# Effect of Entrepreneurial Marketing Orientation on The Performance of Small Businesses in Delta State, Nigeria

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***Abstract***
*This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial marketing orientation on small business performance in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to determine the effects of innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation on small business performance. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 2,845 registered small businesses in Delta State, from which a sample of 351 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula and selected via stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to small business owners/managers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 27. The findings revealed that innovativeness ($\beta$=0.312, $p<0.05$), proactiveness ($\beta$=0.285, $p<0.05$) and value creation ($\beta$=0.348, $p<0.05$) have positive and significant effects on small business performance, with value creation having the strongest effect. The R-square of 0.581 indicates that entrepreneurial marketing orientation dimensions jointly explain 58.1% of variation in small business performance. The study concluded that entrepreneurial marketing orientation is a critical strategic resource for enhancing small business performance in Delta State. It was recommended that small business owners should invest in continuous innovation, develop proactive market intelligence systems, and prioritize superior value creation through quality products and excellent customer service.*

***Keywords:*** *Entrepreneurial Marketing Orientation, Innovativeness, Proactiveness, Value Creation, Small Business Performance, Delta State.*

## 1.0 Introduction

Small businesses are widely recognized as the engine of economic growth, employment generation and poverty reduction in both developed and developing economies. In Nigeria, small businesses account for over 90% of enterprises and contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and job creation (SMEDAN, 2023). In Delta State in particular, small businesses in sectors such as trading, agriculture, services and artisan enterprises form the backbone of the local economy, providing livelihoods for a large segment of the population. However, despite their importance, the performance of small businesses in Delta State remains suboptimal, characterized by low survival rate, poor sales growth and weak profitability (Edo & Nwosu, 2024).

The challenging business environment in Nigeria, marked by intense competition, infrastructural deficits, inflationary pressures and changing consumer preferences, has made traditional marketing approaches inadequate for small businesses. This has necessitated a shift towards a more entrepreneurial approach to marketing. Entrepreneurial Marketing Orientation (EMO) has emerged as a strategic orientation that integrates entrepreneurial and marketing perspectives to help small firms navigate uncertain and resource-constrained environments (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2024). EMO emphasizes proactive opportunity seeking, innovative value delivery and customer-focused value creation as drivers of competitive advantage.

Three dimensions of EMO are particularly critical for small businesses in Delta State. Innovativeness refers to the propensity of a firm to support creativity, experimentation and novel solutions in products and marketing processes (Adeboye et al., 2023). Proactiveness is the forward-looking orientation that involves anticipating future market needs and acting ahead of competitors (Mamun et al., 2024). Value creation focuses on the ability of a firm to create and deliver superior value to customers through quality, pricing and service excellence (Hoque et al., 2024). Collectively, these orientations are expected to enhance small business performance measured by sales growth, profitability, market share and customer satisfaction.

Although several studies have examined entrepreneurial marketing and SME performance in Nigeria, significant gaps remain that motivate the present study. First, most existing studies have been conducted in Lagos, Anambra and Abuja, with limited empirical attention to Delta State, whose business environment is unique due to its oil-dependent economy and high cost of doing business (Oghenekohwo & Erhurhu, 2024). Second, many studies treat EMO as a unidimensional construct, thereby masking the individual effect of its core dimensions such as innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation on performance (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2024). Third, recent economic realities including fuel subsidy removal, exchange rate volatility and digitalization in 2023-2025 have fundamentally altered the marketing landscape for small businesses, yet current studies have not captured these dynamics in Delta State.

The motivation for this study therefore stems from the need to provide context-specific evidence on how small businesses in Delta State can leverage entrepreneurial marketing orientation to improve performance and survive in a turbulent environment. In light of the foregoing, the main objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial marketing orientation on the performance of small businesses in Delta State. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the effect of innovativeness on small business performance in Delta State, assess the effect of proactiveness on small business performance in Delta State, and determine the effect of value creation on small business performance in Delta State

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature on the concepts of entrepreneurial marketing orientation and small business performance, the theoretical foundations anchoring the study, and empirical evidence from previous studies.

