

Effects of Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity on Sustainable Competitive Advantage: A Survey of Small and Medium-Size Enterprises in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the effects of strategic marketing ambidexterity on sustainable competitive advantage of small and medium-sized enterprises in Delta State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design and a purposive sampling technique were used in the study. Data were collected from 212 managers and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises using a structured questionnaire. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed through the utilisation of internal consistency reliability method. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were used as methods of data analysis. Findings showed that the dimensions of strategic marketing ambidexterity such as marketing exploration, marketing exploitation, and absorptive capacity have significant positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage. It was concluded that strategic marketing ambidexterity has a significant positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage. It was recommended amongst others that SMEs should strive to balance both exploratory and exploitative marketing activities. Allocate resources and efforts to both marketing exploration and marketing exploitation. This involves actively seeking new market opportunities while also optimizing and leveraging existing marketing strategies.

Keywords: *Absorptive Capacity, Marketing Exploration, Marketing Exploitation, Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity*

1. Introduction

In order to thrive in the contemporary and dynamic business landscape, it is imperative for small and medium-sized enterprises to not only utilise established marketing knowledge and techniques, but also explore novel approaches. The integration of ambidexterity is imperative for the marketing operations of a company. The global community has observed significant economic closures, financial crises in various nations, cessation of production, limitations on mobility, a considerable number of fatalities, millions of

individuals losing their jobs, and unprecedented hardship for developing countries that have been ravaged by conflicts, civil unrest, food insecurity, illness, and those that are excessively dependent on crude oil as a source of national income. Additionally, there have been forecasts of a famine of monumental proportions (World Health Organisation, 2020). During the current period of significant unpredictability, it is imperative to explore strategies for humanity and commerce to effectively manage and adjust to this novel circumstance in order to survive (Onamusi, 2021). Should the current state of affairs persist with countries adhering to government-imposed shutdown measures, it is highly probable that millions of individuals and businesses will face the dire consequences of starvation and mortality (Soludo, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2020). SMEs encounter a heightened challenge as they tend to prioritise business survival over business model innovation (BMI) (Kesting&Günzel-Jensen, 2015). The task of achieving economic effectiveness by exploiting the current business model (BM) is a significant undertaking, as noted by Anwar (2018). Kesting and Günzel-Jensen (2015) opined that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may focus on addressing existing challenges in implementing business models, which could lead to overlooking new opportunities. In the current era, where the life cycles of business models are becoming shorter (Lindgardt, et al. 2012), it is imperative to exhibit innovativeness and flexibility in response to evolving circumstances in order to ensure sustained viability. Consequently, there arises a necessity to utilise current business models while also exploring novel ones that can conform to the ever-evolving requirements and expectations, in order to establish a viable organisation that can achieve long-term prosperity while operating effectively in the realms of finance, society, and ecology.

In order to effectively participate in the modern and dynamic marketplace, it is imperative for enterprises to not only utilise their current business knowledge and procedures, but also actively pursue novel ones. This necessitates the integration of ambidexterity into marketing endeavours, as stated by Day (2011). By engaging in both exploitation and exploration strategies throughout their marketing endeavours, companies can effectively detect and capitalise on market opportunities, thereby enhancing their chances of long-term viability. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in the demand patterns for goods and services across various industries, thereby exposing vulnerabilities in the global supply chains and service networks. Concurrently, it is noteworthy how expeditiously numerous businesses have undergone transformation, leading to significant advancements in transparency, flexibility, and financial gain. The current body of literature pertaining to the correlation between strategic marketing ambidexterity (SMA) and a company's longevity is insufficient. Previous scholarly investigations on ambidexterity have predominantly centred on product innovation strategies, such as the distinction between radical and incremental innovation (Atuahene-Gima, 2005). The ramifications of pursuing ambidexterity in marketing endeavours remain largely unexplored.

