

## **APPRAISAL OF THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF MARKETING RESEARCH BY SMEs IN NIGERIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

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*Practical application of marketing research is an indispensable part of marketing activity for small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. However, commitment to practical application of marketing research by SMEs in Nigeria is very low. The objectives of the study is to determine the extent of the practical application of marketing researches by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria; and to find out the relationship between marketing research and SMEs in Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were obtained. Frequency and percentage; and five point Likert type of scale were used to analysed data. The finding shows that to a little extent, marketing research are being conducted by SMEs in Nigeria and that there is significant relationship between marketing research and SMEs. It has been suggested that marketing researchers among SMEs in Nigeria go beyond mere fact findings to practical application of marketing research.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Marketing research comprises one of the most important and fascinating facets of marketing. The development of effective marketing strategies is based upon an understanding of the consumer and his or her behaviour. However, understanding the consumer can be achieved through marketing research. According to Curry (2007), marketers who fail to conduct a thorough and comprehensive marketing research run the risk of not achieving their marketing objectives. At one time, businesses were small, customers were few, and markets were mostly local; suppliers and customers were in almost daily, close personal contact; bargaining was done face – to – face; the market place was the hub of economic and social life (Sunny, 2003). Businesses were run not by corporate executives but by people who were similar to those whose custom they sought to attract. They shared the same culture and communications was direct and resonate with cultural values.

With large-scale industrialization and vastly improved methods of transport and communication, entrepreneurs looked further afield for customers to buy their products. Today, technologies are dispersed over the world; new centres of production have been set up for motor cars, electronic equipment, and many other products that were once viewed as the prerogative of the Western developed countries (Paul, 2005). Inevitably, the gap between producer and final consumer has widened: some firms were in danger of

losing touch with the actual needs of their customers. Without valid and reliable information, management decision making would soon degenerate into some crazy game of chance (Rose Land, 2001). Hence, a systematic approach to the task of management is increasingly important in today's complex environment in deciding a company's policy and day-to-day operations. This is possible only applying the systematic approach of research methodology.

Marketing research traces its origins in the United States to 1911 when Charles C. Parlin was appointed as manager of the Commercial Research Division of the Curtis Publishing Company (Bartels, 1962). Much of the early research represented little more than testimonials received by writing purchasers of the firm's products. Research become more sophisticated during the decade of the 1930s, but mistakes were still made. The Literary Digest conducted a major national study of 10,000 households selected at random from lists of telephone numbers and reported that Alf Landon and not Franklin D. Roosevelt would be elected president. The fiasco resulted from a failure to realize that many voters (apparently most of whom were democrats) did not have a telephone in 1936 (Bartels, 1962).

The development of statistical techniques during the 1930s led to further refinements in sampling procedures and improved accuracy in research findings. By 1973 the American Marketing Association reported that 81 percent of the nation's leading manufacturing firms had established formal marketing research departments (Twedt, 1973). Today, several organisations in Nigeria are engaged in marketing research.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are vital part of the Nigerian economy. They account for a very great percentage of the nation's businesses and are dominant in almost every sector of the economy (Galadima, 2004). They contribute to the economic growth of Nigeria as an important source of innovations and new jobs. The failure of large scale import – dependent enterprises to propel Nigeria into a satisfactory course of industrialization necessitated the diversification of strategy by the Federal Government of Nigeria, to embrace the promotion of small and medium enterprises (Ekezie, 1995). Onwumere (2000) said, no other development strategy has enjoyed as much prominence in Nigeria's development plans as the small and medium scale enterprises development strategy. Thus, in specific term, the research intends to appraise the practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Commitment to practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria is very low. When we talk of marketing research in Nigeria, fingers are always pointed at big organisations and multi-national establishment. Small and medium enterprises in Nigeria fail to understand that marketing research is all embracing and organisation wide. Many times, though, they (SMEs) make decisions with limited information and with inadequate facts.

The view of many small and medium enterprises is that marketing research is not necessary. Consequently, they have a care-free attitude towards marketing research. This view is based on the erroneous assumption that many small and medium enterprises are surviving in Nigeria without marketing research, and that marketing research could be expensive.

Also, small and medium enterprises are facing their toughest competition ever. Unfortunately, many small and medium enterprises cannot compete successfully in today's market place because of failure to a commitment to practical application of marketing research.