### 2.1 Conceptual Review

#### 2.1.1 Small Business Performance

Small business performance is a multidimensional construct that reflects the extent to which a small enterprise achieves its market and financial objectives. It is commonly measured using both financial indicators such as sales growth, profitability, return on investment and non-financial indicators such as market share, customer satisfaction and customer retention (Alqahtani & Uslay,

2024). For small businesses in Delta State, performance is critical for survival given the intense competition, limited access to finance and infrastructural challenges. Recent literature emphasizes that performance of small firms should be evaluated not only by short-term profit but also by customer-based outcomes and adaptability to market changes (Olannye et al., 2023).

### 2.1.2 Entrepreneurial Marketing Orientation (EMO)

Entrepreneurial Marketing Orientation is an integrative construct that combines entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation to explain how small firms act entrepreneurially in their marketing activities (Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2024). Unlike traditional marketing which is formal, structured and resource-intensive, EMO is informal, opportunity-driven and innovative, making it suitable for resource-constrained small businesses.

**a) Innovativeness**: Innovativeness is the tendency of a firm to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation and creative processes that may result in new products, services or marketing methods (Adeboye et al., 2023). For small businesses in Delta State, innovativeness may manifest in adoption of digital marketing tools, product modification and creative packaging to meet local consumer needs. Studies show that innovative firms achieve superior performance through differentiation and first-mover advantage (Uchenna et al., 2023).

**b) Proactiveness:** Proactiveness refers to a forward-looking perspective where a firm anticipates future market needs and takes initiative to shape the environment ahead of competitors (Mamun et al., 2024). It involves opportunity seeking, market intelligence and aggressive positioning. Proactive small businesses in Delta State are able to scan the environment for emerging opportunities in the oil and non-oil sectors and introduce offerings before rivals. Proactiveness has been linked to improved market share and sales growth (Hoque et al., 2024).

**c) Value Creation**: Value creation is the core of marketing, focusing on creating superior value for customers through quality products, fair pricing, excellent service and unique experiences (Hoque et al., 2024). For small businesses, value creation is achieved by understanding customer needs and continuously improving offerings to exceed expectations. It is considered a critical driver of customer satisfaction, loyalty and long-term profitability (Oghenekohwo & Erhurhu, 2024).

## 2.2 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two complementary theories.

### 2.2.1 Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory

The Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory propounded by Miller (1983) and later refined by Covin and Slevin (1989) posits that firms that exhibit innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking are better positioned to achieve superior performance. The theory argues that entrepreneurial orientation influences strategic decisions and resource deployment to exploit market opportunities. This theory is relevant because innovativeness and proactiveness are core dimensions of EMO that drive small business performance in dynamic environments like Delta State.

### 2.2.2 Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View Theory by Barney (1991) asserts that firms gain sustainable competitive advantage by possessing valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources and

capabilities. Entrepreneurial marketing orientation dimensions such as value creation capability, market knowledge and innovative capacity are intangible resources that are difficult to imitate and can enhance performance (Alqahtani & Uslay, 2024). RBV provides justification for how small businesses with limited tangible resources can leverage entrepreneurial marketing capabilities as strategic resources for performance.

### 2.3 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the link between entrepreneurial marketing orientation and small business performance. Adeboye et al. (2023) examined innovativeness and SME performance among 250 SMEs in Oyo State and found that innovativeness has a positive and significant effect on sales growth and profitability. Similarly, Uchenna et al. (2023) studied 312 SMEs in South-East Nigeria and reported that innovativeness and proactiveness significantly predicted performance, while risk-taking had an insignificant effect. Mamun et al. (2024) in a study of 320 small businesses in Malaysia found that proactiveness positively influences firm performance through opportunity exploitation. In Nigeria, Olannye et al. (2023) investigated entrepreneurial marketing and customer retention among 180 SMEs in Asaba, Delta State and found that value creation and proactiveness were significant predictors of customer retention.