In order to attain a competitive edge and ensure the longevity of a firm, significant changes in industry framework, consumer demands, and market circumstances mandate equally significant changes in the strategy of marketing operations. Prominent business owners are expected to redefine the significance of marketing operational procedures within their organisations. This will result in the creation of novel value propositions by exhibiting greater attentiveness towards their ultimate consumers. Such initiatives may encompass product development and customer experience innovation, mass customization, and enhanced environmental sustainability, among other possibilities. Moreover, prior research failed to adequately define Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), and a dearth of conceptual precision poses difficulties in cross-study comparisons. Research has demonstrated that the correlation between marketing exploitation and exploration and enterprise performance or survival can be either positive or negative (Ho & Lu, 2015; Vorhies, et al. 2011). This suggests that the relationship between SMA and enterprise survival is contingent upon marketing processes, and that the inconsistent findings may be attributed to the exclusion of such moderators. The available literature suggests that the utilisation of knowledge plays a crucial role in both

exploration and exploitation, as stated by Levinthal and March (1993) and March (1991). The advantages of pursuing SMA may depend on a firm's ability to effectively utilise both internal and external knowledge, as highlighted by Kozlenkova et al. (2014). The primary hypothesis posited is that the correlation between SMA and a firm's survival is contingent upon the firm's absorptive capacity (AC), which pertains to its capacity to assimilate and integrate both exploitative and explorative activities.

The concept of absorptive capacity is focused on the integration of both internal and external knowledge, as posited by Rothaermel and Alexandre (2008). Consequently, the implementation of AC may play a crucial role in resolving the dilemma of prioritising either internal exploitation or external exploration. In addition, organisations that possess favourable absorptive capacity are inclined towards recognising nascent market prospects and exhibiting assertiveness in capitalising on them through internal and external exploration of market-oriented information (Vorhies et al., 2011). In order to navigate the complex and ever-changing marketplaces of today, enterprises are required to make swift adaptations to market fluctuations while simultaneously upholding consistency in their pricing, branding, and marketing endeavours (Day, 2011). In a scenario where all other variables are held constant, companies that prioritise strategic market adaptation (SMA) have the potential to outperform firms that concentrate solely on marketing exploitation or exploration. The concept of exploitation aims to enhance the efficiency and efficacy of current marketing endeavours, while exploration endeavours to experiment with innovative marketing strategies (Josephson et al., 2016; Vorhies et al., 2011). Organisations that pursue both these approaches can mitigate the risks associated with a unilateral focus (Mizik & Jacobson, 2003). The present study seeks to investigate the impact of strategic marketing ambidexterity on the sustainable competitive advantage of companies operating in the dynamic Nigerian marketplace.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have emerged as a novel reality for numerous nations, businesses, and governments across the globe. Given the limited freedom afforded by the pandemic and other external environmental factors, businesses must possess the capacity to adapt to these conditions in order to ensure their continued viability. Failure to do so may result in their demise. In order to meet the demands of customers while operating within the constraints imposed by the pandemic, it is imperative for a company to possess marketing exploration, marketing exploitation, and absorptive capacity. These capabilities enable the company to enhance its ability to engage with customers in a timely manner and implement its adaptive capabilities strategy for the purpose of survival. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed significant limitations and poses a potential threat to businesses, it also presents an opportunity for local enterprises to capitalise on current commercial prospects and enhance productivity. Organisations that possess strategic marketing ambidexterity may have the ability to withstand economic turbulence in a cost-effective manner.

The ability to be ambidextrous presents a distinct opportunity for organisations to integrate exploitative and explorative capabilities, which can enhance their likelihood of enduring turbulent circumstances. Marketers encounter a dilemma whereby they must maintain their existing business while simultaneously exploring novel opportunities. The decision-making process is hindered by the dilemma of choosing between the pursuit of exploitation or exploration, as well as the challenge of unifying and innovating. Consequently, implementing an appropriate strategy can prove to be challenging. Organisations are expected to undertake operational and supply chain restructuring measures to safeguard against a wider range of potential shocks that may be more severe in nature. The company will promptly undertake measures to reorganise their worldwide asset portfolio and supplier composition. Marketing managers are currently contemplating strategies to sustain their performance levels through the utilisation of marketing exploitation, exploration, and absorptive capacity.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the effect of strategic marketing ambidexterity on sustainable competitive advantage of small and medium enterprises in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the effect of marketing exploitation on sustainable competitive advantage.
- ii. Evaluate the effect of marketing exploration on sustainable competitive advantage.
- iii. Ascertain the effect of absorptive capacity on sustainable competitive advantage.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity

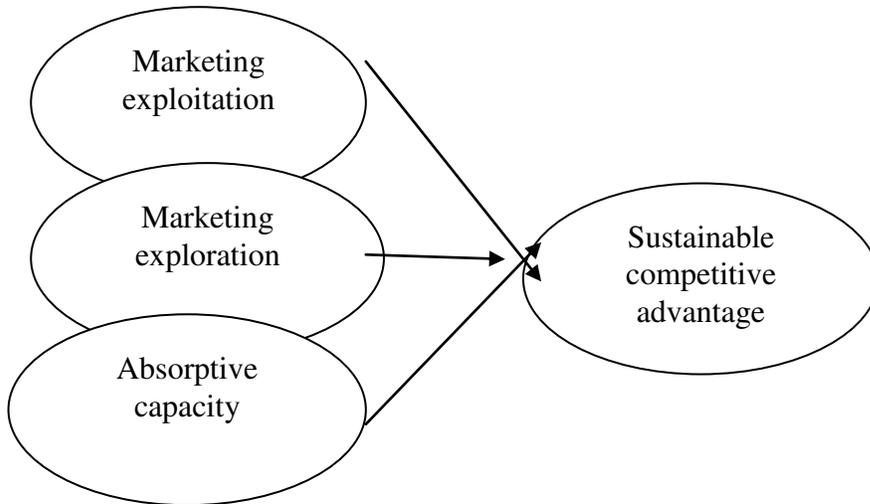
The concept of marketing ambidexterity (MA) was first introduced as a means of achieving strategic marketing ambidexterity, which involves the coordination of exploitation and exploration in strategic marketing activities. This coordination is viewed from the perspectives of advertising (exploitation) and research and development (exploration) (Josephson, et al., 2016). The concept of Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity (SMA) pertains to the simultaneous utilisation of a company's current competencies and exploration of potential capabilities in strategic marketing endeavours. This approach is considered a dynamic capability that plays a crucial role in achieving superior performance. The aforementioned notion is founded upon a restricted comprehension of marketing that disregards crucial marketing endeavours such as segmentation, pricing strategies, and customer relationship management. The fundamental conceptual contrast between exploitation and exploration lies in the fact that exploitation entails the utilisation of existing knowledge, as opposed to the pursuit of novel knowledge (Levinthal & March, 1993; March, 1991). According to Mudambi and Swift's (2014) research, both advertising and research and development (R&D) can fall under the categories of exploratory or exploitative. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to solely associate exploitation with advertising and exploration with R&D based on theoretical considerations. The examination of the interplay between exploitation and exploration has been a focal point in numerous investigations exploring the combined effects of marketing exploitation and exploration on organisational performance (Ho & Lu, 2015; Vorhies, et al. 2011).

This perspective posits that companies could enhance their performance by expanding either their exploitation or exploration, despite the inherent tension between these two divergent marketing strategies. The concept of marketing exploitation is rooted in the collective market-oriented expertise and familiarity of a company, while marketing exploration is focused on novel market-based knowledge that is distinct from the existing knowledge repository of the organisation (Ho & Ganesan, 2013). Hillbun et al. (2020) asserted that SMA refers to a company's equitable and mutually reinforcing focus on both exploration and exploitation in various marketing endeavours, including but not limited to product development, advertising, customer targeting, pricing, market segmentation, and customer service. In general, an elevated level of SMA signifies a transition in a company's marketing operations from a one-sided approach to a two-sided approach, wherein marketing managers allocate comparable resources and attention to both exploitation and exploration endeavours. According to O'Reilly and Tushman's (2008, 2011) assertions, ambidexterity is a dynamic capability that requires the concurrent implementation of operational strategies that are related to the sensing and seizing of market opportunities, which arise from changing market conditions and technologies, as well as the sustained renewal of resources. The attributes in question are deemed to be unique and not subject to exchange, as they are grounded in implicit knowledge and the synchronisation of operational tactics, thereby enabling firms to attain a competitive edge (Teece, 2014; Wilden, et al. 2016).

Smith and Tushman (2005) emphasised the significance of the challenge faced by firms in their endeavour to achieve ambidexterity. They have put forth a theoretical perspective that underscores the importance of reconciling the contradictions that arise due to the simultaneous pursuit of exploitation and exploration, such