Many marketing managers discover that their information problems result from an overabundance (not paucity) of marketing data. Their computer facilities provide them daily with literally a deluge of printouts about sales in different market areas, about different products and customers. The marketing manager solves the crisis of too much information of the wrong kind in the wrong form. The solutions to the problem of obtaining relevant information appear simple by establishing a systematic approach to information management through the installation of a planned marketing research.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this study is to appraise the practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Other objectives are:

1. To determine the extent of the practical application of marketing research by SMEs in Nigeria.
2. To find out the relationship between marketing research and small and medium enterprises in Nigeria.

The research questions therefore, are:

1. What is the extent of the practical application of marketing research by SMEs in Nigeria?
2. What are the relationships between marketing research and SMEs in Nigeria?

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

A study of this kind is significant in many ways. The study centres on the practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. This study is relevant to marketing practitioners and scholars, business organisations, manufacturers, owners and managers of small and medium enterprises as it gives insight to practice application of marketing research. It will assist small and medium enterprises in the application of marketing research. It will spell out the relevance of marketing research on the performance of small and medium enterprises.

Similarly, this inquiry will add to the existing literature on marketing research. The identification of the roles and benefit of practical application of marketing research among other things will surely enrich existing literature especially for SMEs.

Furthermore, marketing practitioners and scholars will find the result of this research very useful as it will enable them come out with practices that will lead to better application of marketing research in our various establishments. In addition, this study will be of valuable assistance to future researchers.

### **THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING RESEARCH**

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2004) the key to winning and keeping target customers is to understanding their needs better than competitors do and to deliver more value. This implies that the company must have an obsession with understanding customer needs and desires; and using that information to deliver satisfaction to the

customer. No where is this more important than in the marketing research responsibilities of the company.

There have been several attempt to define marketing research, and some confusion has been caused by the term “market research” being rather freely used to describe the full range of activities properly covered by marketing research (Gabs, 2007). Although the term market research is now largely used a synonym for marketing research, there is a distinct difference between the scope of the activities they covered. The responsibilities of marketing research, extend comprehensively, whereas market research is limited to finding out information about the market for a particular product (Aduks, 2006).

Marketing, as a specialized function of management, is generally interpreted today as including all those activities concerned with the development, production, and distribution of products to identifiable markets, where they will provide satisfaction to those who buy them. Marketing research is, therefore, far ranging in its enquiries; it covers product development, identifying the market, and suitable methods of selling, distribution, promotion, and sales/service facilities. In fact, it includes, every aspect of business activity from the idea stage to eventual consumer satisfaction. Also, marketing research is by no means restricted to profit-motivated business activities. It has very useful application in, for example, the development of charities, public sector leisure, and cultural services etc.

The wide responsibilities of marketing research are reflected in the definition given years ago by the American Marketing Association: The systematic gathering, recording, and analyzing of data about problems relating to the marketing of goods and services (AMA, 1961).

Kotler and Armstrong (2004) define marketing research as the function that links an organisation to its market through the gathering of information. This information allows for the identification and definition of market driven opportunities and problems. The information allows for the generation, refinement and evaluation of marketing actions. It allows for the monitoring of marketing performance and improved understanding of marketing as a business process.

According to Osuagwu (1999), marketing research can be define as the systematic and objective conceptualization of a marketing problem, and the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of relevant data and information for marketing decision making and problem solving. Marketing research is a systematic process because it has a procedure. The tasks in this process include designing methods for collecting information, managing the information collection process, analyzing and interpreting results, and communicating finding to decision makers. Marketing research is also objective because it lacks bias.

Marketing research providers can be classified as either internal or external, custom or standardized, or brokers or facilitators (Curry, 2008). Internal research providers are normally organizational units that reside within a company. For example, Unilever Plc and PZ plc have internal marketing research department. Glaxo realizes many benefits by keeping the marketing research functions internal; these benefits include research method consistency, shared information across the company, minimized spending on research, and ability to produce actionable research results (Alih, 2007). Other firms choose to use external sources for marketing research. External research

provides, usually referred to as marketing research suppliers, perform all aspects of the research, including study design, questionnaire production, interviewing, data analysis, and report preparation. These firms operate on a fee basis and commonly submit a research proposal to be used by a client for evaluation and decision purposes.

