. 2nd of March.
- El-Ausary, A. I (2005). Relationship marketing management: a school in the history of marketing thought. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 4 (1&2), 43–56.
- Forae, F.O. (2005). *The food and agricultural crisis in Africa: an appraisal of capitalist agriculture in Nigeria*. 5(2), 1–10.
- Gronroos, C. (2002). Service management and marketing: customer relationship perspective. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36 (9), 1164-1166.
- Harker, M. J. (1999). Relationship marketing defined: an examination of current relationship marketing definitions. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*. 17(1), 13-20.
- Li, F & Nicholas, J.A.F. (2000). Transactional or relationship marketing: determinants of strategic choices. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 16(4), 449-464.
- Mckee, D.O; Varadarajan, R.P & Pride, W.M (1989), Strategic adaptability and firm performance: a market contingent perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 53, 21-35.
- McKenna, R., (1991), *Relationship Marketing: Successful Strategies for the Age of the Customer*, Wesley, M.A., Addison Reading.
- Pels, J. & Brodie R.J. (2003). Profiling marketing practice in an economy: the argentine case. *Journal of Global Marketing*. 17 (1), 67–80.
- Piercy, N. C. (2004). Strategic marketing and operations relationship: the case of the learn enterprise. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 12 (3), 145–161.
- Pride, W.M. & Ferrell, O.C (2002). *Marketing: concepts and strategies*. New Delhi: Rajende K Arya.
- Rapp, S. & Collins, T. (1990). *The great marketing turnaround*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Rashid, I. (2003). Relationship marketing: case studies of personal experience of eating out. *British Food Journal*. 105(10), 742-750.

- Sheth, J. N. (2002). The Future of relationship marketing. *Journal of Service Marketing*, 16(7), 590-592.
- Sheth, J. N. & Parvatiyar, A. (2002). Evolving of relationship marketing into a discipline. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 1, 3-16.
- Sherrell, D.L. & Bejoiu, D. (2007). Assessing the productivity of Relationship.
- Short, J.C. Ketchen D.J. Palmer. T.B & Hult, G.T.M. (2007). Firm, strategic group and industry influences on performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(2), 147 - 167
- Sultan, F; & Rohm A. (2004). The evolving role of the internet in marketing strategy: an exploratory study. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(2), 6 -19.
- Stokes, D.R. Fithcher, S. & Blackburn, (2000). *Marketing in Small Firms: a Conceptual Approach*. Kingston-upon-Thames. Report to the Royal Mail, Small Business Research Centre, Kingston University.