as short-term performance versus long-term adaptability, and efficiency versus flexibility. This integration is critical to ensuring consistent performance. Research on ambidexterity at the organisational level suggests that a well-rounded approach to key value-creation activities, involving both exploitation and exploration, can prevent organisations from experiencing the negative consequences of an unbalanced emphasis (He & Wong, 2004; Kristal, et al. 2010; Rothaermel&Alexandre, 2008). To be more precise, if a company's focus on exploiting existing resources exceeds its efforts to explore new opportunities, it runs the risk of becoming obsolete. Cao et al. (2009) opined that the rapid advancements in technology and market may render current competencies outdated, resulting in significant inflexibility that hinders the organization's capacity to acquire new skills and knowledge. Organisations that prioritise exploration at the expense of exploitation may face the risk of underestimating the financial gains derived from expensive search and experimentation endeavours. Atuahene-Gima (2005) asserted that a corporation that excessively prioritises exploration may incur the expenses of discovery without fully realising its advantages. This is due to the corporation's tendency to generate numerous novel and risky concepts while neglecting the enhancement of its existing competencies. According to Lavie and Rosenkopf (2006) and Mizik and Jacobson (2003), a company can achieve greater efficiency through exploitation and increased adaptability through exploration by adopting an ambidextrous approach. This approach allows the company to avoid the drawbacks of a dominant emphasis. Organisations may potentially mitigate the adverse consequences associated with conducting innovative marketing initiatives that prove to be unsuccessful, as suggested by Mani and Chouk (2018). Amazon has strategically developed its supplier networks for branded goods and expanded its private-label business across various product categories, demonstrating a balance between exploration and exploitation. Howland (2017) asserted that this measure serves to alleviate the potential consequences of any shortcomings in the organization's recent foray into private-label merchandise. Firms that possess ambidexterity can enhance their marketing performance by exploiting their current marketing initiatives and exploring emerging market opportunities, thereby maximizing their profits. The phenomenon of marketing managers getting stuck in the "competency trap" is a well-documented issue in the literature. This refers to the tendency of managers to focus on existing competencies and allocate resources towards their development, while neglecting the potential benefits of conducting research. In order to avoid this trap, it is essential for managers to adopt a dual focus approach, as highlighted by Michael and Palandjian (2004) and Vorhies et al. (2011). Nike has been exploring novel approaches to enhance its social media visibility and brand recognition, while also leveraging its extensive experience and knowledge in mass media advertising to create innovative and captivating advertising campaigns. Nguyen et al. (2018) stated that companies can enhance their ability to elicit positive reactions from both current and prospective customers by engaging in marketing activities that balance managerial attention and effort between exploitation and exploration, thereby enabling the development of a comprehensive marketing portfolio. Strategic marketing ambidexterity refers to the capability of an organization to simultaneously engage in both exploratory and exploitative marketing activities. It involves balancing efforts to explore new opportunities and innovate with efforts to exploit existing resources and maximize current market positions. Strategic marketing ambidexterity is a response to the challenges posed by a rapidly changing business environment where organizations must both adapt to emerging trends and leverage their existing strengths.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework
Dimensions of Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity



Source: Researchers Model

2.2 Marketing Exploitation (MET) and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Marketing exploitation refers to the degree to which companies endeavour to enhance their competencies and strategies in fundamental marketing pursuits such as product excellence, customer service, advertising, market segmentation, and pricing. The term "exploitation" has been defined in various ways within the literature. The process of exploitation encompassed refinement, selection, production, efficiency, implementation, and execution, as noted by Lavie et al. (2010). Kyriakopoulos and Moorman's (2004) perspective, exploitation involves enhancing and perfecting current methods in tandem with established marketing tactics, such as prevailing market segments, positioning, distribution, and other elements of the marketing mix. Exploitation refers to the strategic utilisation of explicit knowledge bases to enhance an organization's existing capabilities, including the internalisation and integration of said knowledge bases. The objective of exploitation is to modify the current technology to suit the current environmental circumstances and cater to the requirements of the current clientele, as stated by Lubatkin et al. (2006). Vorhies et al. (2011) asserted that marketing exploitation pertains to the enhancement of novel capabilities that are associated with the firm's current markets, products, and competencies. Judge and Blocker (2008) added that marketing exploitation is a multifaceted procedure that encompasses the creation, distribution, and adaptation to market potential, as well as the cultivation of connections with clients, intermediaries, and vendors, with the aim of meeting customer needs and providing them with value. Jansen et al. (2006) stated that the practise of marketing exploitation involves leveraging and enhancing pre-existing knowledge, abilities, procedures, and establishments. The utilisation of incremental knowledge in marketing exploitation is a suitable approach for companies seeking to gradually enhance their marketing procedures. By restructuring existing processes, exploitation operations can effectively meet the current needs of clients while prioritising efficiency. The utilisation of a company's pre-existing knowledge base and organisational procedures in marketing exploitation enables companies to carry out marketing campaigns with greater efficiency and speed, leading to enhanced consumer satisfaction and an increase in repeat purchases (Kim & Atuhaene-Gima, 2010; Zhang et al. 2015). Moreover, the utilisation of marketing exploitation enables enterprises to promptly address competitive challenges owing to its heightened efficacy. Marketing exploitation refers to the strategic utilization and optimization of existing marketing resources, capabilities, and market positions to maximize the value derived from current customer relationships, market segments, and products/services. It involves leveraging established strengths, refining marketing strategies, and extracting the most value from current

marketing efforts. Marketing exploitation includes strategies to maintain and strengthen competitive positioning within the market. It involves monitoring competitor activities, understanding market dynamics, and differentiating the organization's offerings based on unique value propositions and competitive advantages. By effectively positioning themselves in the market, organizations can protect and enhance their market share. Thus, the hypothesis that was formulated indicated that:

H1a: Marketing exploitation has significant positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage.

2.3 Marketing Exploration (MER) and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Marketing exploration pertains to the quest and endeavour to acquire novel knowledge and competencies beyond the present product market of the organisation. The process of exploration encompassed various elements such as search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, adaptability, discovery, and innovation, as stated by Lavie et al. (2010). Exploration refers to the iterative process of evaluating and improving existing methods for engaging with the market, including innovative approaches to segmentation, positioning, product development, channel selection, and other elements of the marketing mix. Kyriakopoulos and Moorman (2004) asserted that the process of exploration requires the establishment of novel capabilities and the formulation of innovative marketing strategies. The fundamental purpose of exploration is to identify concealed environmental patterns and create novel markets, as posited by Lubatkin et al. (2006). Lavie et al. (2010) asserted that marketing exploration entails the development of novel competencies that surpass the existing knowledge on markets, products, technology, and capabilities. The act of exploration has been associated with various concepts such as innovation, improvisation, capability-building, autonomy, and chaos, and has been observed to facilitate the advancement of developing markets and technologies in a range of research contexts (Kathuria, 2012). Marketing exploration encourages organisations to search for potential customer needs, such as new markets or segments, and devise innovative solutions to address them. This is achieved by placing emphasis on creativity and risk-taking, as highlighted by Zhang et al. (2015). Organisations are compelled to expand their existing knowledge base and established practises to provide novel advantages and value to their clientele, thereby facilitating the development of innovative marketing strategies (Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang, et al. 2017). The objective of marketing research is to incorporate novel marketing tactics and establish inventive marketing methodologies to enable businesses to produce and promote suitable products in the contemporary market. The undertaking necessitates the creation of novel marketing materials and the restructuring of extant marketing materials, as posited by Vorhies and colleagues (2011). Marketing exploration refers to the proactive pursuit of new marketing opportunities, innovative strategies, and untapped markets or customer segments. It involves seeking out uncharted territory, experimenting with new ideas, and identifying potential areas for growth and differentiation. Marketing exploration is essential for organizations to stay ahead in a rapidly changing business environment. Marketing exploration is an ongoing process that requires continuous monitoring of market trends, customer feedback, and competitor activities. This enables organizations to adapt their strategies and tactics as needed to stay relevant and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Thus, the hypothesis that was formulated indicated that:

H2a: Marketing exploration has significant positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage.

2.4 Absorptive Capacity (AC) and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The concept of absorptive capacity pertains to the capacity of a business organisation to effectively identify and appreciate the potential value of novel information, integrate it into its existing knowledge base, and utilise it to achieve commercial objectives. Day (2011) asserted that market-based information is typically not documented and is concealed within a firm's network of alliances. Collaborative alliances, as an example, offer opportunities for enterprises to acquire novel concepts, specialised knowledge, and potential prospects

(Mahmood, et al. 2011). The analysis and revision of a firm's marketing activities, as well as the development of optimal production and distribution strategies, may be facilitated through the acquisition of information from suppliers (Ho & Lu, 2015; Flynn et al., 2010). Mishra and Shah (2009) asserted that customers offer their evaluations regarding design and manufacturing concerns, which enables vendors to be more adaptable to evolving customer requirements (Angulo-Ruiz, et al. 2014; Chang & Taylor, 2016). In order to effectively utilise the knowledge present in the external environment, organisations must possess a robust learning orientation and well-developed learning capabilities. The centrality of market-based learning in the realms of marketing exploitation and exploration (Kim & Atuhaene-Gima, 2010) implies that the association between MA and firm survival is susceptible to the impact of the organisational processes that form the foundation of a firm's learning capabilities. Hillbun et al. (2020) added that the mediator that holds the most theoretical significance for the connection between absorptive capacity (AC) and firm-level outcomes is the absorptive capacity at the firm level. Numerous empirical studies have verified the significance of AC in fostering creativity, facilitating organisational adaptation, and promoting effective collaborations (Zou, et al. 2018). While the majority of prior studies have concentrated on the application of absorptive capacity (AC) within the realm of research and development (R&D), Xiong and Bharadwaj's (2011) marketing investigation demonstrates its potential for facilitating the transfer of market-based knowledge into tangible business benefits.