Many companies use external research suppliers because, first, the suppliers can be more objective and less subject to company politics and regulations than internal suppliers. Second, many external suppliers provide specialized talents that, for the same cost, internal supplier could not provide (Curry, 2008). And finally, company can choose external supplier on a study-by-study basis and thus gain greater flexibility in scheduling studies as well as match specific project requirements to the talents of specific research firms.

Marketing research firms can be considered customized or standardised. Customized research firms provide specialized, highly tailored services to the clients. Many firms in this line of business concentrate their research activities in one specific area such as brand-name testing, a new product development, or customer care. For example, Namestormers assists companies in brand – name selection and recognition; Survey Sampling Inc. concentration solely on sampling development for the restaurant industry (Luck, 2008). In contrast, standardized research firms provide more general services. These firms also follow a more common approach in research design so that the results of a study conducted for one client can be compared to norms established by studies done for other clients. Examples of these firms are Burke Market Research, which conducts (among existing and prospective customers) day-after advertising recalls; AC Nielsen, which conducts store audits for a variety of retail firms (Luck, 2008).

Marketing research is useful for marketing planning and decision making that will affect both the consumers and the business firms positively. Within a market planning framework, managers must make critical marketing decisions. These decisions vary dramatically in both focus and complexity. For example, managers must decide which new markets to penetrate, which products to introduce, and which new business opportunities to pursue. Such broad decisions usually require the practical application of marketing research. Regardless of the complexity or focus of the decision making process, managers must have accurate information about customers, competitors, and the market in order to make the right decisions. The entire marketing planning process is a series of decisions that must be made with high levels of confidence about the outcome. It is therefore not surprising to realize that a sound marketing research process is the nucleus of successful marketing practice (Green, 2007).

For a sound marketing research, managers must focus on competitive analysis. A research task used in competitive analysis is importance – performance analysis, which is an approach for evaluating competitor's strategies, strengths, limitations and future plans. Competitive analysis asks consumers to identify key attributes that drive their purchase behaviour within a given industry. These attributes might include price, product performance, product quality, accuracy of delivery or convenience of store location. When the competing firms are analysed in aggregate, a company can see where its competitors are concentrating their marketing efforts and where they are falling below customer expectations (Unionic, 2006).

## **THE CONCEPT OF SMEs IN NIGERIA**

The failure of large scale import-dependent enterprises to propel Nigeria into a satisfactory course of industrialization necessitated the diversification of small and medium enterprises (Ekezie, 1999). Onwumere (2000) said, no other development strategy has enjoyed as much prominence in Nigeria's development plans as the small and medium scale enterprises development strategy. The government has identified the small business sub-sector as a veritable engine of growth, and has continuously put in place policies and incentive packages that will promote this segment of the economy.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as a concept defies universal definition both among academics and practitioners. Its definition has been both relative and dynamic, varying from country to country, even over time and among industries (Onwumere, 2000). He stressed that, the definition of small and medium scale businesses change overtime and depends to a large extent on a country's level of development. For full definition of small business, these factors are often taken into considerations: size of the business, initial capital outlay, number of employees, financial strength, type of industry and sales value (Oshagbemi, 1982). Over the years, governments, individuals and institutions have given various definitions using the factors listed above. Onwumere (2000) stated that, prior to 1992 in Nigeria, both the federal government and its agencies had adopted vary definitions at the same time or at different time periods due possibly to their variations in development focus/strategy. He explained that, the 1989 industrial policy of Nigeria defines these enterprises as follows: small scale industries are defined as those with total investment between ₦100,000 and ₦2 million excluding cost of fixed capital but including working capital for the entire business.

According to Onwumere (2000), that at the same time, the decree establishing the National Economic and Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) in 1989 defined small and medium enterprises as those with fixed assets excluding land but including the cost of new investment not exceeding N10 million. Other agencies with varying definition were the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry (NBCI), the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB), etc. For instance, the then Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB) defined business as small scale enterprises with project cost (investment and working capital) not exceeding ₦750,000 while it defined as medium scale those enterprises whose projects costs falls between the range of ₦750,000 to ₦3 million.