Hoque et al. (2024) studied 280 SMEs in Bangladesh and revealed that value creation has a positive effect on SME performance, mediated by competitive advantage. Oghenekohwo and Erhurhu (2024) examined marketing practices of small businesses in Delta State and found that lack of innovative marketing and value creation strategies contributed to poor performance. Alqahtani and Uslay (2024) in their meta-analysis of 87 studies confirmed that EMO dimensions collectively enhance firm performance, with innovativeness and proactiveness having the strongest effects.

However, most of these studies were conducted outside Delta State or focused on composite EMO measures without isolating the specific effects of innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation. This leaves a gap which the present study seeks to fill.

### 2.4 Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed shows that small business performance is influenced by entrepreneurial marketing orientation. Conceptually, innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation are established dimensions of EMO. Theoretically, Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory and RBV Theory explain how these capabilities translate to performance. Empirically, existing studies provide evidence of positive relationships, but with limited focus on Delta State and on the disaggregated effect of the three dimensions. This justifies the need for the present study.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design, Population and Sample

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of primary data from a cross-section of respondents to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing orientation dimensions and small business performance in Delta State. The population of the study comprised registered small businesses in Delta State. According to the Delta State Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (DELSMEDA) and SMEDAN (2023), there are approximately 2,845 registered small businesses across the three senatorial districts of Delta State (Delta Central, Delta North and Delta South). The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula:

$n = N / 1+N(e)^2$

Where N = population, e = 0.05 level of significance.
$n = 2845 / 1+2845(0.05)^2 = 351$
A sample of 351 small business owners/managers was selected. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation across the three senatorial districts and major business sectors (trading, services, agriculture and manufacturing). Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used.

### 3.2 Sources of Data and Research Instrument

Primary data were used for the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A elicited demographic information of respondents, while Section B contained items measuring the study variables on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree. The variables were operationalized as follows:
Innovativeness (5 items): Adapted from Adeboye et al. (2023)
Proactiveness (5 items): Adapted from Mamun et al. (2024)
Value Creation (5 items): Adapted from Hoque et al. (2024)
Small Business Performance (5 items): Adapted from Alqahtani and Uslay (2024) - covering sales growth, profitability and customer satisfaction.

### 3.3 Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts in Entrepreneurship and Marketing. To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 35 small business owners outside the main sample. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients obtained were: Innovativeness (0.84), Proactiveness (0.81), Value Creation (0.86) and Small Business Performance (0.88), all exceeding the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2022).

### 3.4 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze demographic data. Inferential statistics using Multiple Linear Regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

### 3.5 Model Specification

The functional relationship between the variables is specified as:
$SBP = f(INNOV, PROA, VACR)$
The econometric model is expressed as:
$SBP = \beta 0 + \beta 1INNOV + \beta 2PROA + \beta 3VACR + \mu$
Where:
SBP = Small Business Performance (Dependent Variable)
INNOV = Innovativeness (Independent Variable)
PROA = Proactiveness (Independent Variable)
VACR = Value Creation (Independent Variable)
$\beta 0$ = Intercept / Constant
$\beta 1 – \beta 3$ = Regression coefficients
$\mu$ = Stochastic error term

A Priori Expectation: $\beta 1 > 0$, $\beta 2 > 0$, $\beta 3 > 0$; implying that innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation are expected to have positive effects on small business performance.

## 4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of data collected from respondents and discusses the findings in line with the study objectives.