Wilden and Gudergan (2015) posited that the field of marketing analytics involves utilising market-based knowledge to enhance and restructure marketing strategies. The extent to which Marketing Analytics (MA) contributes to improved firm performance is contingent upon the capacity of businesses to acquire, assimilate, and apply knowledge for devising marketing strategies and developing marketing initiatives, which are capabilities associated with the Absorptive Capacity (AC) of firms (Zahra & George, 2002). Lewin et al. (2011) opined that the scope of AC extends beyond external factors and encompasses techniques for introspective learning that facilitate individuals in expressing, systematising, and disseminating their internal knowledge and personal experiences. Lewin et al. (2011) opined that the concept of AC encompasses both external and internal meta procedures, with a specific emphasis on the micro-foundations. Hillbun et al. (2020) posited that the internal meta routines are responsible for regulating the range, choice, and duplication of knowledge-related tasks within an organisation, while external meta routines facilitate the identification, assessment, and procurement of information from external sources. Consequently, a significant measure of AC indicates that these enterprises possess the ability to manage the interdependence and harmonisation of both internal and external operations. Hillbun et al. (2020) asserted that the implementation of AC is crucial in leveraging market-based insights obtained from MA to improve overall firm performance. Organisations exhibiting higher levels of absorptive capacity possess the ability to not only recognise nascent opportunities, but also exhibit a proclivity towards taking decisive action by amalgamating both novel and pre-existing knowledge (Jansen, et al. 2006). Kostopoulou et al. (2011) asserted that firms that allocate resources towards the assimilation and utilisation of novel external knowledge are better positioned to capitalise on dynamic environmental conditions by creating innovative products and catering to the demands of nascent markets. The process of formulating a novel schema involves the utilisation of AC's knowledge integration mechanism, which identifies and links distinct and particular sources of evidence, including those derived from exploitation and exploration (Zahra & George, 2002). De Luca and Atuahene-Gima (2007) assert that AC plays a crucial role in converting extensive, profound, and implicit market knowledge into effective marketing strategies.

Ambidextrous endeavours can lead to conflicts between newly acquired and existing information in businesses. However, AC can be utilised to address these incompatibilities and contradictions, as suggested by Fernhaber and Patel (2012). Zahra and George (2002) posit that the implementation of both formal and informal integration techniques within the context of AC can facilitate the establishment of shared

understandings and collaborative relationships among organisational members, thereby mitigating potential conflicts. Mom et al. (2009) asserted that the utilisation of AC can assist managers in effectively managing conflicting objectives, engaging in multitasking, and facilitating communication and integration of varied knowledge domains. The implementation of effective managerial strategies is imperative for businesses to attain favourable MA results. In brief, an organization characterised by high levels of absorptive capacity (AC) has the potential to enhance the utilisation of knowledge in marketing exploration/exploitation, as well as to foster innovative knowledge linkages between these two dimensions of activity. This can lead to a mutually beneficial amalgamation of knowledge for competitive purposes, as posited by Hillbun et al. (2020). Organisations are expected to enhance their resilience against insolvency and adopt a more sustainable approach in their pursuit of Social Media Analytics (SMA). By developing and leveraging absorptive capacity, organizations can better adapt to changes in their external environment, enhance their innovation capabilities, and achieve a competitive advantage. It enables them to stay responsive, learn from external sources, and effectively apply knowledge to drive growth and success. Thus, the hypothesis that was formulated suggest that:

H3a: Absorptive capacity has significant positive effect on sustainable competitive advantage.

3. Theoretical Review

3.1 Adaptive Theory

Adaptive theory refers to a set of principles and concepts that explain how organisms or systems adapt and evolve in response to changes in their environment. Adaptive theory posits that marketing ambidexterity is underpinned by two fundamental needs. According to March (2006), in order to outperform its competitors, a company must possess the ability to consistently replicate success and the associated attributes. Additionally, the company must foster diversity by creating opportunities for the exploration of novel options. The resemblances between exploitation and exploration are noteworthy. Exploitation involves enhancing and reutilizing established practises and abilities to overcome challenges, resulting in standardised, consistent, and foreseeable outcomes. On the other hand, exploration involves implementing inventive, fresh, and unforeseen measures. The aforementioned statement reflects the tension between exploration and exploitation, as firms tend to favour the latter due to its predictable and immediate benefits, while the former yields more distant, uncertain, and unforeseeable returns (March, 1991). Adaptive theory provides a framework for understanding how organisms or systems respond and evolve in dynamic environments. It highlights the importance of adaptation, variation, selection, feedback, and context in shaping the characteristics and behaviors of living organisms or complex systems.

4. Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. The rationale behind the utilisation of a cross-sectional survey research design is that it facilitates the evaluation of the viewpoint of the participant and the gathering of information through a questionnaire at a specific moment in time. The focal group comprises of small and medium-sized enterprises across diverse sectors within Delta State. The study employed the purposive sampling technique. The utilisation of this method was predicated on the notion that the investigators possess the requisite expertise and understanding of the population and its constituents to choose the participants. The sample predominantly comprises of small and medium-sized enterprises that engage in market competition. Due to the dispersed nature of the consumer base of these enterprises in Delta State, they are confronted with a volatile market environment, necessitating the adoption of adaptive marketing strategies for their survival and to sustain competitive advantage. Consequently, the conceptual framework is well-suited for such enterprises. Each respondent was furnished with a summary of the survey. A reminder letter was dispatched to the participants after a lapse of three weeks, which was followed by a

subsequent phone call. A structured questionnaire was utilised as the research instrument to gather data from 212 managers and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises in Warri and Ughelli Metropolises of Delta State. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed through the utilisation of internal consistency reliability method. Internal consistency reliability is a measure of the consistency or stability of responses within a measurement instrument or scale. It assesses the extent to which the items or questions in a measure are measuring the same underlying construct or attribute. Reliability of the items representing each concept was evaluated by employing the Cronbach alpha index to measure the internal consistency. All the items exhibited favourable reliability scores as indicated by the alpha coefficient values (MET= 0.732, MER= 0.722, AC=0.719, and FS= 0.721) exceeding the threshold of 0.6. Malhotra's (2004) suggested minimum value for Cronbach's alpha was surpassed. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were employed to analyze the data collected for the study. The correlation coefficient was employed to determine the degree of association between the variables. The study utilised multiple regression analysis to assess the degree to which the independent variables contributed to variations in the dependent variable, as well as to test the proposed hypotheses.

5 Results of Data Analyses

Table 1 Inter-Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	M	SD	N
1. Marketing exploitation	1				17.63	2.10	210
2. Marketing exploration	.730**	1			17.62	1.67	210
3. Absorptive capacity	.591**	.732**	1		17.95	1.68	210
4. Sustainable competitive advantage	.814**	.890**	.758**	1	17.21	1.98	210

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

Table 1 showed that marketing exploitation(r = 0.814), marketing exploration (r = 0.890) and absorptive capacity has strong positive correlation coefficients with sustainable competitive advantage (r = 0.758).

Table 2: Strategic Marketing Ambidexterity and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.978	.579		-5.141	.000
	Marketing exploitation	.312	.035	.330	8.800	.000
	Marketing exploration	.605	.053	.510	11.495	.000
	Absorptive capacity	.224	.045	.189	5.027	.000
Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage						

Table 2 showed the multiple regression analysis result for strategic marketing ambidexterity and sustainable competitive advantage. The prediction of sustainable competitive advantage using the statistical model is: $SCA = -2.978 + 0.312 \times MET + 0.605 \times MER + 0.224 \times AC$

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	712.407	3	237.469	445.573	.000 ^b
	Residual	109.788	206	.533		
	Total	822.195	209			
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable competitive advantage						
b. Predictors: (Constant), marketing exploitation, marketing exploration, absorptive capacity						

The *F*-ratio in table 3 indicated that the dimensions of strategic marketing ambidexterity statistically significantly predict sustainable competitive advantage, $F = 445.573$, $0.000 < .05$. This implies that the regression model is a good fit of the data and it is significant.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.931 ^a	.866	.865	.7300
a. Predictors: (Constant), marketing exploitation, marketing exploration, absorptive capacity				

Table 4 showed that 86.5% (0.865) of the change in sustainable competitive advantage was brought about by the dimensions of strategic marketing ambidexterity.

6Discussion of Findings

In total, 210 appropriate responses were collected from participants (a 99% response rate). The respondents had been with their companies, on average, for ten years, and were deeply invested in and knowledgeable about the issues posed in the study.