By 1996, all those definitions have changed. According to Onwumere (2000), in 1996, the National Council on Industry united the definitions in the light of prevailing circumstances. These definitions were revised as follows: small scale enterprises as comprising those enterprises with total cost inclusive of working capital but excluding cost of land, of above One million naira but not exceeding 40 million naira and having manpower strength of 11 to 35 workers. The Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS) in 2000 defines SMEs as any enterprise with a maximum asset base of ₦200 million excluding land and working capital; and staff not less than ten or not more than three hundred (Debbie, 2004). According to CBN (2010), a small and medium enterprise is defined as any enterprise with a maximum turnover of N500 million and assets of N250 million (excluding land and working capital).

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF MARKETING RESEARCH BY SMEs IN NIGERIA**

The slow pace of research and indeed marketing research among small and medium enterprises in Nigeria is agonizing. It may also be said that the result of these researches may not be easily demonstrated and replicated; its usefulness is often questionable. There is need for practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. The need to be equipped with proper information to ensure decision making in business calls for gathering and analyzing data. Marketing research, therefore, is needed by SMEs to generate information for decision making. Also, the competitive strength in business organisations put pressure on companies to research into finding the best way to gain competitive advantage. It will enhance more profits and expand business. Research leads to systematic gathering and storage of information which later could be used by the organisation which is basically to plan and make decision. Marketing research, not only provide SMEs with the necessary decision making tools but also help them amass substantial data that may be used in many ways (Jaworki and Kohli, 1995).

It was started earlier that, practical application of marketing research is not yet common among small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. That is, most marketing research programme in Nigeria is being undertaken by the large scale business in the country e.g. multi – national corporations, banks, etc (Elegbe, 2008). The level of articulation of marketing research among small and medium enterprises in Nigeria is just very poor and quite unlike in the U.S.; Japan and Europe (Idris, 2006). These regions of the world had or have a well articulated and widespread marketing research programme and practices.

Though, small and medium enterprises may not be in position to conduct extensive, indepth and highly relevant data that are adequate enough to provide necessary information for decision making. Small and medium enterprises can hire the services of a marketing research firm or conduct marketing research in creative and affordable ways (Kotler, 2003). Such creative and affordable ways may include:

- a. Engaging students to design and carry out projects: One Boston University MBA project helped American Express develop a successful advertising campaign geared toward young professionals at low cost (Kotler, 2003).
- b. Using the Internet: A company can collect considerable information at very little cost by examining competitors' web sites, monitoring chat rooms, and accessing published data.
- c. Checking out rivals: Many small companies routinely visit their competitors. Tom Coohill, a Chef who owns two Atlanta restaurants, gives managers a food allowance to dine out and bring back ideas. (Clancy and Shulman, 2004).
- d. It's easier and cost efficient obtaining internal data such as sales analysis and marketing cost analysis. The purpose of the sales analysis, the indepth evaluation of SMEs sales, is to obtain meaningful information from the accounting data. The sales analysis, easily prepared from company invoices that are stored on computer tapes, can be quite revealing for the marketing executive. Sales analysis is one of the least expensive and most important sources of marketing information, and any SMEs with data processing facilities should include it as a part of its information

system (Prince, 2008). A second source of internal information is marketing cost analysis, which is the evaluation of such items as selling costs, warehousing, advertising, delivery expenses, etc.

- e. An extremely important source of information for the SMEs marketing researchers is the use of secondary data. In fact, so much data of this nature is available at little or no cost that the researcher faces the problem of being literally overwhelmed by the volumes of collected data (Achumba and Osuagwu, 1994).
- f. SMEs have three alternatives in the collection of primary data: observation, survey, or controlled experiment. No one method is best in all circumstances, in fact, any one may prove the most efficient in a particular situation.

Marketing research as an organizational function has remained under developed among small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. The problems SMEs encountered when carrying out marketing research work are:

1. **Problem of finance:** Finance is the life-wire to any action in an organisation. To know more require commitment of financial resources and lack of such resources hinder people from venturing into marketing research. Loan from government public credit – micro or others are not the best answer for raising capital for small and medium enterprises (Alabi, 2008). Commercial loans in themselves are expensive; therefore, we must seek new means of credit delivery. The answer, lies in careful combination of capital and equity source from the financial system, preferably through stock exchange or some other rational objective funding mechanisms.
2. **Poor Management Expertise:** Management has always been a problem in this sector as most small and medium enterprises do not have the required management expertise to carry them through once the business starts growing. The situation gets compounded as practical application of marketing research is not usually accorded priority in such establishment. When we examine the state of our marketing research programme in this sector, one soon realizes a wide mismatch between what businesses actually needs and what are being done.
3. **Inadequate information base:** Small and medium enterprises are usually characterized by poor records keeping, and that usually starves them of necessary information required for planning and management purposes. Also, the accounting system of most small and medium enterprises lack standard and does not make room for the assessment of their performances. All these hamper the development of marketing research among SMEs in Nigeria.
4. **Problem of dynamism:** Marketing research is more difficult to conduct than natural science research because business environment cannot be sufficiently controlled and manipulated to give the type of result that is peculiar to natural science research (Henry, 2005). The result of researches is not easily demonstrated due to many uncontrollable variables. Marketing research is usually tentative. It is thus, difficult for SMEs to invest money on such that does not bring immediate benefits (Landcaster and Massingham, 2003).
5. **Lack of infrastructural facilities:** Marketing research which is the quest to know more often require the movement from one place to another and the infrastructural facilities are not there for researchers to conveniently carry out his/her research work. These are mainly in the areas of access roads, electricity and water supply.

## METHODOLOGY

Desk research and survey were used as methods of collecting data. For the desk research, literature relating to marketing research and small and medium enterprises in Nigeria were reviewed. The survey sought the opinions of six hundred employees and customers of SMEs in Nigeria from an infinite population. The respondents were selected randomly from a multi-stage sampling technique. Frequency and percentage were used to analyse data on objective 1. A pie chart was drawn to show the extent of the practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. For objective 2, data were collected through the use of five point Likert type of scale and were analysed using the mean score model. Response such as strongly agree (SA), agree (A), Undecided (U), disagree (DA), and Strongly disagree (SD) were weighted as 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively, and analysed using mean score model:

$$X = \frac{\sum f_i(A_i)}{N}$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As earlier stated, frequency and percentage were used to analyse data on objective 1. The first objective is to determine the extent of the practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. The result is shown in Table

**Table: Extent of the Practical Application of Marketing Research by SMEs in Nigeria.**

| Response               | Frequency | Valid Percentage | Cumulative Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------------|
| To a very large extent | 22        | 3.8              | 3.8                   |
| To a large extent      | 69        | 11.9             | 15.7                  |
| To some extent         | 124       | 21.3             | 37.0                  |
| To a little extent     | 291       | 50.0             | 87.0                  |
| To no extent           | 76        | 13.0             | 100                   |
| Total                  | 582       | 100              |                       |

**Source:** Field Survey 2011

Result shows that 3.8 percent of the respondents agreed that to a very large extent, there is practical application of marketing research by SMEs in Nigeria. Also 11.9 percent said that practical application of marketing research by SMEs in Nigeria is to a large extent. 21.3 percent said to some extent. 50 percent agreed to a little extent while 13 percent said there is no extent. The pie chart below shows the various responses.