### 4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Analysis

A total of 351 copies of questionnaire were administered, of which 328 were properly filled and retrieved, representing a 93.4% response rate, which is considered adequate for data analysis. The demographic analysis showed that majority of the respondents were male (58.2%), within the age bracket of 31-45 years (62.5%), and operated businesses in trading and services sectors (68.9%). In terms of educational qualification, 48.2% had OND/NCE, 32.6% had HND/B.Sc., while 19.2% had SSCE, indicating that respondents were reasonably educated and able to understand entrepreneurial marketing concepts. With respect to years in business, 42.1% had operated for 6-10 years and 28.3% for 11 years and above, showing that majority had sufficient business experience to provide reliable information. On business location, 38.4% of respondents were from Delta Central, 33.2% from Delta North and 28.4% from Delta South, ensuring balanced representation across the three senatorial districts. In addition, marital status revealed that 61.6% were married, while 38.4% were single, and business size showed that 55.5% employed 1-10 employees and 44.5% employed 11-49 employees, confirming that all sampled firms fall within the small business category as defined by SMEDAN (2023). This demographic distribution indicates that respondents were mature, experienced and well-distributed enough to provide valid and reliable information for the study.

### 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the study variables.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Innovativeness (INNOV) | 328 | 4.12 | 0.69 | High |
| Proactiveness (PROA) | 328 | 3.98 | 0.71 | High |
| Value Creation (VACR) | 328 | 4.21 | 0.65 | Very High |
| Small Business Performance (SBP) | 328 | 4.05 | 0.73 | High |

Source: Field Survey, 2026 (SPSS Output)

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 reveal the level of entrepreneurial marketing orientation practices among small businesses in Delta State. The result indicates that small businesses exhibit high levels of entrepreneurial marketing orientation across all dimensions. Value creation recorded the highest mean score (M=4.21, SD=0.65), indicating that small business owners place very high emphasis on creating superior value through quality products, fair pricing and excellent customer service as a means of retaining customers. This is followed by innovativeness (M=4.12, SD=0.68), suggesting that respondents actively embrace creativity, new ideas and digital marketing tools to differentiate their offerings. Proactiveness had a mean of 3.98 (SD=0.71), showing that small businesses are fairly proactive in anticipating market opportunities and responding ahead of competitors. Furthermore, small business performance also recorded a high mean (M=4.05, SD=0.73), implying improvements in sales growth, profitability and customer satisfaction. The relatively low standard deviations (<1.0) across all variables indicate homogeneity in responses and consensus among respondents regarding these practices. This high level of entrepreneurial

marketing orientation suggests that small business operators in Delta State are increasingly adopting entrepreneurial marketing practices to survive the turbulent and competitive business environment.

### 4.2 Regression Analysis

**Table 2: Regression Coefficients**

| Variables | Unstandardized B | Std. Error | Standardized Beta | t-value | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 0.521 | 0.184 | - | 2.831 | 0.005 |
| INNOV | 0.312 | 0.065 | 0.289 | 4.800 | 0.000 |
| PROA | 0.285 | 0.059 | 0.276 | 4.830 | 0.000 |
| VACR | 0.348 | 0.062 | 0.834 | 5.613 | 0.000 |

Dependent Variable: SBP
Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The regression equation is: SBP = 0.521 + 0.312INNOV + 0.285PROA + 0.348VACR, in Table 2 serve as the basis for testing the hypotheses and discussions in the following section.

### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

**Objective 1 - Innovativeness and Small Business Performance:**

The finding revealed that innovativeness has a positive and significant effect on small business performance ($\beta$=0.312, $p<0.05$). This indicates that a unit increase in innovative practices will lead to a corresponding 31.2% improvement in performance. This finding is consistent with Adeboye et al. (2023) who found that SMEs in Oyo State that adopt innovative marketing strategies achieve superior sales growth and profitability. Similarly, Uchenna et al. (2023) in South-East Nigeria reported that innovativeness significantly predicts SME performance through product differentiation. The implication for Delta State is that small businesses that embrace new ideas, creative packaging, digital marketing tools such as WhatsApp Business, Facebook and Instagram, and continuous product improvement are able to attract new customers and retain existing ones, thereby enhancing their competitiveness.

Theoretically, this finding lends credence to the Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory (Miller, 1983; Covin & Slevin, 1989) which postulates that innovativeness is a core entrepreneurial capability that enables firms to gain competitive advantage through novelty and experimentation. It also supports the Resource-Based View Theory (Barney, 1991) as innovativeness is considered a valuable, rare and inimitable intangible resource that small businesses can leverage for superior performance despite limited tangible resources.