According to the findings presented in Table 1, there was a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.814$) between marketing exploitation and sustainable competitive advantage of firms. The study revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.890$) between marketing exploration and sustainable competitive advantage. The findings indicate a significant and positive correlation ($r = 0.758$) between absorptive capacity and sustainable competitive advantage of firms.

According to the findings presented in Table 2, it can be inferred that the utilisation of marketing exploitation has a statistically significant positive impact on sustainable competitive advantage of firms ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.05$). The results of the H1a test indicate that marketing exploitation has a statistically significant and positive impact on sustainable competitive advantage of firms, as evidenced by the *p*-value of 0.000, which is less than the predetermined *p*-value of 0.05. The outcome is consistent with the claim made by Lubatkinet al. (2006) that the objective of exploitation is to modify current technology to suit present environmental

circumstances and cater to the requirements of current customers. The study also indicates that marketing exploitation, which involves optimizing and leveraging existing marketing resources, capabilities, and market positions, contributes to sustainable competitive advantage. By maximizing market share, improving operational efficiency, and enhancing product offerings, organizations can effectively exploit their current marketing efforts to gain a competitive edge.

The results indicate that marketing exploration has a favourable effect on sustainable competitive advantage of companies ($\beta = 0.510$, $p < 0.05$). According to the H2a test result, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant and positive effect of marketing exploration on the sustainable competitive advantage of firms, as evidenced by the p-value of 0.000, which is less than the standard significant level of 0.05. The findings of Lubatkinet al (2006) were corroborated by the outcome, which suggests that exploration is essentially intended to address covert environmental patterns by creating novel markets. The study found that higher levels of marketing exploration are associated with a greater sustainable competitive advantage. This suggests that organizations that actively explore new avenues and stay ahead of market trends are more likely to achieve long-term competitive success.

The results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between absorptive capacity and sustainable competitive advantage of firms ($\beta = 0.189$, $p < 0.05$). According to the H3a test result, there exists a statistically significant and positive relationship between absorptive capacity and sustainable competitive advantage of firms. This is evidenced by the fact that the p-value of the test (0.000) is less than the commonly accepted threshold of statistical significance (0.05). The findings of the study are in line with Fernhaber and Patel's (2012) research, which suggests that absorptive capacity can aid firms in reconciling perceived inconsistencies and contradictions between pre-existing and newly acquired information stemming from ambidextrous activities. Organisations that exhibit a high degree of absorptive capacity possess the ability to not only recognise emerging market opportunities, but also demonstrate proactive behaviour in leveraging their existing and newly acquired knowledge to capitalise on these opportunities. The study highlights the importance of absorptive capacity in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Absorptive capacity refers to the organization's ability to identify, assimilate, and apply external knowledge, information, and resources. By effectively acquiring and integrating external knowledge, organizations can enhance their learning capabilities, innovate, and adapt to changing market conditions, ultimately leading to a sustainable competitive advantage. The study's results indicate that strategic marketing ambidexterity can be adequately measured by marketing exploration, marketing exploitation, and absorptive capacity, which were all found to have a positive and significant impact on firm's sustainable competitive advantage.

7 Conclusion

According to the research, a great deal of the transformation in sustainable competitive advantage, specifically 87%, can be attributed to the various aspects of strategic marketing ambidexterity. This statement suggests that strategic marketing ambidexterity can be effectively evaluated through the metrics of marketing exploitation, marketing exploration, and absorptive capacity. The study arrived at a conclusion that the implementation of strategic marketing ambidexterity has a noteworthy and favourable impact on the survival of firms operating in Nigeria's dynamic market. By adopting strategic marketing ambidexterity, organizations can effectively balance innovation and efficiency, enabling them to seize new opportunities while leveraging their existing strengths. It allows them to stay competitive in dynamic markets and drive sustainable growth.

8 Recommendations

- SMEs should strive to balance both exploratory and exploitative marketing activities. Allocate resources and efforts to both marketing exploration and marketing exploitation. This involves actively seeking new market opportunities while also optimizing and leveraging existing marketing strategies.
- SMEs should encourage a culture of innovation within the organization. Promote creativity, idea generation, and experimentation among employees. Create channels for sharing and implementing new ideas that can lead to differentiation and competitive advantage.
- Firms should develop the ability to acquire, assimilate, and apply external knowledge and resources. Stay open to learning from industry experts, attending conferences, and engaging in collaborations. Cultivate relationships with research institutions or experts who can provide valuable insights.

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