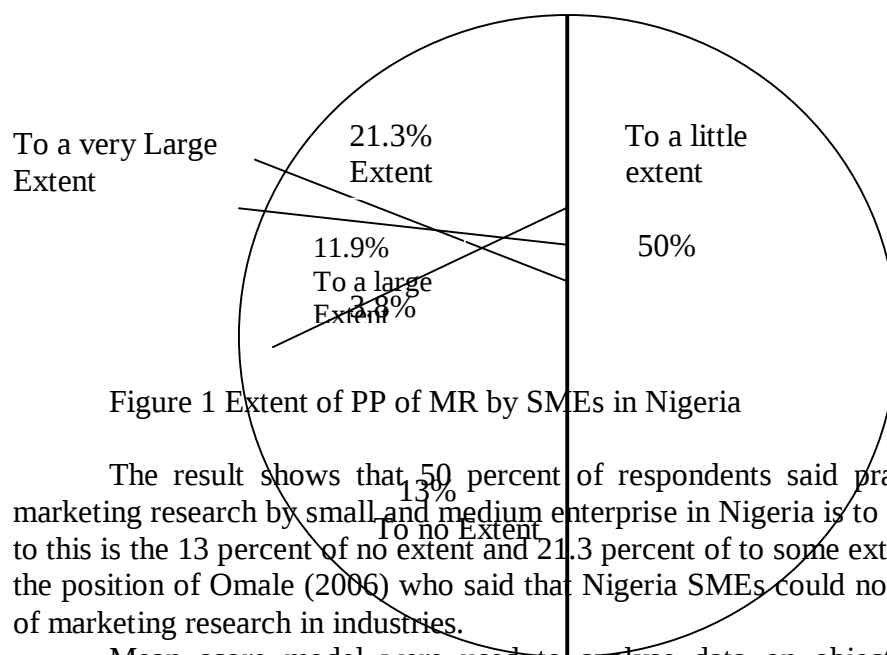


Figure 1 Extent of PP of MR by SMEs in Nigeria

The result shows that 50 percent of respondents said practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprise in Nigeria is to a little extent. Added to this is the 13 percent of no extent and 21.3 percent of to some extent. This agrees with the position of Omale (2006) who said that Nigeria SMEs could not appreciate the value of marketing research in industries.

Mean score model were used to analyse data on objective 2. The second objective is to find out the relationship between marketing research and SMEs in Nigeria. The result is shown in Table.

**Table 2 Likert Type of Scale on Relationship Between Marketing Research and SMEs in Nigeria.**

| Relationship                     | 5  | 4   | 3   | 2   | 1   | N   | $\sum f_i (A_i)$ | X    | Interpretation |
|----------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------------|------|----------------|
| Increase sales and profitability | 39 | 169 | 197 | 118 | 66  | 589 | 1764             | 2.99 | Above average  |
|                                  | 64 | 160 | 210 | 125 | 35  | 594 | 1875             | 3.16 | Above average  |
| Decision making                  | 78 | 175 | 212 | 115 | 18  | 598 | 1974             | 3.30 | Above average  |
|                                  | 40 | 168 | 199 | 120 | 65  | 592 | 1769             | 2.99 | Above average  |
| Adequate Information             | 26 | 121 | 133 | 162 | 147 | 589 | 1484             | 2.52 | Average        |
|                                  | 79 | 153 | 166 | 119 | 80  | 597 | 1823             | 3.05 | Above Average  |
| Competitive Strength             | 18 | 109 | 120 | 168 | 168 | 583 | 1390             | 2.38 | Below Average  |
| Promote Innovation               |    |     |     |     |     |     |                  |      |                |
| Expensive                        |    |     |     |     |     |     |                  |      |                |
| Time wasting                     |    |     |     |     |     |     |                  |      |                |

**Source:** Survey 2011

Table show the relationship between marketing research and SMEs in Nigeria. Increase sales and profitability, decision – making, adequate information, competitive strength, and promoting innovation, recorded above average in their mean score. Also marketing research is expensive as noted by the respondents. Time wasting recorded a mean score of 2.38, which means that marketing research is not actually time wasting.

## CONCLUSIONS

Practical application of marketing research by small and medium enterprises in Nigeria is low. Some SMEs in Nigeria see marketing research as only a fact finding activity. The marketing researcher is supposed to design a questionnaire, choose a sample, carryout interviews, and report result. This reinforces SMEs ideas of the limited usefulness that can come from marketing research. Also, some SMEs view marketing research as little better than a clerical activity and reward it as such. As a result, less SMEs are attracted into marketing research.

There is significant relationship between marketing research and SMEs. A carefully planned marketing result can increase sales and profitability for SMEs. Luck and Rubin (2003) agreed that the long – term impact of marketing research is increase in sales volume. A good decision can be made from marketing research outcome. Osuagwu (1999) agreed with this position when he said that the major objective of marketing research is that all business decision should be made with a careful and systematic consideration of the user (consumer/client). Also, marketing research is the major means by which information are obtained. A marketing decision making process requires possessing information and data about the elements that are involved and relevant, and how they interrelate. Marketing research results in competitive advantage and promotion of innovation. Though, marketing research is expensive, it is necessary. Considerable amount of time is required in conducting marketing research, but the time is not wasted. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Practical application of marketing research is necessary for SMEs and should be conducted when necessary.
- Marketing research should go beyond mere fact findings to its practical application
- A good marketing research should include design of questionnaire, choice of a sample, carry out interview, and report result.
- Low budgets often given to marketing researchers to get information should be discouraged.
- Marketing research that is carefully designed may take a long time to carry out. SMEs need patient to obtain the results.
- SMEs should follow the scientific method of careful observation, formulation of hypothesis, prediction and testing, among others.
- Marketing researchers should avoid over-reliance on any one research method.

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