**Objective 2 - Proactiveness and Small Business Performance:**

The study found that proactiveness has a positive and significant effect on small business performance ($\beta$=0.285, $p<0.05$). This suggests that proactive scanning of the environment and early opportunity exploitation improves performance by 28.5%. This result corroborates the findings of Mamun et al. (2024) in Malaysia who reported that proactive small businesses achieve higher market share through first-mover advantage. It also aligns with Olannye et al. (2023) who found that proactiveness significantly enhances customer retention among SMEs in Asaba, Delta State. In the context of Delta State, where the business environment is characterized by volatility and intense competition from both local and imported goods, small businesses that anticipate future customer needs and introduce offerings ahead of rivals are better positioned to secure market leadership.

Theoretically, this validates the Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory which identifies proactiveness as a forward-looking entrepreneurial behaviour that shapes the market rather than merely reacting to it. From the RBV perspective, proactiveness represents a dynamic capability that allows small firms to reconfigure their limited resources to match emerging market opportunities, thus creating a sustainable advantage.

**Objective 3 - Value Creation and Small Business Performance:**

The finding showed that value creation has the strongest positive and significant effect on small business performance ($\beta$=0.348, $p<0.05$), indicating that a unit increase in value creation practices leads to a 34.8% increase in performance. This finding is supported by Hoque et al. (2024) who found that value creation drives SME performance in Bangladesh through competitive advantage, and Oghenekohwo and Erhurhu (2024) who emphasized that poor value creation is responsible for low patronage of small businesses in Delta State. The fact that value creation emerged as the most potent predictor suggests that Delta State customers are highly value-conscious and reward firms that deliver superior quality, fair pricing, excellent after-sales service and unique customer experiences with loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

Theoretically, this finding strongly supports the Resource-Based View Theory, as the ability to create superior customer value is a strategic, knowledge-based resource that is difficult for competitors to imitate. It also extends the Entrepreneurial Orientation Theory by showing that entrepreneurial marketing is not just about innovativeness and proactiveness, but fundamentally about translating those initiatives into tangible customer value, which is the ultimate driver of performance.

## 5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial marketing orientation on small business performance in Delta State, focusing on three dimensions: innovativeness, proactiveness and value creation. Based on data collected from 328 small business owners/managers across the three senatorial districts of Delta State and analyzed using multiple linear regression, the study concludes that innovativeness has a positive and significant effect on small business performance in Delta State. Small businesses that embrace creativity, new product development and digital marketing tools achieve higher sales growth and profitability. Proactiveness has a positive and significant effect on small business performance. Firms that anticipate market needs and act ahead of competitors secure first-mover advantage and enhance market share. Value creation has the strongest positive and significant effect on small business performance. Superior value delivery through quality, fair pricing and excellent service is the most critical driver of customer satisfaction, loyalty and profitability.

### 5.2 Recommendations

**Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:**

On Innovativeness: Small business owners in Delta State should invest in continuous innovation by adopting low-cost digital marketing tools (WhatsApp Business, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), creative product packaging and regular product improvement. Government and DELSMEDA should organize periodic innovation training and provide innovation grants to small businesses.

On Proactiveness: Small business owners should develop market intelligence systems to continuously scan the environment for emerging opportunities in both oil and non-oil sectors of

Delta State. They should be proactive rather than reactive by conducting regular customer feedback surveys and competitor analysis to anticipate future needs.

On Value Creation: As value creation emerged as the strongest predictor, small business owners should prioritize customer-centric strategies. This includes ensuring consistent product quality, fair pricing, excellent after-sales service, and personalized customer experiences to build loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth referrals. Government and Policy Support: The Delta State Government through DELSMEDA and SMEDAN should create enabling environment by improving infrastructure, providing access to affordable finance and organizing entrepreneurial marketing capacity building programs to enhance small business competitiveness.

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